

Prosperity Theology and African Traditional Religion: Assessing their resonance through a case study

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Abstract

Studies of Prosperity Theology in Africa have increased as research into Pentecostalism has burgeoned, but few theological analyses have explored the significance of African Traditional Religions and their role in shaping Prosperity Theology. While some studies have explored the resonance of Prosperity Theology and African Traditional Religions, they tend to do so briefly, or with a focus on sociology rather than theology. Through a case study of Nigerian Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, this research tests the thesis that many have intuited: Prosperity Theology resonates with traditional African religion, and these resonances contribute to an explanation of the expression and proliferation of Prosperity Theology in Africa. Evaluating the resonance of Oyakhilome's teaching with African Traditional Religions (relying especially on John S. Mbiti's work) demonstrates that Oyakhilome's emphasis on accessing blessing, spiritual enemies, and activating power draws heavily on the resources of the typical African religious worldview.

Keywords

*Prosperity Theology, Prosperity Gospel, African Traditional Religion,
Chris Oyakhilome, John S. Mbiti*

The explosion of Pentecostalism in Africa needs an explanation. [...] It matters where an analysis starts or is located because many studies of African Pentecostalism that are placed in the contemporary period and in the context of urbanity and urban culture miss the force of the movement's fit into the indigenous worldviews and the Pentecostal practices in rural contexts.

– Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*¹

1 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 169.

1. Introduction

In 2015 Paul Gifford broached what he deemed the most notable of “studiously avoided” issues in the discussion of African Christianity.² The “enchanted religious imagination”, as he labels it, became a dominant theme in his writing when he was compelled to pursue it after reading a biography by fellow social anthropologist Isak Niehaus who recounts the harrowing death of his research assistant from AIDS.³ Niehaus’s assistant was convinced his affliction was the result of witchcraft.⁴

Gifford provides a stark juxtaposition between two kinds of Christianity in Africa. The first is a North Atlantic kind of Christianity, shaped by Western Enlightenment, and conceiving the evils of child soldiers, global warming and capitalistic greed as structural issues which require politically informed theological reflection.⁵ By comparison, Gifford visited large Pentecostal churches manifesting a very different Christianity.⁶ Here he found a striking “underlying religious imagination”, utterly different to the former:

this was the worldview that sees spirits, demons, spiritual powers at play in all areas of life. [...] Here the remedy for the problem of evil was not structural analysis and political-economic reform; it was diagnosis of the spirit responsible and deliverance or exorcism by the ministers.⁷

Gifford’s assessment of the profound and enduring significance of the enchanted religious imagination is an example of a growing body of research which considers how African religion has intersected with Christianity.

2 Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst, 2015), 1.

3 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 1.

4 Isak A. Niehaus, *Witchcraft and a Life in the New South Africa*, The International African Library 43 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

5 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 3.

6 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 3.

7 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 3–4.

The focus of this analysis is not Pentecostalism per se, but rather, a theological movement within it, viz., Prosperity Theology (PT).⁸ I have in mind the sort of PT described by the Lausanne Theology Working Group who define it as “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth 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.”⁹

This paper is concerned with the relationship between PT and systems of traditional African religion and philosophy. African Traditional Religion (ATR) is not a monolithic phenomenon. Beliefs vary, and attempts to provide generalised accounts of African religion have been sharply critiqued.¹⁰ And yet, diversity of expression has not stopped the study of other diversiform entities. Take Christianity or Islam as obvious examples. To the extent that it is possible to study these religions that span millennia and continents as singular units, it is possible to study ATR as a unit. Drawing on the work of John S. Mbiti, the research will assess the harmony of PT and ATR using five relevant themes that typify ATRs: 1) Spiritual Proximity; 2) Religious Specialists; 3) Offering and Sacrifice; 4) Suffering; and 5) Eschatology

The primary thesis is as follows: Prosperity Theology in the African context exhibits several resonances and conceptual overlaps with systems of

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- 8 Also commonly “the Prosperity Gospel”. There are significant overlaps with the descriptor “Word of Faith/Word-Faith” which refers more specifically to the mechanism of “positive confession”. I have chosen to use the label PT, in part to better align with the language of modern research, but also to decrease potential confusion when discussing “faith” as an aspect of the theological system being discussed. While the emphases are subtly different, for the most part “Word-Faith” and “Prosperity Theology” are relatively interchangeable in this study.
 - 9 Lausanne Theology Working Group. Africa Chapter, “Lausanne Theology Working Group Statement on the Prosperity Gospel: From the Africa Chapter of the Lausanne Theology Working Group at Its Consultation in Akripong, Ghana, 8-9 October, 2008 and 1-4 September 2009”, *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34 (2010): 99–102.
 - 10 John S. Mbiti’s seminal work *African Religions and Philosophy* is the archetypal example of this. For examples of the critiques Mbiti’s work has attracted see: Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jacob K. Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang, eds., *Religious Plurality in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*, Religion and Society 32 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993); A. Scott Moreau, “A Critique of John Mbiti’s Understanding of the African Concept of Time”, *AJET* 5, no. 2 (1986): 36–48; Y. S. Han and J. Beyers, “A Critical Evaluation of the Understanding of God in J.S. Mbiti’s Theology”, *Acta Theologica* 37, no. 2 (2017): 5–29.

traditional African religion. These resonances contribute to an explanation of the particularities of the proliferation and expression of PT in Africa.

Methodology

Beliefs (and their contingent behaviours) about power, eschatology, spiritual engagement, religious offerings, cult-mediators and suffering will be the focus areas evincing resonance. These categories of resonance will be explored through a case study of pastor Chris Oyakhilome from Nigeria.

While past studies of PT in Africa have pointed to resonances with ATR, the consideration is often cursory. Gifford believes theologians have been strangely ignorant of the enchanted religious imagination.¹¹ To an extent he is right in that it has been tackled more often and deeply by anthropologists than theologians.¹² That said, the literature does include many theologians, especially African theologians, who point to this resonance.¹³ While mentions of resonance are usually only brief, there have

11 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 157.

12 The growth of global Pentecostalism has been met with a steadily growing number of publications on PT with a spike of output in the last decade. See, e.g., Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Andreas Heuser, ed., *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, vol. 161 of *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2015); Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*; Afe Adogame, Ezra Chitando, and Bolaji Bateye, eds., *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa: Emerging Trends, Indigenous Spirituality and the Interface with Other World Religions – Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona*, *Vitality of Indigenous Religions* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012); Katy Attanasi and Amos Yong, eds., *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, *Christianities of the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Daniel Salinas, ed., *Prosperity Theology and the Gospel: Good News or Bad News for the Poor?* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2017).

