CHRISTIANITIES OF THE WORLD

Pentecostalism and Prosperity

The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement

Edited by
Katherine Attanasi
and Amos Yong

Palgrave Macmillan's Christianities of the World

The demographics of Christianity have dramatically shifted from Europe and North America to the Global South. Christianity, which has always been multiple and pluralistic, has now become vastly more so as it is appropriated and transformed by local communities with different cultures and religions. This series, edited by two leading scholars in the field, looks at these plural and diverse forms of Christianity. It combines humanities and social sciences to understand the growth and changes, past and present, of "World Christianity" and their implications for theology, worship, religious education, and church practices.

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Titles:

Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement
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Christianities of the World

In recent decades there has been an increasing awareness in the academy of a reality called "World Christianity." The expression refers to the fact that today Christianity is no longer predominantly Western, but has become a more truly worldwide religion. This "catholicity," a hallmark of Christianity and a fruit of Christian missions, has resulted in a massive demographic shift in the overall numbers of Christians from the global north (Europe and North America) to the global south (Africa, Asia, and Latin America). At the same time, the twin forces of globalization and migration have simultaneously intensified the interconnections and amplified the differences among the various expressions of Christianity worldwide, radically transforming the character of Christianity as it finds expression in diverse forms all over the globe. In the twenty-first century Christianity can only be expected to become even more multiple, diverse, and hybridized. At the same time one can expect to find something that is recognizably Christian among them to make it possible to have a meaningful conversation. We call that conversation "Christianities of the World."

To help understand this new phenomenon Palgrave Macmillan has initiated a new series of monographs appropriately titled "Christianities of the World" under the general editorship of Peter C. Phan and Dale T. Irvin. The intention of the series is to publish single-authored or edited works of

scholarship that engage aspects of these diverse Christianities of the world through the disciplines of history, religious studies, theology, sociology, or missiology, in order to understand Christianity as a truly world religion. To these ends the editors are asking:

- How has Christianity been received and transformed in various countries, especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (the non-Western world) in response to their cultural practices, religious traditions (the so-called "world religions" as well as the tribal or indigenous religions), migratory movements, and political and economic globalization (inculturation and interfaith dialogue)? In particular, how have newer forms of Christianity, especially those that identify with the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, changed the face of World Christianity? What are the major characteristics of Christianities both old and new? What new trajectories and directions can one expect to see in the near future?
- How should the history of Christian missions be narrated? How does one evaluate the contributions of expatriate missionaries and indigenous agents? How should one understand the relationship between missions and churches?
- How should theology be taught in the academic arena (be it in universities, seminaries, or Bible schools)? How should various Christian theological loci (e.g., God, Christ, Spirit, church, worship, spirituality, ethics, or pastoral ministry) be reformulated and taught in view of world Christianity or Christianities of the world, in dialogue with different cultures and different religions, or targeted toward particular ethnic or religious groups?
- How does the new reality of world Christianity affect research methods? How should courses on Christianity be taught? How should textbooks on Christianity as well as on world religions generally be structured? What should curricula, course work, required texts, faculty hiring, criteria for tenure and promotion, research, and publication look like in the academic world that is responding to the questions being raised by the Christianities of the world?

The issues are far-ranging and the questions transformational. We look forward to a lively series and a rewarding dialogue.

Pentecostalism and Prosperity

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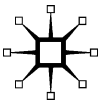

PENTECOSTALISM AND PROSPERITY

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For Michael Palmer
Mentor, colleague, friend

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Introduction: The Plurality of Prosperity Theologies and Pentecostalisms

Katherine Attanasi

This book explores the socioeconomic implications of the prosperity gospel in the lives of Pentecostal/charismatic Christians. The volume offers a robust picture of prosperity teachings, which are sometimes called the "health and wealth" gospel. The authors provide thick descriptions of prosperity theologies and their functions within local communities around the globe—for example, in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. *Pentecostalism and Prosperity* is geared toward a wide readership. The contributors employ a variety of methodological approaches including theology, ethics, history, and the social sciences. The in-depth case studies will benefit specialists in global Christianity as well as sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and others interested in the intersection of religion and economic life. With a diverse audience in mind, I begin with a brief overview defining terms and providing background on Pentecostal Christianity and prosperity messages. I then introduce each chapter and highlight three overarching themes.

Pentecostalism, the Renewal Movement, and Prosperity Messages

The nomenclature "Pentecostal" corresponds with the name of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, which took place fifty (Greek: *pentekonta*) days after Passover. As described in the New Testament book of Acts, which is central to Pentecostal spirituality, Jesus's followers gathered together following his death (around the time of Passover), resurrection, and ascension; on the Day of Pentecost "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4 RSV). In a reversal of the tower of Babel

(Gen 11:1–9), a time when language divided people, the apostle Peter is said to have communicated miraculously with people of different geographic regions and languages by preaching the salvific message of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Pentecostals consider this moment the birth of the Christian church, and they see themselves as the successors to the apostolic church.

Scholars identify three waves of Pentecostalism that are together classified as the "renewal" movement: classical Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, and neo-Pentecostalism.[1] "Classical" Pentecostalism traces its roots back to the Azusa Street Revival of 1906–9 and includes denominations such as the Assemblies of God and Church of God in Christ. The charismatic movement of the 1960s occurred in mainline Protestant denominations as well as Roman Catholic and Orthodox congregations. Charismatics share many of the Pentecostal distinctions (e.g., speaking in tongues) and may even describe themselves as Pentecostal Christians, but charismatic believers usually remain part of non-Pentecostal denominations (e.g., the El Shaddai movement in the Philippines).[2] "Neo-Pentecostals" are part of newer independent churches that are more frequently associated with prosperity messages (e.g., the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil). Strictly speaking, the term "renewal" is an umbrella term to include Pentecostals, charismatics, and neo-Pentecostals. However, there is considerable overlap, and some authors use the term "Pentecostal" (without the designation "classical") as synonymous with the renewal movement writ large.

The major strands of the renewal movement account for a quarter of the world's 2 billion Christians, second only to Roman Catholicism. These "Spirit-filled" communities represent the fastest growing branch of world Christianity. *Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals*—the Pew Foundation's 2006 cross-national survey of individuals' public views of political, social, and economic issues—provides helpful empirical data for gaining a broad overview of the renewal movement. According to *Spirit and Power*, renewal Christians constitute a significant portion of the population in a number of countries, and their practices and beliefs are directly and indirectly reconfiguring world Christianity. Table 0.1 shows the estimated size of Pentecostal, charismatic, and renewalist populations (out of the general population) in several countries around the world.

Pentecostals and charismatics have a highly personalized faith. Congregations emphasize spiritual renewal through the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, and

Table 0.1 Estimated size of renewalist populations in select countries[3]

	Pentecostals	Charismatics	Total Renewalists
United States	5%	18%	23%
Brazil	15%	34%	49%
Guatemala	20%	40%	60%
Chile	9%	21%	30%
Nigeria	18%	8%	26%
South Africa	10%	24%	34%
Philippines	4%	40%	44%

divine healing. According to the Pew study, "Even more than other Christians, Pentecostals and other renewalists believe that God, working through the Holy Spirit, continues to play a direct active role in everyday life."[4] For example, in response to the question, "have you received a definite answer to a specific prayer request?" (table 0.2) Pentecostals were more likely than charismatics to say that God had specifically answered a particular prayer; charismatics were more likely to do so than were other Christians.

Table 0.2 Percentage saying they had received "a definite answer to a specific prayer request"[5]

	Pentecostals	Charismatics	Other Christians
United States	77%	63%	59%
Brazil	95%	68%	65%
Chile	88%	62%	54%
Guatemala	92%	78%	73%
Nigeria	92%	–	89%
South Africa	84%	71%	51%
Philippines	91%	72%	58%

For the purposes of this volume, the most significant characteristic of Pentecostal and charismatic belief is the affinity for prosperity messages. The so-called prosperity gospel says that God wants to bless Christians spiritually, physically, and materially. Renewal Christians believe that God is working in the world and that God's ongoing work includes granting believers prosperity and health. Table 0.3 shows that although large numbers of Christians believe that God grants prosperity and health, Pentecostal believers are even more likely than other Christians (including charismatic Christians) to hold this belief.[6]

Table 0.3 Does God grant believers prosperity and health?[7]

	Prosperity	Health
US, Pentecostals	66%	68%
Charismatics	59%	71%
Other Christians	43%	52%
Brazil, Pentecostals	83%	89%
Charismatics	61%	72%
Other Christians	70%	80%
Chile, Pentecostals	49%	94%
Charismatics	36%	81%
Other Christians	28%	73%
Guatemala, Pentecostals	82%	96%
Charismatics	71%	91%
Other Christians	68%	90%
Nigeria, Pentecostals	95%	97%
Other Christians	93%	95%
South Africa, Pentecostals	90%	97%
Charismatics	85%	91%
Other Christians	78%	85%
Philippines, Pentecostals	90%	99%
Charismatics	85%	97%
Other Christians	85%	95%

Theologian Miroslav Volf argues that Pentecostals have a material view of salvation based on their beliefs that God provides the faithful with physical healing. Volf highlights the implications of beliefs in divine healing and explains that for Pentecostal theology, "salvation is not merely a spiritual reality touching only an individual person's inner being but also has to do with *bodily* human existence."[8] For Pentecostals, God is active in the world, and "salvation in the strict theological sense includes the material aspect of life."[9] In other words, salvation has implications on believers' lives in this world, not just the world to come. Volf's conclusions regarding the materiality of salvation help illuminate renewal Christianity's attraction to prosperity messages, which highlight God's blessings for this world.

As this volume shows, prosperity messages take on a host of forms. Health and wealth teachings define prosperity as more than material well-being; prosperity includes emotional, physical, and spiritual health, although the material aspects are often disproportionately emphasized. Such teachings often equate prosperity with God's *shalom*, a Hebrew word usually rendered "peace" but also entailing justice, equity, responsible governance, and righteous acts. Prosperity teachings about *shalom* also connote psychological,

social, spiritual, and physical wholeness; peace with the natural world, ancestors, God, and fellow human beings; and inner satisfaction, contentment, and peace.[10] The prosperity gospel emphasizes that as part of God's covenant, Christians enjoy unassailable claims to certain blessings as well as to right relationships with God, other humans, and nature.[11]

Prosperity doctrines of physical healing, material wealth, and salvation are often summarized in a particular understanding of what Jesus accomplished through dying on the cross. This teaching says that sickness and poverty are the vestiges of Satan's dominion over the earth. Jesus's death paid the penalty for human sin, thereby breaking Satan's power over God's people. As a result, believers have been redeemed from poverty, sickness, and eternal death. Christ's death (both physical and spiritual) entitles believers to salvation, to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and to prosperity and material benefits.[12] Each Christian should therefore be "physically healthy and materially prosperous and successful."[13] Christians must then procure such blessing by faith, which is defined as more than just belief: faith means "acting on the word, speaking into reality what does not exist, and dreaming and envisioning the desired goals."[14] God's people should claim their divine authority over their circumstances by confessing or declaring the Bible's promises. Healing and prosperity are available; indeed, they are the rewards of being followers of Christ. Nevertheless, it is up to believers to claim them.

Major Themes of This Volume

The foregoing background on Pentecostalism, the renewal movement, and prosperity messages sets the stage for the chapters in this volume. In what follows, I highlight three overarching themes that emerge throughout the collection of chapters: that there is no single prosperity theology—only prosperity theologies; the extent to which Pentecostalism contributes to economic growth; and the plurality of ways renewalists apply prosperity messages.

Regarding the plurality of prosperity theologies, part 1 of the volume offers two taxonomies. Amos Yong's chapter, "A Typology of Prosperity Theology," elucidates five different perspectives. Yong begins by stating the *argument for* the prosperity gospel, which draws on biblical texts and claims that God wants to bless people spiritually (e.g., forgiveness), physically (e.g., healing), and materially (for at least some of Jesus's followers were wealthy people). The *argument against* prosperity focuses

on biblical texts that emphasize contentment, warn against money's evil seduction, and urge generosity. The *missional argument* says that wealth in itself is neutral. When distributed to worthwhile causes, financial prosperity can play an important role in the evangelistic mission of the church—both in funding holistic mission work (e.g., relief and development efforts that invest in the global economy) and in evangelizing affluent people. The *contextual argument* points out that popular understandings of salvation have come to include both physical and economic well-being. Such development is connected to the growth of Christianity in the global South, with its emphasis on healing and holistic redemption. Finally, the *"balanced" argument* highlights three biblical themes guiding the lives of renewalists: live simply and work hard; practice principles of biblical stewardship; and share altruistically. For each of these approaches to prosperity teaching, Yong elucidates their corresponding economic implications. He concludes that while there has emerged a religious economy of global renewal, as of yet there is not a renewal economics.

Providing further distinction within the broad categorization of "prosperity gospel," Nimi Wariboko's chapter, "Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa," develops a fivefold typology of prosperity orientations as embodied in African pastors' perspectives on the continent's economic development. The *covenant* paradigm presumes a kind of contractual relationship between human agency and divine response such that sowing financial contributions or professional excellence leads to national prosperity. According to the *spiritualist* paradigm, poverty is a spiritual matter, and national development requires a spiritual approach to redeeming the land. The *leadership* paradigm holds that Africa's problems are due to unjust structures and immoral leadership, and the solution lies in the church's prophetic critique and election of Christians to positions of leadership. The *nationalist* paradigm says that Africa's development problems are due to subservient relationships resulting from the history of racism, colonialism, and slavery; this paradigm links economic growth with a restoration of black pride. Finally, in the *development* paradigm, the church works toward economic development in order to help the poor and spread the gospel. Like Yong's typology, Wariboko's paradigms provide helpful means of categorizing prosperity gospels.

The central portion of the volume (part 2) consists of individual case studies, the first two of which consider the theme of Pentecostal/charismatic contributions to economic growth. The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) report "Under the Radar" is optimistic about the renewal movement's positive impact on South African

life and development. The CDE's qualitative research describes the results of Pentecostal faith in the following terms: "greater self-confidence and self-esteem"; "greater self-discipline"; and "deferred gratification, resulting in improvements in financial security . . . improved occupational success, as well as an improved work ethic" (CDE report, p. 71). The CDE also identifies several traits of the renewal movement that have positive implications for development: a rejection of worldly concerns (described as "this-worldly asceticism") can help people respond patiently to life's challenges; the movement's constant internal adjustments make for an entrepreneurial spirit that enhances individual agency; and moral discipline helps people respond to incapacitating challenges. While the CDE remains critical of the excesses of the prosperity gospel, the report remains positive about renewalists' contributions to South African development.[15]

In "Capitalism and Pentecostalism in Latin America," Eloy H. Nolivos considers Pentecostalism's trajectories of development within the context of neoliberal reforms in Latin America, Chile, and Brazil in particular. Nolivos outlines several perspectives on how Pentecostalism connects to economic life, especially as it pertains to Pentecostalism's contributions to modern capitalism and development. Ultimately he posits a modest "mutually reinforcing relationship between Pentecostalism and economic advancement" (p. 101). Nolivos then demonstrates this relationship by tracing the development of Chilean Pentecostalism, which he claims had an earlier focus on inward formation but has created a Pentecostal ethic that may yet emerge and contribute to economic development. Nolivos's case study of Brazil shows how the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God's neo-Pentecostal prosperity-oriented message encourages development by teaching individual self-worth and viewing material wealth as part of salvation.

Having established the diversity of prosperity messages themselves and explored how prosperity messages may factor into economic growth, the remaining case studies share another theme, namely, the discrete ways renewalists apply prosperity messages. In some cases the prosperity gospel may provide adherents a belief structure without being determinative; prosperity theologies may also contribute to legitimizing the pursuit of fame or wealth. In other contexts, church teachings encourage entrepreneurial self-reliance or even a "spiritual platform" for neoliberalism. These variations implicitly confirm Milmon Harrison's assessment that "the [Word of] Faith Message is a *practical* and instrumental form of religion."[16]

Jonathan L. Walton's chapter, "Stop Worrying and Start Sowing!," considers how prosperity messages are purveyed and received during

economic hard times by drawing on fieldwork conducted during the 2008 Southwest Believers' Convention in Fort Worth, Texas, hosted by Kenneth and Gloria Copeland of the Word of Faith movement. Walton claims that Word of Faith teachings provide nonrestrictive theological parameters within which practitioners may improvise. The movement's messaging proves convincing in times of economic success and distress: in periods of plenty, Word of Faith principles explain why life is good; in distressing times, Word of Faith principles alleviate anxiety brought by uncertainty. Adherents not only categorize the convention's teachings as "truth" but are also devoted to the teachings in order to show faithfulness and piety. At the same time, the system maintains some flexibility, which enables people to contest and negotiate Word of Faith teachings in light of their own experiences and desires. Walton shows how the Word of Faith movement constructs its identity in opposition to "the world" albeit simultaneously being informed by "secular systems." Walton gives specific examples of how adherents negotiate this cultural system; one such example is that Word of Faith beliefs "function as a baseline," which can then be both interpreted and adapted despite economic difficulties (p. 109).

Gerardo Marti's chapter, "'I Determine My Harvest,'" demonstrates how prosperity theology adapts to changing social and economic conditions. His research is based on fieldwork at Oasis Christian Center, a church that attracts many Hollywood workers who find themselves in an uncertain labor market that requires immense self-promotion in order to string together a series of jobs that together constitute a career. In conversation with sociologist Ulrich Beck, Marti outlines these economic challenges and how Oasis addresses them. According to Oasis, prosperity is the result of hard work and obedience to Christ rather than God's "magical" provision. Oasis teaches that believers should view their individual ambition as subordinate to and part of God's active work in the world. Congregants reconceptualize their careers as a means of advancing God's kingdom in secular places, thereby legitimizing their goals of fame; members then act as extensions of the Oasis community in ways that are self-sacrificing, motivated, and intentional. Marti highlights the dynamism of this exchange between work and religion and observes how economic context shapes both Oasis members' participation in the labor market and Oasis's appealing religious messages. He concludes that Oasis "demonstrates a corporate religious accommodation to a particular organization of society" (p. 147). Members understand their pursuit of fame

(i.e., the individualization required for economic success) as a means of fulfilling their communal identity.

In his chapter, "Urban Property as Spiritual Resource," Nanlai Cao describes the "property Christianity" that flourishes in China's Wenzhou Christian communities. He claims that wealthy Christians' investment in the real estate market is an integral part of China's prosperity gospel and constructs new relationships between evangelism, spiritual vitality, wealth, and property. Based on fieldwork, Cao describes how Wenzhou Christianity has constructed its identity as "China's Jerusalem" through its many building projects. In Cao's assessment, newly rich Chinese Christians see their wealth as a blessing from God. To help secure future blessings, these Christians practice good stewardship and invest in "God's miracles" by financially contributing to church building and planting. Such efforts to "redeem God's blessing" help spread a prosperity message that connects spiritual faith with material prosperity: the wealthy attest to God's grace and blessing, whereas the poor (by implication) lack faith and spirituality. Believers who give large contributions to churches translate economic power into spiritual esteem and influence. Cao explains how architectural dreams become reality, which requires Christians to navigate state regulation of religious life and to fund the purchase of land and building. He concludes that "property Christianity" gives wealth a spiritual meaning and eliminates the conflict between "God and Mammon" that had previously shaped rural Chinese Christian identity. According to this prosperity message, Christians are free to participate in China's modernization process and embrace a reformist state ideology that says "getting rich is glorious" (p. 166).

Katharine L. Wiegele's chapter, "The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics," shows how members of El Shaddai, a Catholic renewal group in the Philippines, apply the prosperity gospel in reconstructing the self to emphasize individual agency and self-reliance. El Shaddai's prosperity message teaches that God wants people to be materially prosperous and physically healthy. According to the seed faith principle, giving tithes and offerings brings about God's blessings. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, Wiegele shows how at El Shaddai rallies and in personal testimonies individuals reassess their life histories and see God's material blessing where they once saw suffering. El Shaddai's message includes a rejection of deterministic class labels; with a renewed sense of personal agency, believers assume that they are able to rise above their inherited status, and they see new possibilities for transformation and opportunity. With such emphasis

on individual agency, El Shaddai's prosperity theology entails an ahistorical and apolitical interpretation of inequality. El Shaddai sees the causes of and solutions to poverty in terms of individual effort in response to divine promises rather than historical, social, or structural issues. Although diverging from official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, El Shaddai's appeal remains: as believers reconstruct their notion of the self, they choose to see themselves as blessed, not as "the poor."

As the final case study, Daniela C. Augustine's "Pentecost and Prosperity in Eastern Europe" shows how the prosperity gospel functions as a "spiritual platform" for neoliberal ideology. Augustine describes the roots of both Western neoliberalism and Eastern European communitarian values. Then she outlines the region's tumultuous transition from planned to market economies and discusses the ways in which the prosperity gospel serves as a coping mechanism for people adapting to capitalism. Here the prosperity message advances the familiar notion of sowing and reaping in saying that God grants personal wealth in response to believers' faith. Whereas some believers take this view as a mandate for hard work, others take it as a call to live (by faith) beyond their means and take financial risks. Augustine contrasts the individualistic consumerism of the prosperity gospel with her own constructive biblical vision of Pentecost communal ethics, which she suggests offers a socioeconomic identity for Pentecostal and renewal Christians that is compatible with the region's Eastern Orthodox heritage and communitarian values. Augustine's Pentecost communal ethics offers an alternative ideology characterized by radical inclusion and socioeconomic justice.

Part 3 consists of responses that place the volume in a broader context. R. Andrew Chesnut examines how and why prosperity messages flourish by noting that prosperity theology coheres with global capitalism and promotes the individualism and pragmatism required by today's multinational labor market. Chesnut notes that prosperity messages are aimed at the disprivileged and create a dialectic between these individuals' lack of prosperity and their desire to acquire the fortune that is preached.

Frank D. Macchia provides a theological assessment of the movement from an ecumenical perspective. He calls for attention to contextual variations in prosperity messages as well as for awareness that capitalism is not neutral. Theologically Macchia concludes with emphases on Jesus's "poverty of the cross" and the Holy Spirit's sovereign activity (see p. 234).

In the final chapter, Douglas A. Hicks brings together the broad themes of the book: prosperity, theology, and economy. He begins by highlighting the difficulties in defining prosperity and calls for an account that considers peoples' capabilities, not just their net worth. Noting the limits of human understanding, Hicks then calls for theologies that can speak to both the mysteries of faith and the realities of suffering. In evaluating economic practices, Hicks asks for Christians to consider a range of economic practices, including consumption, production, and distribution.

This volume highlights the diversity of prosperity theologies, their implications for socioeconomic life, and their application among local communities worldwide. Striving to avoid generalizations, the contributing authors provide a detailed engagement with specific sites where the prosperity gospel has taken hold, and the authors show how people adopt and modify the message.[17]

Endnotes

1. "Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2006, iv.
2. Ibid., 31; and Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on all Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 18–22.
3. "Spirit and Power," 2.
4. Ibid., 1.
5. Ibid., 16.
6. Ibid., 28.
7. Ibid., 29.
8. Miroslav Volf, "Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 447–67, at 448, italics in the original. Volf argues that Pentecostal theology shares this commitment with liberation theology.
9. Ibid., 457.
10. Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 258.
11. Robert Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 208; Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 258. See also Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 148.
12. Bowman, *The Word-Faith Controversy*, 206. Bowman identifies this as "the lifting of the curse." Christians are freed from the "curse of the law," which includes poverty and sickness.

13. Allan H. Anderson, "Pentecostal Approaches to Faith and Healing," *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 363 (2002): 523–34, at 528.
14. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 255.
15. In the background of the CDE report is the ongoing debate regarding Max Weber's classic (although contested) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. According to Weber, the "spirit of capitalism" (or the "modern economic ethic") is a distinctly religious source that precipitated the rise of modern capitalism. This ethic, embodied by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestantism (especially Puritanism), came to be known as the "Protestant ethic," which Weber characterized as a systematic organization of life that used psychological rewards to incentivize economic behavior. Peter L. Berger, a self-identified neo-Weberian who advised the CDE research, describes the Protestant ethic's "this-worldly asceticism" as consisting of behavioral patterns including "a disciplined attitude to work" and "a deferral of instant consumption" in a worldview that is "relatively free of magic." Peter L. Berger, "Max Weber is Alive and Well, and Living in Guatemala: The Protestant Ethic Today," *Faith and International Affairs* 8, no. 4 (2010): 3–9, at 4. Berger claims that Pentecostalism shares these traits, particularly with its emphases on asceticism, personal discipline, and honesty. Weber's thesis is not without critics. Weber's thesis itself is highly contested, particularly his reading of theology, which raises questions about its applicability to Pentecostalism. See also Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth (editors), *Weber's Protestant Ethic: Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
16. Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 148, italics in the original.
17. Special thanks to Emil Attanasi, Amos Yong, and especially James Barker, who read earlier versions of this chapter.

Part I

Taxonomies of Prosperity

Chapter 1

A Typology of Prosperity Theology: A Religious Economy of Global Renewal or a Renewal Economics?

Amos Yong

Introduction

The gospel of prosperity is not a new phenomenon. One of its most direct antecedents in North America, and certainly its most influential genealogical stream, can be traced through the charismatic renewal and the Latter Rain revival movements of the mid-twentieth century back to the teachings of popular writers such as Essek W. Kenyon, among others.[1] Particularly in this broad tradition, prosperity was considered not just in financial terms but also in relationship to bodily health (hence the label "health and wealth"). Kenyon's teachings, as mediated through Latter Rain personalities such as William Marion Branham and charismatic leaders such as Oral Roberts, Kathryn Kuhlman, Kenneth Hagin, and Kenneth Copeland, among many others, have not only informed the scope of discursive practices that fueled the spreading of the prosperity message across the "global South" in the last generation, but they have also motivated many critical assessments of the theology of prosperity.[2]

The pervasiveness of the prosperity theme around the world is another reason focused discussion is needed. Yet because the notion of prosperity has been especially prevalent among churches associated with the global renewal movement (which for purposes of this chapter includes Pentecostal, charismatic, and related churches and organizations), it is very difficult to make reliable generalizations about it. On the one hand, prosperity features prominently in fairly traditional Pentecostal churches such as the

Yoido Full Gospel Church in South Korea and Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria, both of which have planted missionary congregations around the world; on the other hand, prosperity is also central to new and independent churches emerging from the charismatic renewal movement such as the Brazilian-based but also globally present Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Reign of God). And if things were not already complicated enough, there is also the phenomenon of prosperity among groups such as El Shaddai Ministries, a major aspect of the burgeoning Roman Catholic charismatic renewal in the Philippines. Representative of the diversity of global renewal movements, these churches and organizations also illuminate the pluralistic shades of prosperity embraced by Christians around the world.[3] But cumulatively, they represent an irreducibly complex mix of sociological, economic, political, and historical factors, all interwoven with the ongoing task of meaning making that is central to spiritual pursuit and the religious life.

Back in the North American context, the prosperity gospel continues to thrive, although simultaneously morphing according to the shape of its carriers. The emergence of megachurches—most of which cut across racial and ethnic lines—that provide for middle and upper-middle-class respectability means that prosperity preaching is now much more subtly communicated and received. There also have always been and remain televangelistic ministries, which promulgate especially blatant forms of the wealth message to their followers. Inevitably, and rightly so, exposés and scandals following well-known personalities inflame public opinion.[4]

This chapter explores the economic implications of the prosperity gospel. To do so, I will present and develop a typology of five theological arguments and rationalizations, situate them in their various theological contexts, and tease out their economic consequences. Table 1.1, following this paragraph, provides a synoptic overview of the types which are elucidated in the remainder of this chapter. The question in the subtitle of the chapter—"an economy of global renewal or a renewal economics?"—asks if the prosperity gospel has merely spawned a different type of renewal movement with no economic implications or if it has the potential to contribute to another form of the emerging global economy. Put alternatively, is the prosperity gospel merely a mechanism for expanding a certain type of Christianity amid the religious economies offered in the marketplace, or does it motivate a certain mentality that has the potential to transform the global economy?

Table 1.1 A typology of prosperity theology

Argument	Content	Rationale	Economic consequences
For prosperity	Scripture promises salvation of souls, divine healing, and material prosperity.	Christ's holistic ministry and other biblical stories of blessings (e.g., Abraham, Joseph).	Engenders hope in impoverished situations; may motivate actions that could gradually overcome poverty.
Against prosperity	The biblical message as a whole does not support a prosperity orientation.	Both Jesus and the apostle Paul lived simply and taught about spiritual prosperity rather than emphasizing accumulation of material possessions.	Minimal consequences; believers might still be motivated to pursue economic gains, but without theological or religious rationalizations.
Missional argument	Wealth and prosperity are neutral; they can be used for good, though, when directed toward Christian mission and evangelism.	Like the Egyptians' treasures, wealth should be used to benefit God's people.	May entail interfacing with the global economy through investing in development efforts or entrepreneurial projects.
Contextual argument	Popular and indigenous understandings of salvation have come to include physical and economic well-being.	People (particularly in the "global South") are drawn to Christianity because of experiences of healing or of God's redemption in concrete circumstances.	The gospel has the capacity to mobilize masses to make lifestyle changes according to the belief that God heals and provides for human economic and material well-being; may lead to local partnerships with development efforts.
Balanced argument	Although the Bible does not speak with one voice, there emerge basic themes that provide norms to measure success and achievement.	Live simply; work hard; practice principles of biblical stewardship; share altruistically.	This could be viewed as a prosperity version of the Puritan ethic, albeit now translated into the context of the twenty-first-century global renewal movement, and capable of empowering economic activity.

The Argument for Prosperity

First I discuss the arguments for the prosperity gospel. I can do no more than summarize the major threads. While any complete response and assessment will need to attend to the various hermeneutical and sociocontextual factors embedded or presumed within the many versions of the prosperity gospel, here I want to focus on the alleged biblical rationale. This is in order to register the perspective of prosperity gospel advocates, most of whom believe they are merely appropriating the message of the biblical gospel.

One of the most frequently quoted scriptural texts among prosperity proponents is 3 John 2: "Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul." According to Rev. Dr. David Yonggi Cho, founding and senior pastor emeritus of the world's largest congregation (the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea), this prayer identifies three dimensions of blessings: the spiritual, the physical, and life in general.[5] Scripture, from this perspective, has promised the salvation of souls (now and in the afterlife), divine healing for the body, and material prosperity for physical beings. Cho's "triple blessing" message resonates with other advocates of the prosperity gospel, especially in light of the life and ministry of Christ.

Christ's ministry, understood within the prosperity framework, operates at each of these levels. First, there is not only the forgiveness of sins but also the spiritual healing and deliverance of people from the powers and forces that oppress them.[6] In Jesus's teaching, the exorcism of evil spirits needs to be followed by reception of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:43–45). Likewise, the spiritual freedom and liberation that Christ brings ought to be followed by obedience to the teachings of Christ. Thus, with deliverance comes faith that can move mountains and make possible what is otherwise impossible (Matt. 17:20–21), so that "Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive" (Matt. 21:22).

Second, Jesus not only delivered the oppressed but also healed the sick. On numerous occasions, the synoptic evangelists affirmed that Jesus "healed all" the sick who came to him (Matt. 14:36; Mark 1:34, 6:56; Luke 6:19, 9:11). He also empowered his disciples to heal the sick (Luke 9:11; Acts 5:16, 8:7, 28:9).[7] Prosperity thus involves not just wealth; it involves health and physical well-being.

Last but not least, Cho argues that Jesus himself lived a life of simplicity (I will say more about this matter later); nevertheless, Jesus insisted that he came in order that others might enjoy abundant life

(John 10:10), and he accepted the ministry of the more well-to-do. For example, many of his women disciples appear to have been materially and financially well endowed (Luke 8:3), and Jesus's reception of their ministries indicates his endorsement of their affluence. Similarly, the earliest followers of Christ included homeowners and relatively wealthy people such as Joseph (called Barnabas), Tabitha (also known as Dorcas), and Lydia, among others.[8]

Going back to the Old Testament, prosperity advocates suggest that God not only called Abraham the "father" of God's chosen and elect people but also blessed him abundantly in every way: socially, economically, and materially. Joseph's many-colored robe foreshadowed his prosperity as second in command over the whole of Egypt later in life. Job's faithfulness was also rewarded not only with the full restoration of his health but also with double the prosperity that he had before his calamity. In each of these instances and many others, then, the Bible portrays God's desire to bless his people with spiritual, physical, and material abundance.[9]

What might this kind of "prosperity hermeneutic" produce in terms of theological expectations and even a way of life? To be sure, how this question is answered will differ across the world. Minimally, I suggest that in impoverished situations, such a prosperity message will engender hope and perhaps motivate a certain course of action that anticipates the gradual, if not more efficient, overcoming of poverty.[10] But much more needs to be said theologically before we draw these conclusions.

