

Prosperity Gospel: A Pastoral Perspective

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Introduction

The prosperity gospel, which rose to prominence in the 1950s, has emerged as a significant phenomenon within global Christianity.¹ It has, however, faced widespread critique, with many expressing concerns over its extreme teachings, especially for its transactional approach to God—treating blessings as rewards for faith and financial contribution. It is criticised for its distortion of core Christian doctrines, and many argue that its teachings threaten the theological foundations of Pentecostalism and classical Christianity. A search for “prosperity gospel” on the Lausanne Movement’s website yields over two hundred results, reflecting the high level of interest and debate surrounding it even more than seven decades later.² As British anthropologist Simon Coleman points out, this “gospel” has gone global, spreading across Africa, Latin America, Europe, and as I can attest, even here in Asia.³

While many prosperity gospel advocates come from Pentecostal or Charismatic backgrounds and may have taken biblical principles to extremes, it is important to critique this teaching carefully. In rejecting it, one must avoid dismissing valid biblical truths. Unfortunately, the rise of digital religion and the surge of anti-Pentecostal content online—especially during the COVID-19 pandemic—have fuelled widespread claims that all Pentecostals support this doctrine.

¹Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 41.

²“Search Results for: Prosperity Gospel,” Lausanne Movement, <https://lausanne.org/page/1?s=prosperity+gospel> (accessed October 8, 2024).

³Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31-38.

One example is the film *American Gospel: Christ Alone*, produced by Brandon Kimber, whose work reflects a Reformed perspective.⁴ Released in 2018, a significant part of the film criticises Word of Faith teachings and prosperity theology. Various ministers are called out for not preaching true Christian doctrine, and the film contrasts the sermons of prosperity preachers with the testimonies of those who, despite following Word of Faith beliefs, were not healed. The teaching is condemned as a “false theology” that reduces Jesus to a “magic genie,” criticising these preachers for spreading a false gospel and labelling them as false teachers. *American Gospel* has gained significant popularity, particularly among those critical of Pentecostals or harbouring resentment toward their beliefs.

While it is necessary to reject the errors of prosperity teaching, this film unfairly targets all Pentecostals who preach faith in God for healing and daily provision and encourage the spiritual practices of tithing and generosity. As a pastor, I have personally seen the confusion *American Gospel* has caused within my congregation, with many doubting their core beliefs due to the outright rejection of anything linked to the term *prosperity* or *blessing*—even fundamental Pentecostal doctrines like faith for divine healing.⁵

In light of the above, this paper seeks to critically evaluate the prosperity gospel and its connection to Pentecostalism. First, it begins with a survey of its history and development, arriving at the understanding that the prosperity gospel is not exclusively propagated and embraced by Pentecostals but is widespread across different ecclesial traditions. Second, this paper uses the Lausanne Movement’s definition of the prosperity gospel as a framework to understand its teachings. Third, it exposes the extremes of prosperity teaching while seeking to preserve biblical truths that may have been misused. Finally, in light of Lausanne’s definition of the prosperity gospel, which can be problematic for Pentecostals, this paper calls for a balanced response and highlights

⁴“American Gospel Films,” Parkside Church, July 16, 2020, <https://www.parksidechurch.com/learn/building-next-generation/news/2020/7/16/american-gospel-films/> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁵The film’s Calvinistic tone is also evident, as Reformed cessationists seem to encourage abandoning Pentecostal faith in favour of a view that passively accepts evil and sickness as part of God’s will.

the urgent need to reclaim and restore the core Pentecostal doctrines that have been distorted by prosperity gospel proponents.

History and Development of the Prosperity Gospel

Even before its surge in popularity in the 1950s, the idea of Christians flourishing financially had already emerged in the late nineteenth century in the United States.⁶ Prominent evangelical Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) taught that “diligent Christians would reach their individual goals, including material success.”⁷ Similarly, Episcopalian Bishop William Lawrence (1858-1941) preached that “in the long run, it is only to the man of morality that wealth comes . . . Godliness is in league with riches.”⁸

Early Influences: The New Thought Movement and E. W. Kenyon

Scholars often attribute the foundational tenets of the prosperity gospel to E. W. Kenyon (1867-1948), whose Methodist upbringing and later Baptist affiliation informed his theological perspective. Kenyon was also influenced by New Thought, which emerged in the late nineteenth century and emphasised the power of the mind, positive thinking, and the ability to shape one’s reality through thoughts and beliefs.⁹ While Kenyon criticised New Thought as a counterfeit of biblical principles, he adopted its focus on the interplay between mind, spirit, and universal laws. He taught that Christ’s work on the cross guaranteed blessings that believers could claim in the present rather than viewing them as future promises.¹⁰

Kenyon placed emphasis on the power of the spoken word, urging believers to make “positive confessions” as a way to access God’s power. For instance, he interpreted John 14:14, “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (NIV 2011),” to mean, “Whatsoever you

⁶David Bishau, “The Prosperity Gospel: An Investigation into Its Pros and Cons with Examples Drawn from Zimbabwe,” *International Open and Distance Learning Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015): 3.

⁷Coleman, *Globalisation*, 41.

⁸Dennis Hollinger, “Enjoying God Forever: An Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel,” Lion and Lamb Apologetics, <https://lionandlambapologetics.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Enjoying-God-Forever-Hollinger.pdf>, quoting William Lawrence (accessed October 8, 2024); “The Relation of Wealth to Morals,” *Christian Social Teachings* (G. W. Forell; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 331.

