

ARISTOTELIAN RHETORIC IN PASTOR SAM ADEYEMI'S *THE PARABLE OF DOLLARS*

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian Pentecostal leaders increasingly engage secular and socio-economic concerns through written discourse. As such, this paper explores the motivational rhetoric of Pastor Sam Adeyemi's book, *The Parable of Dollars: Proven Strategies for Financial Success*. It reveals the economic themes and principles created through the biblical re-interpretation, examines the stylistic and rhetorical techniques that communicate them and assesses the efficacy of Aristotle's artistic proofs as a tool for examining persuasive texts. The study uses Aristotle's traditional rhetoric model which includes three artistic proofs: logos (logic), pathos (emotion) and ethos (credibility) as its framework. The study adopts a qualitative method and purposive sampling to select extracts from each of the eight chapters (including the introduction and title) of the book for analysis. The study reveals that Pastor Adeyemi recommends planning, passion, positive thinking, savings and investment, and giving back, and condemns corrupt leaders. The author employs metaphors, antithesis, repetition, parallelism, imagery and metonymy to persuade while using the three proofs. Aristotle's rhetorical model is an effective model for analysing motivational texts. Adeyemi is a writer-pastor who provides spiritual and economic advice.

Keywords: economic emancipation, Aristotle's artistic proofs, motivational rhetoric, Pastor Sam Adeyemi, rhetorical stylistics, religious discourse, Nigerian Pentecostalism.

Introduction

The interaction of religion and socio-economic rhetoric in Nigeria has been growing (Udoh 166). Pastors who traditionally focused solely on spiritual guidance are now involved in a wide array of activities (Oyinlola 184). This includes political commentary, human rights, financial literacy and business. This development is part of a broader trend in Nigerian Pentecostalism which, according to Burgess, has begun to present the church as an important social force to deal with moral, political and economic problems facing both its members and the general public.

One of the most conspicuous forms of this shift is the publishing of motivational books by Pentecostal pastors. These books mobilise the authority of office and the rhetorical power of language to motivate readers into social change. Pastor Sam Adeyemi, founder of Daystar Christian Centre in Lagos, motivational speaker and author, is a case in point. His book *The Parable of Dollars: Proven Strategies for Financial Success* (2017) draws on the biblical parable of talents (Matthew 25:14-30) to extract financial lessons for savings and investment, entrepreneurship and governance. By applying biblical wisdom rather than emphasising divine reward, his book stands out from the majority of prosperity gospel texts that emphasise giving to receive, and opens the door to a broader audience. This is profound because the prosperity gospel tradition in Nigerian Pentecostalism has been well documented by scholars who identify its defining feature as a transactional 'give to receive' theology, in which financial giving to the church is presented as the primary mechanism for divine wealth transfer (Gifford 12, Heuser 5). Adeyemi's emphasis on planning, saving, and investment as pathways to financial emancipation places him outside this tradition, aligning his text more closely with mainstream financial literacy discourse than with the reward-based theology that characterises the prosperity gospel genre.

There have been studies on the connection between Pentecostal rhetoric and motivational rhetoric (Sherwani 4080; Tumasang 10; Ajileye, Okere and Dozie 58), but these have focused primarily on the oral sermon and political commentary. There has been less attention given to motivational books by Nigerian clergy. Furthermore, the application of Aristotle's classical rhetoric to such texts has not been explored. This study contributes to filling this gap by drawing on the three Aristotelian artistic proofs of logos, pathos and ethos to examine the stylistic underpinning of Pastor Adeyemi's *The Parable of Dollars*. This is to illustrate the role of language in financial motivation in religious written texts.

It is important to note that the economic state of individuals is intimately connected to their overall well-being. Economic emancipation is the process by which individuals achieve financial independence and the freedom to direct their own resources towards improved standards of living. Sen reveals that this is not merely a material aspiration but a condition of full human agency. In a country such as Nigeria, where poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural deficits remain pervasive social realities despite the country's abundance of human and natural resources, the linguistic means through which economic transformation is imagined and pursued carry significant social weight. According to Torto, language exerts a powerful influence on readers' behavioural patterns, and rhetorical exposition of financial principles is particularly apt for re-orienting audiences towards economic self-determination (269). It is this communicative dimension, that is, the use of written language by a religious leader to mobilise his readership towards economic action, that constitutes the central concern of this study.