The Argument against Prosperity

Critics of the prosperity gospel charge that the broad scope of the biblical witness precludes a prosperity interpretation. Intending to meet prosperity advocates on their own "scriptural" ground, at least three sets of biblical arguments have been marshaled against the prosperity message. First, Jesus himself advocated and embodied a lifestyle of simplicity and not prosperity. In a sense, Jesus was prosperous but not in the materialistic and consumeristic manner implied, if not flaunted, by prosperity preachers. Instead, Jesus was dependent on the support of others (e.g., Luke 8:1–3), even to the point that he did not own his own home (Luke 9:58). More important, in his teachings Jesus not only consistently focused on the importance of seeking after spiritual rather than material prosperity (Matt. 5:3–10, Luke 6:20–22) but pronounced woe on the rich, the prosperous, and the greedy (Luke 6:24–25, Matt. 23:25; cp. James 5:1–6).[11]

Second, the apostle Paul, who followed in the footsteps of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), also advocated a lifestyle of simplicity and contentment, even when he had little, was hungry, or was in situations of great need and reliant on the generosity of others (Phil. 4:11–16). More pointedly, Paul's devotion to the person and cause of Christ meant that he was wholly committed not to the pursuit of material gain but to suffering the loss of all things and counting material possessions as rubbish, "in order that I may gain Christ [and] know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:8b, 10b). True prosperity thus consists not in the accumulation of wealth or material things but in the relationship believers can have with Christ.

Third, there is Paul's grave warning to Timothy: "But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains" (1 Tim. 6:9–10). This is consistent with the various admonitions in the book of Proverbs about the dangers of riches (Prov. 10:15, 11:4, 28, 22:1, passim). It does not mean that prosperity itself is necessarily evil but that wealth may bring with it seductions that entrap those who are not wary.

Inevitably, the harshest critics of the prosperity gospel are incensed when a few of its most glamorous preachers are exposed as swindlers of the unsuspecting,[12] or others are offended that many of the most recognizable television evangelists openly enjoy their affluence. They are concerned that such scandals undermine the Christian witness. There is also unease that the central biblical virtue of giving should motivate the well-to-do to be generous in light of the poverty that afflicts many other Christians (the brothers and sisters of the wealthy!) around the world, not to mention nonbelievers outside the church, when compared with how the prosperity gospel fosters a mentality of accumulating or acquiring wealth. And last but not least, there is also apprehension that too much talk of prosperity leads to the neglect of other important virtues such as hard work and responsible stewardship as well as other necessary topics and themes, such as a more robust and helpful theological understanding of suffering. All of these anxieties understandably motivate protests against the prosperity message.[13]

Interestingly, however, respondents have in turn pointed out that antiprosperity critics (at least the academic critics) are usually white males who are located in the middle class in the Anglo-American West and who are therefore not afflicted by poverty, rarely oppressed

by racial or ethnic injustices, and not generally touched by gender or class-based inequalities. These respondents say, how then should arguments presented by those who have already experienced some measure of prosperity be assessed or received?

In reality, then, critics of the prosperity gospel are not necessarily against prosperity per se. They are relatively prosperous themselves, and in all probability they are contributing members to the global economy. They are not opposed to economic endeavors but rather to the rhetorical exploitation of a theological theme that tarnishes the gospel message in the eyes of the world. But if critics are successful in promulgating their message, might Christians be less motivated to pursue economic ventures or aspire to material or financial wealth? Probably not! Perhaps, this means that the antiprosperity argument has minimal economic consequences in the long run.

The Missional Argument

In addition to the basic for-or-against arguments are more nuanced positions vis-à-vis the prosperity gospel. The missional argument presupposes that wealth and prosperity are neutral and that it is, instead, "the love of money [that] is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains" (1 Tim. 6:10). In other words, being rich or affluent itself is not the problem since wealth and money can be used for good purposes. Most important among these uses are those related to the Christian and ecclesial work of mission and evangelization.

Part of the rationale here involves following in the footsteps of the ancient Israelites who, led by Moses, were instructed to "plunder the Egyptians" (Ex. 3:22). The riches of Egypt, representing the world, were thus understood to have been stored up for the people of God. In plundering their masters and escaping from Egypt, then, the people of God were launched on their own journey to the Promised Land. Historically, then, there has been a long tradition emphasizing the treasures of the world as being kept or stored for the benefit of God's people.[14] At the same time, the resources of the world are not meant to be transferred to the people of God merely for the latter's enjoyment or enrichment. But if the elect of God were to put such treasures and possessions to work according to divine purposes, then such amassment would be justified. There is no better validation for the appropriation of wealth than for purposes related to the evangelization of the world.

Among the early Christians, for example, it has been observed that those who were more affluent "would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:45), and "as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold . . . [to] the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (4:34–35). Jesus's wealthy followers such as Joseph of Arimathea became models of charity who gave of their personal possessions for the welfare of others. Part of the result of such generosity was that "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (2:47). Such a missional model of the distribution of wealth for just and worthwhile causes is central to contemporary arguments that connect prosperity and the evangelistic task of the church.

In some circles, plundering the wealth of the Egyptians logically follows from their evangelization. The thinking here, in brief, is that the wealthy are only going to be engaged evangelistically by others who are also similarly wealthy. The principle involved is that of St. Paul, who wrote, "I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22b). So the wealthy need to be evangelized by those who at least are not impoverished. Put alternatively, it is unlikely the unconverted affluent will be convinced by the gospel unless it is witnessed to them by those who are similarly prosperous.[15] The possession of wealth, in other words, is defended as a necessary means to reach the well-to-do. By way of example, the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) operates effectively as such a group with a twofold mission: to connect business men for their mutual fellowship and discipleship and to equip and empower them to evangelize their colleagues, peers, and friends.[16] Many of the members of the FGBMFI are quite mission-minded. While their lifestyles reflect their success, they are also committed to the task of world evangelization. Focusing on such a group and other similarly like-minded and more well-to-do people shows it is likely that many are motivated to accumulate wealth by more holistic visions of mission work. They are also often engaged in missions understood as development or relief (nongovernmental) humanitarian initiatives in the sense that they are willing to channel their substantial wealth into projects of amelioration and improvement in countries in the majority world or toward disaster aid.[17] In short, advocates of prosperity who are also committed to the missionization and evangelization of the world will often invest into development or other related projects and in that sense, interface with the global economy not solely in terms of consumption.[18]

The Contextual Argument

Closely related to the missional argument is what I call the contextual argument. The missional argument says both that prosperity is given for the purposes of world mission and evangelization and that to some degree prosperous missionaries and evangelists are needed to bring the gospel to the affluent. By contrast, the contextual argument says that the theme of prosperity is especially important in light of popular understandings of what it means to be saved, in particular the prevalent beliefs about salvation held by the masses residing in the "global South." Thus, "prosperity" is an important component of salvation with the latter including physical well-being, etc. Put alternatively, whereas the missional argument presents the perspective of those who are engaged in missionary or evangelistic work, the contextual argument emphasizes the viewpoint of those who are being missionized and evangelized.

There are at least two understandings of prosperity underneath this claim. First, people are being drawn to Christian faith across the "global South" because they or someone they know have experienced healing in some significant way. Consultation with traditional healers or even Western doctors—or in some cases, not having access to the latter—did not alleviate their physical or psychosomatic condition, but an encounter with Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit did.[19] The gospel, or good news in this case, includes physical healing, blessing, and, by extension, prosperity.

Second, the center of gravity of Christianity is shifting from the West to Latin America, Africa, and Asia, in part because people have experienced God as savior not only in their bodies but also in the concrete circumstances of their lives. They believe that God is providing them with jobs; enabling them to pay their bills; rescuing them from debilitating debts; promoting them in the workplace, the church, or the public domain; bringing about a higher quality and standard of life—in short, that God hears their prayers and transforms their situation. Thus the masses see God's salvation as addressing the particularities of their physical, material, and economic needs. Christian redemption thus is not abstract but concrete, resulting in the overall prosperity and well-being of those who walk in the way of Christ and his Spirit.[20]

In this scheme of things, prosperity might be understood as the most recent form of the contextualization of Christianity in the non-Western world. If previous generations of missionaries sought to Christianize their environments, more recent missionary strategies

emphasize the indigenization or inculturation of the gospel. But what does it mean to indigenize or inculturate the good news in contexts marked by poverty, disease, and underdevelopment? In these situations, the gospel that makes a difference must heal bodies, enable socioeconomic lift, and bring about at least gradual upward socioeconomic movement—namely, prosperity.[21] Such prosperity surely might involve the achievement of affluence even when measured by Western standards, but it might also mean nothing more than that those who could not pay their bills in the past now can do so, or that those who did not own their own homes in the past now do.

Thus, prosperity advocates in the "global South" insist: why should African, Asian, and Latin American Christians not be recipients of the prosperity and blessings enjoyed by Westerners? Why is it implausible that God should transform the poverty of his people into affluence across the southern hemisphere as God has done so in the Western world? Of course, such "contextual," even "missiological," rationales could be no more than self-serving theological rationalizations. But with the challenges posed by globalization and transnationalism, inevitably the lines are blurred in terms of self-understandings. Of course, non-Western Christians, even prospective believers, are going to gauge the power of the gospel according to its long-term fruits in the lands of Christendom. If prosperity marks the higher quality of life in Christian nations, why not expect that personal conversion to Christ might bring about collective, even national, wealth understood broadly?

The economic implications of the contextual argument include the capacity of the Christian gospel to mobilize the masses to make lifestyle changes, perhaps embrace a kind of Puritan work ethic, engage in entrepreneurial and other forms of economic activity, and perhaps assume responsibility for development projects.[22] So if the missional argument spurs Westerners to "invest," perhaps with the hopes of enjoying some kind of economic return in the future, the contextual argument motivates local partnerships with development efforts to work for the betterment of life, perhaps in the hopes of experiencing redemption in the form of socioeconomic prosperity and lift, if not in one's lifetime, then perhaps by the generation of one's children or grandchildren.

Is It Possible to Develop a "Balanced" Argument for Prosperity?

A fifth type of argument for prosperity actually consists of arguments against certain forms and expressions of prosperity. Here I consider

the quest for a "balanced" rationale for prosperity, one that at least strives to take into account the entire biblical witness. Much of the thinking along these lines acknowledges a good deal of all four of the preceding types of arguments and grants that the scriptural traditions do not speak with one voice on the topic. So while no one biblical or theological formulation of a theology of prosperity will suffice, there might still be a set of guiding themes from the Bible that would not only inform ideas regarding prosperity but also shape a prosperous life. Three themes deserve explicit mention.

First, any way of life should not be a stumbling block to others, especially those who are less mature in the faith. This is a pragmatic maxim about living prosperously: do not flaunt one's prosperity, but rather live in simplicity. More important is to embody the habits of the Puritan work ethic.[23] The issue here is both to be sensitive to others and to embody a certain set of dispositions and behaviors toward the world and its material blessings and comforts. Prosperity in this framework is neither a set of accumulations nor a mode of consumption. Instead, it is an attitude of gratitude that recognizes that the providential and undeserving character of divine blessings beholden the prosperous to modesty as a way of life and to responsible stewardship.

One expression of such prosperous stewardship—and this is the second biblical theme—is in philanthropic giving, which builds up or edifies others.[24] This is especially the case for those who are more affluent. The motivation here is less "Give, and it will be given unto you…" (Luke 6:38)—which may appeal more to motivate the have-nots in light of the promise of receiving something even greater in return—than "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In the minds of many, the combination of a life of simplicity and hard work with charitable generosity and benevolence is the appropriate response for those blessed with plenty.

The issue of "balance" in prosperity suggests to some that prosperous stewardship is a relative notion depending on the context. A community of people who pool their resources in an impoverished region may be considered prosperous, as were the first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, of whom it was said, "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:35).

Such a vision of a shared and communal prosperity, a central apostolic theme, has motivated many experimental projects, one manifestation of which is the now globally diffused Economy of Communion (EoC), founded in 1991 by Chiara Lubich (1920–2008), an Italian Catholic activist who also established the

Focolare movement.[25] Whereas much of the modern economy is motivated by rational self-interest, the EoC argues that this modality of economic life is actually a fairly recent development and that it had been preceded for millennia by other forms of reciprocal and community exchange. Thus EoC, a network of hundreds of businesses in loosely organized communities around the world, engages the poor with a vision of holistic and communal way of life. While embedded in the market economy, EoC is deeply informed by a form of solidarity in which all profits are reinserted back into the community for the common good. Each member of the community gives and receives with equal dignity.[26]

EoC's successes may not be what make the headlines under the label of the "prosperity gospel," but its accomplishments are no less noticeable. In the EoC cases, of course, local economic initiatives are engaged in their various cultural, social, and political environments. The welfare of all is a common value so that those more able and capable bear a greater share of the burden for the community's well-being (following the teachings of Christ: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded"; Luke 12:48). Yet, all members of the community contribute what they can. The resulting prosperity may not be affluence in the usual sense, but it does involve the socioeconomic lift of the poor.

Within a more capitalist, neoliberal economic context, the quest for a balanced theology of prosperity invites emphasis on altruistic sharing. All people can be compassionate and can give benevolently according to their means. Those with more can be more generous. Prosperity in this case is measured less by the bottom line in bank accounts or according to ownership of material goods than by what is given away.[27] Certainly, such efforts to develop more balanced theological perspectives on prosperity contain much-needed implicit critique of the abuses of the prosperity gospel (especially its consumerism, materialism, and exploitation of the poor who give to "ministers" in the hopes of getting something more in return). But equally certain, in the cases of such "balanced" theologies and practices of prosperity, one often gets the sense that this is quite a bit removed from popular Western notions of the "prosperity gospel."

Conclusion: An Economy of Global Renewal or a Renewal Economics?

The preceding suggests a fivefold typology of various theological postures toward the prosperity gospel. The argument for prosperity

is fairly straightforward in its claim that there are biblical reasons for embracing the prosperity message, although the more explicit theological articulations of this may take widely divergent forms ranging from David Yonggi Cho to Kenneth Hagin/Kenneth Copeland and everyone in between. The argument against prosperity inevitably reacts to the excesses of the prosperity theology, and detractors usually highlight the breadth of the scriptural witness regarding lifestyles of simplicity and contentment. The missionary and contextual arguments are two sides of the one coin of defending prosperity either from the perspective of those who feel a vocational commitment to engage with the more affluent in society or from the more holistic perspectives prevalent across cultural contexts especially in the "global South" where divine salvation is often understood to have material and even financial implications as opposed to a merely cognitive or eschatological character. Last but not least, the balanced argument attempts to mediate between the various positions by recognizing the importance of prosperity to the Christian gospel but emphasizing the need for implementation of biblical notions of responsible stewardship in concrete economic initiatives. In all of this, we can see that the prosperity theology is not one idea but many, such that we can and should legitimately think about prosperity *theologies*.

My second objective has been to explore the economic ramifications of the prosperity message. Here I wish to focus on how each of these arguments have been and will be received in different economic contexts. In particular, I inquire into more developed contexts of affluence and into underdeveloped contexts of more or less poverty. With regard to the former, in more developed regions of the world, I would argue that most Christians operate with a prosperity *mentality* but without a prosperity *theology*. In other words, in societies and cultures of affluence, most Christians imbibe the prevalent economic presuppositions and embody the dominant economic lifestyles. In such contexts, it is natural that the missional arguments for prosperity will sooner or later emerge, usually following on the heels of an earlier generation of prosperity preachers who proclaim more forcefully the rights of all believers to participate in their society's wealth.

It is, however, in the more underdeveloped socioeconomic regions of the world that I press the analysis. Because of globalization trends, the prosperity messages crafted in the more developed regions of the world are frequently telecasted and carried into the majority world.[28] On the one hand, the results can certainly be detrimental to the cause of the Christian gospel, particularly if checks and balances are not in place to rein in unscrupulous practices.[29] In such cases, the

gulf between the haves and have-nots will inevitably widen, and the purveyors of the prosperity message will be seen as benefitting themselves rather than others. On the other hand, the prosperity theology may also have a galvanizing effect, motivating the transformation of economic habits and practices that gradually result in upward socioeconomic mobility. This is particularly in cases involving the informal economy, where many of the urban poor in the "global South" reside and among whom the global renewal movement has made significant inroads.[30] In such cases, the prosperity argument provides an overall vision of what might be, while the contextual and balanced arguments motivate the enactment of the Christian virtues and the implementation of specific economic and even development initiatives with concrete economic consequences.

In the global context, then, the prosperity gospel should be recognized as not being all of one stripe, with the possibility that various aspects of its reception and performance may have positive economic outcomes. In response, then, to the question in the subtitle of this chapter, we might say both yes and maybe. Yes, from a prosperity lens, we can see how there has emerged in the last generation, particularly with the shift of the center of gravity of world Christianity toward the "global South,"[31] a religious economy of global renewal. This means not only that we can use economic matrices to measure how religious movements are competing for their market share of consumers[32] but also see how such matrices involve actual economic scales that reflect how socioeconomic factors are one important domain overlapping with the religious dimension that brings in converts. In other words, people are converting to Christianity at least in part because they are experiencing types of economic betterment. In that case, then, the religious economy of global renewal is not divorced from political economy: people are partially judging the benefits of Christianity by whether it can bring about prosperity, understood perhaps materially and financially, but surely holistically.

But is there also a sort of renewal economics or a kind of economic theory that is informed by renewal movements in general and by the prosperity message in particular? While economic theorists might laugh at such a notion, it is not that far-fetched from a theological perspective, particularly if we include prosperity theologians. For example, a prominent prosperity advocate, such as the Ghanaian Pentecostal pastor-theologian Mensa Otabil, has developed what he calls God's "four laws of productivity" that in effect serve as a platform for economic success.[33] To be sure, this is still a long way from impacting the discipline of economics. But if renewal movements

continue to preach prosperity and its adherents continue to come into prosperity in ways that can be quantitatively studied by economic theorists, then it may not be too long hence before the field begins to ask if there is a kind of renewal economics that may need to be theorized, developed, and studied vis-à-vis global renewal.[34]

Endnotes

1. See D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), esp. chs. 1–3. See also Dale H. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1997).
2. For example, Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel: What's Going on Today in a Movement That Has Shaped the Faith of Missions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), and Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007).
3. For discussion, see Ig-Jin Kim, *History and Theology of Korean Pentecostalism: Sunbogeum (Pure Gospel) Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2003); Asonzeh F. K. Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2008); Berge Furre, "Crossing Boundaries: The 'Universal Church' and the Spirit of Globalization," in Sturla J Stålsett, ed., *Spirits of Globalization: The Growth of Pentecostalism and Experiential Spiritualities in a Global Age* (London: SCM, 2006), 39–51; and Katharine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Popular Transformation of Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005). Cf. also Simon Coleman, *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
4. Helpful discussions are found in Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
5. For further explication of Cho's theology of blessing, see Yong, "Salvation, Society, and the Spirit: Pentecostal Contextualization and Political Theology from Cleveland to Birmingham, from Springfield to Seoul," *PaxPneuma: The Journal of Pentecostals & Charismatics for Peace & Justice* 5, no. 2 (2009): 22–34, esp. 27–32.
6. Deliverance from evil spirits is central to the prosperity message, especially in the "global South"; see, for example, Ogbu U. Kalu,

African Pentecostalism: An Introduction (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. ch. 9.

7. In most instances, the lines between deliverance and healing are blurred; see, for example, Gary S. Greig and Kevin N. Springer, eds., *The Kingdom and the Power: Are Healing and the Spiritual Gifts Used by Jesus and the Early Church Meant for the Church Today? A Biblical Look at How to Bring the Gospel to the World with Power* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1993).
8. Of course, Jesus's teachings on wealth have been subject to a highly contested set of interpretations, both historically and in contemporary biblical scholarship. For an overview of the issues, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBL Dissertation series 39 (Missoula, Mt.: Scholars Press, 1977), and *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981); cp. John Gillman, *Possessions and the Life of Faith: A Reading of Luke-Acts* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical/Michael Glazier, 1991), and Thomas E. Phillips, *Reading Issues of Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 48 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).
9. This is, of course, one-sided. But see the overview of H. L. Bosman, I. G. P. Gous, and I. J. J. Spangenberg, *Plutocrats and Paupers: Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament* (Pretoria, South Africa: J. L. van Schaik, 1991).
10. For example, as demonstrated by Elizabeth Brusco, in her study of how Pentecostal conversion motivated conformation to a way of life that repented from profligacy and promoted moral responsibility instead, resulting in gradual upward socioeconomic mobility, and by Shayne Lee, in his research on upward mobility in the African American neo-Pentecostal ministry of T. D. Jakes; see Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin, Tex.: The University of Texas Press, 1995), and Shayne Lee, *T. D. Jakes: America's New Preacher* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
11. For more on Jesus's teachings against greed and wealth accumulation, see Thomas E. Schmidt, *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).
12. For example, David Pilgrim, "Egoism or Altruism: A Social Psychological Critique of the Prosperity Gospel of Televangelist Robert Tilton," *Journal of Religious Studies* 18, nos. 1–2 (1992): 1–11.
13. See Andrew Perriman, ed., *Faith, Health and Prosperity: A Report on 'Word of Faith' and 'Positive' Confession Theologies by ACUTE* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003). Overall, this volume provides a fair and even-handed treatment of the prosperity gospel, yet it is also critical about its potential and existing excesses.

14. Of course, such appropriation of the "treasures" of the world has always been contentious, with various strategies deployed toward different, even divergent ends. There have also been debates about the extent to which the world's treasures should be embraced by the people of God or the respect in which they should be accepted. Some of the controversial issues can be seen in the analogical adaptation of worldly wealth for Christian use in terms of resourcing pagan sources for pedagogical, rhetorical, and theological purposes; see, for example, the discussion by Carol E. Quillen, "Plundering the Egyptians: Petrarch and Augustine's *De doctrinachristiana*," in Edward D. English, ed., *Reading and Wisdom: The* de doctrina christiana *of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 6 (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 153–71.
15. This appears to be the raison d'être behind churches such as Oasis Christian Center, whose evangelical mission is to bear witness to the gospel in Hollywood; see Gerardo Marti, *Hollywood Faith: Holiness, Prosperity, and Ambition in a Los Angeles Church* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008).
16. The story of the fellowship is told by Matthew W. Tallman, *Demos Shakarian: The Life, Legacy and Vision of a Full Gospel Business Man* (Wilmore, Ky.: Emeth Press, 2010).
17. See Tom Steffen and Mike Barnett, eds., *Business as Mission: From Impoverished to Empowered*, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 14 (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2006). Although, as Jim Harries, "African Economics and Its Implications for Mission and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of the Association of Christian Economists* 38 (January 2008): 23–40, reminds us, Christian development mission should not involve only the transfer of monies from Western to non-Western nations or regions but should involve a more holistic set of strategies.
18. Another example is the World Reach and Operation Blessing mission organizations of the Christian Broadcasting Network; see David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Pat Robertson: A Life and Legacy* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010), ch. 7.
19. For example, W. Meredith Long, *Health, Healing and God's Kingdom: New Pathways to Christian Ministry in Africa* (Waynesboro, Ga., and Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000).
20. This is occurring even in extremely recessed economic regions of the world such as Zimbabwe; see the discussion of the growth and development of Pentecostalism in this country as documented by David Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement* (Athens: Ohio University Press; Harare: Weaver Press; and London: James Currey, 2007).

21. The economics of renewal is here suggested by Isabelle V. Barker, "Charismatic Economies: Pentecostalism, Economic Restructuring, and Social Reproduction," *New Political Science* 29, no. 4 (2007): 407–27; Peter L. Berger, "'You Can Do It!' Two Cheers for the Prosperity Gospel," *Books & Culture* 14, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2008), available online at http://www.ctlibrary.com/bc/2008/sepoct/10.14.html (last accessed 24 January 2009); and Robert D. Woodberry, "The Economic Consequences of Pentecostal Belief," *Society* 44, no. 1 (2006): 29–35.
22. Here I summarize some of the findings of Lawrence Schlemmer and his colleagues at the Centre for Development and Enterprise, in Johannesburg, South Africa: *Dormant Capital: Pentecostalism in South Africa and Its Potential Social and Economic Role* [2008], available at: http://www.cde.org.za/page.php?p_id=1. See also the shorter version of this report published in this volume.
23. The unfolding of the Puritan work ethic across the global renewal movement has been brilliantly explicated by David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
24. See Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
25. See Lorna Gold and Dimitrij Bregant, "Case Study: The Focolare Movement—Evangelization and Contemporary Culture," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 364 (2003): 22–28, and Lorna Gold, The Roots of the Focolare Movement's Economic Ethic, *Journal of Markets & Morality* 6, no. 1 (2003) 143–59.
26. See Luigino Bruni, "Economy of Communion: Between Market and Solidarity," in J. S. Boswell, F. P. McHugh, and J. Verstraeten, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: Twilight or Renaissance?*, Bibliotheca EphemeridumTheologicarumLovaniensium 157 (Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 2000), 238–48, and "Economy as Love: The Experience of the Economy of Communion," In Kala Acharya, Lalita Namjoshi, and Giuseppe Zanghi, eds., *Bhakti: Pathway to God* (Mumbai and New Delhi: Somaiya Publications, 2003), 174–84.
27. Hence while some altruists may be economically affluent, many others are not; many generous people derive from the middle and even the lower classes of society. See the data presented by Matthew T. Lee and Margaret M. Poloma, *A Sociological Study of the Great Commandment in Pentecostalism: The Practice of Godly Love as Benevolent Service* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).
28. For example, Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).
29. See the critical analysis of Pradip Thomas, *Strong Religion, Zealous Media: Christian Fundamentalism and Communication in India* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2008).

30. I discuss the role of the prosperity message for those existing at least in part in the informal economy in my *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), ch. 7.
31. Namely, Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
32. As brilliantly laid out by R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
33. Mensa Otabil, *Four Laws of Productivity* (Tulsa, Ok.: Vincom, 1991); see also Mensa Otabil, *Buy the Future: Learning to Negotiate for a Future Better than Your Present* (Lanham, Md.: Pneuma Life Publishing, 2002), which shows that Otabil is not a typical prosperity preacher but is better understood as a voice within the "balanced argument" in my typology insofar as he advocates also concrete economic and development initiatives in his proposals.
34. Thanks to my graduate assistant Tim Lim Teck Ngern for proofreading an earlier draft of this chapter, and for Katherine Attanasi's editorial comments.

Chapter 2

Pentecostal Paradigms of National Economic Prosperity in Africa

Nimi Wariboko

Introduction

The most existential task facing Africans is economic development. For Christians, this raises the urgent question: what are the African Pentecostal churches' understandings and teachings on the continent's economic predicament? This chapter examines aspects of the social teachings of African Pentecostal churches related to national economic prosperity. I have identified five basic theological paradigms that frame the discourse on Africa's economic development among Pentecostal pastors. These are *covenant, spiritualist, leadership, nationalist,* and *developmental.*

I provide a comparative analysis of each of the paradigms and the alternative solutions they represent. Even though each of them considers poverty as the primary economic problem, each also traces its basic causes to different sources. While the proponents of these paradigms differ in the solution they seek, all believe that the conquering of poverty and acceleration of economic development will be important for the flourishing of humanity in Africa. The chapter reveals a distinct correlation between a church's religious understanding of economic problems and the solution it proffers.

Proponents of all five paradigms share an intense concern for time as an oncoming future. The "future" is no longer what African Pentecostal believers passively wait for to happen to them on earth and in heaven. They must help shape their future lives to be life-(abundance)-affirming rather than death-(poverty)-bringing; pray that abundant life will happen in the here and now; and *buy*[1] and grasp the future through faith and purposeful actions. The present and the past therefore are scrutinized from the perspective of the

future. Yet Pentecostals are not merely oriented to the future; they are also involved in a "recapitulation of the past." That is, they pass a summary judgment on the past that simultaneously enables its redemption and their own critical engagement with the present.[2] The present is the kairotic interregnum of personal and national decisions that end the negative consequences of the past and anticipate the creative, dynamic future of fulfillment.

These five paradigms are Weberian ideal constructs and as such no one denomination, theologian, or preacher will perfectly conform to any of them. As ideal constructs they draw sharply the distinctive features between the historical patterns for the sake of contrast. These paradigms are very rough preliminary systematizations of theological thinking about Africa's economic development. I am merely coding them to stimulate reflection, indicating logical possibilities for relating theological ideas (mainly in the forms of extended sermons and devotional materials) to the continent's economic crisis, and offering some sort of guidance for the research project of this volume.

These ideal constructs have emerged from a close examination of representative works of Pentecostal pastors. I do not rely on the official teachings of church bodies, nor do I reject the usual approach of working from official records and teachings of denominations, presidential addresses, and conferences of bishops. However, the fastest growing segment of Christianity in Africa is the Pentecostal/charismatic and the African independent (initiated, instituted) churches, which are not yet as organized as the Roman Catholic Church or Anglican Church. Thus, focusing on the writings, sermons, and prayers of individual clergy or theologians from the different traditions appears to be the best method for including Pentecostal/charismatic pastors' perspectives, as these churches do not generally issue denominational statements. I contend that we can get a good idea of the paradigms jostling for attention if we focus on theological–ethical analyses coming from a selection of individual pastors.

In evaluating the theological positions of Pentecostal leaders on economic development in this chapter, I have not examined the relevance and validity of sources or even the quality of their exegesis. At this stage of my research I am more interested in explaining what they have to say than in assessing the theological adequacy of their ideas. I will make a comment on how to address this in the concluding section of this chapter.

Before proceeding further, let me indicate how I will be using the terms *paradigm* and *model* in this chapter. Paradigm refers to the predominant way of thinking about the existential task of Africa's

economic development. A paradigm is the generally accepted perspective of a group of pastors (their pattern of thought), which frames the way they see or imagine their problems (challenges), how they build models for explanation and prediction, as well as how they address them. I refer to variants within any of the five paradigms as models, and so a paradigm consists of one or more models on how to think and solve a problem. Models in general seek to explain by identifying a pattern of relationships that pertain to the whole economic system or to parts of it.

The rest of the chapter describes and analyzes each of the five different paradigms. I conclude by briefly discussing the methodology for a systematic assessment of the theological ethics of African Pentecostal pastors.

Covenant Paradigm

The covenant paradigm argues that God blesses nations either according to the covenant of giving or in response to the covenant of good efforts. According to this theory, the individual's prosperity, which starts with ceaseless sacrificial giving of money or time and effort to the church, will lead to national development. Irrespective of the overall state of the national economy, poverty is a religious problem caused by a lack of faith or trust in God's promise. Thus, Christians demonstrate their faith in God to turn around their bad economic circumstances by giving financial and other material resources to the church.

The covenant paradigm is based on an agricultural metaphor of sowing and reaping: sow tithes and offerings (among other elements of a self-sacrificial way of life) into the church and reap bumper harvests of wealth. Lives flourish when these gifts are blessed by or joined with the quasimagical gifts of certain pastors (the fertile soil). The covenant paradigm emphasizes self-development and personal wealth accumulation. It either affirms the status quo or ignores it; it is not oriented to social change.

There are two models or variants to this paradigm. First, there is the typical prosperity gospel approach to national economic development. The second model is the excellence model, which combines prosperity gospel with Afrocentric nationalism and professionalism.