⁹Bowler, *Blessed*, 13.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

demand in my name, I will make good.”¹¹ This understanding of Jesus’s instructions as having binding, legal qualities became central to his teachings. He also popularised the phrase, “What I confess, I possess.”¹² These teachings became the theological foundation of the Word of Faith movement and heavily influenced the “health and wealth” gospel,¹³ often criticised as the “name it and claim it” doctrine.¹⁴

The Post-War Era: Economic Prosperity and Theological Expansion

Kenyon’s ideas gained momentum after World War II, aligning with the United States’ post-war economic prosperity. This historical context was instrumental in shaping a theology that linked faith with both health and material success.¹⁵ The 1950s healing revival in America, led by Pentecostal evangelists like Oral Roberts, Gordon Lindsay, Jack Coe, and A. A. Allen, integrated Kenyon’s faith principles into their teachings on divine healing. This revival would serve as a catalyst for the prosperity gospel’s growth, extending its application from physical healing to financial blessings. The rise of televangelism further accelerated the spread of prosperity theology. Media ministries enabled preachers to reach broader audiences, promoting the message that faith could lead to financial and physical well-being.¹⁶

Key Figures and Theological Divergence

Some consider Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003) as the “theological powerhouse”¹⁷ behind the prosperity gospel, while others see Oral Roberts (1918-2009) as its “major architect.”¹⁸ Prominent figures associated with this movement include Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Robert Tilton, Fred Price, and Eddie Long.¹⁹ Although the prosperity gospel is often linked to these Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders, it does not reflect the core beliefs of the majority of Pentecostals. Most

¹¹E. W. Kenyon, *The Hidden Man: The Secret to Living in the Spirit Realm* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2021), 250.

¹²Kenyon, *The Hidden Man*, 228.

¹³Bowler, *Blessed*, 40.

¹⁴Hollinger, “Enjoying God Forever,” 1.

¹⁵Sampson M. Nwaomah, “Overview of Prosperity Gospel,” in *Prosperity Gospel: A Biblical-Theological Evaluation*, ed. Daniel K. Bediako (Ghana: Advent Press, 2020), 6.

¹⁶Bishau, “The Prosperity Gospel,” 4.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 71, 80, 110.

Pentecostal denominations uphold more traditional theological views that do not align with the prosperity gospel's emphasis on material wealth. Sociologist Peter L. Berger correctly notes that adherents of the prosperity gospel constitute only a small minority within the 600 million-strong Pentecostal community.²⁰ Additionally, this perspective extends beyond Pentecostals as influential figures like Russell Conwell (1843-1925), a Baptist minister,²¹ Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993), a Methodist author,²² and Robert Schuller (1926-2015), a Reformed pastor,²³ have also significantly shaped prosperity teaching.²⁴ The appeal of the prosperity gospel reaches segments of Roman Catholicism and mainstream Protestantism as well.²⁵

Defining the Prosperity Gospel

The African chapter of the Lausanne Theology Working Group defines the doctrine as follows:

We define prosperity gospel 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.²⁶

Within this theological framework is the belief that God wills every believer to experience affluence and to enjoy robust physical health.

There are four fundamental arguments made by proponents of this movement. First, the belief that “God is a good God” who desires to bless humanity with good things (Phil 4:19; Jas 1:17) contradicts the idea that he intends believers to live in poverty.²⁷ Second, financial provision

²⁰Peter L. Berger, “Redeeming Prosperity—A Response to Asamoah-Gyadu’s ‘Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?’,” Lausanne Movement, 2009, <https://lausanne.org/content/redeeming-prosperity> (accessed October 8, 2024).

²¹Bowler, *Blessed*, 31.

²²*Ibid.*, 27, 55.

²³*Ibid.*, 101.

²⁴Bishau gives an example: some consider Bruce Wilkinson’s *The Prayer of Jabez* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2010) as a kind of prosperity gospel because his emphasis for God to “enlarge my territory” is almost equivalent to “prosper me” or “give me wealth” (“The Prosperity Gospel,” 4-5).

²⁵Bishau, “The Prosperity Gospel,” 8.

²⁶Africa Chapter—Lausanne Theology Working Group, “A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel,” Lausanne Movement, <https://lausanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel> (accessed February 1, 2024).

²⁷Frank D. Macchia, “The Prosperity Gospel: A Biblical Evaluation,” *Enrichment*

is part of the atonement (2 Cor 8:9), as Jesus's death and resurrection abolished not only sin and disease but also poverty.²⁸ Third, God has given the laws of faith for believers to access the power of the cross and the resurrected Christ,²⁹ with positive confession (Mark 11:22-24) being a key element—"best be understood as a statement, made in faith, that lays claim to God's provisions and promises."³⁰ Fourth, the practice of tithing and offering is believed to move God to open the floodgates of heaven and bring about material abundance (Mal 3:10-12), aligning with the biblical notion that generous sowing leads to generous reaping (2 Cor 9:6).³¹

Critiques of the Prosperity Gospel

Nearly all aspects of the prosperity gospel, including its four fundamental arguments, have faced intense and consistent scrutiny, with at least eight notable points of contention regarding how it is taught and practised.

(1) Rejection of the "Already and Not Yet" Framework

Proponents of the prosperity gospel emphasise a present reality, interpreting John 10:10 solely in the present tense and asserting a guarantee of abundant health and wealth in the here and now rather than in the eschaton.³² Believers have a "right" (legal entitlement) to demand health and wealth. From this perspective, the "finished work" of Christ's death and resurrection has fulfilled all human needs and eliminated all forms of hardship, leaving no room for a theology of suffering. Ghanaian theologian Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu observes, "Wealth, health, success, and ever-soaring profits in business are coveted, cherished, and publicly flaunted as signs of God's favour. Success and wealth are the only genuine marks of faith."³³

Journal 20, no. 1 (2015): 68, <https://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/Issues/2015/Winter-2015/The-Prosperity-Gospel-A-Biblical-Evaluation>.

²⁸Bowler, *Blessed*, 95.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 141.

³⁰Hollinger, "Enjoying God Forever," 5.

³¹Macchia, "The Prosperity Gospel," 69.

³²Joshua Robert Barron, "Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity," *Conspectus* 33, no. 1 (April 2022): 89.

³³J. 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 (Dec. 2009): 38-39, <https://>

Consequently, Christians who do not experience these blessings are often regarded as spiritually ignorant, immature, or lacking in faith. Robert Tilton says, “Being poor is a sin.”³⁴ His fellow prosperity teacher Jerry Savelle writes, “If I am not prospering, . . . it is not God’s fault, nor the fault of the Word of God—it is my fault.”³⁵ Philosopher Matthew Sharpe argues that teachings like this pose a significant problem for the “implied theodicy” of the prosperity gospel as they fail to account for the continual presence of evil and poverty in the lives of believers.³⁶ This theology accentuates the prosperity gospel’s imbalance between what God has promised in the present and what he will complete in the future.