The specific objectives are to: (i) identify the economic themes and principles generated in the book through its reinterpretation of the biblical parable; (ii) analyse the stylistic and rhetorical strategies that underlie these themes; and (iii) assess the relevance of Aristotle's artistic proofs to the analysis of motivational written texts.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Research on motivational discourse has grown considerably, encompassing social media (Suryaningrant 40; Tumasang 10), commencement speeches (Mubarak and Rhaif 2864), and general motivational speaking (Sherwani 4080, Mawaddah, Yusmalinda, and Waozisokhi 78). These studies converge on a finding that motivational texts deploy narration, hyperbole, framing, and rhetorical appeals to reshape attitudes and inspire action.

Within the Nigerian faith community, studies have explored Pentecostal preachers' use of rhetorical devices. Okpeh and David show how Nigerian Pentecostal preachers rely on rhetorical devices to make their sermons far-reaching and affecting (82). A further study by Ajileye, Okere and Dozie goes on to demonstrate how elicitation and dialogic devices create dramatic pauses to maintain listeners' attention (60). Alternatively, Oyinlola show how audience engagement strategies such as the use of pidgin and ideological persuasion are features of contemporary Pentecostal sermons (177). However, these studies focus on oral discourse, and there is a gap in the literature about the rhetorical design of written motivational texts by Nigerian religious leaders. Linguistically, an analysis of how a particular motivational book uses rhetorical means to promote financial education and economic change is lacking.

From a rhetorical analytical perspective, Torto shows how Aristotle's triad of proofs are used in advertising texts in Ghanaian newspapers and concludes that the combination of logos, pathos and ethos results in the most persuasive appeal for a multifarious audience (275). Adegoju and Adetunji, in their analysis of Pastor Tunde Bakare's political commentaries, show how the linguistic tools of a pastor create and convey ideological views on governance (196). While these works address the persuasive aspects of particular text types, none treats a Nigerian pastor's written motivational book as an economic-rhetorical whole. The current study fills this gap. It views *The Parable of Dollars* not as a religious text with some economic content, but as a deliberately crafted motivational text in which the economic is the main area of interest and rhetoric the primary means of its advancement.

The study adopts Aristotle's classical rhetoric, as set out in his *Rhetoric* (2007) and expanded by other scholars (Jasinski 14, Selzer 10). Selzer asserts that *Rhetoric* aims to discover how language is deployed to persuade others in particular circumstances (300). Aristotle defines the artistic persuasive proofs, the means of persuasion, as logos, pathos and ethos. Logos is the appeal to reason, the persuasive use of argument, evidence and reason, including inductive and deductive reasoning (Herrick 20). Pathos refers to emotional appeal, the power of discourse to influence the audience's behaviour through the arousal of relevant emotions (Ramage and Bean). Ethos refers to the ethical appeal, the persuasive power of the speaker or writer, the trustworthiness and moral character the audience ascribes to the speaker or writer (Griffin 4). Sichach confirms the utility of these proofs in contemporary persuasive discourse and that optimum rhetorical results are achieved by their even combination.

The framework is an apt fit for motivational discourse because, as De Wet observes 'rhetoric and persuasion go hand in hand and the effectiveness of a motivational piece is measured by its persuasive power' (66). The three proofs are linguistically realised in the text through stylistic devices.

Methodology

The data are excerpts from the eight chapters of the book. The Introduction and Title were also sampled, making ten units in total. The purposive sampling approach is used in order to capture all of Pastor Adeyemi's flow of ideas on economic liberation; each extract addresses economic emancipation. The eight main chapters have these titles respectively: 'The Parable of

Dollars'; 'Wealth Mentality'; 'Financial Intelligence'; 'Financial Management'; 'Money Power'; 'Three Rich Men'; 'Financial Empowerment', and 'Releasing Your Increase'.

The research uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach. This method allows for an examination of how words are used in a written piece of religious text that speaks to socio-economic issues (van Dijk 5), and how rhetorical devices operate to encourage economic progress. The primary analysis is complemented by secondary sources such as books, journals and e-articles. The analysis process involves: locating the economic themes and principles in each extract; identifying the stylistic elements; and analysing them in terms of the proofs of logos, pathos and ethos.

Analysis and Discussion

The section is explored across a range of extracts, showing how Pastor Adeyemi weaves the three proofs of rhetoric through various stylistic devices.