Prosperity Model

Ghanaian pastor Nicholas Duncan-Williams of Christian Action Faith Ministries (CAFM) International (Accra, Ghana) argues that

the prosperity of believers depends on the application of spiritual laws, principally "giving, sowing and reaping." "God," he argues, "did not predetermine who will be rich and who would be poor. He simply created His spiritual laws and freely gave them to everyone. Every person has a choice: to implement the laws of poverty, or to implement God's spiritual laws of prosperity."[3]

Prosperity theology emphasizes financial contributions as the key to prosperity and wealth. However, based on the traditional African understanding of praise poetry such as the Yoruba *oriki*, the giving of praise also nudges the divine to bring down heaven on earth. In this context, the model has incorporated several dimensions of local cultural and social aesthetics, which contributes to its widespread support and acceptability. Praise reaffirms one's trust in God despite economic difficulties, but it does more. According to Asonzeh Ukah, "Praising God has become a practice that is embedded in local knowledge, which links praise and money in a reciprocal relationship."[4] In praising God, one crafts a particular image of God's self and actions that one hopes will rub off. Praising God in *oriki* style does not just elevate God for adoration, it also lifts the self imaginatively into the possibilities and abundance of God's kingdom. In the metaphor-filled language of *oriki,* individual believer's prosperity becomes the prolepsis of eschatological flourishing, anticipating the coming reign of Jesus Christ.

Oriki points to the poetics of possibility in African Pentecostal Christian faith. It is a transfer of wisdom from one person to the other and also a synthesis of the traditional and the exogenous religious faiths. It speaks of creativity at multiple levels: artistic, theological, and moralistic. The uses of *oriki* in the Yoruba culture suggest the possibility of humans transcending evil and tragedy through the creative transformation of their social world. *Oriki* is a medium and practice that investigates the "truth of things by means of words." Christians use it to construe, sanction, and authorize certain practices and behaviors in the church. *Oriki,* as a form of social practice of image making as ethics and as a rhetoric of persuasion, functions to interpret, express, critique, and engage with the basic substratum of indigenous Christian theological thinking. Like the ancient Hebraic-biblical thought (but unlike ancient Greek philosophical thought) there is no separation between ethics and poetic image making in the traditional Yoruba worldview. In the Yoruba conception of moral life, ethics and image making are often combined in ways that not only express the inherent moral creativity of the people but also point to the possibilities ahead.

Intensive prayer for breakthrough into wealth is another important element of this theology of prosperity. In Nigeria, the head of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Dr. D. K. Olukoya, reads Psalm 23 innovatively. His exegesis of biblical passages results in a theology of wealth creation that is employed to motivate and empower believers:

> The Lord is my banker; I shall not owe.
> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
> He restoreth my loss: He leadeth me beside still waters.
> Yea though I walk in the valley of the shadow of debt,
> I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;
> thy silver and thy gold, they rescue me
> Thou preparest a way for me in the presence of business competitors;
> thou anointed my head with oil, my cup runneth over.
> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life
> and I shall do business in the name of the Lord. Amen.[5]

Prosperity preachers in this covenant paradigm do not merely address poverty and fuel greed. In a more serious and fundamental way, they produce desires and dreams and connect them to a transcendental God. This is both good and bad, depending on the perspective. In one sense, they motivate believers to become agents of their own personal economic improvement. As David Martin puts it, economists "may be interested in people who refuse to be victims, organize for mutual assistance, and foster aspirations as a battalion of irregulars in the war on poverty. Pentecostals all over the globe believe they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome the spirit of poverty."[6] The churches may also be changing traditional views about money and the moral economy of money. Again, as Martin argues:

> What the so-called Faith Gospel offers is a way of dealing with the moral ambiguity attendant on sudden riches, particularly when these may be achieved by witchcraft, and a way of coping with the impersonality and short-term character of exchanges conducted in purely quantitative monetary terms. Ritual offerings made as part of gift economy, in an atmosphere of shared joy and praise, carry meanings that belong to a personalised and moralised world . . .
>
> Recourse to the supreme power of Jesus explicitly provides an alternative to the 'occult economy,' a power seen as truly beneficial and shorn of moral ambivalence, as well as able to offer protective cover through the 'shed blood' against occult forces. The exchange of money for divine blessings, which may come in spiritual as well as material forms, belong to a long-term covenantal or gift economy rather than to a short-term contractual or utilitarian economy.[7]

Now the bad news: The more prosperity preachers can connect savory religious visions to the social and aesthetic values of the society, the more the idea of the divine is transformed into a drive-by window that fulfils orders. After months and years of this kind of production of desires and dreams, consumerism and greed make their abodes in their victims' deep unconscious, where they are very difficult to control. At this deep level are produced not only incessant quests for material accoutrements but also the desire to align God with the restlessness of material desires in the unconscious. All desires (for God and material consumption) are then linked to the capitalist system's production of desires (demand).[8] As Rieger Joerg says,

> [R]eligion is frequently the ally of free-market capitalism. The Gospel of Prosperity is only the most blatant example. In this case, theology is assimilated to economic goals, endorsing the desires produced by the free-market economy and thus protecting them from being questioned.[9]

Many commentators now believe that prosperity theology in the hands of pastors bent on milking their congregants for every dime they can get has made for a wasteland of greed and avarice. However, all this should not lead us to construe that every pastor preaching the prosperity gospel is a wolf in sheep's clothes robbing the poor. Some sincerely believe that faith and giving to God are viable strategies for combating poverty.

Of all the paradigms, this is the least oriented toward national development, particularly where pastor–entrepreneurs have hijacked it for filthy lucre. In critiquing this personal-prosperity approach to national wealth creation, it is important to note that its assertions attempt to provide religious answers to the questions posed by people's economic predicament. In light of the dire and precarious economic circumstances of the continent, theology must respond to the questions being asked by the people. This is the idea of the *correlation method* popularized by Paul Tillich. Are Pentecostal pastors not answering the questions asked by the people? Are they not in their own ways responding to existential questions in the African environment? Ukah, in his study of Nigeria's Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), was careful to point this out even as he criticized its leader, Pastor Enoch A. Adeboye, for his theology of prosperity:

> Considering the historical background of the RCCG (and that of Adeboye himself…), the incorporation of prosperity theology, therefore, represents a situational response to specific social and

> economic circumstances. In this sense, it is a *situational theology*. When Adeboye teaches about prosperity, he often references his personal and family experiences, his struggles to survive as a school pupil, his father's penury and his mother's tactful art and performance of *oriki* to cajole his father to grant specific requests that involved money . . . The dread of poverty had been a propelling force in his life as well as in his teaching.[10]

In traditional belief systems, salvation is about wholeness, embracing physical and spiritual blessings. The adherents of African traditional religions believe that their God or deities should be able to deliver salvation in the most comprehensive sense of the word. Favors from the gods in traditional societies are not limited to the care of souls, but they also include blessings of fecundity, riches, and a long and healthy life. The gods are expected to make life in the present time (not only the hereafter) worth living. The Pentecostal churches may be tapping into the sources deep in the veins of traditional thought and struggling to reconceptualize the imported meaning of salvation. Academic theologians may want to assist them by unveiling and categorizing the African religious sources from which their theologies emanate and bringing these theologies to critical scrutiny.

Some of the reactions against the prosperity message come from presupposing Western binary thinking regarding the spiritual and the material: God is concerned with only the spiritual and not really with material things. But many African Pentecostal Christians reject this separation. The material realm, the realm of the bread and butter, must be opened to the spiritual.

Pentecostal pastors who adopt the prosperity gospel model believe that God blesses individuals according to the covenant of giving. There is a certain "magical" orientation to economic development and individual prosperity that is based on a supposed operation of a spiritual or metaphysical law that automatically connects giving to prosperity.

Excellence Model

The excellence model builds upon the prosperity gospel model by adding to it the perspective of human capability development and Afrocentric sentiments. If Africans are sowing and reaping material blessings, they must do so, according to the proponents of this model, with the best machinery and organization. The operation of these technologies must be sustained and advanced by the ethos of professional excellence. This model says that Africans have failed in

economic development because there are too few sane, resourceful, and patriotic managers who can bring together and develop the right talents to orchestrate development in the various spheres of the economy. The excellence model is a triangle of nationalism (Afrocentric view), professionalism (human capacity building), and the prosperity gospel orientation to development.

The African Pentecostal pastors identified with this model are Bishop David Oyedepo of Winners' Chapel (Ota, near metropolitan Lagos) and Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo of London's Kingsway International Christian Center, the largest church in Western Europe. Ashimolowo is also the author of a popular book among African Christians, *What is Wrong with Being Black?*[11] Due to space constraints, I will focus only on Oyedepo.

Oyedepo's Afrocentric perspective exemplifies the excellence model, as he situates the task of economic development within a Pan-Africanist context. In *Winning the War Against Poverty,* Oyedepo says:

> Though Africa's input in America's sugarcane plantation as labourers was part of what helped in revitalizing the economy of America, the African is still not considered as any creation of relevance, because the voice of a poor man is not heard, and his wisdom is despised . . . That is why economic recovery is a must. Our human dignity as a people must be recovered . . . I know that in my lifetime, Africa will start causing the same positive concern that China is causing the world today. No longer should Africans rush abroad to continue the slavery of our forefathers . . . With all of us pulling our resources together, very soon we will cause an eruption that the world cannot ignore. Very soon, it will be Africa's turn for an industrial revolution!
>
> The economic dignity of this continent will be recovered. You may choose to be a part of it or be somewhere else on a slave trade trip and be hearing of what is happening back home. It is a choice you must make.[12]

Oyedepo delivers his Afrocentric message in ways that transcend narrow identification and essentialism. His message has transnational and transracial appeal because it is couched in the typical born-again rhetoric of destiny (telos), of liberation and well-being for believers in the universal body of Christ. As Samuel Krinsky rightly observed,

> Whereas words like "origins," "heritage," "tribe," and "race" provided the dominant motifs for all African nationalisms of the early postcolonial era, the newer born-again model focuses far more on "destiny" and "spirit" in its formation of a layered postcolonial nationalist and

> Pan-Africanist public. Without this model, I find it doubtful that the [African nationalist Pentecostal] movement could have succeeded in walking the fine tightrope it navigates between desire to identify with a nonracial transnational community, and at the same time espouse an Afrocentric orientation as a source of pride and empowerment for its membership.[13]

Oyedepo claims that God has given him a special task for African nations: "Arise, get down home and make my people [Africans] rich."[14] Anyone who has listened attentively to his messages or carefully read his books will not fail to notice that his self-proclaimed divinely inspired task is a thinly veiled call to all Africans to conquer poverty and recover their human dignity by professionalism, actualization of their potentialities, and unflinching commitment to excellence. His view carefully goes beyond the prosperity gospel model that only emphasizes giving (sowing and reaping) as the route to economic development.

Oyedepo models professional excellence in the way he runs his huge ministry, and he encourages his followers to pursue excellence.[15] Most people who have seen the operations of this church have hailed the relatively high professionalism found there. In 2007 one of the senior officials of a Nigerian-originated Pentecostal denomination in the United States told me: "Compared to Oyedepo's Covenant University in Ota, ours [denominational university] is a high school." Recently Krinsky wrote:

> While most revivals take place in largely unadorned pavilions sheltered by acres of metal sheeting, Faith Tabernacle, by contrast, is constructed as an enclosure . . . [I]t is without doubt the most opulent and well-maintained publicly accessible space I have ever seen encountered in sub-Saharan Africa—by far.
>
> When I attended Shiloh [the name of the Winners' Chapel's year-end revival] for six days in 2006, it became abundantly clear that Shiloh was intended to be a grand spectacle . . . staged for maximum symbolic effect with utmost planning and expertise . . . It stands as an extraordinary testimony to the high standards for professionalism and presentation that are ceaselessly exhorted as a privileged ethic within the church.[16]

There is no doubt that Oyedepo's message harbors salient features of the prosperity gospel model, but his goes beyond the crass, vulgar wealth and health message to the extent that it embraces a teleological conception of Africans based on a vision of professional excellence. This influential pastor argues that Christians can uplift Africa to her

glorious destiny when they execute their work at a First World level of excellence. For him the principal cause of Africa's poverty is the combination of wrong mentality and wrong covenant. He claims that many Africans do not have a possibility mentality;[17] they are ignorant of the fact that their mental picture of themselves today determines their actual future, and they are unaware of the power within themselves to overcome poverty.[18]

Oyedepo asserts that without a covenant with God both African individuals' and nations' economic prosperity remains elusive. In his Afrocentric orations he especially berates Africans who migrated to Europe and North America to avoid hard economic conditions. As he says in his 2005 book, *Understanding Financial Prosperity*,

> Hear this: Africans, Europeans, Americans or whoever, may be offering themselves for sales, but under the covenant, I will always prevail! Every condition is conducive for the covenant. I am saying this so you can possess a tireless spirit, a tireless approach to what the Lord is talking into us. Oh it's amazing.
>
> Many have escaped to Europe or America because things are hard at home, only to become slaves there. Just for money! There is no nation on earth where there is no poverty, and there is no nation on the earth where there is no wealth…
>
> Yes, God can send you to any nation of the earth. Why not? He is the Lord of all the earth. But there is no escape in any nation. *Without a covenant covering, you remain a victim wherever you go.* The covenant is it![19]

Some may rightly view Oyedepo as a crass prosperity preacher. However, while his basic theology is a covenantal view of economic development (like the prosperity gospel), he goes further than the run-of-the-mill prosperity preacher. The bishop's theological view of Africa's economic predicament and the route out of it ultimately touches the ground in the language of professional excellence, Weberian rational-bureaucratic guidelines.

Oyedepo's more systematic thinking on economic and human development is discernible from the core values he has set for Covenant University, which he founded in 2002 to "raise a new generation of leaders who will positively impact their nation, the African continent and the world at large." The seven core values that guide the operations of the university are *spirituality*, *possibility mentality*, *capacity building, integrity, responsibility, diligence*, and *sacrifice* in service.[20] Oyedepo frequently weaves them into his sermons and discussions on economic development in the African continent.

Spiritualist Paradigm

I am treating the spiritual paradigm immediately after the covenant paradigm because it often undergirds the latter, especially when the proponents of the prosperity model emphasize spiritual warfare as the necessary first step to national prosperity. Nonetheless, it stands as an independent paradigm in its own right because many Pentecostal pastors who argue for Africa's spiritual deliverance as an avenue to economic development do not actually resort to the prosperity model's more "magical" orientation. It is perhaps the earliest paradigm to emerge in the pneumatological imagination of African Pentecostals as they confronted both Western modernizing cultures and African traditional cultures, which they regarded as demonic.

The spiritualist paradigm is based on an exchange model in which God and Satan act in history. The underlying theory is that the continent has been mortgaged to evil forces, and it needs to be bought back by persistent and fervent prayers. National poverty is spiritual, and economic wisdom begins by seeking God's deliverance from the powers, principalities, and rulers (Eph. 6:12) who foul up the economies of Africa. The success or failure of national actions depends on fidelity to Jesus Christ. According to this view, faithfulness to Jesus Christ's demands includes strict obedience to biblical commandments, rejection of African traditional religions, and repudiation of certain indigenous cultural practices believed to be demonic.

The pastors and (their followers) who think about the economic predicament of African nations in spiritualist terms often travel round their cities and countries to pray for the land of Africa, "casting out the principalities and powers holding it down" in order to redeem it for Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:12).[21] Christian leaders such as Pastor Emeka Nwankpa argue that spiritual forces, demons, and the devil hold back Africa's economic development. The key to development, therefore, is intercessory prayer and deliverance (exorcism) to *redeem* the land.[22] The attribution of the economic problem to the devil conveniently sidetracks any real sociological force or need for direct political engagement. Those who made wrong economic policies and/or looted the nations' treasuries are not held personally accountable for the deplorable situation of the continent.

Having said this, this view should not be dismissed as naïve and crassly nonpolitical, as it is rooted in an understanding of political power in Africa as supported by spiritual forces. Spiritualist pastors and congregants believe political and economic powers have both an

outer form and an inner spiritual dynamic that animate their manifestation and uphold them. As Ogbu Kalu argues:

> Pentecostals look beneath the structures of the public spheres to address the spirits that govern them. This theme opens up the possibility for examining both the overt and covert dimensions of political engagement. In Africa the sacralization of the cosmos legitimates the political space and the dynamics of the political culture. The rulers and the ruled often act from a sense of the presence and ultimateness of the spiritual forces.[23]

The spiritualist paradigm's language of spiritual domination or hindrance deftly recognizes the rich substratum of political and economic behavior, and it serves as "a critical rhetoric against power" which portrays political leaders as "possessed and empowered by the spirits that they worship in secret."[24] The call for redemption of the land critiques and resists corrupt political power.[25]

While many Pentecostal pastors do not reject the spiritualist paradigm, they do argue that it misses the real cause of Africa's economic underdevelopment. According to this critical perspective, the problem of Africa is a problem of leadership; therefore, to accelerate economic development, the right leaders and just economic structures have to be in place.

Leadership Paradigm

This paradigm attributes the failure of development to individual moral shortcomings and exploitative social structures. This discourse contains micro and macro perspectives on Africa's economic predicament. At the micro level, African economies have missed the mark of development because of their immoral leaders. But at the macro level, the continent's economic problems are related to unjust, unpatriotic, and exploitative social structures. The macro perspective emphasizes justice, criticizes the leaders of the various nations, and calls them to create structures that accent human dignity and flourishing. Overall, the leadership paradigm is based on system theory: fix the parts of the system, and the economic machine will roar to life. It seeks reforms of economic practices, policies, and structures. It is based on critique and construction. This paradigm, like its covenant counterpart, has two models, in this case prophetic and transformational. First, the prophetic model.

Prophetic Critique

This model defines Africa's economic problems in terms of social structures. What is distinctive about this model is that it not only explains African economic predicament by focusing on exploitative socioeconomic structures, but it also raises serious leadership questions relating to social justice. Few prominent African Pentecostal pastors are participating in its discourse. One key representative is Pastor Tunde Bakare, the senior pastor of The Latter Rain Assembly, Lagos, Nigeria, and a lawyer by training. In 2010, he organized a "Save Nigeria Group: Enough is Enough Rally," mobilizing citizens (Christians and Muslims and people of other religions) to protest political mismanagement, injustice, constitutional abuse, and corruption. In his radio address to the nation on Sunday, January 17, 2010, he said:

> Brothers and sisters, we have locked ourselves in the sanctuary for too long a time, fasting, praying, and preaching for good governance in our nation. That in itself is not evil, but we need to do more than that as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We need to spearhead effective social mobilization, rebuild the spiritual streets and the walls of our nation, and influence what is happening there. IT IS TIME FOR THE TRUE CHURCH TO COME OUT OF THE CLOSET AND REBUILD ANCIENT RUINS.[26]

Bakare exemplifies prophetic leadership in its broad forms: he brings the word of God to his nation as in foretelling and forth-telling, and he pursues God's holiness on the land as a social critic. However, he appears to be inclined more toward political issues than economic development. I have pieced together his views on economic development from his political speeches. There are four key points oriented around development of individuals and federating units. First, Bakare advocates for skill development, which will "guarantee that everyone could have a trade along the lines of his or her strength" and fully develop his or her God-given abilities. Second, he argues that every federating unit in the country should be given a chance to develop at its own pace according to the resources of its area. Third, the profit of the land is for all who live on it; that is, resources of the country should be distributed in such a way to benefit all its citizens. By this third principle, he hopes to balance individualism and regionalism with communal interest within a truly federal system of government. Finally, he reasons that none of these will actually work without reforms (e.g., to social structures, the constitution, and the justice system).[27]

In early 2011 Bakare became the vice-presidential candidate on the Muslim–Christian ticket of the Congress for Progressive Change, one of the two major political parties contesting Nigeria's presidential election that year. Although the party did not win, by this move, Bakare now hopes to embody both dimensions of the leadership paradigm. Whereas the prophetic dimension of it sees Africa's problems as resulting from exploitative structures, the transformational model relates the continent's predicament to immoral leadership. Inthe past Bakare has offered a voice of prophetic critique; it remains to be seen if there is a transformational engagement to his political platform.

Transformational Engagement

This model sees Africa's problems as resulting from immoral leadership. Here poverty is basically considered a moral problem. Africans and their leaders are presently not oriented to the good—whether it be national, natural, or supernatural. The solution posed by the transformational engagement model is for morally upright Christians to access legitimate power and authority. The whole goal of transformational leadership in political and economic development is the election of Christian believers into public offices so that Africa will have messiahs bringing down heaven on earth. As Paul Gifford put it, "There is no reference to anything structural at all; no allusion to economic forces, wider systems, social structures."[28]

This model is based on a medical analogy: Africa is a hospital of sick citizens and a psychiatric house of bad leaders. The prescribed medicine is a good dose of genuine Christianity. By hiring sincere Christians to run the hospitals and psychiatry wards, the continent will be transformed into a well-engineered saintly operation.

A leading proponent of this viewpoint is Ghanaian theologian Robert Aboagye-Mensah, who argues that if Christians would live by the virtues highlighted in Leviticus 19 they would make the necessary impact on social and political structures. His thesis focuses on individuals' inward transformation, which leads to transforming whole societies.[29] This is hardly an adequate theology of development or government but an expression of the belief that if Christians were running the affairs of government there would be social rehabilitation. This view of national development has remained unshaken even after the poor performances of Christian presidents Frederick Chiluba of Zambia (1991–2002) and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria (1999–2007).[30]

The prominent Kenyan Pentecostal powerhouse, Dr. Bishop Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus Is Alive Ministries (JIAM), also holds

this view of economic development. Over the years, her ministries have positively affected many in Kenya, including providing social welfare and outreach to prisoners as well as business and leadership training. According to two Kenyan scholars who have closely followed her career, she has "contributed immensely to issues of public life and . . . has empowered thousands of women spiritually and economically."[31]

Based on this kind of track record and the place of transformational leadership in national economic development, in 2007, Wanjiru was elected to parliament to represent the Starehe Constituency, Nairobi. Wanjiru believes that from this position and with her recent elevation to assistant minister of housing she can promote the country's development by bringing to it the zeal and Christian virtues that have grown her ministry. In a statement to her constituents, she explained her views on transformational leadership.

> As a minister of the gospel, I promise to uphold righteousness, accountability and the rule of law in all affairs. I will continue providing spiritual nourishment and guidance to my constituents and pursue the establishment of religious institutions across the board in an effort to create a more Godly society.
>
> Many of the problems faced by our people are as a result of poor leadership in the past. A leadership that is not dedicated to its people cannot be able to implement any real change. I promise to continue being a people oriented leader and expanding the ability of my people by addressing their issues from the grassroots levels.[32]

This model is also echoed by the Zambian Pentecostal pastor Nevers Mumba, founder of the National Citizens' Coalition (NCC) in 1996.[33] The NCC, which was later converted to a political party, "seeks to nurture potential political leaders of integrity for national leadership."[34] In the NCC manifesto Mumba argued that "the abuse of [political] office, the high levels of selfishness and an overall lack of character in politicians has impeded economic growth in our nation."[35] In keeping with the transformation model, immoral leadership is the bane of Africa and prevents it from developing.

Nationalist Paradigm

The proponents of the nationalist paradigm argue that Africa is behind in economic development partly because of dependent and subservient racial relationships, especially with Caucasians. They attribute the dismal performance of sub-Saharan African economies

to a self-inflicted inferiority complex due to slavery, colonialism, and racism. The cumulative effect of all these is that black Africans have lost their self-esteem and the true knowledge of their selves, gifts, and role in history.

The nationalist paradigm emphasizes the actualization of black Africans' potential using the analogy of circumcision. There are prepuces (such as low self-esteem, ignorance, slave mentality, and outdated cultural practices) that need to be cut off in order to invigorate the actualization of the continent's potentials. Based on a notion of unconcealment, the hidden potentials of the continent must be uncovered through deliberate and focused decisions (*de-caedere*: the word decision comes from this Latin, which means "to cut"). This paradigm strongly affirms racial consciousness.

In the nationalist paradigm, the solution to underdevelopment lies with improved self-esteem and separation from outsiders' influence, which gives room for endogenous, independent development. Africans must chart their own becoming in ways that ensure their self-determination, autonomy, and control over their own destiny. The creation of a new social order is based on principles of the *imago dei*, the historicity of God's relation to the black race, and African heritage.

The nationalist perspective is countercultural; it aims to create an alternative black culture in response to today's prevailing ethos in the struggle for economic development, and its proponents want to raise the economic struggle out of the present slave and short-term mentality with a separate intentionality directed toward robust, sustainable development and black civilization.

Pastor Mensa Otabil of International Central Gospel Church, Ghana, connects Africa's economic problems to its dependence on international structures, which are not conducive to development. He relates 1 Samuel 13:16–22 (which describes how the Philistines handicapped the development of Israelites by prohibiting their iron making) to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank efforts to keep Africans from development. The oppressors of Israel made sure that there was no blacksmith in the country, and so if its citizens needed to sharpen utensils and hoes they had to travel to Philistine territory. In Otabil's words, "I get amused when we talk of breaking the yoke of colonialism and still use the blacksmith called IMF or World Bank consultants, these white people."[36]

Decrying dependence is not Otabil's only signature issue. He is also well known for sermons that motivate Africans to seek endogenous development by cultivating their skill set, acquiring a can-do attitude, instilling black pride, and changing outmoded culture.[37] He

avoids spiritualizing poverty and underdevelopment, and he nudges his audience away from the magical worldview that has come to dominate teachings on wealth creation in his own Pentecostal circles. In a 1994 sermon in Zambia, he clearly stated that:

> We can get everyone in Africa saved, but that won't solve our problem. The root of our problem is not [that] we are not saved. The root of our problem is man-made. I do not believe that just believing in Jesus Christ is the end of life. Jesus must do something about our poverty . . . Jesus must help overcome our ignorance, our superstition. The poverty in Africa is not spiritual . . . Poverty is physical.[38]

Otabil's most provocative book that explains his "liberationist Afrocentric theology" is his *Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia: A Biblical Revelation of God's Purpose for the Black Race.* The book emphasizes a distinctive African identity. Rather than joining other Pentecostal and charismatic preachers who are busy outcompeting one another to preach the health and wealth gospel, Otabil argues that Africans are where they are in the development and civilization ladder because they have lost their identity after the trauma of slavery, colonialism, and racism. He also argues that Africans cling to cultural elements that no longer empower them to move forward, and they reject elements that can engender development. He criticizes African leaders in economic, political, and religious spheres for having "inferiority complexes" and thus imitating or looking to foreigners for the economic emancipation of their nations. He writes:

> The Lord called me to teach my congregation to stop looking to Europe or America as the source of supply, but to cultivate a new spirit and ethic of national development. I fully believe that wherever God puts you, He has enough resources in place to take care of your needs. As a result of that conviction, our church has pursued a vigorous policy of indigenous financing and government.[39]

Another well-known Pentecostal preacher whose teaching coheres with this model is the Nigerian-born Sunday Adelaja, the pastor of the largest church in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. He believes that Pentecostals and charismatics must go beyond prayers to take bold steps to transform their nations, even engaging in peaceful political protests to change bad political leadership. His church participated in the Ukraine's Orange Revolution, which he described in his recent book *Church Shift.*[40] He also cherishes hard work and necessarily rejects the magical sowing-and-reaping mentality as key to development.[41]

Like others committed to the nationalist paradigm, Adelaja focuses on the restoration of black pride as the key to Africa's economic recovery. He emphasizes themes of human dignity, rejection of economic dependency, and political liberation.

Developmental Paradigm

The developmental paradigm sees churches as agents of economic development in their local communities, as ministates providing infrastructure and acting as owners of for-profit corporations that generate revenues for development projects. The development paradigm is based on need fulfillment, and it says that Africa will become a giant mansion of many luxurious rooms one developmental brick at a time.

Denominations such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG, Nigeria's largest Pentecostal/charismatic denomination) engage in economic development even as they have not abandoned the prosperity gospel. The leaders of RCCG maintain that their message is not just about prosperity, but it is one of holiness-induced wealth creation and turnaround of African economies. Its developmental arm, African Mission, gathers and channels much-needed development funds into church communities outside Nigeria. The RCCG heavily invests in local Nigerian development projects as well.

> The RCCG has gradually but steadily gone beyond the provision of social infrastructure such as schools and health care facilities. In recent times, it has moved directly and explicitly into economic engagements that are primarily directed towards the generation of profits…Where the church perceives a need not fulfilled by the state or other groups, it inserts itself through one of its arms.
>
> The RCCG is involved in the economic mobilization of its members. As a result, the church has in place a number of important business schools which are devoted to the training of both members and nonmembers in business management.[42]

There is no clearly articulated theology of development informing these efforts. They are motivated by the pragmatic concern of helping the poor, spreading the gospel, and fulfilling the vision of being "the tree of life for the [economic] healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2, the stated motto of one of the church's economic management arms).[43] In its venture into development projects, RCCG is following the path long tread by the mainline denominations. For example, Roman Catholic churches in Africa have become important agents of local development. For decades, they have been doing agricultural

development as well as building schools, maternity care facilities, hospitals, and mechanical workshops.[44] The difference between RCCG (with stakes also in the prosperity and transformational models) and the mainline denominations is that the latter increasingly speak out against social injustice, for respect for human dignity, and in support of national ideas of justice and democracy, and the RCCG does not.

The RCCG's development paradigm must be understood in the broader context of state–corporation relationships in this oil-rich sub-Saharan African country. In Nigeria corporations often function as states due to massive public infrastructure deficiencies. They frequently provide electricity, water, sewage, garbage collection, communication, security, education, and public transportation for their workers. With its new programs the RCCG now also exemplifies the character of these big Nigerian corporations. Any analysis of development in Nigeria must pay close attention to the context in which the public is privatized and the private "publicized."

This paradigm borrows from the Nigerian notion of development as a "national ideology," and so it is very easy to fall prey to the ideological mindset it accents. According to this ideology, development involves the removal of a set of technical obstacles and pursuit of modernization and Westernization. Thus, the preferred characteristics of the economically developed Western societies become the goal of social evolution. Ruling elites have used this conception of development (as independent of culture and institutional framework) to rationalize their unrestricted liberty to choose the aspects of Nigerian institutions and culture that would allow them to maintain and exploit power and to discard what was not useful for them.

In sum, the proponents of the development paradigm argue that churches must directly engage in providing public infrastructure as a way of promoting economic development in Africa. While there are advantages when African Pentecostal churches relieve the stresses of poverty on the masses by providing public goods and services, it is important to note that many churches have fallen prey to the elites' calculus of power in promoting development as an ideology. Understanding development as ideology is a strategy of power by the ruling class: the need for development is so urgent that exploitative structures and direction of development are not to be questioned. In the end, this ideology actually marginalizes those who should be both the means and beneficiaries of economic development.

The following table (table 2.1) provides a bird's eye view of the essential features of each of the paradigms and models. It shows how each of them considers poverty as the primary economic problem and traces its basic causes to different sources.

Table 2.1 Pentecostal paradigms and models for national economic prosperity in Africa

	Metaphor	The Problem	Intervention
Covenant Paradigm	Exchange Model: quid pro quo	Poverty is a religious problem caused by lack of faith or trust in God's promise.	God blesses nations either according to the covenant of giving or in response to the covenant of good efforts. Individual prosperity leads to national development. Demonstrate faith in God by giving financial or other resources to the church.
Prosperity model	Sowing and reaping	Failure to obey spiritual laws of prosperity leads to poverty.	The emphasis is on financial contributions as the key to prosperity or wealth. The model entails a "magical" orientation to economic development: individual prosperity is based on a supposed operation of a spiritual or metaphysical law that automatically connects giving to prosperity.
Excellence model	Searching for excellence: fight national poverty development with the best technology and management practices.	Africans have failed in economic development because there are too few sane, resourceful, and patriotic managers who can bring together and develop the right talents to orchestrate development in the various spheres of the economy.	This model joins nationalism, professionalism, and prosperity gospel orientation to emphasize developing human capabilities and organizations to embody professional excellence.
Spiritualist paradigm	Redemption model: God and Satan act in history.	The continent has been mortgaged to evil forces, and it needs to be brought back by persistent and fervent prayers. National poverty is spiritual.	Spiritual warfare is the necessary first step to national prosperity. Economic wisdom begins by seeking God's deliverance from the powers, principalities, and rulers who foul up the economies of Africa. The success or failure of national actions depends on fidelity to Jesus Christ. Obey biblical commands and reject African traditional religions. The key to development is intercessory prayer to redeem the land.