(2) Selective Proof-Texting

The prosperity gospel’s practice of selective proof-texting takes biblical verses out of context to support a predetermined narrative. Prosperity advocates often focus on verses about blessings, abundance, and success, overlooking the broader biblical themes, which can result in misunderstanding God’s promises.³⁷ For example, Gloria Copeland asserts that all believers can attain wealth akin to Abraham’s riches (Gen 13:2), contending that Gal 3:14 declares that God has now extended the “blessing of Abraham” to the Gentiles.³⁸ However, a closer examination of the text reveals that the blessing of Abraham is not synonymous with material wealth; rather, it means that “by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”³⁹ By isolating specific texts and ignoring their broader context, the prosperity gospel reduces the Bible to a contractual agreement, implying that fulfilling certain obligations obliges God to grant success and wealth.

research-ebSCO-com.vanguard.idm.oclc.org/linkprocessor/plink?id=e5a314b7-5070-339e-9920-8c4d684804db (accessed February 1, 2024).

³⁴Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 227, quoting Robert Tilton during a *Success-N-Life* television program on December 27, 1990.

³⁵Hollinger, “Enjoying God Forever,” 5, quoting Jerry Savelle, *Living in Divine Prosperity* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1982), 77.

³⁶Matthew Sharpe, “Name it and Claim it: Prosperity Gospel and the Global Pentecostal Reformation,” in *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*, ed. Matthew Clarke (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 168.

³⁷Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?,” 94-96.

³⁸Gloria Copeland, *God’s Will Is Prosperity* (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1978), 18.

³⁹Asamoah-Gyadu, “Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?” 41.

(3) The “Little Gods” Controversy

The concept of “little gods” is common among preachers of the prosperity message. American evangelist John G. Lake (1870-1935), known for pioneering the “God-men” theology, cited Jesus’s passing comment in John 10:34 to claim that “God intends us to be gods.”⁴⁰ Supporters argue that because believers are made in God’s image, granted immortality, and given righteousness in Christ, they are, in a sense, “gods.” Paul Crouch, founder of Trinity Broadcasting Network, echoed this view, stating, “I’m one with Him. I’m in covenant relation. I am a little god!”⁴¹ The underlying message is that believers hold the authority to decree and claim whatever they desire. Critics vehemently accuse proponents of heretically insinuating that “humans are actually divine” by asserting their status as little gods, which strays from orthodox Christian teachings.⁴²

(4) Overlooking the Theology of Suffering

A significant critique of the prosperity gospel is its failure to address the reality of sickness, persecution, and martyrdom. This is evident in the life of individuals like Zhang Rongliang, a Pentecostal pastor and founder of the ten million-member Fengcheng House Church Fellowship in China. Zhang spent twelve years in prison where he endured torture, electric shocks,⁴³ diabetes, and a paralysing stroke.⁴⁴ Zhang is universally revered in the Far East as a man of deep faith, worthy of emulation. Yet, prosperity advocates might view his suffering, illness, and poverty as signs of a lack of faith or a curse. After all, Hagin claims that those who “did not demonstrate God’s power—plagued by . . . poverty or disease—

⁴⁰Bowler, *Blessed*, 23, quoting John G. Lake, *Spiritual Hunger, the God-Men and Other Sermons*, ed. Gordon Lindsay (Dallas: Christ for the Nations, 1982), 20. See also pages 86, 90.

⁴¹Hanegraaff, *Christianity*, 2, quoting Paul Crouch during a “Praise the Lord” programme at Trinity Broadcasting Network on July 7, 1986.

⁴²Some advocates have since clarified that this does not imply believers possess sovereignty, “Question of the Day,” Kenneth Copeland Ministries, <https://www.kcm.org/read/question-of-the-day/does-bible-say-we-are-gods> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁴³“House-Church Leader Arrested,” *Christianity Today*, updated January 5, 2005, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/february/2.21.html> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁴⁴G. Wright Doyle, “Zhang Rongliang’s ‘Stand with Christ,’” China Institute, <https://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/blog/2017/12/28/zhang-rongliangs-stand-with-christ> (accessed October 8, 2024).

fell to live ‘beneath their privileges.’”⁴⁵ In the prosperity theological framework, the depth of one’s spiritual life is evaluated based on net worth rather than the quality of one’s communion with the divine.

Theologian Joshua Robert Barron argues that the prosperity message, by emphasising material success, “emasculates the formation of Christian character . . . [and] leaves no room for brokenness and suffering.”⁴⁶ Poverty is not viewed as a result of structural injustice but as a consequence of demonic influences or generational curses that the believer has failed to address.⁴⁷ Because financial status is tied to spiritual condition,⁴⁸ poverty is blamed on the individual. This often leads to the poor being unfairly labelled as sinful or lacking faith, compounding their suffering and subjecting them to dual victimisation.

(5) Diminishing the Depth of the Believer’s Relationship with God

The prosperity gospel cheapens the relationship with God by introducing a transactional element to giving, thereby diminishing the depth of his love and sovereignty.⁴⁹ It promotes the idea that wealth (and health) can be obtained through positive confessions and consistent tithing, and the latter is viewed as a financial investment rather than an expression of love. When believers claim these blessings through faith, God is obligated to grant them.⁵⁰ Creflo Dollar, a prosperity advocate, asserts, “When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass.”⁵¹ Fred Price adds, “God cannot do anything in this earth unless

⁴⁵Kenneth E. Hagin, “Is Your Profit Showing?” *Word of Faith* (1976), 4-5, quoted in Bowler, *Blessed*, 45.

⁴⁶Efe M. Ehioghae and Joseph A. Olanrewaju, “A Theological Evaluation of the Utopian Image of Prosperity Gospel and the African Dilemma,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 20, no. 8 (2015): 74; cf. Edwin Zulu, “‘Fipelwa na baYaweh:’ A Critical Examination of Prosperity Theology in the Old Testament from a Zambian Perspective,” in *In Search of Health and Wealth: The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective*, ed. Hermen Kroesberge (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 27, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?,” 94.