1. Title and Introduction: Reframing the Parable

The title *The Parable of Dollars* itself is highly rhetorical. In replacing the biblical 'talents' with 'dollars', the world's most widely-held reserve currency, Pastor Adeyemi invokes all three proofs. At the level of logos, the nominal group suggests that there is an argument to be made about the monetary lessons latent in the parable based on evidence of reason and wisdom: the reader is invited to expect instruction in financial matters that is based on reason rather than piety. At the level of pathos, the noun 'dollars' acts as a lexical trigger for desire and fear: money evokes aspiration and anxiety of deprivation, two of the most powerful emotions in times of economic inequality like Nigeria. At the level of ethos, the generic term 'parable' also has implications. Parables are communicated from the wise to the less knowing. This pre-emptively positions Adeyemi as a credible guide. Notably, the choice of an international currency contextualises the financial principles within a contemporary global framework, as Adeyemi himself confirms when he states that 'it will be easier for you to relate to the dollar as an international currency' (6), a rhetorical move that enlarges both the perceived relevance and the audience reach of the text.

In the Introduction, the rhetorical question 'How could we understand the parable if we don't understand the financial principles?' (Adeyemi 5) exemplifies logos through its implicit syllogism: understanding the parable requires understanding its financial dimension; the reader does not yet fully understand that dimension; therefore, the reader must engage this book. The interrogative sentence type creates through pathos a sense of cognitive urgency that prods the reader to continue. The recurrent first-person plural possessive 'our' as in 'our stewardship' (Adeyemi 5) and 'our God-given gifts' (Adeyemi 5) operates as a solidarity device within the proof of ethos, implicating the pastor in the shared problem and dissolving the hierarchical distance that might otherwise alienate readers from his counsel. Adeyemi further strengthens his position by narrating his own epistemic journey from a 'spiritual' reading of the parable to a financial one, presenting himself as a trustworthy guide who has already undertaken the interpretive work the reader is about to encounter.

2 Wealth Mentality: The Rhetoric of the Inner Life

Chapter 2 advances the argument that the fundamental difference between poverty and wealth is an inner one, a question of attitude rather than material possession. The rhetorical contrast between 'the poor and the rich' (Adeyemi 16) is deployed in the antithesis of 'who' versus 'what they do or have' (Adeyemi 16), which draws logos from its logical progression: if wealth is internal, changing the inner quality is the logical way to improve the outer situation, not merely imitating the outward behaviour of the wealthy. The metaphoric use of 'heart' to represent the cognitive and volitional faculty 'The quality of your life will not appreciate beyond the quality of

your heart' (Adeyemi 16) literalises a psychological proposition through a physiological metaphor that is universally understood.

Pathos is invoked through a subject-less imperative 'Re-program your mind!' (Adeyemi 17) that is punctuated by an exclamation mark, which makes it an emotional imperative. The exclamation mark is in and of itself a stylistic device of emphasis, which amplifies the imperative. The repetition of the phrase 'who you are' (Adeyemi 24) and 'who they are' (Adeyemi 16) continues the emotional charge through reiteration and the antonymic pairing of 'grace' and 'disgrace' (Adeyemi 55) presents a stark contrast that appeals to the reader's avoidance of social disgrace and aspiration for dignity. Ethos is established in triple references to the Bible: Proverbs, Solomon and Jesus. This places Adeyemi's advice on money management in the context of thousands of years of traditional wisdom, rather than self-invention. The implication is that having a wealth mentality is not a new self-help theory but a timeless divine idea that the reader has yet to realise.

3 Financial Intelligence, Financial Management, and Money Power: Planning, Prudence, and Passion

Planning is the central motif in Chapter 3. The metaphor that Adeyemi uses is an example of source-to-target domain mapping as defined by Lakoff and Johnson: the hypothetical imperative 'If you do not win on paper, you would not win on the battleground' (Adeyemi, 32) maps financial planning to military preparation. This mapping renders the more abstract idea of financial prosperity accessible by tying it to an already familiar schema of war, where planning is a matter of life or death. The logos is reinforced through the analogical example of the five to seven years architects spend in learning about building design and construction before a stone is laid, an example of inductive reasoning generalising from the profession of architects to the principles of financial planning. The biblical analogies of the tower-builder and the king preparing for war in Luke 14:28-31 serve both as logos (appeal to an authoritative text) and ethos (appeal to the authority of Jesus' teaching). Pathos is evoked with the shame of the unfinished building and the mocking laughter of spectators. They are pathos-moved to not become the butt of ridicule through poor financial planning.