13 See, e.g., Emmanuel K. Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination”, *PentVars Business Journal* 4, no. 2 (2010): 66–76; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?: The Gospel Preached in Africa’s New Pentecostal Churches Ends up Leaving the Poor More Impoverished than Ever”, *Christianity Today* 53, no. 11 (2009): 38–41; Paul Freston, “Prosperity Theology: A (Largely) Sociological Assessment”, in *Prosperity Theology and the Gospel: Good News or Bad News for the Poor?*, ed. Daniel Salinas (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2017), 66–76; Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35–37, 104–6; Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 169–86, 250–69; Sung Kyu Park, *Christian Spirituality in Africa: Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspectives from Kenya* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 124–31; Dan Lioy, “The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel: Self or the Savior?”, *Conspectus* 4 (2007): 41–64; David Ogungbile, “African Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel”, in

been some sustained engagements. Of these, only a handful employ thick case studies.¹⁴ This paper is a meagre step toward filling this gap.

There is no suggestion that the mechanism under consideration is any more than a segment in a larger sociological mosaic. Further to this, PT's rapid growth is not unique to the African continent. Perhaps the largest opening for attack against the thesis is the fact that PT is growing in many places that are not Africa. I lack the space here to properly counter this, but suffice it to say that other research has effectively argued that PT's appeal, though universal, is complex and depends on the sort of factors we address.¹⁵

The primary justification for selecting Chris Oyakhilome as the study's subject relates to influence and accessibility of sources. The scope and impact of Oyakhilome's ministry is undeniably large. His teachings are also very accessible through online media. For these reasons, Oyakhilome is a natural choice for our study.

Our main source will be Oyakhilome's books. Data will be presented systematically according to theological emphases, rather than diachronically. Some aspects of Oyakhilome's teaching which are absent in his books will become apparent through other sources.

Pentecostal Theology in Africa, ed. Clifton Clarke, African Christian Studies Series 6 (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick, 2014), 138–42.

- 14 As Wariboko says, case studies are more useful than official statements of doctrine for examining PT, because Pentecostal churches are less often tied to centralised models of governance than churches from mainline denominations. Nimi Wariboko, 'Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa', in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, ed. Amos Yong and Katy Attanasi, Christianities of the World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 36.
- 15 See the following for more on causal factors relating to PT proliferation: Freston, 'Prosperity Theology'; Lovemore Togarasei, 'African Traditional Religion in the Study of the New Testament in Africa', in *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa: Emerging Trends, Indigenous Spirituality and the Interface with Other World Religions—Essays in Honour of Jacob Kehinde Olupona*, ed. Afe Adogame, Ezra Chitando, and Bolaji Bateye, Vitality of Indigenous Religions (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 340; Bong Rin Ro, 'Bankrupting the Prosperity Gospel', *Christianity Today* 42, no. 13 (2016): 60; Knut Rio, Michelle MacCarthy, and Ruy Blanes, eds., *Pentecostalism and Witchcraft: Spiritual Warfare in Africa and Melanesia*, Contemporary Anthropology of Religion (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

2. Case study – Pastor Chris Oyakhilome

Discussion

At the time of writing, Oyakhilome has published approximately 23 monographs.¹⁶ Having read all of Oyakhilome's books, I distilled prominent themes from each work. Three of the topics which Oyakhilome engages far exceeded all other topics in frequency and depth of treatment. These themes are not artificially prominent due to broad categorisation—rather, these particular themes stand apart as focussed subjects that saturate Oyakhilome's writing.

His characteristic teachings are captured by these three ideas: 1) Accessing Blessing; 2) The Spiritual Enemy; and 3) Activating Power.

Theme 1: Accessing blessing

In practically every one of Oyakhilome's books the default application of any theological exposition relates to the believer accessing prosperity and blessing. Whatever the doctrinal topic—faith, evangelism, the Holy Spirit, prophecy, tongues, prayer, disease, theophany—the foundational presupposition is that theological understanding serves the purpose of drawing God's blessings to the Christian.

Oyakhilome's books often begin by posing questions about the reader's circumstances, e.g. what circumstance do you wish to prevail in your home,¹⁷ or what sort of future do you desire?¹⁸ In an early work entitled *The*

16 In all the following citations the author is "Chris Oyakhilome" and the publishing place/publisher are "Randburg, South Africa: LoveWorld". *The Promised Land* (1997); *The Gates of Zion* (1998); *Recreating Your World* (1998); *Your Rights in Christ* (1998); *The Oil and the Mantle* (1999); *Now That You Are Born Again* (1999); *How to Receive a Miracle and Retain It* (2001); *None of These Diseases* (2001); *When God Visits You* (2001); *Join This Chariot* (2002); *Pray the Right Way* (2004); *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do For You* (2004); *Don't Stop Here: A Spiritual Journey to Greater Impact* (2004); *The Power of Tongues* (2005); *How to Make Your Faith Work* (2005); *Prophecy: Understanding the Power That Controls Your Future* (2005); *The Holy Spirit and You* (2005); *The Seven Spirits of God: Divine Secrets to the Miraculous* (2006); *Healing from Heaven*, 3 vols. (2010–12); *How to Pray Effectively: Understanding the Rules of Prayer for Different Situations and How to Apply Them for Your Desired Outcome* (2012); *The Power of Your Mind: Walk in Divine Excellence and Transform Your World through the Power of a Renewed Mind* (2016).

17 Oyakhilome, *Recreating Your World*, 19.

18 Oyakhilome, *Prophecy*, 7.

Gates of Zion, he interprets the gates of the Jerusalem wall in Nehemiah 3 as an allegory for the Christian life. The book begins by asking: “Are you experiencing the upward, supernatural and progressive life?”¹⁹

At other times he will simply introduce the book by stating that blessings are God’s will for the believer. In a recent work he writes: “God’s greatest desire is for us to live victorious lives and continually enjoy His blessings.”²⁰ It is for this purpose that the Spirit has prompted his writing:

This is what the Spirit of God is guiding me through this book to help you discover and understand, so you can effectively harness the power of your mind and channel its contents in a way that’ll help you create a winning, successful, and vibrant life.²¹

What motivation does he give for increasing one’s knowledge of the Holy Spirit? It is “the key to that successful life you’ve always desired.”²² Why study theophanies? To learn from people who “were able to take advantage of God’s visitation to receive their healing, find solutions to their problems and moved their lives up to a higher level.”²³

Many words are given over to detailing the extensive and abundant nature of the blessings on offer. The following excerpt shows their limitlessness:

You can be anything in this world! [...] You can go anywhere you choose to go; have every good thing you desire; live a supernatural life of prosperity and be an all-round success. [...] If you’re born again, you don’t need to suffer another day in your life. You don’t have to be sick, broke, frustrated, poor, diseased or infirmed in your body. [...] A glorious, prosperous, healthy, excellent, successful and good life is your God-given inheritance. [...] Divine health is yours. Prosperity is yours. Lasting peace is yours. Success, excellence and the good life belong to you.²⁴

19 Oyakhilome, *The Gates of Zion*, 16.

20 Oyakhilome, *Power of Your Mind*, 8.

21 Oyakhilome, *Power of Your Mind*, 10.

22 Oyakhilome, *Holy Spirit and You*, 9.

23 Oyakhilome, *When God Visits You*, 11.

24 Oyakhilome, *Make Your Faith Work*, 19, 30–31.

The blessed life is impervious even to death. Drawing from the example of Moses who died “when he was ready”, Oyakhilome instructs his readers:

Don’t expect to die. [...] If you want to die, you tell everybody, “I want to die.” Don’t die by accident, don’t die by any gunshot, don’t die for anybody, because somebody already died for you and everybody else, so you don’t die until you choose to die.²⁵

Oyakhilome’s emphasis on blessing is reinforced by his eschatological beliefs. “We’re living in the day when we can enjoy all that God has done for us in Christ.”²⁶ Health is the believer’s present tense possession.²⁷ Oyakhilome says the Lord’s Prayer is a useless model for Christians in the present age because: the kingdom has already come; we can bless the earth and command it to supply our daily bread; our debts are already forgiven; and we are already delivered from the devil’s evil.²⁸

As a starting place for personal Bible reading, Oyakhilome suggests people read Ephesians to “Find out everything [Christ] says He has already done, [...] and what He says belongs to you.”²⁹ Oyakhilome argues from 1 Corinthians 3:21–23 that instead of *asking* God for things, believers need to realise they *have* all things and declare that their needs have been met through God’s riches.³⁰

Regardless of the book’s subject matter, the knowledge imparted serves to increase access to blessings. This includes praying aright, speaking in tongues, union with Christ, the Promised Land, and prophecy.³¹ There is no need to pile on more examples. Oyakhilome understands blessing as a promised inheritance and every aspect of Christian spirituality serves to see those blessings realised.

25 Oyakhilome, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do*, 29–30.

26 Oyakhilome, *The Oil and the Mantle*, 25.

27 Oyakhilome, *Receive a Miracle*, 12, 31.

28 Oyakhilome, *Pray the Right Way*, 34–38.

29 Oyakhilome, *Receive a Miracle*, 36.

30 Oyakhilome, *How to Pray Effectively*, 70.

31 Oyakhilome, *Pray the Right Way*, 41; Oyakhilome, *Tongues*, 24; Oyakhilome, *Your Rights in Christ*, 34; Oyakhilome, *The Promised Land*, 154; Oyakhilome, *Prophecy*, 23.

Theme 2: The spiritual enemy

Oyakhilome is very conscious of the activity of spiritual beings. God's children have an enemy doing everything he can to "keep you from getting what is yours."³² Despite health being a guaranteed possession, if a person refuses to walk in love they open their life to satanic attack and consequently sickness.³³ Fear and unbelief are not merely personal dispositions; they are spirits that attack people and must be cast out by the quotation of Scripture.³⁴ And when these enemies attack, they target the prosperity God gives: "Sometimes devils frustrate people's businesses, their families, their finances, and their bodies too."³⁵

If the Christian has properly understood the way God has equipped them, they will be victorious in every spiritual battle because God's power exceeds that of the devil. "It doesn't matter how the devil tries or through what means he tries to work it, we've been given authority over all his ability".³⁶ If a person is bold, their faith will become effective and their words will become powerful, allowing them to stand in the presence of the devil and all the cohorts of hell combined.³⁷ Devils shake and tremble when God's word is declared with faith.³⁸ Satan will build his attacks but eventually his resistance will break and he will flee.³⁹

It is possible to rally spiritual beings in certain situations. The stars in their courses fought for Deborah and Barak, and through prayer a person can summon the same to stop satanic forces influencing their governments.⁴⁰ If furthering the gospel is your sincere priority, then "angels will always be on assignment for you, literally working over-time to ensure you never lack".⁴¹ If kidnapped, Oyakhilome gives these specific instructions:

32 Oyakhilome, *When God Visits You*, 15.

33 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 64.

34 Oyakhilome, *Make Your Faith Work*, 63.

35 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 96.

36 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 88.

37 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 67.

38 Oyakhilome, *When God Visits You*, 28.

39 Oyakhilome, *Prophecy*, 37.

40 Oyakhilome, *How to Pray Effectively*, 54.

41 Oyakhilome, *How to Pray Effectively*, 74.

Don't beg. Don't negotiate. Let them take you. Sit there with them and say, "Let's go!" As they're taking you away, speak in other tongues. Before long, they'll be the ones begging you. [...] They may tell you, "Shut up or else..." but don't respond in English. [...] As you speak, your angels will take their positions and you will be victorious!⁴²

The Holy Spirit's work is a special instance of spiritual protection. He sets up a force field around a person as a powerful defensive barrier.⁴³

Christians need to engage with the spiritual realm because it is the place where things "get done". Prayer or singing can cause "communication and transportation that take place in the realm of the spirit."⁴⁴ A person may feel as though they have been taken out of the "earth realm" into the "warmth of God's Spirit" during passionate worship.⁴⁵ Certain modes of prayer "help straighten out things in the spirit-realm."⁴⁶ The believer must learn to function spiritually through bidirectional communication in this realm:

Your reading this book is the Spirit's effort to engage you in the realm of the spiritual Kingdom to which you belong, because the words you're reading now are not of this world. If your spirit can get a hold of these words in the realm from which they're coming to you, you will begin to function in that realm by communicating with the Holy Ghost.⁴⁷

Engaging the spiritual enemy: Oyakhilome's anthropology

Oyakhilome says humans can (and must) engage the spiritual realm because they themselves are spirits. The body is not the real person, rather, a person is a spirit, *has* a soul, and *lives in* a body.⁴⁸ When someone's body dies, the