⁴⁷Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 94.

⁴⁸David Maxwell, “Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?” Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 357, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1581574>, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?,” 94.

⁴⁹J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Studies in Global Christianity, 2013), 100, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 95.

⁵⁰Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 95.

⁵¹David W. Jones, “5 Errors of the Prosperity Gospel,” The Gospel Coalition, June 5, 2015, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-errors-of-the-prosperity-gospel/>

we let Him.”⁵² Such rhetoric indeed reduces God to a “magic genie,” obligated to fulfil our every whim and fancy, which contradicts the true nature of our relationship with him—one rooted in mutual love and trust, not manipulation or coercion. It undermines his sovereignty and reduces faith to a tool for controlling outcomes, rather than authentic expressions of trust in his will and provision.

(6) Extravagance of Prosperity Preachers

A major critique centres on the extravagant earnings of prosperity advocates, which often come at the expense of the sacrificial giving of their followers.⁵³ Unethical and manipulative fundraising techniques, such as guaranteeing miracles for those able to pay a specific amount, further emphasise the critique. Asamoah-Gyadu reports of an evangelist guaranteeing that “God is going to provide a 24-hour miracle in the lives of those with the ability to pay \$240.”⁵⁴

According to Lausanne, many prosperity preachers lead flamboyant lifestyles characterised by excessive wealth “in ways that are utterly inconsistent with either the example of Jesus or the pattern of discipleship that he taught.”⁵⁵ These preachers often display opulence with luxurious cars, expensive mansions, private jets, and business empires, flaunting such affluence as evidence of God’s favour and blessing.⁵⁶ Their emphasis

(accessed October 8, 2024).

⁵²Hanegraaff, 113, quoting Frederick K. C. Price, “Prayer: Do You Know What Prayer is . . . and How to Pray?” *The Word Study Bible* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1990), 1178.

⁵³Lovemore Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in African Contexts of Poverty: An Appraisal,” *Exchange* 40, no. 4 (2011): 349, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157254311X600744>, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 95.

⁵⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, “Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?” 40.

⁵⁵Africa Chapter – Lausanne Theology Working Group, “Statement on the Prosperity Gospel.”

⁵⁶Nwaomah, “Overview of Prosperity Gospel,” 15, quotes the following examples: Ogaga Ifowodo, “God’s Private Jets,” *Vanguard*, November 28, 2012, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/11/gods-private-jets/> (accessed October 8, 2024); Carmen McCain, “Private Jets for Jesus,” *Daily Trust*, November 7, 2012, <https://dailytrust.com/private-jets-for-jesus/> (accessed October 8, 2024); Ifreke Inyang, “Pastor Tony Rapu: Is it Right or Wrong to Own a Jet? It Goes Deeper,” *Daily Post*, November 26, 2012, <https://dailypost.ng/2012/11/26/pastor-tony-rapu-is-right-wrong-jet-it-goes-deeper/> (accessed October 8, 2024); Mfonobong Nsehe, “Wealthy Nigerians, Pastors Spend \$225 million on Private Jets,” *Forbes*, May 17, 2011, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/05/17/wealthy-nigerians-pastors-spend-225-million-on-private-jets/?sh=f7e3c663b447> (accessed October 8, 2024).

on money as the supreme good takes precedence over the preaching of repentance⁵⁷ and detachment from sinful behaviours and worldly values.

This approach fails to challenge believers to a life of humble self-denial and cross-bearing, leaving little room for the costly discipleship central to Christ's message.⁵⁸ The message, in its pursuit of worldly interests, contradicts the deeper values of God's Kingdom as consistently warned in Scripture. For example, the donkey that Jesus rode into Jerusalem has been reinterpreted as the modern equivalent of a Bentley or Rolls Royce. The more expensive and luxurious the vehicle, the more it is seen as visible proof of God's blessing on the believer's life,⁵⁹ ultimately sacralising materialism, greed, and covetousness.⁶⁰

(7) Promoting a Culture of Complacency

A significant critique of the prosperity gospel is that it fosters a culture of complacency or outright laziness among its followers.⁶¹ Tithing and giving offerings are often presented as ritualistic actions that magically generate instant wealth, undermining the importance of diligence and hard work.⁶² Many scholars view this teaching as a distortion of the Christian faith, resulting from a troubling blend of Western materialism and traditional indigenous superstitions,⁶³ while others see it as an encouragement of delusion.⁶⁴

⁵⁷Africa Chapter – Lausanne Theology Working Group, "Statement on the Prosperity Gospel."

⁵⁸DeBorst, "Gospel of Greed."

⁵⁹Asamoah-Gyadu, "Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?," 40.

⁶⁰The terms *materialism*, *greed*, and *covetousness* are related, but they each have distinct meanings: *Materialism* refers to a worldview or attitude that places a high value on material possessions and physical comfort. *Greed* is an intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power, or food. *Covetousness* specifically refers to the desire for something that belongs to someone else. *Materialism* is a general focus on possessions; *greed* is an excessive and selfish pursuit of more; *covetousness* is the desire for what belongs to others.

⁶¹Olugbenga Olagunju, "Health and Wealth Gospel in the Context of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 14, no. 2 (2009): 149-62, and Sampson M. Nwaomah, *The Gospel of Wholeness: Biblical Reflections of Anointing, Healing and Prosperity* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Positive Press, 2012), 73-78, quoted in Nwaomah, "Overview of Prosperity Gospel," 11.

⁶²Asamoah-Gyadu, "Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?" 40.

⁶³Berger, "Redeeming Prosperity."

⁶⁴A. O. Dada, "Prosperity Gospel in Nigerian Context: A Medium of Social Transformation or an Impetus for Delusion?," *ORITA: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 1-2 (2004): 95-105, quoted in Nwaomah, "Overview of Prosperity Gospel," 11.

