

THE PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS AND THE PROSPERITY THEOLOGY TODAY.

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ABSTRACT

Christian life is often believed to be a transition to heaven; therefore, Christians are expected to be indifferent to the passions of this earth. However, the cravings of many Christians today are all about prosperity, materialism, and affluence. Meanwhile, it is recalled that the early Christians suffered persecutions and martyrdoms. It is anticipated that the church as an institution will help her members to deal with discomforting conditions as a result of their faith. It is in this light, that this paper adopts largely historical and observational approaches in order to evaluate the way churches today deal with suffering. It is interesting that the Historical Mainline Churches are found to be less interested in the prosperity gospel hence many of their sermons focus more on the reality of suffering and the second coming. However, the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches cling more towards the prosperity theology while curtailing emphasis on Christian suffering.

Keywords: Persecution, Martyrdom, Prosperity, Suffering

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Christian expression suggests that when a person becomes a Christian, all the challenges of life such as sickness, pains, barrenness, anguish, and perplexities disappear. To this extent, many Christians come to faith with the assumption that Christianity is a bed of roses and service on a gold plate. Christian music and videos equally communicate similar ideas of Christianity representing the best of life. In recent times, a Ghanaian gospel singer Christiana Love sings *‘kane na meso neama* (literary translated as *‘in the past, I was carrying a heavy luggage’*) and Ama Boahema sings this same theme, where she is molested, homeless and in pain but in her destitution she becomes a Christian and all of a sudden she owns cars, buildings and jobs. What worsens the situations are preachers of today who dress and say that *‘if Christians are not living flamboyantly - they are no Christians after all’* because Christians must live without wants since their Father in heaven is the source of all wealth.

This leads to a situation of breeding Christians, whose attention is on experience without a history, thereby becoming emotional in their expressions. This picture of Christianity certainly raises a lot of questions such as: when people become Christians, do their challenges disappear? Can there be Christianity without the cross? It is nevertheless without a doubt that wherever the gospel had begun, Christians have shed their blood. It is therefore imperative for contemporary Christians to learn from the examples of the early church in dealing with predicaments of Christians today.

The emergence of the Christian movement in the early Roman Empire included persecution and martyrdom of various kinds. The widespread nature of the hostilities against the early Christians influenced Herbert Musurillo to argue that “No study of the church can be complete without a discussion of the Acts

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of the early Christian Martyrs.”² This statement when juxtaposed to Tertullian’s earlier assertion “the blood of Christians is seed”³ affirms the significance of the persecution and martyrdom to Christian development. The phenomena of persecution and martyrdom of the Christians are not only events of history but also a contemporary reality. Many Christians over the world, including Africans, still face persecution and martyrdom in various forms. Langdon Gilkey asserts that “suffering represents a universally shared experience, but still one always received, experienced and understood it in a particular way.”⁴ Thomas Oden argues that the persecution and martyrdom of African Christians point to a continuity of “the communion of saints” wherein the third century these hostilities were perpetuated by the Romans, in the seventh century by the Arabs, in the nineteenth century by colonial powers and today by Jihadist groups.⁵

NATURE OF THE PERSECUTION AND MARTYRDOM

Persecution may include mocking, torturing, whipping and other discomfoting treatments against a person or a group of people but may exclude the death of the victim. It is important to stress that there is a thin line between persecution and martyrdom. Persecution may lead to martyrdom where death becomes the eventual end of persecution. John S. Pabee provides two definitions of the word martyr, the first relates to suffering while the second relates to the motive of the sufferer to accept the suffering. He maintains that martyrdom should be in accordance with acceptance in order to be a “witness to God.”⁶ To him, therefore, a martyr is “...one who comes into suffering as a result of his zealous devotion to God.”⁷ His second definition asserts, “A martyr is a zealous devotee of God, who is willing and able to undergo suffering because of his deep-rooted conviction that the Almighty