In Chapter 4, Parkinson's Law 'expenses will always rise to meet income' is used as a logos device which combines secular economic theory with biblical doctrine to promote a saving ethic. The strategy is rhetorically significant. By invoking a famous economic theory, Adeyemi creates an impression of erudition that adds to his ethos as more than a local pastor. The biblical analogy of Joseph's recommendation to Pharaoh that he store 20% of crops in a year of economic bounty demonstrates an instance of ethos through historical authority, which affirms the wisdom of the financial advice as eternal. The recurrence of the 'to' infinitive in a list of imperatives like 'learn to save,' 'learn to invest' lends the piece a sense of parallelism that scholars (DiYanni 42 and Ogunsiji and Aluya 80) have linked with coherence, rhythm, and rhetorical effectiveness. The prophetic mode of 'The move of God will be followed by economic empowerment' (Adeyemi 46) temporarily transforms Pastor Adeyemi's ethos into that of a prophet. This heightens the emotional appeal to divine approval that is especially relevant for a Nigerian Pentecostal audience.

In Chapter 5, the metonymic substitution of 'energy' for 'money' as in 'money flows in the direction of energy' (Adeyemi 55) makes diligence and passion the abstract qualities Pastor Adeyemi promotes. It is the force that attracts money. Metonymy is a figure of speech where one word is substituted with one associated with it. It allows the process of financial success to be more tangible. The black-and-white choice between 'grace' and 'disgrace' in 'When you do not operate by grace, what you get is disgrace' (Adeyemi 55) is a logos-based false dilemma that reduces the range of possible outcomes to two, reducing the number of choices available to the reader and

therefore the likelihood of their taking the recommended course of action. The Don Herold quote on unhappiness appeals to pathos by linking purposelessness to unhappiness, while the Romans 8:28 quote establishes a connection between financial prosperity and God's purpose in his word.

4 Three Rich Men and Financial Empowerment: Corruption, Poverty, and Spiritual Power

In chapter 6, the book shifts its focus from the reader to Africa's political economy. The character of Judas Iscariot is invoked to designate greed as a deadly sin on par with adultery or fornication. Such sin is usually considered the gravest among Nigerian Christians. This is a daring rhetorical strategy that casts financial corruption as spiritual calamity, tapping into the reader's sense of morality to evoke disgust. The *logos* is systemic cause-and-effect: poverty leads to a political office as the chief path to financial gain. This turns elections into 'do or die' affairs and entrenches a cycle of greed and corruption that results in the continuing impoverishment of the electorate.

The satirical depiction of politicians who 'sit tight' (Adeyemi 67) and have 'made up their minds to die in office' (Adeyemi 67) creates pathos through frustration and anger. Sherwani (4085) suggests that emotions can be powerful inspirations for change when identified. The refrain 'the spirit of greed' (Adeyemi 67) is echoed throughout this section. It is a figure of speech and a theological explanation that links self-indulgence to a supernatural evil spirit, rather than to individual sin. This strategy reflects the African spiritualised cosmological worldview described by Brendan in which social ills are 'spiritualised' (130) and offers a degree of pastoral forgiveness that maintains the reader's agreement with and identification with the author.

In Chapter 7, the author begins with a counter-argument in which the commonly misrepresented biblical quote of 'money is the root of all evil' is clarified with the correct biblical text of 'the love of money' (1 Timothy 6:10). It is also suggested by the pastor that 'the lack of money is the root of all evil' (Adeyemi 73). This is *logos* at its most direct logical refutation of a widely held fallacy supported by textual evidence and it opens interpretive space for the reader to pursue wealth without guilt. The argument is corroborated by the statistical evidence of life expectancy differentials between developing and developed nations, an empirical *logos* appeal that grounds the discussion in verifiable social reality. The naira-note analogy in which both old and new notes retain equal monetary value regardless of their physical condition generates pathos through vivid imagery that affirms the intrinsic worth of economically marginalised readers and challenges them to seek conditions in which their value can be fully expressed. The nominal group 'one of my associates' (Adeyemi 75) functions as an ethos marker, presenting Adeyemi as a mentor figure at the centre of an influential network whose members are themselves becoming financial authorities.