An illustrative example from Zimbabwe highlights the impact of this message. A devotee, influenced by a prosperity sermon, believed that tree leaves could magically transform into money. This woman boldly filled an entire shopping cart with groceries at a supermarket, approaching the checkout counter without actual money—only tree leaves in her purse—a presumptive act of faith instilled after attending a prosperity seminar.⁶⁵ Examples like this indicate that such a doctrine potentially leads to distorted beliefs and unrealistic expectations.⁶⁶

(8) Lack of Consideration for the Poor

A theology that promotes materialism, greed, and covetousness inhibits individuals from using their resources for the service of others.⁶⁷ A central theme running throughout the entire Bible is the responsibility of every believer to care for the poor and the marginalised. However, the prosperity gospel tends to downplay this aspect, associating poverty with a lack of faith, unfaithfulness in tithing, or living under a curse.⁶⁸ By promoting materialism, it often fails to address challenging contextual realities and provides inadequate pastoral care for those facing real-life struggles.⁶⁹ Supporters of this message frequently cite Eccl 10:19, which states, “Money is the answer for everything (NIV 2011),” suggesting that financial wealth can resolve all problems and bring happiness.⁷⁰ This teaching is critiqued for being myopic, and it “blinds its proponents to the realities of sin as their desire for health-and-wealth prosperity becomes a consuming focus.”⁷¹ By prioritising personal wealth accumulation for comfort, status, or perceived spiritual favour, this materialism shifts the focus away from the needs of others and towards self-gratification. Instead of cultivating the virtue of generosity, it stifles it and withholds aid from those in need.

⁶⁵Bishau, “Prosperity Gospel,” 4, 8.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁷DeBorst, “Gospel of Greed.”

⁶⁸Asamoah-Gyadu, “Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?,” 40-41.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 40.

⁷⁰The challenges in a person’s life often cannot be resolved with money alone. For instance, when issues arise at home, the solution may lie in dedicating more quality time to family rather than working harder to earn additional income.

⁷¹Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 107, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 96.

Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel

The concept of prosperity, however, does have a biblical foundation. Even the Lausanne Movement acknowledges the following:

Some dimensions of prosperity teaching . . . have roots in the Bible, and . . . [affirm] that there is a biblical vision of human prospering, and that the Bible includes material welfare (both health and wealth) within its teaching about the blessing of God.⁷²

Numerous passages, like 1 Chr 29:12 and Eccl 5:19, highlight God blessing his people with material abundance. Psalm 112:3 declares that those who fear the Lord will be blessed with “wealth and riches . . . in their houses.”

Interestingly, Billy Graham, founder of the Lausanne Movement, had a net worth of \$25 million at the time of his death, making him one of America’s wealthiest pastors.⁷³ Similarly, Rick Warren, a Baptist pastor, despite rejecting the prosperity gospel, has a comparable net worth.⁷⁴ Their wealth illustrates that being rich is not inherently sinful. As Paul exhorts in Phil 4:12, we must learn to be content in both times of need and abundance—implying that having plenty is not wrong.

Critique of the prosperity gospel arises from its disproportionate emphasis on material blessings, often sidelining the Bible’s broader teachings on contentment and the dangers of greed. The New Testament, particularly in 1 Tim 6:5, warns against those who see godliness as a means of financial gain. Paul stresses that the desire to be rich can lead to temptation, traps, and ultimately, ruin and destruction. The love of money or eagerness for wealth is the root of all kinds of evil, causing some to stray from the faith and bring sorrow upon themselves (vv. 9–10).

Most Pentecostals highlight the need to maintain a balanced view by prioritising the kingdom of God and his righteousness first (Matt 6:33). To Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia, seeking the Kingdom involves a life of “devotion to God, following the self-sacrificial way of Christ, and living by the leading of the Spirit, joining with the community of

⁷²Africa Chapter–Lausanne Theology Working Group, “Statement on the Prosperity Gospel.”

⁷³Ela Teodosio, “Billy Graham Net Worth: Beloved Evangelist was Reportedly a Millionaire,” *The Christian Post*, updated February 22, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/billy-graham-net-worth-the-life-he-left-behind.html> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁷⁴Teodosio, “Billy Graham.”

the faithful, and caring for the lost and the outcast.”⁷⁵ While financial health can be a part of a Christian’s experience of wholeness, it should not overshadow the deeper priorities of discipleship, which include self-denial and an acceptance of suffering. The prosperity gospel becomes distorted when it focuses solely on material blessings, neglecting the biblical balance of both flourishing and enduring hardship. While certain biblical figures experienced material prosperity, Heb 11:36-39 commends those who, by faith, endured destitution, torture, imprisonment, and execution. Hebrews 10:34 even encourages those who “joyfully accepted the confiscation of [their] property (NIV 2011).” Therefore, the New Testament does not present the “riches of salvation” (Isa 33:6 GW) as exclusively or primarily material wealth.⁷⁶ True prosperity encompasses spiritual well-being, faithfulness, and a willingness to follow Christ through both blessing and suffering.

Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel

While Lausanne asserts that “the teachings of . . . the ‘prosperity gospel’ are false and gravely distorting of the Bible,”⁷⁷ not all Pentecostals wholly reject it. Most, like Macchia, recognise elements of biblical truths within its framework, albeit with corrections.⁷⁸ Others reject the demonisation of success, and they contend that poverty can hinder the full expression of the Christian life and that wealth enables greater capacity to positively impact society.⁷⁹ From a sociological standpoint, David Bishau notes that wealth and success often elevate one’s social status, contributing to increased influence and congregational following. This aligns with the observation that people tend to gravitate towards the affluent, as seen in both the Old and New Testaments. Practically speaking, the Church is also a social institution that requires financial resources, making wealth a factor in its capacity to fulfil its mission.⁸⁰

While Lausanne’s definition of the prosperity gospel is accurate, it presents pastoral challenges for many Pentecostal churches. Berger notes that most Pentecostals do not believe health and wealth are guaranteed

⁷⁵Macchia, “The Prosperity Gospel,” 69.

⁷⁶Issiaka Coulibaly, “2 Corinthians,” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 1407, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 91.

⁷⁷Africa Chapter–Lausanne Theology Working Group, “Statement on the Prosperity Gospel.”

⁷⁸Macchia, “The Prosperity Gospel,” 69.

⁷⁹Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 109, quoted in Bishau, “Prosperity Gospel.”