God is the ultimate authority and ruler of the world who alone matters.”⁸

Scholars have noted that the persecution and martyrdom of the early Christians were based on various charges and allegations.⁹ The Christians were not accused of any single offence but purported to be engaged in multiple crimes including ungodliness, superstition, immorality, secret gatherings and rebellions amongst others.¹⁰

Benko suggests that the Christians were not punished for any vice in particular but because of the name “Christian” which was associated with many social vices.¹¹ In the example of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the account recalls that

The governor persisted and said: swear and I will let you. Curse Christ! But Polycarp answered: “For eighty-six years I have been his servant and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme against my king and saviour?”¹²

²Herbert Musurillo, trans. *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), xi. All the martyr texts used in this study are from this translation, if any different source is used, it shall be indicated.

³T. R. Glover, trans. *Tertullian Apology De Spectaculis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), Apologeticum 50:13. Some people translate it as “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” but the Latin text is “*semen est sanguis Christianorum*” which is best translated as “the blood of Christians is seed” not the usual “the blood of the Christians is the seed of the Church”.

⁴ Langdon Gilkey “The Christian Understanding of Suffering” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 5, (1985): 50.

⁵Thomas Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind. Rediscovering the African Seedbed for Western Christianity* (Illinois: InterVasty Press, 2007)117.

⁶John S. Pabee. *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul*. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 24.

⁷Pabee, “Persecution and Martyrdom” 24.

⁸Ibid, 34.

⁹ A. N. Sherwin-White “The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again” *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 (1952): 207-212; Ste. Croix, “Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?” 6-38; G. E. M de Ste. Croix, “Why were the Early Christians Persecuted? – A Rejoinder,” *Past and Present* 27 (1964): 28-33; Joseph Walsh “On Christian Atheism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 45 (1991): 255-277.

¹⁰Engberg, *Impulsore Chresto*, 187-201, L. F. Janssen, “Superstitio and the Persecution of the Christians,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979): 131-159, Sherwin-White, “The Early Persecutions”, 772-787; Ste. Croix, “Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?” 6-38; Walsh “On Christian Atheism,” 255-277.

¹¹Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and Early Christian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 1-29.

¹² Martyrdom of Polycarp 9:2-3

When he felt the Governor pushed him to recant, he replied “If you delude yourself into thinking that I will swear by the emperor’s Genius, as you say, and if you pretend not to know who I am, listen and I will tell you plainly; I am a Christian.”¹³ After this came the judgment “Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian”¹⁴

Furthermore, in the case of Perpetua and her companions, the author of the text recounts a little interaction between Perpetua and her father as

While we were still under arrest (she said) my father out of love for me was trying to persuade me and shake my resolution. `Father` said I, `do you see this vase here, for example, or water pot or whatever?

`Yes, I do`, said he.

And I told him `could it be called by any other name than what it is?`

And he said `No.`

`Well, so too I cannot be called anything other than what I am, a Christian.`

At this my father was so angered by the word `Christian` that he moved towards me as though he would pluck my eyes out....¹⁵

Thereafter, when they appeared before the Governor, he also asked “Are you a Christian?”¹⁶ and when they answered in the affirmative, they were sentenced to be put to death by the beast. The name Christian was associated with abominable practices such as cannibalism and incest.¹⁷ These accusations were fueled because Christians often met in secret places and under the cover of darkness.¹⁸ The charge of being incestuous was influenced by Christian gesture of holy kisses after their meetings and yet referring to one another as `brothers and sisters`. This warranted the accusation of incest, because if a person engages in a romantic act (such as kisses) with a brother or sister then it is only described as incest.¹⁹ Pliny for instance associated the name Christian to cannibalism and incest prior to his interrogation of people who were accused of being Christians.²⁰ The accusation of cannibalism was due to the Christian celebration of the Eucharist.²¹ The Christians said they were eating the body and blood of their crucified Saviour. Cannibals eat the flesh and drink the blood of another; therefore, the ascription of Christians as cannibals. Benko and Engberg argue that the accusation that Christians are cannibals and incestuous contributed to the branding of Christianity as superstitious. This accusation then fed the conviction that the Christians were magicians.²² In the account of the martyrdom of Perpetua, the Christians were accused of being magicians.²³ Benko suggests that the pagans believed that only mischievous people who had something to hide would resort to secrecy, and this was the hallmark of magicians.²⁴