Leadership paradigm	Systems theory: fix the parts in order for the whole to work.	The failure of development is due to individual moral shortcomings and exploitative social structures.	Fix the parts of the system and the economic machine will roar to life. Reform economic practices, policies, and structures.
Prophetic model	A voice in the wilderness: critiquing and offering alternatives to current social systems	Africa's problems result from exploitative structures.	Exercise prophetic leadership and pursue God's holiness in the land as a social critic.
Transformational engagement model	Medical analogy: Africa is a hospital of sick citizens and a psychiatric house of bad leaders. The prescribed medicine is a good dose of genuine Christianity. By hiring sincere Christians to run the hospitals and psychiatry wards, the continent will be transformed into a well-engineered saintly operation.	Africa's problems result from immoral leaders, who are not presently oriented toward the good, be it national, natural, or supernatural.	Morally upright Christians should access legitimate power and authority. Elect Christian believers into public offices so that Africa will have messiahs bringing down heaven on earth.
Nationalist paradigm	Circumcision: cut off prepuces (such as low self-esteem, ignorance, slave mentality, and outdated cultural practices) to invigorate the actualization of the continent's potential.	Africa is behind in economic development partly because of dependent and subservient racial relationships, especially with Caucasians. Sub-Saharan African economies do not perform well due to self-inflicted inferiority complexes due to slavery, colonialism, and racism.	Uncover the hidden potentials of the continent through deliberate and focused decisions. Improve self-esteem and separation from outsiders' influence to give room for endogenous, independent development.
Developmental paradigm	Africa will become a giant mansion of many luxurious rooms one developmental brick at a time.	Africa lacks the building blocks of development, such as basic infrastructure and institutions.	Churches are agents of economic development in their local communities; they provide infrastructure, goods, and services.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have laid out the theologies of development circulating in African Christian circles, especially within Pentecostalism, the fastest growing segment of the African Christian population. These views are neither comprehensive nor theologically coherent for two reasons. First, few writers and preachers have explicitly developed a comprehensive viewpoint on the subject of economic development. Second, I have not sought to elucidate their writings in a theologically systematic and comprehensive way. Doing this would have required examining their works in multiple areas of theology and piecing together their systematic viewpoints on theological ethics. (It is a task worthy of undertaking at a later date.) To do this I would have had to relate their thoughts on economic development to what eminent ethicist, James Gustafson calls "certain base points." There are, according to Gustafson, four principles to make a coherent theological ethics: (a) the understanding and interpretation of God; (b) the interpretation of the significance of the world and of human life in the world; (c) the interpretation of persons as moral agents and their acts; (d) the interpretation of how persons *ought* to make moral choices.[45]

Though none of the Pentecostal preachers scored high on these points in their writings, through ethnographic interviews and careful review of their sermons and speeches one can suggest a systematic theological presentation of their social teachings on economic development. Once such comprehensive theologies are in place they can be subjected to scrutiny and further systematization. In this way, academic theologians within and outside the Pentecostal movement in Africa can construct an African theology of economic development that is not only built from the bottom up but also is in dialogue with "main-street," historically concrete thoughts of practitioners.

Endnotes

1. See Mensa Otabil, *Buy the Future: Learning to Negotiate a Future Better than Your Present* (Lanham: Pnuemalife Publishing, 2002).
2. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: University of Stanford, 2005), 75–77; and Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 66–67.
3. Nicholas Duncan-Williams, *You are destined to Succeed* (Accra: Action Faith, 1990), 139.

4. Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power: A Study of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2008), 324.
5. D. K. Olukoya, *Pray your way to Breakthroughs*, 3rd ed. (Lagos: Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, 1996), Prayer no. 65, page 101.
6. David Martin, "Another Kind of Cultural Revolution?" in Roger Southall and Stephen Rule eds. *Faith on the Move: Pentecostalism and its potential contribution to Development. Centre for Development and Enterprise Workshop Proceedings No. 2* (Johannesburg: CDE, August 2008), 8–19; quote on 12.
7. Ibid., 15.
8. This paragraph was inspired by Joerg Rieger's analysis of the capitalist production of desires in consumers. See his *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 89–101.
9. Ibid., 100.
10. Ukah, *New Paradigm*, 184; italics orig.
11. Matthew Ashimolowo, *What is Wrong with Being Black: Celebrating our Heritage, Confronting our Challenges* (Shippensburg, Penn.: Destiny Image Publishers, 2007).
12. David Oyedepo, *Winning the War Against Poverty* (Canaan Land, Nigeria: Dominion Publishing House, 2006), 7–14; quoted in Samuel Krinsky, "The Pan-African Church: Nation, Self, and Spirit in Winners' Chapel, Nigeria," in AfeAdogame and James V. Spickard eds., *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New Africa Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 229–51, quote from 246.
13. Krinsky, "The Pan-African Church," 245.
14. David Oyedepo, *Pillars of Destiny: Exploring the Secrets of an Ever-Winning Life* (Canaan Land, Nigeria: Dominion Publishing House, 2008), 7.
15. Oyedepo has long been concerned with excellence, even before he came into ministry. See his *Pillars of Destiny*, 73, 378, 425, 434–35.
16. Krinsky, "The Pan-African Church," 229–30.
17. According to him, Africans are also bedeviled by poverty mentality. See Oyedepo, *Pillars of Destiny*, 414.
18. David Oyedepo, *Possessing your Possession* (Canaan Land, Nigeria: Dominion Publishing House, 2006), 37, 50.
19. David Oyedepo, *Understanding Financial Prosperity* (Canaan Land, Nigeria: Dominion Publishing House, 2005), 36–37; italics added.
20. Core Values, Covenant University, http://www.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/About-Us/Our-Core-Values, accessed January 3, 2011.
21. It is important to note that the pastors who fit into the other paradigms are not necessarily against redeeming the land. However, for them redemption of the land is not the cutting edge of their theology of

African development. In the light of all this, it is germane to mention that the distinctions I have made are only for the sake of typology; and as Max Weber pointed out long ago there is no watertight separation in ideal constructs.

22. Emeka Nwankpa, *Redeeming the Land* (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Publishers, 1995).
23. Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200–201; see also 199, 202.
24. Ibid., 211.
25. See Ruth Fratani-Marshall, "Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 278–315, esp. 3067; quoted in Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 216.
26. Tunde Bakare, "Being Text of Live Radio Broadcast from the Auditorium of the Latter Rain Assembly, Lagos, Nigeria. Sunday, January 17, 2010," 5; emphasis orig. See http://www.latterrainassembly.org/downloads.php (accessed on January 2, 2011).
27. Tunde Bakare, "There Is Hope in Our Future," Independence Day Live Broadcast, October 1, 2009; "It Is Time to Blow the Jubilee Trumpet," Live Broadcast on October 10, 2009. See http://www.latterrainassembly.org/downloads.php (accessed on January 2, 2011).
28. Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 72.
29. Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah, *Mission and Democracy in Africa: The Role of Church* (Accra: Asempa, 1994).
30. These were two self-proclaimed born-again presidents whose national economies did not perform well during their tenures. For their stories see Cyril Imo, "Evangelicals, Muslims and Democracy: With Reference to the Declaration of Sharia in Northern Nigeria," in Terence O. Ranger ed. *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37–66, and Isabel Apawo Phiri, "President Frederick Chiluba and Zambia: Evangelicals and Democracy in a 'Christian Nation'," in Ranger ed., *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy*, 95–129.
31. Damaris Seleina Parsitau and Philomena Njeri Mwaura, "Gospel without Borders: Gender Dynamics of Transnational Religious Movements in Kenya and the Kenyan Diaspora," in Afe Adogame and James V. Spickard, eds., *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New Africa Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 185–209; quote from 199.
32. Margaret Wanjiru, "Vision for Starehe." See http://www.bishopmargaretwanjiru.com/economic_religious_affairs.htm (accessed January 4, 2011).
33. He is also the founder and president of Victory Ministries International.
34. Phiri, "President Frederick Chiluba and Zambia," 109.

35. Quoted in Phiri, "President Frederick Chiluba and Zambia," 109.
36. Sermon quoted in Gifford, *African Christianity*, 88.
37. For study of Mensa Otabil's ministry see Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 113–39. For a representative book on Otabil's "theology of entrepreneurship and personal improvement" see his *Buy the Future*.
38. Gifford, *African Christianity*, 240.
39. Mensa Otabil, *Beyond The Rivers of Ethiopia: A Biblical Revelation on God's Purpose for the Black Race* (Lanham: Pnuema Life Publishing, 1993), 86.
40. Sunday Adelaja, *Church Shift* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2007), 163–72.
41. Ibid., 77.
42. Ukah, *New Paradigm*, 158.
43. Quoted in Ukah, *New Paradigm*, 158.
44. Gifford, *African Christianity*, 147, 225.
45. James M. Gustafson, *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 138–40; italics orig.

Part II

Case Studies

Chapter 3

Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and Its Potential Social and Economic Role

*The Centre for Development and Enterprise, South Africa**

Introduction

The durability and adaptability of religious faiths and their dynamic interaction with other powerful forces in this globalizing world have begun to attract the attention of researchers. Among them are those whose interest lies in understanding the social, economic and political factors that promote or retard development in emerging societies. One specific focus of this kind of research has been the spectacular growth of Pentecostal Christian churches in developing societies in Latin America and the Far East.

Noting similar explosive growth in Pentecostal churches in post-apartheid South Africa, the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), in conjunction with Professor Peter Berger of Boston University and Professor James Hunter of the University of Virginia, obtained funding to undertake research with the aim of opening up a discussion of the possible developmental implications of this phenomenon.[1]

This project has revealed a world of activity, energy, and entrepreneurship previously unknown to an otherwise well-informed South African think tank. Flying under the radar screens of politicians, intellectuals, academics, and journalists are a large number of institutions and individuals that are actively concerned about and working on questions of values and personal behavior. These concerns include family life, personal responsibility and the freedom to act, unemployment, skills creation, and a range of other national concerns.

As a result, there could well be more energy and activity in civil society in South Africa today, albeit of a more religious nature, than anyone has guessed. The country might have considerably more social capital than is currently assumed in popular or political debates, and the so-called African renaissance could have a religious dimension that few politicians, intellectuals, and analysts have even begun to imagine.

This report describes CDE's project, places it in context, outlines its findings, and suggests ways in which policy debates in South Africa might take account of the phenomenal rise of Pentecostal Christian churches. It summarizes a longer and more comprehensive research report, which is available from CDE online.[2]

The South African Context

It is common cause that South Africa is a very religious country. The 2001 national census finding that 80 percent of South Africa's population professes to be Christian would probably surprise few people. In addition, there has been a dramatic growth in the number of people belonging to churches outside the mainstream Christian denominations that include the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the various long-established reformed churches inspired by Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Something in particular is missing from an understanding of this silent religious revolution. That is the failure to investigate possible connections between newly spreading and developing forms of religious belief, practices, and organizations on the one hand, and the basics of economic growth—including work and enterprise, saving and spending—on the other. These connections have increasingly been made in research on religion and economic development in other developing regions, notably Latin America. This research has made it clear that the importance of new Christian faiths, such as those growing in South Africa, is not confined to the worlds of theology and spiritual experience.

There are some understandable reasons why the rise of new Christian denominations in postapartheid South Africa has been obscured and underestimated. First, churches and religious movements outside the Christian mainstream are difficult to classify and even to make sense of. This is because:

- They are a mixture of old and new (often transitory) institutions. For instance, the broad Pentecostal movement was founded in the

United States in the early 1900s, but in many ways it is a revivalist (of early Christian experiences and practices) movement rather than an entirely new one in a modern sense. Organizationally it is in a constant ferment of development thanks to the spirit of independence and individual initiative—often entrepreneurial and often prompted by dissatisfaction with existing churches—that characterizes it. In this context, it makes sense to talk of "classical" and "new" Pentecostal churches.

- The new denominations reflect a mixture of global and local cultural influences and vary organizationally from large corporate structures (sometimes called "megachurches") to tiny and rudimentary congregations following a single determined leader.
- In South Africa the existence of African independent churches (AICs) complicates the issue of classification. These churches have much in common with wider Christian movements nationally and globally, but their strong individual character based on African traditional religious practices places them in ambiguous (and sometimes tense) relationships with those broader movements.

The general effect, then, is that although growth in religious movements has been concentrated in nonmainstream churches, they are so fragmented and so diverse that it has not been easy to grasp the extent of their growth and generalize about their real and potential impact.

A second hindrance to a wider and better understanding of this phenomenon is the fact that many members of the governing and other elites—and many ordinary members of society—regard unconventional religion with indifference, condescension, skepticism, and distrust. This is linked both to the power of secular influences, such as socialism and liberal humanism, that have done so much to shape the basis and content of rights in South Africa's constitution as well as to the hold that mainstream churches have on even unbelievers' understanding of religion.

Pentecostalism and Socioeconomic Development

The current dramatic growth of independent Pentecostal churches can be broadly understood as a third wave of Protestantism. The first wave was the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the second was the revivalist movement in the United States—which led to the formation of a series of church groupings, including the Assemblies of God—in the early twentieth century.

The evolution by Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Protestant reformers of an alternative form of Christianity to Roman Catholicism fostered an approach to life that has come to be called the Protestant ethic. Coined by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920), the term refers to an ethic that, directly and indirectly, gives spiritual sanction to the rational pursuit of economic gain. While Weber traced the origins of the Protestant ethic to the start of the Protestant Reformation, he identified it most closely with Calvinism rather than with Lutheranism.

As set out by Berger, the Protestant ethic is characterized by a "this-worldly (or world-accepting) asceticism," a disciplined and rational approach to work and to social activity that includes family life along with a deferral of gratification and instant consumption. These habits promoted savings, capital accumulation, and economic advancement, all in a context of a worldview free of magic and superstition. In other words, this context favored predictability and rational planning. Berger adds that Weber also emphasized the education of children and the propensity to create voluntary associations of non-elite people as characteristics of the Protestant ethic.

Central to this ethic was a particular theological interpretation of salvation that needs to be explained, sometimes even to members of reformed churches. This interpretation, dating back to forms of early Christianity, is that humankind, being subject to the burden of original sin, can never be certain of God's mercy and salvation since only the chosen will be saved. The only candidates for God's mercy are those who lead exemplary and ascetic lives, and there may be signs in this world that a believer is a candidate for God's mercy. Mortals can only demonstrate to themselves and their fellows that they are in reach of God's election by showing signs of divine recognition and blessing. In time, this developed into displays of superrespectability, prosperity, and this-worldly material achievement. It should be noted that anxiety about prospects of salvation became a powerful driver of material progress, impelling believers to follow the lifestyles described by Berger.

As implied by the title of his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued that the Protestant ethic was a major driving force behind the development of capitalism. However, after this considerable initial impact the Protestant ethic gradually declined, and today it is present only in an attenuated form in mainstream Protestant churches.[3] In Pentecostalism, however, there is at least a parallel interpretation, namely, that the Holy Spirit can display gifts of mercy and salvation after baptism, and the signs of these gifts

are also found in demonstrations of exemplary behavior, prosperity, and progress in this world. Furthermore, the nature of Pentecostalism as "individually located, voluntarist in religious election, populist and lay-orientated in self-organization, activist and missionary in its orientation to the world" comes close to the Calvinist model and places the movement broadly within Weber's description of the Protestant ethic.[4] However, it must be noted that the spiritual and religious dynamics behind these behavior patterns differ significantly from those of early Protestantism.

Pentecostal Churches in South Africa

In recent years the number of people in South Africa who have joined charismatic or Pentecostal Christian churches appears to have grown rapidly. Already about 12.5 million South Africans—around one third of all Christians—are members of such nonmainstream churches, and their numbers are growing fast; those of the mainstream churches remain static. This is consistent with global patterns. According to international authorities, Pentecostal and broadly associated charismatic religions now have between 200 and 250 million adherents in 150 countries and are growing rapidly, particularly in the developing world. However, in South Africa, the speed, extent, and diversity of growth in Christian churches that do not fall in the mainstream is a largely hidden story, and it is also not well understood.

According to the national census, Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity are the fastest growing faiths in the country. The fastest growing group of all—by 55 percent between the 1996 and 2001 censuses—is that classified as "Pentecostal" or "charismatic" (see table 3.1).

National census figures indicate that both the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are growing far more rapidly than the Christian community as a whole, which in turn is growing more rapidly than the population. Furthermore, the figures for the Pentecostal churches

Table 3.1 Growth in religious denominations in South Africa, 1996–2001

	1996	2001	% Growth
SA Population	40.58 m	44.82 m	10.5%
All Christians	30.0 m	35.8 m	19%
Pentecostal and charismatic churches	2.2 m	3.4 m	55%

Source: Statistics SA, http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/RSAPrimary.pdf

may still be underestimated because the 2001 census also records 3.2 million "other Christians," many of whom could be members of smaller Pentecostal community churches.[5] Membership of South African Pentecostal churches and evangelical movements recorded under "other Christian"—in other words, unaffiliated—churches rose by 166 percent between the 1996 and 2001 censuses, while traditional mainstream Christian churches did not grow at all. If the rate of growth reflected in table 3.1 is sustained, South African Pentecostals (excluding members of the Apostolic churches) will number almost 10 million by 2011, almost one fifth of the population.

South African Pentecostal churches are strongly influenced by global Pentecostalism, with particularly dominant strands coming from the United States and from Latin America (especially Brazil), as well as West Africa (especially Nigeria). However, some local Pentecostal churches have features unique to Africa, due to a degree of cross-fertilization between them and African independent churches (AICs).

Numerous analysts and observers have pointed out the difficulties of identifying various forms of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. This is particularly true not at the level of the megachurches or classical Pentecostal churches, but in respect of community-based and township churches, where the lines between Pentecostal churches and AICs can be blurred. Allan Anderson conducted an extensive study of the religious fabric of the people of Soshanguve between November 1990 and April 1991.[6] A total of 1,633 families from 254 churches were interviewed. He found several Pentecostal church types that focused on experiences of the Holy Spirit, either individually or communally. These were "Pentecostal mission churches" started by missionaries and "independent African Pentecostal churches," which closely resembled the mission churches but were independent from them (for example, the Grace Bible Church). But he also found large areas of convergence between the Pentecostal "spirit-type" churches and the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). Furthermore, in township church culture there can also be overlap between Pentecostal churches and certain local mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Given the partially shared roots of the Pentecostal churches and AICs, these intersections are not surprising.

Features of the liturgy and practices of township Pentecostal and AICs that tend to overlap include the following:

- **Healing:** In the ZCC and St. Johns AFM churches, poor Africans become involved in healing ministries, and they themselves receive

healing through their communities. Some researchers contend that the healing rituals are ways of "reinventing" social reality. There are known facilities in Pentecostal churches for helping drug addicts and prostitutes to rehabilitate themselves, and some Pentecostal churches have started food garden projects to help poor and HIV/AIDS-stricken households. In some Pentecostal churches, however, HIV/AIDS is perceived as a punishment from God for sin, regardless of how it was contracted. Sometimes the sin concerned is ancestor worship. This attitude was encountered among Pentecostal congregants in Hout Bay on the Cape Peninsula interviewed for this study. One of the congregants remarked: "... there is a debate (among us) that AIDS is a punishment from God to the people of earth because of all their sin." These views are certainly not the formal position of the churches. However, poorer African congregants often feel besieged by the extent of social and moral decay in their communities, and punitive views about sexuality and HIV/AIDS are therefore not surprising.

- **Poverty outreach:** Pentecostal and some AICs are also involved in poverty alleviation. A key strategy is tithing: church members are taught to give generously to church work, and through this to overcome their own material poverty. Women's prayer meetings are an important means of support and solidarity in a male-dominated world, and male Pentecostals emerge as less "predatory" and more family oriented. For example, a Johannesburg church for refugees serves to integrate its members socially and economically into the South African host society from a comfortable base with familiar rituals and shared cultural backgrounds. The Back to God movement linked to Pentecostal churches reports successes in reducing crime in some areas.
- **Shared recognition** of a range of demons and evil spirits that are particularly African and owe their identities to deeply rooted traditional myths and beliefs: the issue of ancestor veneration divides the Pentecostals from the AICs more clearly than their demonology.

The blurring of features between township Pentecostal churches and AICs is least evident in the megachurches of the prosperity type. These churches have a markedly American flavor that has been a key feature of Pentecostalism among white congregations (although these congregations are increasingly representative of the country's population), and thus they have more in common with similar churches elsewhere in the world than with township Pentecostal churches in

South Africa. However, there are wide variations in the way in which the prosperity message is conveyed.

Pastor Ray McCauley of the South African Rhema Bible Church (a megachurch) holds that prosperity is granted to Christians so that they can help others. This contrasts with cruder forms of "prosperity theology" that declare rather simply that poverty is a result of sin and a lack of faith, and health and wealth are a sign of God's blessing.

A key feature of organized religion and the Pentecostal faith in South Africa is that individual denominations have never had to fight any official opposition to their existence and practices. This has resulted in an exceptional pluralism of religious practice and organization, and out of this pluralism many convergent features in Christian practice have emerged.

Against this background, below find the major themes and results of the research undertaken for this project, and the insights that flow from it. CDE's surveys covered a range of themes, and they were aimed at building a broad picture of religious beliefs and practices as well as socioeconomic profiles of members of different Pentecostal and other churches. Key questions were:

- **Priorities of faith**: What do congregants seek and find in their faith?
- **Key features of faith**: What are the fundamental beliefs about God and the scriptures? What are the common forms of religious practice and observance?
- **Patterns of recruitment**: What attracted particular congregants to a particular church?
- **The impact of faith on lives**: Has faith changed family, work, career, material circumstances?
- **Moral views and the social fabric**: Tolerance and Puritanism? Contribution to building and preserving the social fabric? How conservative? Implications for political beliefs?
- **Personal happiness and identity**: Experience of and expectations of improvements in life circumstances;
- **Community outreach and volunteer work**: Is church membership associated with membership of associations?
- **Social capital**: To what extent are church members supported by social and community networks? How supportive are the congregations themselves?
- **Church and society**: Does the experience of faith encourage withdrawal from society or great social involvement?

- **Economic patterns**: Lifestyle measures and patterns; saving, spending, and deferred gratification; work ethic;
- **Sociopolitical dynamics**: Satisfaction with trends in South Africa; political interest and involvement; ideology and reactions to major political issues.

The focused investigation of congregants in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Durban used a more open-ended narrative approach. However, both investigations yielded very similar results, in respect of new Pentecostals in particular. Reported results of faith include:

- Greater self-confidence and self-esteem, their sense of personal agency, and their determination;
- More harmonious family and other relationships, including work relationships;
- Greater self-discipline in respect of alcohol, drugs, pre- or extramarital sex, and other temptations;
- Quasi-Calvinist pattern of deferred gratification, resulting in improvements in financial security and material conditions. Responses from both surveys suggest that "tithing" encourages deferred gratification, financial planning, and discipline in handling family and personal finances.
- Improved occupational success, as well as an improved work ethic;
- An emphasis on the importance of education for respondents as well as their children;
- Perceptions of improvements in health;
- Stern, conservative values in respect of public morality, corruption, and the government's stance on capital punishment, abortion, gay rights, and progressive rights issues;
- Outreach and volunteer work in the community among the poor but largely contained within the church community as well as strong mutual support within the congregation.

The Social Impact of Pentecostalism in South Africa

It is remarkable how little South Africans in general and members of the mainstream churches in particular know about Pentecostal churches and their members. Exceptions are the well-organized mega-churches led by nationally known pastors with high levels of communication skills and persuasive messages about which theologians, intellectuals, and ordinary people are quite deeply divided.

Media coverage of the Pentecostal movement paints a contradictory picture. Most reports are brief and oversimplified accounts of the flavor of services in which the spontaneity, emotional arousal, and dramatic expressions of spiritual ardor are played up. Readers are not frequently reminded that these features are not new or "alternative" expressions of Christian spiritual passion, but they stretch back to the very beginnings of organized Christianity. Hence the image created is often of deviant or even "primitive" forms of worship. Mainstream Christianity has changed considerably in recent decades, and established rituals are blended with informal Christian fellowship and generally warmer communication within services. Nevertheless, many still expect church services to be "dignified." By these standards the Pentecostals are seen as excessively spontaneous; the journalist Nomavenda Mathiane has described the Pentecostal message as one of "red-blooded spiritual sustenance."[7] Nevertheless, Dr. Isak Burger, president of the Apostolic Faith Mission, correctly points out that, while the Pentecostal faith may be "childlike," it is far from being "childish or superficial."[8]

By far the most criticism is directed at the "prosperity message," however. For example, in 2005, the *Sunday Times* (South Africa) ran an article headlined "Evangelists prey on a nation seeking succor: Pentecostal churches, with their promises of prosperity and easy solutions, are booming in Nigeria."[9] The report may well have been about Nigeria, but the concern is local as well. The South African religious journalist Anastasia de Vries calls this the assumption that the faithful have a right to lay claim to prosperity.[10] Pastor Moss Ntlha, general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, is himself critical of some local charismatic churches, saying: "The balance sheet of the church has overtaken the spiritual well-being of members . . . they are run like commercial vehicles."[11] He is emphatic that the prosperity message should not be seen as anything more than the biblical concept of "as you sow, so shall you reap."[12] But the concern is pervasive, fed by appearances of great wealth and expensive technology in some megachurches.

Perhaps the greatest concern is that some of the entrepreneurial pastors in smaller community churches are enriching themselves at the cost of devout but naïve followers. There is much to be said for religious entrepreneurship in the establishment of new denominations in concert with followers with intense spiritual needs; there is merit in pluralism, diversity, and competition in most spheres of life. But the concern is about the presence and extent of a pure profit motive. This tendency is apparently a major problem in some African countries,

such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo,[13] and many of these "religious entrepreneurs" are arriving in South Africa as unrecorded immigrants. These problems do not appear to be serious in South Africa at the moment, but it would be hazardous to ignore them.

There is reason to believe, however, that the positive impacts of Pentecostalism outweigh the concerns. To a lesser or greater extent, all the Pentecostal churches reviewed above are characterized by a moving sense of spiritual encounter and a corresponding sense of joy, happiness, and optimism among congregants. More often than not, these reactions are associated with feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of viability—which, following Martin David, is described as "personal agency."[14] At the very least, these feelings create higher levels of personal energy that also find outlets in a more intense family life, working life, and business activities. These themes boil down to something approximating the central features of original Calvinism as described by Max Weber: a sense of purpose and therefore confidence in worldly engagement, strengthened by this-worldly asceticism.

Martin has identified specific impacts of Pentecostal movements in Latin America and elsewhere.[15] CDE studies have confirmed many of these impacts in South Africa.[16] Martin mentions, for example, that Pentecostalism in the United States, although vibrant, is subordinate to other denominations. The same applies in South Africa: the mainstream churches usually command the bulk of attention from the media, whereas the Pentecostal churches are overlooked. He also notes that Pentecostal economic virtues are discounted by the American liberal establishment. The same may again be said for South Africa, where liberal corporate capital operates at a level of sophistication that obscures the valuable feeder effect of small enterprises as foundations for a market economy.

A vital function of Pentecostalism isolated by Martin is that it has provided an avenue for the recognition and integration of marginalized people: calling the movement "...the mobilization of the culturally despised."[17] He talks of the evangelical upsurge creating "...autonomous social space within which people may participate in the creation of a different kind of subsociety. In this subsociety, those who count for little or nothing in the wider world find themselves addressed as persons able to display initiative and to be of consequence."[18]

The Pentecostal churches in South Africa have performed this role in various ways. The narrative interviews, which supplemented the main surveys, have confirmed this with reference to the exclusion of blacks under apartheid; a number of black respondents described

how their conversion helped them overcome a crippling sense of racial inferiority. It has also done much the same for former traditionalists who have been able to facilitate their own modernization by moving from AICs to Pentecostal community churches. Earlier, the Assemblies of God, the Full Gospel Church, and the Apostolic Churches provided a refuge for poor and struggling Afrikaners who felt uncomfortable in the abstract formality of the reformed churches. And, in all groups at all times, the Pentecostal churches have offered a degree of spiritual support that has enabled people whose lives have been disrupted by disease, alcoholism, family breakdown, or other ills to recover their self-respect.

Martin also notes that, contrary to superficial perceptions, the ecstatic spiritual release in Pentecostal faith actually complements self-control and discipline in other spheres of activity, something that may also be observed in the South African setting. However, the extent to which various churches spur economic aspirations and motivations to succeed in business and become prosperous varies between subtypes. The prosperity message is played up in some and played down in others, but the underlay of the prosperity orientation is general.

All these features counter the glorification of wealth for its own sake, the rush for new consumer technologies, and the obsessive lifestyle and image concerns that characterize new class formations. Most importantly, however, these features of Pentecostalism provide a genuine relief from the stress of grinding poverty, and could throw lifelines of identity to the 30–40 percent of South Africa's population who are sidelined by most of the new development and opportunity in the country. As such, they could be an important counter to the political opportunism and over politicization of certain social issues common in South Africa.

This last comment, however, raises the important question of whether or not the Pentecostal movement serves the purposes of the political and economic status quo by taking mass demands and protests out of the equation. Does it ultimately have conservative political consequences?

A further word of caution is necessary at this point. Organized religion in South Africa is highly plural, and there is no stuffy ecclesiastic hierarchy in a denominational monopoly imposing doctrinal conformity or social norms. Even at the height of apartheid the governing party-linked Dutch Reformed Church had to compete in a wider religious marketplace. Hence there is and always was much less consolidated opposition to the growth of the Pentecostal churches than in Latin America, for example. This also means that the attractions of

Pentecostal services are somewhat less unique than they are in societies formerly characterized by doctrinal conformity. Hence the impacts of Pentecostalism are also in some respects the impacts of many other denominations today.

For example, the surveys show that Catholic and Dutch Reformed congregants are at least as likely as Pentecostals to feel that their faith sanctions a commitment to personal careers and future prosperity. If spiritual liberation and personal empowerment are the issues, then all denominations seem to be converging.

The impacts of the Pentecostal churches, therefore, have to be seen in a wider context of the role of organized Christianity, and indeed other worshippers of the God of Abraham—Jews and Muslims—should be drawn into consideration as well. But, while they are not unique, the Pentecostal churches do represent the most consistent and intense emphasis on the power of the gifts of the Spirit.

Some data also suggests a certain convergence between Pentecostals and members of mainline Christian churches in that in both groups faith seems to lead to optimism, confidence in the future, and other positive attitudes. But, in order to understand what this means, one must take the respective social contexts of these churches into account. Suppose an upper-middle-class Anglican living in an affluent suburb and a poor Pentecostal living in a township both make the following statement: "My faith helps me cope with the problems in my life." While they have used exactly the same words, the statement has entirely different meanings in the two contexts in question. In the first case, it will probably have little or nothing to do with the life chances of the individual concerned. In the second, however, it will have everything to do with it—for here the statement reflects precisely the "Protestant ethic" which, as Berger argues, is conducive to social mobility and ultimately to economic development. It is clear, therefore, that Pentecostal churches in particular have a highly significant potential role to play in society. What are the chances of this potential being realized?

The Impact of Religion in General

Before attempting to answer the question posed above, we have to refer to a key feature of Pentecostalism, namely the "redemption lift" long associated with conversion to Christianity. This draws attention to the broader dimension of the findings of the Gauteng survey in particular, which led to a preliminary conclusion that religion beats politics in the search for a better life. For a whole variety of reasons,

the expectations raised by faith do not seem to end in the kind of disillusionment that politics can generate. Perhaps this is because the ways of the Almighty are too mysterious to generate categorical expectations and disappointments. Both in the townships and in the suburbs, responses to the surveys suggested that religion had done far more to improve lives and morale than the political programs and promises of recent years. The buoyant mood among the faithful contrasted significantly with a relatively hesitant mood among nonchurchgoers. People in the suburbs and black areas alike felt oppressed by crime, the opportunism of politicians, unemployment, and the lack of delivery by government, but personal spheres of life seem to be insulated from these harsher realities. Certainly, the insulation offered by faith seems thinner in the black areas than in the suburbs, but it is still effective in ensuring overall well-being. South Africa's overpoliticized and myopically secular media miss this point almost completely.

