

Paper proposal for panels nr. 1 (Frei) or nr. 6 (Heuser) or nr. 7 – preference in the order of listing

Mammon, the Spirit and Faith: Prosperity Gospel in the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Helsinki, Finland

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The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is one of the more successful African diaspora churches in Helsinki, Finland. The proclamation in the church is openly and even simplistically Prosperity Gospel. In this paper, the ideas of prosperity in RRCG Helsinki are analysed in light of proclamation and ritual practice of the church taking into consideration the social, economic and cultural location of the predominantly African migrants attending to the church. The analysis is specified and deepened through interviews with some of the congregants and the leading pastor.

The position of the congregants as African immigrants in Finland is often precarious, and the pressures towards success are great. However, in terms of Prosperity Gospel, the situation is extremely complicated in the sense that on one hand, the success of the earlier arrived immigrants frequenting to the church is affirmative to the proclamation whereas the comparison to the blatantly secular Finns reveals a major economic gap between the immigrants and the godless Finns. The same applies naturally on the global level where affluence and secularisation seem to go hand in hand whereas religiosity and poverty tend to coincide.

Interviews revealed a considerable deepening of understanding of the content of the concept of prosperity, theological ideas behind prosperity as well as the connection between these two. The single-minded economic emphasis of preaching and teaching was far more nuanced both in the leading pastor and the interviewed congregants as seen through the interviews. The intellectual and emotional challenges related to the tension between the Prosperity Gospel theory and real life were taken seriously, and various theological arguments were developed.

The outcome of that theologising between the church's official Prosperity Gospel teaching and the harsh realities of life are that while the congregation openly preaches Prosperity Gospel, the theological interpretation of that message is so flexible that one may wonder whether it is a matter of Prosperity Gospel any longer.

The paper closes with ethical considerations on Prosperity Gospel in terms of the consequences to the lives of these immigrants by using liberation theological views as a critical partner of discussion. To which extent is such a theology useful for the immigrants? In case it is successful, is it acceptable to interpret the Christian message in such a capitalist manner?