Furthermore, `Superstitio` was one of the greatest charges against the Christians and this has been at the center of the discussions among scholars. Beard, North, and Price show the relationship between `religio` and `superstitio` and discuss how the Romans used these terms when drawing the distinction between correct and/or improper religious behaviour. “Religio” was an aspect of Roman’s self-description while “superstitio” was often a spur against others”.²⁵ However, Beard, North and Price also show that “superstitio”, far from being a false religion, could be seen as an extremely powerful and dangerous practice

¹³ Martyrdom of Polycarp 10:1

¹⁴ Martyrdom of Polycarp 12:1

¹⁵ Martyrdom of Perpetua 3:1-4

¹⁶ Martyrdom of Perpetua 6:4

¹⁷ Benko, *Pagan Rome* 54-74, Walsh, “On Christian Atheism,” 264-267, Engberg *Impulsore Chresto*, 187-191, Sherwin-White, “Why were the Early Christians persecuted?” 23-24.

¹⁸ Benko, *Pagan Rome* 10-11, 24.

¹⁹ Ibid, 79-98.

²⁰ Pliny 10:96, 7-8

²¹ Ibid, 60-61.

²² Ibid, 11, Engberg *Impulsore Chresto*, 306-313.

²³ Martyrdom of Perpetua 16:2

²⁴ Ibid, 10-11.

²⁵ Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 215.

which threatens the stability of “*religio*” and the state.”²⁶ Wilken defines “*superstitio*” as “beliefs and practices that were foreign and strange to the Romans.”²⁷ Janssen contrasts the ancient perception of superstition as something harmful “in our opinion superstition is something quite silly, but harmless; we laugh at those who yield to it, but the mockery is always tinged with compassion.”²⁸ Wilken states

According to Plutarch, superstition sets people apart from the rest of society because the superstitious person does not use his intelligence in thinking about the gods...leads to bizarre and extreme behaviour...superstition leads to irrational ideas about the gods...²⁹

Janssen asserts that *superstitio* was like an infectious disease, a *tabum* that spread more and more; by its very contagiousness and became a real danger to mankind.”³⁰ This shows that *superstitio* is more of an epidemic disease, which must not be ignored.

Another important charge against the Christians was their obstinacy. To the non-Christians, the Christians as haters of order, revolutionary and apostates. The charge of obstinacy, therefore, expresses the Christian stubbornness and unpreparedness to obey the Romans in order to escape being martyred. For instance, Polycarp could have escaped arrest on the advice of his fellow Christians in his hiding place but maintained his location to the extent of acting friendly to his captors.³¹ The account said before his arrest “He could have left and gone elsewhere but he refused, saying: May the will of God be done.”³² The police captain who came to arrest him counseled him logically as “Now what harm is there for you to say ‘Caesar is Lord’ to perform the sacrifices and so forth, and thus save your life? To this he responded: “I do not intend to do what you advice.”³³ This answer sounds rude to an open advice a captor. Additionally, when the governor could not persuade Polycarp to recant, he threatened him “I have wild animals, and I shall expose you to them if you do not change your mind. Polycarp responded, “Go and call for them!”³⁴ On the other hand, Perpetua was obstinate to her father and the Roman governor in several ways. Her father used various means to sway her to renounce Christianity but all in vain. Her father on an occasion while crying was pulling his beard and cursing himself. Perpetua remarks that her father’s actions could “move all creation”³⁵ to a change of mind. She adjudged that “This was the way my father spoke out of love for me, kissing my hands and throwing himself down before me.”³⁶ However described her father’s persuasive acts as “diabolical.”³⁷ Perpetua’s obstinacy was also exhibited before the governor, who tried to get her to sacrificing to the gods but she refused.³⁸ The governor even beat her father with a rod to convince her to recant but all to no avail. She remarks, she felt bad for her father but was not moved to renounce her faith.³⁹