42 Oyakhilome, *Tongues*, 14.

43 Oyakhilome, *When God Visits You*, 34.

44 Oyakhilome, *How to Pray Effectively*, 83.

45 Oyakhilome, *How to Pray Effectively*, 83.

46 Oyakhilome, *How to Pray Effectively*, 8.

47 Oyakhilome, *Holy Spirit and You*, 30.

48 Oyakhilome, *Your Rights in Christ*, 34; Oyakhilome, *Tongues*, 9.

real person lives on, having lost nothing except the ability to function in the physical world.⁴⁹ Oyakhilome believes the Christian's body is no longer reliant on the blood that runs in it.⁵⁰ The flesh is so transformed by the new spiritual life source that the blood cells of Christians are changed: "Some scientists have reported their findings that there seems to be a difference in the blood group of those who are born again and the rest of the world."⁵¹

Born again man is special and should declare as God did "I Am that I Am."⁵² Oyakhilome instructs believers to let God's divinity inside of them increase as their humanity decreases.⁵³ On the journey of the Christian life, there is a point where a person "arrives at Jordan" as Elijah did, at which point:

the flesh drops and the spirit takes over. [...] The things of this life can't get a hold of you because you've soared high in the realm of the spirit. You're like Elijah and Enoch now; you now possess translational power and have been propelled into the realms of the Holy Ghost. [...] They've learnt to live beyond the human body. In Jordan, you live by the power of the "Whirlwind" – the Holy Ghost – Who transports you from the natural realm into the supernatural!⁵⁴

Theme 3: Activating power

Blessing is the goal. Spiritual enemies are the impediment. Methods for activating power to remove the spiritual barrier and generate blessings are the missing ingredient.

Christians need to "learn to activate the power. [...] How to make His power that is released on our behalf work for us is what many don't know."⁵⁵ Oyakhilome frequently employs the language of activating, releasing, and

49 Oyakhilome, *Born Again*, 10.

50 He bases this argument on the following passages: Leviticus 17, John 1:12–13, Galatians 2:20 and Romans 8:11.

51 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 38.

52 Oyakhilome, *Join This Chariot*, 34.

53 Oyakhilome, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do*, 41.

54 Oyakhilome, *Don't Stop Here*, 31.

55 Oyakhilome, *How to Pray Effectively*, 84.

unleashing power. The only thing preventing a believer receiving blessing is a lack of understanding of the varied methods for doing so.

God is the foundational power source. Objects may carry power, but physical things should not distract from the true power source.⁵⁶ The Holy Spirit is the “supplier of the power” who situates God’s power in the believer and grants the “dynamic ability to cause changes.”⁵⁷ Oyakhilome warns against obsession with spiritually charged objects, but he believes the Spirit’s power can imbue physical objects.⁵⁸ The Spirit of God was the primeval creating force and he brings that same power to those he indwells. Satan stole mankind’s power of dominion—the ability to create with faith-filled words as God did – but Jesus fought the devil to win that authority back for us.⁵⁹

Shaping reality through assertive declarations is the primary method for activating power. The performance of “positive confessions” is a mainstay of PT doctrine found repeatedly in Oyakhilome’s teaching.

Whatever you consistently confess becomes a reality. The power is in the speaking, in your words. You will have whatever you say. Your life today is a result of what you said yesterday. Death and life are in the power of your words (Prov 18:21).⁶⁰

Declaring our desires releases the power in our words.⁶¹ Our words are spirit and life as Jesus’s were; “They’re potent; they have conquering, overcoming and prevailing power over devils, adversities and every negative circumstance of life.”⁶² The name of Jesus may be invoked when making declarations to draw upon his delegated authority. It can unlock

56 Oyakhilome, *The Oil and the Mantle*, 22.

57 Oyakhilome, *Recreating Your World*, 3, 5.

58 Oyakhilome, *Holy Spirit and You*, 27.

59 Oyakhilome, *The Gates of Zion*, 14.

60 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 77.

61 Oyakhilome, *When God Visits You*, 22.

62 Oyakhilome, *Make Your Faith Work*, 66.

doors, destroy sickness, grant mastery over the devil, draw water from dry taps, and tame feral dogs.⁶³

Power can be honed and strengthened by a person's consciousness of spiritual truths. If a devil is disturbing a person then consciousness of the individual's righteousness will generate boldness and the power to expel the assailant.⁶⁴ The Apostle Paul was impervious to the venom of the viper in Acts 28 because he was "zoë-conscious".⁶⁵

Some practices trigger power. Speaking in tongues "triggers off" the power of the indwelling Spirit by "quick charging" the speaker's inner divine power.⁶⁶ Other practices are useful for ensuring a miracle received is maintained and not lost. Oyakhilome lists six ways to maintain a miracle: 1) disregard symptoms; 2) exercise faith; 3) abstain from sin; 4) attend church regularly; 5) pray regularly; and 6) study the word.⁶⁷ There are also certain behaviours that cause power-activation failures: 1) lacking knowledge; 2) wrong confession; 3) laziness; and 4) walking out of love.⁶⁸

The foundation for activating power: Oyakhilome's notion of faith

Faith is a sort of meta-category in Oyakhilome's collection of activation methods. If a person has not learnt to "make their faith work" then praying, fasting, seed-sowing, and even positive confessions are powerless against tragedies in a person's life.⁶⁹ Faith is "the necessary spark for the miraculous."⁷⁰

Oyakhilome describes faith as "a spiritual force, an attribute of the human spirit" which "transcends the realm of reasoning and the mind."⁷¹ He recounts the story of a man who suffered from a large growth who, upon hearing a message on tongues, put his hand on the growth, spoke in

63 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 84–98.

64 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 70.

65 "Zoë" is Oyakhilome's transliteration of ζωή. Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 42.

66 Oyakhilome, *Tongues*, 12, 15, 28.

67 Oyakhilome, *Receive a Miracle*, 29–36.

68 Oyakhilome, *None of These Diseases*, 56–64.

69 Oyakhilome, *Make Your Faith Work*, 8.

70 Oyakhilome, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do*, 11.

71 Oyakhilome, *Make Your Faith Work*, 11.

tongues, and “as he did, faith was released from his spirit.”⁷² Faith is like any muscle; use it often and it will get stronger.⁷³

Tithes and offerings: A strange omission?

Oyakhilome often discusses finances when speaking of blessings. But he is set apart from stereotypical PT teachers by a lack of attention on seed-faith in his books. Seed-faith operates a reciprocal mechanism in which giving offerings guarantees the giver a greater financial return from God. At one point in his books Oyakhilome does agree with the seed-faith doctrine: “In the Church [...] we’ve said, ‘When you give, God will give back to you.’ But [...] it’s only half-truth.”⁷⁴ Oyakhilome agrees with the concept but believes an aspect is missing from the equation, viz., prayer and belief. Drawing on the words of the prophet Zechariah about the “time of the latter rain” (Zech 10:1) he writes:

When you sow your seed and give to God, if it’s going to come back, it’s going to be as a result of the rain, and your prayer is what makes the rain to fall. This is the mistake a lot of Christians have made.