⁸⁰Bishau, “Prosperity Gospel,” 8.

outcomes of positive confessions and financial contributions, nor do they believe that the supreme goal in life is possessions, power, and prestige.⁸¹ Instead, they see the purpose of salvation as experiencing loving communion with the Triune God, attaining a transformative union with Christ in his divine nature by the Spirit, and being empowered for service, evangelism, and missions. Despite these distinctions, Pentecostalism is often unfairly linked with the prosperity movement due to overlapping core beliefs. This results in a tendency to “throw out the baby with the bathwater” by disregarding both the positive and negative aspects. The beliefs outlined below represent core tenets held by Pentecostals, though these truths have been hijacked by prosperity preachers.

(1) Divine Healing

Pentecostals affirm the doctrine of divine healing as an intrinsic component of the gospel, intricately connected to the atonement, and a privilege accessible to all believers, as supported by biblical references like Isa 53:4-5, Mark 16:15-17, and Jas 5:14-16.⁸² Healing is a proleptic expression of the complete redemption of the human body, which will only be fully realised at Christ’s Second Coming. In this dynamic interplay between the “already and not yet,” healing experiences vary—some individuals witness instant healing, others experience gradual restoration, yet cases exist where healing does not occur. Importantly, the acknowledgment of divine healing does not negate the acceptance of suffering endured for the sake of Christ and the gospel.⁸³ On this point, Pentecostals find common ground with Lausanne and “reject as unbiblical the notion that God’s miraculous power can be treated as automatic . . . or illness or early death, is always a sign of God’s curse, or lack of faith.”⁸⁴ Pentecostals stress the importance of aligning theological beliefs with biblical principles and rejecting simplistic interpretations that link health outcomes solely to an individual’s faith or divine favour.

⁸¹Berger, “Redeeming Prosperity.”

⁸²Assemblies of God, “Our 16 Fundamental Truths,” accessed October 8, 2024, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Statement-of-Fundamental-Truths#12>.

⁸³Assemblies of God, “Divine Healing (Adopted by the General Presbytery in Session August 9-11, 2010),” <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Divine-Healing> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁸⁴Africa Chapter – Lausanne Theology Working Group, “Statement on the Prosperity Gospel.”

(2) Abundant Provision

Pentecostals affirm the principle of abundant provision and maintain that those committed to God and the teachings of Christ can expect a flourishing life that encompasses both spiritual and physical well-being. They hold a robust faith in Jehovah Jireh's ability to meet the needs of individuals and the Church. While they do not reject the aspiration for material betterment or wealth, they align with Lausanne's view that wealth is not "always a sign of God's blessing (since it can be obtained by oppression, deceit or corruption)."⁸⁵ Simultaneously, they affirm, in agreement with Lausanne, that "it is not his will that people should live in abject poverty."⁸⁶

The teachings of John Wesley (1703-1791), a central influencer in the formation of Pentecostalism, provide valuable insight into perspectives on money and wealth. In his Trilateral sermon, Wesley outlines three principles.⁸⁷ First, *earning all you can* legitimises the acquisition of wealth through industrious and wise work. Notably, Wesley was a high-earning preacher, reportedly earning £1,400 a year at his peak—a sum equivalent to \$1.4 million in today's terms—making him a wealthy man in England.⁸⁸ Second, *saving all you can* promotes a lifestyle of simplicity aligned with the teachings of Jesus, cautioning against extravagant living. Third, *giving all you can* stresses the importance of generosity, contrasting sharply with the teachings and lifestyles of prosperity gospel advocates. For Wesley, the primary motivation for accumulating wealth was so he could give significantly to charitable and missionary causes. Even when his annual income reached the substantial amount of £1,400, he continued to live on just £30, donating the remainder to those in need. When Wesley died in 1791 at the age of eighty-eight, he left behind only a few loose coins on his person and in a drawer.⁸⁹ Many Pentecostals, like David Yonggi Cho, exemplify Wesley's ideals by dedicating substantial

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid. Macchia supports this view by asserting that poverty is a consequence of human actions, not a divine will, referencing Ps 140:12 ("The Prosperity Gospel," 70).

⁸⁷Keith Drury, "John Wesley's 'Trilateral,'" Drury Writing, accessed October 8, 2024, <https://www.drurywriting.com/keith/wesley.htm> (accessed October 8, 2024), quoted in Bishau, "Prosperity Gospel," 11.

⁸⁸Drury, "John Wesley's 'Trilateral,'" quoted in Bishau, "Prosperity Gospel," 11.

⁸⁹Charles White, "What Wesley Practiced and Preached About Money," *Mission Frontiers*, September 1, 1994, <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/what-wesley-practiced-and-preached-about-money> (accessed October 8, 2024); Warren du Plessis, "The Economics of John Wesley," *Medium*, April 23, 2022, <https://warren-du-plessis.medium.com/the-economics-of-john-wesley-dd0de64a144a> (accessed October 8, 2024).

portions of their wealth to Christian charities and missions, illustrating a commitment to a holistic understanding of wealth and its purpose.⁹⁰

(3) Positive Confession of Faith

Pentecostals affirm and embrace positive confession, emphasising the biblical precedent for believers to confess their sins (1 John 1:9), confess Christ (Matt 10:32; Rom 10:9-10), and maintain a good confession of faith (Heb 4:14; 10:23).⁹¹ Pentecostals differentiate their faith confession from the mechanical and formulaic approach of the prosperity gospel, asserting that in their practice, God's will takes precedence over the believer's plans or desires (Jas 4:15). Pentecostals also acknowledge the reality of suffering in life (John 16:33; Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 3:12). They believe that God's purpose in difficult situations is not always to remove us *from* them but to guide us *through* them.⁹² Positive confession does not imply denying the reality of challenges and hardship, but it involves praying for grace to endure the hard times with an unwavering trust in God (2 Cor 12:5-10).

(4) Sowing and Reaping

Pentecostals affirm the principle of sowing and reaping (Gal 6:8; 2 Cor 9:6), highlighting the blessings of generosity. For Wesley, it is said that the more he received, the more he gave away, and the more he gave away, the more he seemed to be blessed.⁹³ Pentecostals, however, caution against treating this principle as a magical formula to manipulate God, which would undermine his sovereignty.⁹⁴ They stress that, in this lifetime, the only guaranteed blessing for believers is Jesus Christ, their Saviour and Lord.