Therefore, Pliny found the Christians to be full of “stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy”⁴⁰ which must not go unpunished. This charge stands tall, especially in the 3rd century.⁴¹ The Latin word which means obstinacy is *contumacia* which may also mean `defiance, insolence, liability, or insult.` Boamah argues that the accused Christians were obstinate due to the visions they believed to have seen.⁴² His argument

²⁶ Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 217.

²⁷Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), 50.

²⁸Janssen, “Supertitio and Persecution,” 134.

²⁹Wilken, *The Christians*, 61.

³⁰Janssen, “Supertitio and Persecution,” 138.

³¹ Martyrdom of Polycarp 6, 7

³² Martyrdom of Polycarp 7:1

³³ Martyrdom of Polycarp 8:2-3

³⁴ Martyrdom of Polycarp 11:1

³⁵ Martyrdom of Perpetua 9:2

³⁶ Martyrdom of Perpetua 5:5

³⁷ Martyrdom of Perpetua 3:3

³⁸ Martyrdom of Perpetua 6:3-4

³⁹ Martyrdom of Perpetua 6:5-6

⁴⁰Betty Radice, trans. *Pliny to the Emperor Trajan. in Pliny Letters and Panegyricus*(London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1969), Pliny, 10:96,3.

⁴¹Engberg *Impulsore Chresto* 191-193.

⁴²Boamah *Magic and Obstinacy* 104-128.

stems from his observation that most of the martyrs, including Polycarp, Perpetua, and Stephen, are said to have seen some kind of vision before or during their martyrdoms. The visions must have communicated something to these Christians because most of these visions had a common feature of being eschatological.⁴³ This, therefore, made the Christians resolute in their faith and this translated into stubbornness or disrespect where the Romans were concerned.⁴⁴ In the account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and her companions, when they were arrested and imprisoned, the victims requested from Perpetua to see a vision because she's gifted with the gift of seeing visions.⁴⁵ When she eventually saw the vision which communicated to them that they were going to die, it influenced their obstinacy because their fate was already revealed to them by God and even more their death would mean their conquest of the devil.⁴⁶ Pobeie has, therefore, identified that persecution and martyrdom manifest itself in eight different forms.⁴⁷ He discusses forms such as those that took place in the arena of the amphitheatre which include crucifixion, use of the sword, stoning, burning, imprisonment, expulsion or excommunication, and corporal punishment. These identified forms show that the suffering of the Christians and the manner of death was not honourable especially in the sight of the persecutors because the forms of the persecutions are linked to the charges that are levelled against them.

NEO-PENTECOSTALISM AND PROSPERITY GOSPEL

The subject of suffering is a composite part of the Christian life from its inception in the Roman world to our modern period. I Peter 5:10 admonishes that "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you." Although this text shows that suffering is part of the Christian life from the 1960s, the role of suffering in Christianity began to change with the inception of the Neo-Pentecostal theology of Kenneth Hagin.⁴⁸ Shayne Lee argues that when the Pentecostal movement began, the leaders were poor and eschewed materialism.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the situation began to change owing to economic factors and the influx of young upward mobility.⁵⁰ Some of the major contributors to what is now defined as prosperity gospel included Oral Roberts, Kathryn Kuhlman, Creflo Dollar, T.D. Jakes, Frederick Price, E. W. Kenyon, Benny Hinn,⁵¹ Joel Osteen, John Avanzini, Lester Sumrall, Benson Idahosa and Enoch Adeboye amongst others.⁵²

This theology stresses the positive confession of faith for financial breakthrough and healthy living. They, therefore, attribute poverty as a curse and claim that Christians who are poor and sick lack faith.⁵³ Often times their worship centers employ state of the art technology, ecstatic worship forms and the tolerance of liberal dressing.⁵⁴ Their meetings stress giving and seed or covenant sowing.⁵⁵ It is necessary to investigate how such a gospel entered Africa giving the level of poverty and economic circumstances of the people.