They do not pray, they just give and expect.⁷⁵

In sermons, blog posts and interviews Oyakhilome states agreement with seed-faith more explicitly, and also teaches that the tithe and first-fruit offering, along with some other Levitical offerings, are still a model for the church.⁷⁶

⁷² Oyakhilome, *Tongues*, 28.

⁷³ Oyakhilome, *Make Your Faith Work*, 40, 53.

⁷⁴ Oyakhilome, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do*, 36.

⁷⁵ Oyakhilome, *Seven Things the Holy Spirit Will Do*, 36.

⁷⁶ Oyakhilome, “Rule the World by Your Giving!”, *Christian Daily Devotional*, 23 June 2017, <https://christiandevotional.com.ng/rule-the-world-by-your-giving/>; Oyakhilome, *Your Miracle Is In Your Offering*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ShTn-S273c>; Oyakhilome, *Question on Tithe, Offering and Seed*, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eAOE-qToGw>; Oyakhilome, *What Are the Benefits of Giving Your First Fruit Offerings*, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1O8ZZ_32ok.

Lay perceptions: The anointed Man of God

One final consideration, relatively imperceptible in Oyakhilome's books but germane to the analysis of PT-ATR resonance, is lay perceptions of Oyakhilome.

Oyakhilome's teaching is presented as having a special divine endorsement. He encourages everyone to prophesy, but his own prophecies concern global renewals.⁷⁷ He encourages all to make positive confessions, but he can utter words and stop the wind when it interrupts his preaching.⁷⁸ He tells readers that the Holy Spirit speaks directly to them through Oyakhilome's writing.⁷⁹ His teaching is occasionally framed as a secret knowledge which he discovered and is now sharing.⁸⁰

Oyakhilome is treated with a great deal of respect by laity and colleagues. Congregants refer to him as "(the) Man of God", along with other adulatory titles.⁸¹ An online birthday greeting reads: "We Love You, We celebrate the life of a marvellous light sent to set ablaze the lives of men, [...] The heaven's host converges in celebration of the prophet of our time."⁸²

This respect takes on a different form in other settings. Oyakhilome runs a "Healing School" which attracts global guests seeking miraculous healing. Oyakhilome's entrance is the climax of the event. One attendee recounts: "When the man of God walked in, it felt like a mighty army from heaven had come in. He carried such a powerful presence[...]"⁸³ He will approach individuals and either command a spirit to leave, lay hands on the site of sickness, puff air carrying "the anointing" on them, demand them to rise, or instruct them to breathe anointing off his hands. These actions are the moment Oyakhilome's power enters the supplicant. One recount describes

77 Oyakhilome, *Join This Chariot*, 61.

78 Oyakhilome, *Seven Spirits of God*, 28.

79 Oyakhilome, *The Oil and the Mantle*, 13.

80 Oyakhilome, *When God Visits You*, 44.

81 "Birthday Greeting", *1 Million Birthday Wishes for Pastor Chris Oyakhilome*, 7 December 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/204301261704/photos/a.10155134154616705/10155134159306705/>

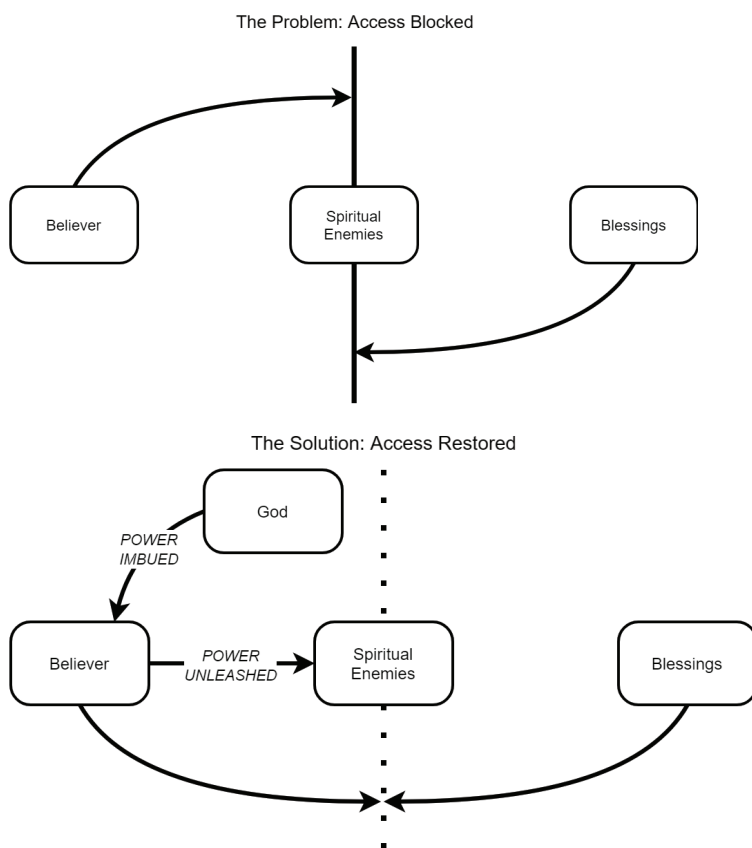
82 LoveWorldSAT, "Birthday Greeting", 7 December 2014, https://www.nairaland.com/attachments/1921826_offer73_jpegdbfa318fec450e231a5510cfac0ca96

83 Oyakhilome, *Healing from Heaven*, 1:53.

Oyakhilome's touch like being "hit by a might force. 'I felt the power of God go right inside my body.'"⁸⁴ There are dozens of similar testimonies.

Conclusion

In essence, Oyakhilome's teaching is concerned with a problem and its solution. The problem is that the believer's access to blessings is impeded by spiritual enemies. The solution is found in unleashing the power God has granted to believers against these enemies.



84 Oyakhilome, *Healing from Heaven*, 1:82.

In Oyakhilome's theological framework, God's people suffer due to their lack of knowledge. Christians must rectify this by learning how to wield the powers God has given them to fend off the devil's attacks. The Spirit empowers believers in various ways: He teaches them from the inscripturated Word, and also shows them the full array of means for accessing spiritual power that can be unleashed in the spiritual realm to produce superabundant blessing in the physical realm. It is not that God gives power or blessings in different measures; the power and the blessings are available and plentiful for all. The problem is the person. They must become cognizant of the power that resides in them and then learn the methods for activating that power to push the devil away and draw their blessings near.