There is independent evidence of even more tangible effects. In the field of physical and social health, both marked by a powerful interaction with the human spirit, the impact of religion seems incontrovertible. A recent review of 669 mainly medical studies found that religious faith had beneficial effects in the areas of hypertension, longevity, depression, suicide, sexual behavior, alcohol and drug use, youth delinquency, well-being, hope, self-esteem, and educational attainment.[19] Religious faith has also been linked to educational attainment in a survey of nineteen studies.[20]

In studying the survey results, it was surprising how little impact political disillusionment seemed to have on personal morale among believers as opposed to nonchurchgoers. Politics invades the attitudes of all people, but among churchgoers in particular its effects are relatively superficial. Signs of acute political aggravation were most common among nonchurchgoers. Religious commitment in general promotes a buoyant mood, and "spiritual capital" seems to be correlated with social capital, confidence, patience, and fortitude. Religion seems to insulate people from political and economic stress, even without "otherworldly" seclusion or fatalism. Respondents were quite willing to respond to political issues, but they did so at a somewhat greater distance than nonchurchgoers. Importantly, all categories of churchgoers reflected sentiments of self-reliance—a crucial finding in view of the mass dependence on state support among the population at large. This tendency can very easily be seen as a "panacea for the masses" in crypto-Marxist terminology, but religion did not seem to be a soporific and a source of generalized false consciousness. As

already suggested, what religion does seem to do is insert a cushion between the individual and the realities of economics and politics, without obscuring the latter.

Can the Social Potential of Pentecostalism Be Realized?

The results of this research provide cause for optimism about the impact of Pentecostalism on social life and development in South Africa. Four factors are particularly prominent. The first is the morality and life orientation of typical Pentecostal congregants. The survey results broadly confirm Berger's depiction of the Calvinist social character, meant to frame his review of Pentecostalism in Latin America, as a: "...worldly asceticism...a disciplined attitude to work; an equally disciplined attitude to other spheres of life; a deferral of instant consumption [in favor of] savings, eventual capital accumulation, and social mobility."[21] This is more or less applicable to other denominations including mainstream churches, but the fact that the consequences of Calvinism have become generalized beyond the reformed churches does not detract from its importance in the Pentecostal context.

The second concerns the inadvertent effects of faith that can often be more salient than organized religious goal-seeking activity. In their study in Hout Bay, Schlemmer and Bot conclude that "it is almost as if their [local respondents'] emotional rejection of worldly concerns relaxes them and releases energy for the same worldly matters, precisely because these things mean so little to them."[22] In other words, the relaxed and patient approach to work and life that so many Pentecostals reported may help them to respond to challenges more effectively. Perhaps it is this quality of motivation that has produced the remarkable upward shift in lifestyle scores among Pentecostals recorded in the course of this study.

A third factor also noted by David Martin in his review of the Pentecostal movement is that it "works by constant adjustment on the ground...[it] belongs by nature to open markets..."[23] This entrepreneurial feature of the movement, which emerged in various ways in the course of this research, means that pastors influence the mindsets of congregants in ways that incline them not to moral flexibility but strategic adaptability, with obvious implications for development. This entrepreneurial quality of many Pentecostals, which Martin also refers to as "voluntaristic and competitive pluralism," will help the movement to continue renewing itself, protecting it from the formalization

and operational conservatism that Weber noted in religious denominations in general.[24]

Fourth, development assumes that social decay and the debilitating aspects of community life be countered, and the Pentecostal moral discipline that has been pervasively recorded in these findings promises this. Berger describes the effect in a compelling way:

> As long as the individual can indeed find meaning and identity in his private life, he can manage to put up with the meaningless and dis-identifying world of the mega structures. . . . The situation becomes intolerable if 'home,' that refuge of stability and value in an alien world, ceases to be such a refuge—when, say, my wife leaves me, my children take on lifestyles that are strange and unacceptable to me, my church becomes incomprehensible, my neighborhood becomes a place of danger, and so on.[25]

These findings show that Pentecostalism and other denominations have indeed protected the family, the home, and the personal spheres of millions of people. This has helped to insulate growing segments of the population from the effects of severe socioeconomic alienation in South Africa.

Hence Pentecostalism reveals promising signs of a positive role in development. It is important, though, neither to overestimate the likely effects nor to misunderstand how they might be achieved. Direct engagement by these churches to influence social and economic policy either directly or through political surrogates is unlikely, and many would argue that this would be unwelcome in any case. Instead, Pentecostal churches are likely to have the greatest effect if they extend their existing mode of influence to a wider propagation of goals and targets in South African democracy and to economic life at the community level. According to Alan Aldridge, Pentecostal activity is at its most powerful when it is able to impose its own definition of a situation on its own spheres of activity and interaction.[26] The problem in South Africa is that, despite the large numbers of Pentecostals, their definitions of situations and challenges are largely unknown within local politics or other spheres of organized development activity.

This raises the issue of the relative seclusion (not withdrawal) of Pentecostal churches from public debate about community issues. Pastors do speak out about community matters and sometimes intervene in them, but those who do are usually in the larger churches with a higher public profile. The community churches that are closest to the real needs of the majority of Pentecostals have almost no public

profile at all. Furthermore, the media exposure of the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa is minimal, and it is not well known for raising issues for public debate very consistently.

This means that important views and messages are lost to the general public and to decision makers. One can understand that a public role comparable to that of the Anglican Church, for example, is not the preferred mode of interaction of Pentecostals. Furthermore, as in the United States, they do not have the status of the mainstream churches, and this makes it difficult for them to penetrate the media. It is probably up to the media to do something about this rather than the Pentecostal churches themselves. Fortunately, some newspapers, particularly Afrikaans-language ones, are improving their coverage of religious activity mainly because they have realized that public interest in religion outstrips that in most other topics.

Unfortunately, the success of the "prosperity churches" in mobilizing the energies of congregants for commercial and occupational success is one of the more controversial aspects of Pentecostalism, as the churches themselves have admitted. As noted earlier, prominent church leaders emphasize that the prosperity message has a theological grounding, but the concern is pervasive and is fed by the appearance of great wealth and expensive technology in some megachurches.

This image would make it difficult for the movement as a whole to cooperate with the ecumenical agencies of the mainstream churches in any public action. In any case, some key aspects of the potential contribution of the Pentecostal churches might be overshadowed by the much greater public profile of heavyweights in the mainstream churches and the more politicized approaches that characterize mainstream ecumenical agencies. Another danger is that the particular quality, passion, and flavor of the Pentecostal churches and their congregations might be obscured.

Emerging Possibilities

In thinking about the potential consequences of CDE's research for South African development, its executive director, Ann Bernstein, has raised a number of issues.[27] Will the growth in the number of Pentecostals continue? Can we distinguish their social influence—direct and indirect, intended and unintended—from that of members of other religious groups? And, ultimately, to what extent can the considerable social capital embedded in this movement be utilized for the benefit of broader South African society?

One of the most striking themes emerging from this research, and arguably the distinguishing feature of this group of religious denominations, is that Pentecostalism encourages a sense of agency in its participants. In many respects, the positive possibilities of the continued growth and development of these churches stem from this characteristic. The message that Pentecostalism conveys in numerous ways to its adherents is: you are a worthy person, and you can change and improve your life. This message may also be contained in countless self-help articles and seminars, but there it does not have the driving force of religious experience behind it.

This is a different message in many respects from that conveyed in South Africa's democratic transition. The ruling party and its government have long emphasized public sector "delivery" and the duty of the state toward citizens. Even now they are becoming concerned about a growing sense of entitlement among citizens and communities, and token warnings on this score have become an intermittent feature of government communications. Too many South Africans seem to perceive their role as that of waiting for the government to deliver, with far less emphasis on what it is that citizens should be doing for themselves. Can Pentecostalism be said to be a force promoting a different set of attitudes, encouraging often very poor people to take charge of their own lives and not wait for every aspect of "delivery" from an overstretched state?

Fascinating indications of this sense of agency at work and hints of the role it could play emerged in CDE's research results:

- A notable feature of the growth of the Pentecostal churches is their entrepreneurial character. Is this one of the outlets for entrepreneurial energy in the country? If so, why is it taking this form, and what does this mean? According to numerous surveys, South Africa lags far behind many other developed and developing countries with respect to levels of entrepreneurship. Apartheid prevented Africans (and other black groupings) from developing their entrepreneurial skills and exploiting opportunities for business. As more opportunities open up for black South Africans, will these Pentecostal entrepreneurs find other outlets for their talents? Will this entrepreneurial approach lead their congregants into more effective participation in the economy—through creating enterprises themselves or finding jobs more readily?
- One of the intriguing questions hinted at but not resolved in this research concerns the extent to which participants in Pentecostal churches are gaining skills they did not have before. Among these

are the skills needed to start churches and congregations and to manage and participate in their activities, from the most basic administrative skills to people management skills. Many Pentecostal churches also say they offer workshops aimed at imparting basic skills, for example, how to look for a job, how to apply, how to approach the interview, and so on. This is a feature of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America and was certainly talked about in these interviews. This is another important potential contribution in a developing country whose education system is struggling to deliver, whose formal economy is not generating enough jobs, and in which many families only have experience of manual labor and some of no employment at all.

- There is much talk in South Africa of what communities and individuals can do to combat crime. Many of the pastors interviewed want to be involved in crime prevention and believed they had an active role to play. Whether it was talking to the local station commander every week, asking the police to come and talk to members of the congregation, or finding out which churches offenders belong to, there is a range of strategies being discussed and applied. And yet no political, business, or any other leader in South Africa has ever mentioned these communities or group of pastors as possible resources in combating crime.
- There is evidence that, as Africans move to the cities, they also tend to move away from the African independent-type churches to Pentecostal churches. Will Pentecostal churches harbor ever-increasing numbers of Africans as they start to become more settled urban dwellers and their prospects improve? And does the spectrum of Pentecostal churches offer them an ordered, progressive means of continued religious participation as they become more affluent and their prospects improve? Megachurches seem to be an important marker of aspiration and upward mobility. Therefore, as some black South Africans move from the townships to the more affluent suburbs, they tend to move from community-type churches to churches such as Rhema Bible Church. Even if one cannot yet move into the more peaceful, settled formerly white world of suburbia, however modest, one can at least go to church in those areas and associate with people from the materially more secure world to which one aspires. Therefore, Pentecostalism may well perform better at retaining congregants than other denominations as they move up the social ladder.
- Pentecostal churches are often "bottom-up" institutions. An individual decides to "plant" a church and then has to attract

> congregants. The pastor is frequently accountable to that local community, and if they do not approve of what he says or does or how he spends their donations, they are free to leave at any time. The voluntary and entrepreneurial nature of the "movement" means that, at any time, a particular pastor could suffer a schism in his local community with a future pastor and find his followers walking away from his church and starting another one. This is a very direct form of local accountability, which raises interesting questions about the consequences of this experience for the communities and individuals involved. Is this pattern of behavior carried over into the political sphere? Can these local level churches start to form—in David Martin's phrase—"little platoons of democracy" where they start to apply principles of local accountability to local politicians or members of parliament, for example?

Policy debate in South Africa is essentially secular. However they may differ, policy makers in government and the analysts in dialogue with them draw on essentially the same repertoire of scripts and actors. This research project has given CDE the unusual—and salutary—experience of looking outside this world. Again unusually, it has not led us to a package of firm policy proposals and prescriptions, but it presented us with intriguing questions and possibilities. South Africa's former president (Mbeki) often talks about an African Renaissance. Could this renaissance be driven more effectively by the entrepreneurial and moral energies of a burgeoning Pentecostal "movement" than by politicians? Put another way, can the efforts of the politicians to create sustainable democratic politics and more effective enabling environments for business activity be bolstered by the "little platoons" or enclaves of local civic religious and other activities encouraged by the Pentecostals?

Proactive engagement with key national challenges does not feature strongly in these findings. Nevertheless, there is evidence of social capital upon which the religious faithful can draw as a means of dealing with the pervasive pathologies in South African society, to the extent that these affect their personal lives. Such social capital is not something that can easily be generated by state intervention. The state would therefore be well advised to promote and encourage the growth of the Pentecostal movement and the religious sector in general.

Ultimately, the largest social challenge facing South Africa is the integration of the divided, unequal, and alienated sectors of the economy and society. Of all the denominations, the Pentecostal

churches are probably best able to reach out to South Africa's marginalized communities.

For the rest, the Pentecostal churches should go on doing what they are already doing so well—protecting the social fabric from further decay, and giving people who are otherwise sidelined in South Africa's sense of purpose and mission. What they deserve, however, is greater recognition from major role players in South African society that they, the churches, have a role where grandiose policy has failed.

Endnotes

* The CDE team was led by Ann Bernstein. This paper includes the findings of a variety of research papers commissioned by CDE. The project was managed by Stephen Rule and Timothy Clynick. Contributions were made by Lawrence Schlemmer, Tony Balcomb, Phil Bonner, Tshepo Moloi, Godfrey Dlulane, Timothy Clynick, William Domeris, Paul Germond, Steven de Gruchy, Riaan Ingram, Hudson Mathebula, Lehasa Mokoena, Attie van Niekerk, Monica Bot, Montagu Murray, and Sandy Johnston. The project was advised by Professor Peter Berger of Boston University—CDE's international associate—and Professor James Hunter of the University of Virginia.

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    Timothy Clynick and Tshepo Moloi, *Anointed for Business: South African "New" Pentecostals in the Marketplace* (2006).

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Chapter 4

Capitalism and Pentecostalism in Latin America: Trajectories of Prosperity and Development

Eloy H. Nolivos

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, countries of the developing world still face the challenge of managing progress and protecting people from unjust systems. Yet the path to a better life aspired to by nations continues to involve economics, politics, and sociocultural dimensions. Understandably, economic theorists have invoked economic considerations in their attempt to explain Latin America's development or lack thereof from the colonial period up to the present global capitalist system. Thus Osvaldo Hurtado, former President of Ecuador, in *Las Costumbres de los Ecuatorianos* (*The Customs of Ecuadorians*), examines the relationship between culture and development to understand Ecuador's lack of progress and the inadequacy of its democratic system.[1] For Hurtado, the answer to Ecuador's economic problems lies ultimately in its people, even amidst the dire circumstances of the present time. But Hurtado responds: "the cultural values of nations are not immutable, nor inherent to one race, to one religious group, or to one social class. Thankfully, problematic customs, beliefs, and attitudes can change through transformations of the socioeconomic structures, by the leading role of political and judicial institutions, by educational programs designed for such purpose, [and] by the indoctrination of churches."[2]

This study, not unlike Hurtado's, shows connections between a religiocultural movement (Pentecostalism) and economic life in order to catch a glimpse of two interrelated paths of development in Latin America. Although capitalism and Pentecostalism have a shared goal

of achieving a state of well-being, their departure points are divergent: one is grounded in economics while the other is religiously based. This chapter first briefly highlights Latin American economic history before considering the debate over neoliberalism's success or failure in the past few decades. Then, I discuss Max Weber's social analysis of religion and capitalism in light of Latin America's Protestant expansion, especially the Pentecostal movement's proliferation and economic contribution. Finally, I explore two approaches to Pentecostal development as found in Chile and Brazil, showing the various ways Pentecostalism supports economic development and life.

Latin America and the Global Economy

Since the 1960s and 1970s when the region opened its economies to capitalism, sentiments that Latin America is a victim of an unjust and unequal system have been prominent across the continent. The extensive poverty and social exclusion that a globalized market economy nurtured for a half century fostered this perception. As early as 1970, leaders expressed their discontent:

> Latin America . . . must cast off the feudal yoke, destructive monopolies, acquire economic independence, and allay the hunger of stomachs and hearts. (Brazilian statesman)
>
> I think it is obvious that the United States capitalist system, by its control of world markets, has succeeded in developing a vast imperialist system (Bolivian sociologist).
>
> When our cheap raw materials cannot pay for the expensive machinery we must import, the United States lends to us at high interests rates . . . The ruling class allied to the North American capitalists grows stronger, while the real Colombians of the middle and lower class experience a progressive lowering of their living standards (Colombian priest).[3]

The Latin American economy's dependence on capitalism derived from the Western world (particularly the United States) evokes both some highly charged terms such as "neoliberalism," "neocolonialism," and "NAFTA" (North American Free Trade Agreement) as well as some positive terms such as "free market," "development," and "progress," reflecting capitalism's potential throughout the continent.

In Latin America the implementation of diverse economic policies throughout the twentieth century reflects the region's search for stability and development, which have culminated with

neoliberalism as the present economic approach. Latin American countries' adoption of import substitution industrialization in the 1930s and 1940s fostered closed economies that attempted to safeguard domestic producers from foreign imports. During this period, moderate state intervention by means of populist ideology oversaw economic policy in most Latin American countries.[4] In the years following World War II and the formation of the United Nations (and particularly since the 1960s), the world has sought to enable the capitalist process for underdeveloped countries by emphasizing global development. Throughout this period and into the 1970s, Latin America steadily opened its economies to free trade and foreign investment with some United States-backed military dictatorships leading the way. Yet the course of development and prosperity abruptly came to a halt in the 1980s—coined the "lost decade"—when the global economy entered into recession. Insurmountable foreign debt escalated the region's economic crisis crippling any growth performance acquired and shattering hopes of development. Beginning in the mid-1980s, Latin American governments began a period of redemocratization, replacing the vestiges of military regimens with the formal democracies that are now present in almost all countries.

When the economic and political volatility of the 1970s and 1980s led to market failure in these unregulated and liberal environments, the immediate response of state interventionism was called into question by a new ideological economic movement, a more robust version of the economic liberalism of Adam Smith prevalent in Europe and the United States during the 1800s and 1900s. According to Joseph Cohen and Miguel Centeno, "This new political-economic liberalism—*neoliberalism*—mandated the removal of governments' hold over the economy and the reintroduction of open competition into economic life," especially in Latin America.[5] As a result, neoliberal reforms have been implemented since the 1990s by Latin American countries in pursuit of progress and prosperity. This has significantly impacted the region's socioeconomic development.

Neoliberalism: Toward Laissez-Faire and Prosperity

According to the new economic ethos in Latin America, movement toward free-market capitalism will produce economic stability and wealth. The liberal reforms of the 1990s have opened previously closed markets to foreign competition. Trade liberalization deregulated many policies on international investment, and the emergent private

sector has replaced state involvement as the main catalyst of Latin America's economic development.[6]

Recent neoliberal literature has examined the rationale, causes, performance, and effects market liberalization has had in Latin America. Scholars consider how to characterize neoliberalism, as its common definition as a wholesale movement guided by capitalism with an ambiguous process of regulation, open trade, and freer markets belies its complexities. The extreme assumptions that free markets foster development on the one hand whereas protected markets benefit the poor do not easily resolve the economic debate. Cohen and Centeno arrive at a moderate position. Like most studies of neoliberalism, they utilized the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* to examine national economic data in order to assess government participation and economic growth.[7] The undulated evidence leads them to conclude that neoliberalism is a "gradual reconfiguration of the state–market relationship . . . [that] brought fewer trade barriers and more international capital exchange, but not necessarily a broad-based explosion in trade nor a major, worldwide dismantling of government spending and redistribution."[8]

After two decades of neoliberalism in Latin America, scholars have seriously begun to evaluate the effectiveness of free-market economics and its socioeconomic impact. Cohen and Centeno question the model's performance to determine if in fact economic policy and activity have changed: "If the actual, rather than theoretical, economy has made a neoliberal shift, we would expect to see less government intervention, lower taxes, fewer tariffs, open borders, smaller redistributive transfers, less regulation, and freer financial flows."[9] They suggest that the shift has actually been more of a complex reconfiguration of the state–market relationship than a simple transfer to market-guided economies.

Another contested neoliberal premise associates the more liberalized (freer market) economy with more productive results including stability, mobility, and development. Recent empirical studies have examined the socioeconomic consequences neoliberal reforms have had on Latin American society. These studies analyze market policies initiated since the 1980s and 1990s to determine if the reforms created economic growth and stability and whether liberalization has made a difference on social matters such as inequality, poverty, and unemployment. The findings suggest neoliberalism's effects are fluid and mutable. For example, by the 1990s, all Latin American countries had to some degree initiated neoliberal reforms, and the rate of growth and stability of these economies fluctuated. After the lost

decade of the eighties, the growth rates rose in the first half of the nineties, but then they fell in the second half with the financial crises in Asia (1997) and Argentina (2001). Likewise, while Latin American countries experienced stability with the lower rates of inflation during the nineties (unlike any time before), the ensuing financial crisis sparked volatility causing the decline of growth rates and their potential.[10] This ebb and flow has also had varied effects on inequality and poverty: although poverty levels improved in the 1990s (they fell almost 5 percent from 48.3 percent in 1990 to 43.8 percent in 1999), they were still above the 40.5 percent level of 1980, as examined by Huber and Solt.[11] Their study concludes that Latin American countries with higher levels of liberalized economies actually produced higher levels of inequality and poverty. On the other hand, studies that advocate for freer markets find that institutional obstructions factor into unproductive and lagging economies. For example, Michael Walton of the World Bank disagrees with Huber and Solt stating: "our interpretation of the evidence on the effects of at least a subset of market-oriented reforms is more positive and differentiated."[12]

In general the analysis of the last thirty years demonstrate that Latin America's nongovernment interference policies have prospered a small minority; for most Latin Americans, though, the basic aspects of human development (health, education, and a respectful standard of living) have not been achieved. The progress of the country of Ecuador is an example. Although from 1980 to 2010 Ecuador's Human Development Index (HDI) value increased 21 percent from 0.576 to 0.695 (an average annual increase of 0.6 percent), the value drops back to 0.554, a loss of 20 percent, when adjusted for inequality.[13] The case is not that different from Ecuador's neighbors Venezuela and Peru; their inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) show losses of 21 percent and 31 percent when adjusted for inequality.[14] A closer look at income distribution also reflects the inequality in the region. Although the World Bank classifies the Latin American republics in the "middle income" GNP per capita in the world, this does not account for inequality. Neoliberal reforms in the last three decades have failed to alter the vast differences in income distribution throughout most of Latin America.[15] During the 1990s, the GINI coefficient of Latin America averaged 49.3 and by the mid-2000s it was 53, making it the most unequal region of the world.[16] Governments' spending on industry and foreign debts have depleted budgets leaving hardly any funds for job-creation programs for the unemployed, leading to a systemic failure to construct solid social safety nets as part of the reforms.

Pentecostalism and the Pentecostal Ethic in Latin America

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the rise of the Pentecostal movement and the process of Pentecostalization of churches have caused the five centuries of Roman Catholic dominance in Latin America to begin to unravel. As the region entered into the global capitalist market, the religious field was diversifying with Pentecostalism's rapid growth and the emergence of a religiously plural environment.[17] A main reason for the transformation of Latin America's religious landscape is Pentecostalism's mass appeal. This popular religion of the poor—centered on the gifts of the Spirit—has adapted itself to the Latin American culture so as to become Catholicism's number one competitor. The movement's "pneumatic spirituality" and "faith healing" has captured religious consumers "to the point that they have cornered the market of faith among the disprivileged of the region."[18] Some scholars such as R. Andrew Chesnut, Lamin Sanneh, Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, Philip Jenkins, and Paul Freston, implicitly or explicitly credit Pentecostalism for shifting the center of world Christianity to the global south (Africa, Asia, and Latin America).[19] Freston locates the center precisely in Latin America:

> Latin America can now be considered the heartland of world Christianity. It has more Catholics than any other region in the world, and possibly also more Pentecostals (as well as their Catholic equivalent, the Charismatic Renewal). Its influence on world Christianity and beyond (through missions) will surely grow, especially as it has many advantages over Africa in this respect (a sounder economic base, stronger institutions, a foot in the Enlightenment)... Latin America is undergoing a unique process of Christian pluralization *from within* (i.e., not significantly stimulated by missionaries or immigrants) and *from the bottom up* (i.e., not by top-down national Reformations). Latin America is thus a unique site for globalizing the US–European debate on religion and modernity.[20]

Freston's focus on Latin American Christianity reflects its global relevance, which has piqued the curiosity of experts and raised questions about the relationship of Pentecostalism and economics and their conjoined significance for this region. Although in one sense Pentecostalism has been a response to the socioeconomic crises that have surfaced (i.e., the lost decade of the eighties), it does not claim or aim to solve the social and economic problems of Latin America. Yet, during times of economic progress or collapse, a dynamic characteristic

of Pentecostalism has been its ability to create communities of refuge and social capital in the megacities.[21]

Faith has long been considered a contributing factor in the development of capitalism. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1920), Max Weber argues that a particular morality within Christianity, namely a Calvinist variant of Protestantism, contributed significantly to modern capitalism. This Protestant ethic had an essential element that he coined "this-worldly asceticism" that no other faith tradition possessed. Whereas the ascetic discipline of self-denial is part and parcel of most religions, the uniqueness of Protestantism's asceticism was expressed in its worldly pursuits of economic ventures.[22] It was (and is) a way of life motivated by a high moral work ethic, grounded in a rational worldview, and free of superstition. At the same time, it is extremely organized and disciplined in terms of consumption and production. According to Weber, because the Protestant ethic translated into the believer's everyday behavior or "organization of life," Protestantism was one of the most important "carriers" of capitalist development.[23]

The rise of Latin American Pentecostalism would suggest the movement's potential to foster economic values and development. Because Pentecostalism also embraces a this-worldly asceticism, hard work, frugality, and delayed gratification, Peter Berger asserts Pentecostalism has the specific qualities of the Protestant ethic that are necessary for development. While the Pentecostal ethic may be seen by some scholars as an updated version (Miller and Yamamori) or a new mutation (Bernice Martin) of the Protestant ethic, Pentecostal conventionalities do not differ much from the Puritan ethos studied by Weber. Although Pentecostals differ doctrinally with Calvinism on topics such as covenant theology and predestination, their moral code is similar. For Pentecostals, being a "new creation in Christ" is a journey of encountering and striving to "intimately [know] Scriptures, the resurrected Christ, the person and power of the Holy Spirit, the life of the community of believers, and society for purposes of evangelization."[24] The change of lifestyle from decadence and vice to virtue and purity creates social capital; income previously wasted on alcohol, drugs, or gambling now is saved or used for the betterment of the family. The Pentecostal ethic is akin to the Protestant ethic in that at their best Pentecostals form honest, forthright, ethical, and hard working people who strive to honor God in all their interactions.

In the past several decades, neo-Weberian proponents like Berger and the Institute of Culture, Religion and World Affairs (CURA)

of Boston University have studied the relationship between religious faith and development in many parts of the world. As former director of CURA, Berger proposes that Pentecostalism is a positive resource for modern economic development.[25] Other investigations by Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, Paul Freston, David Martin, David Maxwell, and Bernice Martin recognize (though not to the extent of Berger's assessment), Pentecostalism's ability to foster a form of capitalist development.[26] The positive forecast of the movement is suggested in light of Pentecostalism's role in helping people enter into today's modern economy, as was the case in Weber's study. The verdict is still out as to what constitutes a Pentecostal ethic and whether it would still be valid if Pentecostals climb the ladder of upward social mobility or if society moves past the current post-industrial era.

Perspectives on whether Pentecostalism contributes positively to development vary from those who assert no connection to those who see a vibrant interrelatedness reflected in the Pentecostal ethic. In his examination of the 1990 World Values Survey on Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, Anthony Gill argues that denominational affiliation (whether Catholic or Protestant) "has little impact upon support for political and economic liberalization at the individual level."[27] In fact, "age, gender, and socioeconomic status carry much more explanatory weight."[28] Gill concludes that Weber's work does not apply to Latin America, "at least in terms of the culturally defining role of Protestantism."[29] But Gill's conclusions hardly apply to Pentecostalism as its social and economic variables are not part of his study. On the other end of the spectrum, Berger affirms that Weber's theory does apply in Latin America and that Protestantism is a significant factor in the development of modern capitalism. He claims Pentecostalism has the appropriate features of the Protestant ethic "that are functional for modern economic development."[30]

Because Freston sees that Latin American Pentecostals neither display the Weberian Protestant ethic nor do they function in a similar economic context, he parts with Berger, also calling attention to the fact that with regard to micro- and macromobility, the empirical evidence is scarce and difficult to establish. Freston instead offers a third possibility that neither negates a relationship between Pentecostalism and capitalism nor applies Weber's findings directly. He argues that the link between Pentecostalism and capitalism in Latin America reflects a complex and interdependent relationship.[31] Latin America's Pentecostal faith and pneumatological spirituality brings the proclivity for economic advancement. The Pentecostal life or "life in the Spirit" promises empowerment as well as an abundant (spiritual and

material) standard of living for the individual, family, and community through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Virginia Nolivos affirms that Latin American Pentecostalism challenges both men and women to view their identity in light of God's image and "according to the created order before the fall" so as to be fully transformed by the redeeming work of Christ.[32] The subsequent code of ethics resembles Weber's asceticism and inner spiritual quality insofar as affiliation with drugs, alcohol, illicit sex, and extracurricular pleasures become things of the past. Thus, Pentecostal converts who previously spent money on addictions and/or pleasures now have economic surplus to invest in their family's education or in business ventures.[33] Moreover, in their businesses they are known to be transparent merchants, which results in more economic exchange and opportunities. The miracles and healings associated with Pentecostalism may also improve the financial state of the family as those healed presumably no longer spend money on doctors, medicine, therapy, or counseling.[34] In this manner, the Pentecostal ethic cultivates hard working, disciplined, people who are honest in their interactions; in general, it reconstructs the Latin American household and its economy.[35]

Because of the heterogeneous nature of Pentecostalism, a comprehensive analysis of the Pentecostal faith and development in the region requires much more space than this study allows. In what follows, I give two case studies of the Pentecostal movement in Chile and Brazil. The first case demonstrates an initially dormant Pentecostal ethic in Chilean Pentecostalism, which later awakens and becomes a resource for economic development. The second case, neo-Pentecostals in Brazil, is an example of the prosperity gospel's impact on Pentecostalism and its role as a new carrier of capitalist development in the region (although Brazilian Pentecostalism is diverse and engaged at many levels of economic development). Both cases are an example of the range of economic involvement and development Latin American Pentecostalism is navigating.

Case Studies in Pentecostalism and Economic Life

Chile: Pentecostal Salvation, Prosperity and Development

In 2009, Latin American Pentecostalism celebrated its centennial after the first Pentecostal revivals in Chile and Brazil (1909 and 1910) gave birth to the movement, practically independent of the Azusa Street revival of 1906 in North America. Although the Valparaiso revival caused a split in the Chilean Methodist Church (1910), the break set

the Pentecostal movement in Chile on a path that was unequivocally autonomous, distinctively Chilean, and at home among the poor. For this reason, Chilean Pentecostalism today is more nationalized and indigenous than anywhere else in the region.[36]

The focus by and large in the Pentecostal movement in Latin America and especially in Chile is on salvation and the gifts of the Spirit (glossolalia, healings, prophecies, etc.). From here Pentecostal praxis flows, be it economic, social, political, or religious. The sense of personal salvation and trust in the Holy Spirit (understood as an inner transformation) of Pentecostal believers in regions marginalized by modernization and globalization generates the economic behaviors of initiative and independence that are needed to survive the informal economy and vicious cycle of poverty, but only inasmuch as Pentecostalism "empowers individuals in new ways and open(s) up to them freedoms which have never before shown up on the radar screen of self or of society."[37] For this reason Sepulveda Juan, a Chilean Pentecostal scholar, cautions that although the query of Pentecostalism's "social function" is legitimate, the movement's primary purpose, to execute a religious mission, should not be overlooked.[38]

During the 1960s when the first significant wave of Pentecostal expansion occurred in Chile and Brazil, scholars such as Emilio Willems (a German anthropologist) and Christian Lalive d'Epinay (a Swiss sociologist), provided the initial analyses of Pentecostalism and development.[39] Willems's study followed the Weberian notion that connects modernization to a Protestant ethic, whereas Berger and Martin David follow a more neo-Weberian social analysis. Simply stated, for Willems, lower class Chileans' conversion to Pentecostalism transformed them into active members of society. Nevertheless, d'Epinay's evaluation that Pentecostalism's prioritization of moral values actually inhibited economic productivity and worked against the accumulation of capital among its supporters eventually garnered more acceptance. Scholars said the movement did not assist in social mobility or economic development; rather the Pentecostal faith insulated its followers from the world, manifesting, in effect, "the absence of the 'spirit of capitalism' [in Chile], dear to Max Weber."[40] D'Epinay interpreted Chilean Pentecostalism during this time period of the 1960s as a conservative and traditional movement, passive toward social capital and politics.