⁴³Boamah *Magic and Obstinacy* 118-128.

⁴⁴Boamah *Magic and Obstinacy* 118-128.

⁴⁵Martyrdom of Perpetua 4:1.

⁴⁶Boamah *Magic and Obstinacy* 123-125.

⁴⁷ Pobeie, *Persecution and Martyrdom*, 1-12.

⁴⁸Shayne Lee, "Prosperity Theology: T. D. Jakes and the Gospel of the Almighty Dollar" *Cross Current* 57, no. 2 (2007): 227.

⁴⁹Lee, "Prosperity Theology" 227.

⁵⁰Ibid, 227.

⁵¹He has recently given a broadcast in which he has deny prosperity theology, <https://religionnews.com/2019/09/06/is-televangelist-benny-hinn-renouncing-the-prosperity-gospel/>

⁵²Lee "Prosperity Theology" 229; James Kwarteng-Yeboah, *The Social Effect of Prosperity Gospel on Poverty Reduction in Ghana* (Saarbrücken: Scholars' Press, 2016), 57; Paul Gifford, "The Prosperity Theology of David Oyedepo, Founder of Winners' Chapel," in *Pleasures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond* ed. Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 84.

⁵³Lee "Prosperity Theology" 228, J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Book International, 2013) 89.

⁵⁴Lee "Prosperity Theology" 231.

⁵⁵Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 79.

a. Prosperity Gospel in Africa

Paul Gifford and other scholars believe the prosperity gospel came to Africa from North “America, but Matthew Ojo and others, including Asamoah-Gyadu, hold the view that the prosperity gospel was already present in Africa since culture indicates that the African constantly prays for their well-being (prosperity).⁵⁶ Meanwhile, they maintain that the conditions that gave rise to prosperity gospel in North America were equally prevalent in Africa. Kwarteng-Yeboah traces the development of prosperity theology in Ghana from Benson Idahosa who was trained by Kenneth Hagin.⁵⁷ Idahosa also trained people like Mensa Otabil, Nicholas Duncan Williams and many others. Idahosa set up his own Bible School to train Africans who could not go to the USA. For this reason, he established the Church of God Mission International with its Headquarters in Benin City.⁵⁸ Idahosa also visited many African nations for crusades and leadership seminars. Through such travels, he was able to affect many African Pentecostals, and this helped him spread the prosperity gospel.

Another Nigerian who contributed to the spread of the prosperity gospel was David Oyedepo of the Living Faith World Outreach or Winners Chapel.⁵⁹ Paul Gifford suggests that Oyedepo was influenced by the books and television programmes of Kenneth Hagin.⁶⁰ Oyedepo stressed faith in the life of the Christian, giving of testimonies and throwing of scriptures about intermittently.⁶¹ He is believed to have four private jets, houses in London and the USA, as well as a publishing company. His wealth is valued to worth about US\$ 150 million.⁶² He has since planted churches in thirty-eight African countries after the establishment of the church.⁶³

THE PLACE OF SUFFERING AMONG GHANAIAN CHURCH TRADITIONS

Considering the above, it is crucial to evaluate how the various churches help their members to deal with suffering. It is anticipated that the various churches may have some concrete structures to assist members to cope with the phenomena since it is inevitable.