3. The resonance of Prosperity Theology and African Traditional Religions

We are now in a position to compare the teachings of Oyakhilome to typical ATR beliefs. Mbiti's seminal work *African Religions and Philosophy* is a renowned "systematic theology" of African religion based on extensive fieldwork.⁸⁵ To explore the resonance of ATR and Oyakhilome's teaching we will consider five relevant themes from Mbiti's research: 1) Spiritual Proximity; 2) Religious Specialists; 3) Offering and Sacrifice; 4) Suffering; and 5) Eschatology.

Theme 1: Spiritual proximity

According to Mbiti, the African world is densely populated with spiritual beings and the spiritual and physical realms are a unit which "intermingle and dovetail into each other".⁸⁶ In Oyakhilome's system, the spiritual forces allied to Satan operate deliberate attacks on people. The spirits are not neatly divided into "good" and "bad" in ATR thinking. Spirits can act benevolently or in a malicious manner, but their motivations are personal and unpredictable. They are feared because they are powerful strangers

85 While Mbiti's work has been (rightly) critiqued, the issues do not prevent us applying his frameworks to serve our purposes. His general observations are employed with acknowledgment of the discussions around his work.

86 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 75.

whose disposition is unknown to the average person.⁸⁷ When there is sufficient motivation, spirits do attack people. The recently departed (labelled “the living-dead” by Mbiti) have the potential to exact revenge if they were offended before they died or not properly buried.⁸⁸ Sorcerers, witches and wizards employ mystical power through a range of means. To perform evil magic, they might send animals to attack or carry diseases, deploy secret incantations to make their spittle harmful, or place magical objects in a victim’s field or house.⁸⁹ But these specialists can also invoke spirits to attack or possess someone.⁹⁰ Speaking of evil more abstractly, spirits are the root of malevolence according to African religion: “In nearly all African societies, it is thought that the spirits are either the origin of evil, or agents of evil.”⁹¹

By default, spirits have more power than people.⁹² The strength-differential of competing spiritual powers matters in ATR and PT. Oyakhilome stresses that the Christian’s power comes from God himself and therefore it exceeds the devil’s power. Africans who have grown up in traditional environments are aware of the mystical power experienced through magic, divination, witchcraft and mysterious phenomena.⁹³ According to PT, Christians are not only aware of it; they have been granted the ability to harness it.

ATR does not exhibit the rallying of angels or other good spirits to the degree Oyakhilome does. It would take an unimaginably great deal of power to rally an army of spirits to protect a person. But the medicine-man does bring protection through mystical powers, which includes persuading spirits to act for a person. Among the Ndebele, when a person has died from witchcraft, a medicine-man will take a medicated stick and strike the grave of the recently deceased, saying “So-and-so, wake up! Go and fight!” The spirit will enter an animal and wait at the house of the witch until a member of the witch’s family kills the animal, transmitting a curse which

87 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 81.

88 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 84.

89 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 200–201.

90 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 200.

91 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 204.

92 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 79.

93 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 194.

causes the family members of the witch to die.⁹⁴ Mediums have positive relationships with a spirit or spirits, and are often very grateful to the spirit who possesses them.⁹⁵

Oyakhilome believes the spiritual realm is to be engaged in and in some ways even entered. While the average person does not “enter” the spiritual realm according to most ATRs, mediums provide a link between humans and spirits.⁹⁶ Oyakhilome’s clearest statements about entering the spiritual realm tie ecstatic singing to realm-crossing experiences. Mediums use music to entice a spirit into them and bring about their trance state.⁹⁷ Oyakhilome speaks about tongues in a similar way – letting the power of the spirit take over so that one can access spirit-realm communications.

Anthropology: Man is spirit

Mbiti surveys the language and euphemisms used by tribal groups to describe dying. He concludes that death is conceived of as a departure, not annihilation: “[The deceased] moves on to join the company of the departed.”⁹⁸ For the majority of peoples, the “next world” is geographically here, differing from the world inhabited by the living only in that it is invisible to the living.⁹⁹

Mbiti uses the language of soul synonymously with spirit for the most part. His main distinction is between humans and spirits as two types of being, but he also distinguishes body from spirit/soul (using the two interchangeably in this context) as the two parts of the human. When discussing death he will switch between soul and spirit to describe the part of the human not disrupted by death.¹⁰⁰ While Oyakhilome states he has a tripartite understanding of mankind’s constitution, this seems to have little effect on the rest of his theology. Oyakhilome says next to nothing about the soul or souls (except in the evangelistic idiom “winning souls”).

94 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 168.

95 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 174.

96 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 171–72.

97 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 172.

98 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 157.

99 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 159.

100 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 155–65.

The spirit (which *is* man) and the body (which is his vessel), are his primary categories. This is quite like ATR belief.

In neither the afterlife nor this life is there anything like a process of deification in ATR; no growing spiritually towards or like God.¹⁰¹ Intermediaries can *manipulate* divinities and spirits, but man does not possess a variable attribute of divine-likeness. Onyekwe describes the Igbo belief that man becomes spirit at death as a natural meeting point between Christian doctrine and ATR.¹⁰² This assertion only works with a very particular understanding of divinization (certainly not classical deification or *theosis*). Death does not mean becoming more like God in ATR. Rather, after the ceasing of the body's function, a person continues to live, albeit in the invisible realm rather than the visible. Oyakhilome, on the other hand, speaks of divinity increasing in the believer during their lifetime. At this point he differs from ATR. And yet, the ontology of the cosmos that sits behind his belief is still ATR-resonant; a powerful spirit has entered and empowered the Christian, and that spirit happens to be God himself.

Theme 2: Religious specialists

“Religious specialist” refers to a range of roles with varying degrees of overlap; herbalist, medicine-man, witch doctor, shaman, diviner, medium, priest/priestess, prophet, and rain-maker. In two major ways, Oyakhilome's ministry resonates with the practices of traditional religious specialists. First, it was evident in the previous chapter that members of Oyakhilome's church perceive him as a powerful “Man of God.” Second, Oyakhilome devotes much of his efforts to sharing the means for activating power. Religious specialists provide similar functions: they are powerful intermediaries between people and the spirits, and technicians with expertise in wielding the latent power that exists in the universe.

Mbiti augments his tiered ontology of the universe with a permeating energy or power:

101 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 165.

102 Anthony Onyekwe, *Marriage and Life After Death: A Model of Regenerative Inculturation* (Dartford, England: Xlibris, 2015), sec. 6.1.2.

[T]here seems to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is the Source and ultimate controller of this force; but the spirits have access to some of it. A few human beings have knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it.¹⁰³

On God as the source and controller, Oyakhilome explicitly agrees. Religious specialists can provide a measure of this mystical power to people through charms, amulets, powder, feathers, or special incantations.¹⁰⁴ On this point also we find resonance; Oyakhilome provides people with access to spiritual power. Oyakhilome does not give magical objects to people, but positive confession can be understood as a method not unlike a special incantation.

