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Review

Emmanuel Kwasi Amofo, *Stand Up for the Gospel: Getting the Church Back on Track*. Oasis International Publishing, 2022. ISBN 1594528519, 207pp.

Review by Dr Ryan Faber¹

Many lament the current captivity of the African church to prosperity teaching, but few provide as clear and compelling a prescription for getting the church back on track as does Emmanuel Kwasi Amofo in *Stand Up for the Gospel*. Amofo, a lecturer at Global University (USA) and St. Paul's University (Kenya), believes that the biblical book of Jude holds "the key to solving the serious departures from the gospel that we find in the church in Africa today" (Amofo 2022:1). Jude can "help us move from our serious theological crisis to a place of hope, truth, and power" (Amofo 2022:8).

Stand Up for the Gospel brings together two stories: the story of the church to which Jude wrote, with which Amofo is familiar from his doctoral studies; and the story of the African church today, with which Amofo is equally familiar from two decades of ministry in the Anglican Church of Kenya. Both stories "demonstrate serious deviation, negations, and departures from the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Amofo 2022:5). The present departures include especially the prosperity doctrine. Amofo refused to call it a gospel, because it is not; it is a teaching (doctrine), not a gospel (good news).

Amofo notes that in Africa "many people's real beliefs and worldview are strongly influenced by African Traditional Religions (ATR)" (Amofo 2022:33). The early Western missionaries' version of the gospel that focused on sin was not "relevant to someone with this worldview". Africans are "concerned about deliverance from the influence of evil powers in the unseen spiritual realm"

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(Amofo 2022:33). “Lingering aspects of an ATR worldview” makes many Africans “easy prey for prosperity teaching” (Amofo 2022:77). The solution is not outright rejection of the ATR worldview - “the Bible affirms that the unseen spirit world of darkness is real” (Amofo 2022:83) - but “presenting the gospel as deliverance from Satan and his demons”. Such a gospel presentation, which Amofo ably models, “feels very relevant to the fear that pervades an ATR worldview” (Amofo 2022:36).

Amofo exposes the lie of prosperity preachers who only offer “false hope and disappointment to churchgoers in Africa” (Amofo 2022:79). When the prosperity they promise is not realised, these preachers “blame churchgoers for their lack of faith as a way of excusing their inability to make real their false promises” (Amofo 2022:79). Prosperity teaching “seems to only enrich the church leaders” (Amofo 2022:111), who are “only interested in luxury cars and sound equipment” (Amofo 2022:115). They hold up their lives as evidence of the truth of their teaching, but “what would happen if members stopped paying tithes?” (Amofo 2022:110).

Amofo also exposes the poor biblical interpretation of prosperity preachers. He argues that “Scripture must be correct interpreted, as God intended it in the original context, to be rightly considered the Word of God” (Amofo 2022:62), and offers sound explanations of numerous verses that are often misused by prosperity preachers, including 3 John 2, Mark 10:29-30, Psalm 90:10, Deuteronomy 28:1-14, and 2 Corinthians 9:6 and 8:9.

In the end, getting the church back on track requires one thing: that we preach the gospel - the gospel rightly understood. The gospel reminds people that “they are in Christ” (Amofo 2022:133). In Christ, they are “called, loved, and kept by God” (Amofo 2022:16). This is a key theme for Amofo: Christians must know their true identity in Christ, because “doubting God’s love is often the root issue when people fall way” (Amofo 2022:158). “The lack of these reassurances” - that we are loved and kept by God - “[makes] people susceptible to those people who claim special status as ‘the man of God’” (Amofo 2022:9). Such preachers “use fear to influence people: the fear of witchcraft, the fear of demons, and the fear of the future” (Amofo 2022:19). But “the Bible clearly teaches that, although Satan may exercise power through witchcraft, demons, spells, and curses, we have power over all these

evil forces through Christ” (Amofo 2022:83). The book includes personal accounts of how “God is able to deliver and protect believers from demonic influence and attacks and from witchcraft” (Amofo 2022:85).

Amofo argues that the gospel “is not a religion of dos and don’ts, but rather, it is a relationship with God the Father that is made possible by the work of God the Son on the cross and experienced in our lives by the empowerment and in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit” (Amofo 2022:134). The most effective way to preach the gospel is through expository sermons (Amofo 2022:137). Such sermons will necessarily focus on Christ, because “focusing on Christ is essential to understand and effectively preach any biblical text” (Amofo 2022:137).

My only criticism of the volume is that Amofo’s assertion that “the solution to every problem Christians face in work, in relationships, or in interactions with non-Christians” (Amofo 2022:129-30) is left undeveloped. It requires further elaboration or clarification: How is the gospel the solution to every problem? Without clarification, the assertion risk sounds no different from the (false) promises of prosperity preachers.

Despite this criticism, *Stand Up for the Gospel: Getting the Church Back on Track* is highly recommended. Amofo offers an insightful diagnosis of the current theological crisis in the African church, especially prosperity teaching’s influence and inroads. His prescriptions for the church’s correction are contextual, clear, and clearly rooted in Scripture. The centre of Christianity has shifted to the global south, particularly Africa. “Now it is up to us: will the faith once for all delivered to the saints stay here and thrive or will it move on?” (Amofo 2022:54). *Stand Up for the Gospel* is essential reading for all who want to see true Christian faith thrive in Africa.