For the purpose of this paper the Ghanaian Christianity can be classified broadly into the Historical Mainline Churches (which may include the Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians churches) and the Pentecostal or Charismatic ministries (from the Classical Pentecostals to the Neo-Prophetic Ministries).⁶⁴ This section compares the theologies of these two classes of churches in relation to suffering using especially their sermons. Some selected sermons by the preachers of the Historical Mainline Churches will be compared to what preachers of the Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries tell their congregations with regards to suffering, end time and the prosperity theology in general. It is interesting to note that in churches where suffering and end-time issues are prominent, the prosperity gospel is not prominent whereas where the prosperity gospel is present, suffering and end time issues are found wanting.

The Historical Mainline Churches largely depend on the lectionary reading for their themes and lessons on Sundays. At the very least, the content of the liturgical calendar reflects the theology and beliefs of the churches. A critical examination, therefore, of the readings and themes on the calendar shows that about twenty-five percent of the readings and themes deal with issues of suffering and the end time.⁶⁵ These

⁵⁶Kwarteng-Yeboah *Social Effect of Prosperity Gospel* 56; Asamoah -Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 79.

⁵⁷Kwarteng-Yeboah, *Social Effect of Prosperity Gospel*, 58.

⁵⁸Kwarteng-Yeboah, *Social Effect of Prosperity Gospel*, 58.

⁵⁹Kwarteng-Yeboah, *Social Effect of Prosperity Gospel*, 59.

⁶⁰Gifford, “The Prosperity theology of David Oyedepo” 84. Oyedepo mentions Gloria Copeland as his role model and adds that he slept on Kenneth Copeland’s bed. Oyedepo also claims that he had a vision of God telling him that a baton has been passed on from Kenneth Hagin to him. (Kwarteng-Yeboah *Social Effect of Prosperity Gospel* 58.)

⁶¹Gifford “The Prosperity theology of David Oyedepo” 85-99.

⁶²Kwarteng-Yeboah *Social Effect of Prosperity Gospel* 59.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Cephas Narh Omenyo and Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, *Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo- Prophetism in Ghana*, in Ghana Bulletin of Theology, vol. 1. No. 1 July 2006:55-68

⁶⁵Some of the themes on the Almanac include ‘Repent, God’s word overcomes temptation, Dying with the Lord, Sacrificial Life, Persisting to the end, Prepare for the day of the Lord, Prepare to meet the Lord, Bearing fruits of the Kingdom, Return to the

lessons and themes encourage the members to stand firm and resolute in preparation for the end time because they see suffering as part of the Christian calling. The Historical Mainline Churches, therefore, have very little place for the prosperity gospel as part of their sermons and theology. They consider that Christians should seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness and all other things (representing prosperity) will be added to them.⁶⁶ Therefore the responsibility is to stand firm for Christ and then the reward will follow. Indeed, in some cases, the Historical Mainline Church preachers use the examples of Job and the martyrs to encourage the members to equally stand strong in the face of adversity. On such occasions, the life and contributions of these martyrs are recounted in the celebration of special masses to encourage members to know that if they are suffering today, others have also suffered to the point of losing their lives for the gospel. These encouragements help members of these churches to be resolute in the face of adversities as compared to members of the charismatic ministries.

However, the situation is different with regards to the Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries. There is hardly a place for suffering among the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians. It is as if Christianity in their theology means fashionable houses, glittering cars, business class flight to paradise, buffet party and being served by others like princes and princesses. Indeed, it sounds like a fairy tale. Charismatics and Pentecostals believe that if the believer lives righteous lives without sin and free from demons, they are logically supposed to be wealthy.⁶⁷ They see prosperity as a core component of the Christian calling. The sermons from the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches are full of such flowery accounts which make Christianity attractive and a solution centre. Although not all the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have a homogeneous theology, some of their positions are quite similar which makes them comparable.⁶⁸