Sepulveda concurs with d'Epinay's depiction of the movement as conservative prior to the 1960s, but he says thereafter the social behaviors of Pentecostals counter the Swiss scholar's conclusions. The lack of political participation by the lower class (Pentecostals included)

in Chilean politics during the twentieth century was due to exclusion by the establishment rather than lack of initiative. Sepulveda claims that Pentecostalism in Chile did not deter people from social, political, or economic involvement as the image of a "haven of the masses" may suggest. Rather, as early as 1958 Pentecostal churches began to participate in relief programs that assisted the poor and victims of disasters; at the same time other Chilean Pentecostals began to incorporate social activities as part of the church's mission.[41] According to Sepulveda, "the way in which Pentecostal churches as institutions relate to the state, to contingent politics, and to society as a whole, seems conditioned . . . by the dynamics of changes and tensions within the 'religious field' of the country" and not conservative ideology.[42]

Latin American Pentecostals view wealth through a wide assortment of perspectives. On one side of the spectrum, they mistrust materialism; other Pentecostals have sophisticated theologies of prosperity. For instance, a Chilean agricultural laborer exhibits suspicion for social mobility when he confesses: "In material things I do not hope for anything more than the little I already have. What I have at [the age of] fifty-seven is enough to live on for the rest of my days and to serve the Lord. If I had more I would be more concerned with earthly things than with the Lord."[43] But for most Pentecostals in Latin America who continue to live in economically volatile societies characterized by inequality and poverty, the Pentecostal faith helps make spiritual sense of the disparity and even facilitates some upward mobility. According to Bernice Martin, since most Latin American Pentecostals are still at the bottom of the economic structure, many of them innovate work for themselves—collecting recyclable items for resale, cooking and selling on the street corners, repairing all sorts of things, shining shoes, washing clothes, and creating many more informal ventures. In the case of Chilean Pentecostalism's (as well as Latin American Pentecostalism's) track record, one could say the movement's main "social function" or "this-worldly asceticism" has been an effective survival tactic for the poor who implement what Bernice Martin coins "survival entrepreneurship"—on occasion turning penny capitalism into real and modest economic success in a context of endemic poverty.[44]

Brazil: Pentecostal Globalization and the Prosperity Gospel

Although the movement in Brazil had minimal foreign contact in the beginning (1910), like Chile, Brazilian Pentecostalism rapidly

became a popular and national phenomenon. In the 1950s, many of the transplanted foreign denominations splintered, resulting in the movement's diversification in its expansion. Pentecostalism in Brazil and Chile experienced rapid growth in the 1950s, two decades earlier than Pentecostalism's expansion in Central America and other parts of the region. Because of Brazilian Pentecostalism's popularity among lower classes and due to its nationalistic nature, Brazil in 2000 had the largest numbers of Pentecostals among the country's Protestant community (68 percent); next to the United States, it has the second largest group of Protestants in the world. In Brazil, one observes a distinctive globalization of Pentecostalism. The kaleidoscope of Pentecostal groups in the country provides a rich local illustration of the movement's global reality. In the following paragraphs, I focus on Brazilian neo-Pentecostalism to identify a particular Latin American version of the prosperity gospel and consumerism.[45]

The neo-Pentecostals are a rapidly growing component of Pentecostalism in Latin America, sweeping the impoverished populace off their feet with a local brand of the prosperity gospel.[46] As part of a third wave of contextualized Pentecostalism in the 1970s, (the first two correspond to the movement's origins during the 1910s and then early expansion through the 1950s), neo-Pentecostals embrace both the traditional religious and modern secular aspects of Latin American (Brazilian) culture that in part explains the present Pentecostal boom.[47] Often critics point to the adverse characteristics of the "health and wealth teachings" as a product of Western capitalist and religious self-centered culture. North American prosperity proponents like Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and Robert Schuller popularized the maxim that God desires, promises, and wills to give material (physical and economic) blessings to his children. In Latin America, the trend has created its own charismatic personas and consumerist versions in people like Claudio Freidzon (Argentina), Cash Luna (Guatemala), Juan R. Capurro (Peru), Yamil Jimenez (Costa Rica), among others.[48] During the economic crises of the latter part of the twentieth century, Pentecostal growth especially in Brazil can be associated with a prosperity theology characterized as a "religion of results."[49]

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), the fastest growing and main Brazilian neo-Pentecostal church, exemplifies the process of sociocultural adaptation. Although founded in 1977 in Rio de Janeiro, the UCKG is now in more than sixty countries mainly among lower socioeconomic classes. In spite of still being at the bottom of the social order, UCKG members who once saw and

were themselves the cultural and financial losers of Brazilian society now see themselves differently as they form part of an institution with immense economic, political, and media power.[50] The UCKG embraces the Afro-Brazilian religious heritage and teaches empowerment through a pneumatological ethos of economic success. This effectively combines the exorcism of evil spirits *and* the reciprocity principle of prosperity theology. Although the opulent lifestyle of "health and wealth" leaders and their continual requests for money have generated massive criticism, the UCKG provides common sense teachings about upward mobility strategies for the people. The church's publications supply helpful suggestions on business topics and financial planning for startup ventures. The following UCKG sermon exhortation and a member's testimony are a case in point:

> It's no good just giving an offering. You must quit your job and open a business. As an employee you'll never get rich.[51] (exhortation)
>
> The Bible speaks of a great possibility, it speaks of wealth. Because all the men who served God were very rich. I don't know why I haven't begun to develop a talent. I have to go deeper in my aim of getting rich. I've just earned enough to eat. But what I want is something really big. I don't want just a little blessing today, another tomorrow, and then you've got the cord round your neck again. What God promises for my life I haven't got yet…I have the spirit of a winner. I'm doing my part. I have the spirit of victory.[52] (testimony)

This self-employment emphasis, one of several controversial UCKG values, is grounded on self-valuation. UCKG prosperity teaching posits that individuals are "worthy of having more and doing more and being more," sensibilities that are crucial for people teetering toward social and economic chaos.[53] Notwithstanding Pentecostalism's individualistic spirituality and prosperity teaching's egocentrism, the movement uniquely stands to assist people through economic and cultural transitions.

Case Studies in Conversation

These two Latin American cases of Pentecostalism demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of the movement and its interactions with economic life. Chilean Pentecostalism represents a traditional and modern Pentecostal expression of development. Sepulveda taps into the conservative nature of his country's movement: "[it] does not see itself as a bearer of a specific contribution to development, but as the bearer of a message of, and a way to, Salvation."[54] Pentecostal

conversion and transformation from life's vices allows individuals to regain control over their lives; thus, in terms of social function, the new self (the convert) becomes a precondition for involvement in economic development. Although Chilean Pentecostalism in its early stages primarily focused on inward spiritual formation over economic ventures, the movement's Pentecostal ethic later awoke and inspired Pentecostals to value and seek economic development.

Within Pentecostalism's paths toward development, Pentecostals also hold in tension a plurality of perspectives regarding prosperity: on the one hand they warn about the danger of the love of money for its own sake, and on the other hand they affirm reception of prosperity as a blessing enabling one to be a blessing in turn. Conservative Pentecostalism leans toward the former while neo-Pentecostalism, the UCKG, and prosperity advocates relish in the latter. Even with the problematic features of prosperity theology, the UCKG demonstrates productivity as "salespeople promoting assurance and converting the skills of the illicit economy to licit advantage."[55] The prosperity gospel in the global south in general and Brazil in particular has cultivated social mobility, in the process safeguarding some of the masses from impoverishment and encouraging their acceptance of and transition into the modern world.[56] Unlike traditional Pentecostalism, the prosperity gospel does not separate salvation and material wealth, and this legitimates believers' pursuit of prosperity and development in Latin America. The uninhibited economic nature of neo-Pentecostalism enables this sector of the movement to become one of the major forces of capitalist development in the region.

Conclusion

Latin America's present troubles are part of the region's transition into full integration in the global capitalist economy. This process has caused economic, political, and social upheavals that have inundated the continent. Latin America's neoliberal dream hoped for a wholesale approach of laissez-faire to overtake the region in order to create economic prosperity. Instead, the complex interaction between governments, markets, and liberalization over the past three decades requires a more nuanced assessment of the neoliberal project than originally forecasted. The evidence is inconclusive as to whether market reforms have fostered stability and growth in Latin American economies. Furthermore, as international capital mobility and trade liberalism increased, for the most part countries have seen little improvement in equality, growth, employment, or the lowering of national debts.

As an empowering and transformative movement, Pentecostalism helps anchor the transplanted and dislodged masses of a globalized Latin American continent. Pentecostalism's emphasis on the believer's inner transformation after conversion heightens an anthropology centered on the individual who belongs to God. Pentecostalism's "business *is* the business of selfhood" and Pentecostals' conversions become "mythologies of the new self."[57] According to Bernice Martin, Pentecostalism enables its followers to have a global and radical individualized self-consciousness at the personal level; at a structural level, Pentecostalism serves as a cultural and institutional prophylactic. At both levels this religious movement equips its adherents for the tumultuous elements of neoliberal economics. As the above-mentioned cases exhibit, Pentecostalism encourages a variety of trajectories of development within the context of economic crisis.

In this chapter I have considered Weber's Protestant ethic and its applicability to Pentecostalism in Latin America as part of the ongoing debate about whether Pentecostalism is linked to real economic prosperity. Neo-Weberians like Berger say Pentecostals are a formidable resource of capitalism and development especially in the global south. Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals, like those of the Methodist Pentecostal Church (Chile) and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Brazil), affirm Berger's notion and claim that they have experienced economic betterment; yet, Freston cautions that this type of economic improvement should be measured alongside Latin America's reality. David Martin and Bernice Martin hold to a careful, moderate view that affirms the mutually reinforcing relationship between Pentecostalism and economic advancement: the latter is latent and may take generations to see results, while the former serves as a survival tactic for the marginalized. Ultimately, I find this view most convincing. Pentecostalism is not wholly a partner of capitalism; thus, it is important to acknowledge the complexities and interrelatedness between Pentecostalism and economic development.

Although most Latin American Pentecostals are among the poor, it is not surprising to find Pentecostals at every socioeconomic level today. This chapter sketches the multiple Pentecostal trajectories of development throughout Latin America. Further work must be undertaken to analyze the upcoming generations of educated professionals (teachers, lawyers, executives, office workers, etc.) from established Pentecostal denominations. Future research should explore the first generation of the self-made business class that is organizing to engage in evangelistic ventures, charitable programs, and networking. The forces of Pentecostalism and capitalism in the region have

much wind behind their sails blowing into the twenty-first century, and they should not be underestimated in the years to come.

Endnotes

1. Oslvado Hurtado, *Las Costumbres de los Ecuatorianos*, 7th ed. (Quito: Editorial Ecuador, 2008). Hurtado was elected vice president in 1979 but in 1981 ascended to the presidency after the death of Ecuador's President Jaime Roldos.
2. Ibid., 19; my translation.
3. Cited in Gary MacEoin, "Neocolonialism in Latin America," *Christian Century* 88, no. 22 (June 2, 1971): 685–97 (685).
4. See Kurt Weyland, "Assessing Latin American Neoliberalism: Introduction to a Debate," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 3 (2004):143–49, and Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
5. Joseph Nathan Cohen and Miguel Angel Centeno, "Neoliberalism and Patterns of Economic Performance, 1980–2000," *Annals, AAPSS* 606 (July 2006): 32–67 (33).
6. Ibid., 44.
7. The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank are international agencies that provide loans, advice, and various resources to developing countries.
8. Cohen and Centeno, "Neoliberalism and Patterns," 37.
9. Ibid., 36.
10. Evelyne Huber and Fred Solt, "Successes and Failures of Neoliberalism," *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 3 (October 2004): 150–64.
11. Ibid., 152.
12. Michael Walton, "Neoliberalism in Latin America," *Latin American Review* 39, no. 3 (October 2004): 165–83 (166).
13. The HDI serves as a measure for assessing long term progress in the basic dimensions of development: "a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living" (1). The United Nations's 2010 Human Development Report positions Peru (HDI of 0.723), Venezuela (HDI of 0.696), and Ecuador (HDI of 0.695) in the high human development category ranking each country at 63, 75, and 77, respectively out of 169 countries. See "Ecuador: Explaining HDI Value and Rank Changes in Human Development Report 2010," 1–8 (3, 6); available at http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/ECU.pdf (last accessed on 16 April 2011).
14. Ibid., 6.
15. See Bulmer-Thomas, *Economic History*, and Paul Freston, "Evangelicals and Politics in Latin America," *Transformation* 19, no. 4 (October 2002): 271–74.

16. See David de Ferranti, Guillermo E. Perry, Francisco H. G. Ferreira, and Michael Walton's section on Statistical Appendix in *Inequality in Latin America: Breaking with History?* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2004), 303; and Luis Felipe Lopez-Calva and Nora Claudia Lustig, *Declining Inequality in Latin America: A Decade of Progress?* (Baltimore, Md.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 1.
17. See Jean-Pierre Bastian, "The New Religious Map of Latin America: Causes and Social Effects," *Cross Currents* 48, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 330–46; R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Freston, "Researching the Heartland of Pentecostalism: Latin Americans at Home and Abroad," *Fieldwork in Religion* 3, no. 2 (2008): 122–44.
18. Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 78, 100; and "Pragmatic Consumers and Practical Products: The Success of Pneumacentric Religion among Women in Latin America's New Religious Economy," *Review of Religious Research* 45, no. 1 (2003): 20–31 (20).
19. See R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003); Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of World Christian Movements: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001); and Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
20. Freston, "Researching the Heartland of Pentecostalism," 124; emphasis orig.
21. David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Malden, Mass., and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 79.
22. See Peter L. Berger, "Faith and Development: A Global Perspective," paper presented for The Centre for Development and Enterprise Public Lectures, Johannesburg, South Africa (2008).
23. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans. Stephan Kalberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72.
24. Virginia Nolivos and Eloy H. Nolivos, "Pentecostalism's Theological Reconstruction of the Identity of the Latin American Family," in Calvin L. Smith, ed. *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact, and Faith of Latin American Pentecostalism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011): 217.
25. Berger, "Faith and Development," 6.
26. See Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2007); Paul Freston, "Religious Change and Economic Development in Latin America," paper presented at Conference of Religion and Development, at Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (June 2007); David Martin, *Pentecostalism:*

The World Their Parish; David Maxwell, "Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty? Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998), 350–73; and Bernice Martin, "New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic among Latin American Pentecostals," *Religion* 25 (1995): 101–17.

27. Anthony Gill, "Weber in Latin America: Is Protestant Growth Enabling the Consolidation of Democratic Capitalism?" *Democratization* 11, no. 4 (August 2004): 1–25 (9).
28. Gill, "Weber in Latin America," 10. Gill concludes that "Protestants and Catholics do not differ dramatically in their political and economic attitudes" (19). He also found when demographic variables were controlled for, church attendance was the most relevant religious feature: it appeared to "enhance participation in civil society in more religiously pluralistic societies" (2).
29. Gill, "Weber in Latin America," 19.
30. Berger, "Faith and Development," 6.
31. See Freston, "Religious Change and Economic Development in Latin America," and Bernice Martin, "New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic."
32. Virginia Trevino Nolivos, "A Pentecostal Paradigm for the Latin American Family: An Instrument of Transformation," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, no. 2 (July 2002): 223–34 (228).
33. Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 164. See Chesnut, "Practical Consumers: The Success of Pneumacentric Religion among Women," in *Competitive Spirits*, 128–146; Elizabeth E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); and Cornelia Butler Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia: Baptism by Fire and Spirit* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1976).
34. In *Born Again in Brazil*, Chesnut argues that the quest for health here and now (faith healing) is the centrifugal force that draws people to Pentecostalism. Health consists of "the right to employment, fair wages, potable water, clothes, and education" (52).
35. See Nolivos and Nolivos, "Pentecostalism's Theological Reconstruction of the Identity of the Latin American Family," 205–26.
36. Freston, "Pentecostalism in Latin America: Characteristics and Controversies," *Social Compass* 45, no. 3 (1998): 335–58 (343).
37. Bernice Martin, "From Pre- to Postmodernity in Latin America: The Case of Pentecostalism," in Paul Heelas, ed., *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 107.
38. See Juan Sepulveda, "Religious Practices and Development: The Case of Chilean Pentecostalism," paper presented at Conference of Religion and Development, at Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (June 2007).
39. See Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith; Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile* (Nashville: Vanderbilt

University Press, 1967); and Christian Lalive d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969).

40. d'Epinay, *Haven of the Masses*, 156.
41. Sepulveda, "Religious Practices and Development," 7.
42. Ibid., 9.
43. Cited in B. Martin, "New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic," 102.
44. B. Martin, "From Pre- to Postmodernity in Latin America," 111.
45. See Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil*, 53–54; Freston, "Neo-Pentecostalism in Brazil: Problems of Definition and the Struggle for Hegemony," *Archives des Sciences Sociales des Religions* 105 (1999): 145–62; and B. Martin, "New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic."
46. For Bernice Martin, neo-Pentecostalism's prosperity gospel is one of several Latin American Pentecostal adaptations of the Protestant ethic; see "New Mutations of Protestant Ethic," 101.
47. Freston, "Neo-Pentecostalism in Brazil," 147–48.
48. For a theological discussion on the issue in Latin America see Arturo Piedra's, "Theology of Grace and Theology of Prosperity," *Reformed World* 55, no. 4 (December 2005): 326–54; and "The New Latin American Protestant Reality," *Latin American Theology* 1, no. 1 (2006): 42–67.
49. See Freston's, "Pentecostalism in Latin America," 347; and "Neo-Pentecostalism in Brazil," 149.
50. Economically, the UCKG ranked as the thirty-fourth largest private enterprise in Brazil. Politically, at one time they had seventeen members in the Brazilian Congress, and their media empire consisted of a daily newspaper, over thirty radio stations, and the third largest television network in the country. See Freston, "Globalization, Religion, and Evangelical Christianity: A Sociological Meditation from the Third World," in Ogbu U. Kalu and Alaine M. Low, eds., *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Local Identities* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 24–51 (43); and Leonildo Silveira Campos, *Teatro, Templo y Mercado: Comunicación y Marketing de los Nuevos Pentecostales en America Latina*, trans. Eduardo T. Panik (Quito, Ecuador: AbyaYala, 2000).
51. Cited in Freston, "Pentecostalism in Latin America," 353.
52. Cited in B. Martin, "New Mutations of the Protestant Ethic," 101.
53. David Van Biema, "Maybe We Should Blame God for the Subprime Mess," *Time/CNN* (October 3, 2008), available at http://www.time.com/time/business/news/article/0,8599,1847053,00.html (last accessed 11 December 2010).
54. Sepulveda, "Religious Practices and Development," 3.
55. D. Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, 88.
56. Maxwell, "Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty," 351.
57. B. Martin, "From Pre- to Postmodernity in Latin America," 129, emphasis Martin's.

Chapter 5

Stop Worrying and Start Sowing! A Phenomenological Account of the Ethics of "Divine Investment"

Jonathan L. Walton

Introduction

Every summer thousands of evangelical Christians travel to Fort Worth, Texas, to attend the Southwest Believers' Convention, hosted by Kenneth and Gloria Copeland. The convention is one of several revival-style campaigns organized across North America and Europe by Kenneth Copeland Ministries (KCM), arguably the premier Word of Faith ministry in America. This particular meeting is the largest as it is comprised of those whom many consider the Big Five of the Word of Faith: Jerry Savelle, Jesse Duplantis, and Creflo Dollar in addition to the Copelands. From early in the morning to the prime-time evening slot, these five evangelists rotate, taking the stage at the Fort Worth Convention Center. For those unfamiliar with the nomenclature of Word of Faith, this neocharismatic movement is better known for the theology it espouses, the prosperity gospel of divine health and material wealth. Ministry partners—those persons who commit to supporting Copeland's ministry through prayer and financial support—as well as regular viewers take off work, organize vacations, and even coordinate family reunions to brave the region's heat and humidity to hear a positive word of prosperity from one of their favorite television evangelists.

For five days in August of 2009, one speaker after another exhorted attendees on how to deal with the subject on the hearts and minds of the vast majority of those in attendance, the financial crash of 2008 that led to the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. "American households have lost 14 trillion dollars

in wealth," evangelist Jerry Savelle tells the crowd. "But that will not affect me. Dow Jones is not my source. United States government is not my source. Social Security is not my source. God is my source of supply!" Savelle urges the assembly not to worry about the economy and even to ignore negative news reports. "Stop worrying and start sowing," he says. And in explaining "God's way" to handle the stress and strife of financial calamity, Savelle suggests, "If you don't have enough money to pay your bills, sow a seed," and "every time a worried thought about money pops up in your mind, the next thing you do is sow. This is spiritual law. Whatsoever a man soweth, he shall also reap."[1]

The constant allusions to God as supplier and copious scripture references to health, wealth, and sowing reveal a world of exuberant hope and unbridled optimism. The people gathered here in Fort Worth worship a God who can transform individual circumstances, nullify negative social conditions, and make it possible for believers to transcend financial constraints so they can gain a "supernatural financial breakthrough." This is the Word of Faith movement. Evil is negated, fear is cast out, and poverty, sickness, and any other form of material lack are overcome by a commitment to the "covenantal" relationship between believers and God. Indeed these are the characteristics of many faith perspectives in general and Christian denominations in particular. But what stands out about the Word of Faith movement, like its charismatic antecedents, is the emphasis placed on God's desire to provide supernatural solutions to the ills of life.[2]

This is also a world that cuts across race, ethnicity, class, and gender—at least on the surface. Middle-aged white men in leather Harley Davidson biker gear sit on the same rows as young African American men in doo-rags and Timberland boots. A group of Latina Pentecostal women pray over a twenty-something white male with bleach-tipped, spiked hair, who lies before them "slain in the Spirit." And at one point the entire arena stands to their feet to honor a 106-year-old African American man sitting on the front row. Most gathered appear to take heed to the principle evangelist, Jesse Duplantis, who told the crowd one morning, "forget your color—but not your culture."

For five days I entered this world in Fort Worth, Texas, worshipping, dining, and deliberating alongside conference attendees as a participant observer. I ascertained that despite the perilous economic times that many participants faced, preachers continued to appeal to the pre-established theological tenets of the Word of Faith movement.

In this chapter I show that these tenets and religious rationalizations correlate with the neoliberal economic policies that cultivated the conditions for the Great Recession to take place. I found that many adherents appreciated the theological consistency the Word of Faith movement offers, and they creatively interpreted core teachings to respond specifically to their particular circumstances. Hearing the teachings of leading Word of Faith teachers apart from the latter interpretations of attendees could lead to an overdetermined account of "hailed" subjects who embrace the ideology of said Word of Faith teachers wholesale.[3] This is not the case. Participants possess their own religious aspirations, moral imaginations, and interpretive frameworks within this otherwise predetermined religious world.[4]

Informed by French theorist Pierre Bourdieu, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how persons negotiate structures and cultural rules within a given habitus in order to acquire resources such as material goods, social status, prestige, and/or privileged relationships.[5] To paraphrase theologian Harvey Cox, religious persons in general, and Pentecostals in particular, improvise like jazz artists. There may be an operative chord structure or repetitive rhythmic refrain within the Word of Faith movement to which persons adhere, but adherents strategically riff and creatively improvise within the system.[6] Such a theoretical framework, then, allows us to see the Word of Faith movement as determinative without being all-determining, restricting though never restrictive.

This chapter begins with a theological history of the Word of Faith movement and then turns to the adversarial relationship the Word of Faith movement takes toward "the world" in the contemporary moment. Here we see not only how the central tenets of the Word of Faith movement are deployed against perceived secular society but also the ways adherents negotiate multiple worlds and just how much the Word of Faith movement is informed by the same "world systems" it castigates. Moreover, due to this latter point, it will become evident how some adherents deploy the rhetoric of piety (over against politics) and appeals to spiritual authority (as opposed to fundamentalist allegiances) as a means of acquiring spiritual capital within a conservative evangelical habitus, which is informed both by neoliberal economic policies and a conservative theological agenda that ultimately depends upon mass appeal. Finally, considering Word of Faith messages in terms of strictness and/or authoritativeness illuminates additional ways in which the Word of Faith message functions—even in hard economic times—as a baseline that adherents then interpret and adapt.

Living the Higher Life: Historical Overview

The theological background of the Word of Faith movement blends evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic strands of the twentieth-century postwar era that built upon New Thought metaphysics and mind-science philosophies dating back to the late nineteenth century. The senior guard of today's Word of Faith cadre is connected to the ministry of the late Kenneth Hagin, Sr. of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. The Texas native and Assemblies of God minister earned a positive reputation within Pentecostal and charismatic circles in the 1950s and '60s for his clear and coherent teaching style. Though he was a player in the technology of the Pentecostal healing revival sweeping the southern and southwestern regions, he neither maintained nor appeared to desire large campaign operations like William Branham or Oral Roberts. Rather, Hagin emphasized a teaching ministry, believing this to be more accessible in the short term and valuable over the long term than ministries led by charismatic and captivating personalities. This is not to suggest that Hagin did not take advantage of mass media technologies. His *Word of Faith* magazine, *Faith Seminar of the Air* radio program, audiocassette tapes, and scores of published books and pamphlets remain valuable commodities within charismatic circles even years after his death. Even here, however, his straightforward and precise presentation of scriptures to underscore divine health and validate material wealth served as the real attraction. In 1974 Hagin organized the Rhema Bible Training Center, which continues to train many of the leading Word of Faith teachers throughout the world.

The theological character of Hagin's teachings has a much longer genealogy that precedes and transcends the so-called healing revival of the post-World War II era. Hagin's appropriation of nineteenth-century New Thought metaphysic and positive-confession mind science through the writings of Essek William Kenyon is well documented, though it is unproductive to get bogged down in "heresy" versus "orthodoxy" debates as much of the popular literature on the Word of Faith movement has done. Rather, situating Kenyon, Hagin, and their many spiritual interlocutors in a larger cultural context of American metaphysics and its cross-pollination with Holiness, Pentecostal, and mainline traditions of the late nineteenth century and twentieth centuries proves more productive. Such an undertaking requires more time and space than allowed here. As for now, let us be content with highlighting a few undeniable connections between the "Higher Christian Life"/Keswick movements and New Thought metaphysics

of the nineteenth century. For instance, Charles Wesley Emerson's Faith Training College in Boston introduced a young E. W. Kenyon to both the Holiness teachings of Charles Cullis and developing New Thought philosophies of Ralph Waldo Trine. Emerson College president Charles Wesley Emerson had previously taught at Charles Cullis's Faith Training College in Boston, a Holiness movement institutional and educational epicenter, alongside leading nineteenth-century Holiness exponents such as William Boardman (the author of *The Higher Christian Life*), A. B. Earle, and William McDonald, then editor of the *Advocate of Christian Holiness* and the *Christian Witness*. And all first-year students at Emerson were required to take Trine's course on rhetoric with its "Christianized" New Thought inflections.[7]

It was this Keswick emphasis on the denial of self for the purpose of receiving the inward fullness of God that created the conditions that necessitate divine healing. In this vein, Kenyon and others took the traditional substitutionary atonement theory a step further, arguing that the finished work of Christ on the cross affords Christians all the privileges and power of Christ: "He became as we were, so that we might become as He is."[8] Divine healing, having one's material needs met, and being able to speak to one's situation by faith, then, are spiritual entitlements of Christians. As in New Thought, a certain spiritual discipline and self-mastery are emblematic of a God potentiality latent in us all. Therefore, both Higher Life and New Thought reflect what historian Dale Simmons refers to as the "intuitionist impulse" of the late nineteenth century that emphasized the immanence and even inwardness of God. Building on the writings of eighteenth-century thinkers such as Emmanuel Swedenborg and Immanuel Kant, nineteenth-century transcendentalism contributed to religious and philosophical movements that turned increasingly within in order to deflect social chaos and economic pressures from without. Situated within a growing intellectual context of human progress, perfectability, and pragmatist approach, Higher Life, and New Thought were, according to Simmons, "fleeing legalism and pursuing the interior life of the spirit."[9]

The core theological tenets of the contemporary Word of Faith movement bear the marks of this multitraditioned religious history. There are essentially three main tenets of Word of Faith theology to which Word of Faith teachers remain wed. First, the Bible is conceived as a contract between true believers and God, and persons must come to know their own higher self in Christ according to the laws of the scriptures. Knowledge of one's divine right is contractually

agreed upon in the scriptures, which entitles persons to "name" into existence whatever they desire and "claim" it by faith. Second, the "name it and claim it" component is an act of positive confession. By faith, adherents know who they are in Christ and thus God's contractual obligation to them as believers. Word of Faith teachers often cite Proverbs 18:1, "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit," to foreground positive confession as integral to faith. Words "unleash" faith into the atmosphere actualizing thoughts, ideas, and desires. Just as Christians "confess with [their] mouth" about Jesus being lord as a demonstration of the faith they "believe in their hearts," so also should they "confess" the other entitlements and provisions the atoning work of Christ on the cross affords. Third, demonstrations of faith must move beyond positive confession ("naming and claiming") to contractual giving, what Word of Faith adherents refer to as "sowing and reaping." This is not sacrificial giving in any traditional sense. Rather, due to the preceding two theological principles, adherents are contractually bound to give (sow) just as God is obligated to return one's gift at least tenfold (reap).[10]

This latter principle is among the more controversial and contested aspects of Word of Faith teachings. Seed-faith is more associated with Oral Roberts than Kenneth Hagin. The former pioneered this principle during the 1950s while attempting to subsidize his initial television pilots. As a part of his "Blessing pact" with radio listeners and ministry partners, Roberts taught that believers reap materially in sevenfold proportion to the seeds they sow in faith; namely, sow $1 and you will reap $7. This, for Roberts, is the natural order of God's law.[11] Yet by the 1970s, seed-faith became the dominant theme in his teachings. By this point Roberts had developed three key components of seed-faith. First, according to Philippians 4:19 believers must understand that "God is [their] source." God supplies abundantly, meeting more than just minimal needs. Second, citing Luke 6:38, "Give that it may be given unto you," the key to receiving anything from God is first to give. And, third, "Expect a miracle" or what many refer to as a "breakthrough." Since God is faithful to natural law, God, Roberts taught, will release a miracle according to the releasing of one's faith.[12]

As much as Word of Faith teachers remain wed to theological consistency around these aforementioned tenets, the movement remains somewhat transdenominational. Notwithstanding their neo-Pentecostal roots, Word of Faith congregations such as those pastored by convention speakers are nondenominational and maintain

no affiliation with any Pentecostal fellowship. Hagin's protégés such as Kenneth Copeland (Fort Worth), John Osteen (Houston), and Fred Price (Los Angeles) built many of the largest Protestant ministries, both congregational and media-based, in the United States during the 1970s and '80s, just as Copeland subsequently mentored and launched the ministries of persons such as Creflo Dollar and Jesse Duplantis. Thus due to the influence, appeal, and spiritual authority the movement garnered by their sophisticated use of advanced media technologies in recent decades, the message has attracted followers from both independent and denominational congregations alike. At Word of Faith conventions one can meet groups from local Word of Faith congregations in their respective communities as well as individuals who otherwise attend Methodist, Baptist, and traditional Pentecostal congregations.