Words are supremely powerful in Oyakhilome's teaching. "In the name of Jesus" is his essential incantation. In ATRs words have mystical power and so can cause "good fortune, curse, success, peace, sorrows or blessings, especially when spoken in moments of crisis."¹⁰⁵ Even when administering medicines, the *words* of the traditional specialist are the foundational source of power, more than the actual herbs.¹⁰⁶

Religious specialists know the practices that will trigger or manipulate power. This is a fundamental aspect of their role, and Oyakhilome's ministry operates in a similar mode. When people consult religious specialists they will often prescribe certain activities to fix the spiritual source of problems. Witchcraft provides an explanation for misfortunes which befall people for no apparent reason; these sorts of problems require spiritual remedies.¹⁰⁷

Oyakhilome teaches that faith is a prerequisite for releasing power. In his religious system faith is mystical power become spiritual substance – a force that transcends the rational mind. In Mbiti's study *The Prayers of African Religion*, he writes: "[M]an prays with his eyes of faith wide open. Prayer is an exercise in confidence, and in praying man moves in word, ritual,

103 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 16.

104 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 198.

105 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 197.

106 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 197.

107 M.F.C. Bourdillon, "Witchcraft and Society", in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona, World Spirituality: An Encyclopaedic History of the Religious Quest 3 (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 180.

hope, and trust towards the spiritual.”¹⁰⁸ Mbiti means by faith something more akin to Protestant understandings of faith as trust. Oyakhilome’s definition of faith is more like Mbiti’s description of the permeating force. What Mbiti calls mystical power, and Austronesian languages call *mana*, Oyakhilome calls faith.

The descriptions of Oyakhilome from his followers certainly frame him as an icon of hope. Mbiti writes: “the medicine-men symbolize the hopes of society; hopes of good health, protection and security from evil forces, prosperity and good fortune”.¹⁰⁹ This description could apply just as readily to Oyakhilome. He is hope of all these; health, protection, and prosperity. “Medicine-men are the friends, pastors, psychiatrists and doctors of traditional African villages and communities.”¹¹⁰ Likewise, Pastor Oyakhilome is the friend, medicine-man, psychiatrist and doctor of his own “village and community”.

Theme 3: Offering and sacrifice

The doctrine of seed-faith is not especially prominent in Oyakhilome’s teaching. Nonetheless, the teaching is present and is an important instance of PT-ATR resonance. Gerrie ter Haar argues that “investing spiritually” is entirely logical in the African worldview where the material and the spiritual are so tightly tethered.¹¹¹ Dena Freeman points out that Protestantism developed in Europe against a backdrop of Catholicism which promoted an ascetic ideal, but in Africa, it is developing against an ATR background which emphasises sacrifices and offerings to receive blessings.¹¹²

108 John S. Mbiti, *The Prayers of African Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975), 23.

109 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 170.

110 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 171.

111 Gerrie ter Haar, “Mixed Blessing: Religion in Contemporary Politics”, in *Faith in Civil Society: Religious Actor as Drivers of Change*, ed. Heidi Moksnes and Mia Melin (Uppsala: Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development, 2013), 41.

112 Dena Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development”, in *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*, ed. Dena Freeman, Non-Governmental Public Action (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 18–19.

Sacrifices are one of the commonest acts of worship in ATRs.¹¹³ Mbiti says there are four main theories to explain the function of sacrifices: the gift theory; the propitiation theory; the communion theory; and the thank-offering theory.¹¹⁴ He struggles to synthesise the data on sacrifices because the practice is so common and so variant. He does seem to think all four theories operate at different times.¹¹⁵ Many societies pray for fertility, health and provision from God and accompany these prayers with sacrifices.¹¹⁶

Because Oyakhilome says little about seed-faith, and because sacrifice is used for varied purposes in ATR, the resonance is less overt. One conclusion Mbiti does draw out is that “As a rule, there are no sacrifices without prayers”.¹¹⁷ Whether we see much significance in it or not, Oyakhilome insists that offerings to God must be accompanied by prayer; without prayer, seed-faith is only a half-truth. In a broad sense at least, making offerings to God for personal prosperity is a shared feature of ATR and PT.

Theme 4: Suffering

Blessing and suffering are strictly antithetical in Oyakhilome’s teaching. He teaches against those who argue that God disciplines Christians, and in his writing there is no consideration of any potential good that might come from suffering. This plays into the mentality of non-acceptance towards suffering seen in ATR.

We covered the role of spirits as origin and agents of suffering above. While religious specialists harness mystical power to benefit their patrons, some use the same power negatively “to ‘eat’ away the health and souls of victims, to attack people, to cause misfortunes and make life uncomfortable.”¹¹⁸ Because the cause of all suffering is “known” (i.e. there is no suffering without either a human or spirit-realm cause), all suffering is “treatable”. The medicine-man’s duty is, first and foremost, dealing with sickness and

113 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 58.

114 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 59.

115 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 59.

116 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 42.

117 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 61.

118 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 203.

misfortune.¹¹⁹ Mbiti notes that endurance is a valued trait and something which Akamba children are encouraged to display by bravely bearing the pain of puberty rites.¹²⁰ By default, however, suffering is not a means to an end, but rather, something to be dealt with.

We may not be overstating the case by claiming that the alleviation of suffering is the primary purpose of religious activity in ATRs. Anim makes this point and argues for PT-ATR resonance. Prosperity teaching thrives because:

charismatics have tapped into fertile ground already nurtured by the traditional concept of prosperity. [...] Africans do not ‘honour’ or accept suffering or poverty. It is a battle they have always sought to fight. The belief in the gods is primarily to ensure prosperity and well-being. The influence of American-type prosperity teaching only served as a catalyst and also reinforced what was already prevailing in the matrix of the primal worldview.¹²¹

Oyakhilome’s fundamental belief – that blessing will come to those who understand the things of God – shares significant correspondences with ATR attitudes to religion’s role in dealing with suffering.

Theme 5: Eschatology

Mbiti says the distant future is relatively insignificant in traditional African conceptions of time.¹²² Mbiti does not deny there is a spiritual journey that takes place after death.¹²³ The point he makes is that there is no telic direction for history, no culmination or climax towards which events are headed.¹²⁴ Time is simply the composition of events which have occurred, those taking place now, and those immediately to occur.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 169.

¹²⁰ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 123.

¹²¹ Anim, “Prosperity Gospel and Primal Imagination”, 66.