⁹⁰Cho had considerable wealth from the sales of his books, tapes, and preaching honoraria. From my firsthand knowledge as a close disciple and family friend, Cho lived in a small three-room apartment. Most of his wealth has been given away for the work of the Kingdom. I heard him mention it once, but because I have no documentary evidence of the exact amount, I would not speculate.

⁹¹Assemblies of God, "The Believer and Positive Confession (Adopted by the General Presbytery in Session August 19, 1980)," <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/The-Believer-and-Positive-Confession> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁹²Asamoah-Gyadu, "Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?" 41.

⁹³Du Plessis, "The Economics of John Wesley."

⁹⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 102, quoted in Barron, "Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?" 96.

(5) Tithing, Offerings, and Sacrificial Giving

Pentecostals view tithing, offerings, and sacrificial giving as normative practices to support the church and its mission.⁹⁵ The Foursquare Church asserts that tithing—the biblical principle of giving a tenth of one’s income—is divinely ordained to sustain the local church and its ministries, promote the spread of the gospel, and serve as a means of receiving God’s blessings.⁹⁶ While Mal 3:10 promises blessings for the giver, Pentecostals emphasise that tithing and giving should be done with a generous heart, recognising that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35 NIV 2011). Believers should not treat tithing and giving as a transactional act aimed at purchasing God’s over-abundant blessings.⁹⁷

Redeeming the Prosperity Gospel

The five Pentecostal beliefs outlined above have certainly been misused by advocates of the prosperity gospel.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the existence of these shared core values does not warrant an automatic association between Pentecostalism and the prosperity movement. When Pentecostal beliefs are considered in light of Lausanne’s definition of the prosperity gospel, it becomes clear that the sum of the parts does not necessarily define the whole. The overwhelming majority of Pentecostals do not view health and wealth as the ultimate aims of salvation in Christ.⁹⁹ While the prosperity gospel has numerous flaws, its primary deficiency lies in its lack of balance.

Empirical analysis shows that, for some people, prosperity theology serves as an effective means for overcoming poverty.¹⁰⁰ Macchia argues that this teaching resonates with the innate human desire for a flourishing life, one characterised by generosity and alignment with a benevolent God. Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong also cautions that an uncritical embrace of the prosperity gospel overlooks many other facets of biblical

⁹⁵Church of God, “Tithing,” 1972, <https://churchofgod.org/resolutions/> (accessed October 8, 2024); Rollie Dimos, “The Blessing of Giving,” Assemblies of God, updated January 10, 2020, <https://news.ag.org/en/article-repository/news/2020/01/the-blessing-of-giving> (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁹⁶International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, “Declaration of Faith,” 16, https://s3.amazonaws.com/foursquare.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/28143224/Declaration_of_Faith_2023.pdf (accessed October 8, 2024).

⁹⁷DeBorst, “Gospel of Greed.”

⁹⁸Macchia, “The Prosperity Gospel,” 68-69.

⁹⁹Berger, “Redeeming Prosperity.”

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

revelation, but a wholesale rejection of it, in a reverse form of absolutism, is equally unbalanced. As many scholars in the Global South have noted, such blanket critiques often come from white Western Christians who have already attained a measure of prosperity.¹⁰¹

Berger sees the prosperity gospel as a modern version of the “Protestant work ethic,” emphasising hard work, delayed gratification, and future planning—a creed that mirrors the values that helped shape America’s development. Others, however, see the prosperity gospel as belonging to the category of so-called “cargo cults”—a belief that the fruits of modernity will be delivered magically, with no effort from the recipients. Berger suspects that both camps are right. The sermons that most Pentecostals hear promote behaviours that require significant effort—such as hard work, saving, abstaining from alcohol and sexual promiscuity, and more. When this lifestyle is tied to promises of material improvement, Berger argues it is not a false hope but rather a pathway to social mobility.¹⁰²

Despite all the rhetoric against it, the Lausanne Movement recognises the possibility of redeeming the prosperity gospel:

We affirm the biblical teaching on the importance of hard work, and the positive use of all the resources that God has given us—abilities, gifts, the earth, education, wisdom, skills, wealth, etc. And to the extent that some prosperity teaching encourages these things, it can have a positive effect on people’s lives. We do not believe in an unbiblical ascetism that rejects such things, or an unbiblical fatalism that sees poverty as a fate that cannot be fought against.¹⁰³

Lausanne acknowledges (perhaps, somewhat grudgingly) that there are positive aspects of prosperity teaching.

Some propose that the prosperity gospel can be rehabilitated if directed towards combating poverty.¹⁰⁴ In a similar vein, Macchia argues that the biblical instruction to help the poor and needy is clear (Ps 82:3-4). The generous will flourish in life (2 Cor 9:10-11). A holistic understanding of prosperity must be put forth—one that transcends

¹⁰¹Amos Yong, “Joseph Wore Designer Robes, Too!—A Response to Asamoah-Gyadu’s ‘Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?’” Lausanne Movement, 2009, <https://lausanne.org/content/joseph-wore-designer-robres-too> (accessed October 8, 2024).

¹⁰²Berger, “Redeeming Prosperity.”

¹⁰³Africa Chapter – Lausanne Theology Working Group, “Statement on the Prosperity Gospel.”