5 Releasing Your Increase: The Seed Principle

The final chapter uses the farming metaphor of planting and reaping to illustrate the case for timely financial investment. The metaphor is nuanced: cocoa, which takes seven to eight years to mature but is more valuable than corn, stands in for long-term investment strategies that require patience but offer greater returns. This is an inductive *logos* argument, from the particular to the general, that is cognitively satisfying because it references a source domain (agriculture) with which many Nigerian readers are familiar.

The subordinating conjunctions 'when' and 'if' introduce a series of cause-and-effect statements: 'When you understand the seed principle, time works in your favour' (Adeyemi 93); 'If you do not sow your seeds when your contemporaries are sowing theirs, by the time they are reaping, you will be frustrated' (Adeyemi 93). These emphasise the logical implications of action and inaction. It renders the exhortation to timely investment not only persuasive but coercive. The

lexical field 'sow', 'seed', 'harvest', 'longer', and 'poorer' creates a continuous pastoral metaphor which is designed to evoke a metaphorical image of financial growth or stagnation, and to engage the pathos of the reader in anticipation of his identification with either the successful farmer or the disappointing late-comer. The placement of the adjective 'frustrated' at the boundary of the clause that delivers the news of inaction's consequence labels the reader's probable state and turns it into a motivation.

The pastoral prayer that concludes the book 'I pray that you and your children will never beg' (Adeyemi 93) is the final ethos gesture of the book. Prayer is a hierarchical act in many Nigerian Christian communities, following the Pauline adage that 'without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater' (Hebrews 7:7). By praying for the reader, Adeyemi affirms his spiritual leadership at the very moment of separation, transforming a motivational book into a pastoral gesture and delivering to the reader the practical and the affective benefits of pastoral care.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Pastor Sam Adeyemi's *The Parable of Dollars* is a book of motivation that combines Aristotle's three artistic proofs of logos, pathos and ethos in a range of stylistic features such as metaphor, antithesis, repetition, parallelism, imagery, metonymy, biblical allusion and supernatural authority. The economic values the book promotes such as planning, wealth consciousness, financial discipline, passion work, anti-corruption, and seed planting are rhetorically presented through language that engages the reader's reason and emotions, and establishes the writer's authority.

The study confirms the claim of Bloor and Bloor that rhetorical structures have ideological ramifications. In claiming to be pastor, motivational speaker, financial advisor, and prayer warrior, Adeyemi showcases the multi-faceted authority of Pentecostal pastors in contemporary Nigeria. Rather than focusing on the theology of reward for financial gift giving of the dominant prosperity gospel, Adeyemi's text is notable for its emphasis on responsibility: planning, saving, investing, and finding a passion-driven vocation, as critical supplements to faith. This locates him at a creative juncture of the spiritual and the secular.

This study also confirms that Aristotelian rhetoric is a useful tool in the analysis of motivational written texts, as it reveals in detail how persuasion is embedded in language, at the level of reason, emotion, and character. Sichach is correct in observing that the integration of the three proofs is the distinguishing feature of persuasive discourse over and above informative or merely provocative discourse. *The Parable of Dollars* exemplifies this integration as the argument unfolds: logos underpins the rational argument for each financial principle; pathos ensures the audience feels the message as well as understands the argument; and ethos ensures that the reader has sufficient trust in the author to take action on the financial advice provided. The three proofs are therefore not successive but all three are invoked in every extract, even if one be dominant.

This work has some implications. First, it adds to the emerging body of knowledge that Nigerian Pentecostalism is a socio-cultural phenomenon that transcends the confines of the church. The linguistic analysis of Adeyemi's book confirms the claim of Ajileye, Okere and Dozie (58) that the rhetoric of Nigerian Pentecostalism is architecturally complex. But while previous research has privileged the study of oral Pentecostal sermons, this study shows that rhetorical design of written Pentecostal texts is similarly sophisticated and worthy of study. Second, the study contributes to the field of financial literacy in the Global South. Adeyemi's text is an example of a model in which scripture, motivational psychology and economic advice are brought together through rhetorical language. This is a model that may be more accessible to many Nigerian readers than other financial education texts that do not engage with the spiritual worldviews that shape

their lives. This analysis could be repeated for other written motivational texts by Nigerian and other African Pentecostal pastors, or through a comparative analysis of the role of such texts across different African socio-religious settings.

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