¹²² Mbiti, *African Religions*, 17.

¹²³ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 149–65.

¹²⁴ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 23.

¹²⁵ One of Mbiti’s primary pieces of evidence is that the East African languages he has studied do not carry concrete words or expressions to convey the idea of a distant future. Mbiti, *African Religions*, 17–19.

Moreau describes this view with the illustration of a person standing in a river staring in the direction of the current; time does not move forward, it moves backwards, flowing past the fixed observer, who knows the future only peripherally.¹²⁶

If Mbiti is right about conceptions of history's culmination, this may help to explain why suffering is not a means to an end in ATR. At death one moves from present being to past being. There is no recompense in the after-life, unless through spiritual attack to enact retribution. PT speaks into this ATR mindset well. The stance towards suffering is not one of endurance for future reward. For Oyakhilome all of Christ's blessings are ours now. He holds typical dispensationalist views on the rapture and the parousia, but he rarely speaks about them. Christian hope is seen as an improved life tomorrow, not salvation at the judgement.

Situating Oyakhilome: Other case studies as comparative examples

From his field studies of African Pentecostalism, Paul Gifford identifies six “registers of victorious living” which characterise Pentecostal teaching on success: 1) Motivation to Prosper; 2) Entrepreneurship; 3) Practical skills; 4) the Faith Gospel; 5) the “Anointing” of the Pastor; and 6) Defeating the Spirits Blocking one's Advance.¹²⁷ Gifford contends that those who argue the Weberian angle in which Pentecostalism is propelling Africa towards modernity¹²⁸ have only accounted for the first three of the six registers

126 Moreau, “A Critique of John Mbiti's Understanding of the African Concept of Time”, 39.

127 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 47–8.

128 E.g. Peter L. Berger, “Max Weber Is Alive and Well, and Living in Guatemala: The Protestant Ethic Today” (Lecture presented at the Norms, Beliefs, and Institutions of Capitalism: Celebrating Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Center for the Study of Economy & Society, Cornell University, October 2005), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2010.528964>; R. Andrew Chesnut, “Prosperous Prosperity: Why the Health and Wealth Gospel Is Booming across the Globe”, in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, ed. Amos Yong and Katy Attanasi, Christianities of the World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 215; Robert W. Hefner, “The Unexpected Modern – Gender, Piety, and Politics in the Global Pentecostal Surge”, in *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2013), 23; Douglas A. Hicks, “Prosperity, Theology, and Economy”, in *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement*, ed. Amos Yong and Katherine Attanasi, Christianities of the World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 239–51.

(which are in his opinion less widespread and less significant than the latter three).¹²⁹ These defining characteristics happen to map on to our five themes well. His “defeating spirits” aligns with our “spiritual proximity”; his “anointing of the pastor” with our “religious specialists”; “faith gospel” with “offering and sacrifice”; and “motivation to prosper” with “suffering”. The reason for noting this is merely to show that the resonances he has perceived between the enchanted religious imagination and African Pentecostalism (the churches he studies are all examples of strong PT) corroborate the findings of our own study.

While there are few thorough case studies of PT preachers in Africa, Gifford’s research stands out as a useful comparative tool. He provides a focussed case study of two PT-endorsing pastors. These pastors sit towards opposite ends of a spectrum which measures the “enchanted religious imagination”. Daniel Olukoya represents a PT which focusses on the enchanted imagination “almost exclusively, and to an almost unsurpassable degree.”¹³⁰ Gifford contrasts Olukoya with David Oyedepo whose rhetoric is proportionally far less exclusive in its attention to the enchanted imagination. And yet Oyedepo’s ministry is still highly concerned with material prosperity and utilising mystical power over spiritual forces.¹³¹ Gifford’s conclusion is not that some Pentecostal preachers foreground the enchanted imagination and others reject it, but rather, “the enchanted imagination [...] is present in all African Pentecostalism, on a spectrum from aggressively unavoidable to gently unobtrusive.”¹³²

Gifford’s spectrum provides a means of situating Oyakhilome amongst his contemporaries. Oyakhilome sits somewhere in the middle of the enchanted spectrum – more conscious of the enchanted imagination than Oyedepo, but less so than Olukoya. As with both Olukoya and Oyedepo, Oyakhilome’s Christianity speaks into the ATR worldview very effectively.

Cf. Coleman’s critique of neo-Weberian explanations: Simon Coleman, “Morality, Markets, and the Gospel of Prosperity”, in *Religion and the Morality of the Market*, ed. Daromir Rudnyckyj and Filippo Osella (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 59–60.

129 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 55.

130 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 51.

131 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 150.

132 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 51.

Conclusion

When the theological system of Oyakhilome is compared with typical traditional African religious beliefs, there are several areas of significant overlap. Other scholars have hinted at these resonances. Some have suggested spiritual proximity as the cause of the birth and growth of PT.¹³³ American anthropologist Robert Hefner writes: “the tendency of indigenous religions to treat the material and the spiritual as inextricable and to expect the indigenous spirits to enter into ‘contracts’ to deliver worldly ‘goods’ creates very fertile ground for a prosperity gospel.”¹³⁴ Some have observed the way PT-endorsing pastors take on the role and personalities of traditional religious specialists.¹³⁵ Positive confession has been described as “neo-magical”.¹³⁶ Some have pointed to the practice of making offerings for prosperity as a resonant feature contributing to PT acceptance.¹³⁷ And many note the role of suffering and eschatology in the growth of PT in Africa.¹³⁸

What others have hinted at is confirmed by our synthesis of the case study of Oyakhilome and Mbiti’s presentation of ATR. The resonance is mild in sections, but for the most part there is a strong conceptual overlap between Oyakhilome’s PT and ATR.

133 Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, 51; Liroy, “The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel”, 47; Feumba Samen, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa”, *World*, 14 November 2014, https://world.wng.org/2014/11/the_prosperity_gospel_in_africa.

134 Hefner, “Unexpected Modern”, 22.

135 Eric Z. M. Gbote and Selaelo T. Kgatla, “Prosperity Gospel: A Missiological Assessment”, *HTS Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 5; Ro, “Bankrupting the Prosperity Gospel”, 60.

136 Marco Frenschkowski, ‘Pentecostalism/Charismatic Movements: I. Church History’, in *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 691–93.

137 Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development”, 18–19; Gbote and Kgatla, “Prosperity Gospel”, 5; Haar, “Mixed Blessing”, 41.

138 Anim, “Prosperity Gospel and Primal Imagination”, 66; Freston, “Prosperity Theology”; Haar, “Mixed Blessing”, 38; David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 73; Samen, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa.”

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