"The Word" over "The World"

Creflo Dollar steps to the podium in prime time on the second night of the convention. The Atlanta-based pastor and only African American evangelist invited to preach at this particular meeting is arguably the biggest draw aside from Kenneth Copeland himself. Dollar is highly regarded in neocharismatic circles for his popular books on prosperity and ubiquitous presence on religious broadcasting networks. "That is not our crisis," he tells the crowd to great applause. "The kingdom of God does not need a stimulus package. Heaven is not broke!" Dollar declares exuberantly to the crowd the theme of conferring "God's word" more weight than one's current circumstances. This is what it means to "honor God," and "when you honor God, God will honor you." He assures attendees that they should not be "tempted" not to tithe or allow the state of their finances to "weigh heavier than God's command." Citing Proverbs chapter 3:9 where it states, in part, "trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding," and "honor the Lord with thy substance," he encourages the assembly the assembly to "lean not on your own budget." But rather by giving generously toward the offering, God will honor the faithful with a financial "breakthrough." Many nod their heads affirmatively as others scream "Hallelujah" with hands waving toward the sky. Dollar then invites the ushers and musical praise team to come forward, and to a heart-thumping chorus of "It's not by might, it's not by power, but by the supernatural power of the Holy Ghost," attendees place cash and checks in the distributed white buckets.

Though the offering period lasts nearly twenty-five minutes, with about half of that consisting of Dollar's aforementioned offertory appeal, participants appear anxious for the preached "Word," celebrating with rousing applause as Dollar returns to the stage. He then refers to 1 John 5:4 from the *Message* version of the Bible and reads, "Every God-begotten person conquers the world's ways. The conquering power that brings the world to its knees is our faith." Dollar begins by distinguishing between faith and trust. Faith breeds confidence, and trust breeds commitment. Dollar offers these as two sides of the same coin in the life of the believer. "Faith is how we live," he declares. And when persons have "real Bible faith" they are able to remain committed to God's word. For twenty minutes he repeats variations of these points with constant allusions to the media and other similar "worldly systems." And in contrast to what he depicts as the vacillations and insecurity of the "world's ways," those who have faith will remain "committed to the Word because of their confidence in the Word." Then Dollar makes explicit what up to this point had been only implied. "When there is a financial problem going on in our country, we just continue to do as we have always done. We sing in their face while they are crying because our God shall supply all our needs."

The following morning Jerry Savelle reiterated these same central tenets of the Word of Faith movement while demonstrating a discipline to stay on message that might make a White House press secretary jealous. Yet where Dollar foregrounded Word of Faith principles as a segue into the current economic crisis, Savelle named the financial elephant in the room from the outset. "Folks are upset with us because we won't join their recession," Savelle mockingly suggested. Then he exhorts the crowd, "Say with me, 'I'm in this world, but not of it. I'm not normal." And to the demonstrative praise of some and with scores of morning worshippers making their way to the stage to sow a financial gift at his feet, Savelle declares, "If you're not of it, you don't have to be affected by it . . . I'm off limits to all this stuff." Savelle then cites the Old Testament character Isaac noting his success in Egypt during the great famine. "In the same year that everyone is having famine, God will empower you . . . Isaac increased more and more as everyone else lost more and more."

These sorts of references to the trials and triumphs of biblical figures are staples of evangelical preaching. In interpreting the religious rhetoric of Jerry Falwell, anthropologist Susan Friend Harding notes that Falwell and his followers inhabited "a world generated by Bible-based stories," and Falwell's speech, like the Bible, took on

a generative quality. Those committed to his ministry interpreted Falwell's illustrations like a biblical text: "not as already true, but always coming true."[13] In this regard, both Falwell and his community of faith became postbiblical characters extending the tales of the Old and New Testament into the contemporary moment. The biblical text, then, is not only the final authority on how persons should live but also an eschatological vision of what ultimately shall be. Word of Faith adherents, not unlike Falwell's politically based neofundamentalist constituency, situate themselves in the text to derive positive penultimate visions of realized victories in the here and now. A man sitting a few rows in front of me at the convention articulated this point. He introduced himself as Earl, an affable and engaging man who smiled with his eyes when he talked with a thick Cajun drawl. He and his wife Geraldine drove over from Shreveport with their pastor and other members of their local Word of Faith congregation. After revealing myself as a researcher interested in the Word of Faith movement, Earl became even more loquacious during the break between the morning sessions. In the past year Earl was laid off from his construction job. Like many in the construction industry, Earl confessed that at age fifty-seven he was not very optimistic about employment in the near future. His wife Geraldine had worked for a major automotive company for almost thirty years, but she, too, according to her husband, was quite nervous about her position. (Geraldine did not seem interested in holding a conversation with me, and even walked away. But she apparently did not have a problem with Earl sharing his thoughts with me as he searched me out on several other occasions throughout the week.)

When I asked Earl whether this was "his recession," he appeared to contradict Jerry Savelle's sentiment. "Oh, we in it!" he declared. "Man, right now I'm broke!" But then he began to expound in a sermonic though seemingly sincere way.

> Satan was trying to pressure my mind with bills. The money I lost in the last two years . . . Shoot, if I didn't know Jesus, I would have shot myself in the head. I'm fifty-seven. I was trying to retire. But it got to the point where I couldn't sleep at night. That's why I had to go to my brothers in the church so they could pray for me. I'm in the recession. But our God supplies our needs. That's what I have to stand on . . . It's a true statement. Even though I feel it [the recession], yes we are going to go through things others go through, but we have to trust in God.

Earl shows adherence to the core principles of Word of Faith, but he uses his own interpretive framework. Affirming God's fidelity to the

promise of prosperity does not mean ignoring his own material conditions. There is no reason for him to live in denial concerning the fragility of his family's economic situation. In fact, with his admission of how he would have committed suicide if it had not been for his faith, Earl reveals an awareness of what scholars of religion refer to as theodicy and a sense of the tragic—both of which are traditionally considered absent from Word of Faith theology. But his belief in a covenantal relationship with a God of provision acts as an existential and conceptual life preserver providing buoyancy amidst a flood of financial difficulty. Earl even repeated proudly the convention mantra of the previous day, "God supplies our needs." But rather than sounding like a compensatory plea or opiate-laced platitude, on Earl's lips the phrase came across as an earnest sentiment intended to inspire one to human action.

Similar was the case with Carlos and Annette. The couple made the two-and-half-hour trek to Fort Worth from the eastern part of the state with their friend Carolyn. Annette, who is currently unemployed but pursuing a doctorate of business administration from an online university, watches Kenneth Copeland and Creflo Dollar "two to three times per week." And her husband Carlos, a licensed Baptist minister who is currently "underemployed" despite his master of science degree in marketing. shares a similar regular viewing schedule. Carlos seemed less comfortable discussing the couple's financial troubles. He spoke boastfully, clutching his Bible with pride. Like the Baptist preacher he is, the more he quoted scripture, and as biblical narratives poured effortlessly from his mouth, his confidence grew and his posture straightened. "With the word we don't have to hear about all that negativity. You don't have to be rich to die. You don't have to be saved to die. Anybody can die." Yet Annette wanted to bring the conversation back to their finances. "We are having to budget through financial difficulties, paycheck to paycheck," she said demurely while turning slowly toward her husband as if to both affirm him and hoping not to have embarrassed him. "I know this is our recession. We are in the middle of it. Yet God keeps blessing. For instance, my unemployment benefits being extended was the Lord. And at times that all the money was gone, the church let him [Carlos] preach. Our God is the source of our supply."

But despite the emphasis on "victorious living" and "God as your source of supply" at the individual level, an oppositional tone was increasingly present among the preachers by midweek. Like Dollar's reading 1 John 5, referencing "the conquering power that

brings the world to its knees," and Savelle's allusion to Isaac, who "increased more and more, as everyone lost more and more," speakers constructed an image of prosperity that relied on a defeated other. Not unlike the nineteenth-century Higher Life/Keswick writers, who faced charges of spiritual hubris, there appears to be an edifying dimension to the thought of "the world" in peril while "true believers" prosper. "The Word" was being deployed as a weapon against a number of named and unnamed critics, namely the media and the federal government. "They need to know that every time they try to touch us we get bigger. They think folks going to leave. They think our ministries will shrink. But they can't understand why we continue to prosper," Dollar tells the crowd to a rousing applause at one point in his sermon. And in this particular context one cannot help to think that Dollar is referencing the larger than normal negative media attention he and other select televangelists have received in recent years since the launching of Senator Charles Grassley's investigations into ministry spending in 2007. Grassley, a Republican from Iowa and ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, was interested in whether high-profile ministries were abusing their tax-exempt status. Thus, he issued individualized letters inquiring into the spending patterns of six evangelists: Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Paula White, Eddie Long, Creflo Dollar, and Kenneth Copeland. Forever entertained by the salacious potential of religious scandal, the media weighed in. And when the toxicity of the economic crash appeared to discredit the central tenets of the Word of Faith message for many pundits, commentators, and scholars (myself included), Word of Faith teachers appeared to embrace the philosophy that the best offense is a better defense.[14] By casting themselves (and vicariously the larger gathering) as prophetic, truculent martyrs standing on "the Word" against "the world," Word of Faith teachers engaged in spiritual (and rhetorical) jujitsu, utilizing the power of the opposition as a weapon. Thus, in the face of economic uncertainty and failing "systems of the world," commitment to the principles of the Word of Faith became even more of a virtue.

For instance, Jesse Duplantis, the comedic evangelist from Louisiana who has been referred to as the Robin Williams of the Word of Faith movement, raises the question, "Who would ever write a book against Faith?" It can be safely assumed that Duplantis is referring to the many publications that have sought to discredit the health and wealth gospel such as Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon's *The Seduction of Christianity* (1985), D. R. McConnell's *A Different*

Gospel (1995), and most recently Hank Hanegraaff's *Christianity in Crisis* (2009). "You may get mad at us. But we just want you to do what Jesus said . . . Oh, ye of little faith," Duplantis laments as he conflates the verb and noun definitions of the word faith with the Word of Faith movement. And throughout the week Kenneth Copeland repeatedly referred to the US federal government as a "Babylonian system," referencing the wicked Old Testament empire. According to Copeland's jeremiad, this system is "man trying to meet his own needs without God." At the Wednesday morning session, Copeland argued that it began with Nimrod, the grandson of Ham and great-grandson of Noah. Since Noah's son's Ham and Japheth left Noah to "do their own thing, they produced the world's first king. And he was a jerk. And he brought in socialism, producing the tower of Babel. God capped that system with the tower of Babel. And every Babylonian, socialist system since then has grown up to a place and collapsed." After providing this "historical" foundation, Copeland made the direct link to the contemporary moment with a bold declaration. Speaking to the debate over healthcare reform that filled the media cycle at the time, Copeland declared, "No government can pay for healthcare for a nation full of sick people. Everybody that has tried has failed at it."

The only speaker who did not take this oppositional approach was Gloria Copeland. For the entire week she spoke to the theme of "talking to things," in reference to the central Word of Faith tenet of positive confession. Limited to the 1:30 p.m. time slot, the least attended hour throughout the week, Gloria Copeland reiterated the core principles of the Word of Faith. Yet she was least likely of the speakers to emphasize the supernatural and miraculous, opting instead for a message of "faith and patience." "If you speak to the car you want, it may take three years. But keep believing for the car. If you don't speak to it, where are you going to be anyway?" she asks the sparse afternoon crowd. "If it takes three years, so be it. You have a new car. Patience is the key." Moreover, unlike the other four speakers, Gloria Copeland continuously encouraged persons to reject debt, live within one's means, and "know the difference between need and want." Interestingly enough, like the previous quote, most of her examples involve some sort of luxury good such as a new car or home, but with constant reference to Mark 11:23, "whosoever shall say unto the mountain, be thou moved, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith."

The Politics of Spiritual Capital

The Word of Faith movement's relationship to politically active Christian groups such as the former Moral Majority and Christian Coalition in the 1980s or the Family Research Council and Christian Reconstructionists of recent decades is tangential at best. Word of Faith teachers have been successful at reaching across political, generational, and racial lines due to their emphasis on scripture, prophecy, healing, and wealth rather than hot-button political issues that have largely defined the American culture wars. This is not to say, however, that the theology of the Word of Faith movement is not consistent with conservative political currents. Abortion, homosexuality, the teaching of evolution, and any form of religious pluralism are all generally rejected as counter to their interpretation of scripture. At one point during the week Kenneth Copeland even asserted that he does not believe in kids going to public schools or state colleges and universities because "it tears down their faith." Several speakers offered theological interpretations of texts that directly and indirectly reinforced neoliberal economic and social policies.

Jesse Duplantis suggested that aside from Word of Faith teachings transforming the heart and self-conception of individuals, charity and justice issues amount to a fool's errand. "People are genetically altered to accept welfare," he told the assembly on Tuesday morning. Duplantis then offered an anecdote about "a friend" who went into a shelter immediately following Katrina and could not find one person out of 1,500 to accept a job on the spot. Without any reference to the traumatic effects of such a natural disaster, the devastating loss of personal property, and anxiety concerning missing family members in the wake of tragedy, Duplantis declared to the moans and supportive head-nodding of the crowd, "people have the attitude you owe [them]." After Copeland made the declaration that every nation that has attempted universal healthcare has "failed at it," he argued from the Word of Faith principles that "poverty is not a money problem. Sickness and disease is not a medical problem. They are spiritual problems." Referencing the Obama (Barack) administration's healthcare plan that was being debated in Congress at the time as well as the opposition's talking points, Copeland even told the crowd, "He [President Obama] is going to start pulling the plug on old people." And Creflo Dollar told the assembly on Thursday morning, "It's better to trust in the Lord, than to put your confidence in any man, 401k or stimulus package. The only stimulus package you need is wrapped up in this book. And if you need stimulating, grab you a scripture."

So in place of an explicit call for private enterprise, limited government, and a competitive open market ruled by the logic of an invisible hand, Word of Faith teachers offer a theological corollary: a private spirituality, a government that is irrelevant, and a world of unlimited possibilities for believers animated by their own faith and the logic of a supernatural, contractually bound hand of God. Nevertheless, aside from the central tenets of the Word of Faith movement, there are no other political (or doctrinal) commitments one need make. Thus one can get the impression that the Word of Faith movement is more politically conservative and even fundamentalist in profession than it actually is in practice. This disjunction between thought and action allows persons to adhere to "the Word" and even frame themselves as a righteous remnant while yet seeking mass appeal. The crowd is allowed access through the narrow gate. And Word of Faith teachers are able to affirm the first principles of their faith over against "the World" while simultaneously offering a vision of an alternative reality characterized by all of the pleasures and luxuries "Babylon" has to offer.

This reveals, then, the irony of and ambiguities within Word of Faith teachers taking this jeremiad approach. It is consistent with Sacvan Bercovitch's assertions that the jeremiad form in America works within a particular myth system insofar as it can help to reify both the hegemony of laissez-faire principles and an ultimately limited national identity. As a ritual form, the jeremiad often works to situate communities back within unjust structures and to limit dissent from the masses. As Bercovitch states, "For leaders of politics and industry in the nineteenth century, the symbol of America was the key to social control. For revivalists, it was the link between religion and middle-class values. For reformers it was a way of fusing the millenarian impulse (which tended elsewhere to challenge the status quo in basic ways) with the concept of gradual improvement."[15] In other words, laissez-faire principles construed from particular mythic conceptions of reality are designed to "contain self-assertion." Bercovitch employs the term containment in a double sense: a means of sustenance where it unleashes creative energies and visions while yet confining listeners' imaginations within the boundaries of a given mythology.

For instance, let us consider the cultural correlations between the prevalence of the prosperity gospel in recent decades and the housing and stock market bubbles that precipitated the crash. Both were fueled, in part, by ever-increasing super-sized conceptions of life that equate success with grandness of size and prosperity with pecuniary

gain. For the Word of Faith movement, it took the form of a realized eschatology that promised the believer "everything in this world" including the supernatural power of Jesus to "name and claim" the desires of one's heart into existence. For Washington and Wall Street it took the forms of market deregulation and tax cuts that, by far, benefited the wealthiest Americans and cultivated the incentives to engage in what Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson refer to as "winner-take-all" politics and finance.[16] Couple both of these with an optimistic telos of inevitable financial growth and one has the basic outlines of America's most recent unsustainable gilded era. Mortgage lenders created exotic loans that were eventually rolled up into and sold off as high-risk securities, kicking the can of debt up and down the financial sector. Buyers assumed subprime teaser rates with confidence in inflated home prices and their capacity to refinance before balloon payments were due. Homeowners were using the apparent equity in their homes to pay down other debts, pay college tuitions, purchase new cars and fund luxury vacations. All the while television shows such as MTV's *Cribs* or HGTV's *Flip This House* and *Property Ladder* encouraged viewers that the game of acquisition is not only desirable but profitable. At the same time, persons within Word of Faith congregations testified to the "goodness of God" as a result of being "blessed" with a new home, luxury cars, and/or other luxury items that were often the result of easy credit and unmanageable debt.

It makes sense, then, that the cultural and economic climates of the past few decades have heightened a longstanding American mythology that both structured and animated the Word of Faith movement's success. Whether it's the ruling ideal of rags to riches, myth of American success, or America as a land of unbridled opportunity and economic plenty where one can amass infinite wealth by the sweat of one's brow, Word of Faith teachers both cast and model this theological vision for adherents. If Wall Street CEOs and the American overclass can live the American Dream, then the faithful believe that God wants them, too, to prosper and be in good health, even as their souls prosper. The *doxa* that informs ardent devotion to these theological principles becomes largely indistinguishable from its socioeconomic, though no less religious, variant of free-market fundamentalism. This is the cultural habitus in which Word of Faith participants live, move, and have their being. True, these principles provide persons like Carlos, Annette, and Earl the conceptual tools to avoid making peace with unemployment, economic disenfranchisement, and overall existential angst. Nevertheless, these same principles also condition and thus contain adherents' conceptual capacity to call into question the

established rules and rhythms of the habitus. In this regard, Word of Faith teachers are in a win-win situation, fueled by both evidence and anxiety. When economic times are good, this is evidence that the core principles of the Word of Faith movement work. And when economic times are bad, the same principles assist persons in allaying and alleviating the anxieties that come with economic uncertainty and financial fragility.

This is not to suggest that participants operate in a closed, wholly determinist cultural system. According to Pierre Bourdieu, a cultural habitus provides coherence and consistency for an individual's practice, a practice that is often unreflective and takes place within a broader structural frame informed by the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition.[17] The Word of Faith movement thrives on "forgetting history" and the assumed natural state of competitive, consumer capitalism (or at least the positive by-products afforded to the privileged). But I distinguish my analysis from Bourdieu insofar as his theory provides an overly deterministic account of religious experience and behavior. This is indeed one of the central and persistent criticisms of Bourdieu's theoretical vision. If you hold on to the derivative nature of the habitus too tightly, even with Bourdieu's allowance for unpredictable spontaneous behavior that is unconscious and prereflective, human behavior remains a mere reflection of the material conditions of existence. There has to be room for willful, volitional conscious behavior. To be sure, I have sought to articulate the many ways Word of Faith participants operate reflectively and unreflectively within a cultural frame. But to deny conscious motives and personal goals to human actors is theoretically flawed and methodologically untenable.

Here the insights of sociologist Bradford Verter are instructive. Verter thinks "with and against" Bourdieu insofar as he builds upon and moves beyond Bourdieu's notion of symbolic/cultural capital to posit a notion of spiritual capital. He believes the latter, whether as a spiritual disposition of piety or religious "tastes," can be a part of a larger competitive class struggle. "Spiritual knowledge, competencies, and preferences may be understood as valuable assets in the economy of symbolic goods"; such spiritual capital, Verter contends *pace* Bourdieu, "might affect social dynamics beyond the arena of competition between religious professionals" within different fields.[18]

Viewing spiritual capital in relation to the fields of elite cultural production and political power provides one example. Certain religious practices such as mystical esotericism may be highly esteemed

within fields of elite cultural production due to their comparative rank within a hierarchical social order. The "tastes" of members of the privileged class determine and maintain their value. Similar to the ways an appreciation of art, music, and food are tied to social classes and thus used as a means of strategy in the game of social competition, the seemingly restricted nature of certain religious practices heightens their cultural value. The greater the cultural restrictions, the greater the cultural esteem. Religious esteem and spiritual capital are inverted, however, when it comes to the field of political power. The restricted, elite nature of esotericism has less political import due to its lack of wide cultural appeal.[19] On the other hand, popular religious traditions, those which are culturally accessible and thus often denigrated within both the fields of religious and elite cultural production for their perceived chintzy tastes, are more in line with and esteemed by the field of political power, namely, the networks between the religious Right and the Republican Party or more recently Rick Warren and other evangelicals in relation to the Obama administration. So, according to Verter, whereas lack of accessibility becomes a positive attribute in terms of cultural production, more accessible spiritual capital is usually correlated with political power. And though spiritual capital is diminished among faith communities and as a cultural product when it is regarded as too popular and large scale (like televangelism), spiritual capital is increased in relation to political power.

Verter's notion of spiritual capital thus provides us with a religiously informed variant of Bourdieu's notions of symbolic/cultural capital. Rather than being contained within religious hierarchies (similar to education, race/ethnicity, and social networks), spiritual dispositions can be both products and instruments within a system of class relations. Spiritual capital invariably means that persons are able to appeal to and employ their religious identities in negotiating their world as they know it. Horace and Reba were attending the convention from Canada. Both originally grew up as Lutherans in Europe, but their "faith walk began when they received Kenneth Copeland ministry tapes from a friend." Horace's job as an engineer that "provides the financial resources for Reba to stay home and concentrate on the children," expressed an utter indifference toward Copeland's prosperity gospel, which is a real draw for many. Dining in the private clubroom of the swanky host hotel (which was not particularly populated by conference attendees), Horace states, "Health and wealth is just a part of his message. It's a no-brainer that God wants us to prosper. But I listen to Kenneth Copeland to hear the truth." When I pressed the

couple about the recession and its impact on people's lives, Reba, with no sense of smugness and evident compassion said, "Persons can and will come out of it. It's not the end. That's why we are responsible to help people see the truth. You have to have hope. And this is a message of big hope." Horace chimes in, reiterating his previous point, "Kenneth Copeland preaches the truth. And the truth will set you free." Yet in discussing their past lives of drug and alcohol abuse, rejection of sin—not prosperity—is the theme to which both constantly return. "Sin puts us on a dangerous path," Reba said. Horace followed, "They preach the truth. They preach the Bible. Kenneth Copeland helps me to stand on the word so I won't fall." It became evident that this "truth" is privileged more than visions of wealth. The couple's personal sense of religious piety, according to their account, has allowed them to transcend the troubled relationships and habits of their past. Thus, unlike many who identify with Word of Faith teachers due to their teachings on and displays of material wealth, Horace and Reba access and deploy Copeland's holiness message of sobriety from drugs and alcohol as both justification for and symbols of their economic security and family stability, a form of spiritual capital that is related though not reducible to the prosperity gospel message.

Piety over Politics and Authority over Allegiance

As noted earlier, unlike many conservative evangelicals, Word of Faith teachers have garnered mass appeal by avoiding what participants interpret as politically divisive issues. True to form, the greatest push-back from respondents involved the overt references to political matters. Earl, as an example, looked evidently uncomfortable during Savelle's Wednesday morning sermon, as the preacher made multiple digs concerning President Barack Obama and his administration. When Copeland immediately followed with the aforementioned comments concerning "a Babylonian, socialist system" and "pulling the plug on old people"—both sounding like talking points from a Fox News talk show—Earl rose to his feet, made a dismissive gesture toward the stage, and walked out of the arena. When I asked him during the next break why he had walked out, Earl said, "I just couldn't take it anymore. God establishes government." Earl continued. "We just had a historical moment: a black man became president of the US. And he's been ridiculed since day one. God said I appoint kings and princes. We play our part, but he was appointed president. The same respect you gave President Bush, give it to Obama. We don't

ridicule him. We pray for him. So I had to leave to get my composure. You see, if I had stayed, I would eventually miss my blessing."

Once again Earl demonstrated his sophisticated and consistent understanding of traditional Word of Faith teachings. He was absolutely correct insofar as Word of Faith teachers have referenced Romans 13:1 in the past to either remain silent or tacitly support select presidential administrations and federal policies. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God," the King James translation reads. In 2004, Creflo Dollar posted an open letter on his Web site expressing "concern" about the number of Americans protesting the war on terror. Not only did the article suggest that protesters should pray for repentance, but Dollar also provided positive confessions to be spoken toward the president and armed service members, "If you have taken part in any protest or have allowed any corrupt communication to flow out of your mouth concerning the president," the letter states, "repent and begin to show your support for him by calling his name before God."

Carlos, Annette, and Carolyn expressed a similar disdain for what they considered inappropriate criticisms of President Obama. Carlos, like Earl, imputed a racial motive. "You've got folk who think they supposed to be ruling. I'm talking about white people. So I don't like when they blame Obama." Carolyn reaffirmed her faith in God in defense of Obama, "God can always make a way. Whoever and however God uses them," she said. And Annette attributed it to "they getting away from the truth when they start getting into all that politics" demonstrating that she, too, holds on to the stark division between "the word" (the truth) and "the world" (politics). Horace and Reba shared this latter sentiment. In our final interview, after one of their declarations about how Kenneth Copeland speaks and teaches "the truth," I inquired about outlandish claims made by Copeland that week such as, "97 percent of business school graduates are failures in business and life because of the world's system" or that every nation that has tried to provide healthcare has failed. Horace initially remained quiet while Reba interjected, "We're from Europe. We have excellent coverage. When he said that, I thought, 'Canada has got that system. Many parts of Europe have that system.' " But she then makes an allowance for Copeland by suggesting, "I guess it was about his [Copeland's] passion for the message of taking care of yourself. That is our first responsibility." Then Horace declares, "When he preaches the Bible, he preaches the truth. He didn't stick to the Bible."

To be clear, though Word of Faith teachers are lovers of the Bible and stick to their core principles, that does not mean they are fundamentalists in any sense. Most adherents, as noted, come from multiple (sometimes competing) faith backgrounds, and they clearly reinterpret Word of Faith teachings in order to exercise their own forms of spiritual capital. Word of Faith teachers are conservative, though not necessarily strict. And they are authoritative though not fundamentalist. Part of the analytic problem may involve how scholars have equated terms such as strictness, conservatism, fundamentalism, and authoritativeness. For instance, Laurence Iannaccone's contemporary classic though much contested article "Why Strict Churches Are Strong" argues that strict churches strengthen congregations by screening out members who lack commitment and thus reduce the "free rider problem." Iannaccone defines strictness as "the degree to which a group limits and thereby increases the cost of nongroup activities such as socializing with members of other churches or pursuing 'secular past times.' "[20] Strict religious groups, Iannaccone argues, are able to mitigate members' participation in other groups by socially stigmatizing members by way of distinctive diet, dress, grooming, and other social customs that demarcate their bodies from the larger society. Moreover, even private activities such as drinking alcohol, smoking, and sex, can be curtailed by "limiting the size of congregations, holding meetings in members' homes, and demanding that members routinely socialize with each other."[21]

This sort of conservative approach to the world, coupled with its resultant sectarian posture, characterizes religious fundamentalism. And the absolutist, bifurcating rhetoric that draws lines between "the Word" and "the world" among Word of Faith teachers appears, at face value, to be consistent with this sectarian posture. But we have already seen that the Word of Faith movement resists Iannaccone's definition of strictness in almost every way. First, the quest for luxury goods such as nice homes, fancy cars, and expensive clothes, not to mention the associated lifestyles, are individualized, nongroup activities that place persons at the center of many secular pastimes, particularly many of the associated trappings of leisure culture. Second, it is assumed by Word of Faith teachers that those who partner with their ministries and attend their mass meetings not only associate with but also are themselves members of other churches. And, third, since the primary means of ministry for Duplantis, Dollar, Sevelle, and the Copelands is religious broadcasting and large events across the United States, Europe, and Africa, home meetings and small social networks that monitor private behavior are not even realistic

options. Not to mention the fact that as opposed to "limiting the size of congregations," Word of Faith churches are among the largest in the nation where many parishioners attend in anonymity.

Joseph Tamney and Stephen Johnson counter the strict churches thesis by teasing out the difference between strictness and authoritativeness. Their survey of over 650 conservative, largely white and African American Protestants of diverse age groups from Indiana reveals that while strictness in terms of antimodernist conceptions of society, maintaining a distinctive lifestyle, and stringent moral codes of inclusion are more appealing to older and less formally educated persons, strict churches are not more popular across the board. Only 9 percent of respondents affirmed strictness as an ideal characteristic of their church. On the other hand, the leading characteristic of an ideal church among survey respondents (67.8 percent) was "truth," defined as a pastor who speaks with certainty. Thus Tamney and Johnson show that persons distinguish between strictness and authoritativeness. This is instructive when assessing the Word of Faith movement. Strict, fundamentalist, politically conservative churches are always authoritative. Yet authoritative and even politically conservative churches need be neither fundamentalist nor strict and restrictive. For the latter group, those who "prefer a church led by a pastor who is certain that what he [sic] teaches is the truth may not believe that the pastor should demand uncritical acceptance of what the pastor understands to be the truth."[22] This is an additional reason why Word of Faith teachers seem not to go wrong sticking to the core principles of the Word of Faith. The seeming clarity and coherence of the Word of Faith message provides the authoritative baseline from which persons, like those represented in this chapter, can then appropriate, negotiate, and religiously interpret on their own terms.

Conclusion

This article sought to provide an account of how leading Word of Faith evangelists successfully appeal to the core tenets of the health and wealth gospel amidst the worst national economic crisis since the Great Depression. Clear and consistent Word of Faith principles lend themselves to the authoritative system of "truth" that many evangelicals find convincing and compelling. During times of economic uncertainty and fragility, pious devotion to these principles is worn by many as badges of faith and fidelity. Yet these are not closed ethical systems. We see that conference attendees and prosperity gospel participants appropriate, negotiate, and contest Word of Faith

teachings based on their own cultural locations, personal experiences, and spiritual aspirations. And rather than a means to deny or obscure harsh material realities such as unemployment, financial strain, or social chaos, the Word of Faith movement offers a theological chord structure from which persons can theologically riff and spiritually improvise.

Endnotes

1. All undocumented quotations in this paper derive from field notes taken at the Southwest Believers Convention, Fort Worth, Texas, August 2009. All names of interviewees have been changed to protect their identities, even as I would like to thank the many conference attendees who were so generous with their time and so thoughtful concerning their own testimonies. I would also like to thank the members of my "Pentecostalism and Prosperity" seminar at Harvard Divinity School. Samantha Fong, Quaime Lee, Chelsea Shover, and Katie Lazarowicz are not only phenomenal students and thinkers, but they proved to be valuable intellectual interlocutors as I sought to complete this article.
2. Scott Billingsley, *It's a New Day: Race and Gender in the Modern Charismatic Movement* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 6.
3. According to Louis Althusser, individuals are subjected into a dominant ideological system by a hailing process which he refers to as interpellation. A mass-mediated message, for instance, calls out (hails) viewers with the end result being the total acceptance (subjectification) of a particular ideological proposition. Persons may resist the interpellation process with the understanding of being placed outside the system as rebels. There is little room for polyvalent interpretations or resistance within the ideological system itself. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Others* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174–75.
4. This project is informed theoretically by the "lived religion" approach that, according to historian David Hall, is concerned with "representing our subjects as they live with and work through multiple realms of meaning." It is the way persons practice their faith in complicated and even contradictory ways that disrupts the "official" prescriptions of any given faith community. Practice, to again cite Hall, "bears the marks of both regulation and what, for want of a better word, we may term resistance. It is not wholly one or the other." David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1997), xi.

5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 16 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 42–46.
6. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, Mass.: Addison Wesley Pub, 1995), 147.
7. Dale H. Simmons, *E. W. Kenyon and the Postbellum Pursuit of Peace, Power, and Plenty*, Studies in Evangelicalism 13 (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 14.
8. Ibid., 29.
9. Ibid., 91.
10. Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches : The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8–11.
11. Oral Roberts, "Do You Want God to Return Your Money Seven Times?" *America's Healing Magazine* (April 1954).
12. David Edwin Harrell, *Oral Roberts: An American Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 461–62.
13. Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell : Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 27.
14. Deborah Potter, "Prosperity Gospel," in *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, an online companion to the weekly television program, (PBS, 2007); David Van Biema, "Maybe We Should Blame God for the Subprime Mess," *Time* (October 3, 2008); Jonathan L. Walton, "Tax-Exempt? Lifestyles of the Rich and Religious," *Christian Century* (January 29, 2008); Hanna Rosin, "Did Christianity Cause the Crash?," *The Atlantic* (December 2009).
15. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 180.
16. Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics : How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schustser, 2010).
17. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78–79.
18. Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 2 (2003): 157.
19. Ibid., 160–62.
20. Laurence Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," *The American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1182.
21. Ibid., 1188.
22. Joseph Tamney and Stephen Johnson, "The Popularity of Strict Churches," *Review of Religous Research* 39, no. 3 (1998): 219.