¹⁰⁴Walton, *Watch This!* 109, quoted in Bishau, “Prosperity Gospel,” 2.

personal gain with the intent of abounding “in every good work” for the benefit of others (2 Cor 9:8). The prosperity gospel retains relevance within the Church as long as it aligns its focus with this broader, selfless direction, emphasising a purposeful and collective flourishing that extends beyond individual success.¹⁰⁵

Alternative Way Forward

In the tumultuous context of Central America—marked by decades of revolution, military oppression, and adversity—Pentecostalism emerges as a beacon of hope for poor and marginalised communities. Douglas Petersen, a social theologian, drawing on twenty-five years of missionary experience in Latin America, aptly describes this phenomenon as “redemption and lift.” When individuals embrace faith in Christ, they undergo profound transformation empowered by the Spirit. Through this spiritual renewal, they cast off old vices, adopt diligent work ethics, and strive for advancement in their employment or entrepreneurial endeavours. As a result, their economic status improves, providing their children with greater opportunities for a brighter future.¹⁰⁶

In Africa, the desire to escape poverty and overcome various forms of oppression has similarly fuelled the rise of empowerment theologies. A recent development within African Pentecostalism, known as the “productivity gospel,” seeks to maintain orthodox Pentecostal theology while avoiding the extremes of the prosperity gospel.¹⁰⁷ Distinct from prosperity teaching, the productivity gospel integrates elements of personal accountability and the Protestant work ethic, emphasising hard work and discipline as a path to reward. While the Protestant work ethic is built on the belief that “work honours God,” and the prosperity message is built on the belief that “God promises prosperity to the faithful,”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵Macchia, “The Prosperity Gospel,” 71.

¹⁰⁶Douglas Petersen, *Not by Might nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Oxford: Regnum, 1996), 130-132.

¹⁰⁷Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 162-64; Tomas Sundnes Drønen, “Weber, Prosperity and the Protestant Ethic: Some Reflections on Pentecostalism and Economic Development,” *Svensk Missionstidskrift [Swedish Missiological Themes]* 100, no. 3 (2012): 321-35, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” The terminology may be different, but Max Weber’s “protestant work ethic” thesis applies to this form of the prosperity gospel.

¹⁰⁸Mitchell J. Neubert et al., “Beliefs about Faith and Work: Development and Validation of Honoring God and Prosperity Gospel Scales,” *Review of Religious Research* 56, no. 1 (2014): 149, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-013-0129-y>, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 98.

the productivity gospel combines these two themes.¹⁰⁹ Success, in this paradigm, is achieved through practices such as tithing, following the laws of sowing and reaping, and cultivating personal qualities like self-confidence, determination, and discipline.¹¹⁰ By building on the prosperity message “that God wants his children to live successful lives,” the productivity gospel “gives many Africans a positive mindset that they can make it in business through God, rather than by waiting for a Western donor to extend a helping hand.”¹¹¹

Additionally, when believers prosper, others “also benefit from the material support of the church community.”¹¹² “Pentecostals . . . care for the sick, orphans and widows, and often provide housing in an urban environment where it is scarce and expensive.”¹¹³ In these ways, a “holistic approach to life can contribute to poverty alleviation,”¹¹⁴ fostering self-reliance, self-worth, dignity, and motivation to succeed.¹¹⁵ These practices do not enrich only a few but promote greater equity among believers (2 Cor 8:14). Financial abundance is not about selfishness or greed but about addressing systemic socio-economic injustices and blessing others. Whereas the prosperity gospel operates as an attempted “manipulation of a rather mechanical God,”¹¹⁶ concepts like “redemption and lift” and the productivity gospel allow room for expressions of gratitude through generosity.

¹⁰⁹Wanjiru M. Gitau, *Megachurch Christianity Reconsidered: Millennials and Social Change in African Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 149, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 98.

¹¹⁰Paul Gifford, “Ghana’s Charismatic Churches,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 24, no. 3 (1994): 246, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1581301>, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 98.

¹¹¹Togarasei, “Pentecostal Gospel,” 123, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 99.

¹¹²Maxwell, “Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?” 355, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 99.

¹¹³Maxwell, “Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?” 355, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 99.

¹¹⁴Togarasei, “Pentecostal Gospel,” 349, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 99.

¹¹⁵Zulu, “Fipelwa na baYaweh,” 29, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 99.

¹¹⁶Hermen Kroesbergen, “The Prosperity Gospel: A Way to Reclaim Dignity?” in *In Search of Health and Wealth: The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective*, ed. Hermen Kroesbergen (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 82, quoted in Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel?” 100.

Conclusion

When examining Pentecostal beliefs in light of the Lausanne Movement's definition of the prosperity gospel, a nuanced picture emerges. While acknowledging the imbalances inherent in prosperity theology, most Pentecostals still adhere to the beliefs that health and financial provision are part of God's blessings to believers but at the same time reject a reductionist view that centres health and wealth as the essence of salvation. Unfortunately, the distortion of core Pentecostal beliefs by the prosperity gospel has caused deep divisions within the Pentecostal community. Some Pentecostals, disheartened by the abuses of the prosperity gospel, have become hypersensitive and withdrawn from discussing these doctrines. Too often these core doctrines have been relegated to the periphery of their faith, leaving a void where vibrant, balanced theological engagement once thrived.

In many parts of the Global South, there is a shared emphasis on family and community over individual concerns, and much of Asia, like Latin America and Africa, remains economically underdeveloped. The idea of a benevolent God desiring prosperity aligns with the Asian mindset,¹¹⁷ where money is often seen as a symbol of prestige and power, marking one's arrival.¹¹⁸ Asian Pentecostals have a unique opportunity to adopt a balanced and responsible approach to prosperity—one that fosters community engagement and contributes to holistic societal development while steering clear of the materialism, greed, and covetousness often associated with prosperity teaching. By embracing a nuanced perspective that integrates prosperity with communal well-being, they can navigate the complexities of their cultural and socio-economic realities without falling into the trap of an overly simplistic focus on personal material success.

Although the prosperity gospel has distorted some core Pentecostal doctrines, their recovery is both possible and necessary. By recovering these core beliefs with theological integrity, Pentecostals can reaffirm their faith and chart a path forward that honours their heritage while addressing contemporary challenges. They must intentionally reclaim and restore these doctrines to the rightful place within a biblically grounded, Spirit-led faith.

¹¹⁷Anne Kamiya, "Caishen, the Chinese God of Money | History, Role & Worship," Study.com, updated February 16, 2023, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/caishen-origin-mythology-role-chinese-god-money-wealth.html> (accessed October 8, 2024).

¹¹⁸Pandanese, "4 Reasons How Money in Chinese Culture Became Important," updated August 13, 2021, <https://www.pandanese.com/blog/money-in-china-why-the-chinese-love-their-money> (accessed October 8, 2024).

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