LIVE LONG AND PROSPER

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There is something slightly ugly about westerners, comfortable with their financial security and good health care condemning brothers and sisters around the world for wanting to share a little bit of what they take for granted.Â

Category: Observations

This is the third and final post inspired by a Gospel CoalitionÂ (GC) article on the need for Westerners in Africa and a response by an African ChristianÂ (MH).

In this post I would like, briefly to say something about the prosperity Gospel. First let's start with quotes from the original articles:

> *"Additionally, much of what is classified as â€œevangelicalÂ Christianityâ€ in Africa is influenced toÂ some degree byÂ prosperity theology." (GC)*
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> *"I would argue that the way the prosperity gospel is described as evil in Africa in the TGC article is the same as how Black Christians would describe Patriotic Evangelism in America; both are blinding and so appealing to the needs of a manâ€™s heart to self-exalt and self-serve. I do not deny that most of Africa is struggling with the prosperity gospel, but one thing we can learn from those false teachers is that they are letting people live where they are, and going and â€œevangelizingâ€ them in their own language and culture. They are not trying to â€œcivilizeâ€ them and make them conform to their way of living. It is one thing when missionaries go into villages to build hospitals and schools to help what is already there, but the TGC article appears to be demanding westernization and even, audaciously, religious freedom." (MH)*

What these two quotes show is that the issue of the prosperity gospel is not quite as simple as some would like to suggest. There are a number of dimensions which don't always get mentioned in Western critique of African Christianity.

Here are a few bullet points of my own:

- We in the West need to own the problem of the prosperity Gospel and not simply see it as a problem that others suffer from. If you watch TV in many African countries (and not just Africa), it can be difficult to escape from programs showing westerners in slick suits preaching a prosperity message. We have flooded the world with this toxic nonsense and we shouldn't be surprised that others have picked up on it.
- We need to be a bit more understanding of the reality that many people face. Many (not all) Africans are desperately poor, and a message which promises health and financial security is understandably attractive in that context. There is something slightly ugly about westerners, comfortable with their secure financial position and good health care condemning brothers and sisters around the world for wanting to share a little bit of what they take for granted.
- We also need to take a good hard look at ourselves and our own failings. MH mentions Patriotic Evangelism in the US, which is a sort of prosperity gospel for the nation, but I'd suggest that there is a more generalised malaise in the west. By and large, western Christians are phenomenally wealthy by historic standards, yet we treat Jesus' teaching about camels

and needles' eyes, or about serving God and Mammon as if he were talking about someone else. These passages point to us and we need to reflect on them, before we go out of our way to criticise others.

I am not defending prosperity teaching, far from it, but I do think we need a lot more self-awareness and honesty from westerners who set out to criticise it.