The discussion of the place of suffering in this class of churches in terms of their affinity to the theology of suffering and the prosperity gospel is based on an analysis of sermons by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome and Pastor Mensa Otabil. Asamoah-Gyadu has analyzed Pastor Otabil's theology in a chapter entitled "Salvation as Prosperity" in his *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*.⁶⁹ Pastor Mensa Otabil is the founder of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) which has branches across the country and is highly listened to in Ghana and other parts of the world, especially via electronic media. On the other hand, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome is the founder of Christ Embassy which has its headquarters in Lagos. The youth like him very much because of his style in terms of his accent and dressing. Pastor Chris used to be aired on an Accra based radio station on weekdays from 3:00 pm – 3:30 pm. He also writes a daily devotional guide booklet called *Rhapsody of Realities*, which is distributed on the streets and other places sometimes free of charge. Although this publication is not an academic material, it is made of the best print source material that helps to identify the theology of Pastor Chris Oyakhilome and his followers.⁷⁰

Pastor Mensa Otabil preaches that Christians should enjoy what he calls 'biblical prosperity' which includes good health and material adequacy as a birthright of the believer.⁷¹ Mensa Otabil identifies three major types of prosperity from III John 2, which states that the Christian must enjoy as an inheritance: financial, material and spiritual prosperities.⁷² To such preachers Jesus wore the best (arguing that his

Lord, Sharing in Christ's Suffering, Understanding the importance of the Cross, Die with Christ and live, Christ our example of Suffering, The Cost of Discipleship, Wealth and the Kingdom of God, Know the signs of the end time, Be faithful to the end, Suffering for purpose, Christ's victory over death, Stand for Jesus, Prepare for the Heavenly city, You must be ready, Knowing the times, Endurance, Awake and watch for His coming, Jesus the King of glory, Carry your cross etc

⁶⁶Matthew 6:33

⁶⁷Asamoah-Gyadu, *Salvation as Prosperity* 201

⁶⁸Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 221

⁶⁹Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu J. *African Charismatics. Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Brill: Leiden 2005.

⁷⁰Some of the topics are "Believe in miracles; No more tears; It's not too late; You can't be a fool for faith; Self-sufficiency and independence; Christians cannot be poor; No more sickness; You are bigger than Inflation; God always says Yes!; Ordained to receive answers; A victory Parade; God loves to brag with your life; Faith: your currency to rule your world; Born with wealth untold."- Chris and Anita Oyakhilome, *Rhapsody of Realities*, Loveworld Publishing, September, 2008; July, 2012, July, 2013

⁷¹Asamoah-Gyadu, *Salvation as Prosperity* 201-202

⁷²Asamoah-Gyadu, *Salvation as Prosperity*, 205

clothes were customised since there was no seam to it and soldiers needed to gamble to own it at his crucifixion in John 19:23),⁷³ he ate good food (his meals were prepared by Mary and Martha at home not from the roadside in Luke 10:38-42) and used one of the best means of transportation (rode on a donkey that had not been used and people laid down their clothes for it to walk on, Mark 11). For many other Charismatic preachers apart from Pastor Mensa Otabil and Pastor Chris, there are the likes of Duncan Williams, Eastwood Anaba, Ampiah Kofi, Owusu Bempah and others, who suggest that since God is rich and is the owner of all wealth, the Christian must not and cannot be poor.⁷⁴ To this end, most of the preachers of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches teach more on topics like “Principles of sowing and reaping, Principles of wealth creation, Attracting the favour of God, Living a Prosperous Life, Keys to understanding wealth, Walking in the fullness of God” among many other such topics. The preachers often sermonize about wealth, principles, keys and demons whereas topics of the end time and Christian sufferings are hardly preached. Suffering is not seen as Christian in most cases in this class of churches. Pastor Oyakhilome Chris argues based on II Corinthians 2:14-15 that “Glory to God! We’re His trophies! We’re the sweet fragrance of Christ! Your life is not for shame and emptiness; it’s for beauty and for glory!”⁷⁵ The best of the land must be enjoyed by the Christian based on Pastor Oyakhilome Chris’ theology of the inheritance of the Christian. He argues that “Throughout the New Testament, God’s Word clearly shows us that every form of sickness has no place in the new creation (referring to the Christian) ... the new creation is not subject to sickness, disease or the devil... So, you see, the new creation isn’t supposed to be sick.”⁷⁶ To him, and his followers, the Christian is not born to suffer but to enjoy the best or good of the land because God is a rich father. He says ‘a Christian does not fall sick, live in poverty, debt or want because the father of the Christian has more than enough for His children to suffer want. This is also influenced by Psalm 23 where David says ‘the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want’, therefore a good Christian must never lack let alone be in need. He argues that Christians need not pray for riches because they are born rich and heirs of all kinds of riches and wealth.⁷⁷ In his September 2008 edition of his Rhapsody of Reality, under the topic “Unleash your faith!” he comments that “If it’s poverty that tries to attack you, do the same thing—unleash your faith without restraints! Refuse to accept thoughts of lack. Keep declaring, ‘The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I’ll never lack! He supplies all my needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.’”⁷⁸ He further argues that when a Christian prays, God always says ‘Yes’ to prayers.

God never says no. I’ve heard some people (referring to the preachers of the Historical mainline churches especially) say ‘God always answers every prayer either by saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’! He says “yes” if He honours your request and “no” if He doesn’t! This sounds logical, but it sure doesn’t measure up with the character of God and what the Bible says... Understand that God never refuses His kids any good thing; He never says “no”; it’s not in His nature to withhold any blessing from His children.’⁷⁹

The comparison between the Historical Mainline and the Pentecostal churches under study in this paper shows there is a vast difference between them particularly in relation to their theologies of suffering and the prosperity. The analysis has shown that whereas the Historical Mainline Churches accept that the Christian can suffer but speak less about Christian prosperity, the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches preach less about Christian suffering but more about the prosperity of the Christian. Indeed, Pastor Mensa Otabil is recorded to have said in relation to the Historical Mainline churches that “We’ve been trained to believe that money is evil’ and that ‘poverty and piety are bedfellows.’⁸⁰ Suggesting that the Historical

⁷³Asamoah-Gyadu *Salvation as Prosperity* 205

⁷⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, *Salvation as Prosperity*, 205-206

⁷⁵Chris and Anita Oyakhilome, *Rhapsody of Realities*, Loveworld Publishing, September 13th, 2008

⁷⁶ibid

⁷⁷Chris and Anita Oyakhilome, *Rhapsody of Realities*, Loveworld Publishing, July 25th, 2013

⁷⁸Chris and Anita Oyakhilome, *Rhapsody of Realities*, Loveworld Publishing, September 16th, 2008

⁷⁹ibid

⁸⁰Asamoah-Gyadu *Salvation as Prosperity* 201

Mainline Church glory in poverty and suffering even as Christians and that poverty means righteousness but this is not Biblical.

CONCLUSION

It is without a shrill of doubt that the story of the persecution and martyrdom of the early Christians is still an African story. From the missionary days to the contemporary period, many Christians keep on suffering various kinds of discomfort and pains as a result of their faith. In all of these, the resilience and capacity of the early church in withstanding what they suffered at the hands of the Romans from the second to around the fourth centuries are relevant today, as reflected in the hymn

They have come from tribulation,
And have washed their robes in blood,
Washed them in the blood of Jesus;
Tried they were, and firm they stood;
Mocked, imprisoned, stoned, tormented,
Sawn asunder, slain with sword;
They have conquered death and Satan
By the might of Christ the Lord.

The Christian today can gainfully learn from the examples and strategies adopted by the early Christians in dealing with the hostilities against them and this can be a study ground for Christians today. The Christian will certainly keep suffering in a world like this because martyrdom is seen as a baptismal faith since baptism is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.⁸¹ Therefore if this is the way their master Jesus went, the subjects need to follow the same path, As it is written "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they would also persecute you..."⁸² The church should, therefore, help her members deal with the reality of persecution and martyrdom well in our current dispensation.

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⁸¹Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*, 119

⁸²John15:20

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