Chapter 6

"I Determine My Harvest": Risky Careers and Spirit-Guided Prosperity in Los Angeles

Gerardo Marti

Religion, Prosperity, and Social Change

Religious orientations do not come into the world fully formed, nor are they developed apart from broader economic and social structures. "Word of Faith" or "prosperity theology" therefore has a historical dimension. Specifically, prosperity theology developed amid the progressive globalization of modern capitalism. Correspondingly, human beings cannot sidestep the effect of broader social structures. Macrosocietal developments shape the microintimate contours of human subjectivity (as history impacts the formation of our "selves"). By connecting these two insights, I suggest that prosperity theology resonates with people today because of the effect of globalized capitalism on everyday life. In particular, an individual-affirming faith—one that positively sanctions individual merit, prominence, and renown—is necessary because workplace survival in today's economic context requires an aggressive promotion of the self. Throughout this chapter, I consider the connection between prosperity theology and the contemporary demands on the modern self through a case study of a Hollywood church that orients its ministry toward workers in the entertainment industry.

Oasis Christian Center is located just blocks away from the famous Hollywood Walk of Fame where sidewalks are dotted with star-shaped plaques bearing the bronze-engraved names of film stars, radio personalities, and entertainment idols. In fact, Oasis meets in a refurbished "movie house" on Wilshire Boulevard that boasts on the sidewalk in front of its main doors a specially crafted bronze

Hollywood star for "Jesus Christ—The Son of God." More than 2,000 weekly attenders walk past Jesus's Hollywood star to attend this nondenominational charismatic church, which is pastored by husband-and-wife team Philip and Holly Wagner and distinguished by a particular blend of prosperity/Word of Faith theology.[1] Oasis began in 1983 when a small group of entertainment industry believers met at an Academy Award winner's Beverly Hills home for Bible study. Today more than 80 percent of attendees are still connected to the Hollywood industry. The metaphor of worshipping in a converted movie house is impossible to ignore as this "spirit-filled" church aggressively promotes ambition and sends the faithful to succeed in a materialistic, exploitative, and uncertain industry. Many congregants are aspiring industry workers hoping for their big break, and many, while having left the industry, carry a lingering heartache from their disappointing experiences.

I pursued an understanding of Oasis's ministry through twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork, which included fifty in-depth interviews and an analysis of the memories of long-term participants and of the audio and print resources available from church archives.[2] Although the actions and beliefs of church leaders are vital to this congregation, I spent most of my time with rank-and-file members and visitors in this racially diverse church. Drawing on a "lived religion" approach that ignores doctrinal pronouncements and apologetic corrections, I focus on how the "prosperity theology" operating at Oasis embodies an intriguing adaptation of Christian belief and practice to a globalized, capitalistic economic atmosphere that is radically reshaping the structure of modern work.[3]

Oasis reveals a dynamic connection between religion and work occurring throughout the world today. In particular, Oasis's prosperity orientation celebrates achievement and autonomy in the workforce, matching the popular ideal of literate, more educated, capitalistically inspired workers who wish to throw off concerns of structural inequality in the belief that ultimately, with the help of God, their effort and talent will pay off. These workers believe in a God-empowered meritocracy. Yet the goal for an Oasis Christian is not just to "succeed" but also to transform the world in partnership with God. Each member's individual ambition is overshadowed by a vision of God's active work in the world. Donna, a long time member, said, "God's plan is always better than what we think our plan is."

Robert Mapes Anderson famously connected Pentecostalism with vast economic changes, observing how Pentecostalism emerged during important transitions in the early twentieth-century economy of

the United States.[4] What stands out most from Anderson's analysis is the adaptability of Pentecostal belief systems to current economic demands. By seeing religion as an "adaptive mechanism," Anderson and others view religion as reactive rather than proactive; religion responds to social change rather than instigates it.[5] Anderson even argues that certain people are predisposed to become Pentecostals. This deterministic language is insufficient for the kind of analysis social scientists engage in today. It would be difficult to say who would be predisposed to become a member of the Oasis Christian Center or to adhere to prosperity theology. However, there is an affinity between the religious resources made available to attendees at Oasis and the economic circumstances that structure their lives as a whole. Nevertheless, along with Anderson I believe that workers respond to theological orientations that meet them at their point of need. Religion matters to modern workers because religion provides both a cohesive vision for a faithful life amid changing demands and a supportive community for dealing with achievements and disappointments along the way. The form that religion takes today therefore depends on the distinctive challenges faced by workers in the climate of advanced capitalism. Even more, the extent to which theological teachings are commensurate with the demands of contemporary lives determines how readily these teachings will be adopted and expansively spread.

Today, workers must assert themselves in what appears to be an egocentric manner. The celebrity-seeking Hollywood workers at Oasis accentuate the situation of the broader workforce that must master self-promotion for economic survival. These workers accommodate themselves to an uncertain labor market, and their congregation provides a supportive community for working through those challenges. In adopting the prosperity orientation, what are essentially socially enforced biographical life plans become sacred vocations. Christians at Oasis come to see themselves partnering with God. Charlene said, "Regardless of my work, my real work is working for God." Individual-level ambition becomes a grand, cosmic ambition. Sandra, a producer who began to question her career through her involvement at Oasis, eventually resolved her doubts, saying, "My ambition isn't for me anymore. I will benefit from it, and I absolutely know that I will benefit from it. But it isn't for me alone." Over time, members at Oasis stop seeing the entertainment industry as an avenue for personal success and see it instead as a venue wherein they actualize the greater potential of their lives and their work. Prosperity is not just for the self; rather, prosperous lives participate in spiritually revolutionizing the world.

In short: Because the economic structures that foster the formation of prosperity theology simultaneously affect the life circumstances of individuals with whom prosperity theology resonates, a close look at the life and faith of entertainment industry workers at Oasis represents the broader circumstances of Christian workers in globalized capitalism. Workplace survival today demands the branding and promotion of the self to manage risk while simultaneously working through disappointments and failures. As current capitalistic structures enforce an individualization that structures each person's life and workers are more prone to risk uncertainty, developing and maintaining an individual-affirming faith becomes necessary. The modern, ego-oriented, and uncertain selves of Oasis resonate with the prosperity orientation promoted there and develop into "champions" and "overcomers" who proactively seek to fulfill God's purposes in the world.

Identity and Individualization in the Risk Society

Prosperity theology emerges neither as a tool for exploitation of workers nor a crass pursuit of higher status. It is an adaptation—a profound and practical adaptation—of religious life to demands of new forms of life, particularly with regard to economics. Sociologist Ulrich Beck presents a comprehensive yet troubling picture of individuals and their labor in the modern economy.[6] For Beck, "individualization" summarizes profound structural shifts in advanced capitalist structures, the welfare state, and corporate-backed commercialization (which are all aspects of globalization). He sketches a model of "individualization" that summarizes how—amid increasing economic uncertainty—broad societal transformations leave individuals with a greater burden for working out their own particular life courses. The "individualization thesis" describes "a chronic indeterminacy of risk and risk-taking," a characteristic of the information age and the rise of post-Fordist corporate structures.[7] As capitalism uproots traditions and spreads throughout the globe, individuals all over the world find they are obliged to craft their own lives with fewer structures to sustain them. Voluntary networks replace traditional group memberships, and individuals are left drifting in an endless pursuit of strategically beneficial relationships.

Wage labor is fundamental because nearly everything about life today (health care, future welfare, family) depends on the ability to find and sustain work. Work has become enormously important, more so than any other period in history. Everyone must earn a living, and individuals are "thoroughly dependent on the labor market."[8] This

task is complicated by mobility. People are not rooted but nomadic (experiencing "place polygamy") as people spread aspects of their selves across different social worlds.[9] The labor market is now based on individual initiative, encourages people to move away from fixed ties, and requires flexible adjustment to changing conditions.

Beck's theoretical emphases on individualized risk, uncertainty, and the pursuit of new networks of allies are concretely and pragmatically present in the lived experience of workers at Oasis. The majority of members at Oasis moved to Los Angeles for the Hollywood entertainment industry to pursue personal success. They quickly discover the bitter reality that no company exists to fulfill the naïve dreams of the star struck. Hollywood is first and foremost a collection of profit-maximizing businesses, and people's dreams and aspirations must always come to terms with the financial bottom line. Hollywood is also the center of one of the most complex local labor markets in the world.[10] Allen J. Scott writes, "The advent of the new Hollywood represents a dramatic vanguard case of the flexibilization of work arrangements that was later to spread much more widely throughout the United States."[11] In anticipation of what is often called "the new economy," the motion picture industry reorganized in the 1950s and 1960s to make itself less concentrated. Hollywood now consists of an endless series of translocal networks both nationally and internationally, representing a broad array of individuals, businesses, corporations, and governmental bodies. Firms strategically locate in Los Angeles to benefit from the clustering of creative industries and the spatial concentration of labor markets.[12]

This loosely networked structure makes for a much more elastic, economically adaptable system of production, but working in Hollywood has shifted from staying with one company for an extended period of time to bouncing from job to job, being subject to fluctuations in production schedules and the availability of work. By reconfiguring the Hollywood industry into shifting coalitions of networks with flexible production schedules, the conditions of workers in Hollywood were reshaped into project-to-project contract work. The majority of industry workers are now temporary or freelance, as workers take on assignments as short-term employees. With numerous shifting coalitions of networks and flexible production schedules, long-term success depends on the ability to string together a series of employment gigs with each paying substantial sums. The most sought after workers negotiate commitments into a series of overlapping projects. Individuals try to keep themselves attractive to employers as they struggle to construct a cohesive sequence of

projects into a "career." Scott summarizes these shifts, saying, "The local labor market became increasingly flexible and volatile, so the workers caught up in it today are subject to extremely high levels of risk in regard to remuneration, benefits, job prospects, and so on."[13] Even when the overall industry seems to be thriving, most individuals are not.

There is the story of Denny, an African American in his early forties, who moved out to Hollywood to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. He had some success as a character on a popular television show. The money was good, and he was achieving a measure of fame. Then, the writers killed him off from the show. When he told me he had been killed, I immediately said to him, "I'm sorry." And Denny said, "I am too." After that, he started getting some small roles in feature films, but it soon dried up. "It just went bad. I mean, we got zilch." Roles failed to come. "I ended up broke, on the street, having to move in with a friend after being homeless for about six months." He sought government help. Broke, homeless, and alone, his friend said, "I know things are kind of bad for you, but come and check out the church I go to." That was his introduction to Oasis.

When we grasp the bitter reality for workers in the entertainment industry—that motion pictures are commercial entities—much of the heartache and disappointment routinely revealed by workers at Oasis becomes clear. Through interviews at Oasis, I found that efforts to string together credits and production experiences lead workers to seek celebrity as a particular type of reputation building, which becomes invaluable for long-term survival. The need to manage uncertainty and create a flow of work structures the goal of becoming a celebrity or star among industry workers. In short, the pursuit of fame in Hollywood is less about building one's ego and more about securing long-term financial stability. People primarily aspire to achieve a sense of security, to keep at bay dangers that would threaten their economic well-being.

Oasis creates spaces of community for ambitious individuals like Denny who find systems overwhelming and their goals frustrated; yet they gain great confidence that God can, wants to, and (eventually) will use them to fulfill cosmic purposes as they at the same time achieve personal fulfillment in a world-affirming way. By "world-affirming" I mean that their achievements are intended to be recognized, measured, and praised by strangers out there in the world, namely, people who do not share their religious values and beliefs. The emphasis on the individual is not about individual self-promotion but about creating a platform as an ambassador of the kingdom of God in the

world at large. At Oasis, individualism coexists with the general call for generosity and self-sacrifice because the individual is seen as the conduit by which God will accomplish his purposes on the earth. It is a win-win solution; God fulfills his missional purposes, and his people live prosperous, fulfilling lives.

Thematizing a Life Plan in an Uncertain World

Prosperity theology contributes to shaping the nature of ambition at Oasis; achieving fame is not merely for one's self but includes the promotion of a set of religious ideals intended for the betterment of the whole world. Prosperity theology serves to support a kind of "self" needed to live in the world today. For Ulrich Beck, individual identity today is not simply given to people but is rather a "task" to be accomplished.[14] According to Beck, the structures of labor have shifted such that each person is now an individualized worker and must cultivate a proactive approach to the pursuit of wage labor. Class and family are not removed as much as "recede into the background relative to the newly emerging 'center' of the biographical life plan."[15]Structures of modern society demand that each person figure out who they are and develop a sense of the narrative shape of their life, which is what Beck calls a "biographical life plan."

The biographical life plan is the idealized sense each person has of what the chronological progression of her life is to be. According to Beck, to attain "modern social advantages one has to do something, to make an active effort. One has to win, know how to assert oneself in the competition for limited resources—and not only once, but day after day."[16] The "life plan" becomes actualized by conforming to expectations of what should be true in our lives at any particular point in time. Prosperity theology becomes a resource at Oasis for cultivating among members a sense of one's own self.

Beck takes care not to describe the loosening of individuals from societal bonds as "liberating" or "emancipating" in the sense that individuals gain their freedom, creativity, or true humanity apart from oppressive structures. Instead, Beck uses the descriptive phrase "institutionalized individualism."[17] Indeed, Beck argues that individuals are now caught in a new type of oppressive system; people are now condemned to individualization. We do not have increased egoism in modern society; rather, modern society enforces individualization. Individualized lifestyles force people for the sake of material survival to make their own selves the center of their life plans and conduct.

As modern workers struggle to maintain their precarious economic lives, they seek new allies and pursue affiliation with advantageous social networks. Biographical life plans are never truly "individual" but rather are enacted in community. Life plans require the support of others who share ideals. In religious terms, individuals come to seek out empowerment for their idealized selves in a moral community that fuels their ambition in a cooperative, constructive manner.

Many workers find allies in church communities like Oasis. In the thematization of life found among Oasis members, there occurs a notable shift from personal to collective ambition that builds directly on the disappointment and heartache experienced in the industry. Oasis stresses "honoring God" and "seeking God's will" regardless of where—or if—one is employed. The failure of a "successful" career is reframed into new, religiously oriented themes. For example, Charlene desires to see God pleased with her choices in the midst of all her difficulties. "I really would like to have God say every day, 'You did good, girl. I know you really were down today because you lost this job, but I've been watching you, Charlene, and even though circumstances are tough, you're still praising me.' " She went on to say, "At the end of the day, you go, 'Did I do what God wanted me to do today?' "

In the process of actualizing their biographical life plans as sons and daughters of the King, Oasis members come to share a common spiritual kinship; they share the status and honor of their Father God. A new, privileged self wards off low self-esteem, disappointment, and loneliness. Gladys said through Oasis she realizes, "I do have a purpose, that there really is a destiny, and that God created me because he has something that he wants me to do." Every person is significant. Oasis is a place where all believers discover their "unique" role in life. "Everybody has a place, everybody has a role. Get it and do what you have to do and just watch God move." By emphasizing morality and character, it is possible to "be yourself" regardless of the variability of work roles occupied over time. Bridgette said, "I am able to be who I am, who God has created me to be, and to do the things that He wants me to do. And I no longer have to please people and be who they want me to be." This twist on "be yourself" forges a new connection between work and identity. Oasis cultivates a public morality, namely, a set of standards for how to conduct oneself with success in the world.

Consistent with Beck's assertions, the life plan of Oasis members is dominated with considerations of work. In the process of adhering to the prosperity orientation found at Oasis, members find a means to craft a self that is more holistic by considering how their selves are

simultaneously engaged in several areas, especially spheres of family and church in addition to work. The largeness of God's concerns for them, others, and the world encompasses the larger complexity of a person's multiple—and often contradictory—commitments. Members come to see themselves as making their way through life in partnership with God in a manner that addresses their overlapping role responsibilities and group memberships.

Overall, a cohesive life plan is necessary because global transformations in the nature of work leave individuals problem solving for the staging of their own selves. In Beck's terms, each person has a "biographical life plan," which privileges economic survival. Beck states, "In the individualized society the individual must therefore learn, on the pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the center of action."[18] Beck continues, "What is demanded is a vigorous model of action in everyday life, which puts the ego at its center, allots and opens up opportunities for action to it, and permits it in this manner to work through the emerging possibilities of decision and arrangement with respect to one's own biography in a meaningful way."[19] Moreover, "in order for one to survive, an egocentered world view must be developed."[20] The prosperity orientation invoked at Oasis resonates with the demands placed on members while allowing members to practice their "freedom" to negotiate their uncertain and often conflictual self-organization.

Ambitions move from merely working for success in one's occupation to working with the explicit goal of accentuating one's Christian spirituality in such a way that it holds together the multiple aspects of their lives. Santiago said, "We are all supposed to have a purpose and someplace we are going. How do we get there? Do we compromise whatever we do? How do we accomplish it? Then we have to weigh those things with family, church, everything. And keeping everything in balance." Charles, an African American, turns down work opportunities to protect time with his family. "Now for the rest of my life, my ambition goes toward that. I think of God, and then I think of family. Anything after that is gravy." Charles channels the majority of his acting, writing, and directing through the congregation. "It's just wherever God wants me to be right now."

At Oasis, the prosperity orientation resources a sense of self in relation to overwhelming structures of wage labor by providing a more comprehensive framework for how believers can live a successful and "prosperous" life. By thematizing a life plan, the community of Oasis shapes a religiously based persona oriented around managing the successes and failures of sustaining work while maintaining a broader

set of considerations for their social and emotional lives apart from their labor.

Tithing, Personal Responsibility, and the Discipline of Prosperity

The practice of religion at Oasis focuses on cultivating a proactive orientation of one's self toward the world. One night, pastor Holly came up to speak, and the first thing she said was, "Hold up your Bible." After those with Scriptures held them up over their heads, she quoted Joshua 1:8, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." She admitted she wanted success—everybody wants that—and then looked intently to the crowd, "Do you want to prosper? Then this is what it says, 'Don't let this book get away from you.'" She moved to the New Testament book of Galatians, Chapter 5, and talked about sowing and reaping. She emphatically stated, "I determine my harvest." She repeated it several times: "I determine my harvest. I determine my harvest! I DETERMINE MY HARVEST!" She talked about finances and then about healthy marriages. She connected being successful, prosperous, and ambitious with marriage, relationships, intimacy, and companionship. Good investments yield good results not just financially but in all arenas of life.

Many messages at Oasis focus on finances, and talking about connections between one's finances and other aspects of one's life plays an important role in helping members take on a "prosperous" life plan. The common challenge of struggling with finances among Oasis members places tithing at the center of every member's efforts to reframe personal ambition according to this redefinition of prosperity. Through the regular practice of tithing, a person's goal for financial success transforms into a set of shared goals to become a truly "prosperous" self who grows spiritually and expands God's influence. Donna provides her formula, "The more you tithe, the more you let go. You live less in fear and more in faith. Your heart gets stronger. The more you serve, your heart gets stronger. The more you love, your heart gets stronger. So to me, it's really about working that heart in every area of your life so that you are always putting God first. It's like science. It's basic. Like making a cake."

Congregants see prosperity as less a result of God's provision and more the result of a person's hard work. An associate pastor of the church told me, "The Word is filled with simple principles that work

whether you are saved or unsaved about frugality and about being focused and the diligent hand will be made rich." Through a modified form of positive confession that propels believers to assert an idealized self, Oasis members affirm their identity as "champions of life" who take on productive roles and understand their responsibility to expand God's kingdom on earth. At Oasis, the teaching involves less of a promise of prosperity and more of an expectation that diligent work exercising one's talents leads to success in secular careers. Never in my interactions at the congregation did I ever hear any empty assertions of godly promises as if attainment or achievement happens by magic. "There's no name it and claim it at the church," a longtime female leader in the congregation said. "If you tithe, you're not going to get money back or anything." Instead, Word of Faith teaching has been distilled in the context of Oasis to a focus on obedience to Christ and a trust in God's ability to work out circumstances as people remain diligent in their work before God.

Through the act of tithing, worship services provide regular opportunities for leaders to connect each person's finances to both an individual's work and the congregation's collective ambition. Every Oasis service includes a five-to-ten-minute exhortation before the offering to give people a biblical understanding of their relation to their money. More than introducing the offering, it is always a teaching message with a theme such as "We are the trustees of God's money." The messages encourage individuals to give, and in doing so, members assert their agency in the world with intentional acts that express their own goals and values. Some observers might suspect that prosperity teaching motivates people to give more, thus serving the interests of leaders who want to make sure the church sustains itself and further consolidating their base of power. But this underestimates the pastoral concern of the leaders of the church. In keeping with the overall thematization of life plans in terms of shared goals, Oasis attempts to acculturate members away from career success toward thinking altruistically about the needs of others. Philip and Holly make no apology in stating that giving is an essential aspect of the Christian life and that the local church is the place in which the riches of God's people are redistributed for the work of the kingdom. In pragmatic terms, giving to the local church is important "both as a prerequisite for receiving financial blessing and as the natural response to it."[21] Any provision or prosperity that God may grant is not for the comfort of the believer, but it stirs believers to be generous to others.[22]

Thus, Oasis embodies core aspects of the Word of Faith movement and encourages practices such as tithing, serving, and being generous

although not as a way of providing empty promises to potential converts. At Oasis, the Word of Faith movement provides a way of affirming a distinctively Christian identity within secular workplaces and a set of doctrinal beliefs that encourage believers to remain vitally connected with the Spirit of God despite any type of challenge or temptation. Rather than believers being saints in exile living as aliens and strangers in the world, Oasis reverses the exile theme by placing believers firmly within the day-to-day machinery of the modern world.[23]A male member in his twenties said, "When they talk about being prosperous and successful, it may not be what you expect. There is a lot more to it—your relationships with other people, your job, and issues that you may be struggling with."

The Oasis Christian Center does not believe the attainment of wealth is an end in and of itself, nor do leaders say that wealth is promised. The promotion of wealth "is linked to the promotion of not only personal growth, but also a sense of projecting a mobile and inspired self into the world."[24] Rather than challenging Christians toward asceticism and retreat from the world, Oasis embraces aspects of the Word of Faith message that challenge believers to take responsibility over their lives as an extension of their stewardship to God. The self is interjected into the world in order to transform it. Godly living is less oriented toward pietistic introspection and more toward pragmatic Christian activity. Religious faith is not routine or ritualized but vital and dynamic. Faith is lived out in practical everyday life.

Reflecting on the Word of Faith teachings at the church, an associate pastor explained how Oasis rejects "a very self-indulgent, 'God's my butler' faith." Wealth is not the goal; rather, God promises his provision when believers work in concert with God's vision. The pastor illustrates this with a story:

> It's like a farmer who says to his farmhand, "Take my cell phone. I need you to go out to the corner of the property and fix that broken down fence so the horses don't get out. And whatever you need, just call me." So, he drives out there in his pickup truck, works on the fence, calls the farmer, and says, "I was thinking, and I would like a new suit and two tickets to Hawaii and a nice dinner for me and my wife." The farmer did say, "Whatever you need, just let me know," but he was saying it in relation to getting the job done, which is obviously very different. We believe in the part of prosperity that says while you are about your Father's business, he is meeting needs and giving people favor, not for the sake of promoting people but for the sake of—What's that scripture in Psalms? "Let those who favor my righteous cause say continually, 'The Lord has pleasure in the prosperity of His servants.'"

This pastor said, "We believe that our commission of believers is similar to that of Jesus when he said, 'I must be about my Father's business.' "

Oasis emphasizes each believer's identity as a child of the King and an heir of divine promise. Enacting their royal heritage, Oasis members should not squander their abilities but be wise in their investments and use personal and professional resources to expand their influence, thereby expanding the living presence of the Spirit of God in the world. A staff member said, "We want to help you understand how God has wired you up, what are the gifts he has put in you, what are the things that you love to do, that way we can help you do what you are placed here to do." Another member who is part of the Oasis worship band said, "It really isn't about living abundantly and financially. It's about being happy because you understand God's will for you and you're doing it." Through this framework, Oasis energizes weary and frustrated workers with a sense of mission and purpose.

Champions of Life

At Oasis, life plans are thematized in a way that affirms individuals while drawing them toward concern for the community of the church and compassion for others beyond the congregation. The success of one's financial life is not guaranteed, and one's life may not be smooth or easy. Indeed, much of the congregation is structured around the acknowledgment and expectation that individuals will be disappointed and fail. Nevertheless, a religious self is crafted within the prosperity orientation that encourages individuals to remain ambitious while tying them tightly into a shared religious community of fellow champions of life. It is a religiously themed self that is robust, mobile, and adaptable to changing economic circumstances.

With a focus on Hollywood workers, the converted movie house at Oasis successfully gathers industry-related believers in the intimacy of a physical site where the beliefs and practices enacted through the church resonate with their experiences, reinforce their shared status, and accentuate a corporate bond appealing to their hopes, dreams, and ambitions. Oasis does not immediately challenge a person's desire to "make it" in Hollywood. An older, African American woman said, "Pastor is a kind of guy that makes it okay for us to be in the entertainment industry." Christians who arrive at Oasis find acceptance for their ambitions and sympathy for their heartaches. Nevertheless, much of the pastoral work of the congregation tries to help people separate from their "Hollywood" identity to embrace a broader,

church-based Christian identity. A television producer said, "While we're in this industry, we don't want the industry to get in us." A staff member said, "I have to remind them not to get wrapped up in the industry and not allow whatever they do, dancer, writer, actor, to make that their identity." Another staff member said, "We are constantly challenging and getting in people's business about serving and selling out and putting God first and making him a priority and honoring him." In the context of economic uncertainty, the church provides financial help and offers workshops of various sorts to help people manage their personal finances. But the foundational ministry is one of identity reorientation: understanding successes and failures in terms of a broader divine plan.

While workers in the entertainment industry have no confidence in the stability of their occupations, workers at Oasis take supreme confidence in their stable sense of religious purpose. Charlene said, "What has kept me coming back is to understand that I do have a purpose, that there really is a destiny, that God created me because he has something that he wants me to do. Now, that something could be a major thing where everybody gets to see my face or it could be a minor thing. But, I do have a role in the body of Christ." The champions of Oasis subordinate the goal of public fame to the goal of gaining personal influence and successfully enacting their Christian ideals through their work. Jarrell drew on imagery from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount to say that in his work on studio lots, "The motive is showing the world God's love, being the salt and the light in the world."

Oasis also helps members work through the difficulties of living in this "spiritually foreign" culture. They live out their new identities energized by a corporate purpose in the day-to-day world. Secular callings gain a moral quality. On this point, Max Weber asserts that creating a sacred value for work in this world was the unique achievement of Martin Luther during the Reformation. In his classic analysis of Protestantism Weber called this phenomenon "one of the momentous achievements of the Reformation."[25] Likewise, the congregants of Oasis see themselves as spiritually responsible believers who work outside religious institutions to effect God-inspired initiatives. They see the pursuit of external fame and fortune as a veneer for the real self who, in concert with the moral community, reshapes social values to be congruent with their religious beliefs.

With this overarching desire to advance God-inspired initiatives, prosperity that comes from God is not like winning the lottery where an abundance of unearned cash is showered on the expectant believer. Instead, Oasis defines prosperity as the faithful exercise of gifts and

talents for God's purposes. This redefines ambition. Gladys said, "I'm ambitious but perhaps not in ways many people would think of ambitious." She said, "My ambition has changed because it became more other-focused." Ambition changes from being solely oriented toward personal career success to enacting faithfully an evangelical orientation that avoids immorality and inspires a charitable stance toward helping others. Sandra is one of many who told me that "Hollywood in its truest form is a dark place," but she felt she had an opportunity to be "a light" in the industry, especially to young women while working on the set of various productions.

Morality, cultivated through the congregation, structures the behavior of Oasis workers in their secular vocations; the individual is a tool of God. Charlene said, "When you come to Oasis, you find out there is something for you to do. And everybody has a place, everybody has a role. Get it and do what you have to do and just watch God move." Even more, self-advancement becomes a form of community advancement, pushing forward its sacred, moral imperatives. The pursuit of fame and fortune is not wild egotism but a faithful fulfillment of a moral imperative—to extend and advance the message and reputation of Christianity to the utmost degree by successfully integrating oneself into the mainstream culture through influential positions. Charlene said, "God created me because he has something that he wants me to do." The ambitious individual transforms into a sacralized self that is connected to a community. Together, community members fulfill the mission of God to extend his kingdom in this world. Thus, for the champion, success in a job is only an extension to the successful work of God who emboldens his representatives to work in the power of his Spirit while gaining influence in nonreligious and irreligious realms. Champions are empowered individuals; they are empowered by God and the community to work confidently and independently for God.

The Prosperous Self in an Uncertain World

According to Karl Marx, religion alleviates the difficulty of modern work conditions. But rather than merely see religion as an escape, there can be a "fitting," a resonance, between religion and uncertainty; religion can serve to legitimize the inevitable choices individuals have to make. So while it may be possible to see some forms of religion as an escape from modern conditions, it may be more fitting to see certain forms of religion as an embrace of these conditions, an implicit acknowledgement that the world has changed. Here Max

Weber's insights on the adaptation of religion in every generation are helpful.[26] Weber argues that religion is most concerned with the alleviation of suffering. The nature of suffering—the difficult conditions of life—experienced in particular places and times becomes the most important determinant in the development of religious orientations and the nature of their ideals. In other words, we best understand the ideals set by religious orientations when we connect them to the concrete conditions confronted by individuals as they face challenges in their lives. The prosperity orientation exemplified at Oasis is therefore a specific response to the precarious situation of workers in a globalized, individualized capitalism. Asserting a "fit" between prosperity theology and modern work conditions is consistent with the findings of other researchers.[27]

Bernice Martin once wrote about Pentecostalism that "its business is the business of selfhood."[28] In a remarkable essay, Martin relates the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America to economic changes.[29] She recounts a familiar story of individuals increasingly atomized both socially and economically. Individuals are the operative social unit in determining economic success. She powerfully asserts,

> The current transformation of capitalism in Latin America, involves a postindustrial, post-Fordist labor force for whom assembly-line facility, deference to hierarchical authority or the clock time disciplines of the factory would be anachronistic. What this postmodern economy requires from them is micro entrepreneurial initiative, an individualized and more feminist psyche, a high level of self-motivation, and the flexibility with which to face insecure employment in self-employment, mobility, and the 24-hour working day.[30]

The new Protestantism energizes the irreducible human motivation to survive even the most unpropitious circumstances by harnessing that motivation to transcendent ends. At the same time it roots and supports the individual within a face-to-face, voluntary community of believers. Within this voluntary community they find mutual help, education and strength for a sustained will for individual responsibility, and continuity for the self.

Grant Wacker also describes the affinity between Pentecostalism and advanced capitalism by insightfully demonstrating the inherent pragmatism in Pentecostal life and thought.[31] As Pentecostals rejected "the world," they simultaneously encouraged believers to adapt to the dominant processes of industrialization and urbanization. Wacker writes, "Conversion, sanctification, and Holy Spirit baptism

started with the individual, skirted the institutional church, downplayed the ordinances, and ended with the individual."[32] He quotes historian Joel Carpenter who said, "Pentecostals can be unblushingly self-interested in their worldly dealings because they know that God wants them to prosper here."[33] While many Pentecostal leaders and scholars see a clear connection between conversion and upward mobility, Wacker asserts, "At the end of the day Pentecostals proved remarkably willing to work within the social and cultural expectations of the age. Again and again we see them holding their proverbial finger to the wind, calculating where they were, where they wanted to go and, above all, how to get there."[34]

Prosperity theology energizes a form of spiritual autonomy to survive uncertain circumstances and harnesses ambition to transcendent ends. David Martin believes Pentecostalism is generally suited to a new structure of work that "requires a mobile self and indeed a powerful persona constantly redeployed to meet constantly changing situations and exigencies."[35] Arguing for an elective affinity between neo-Pentecostalism and postmodernity, Martin states that Pentecostalism "fits well enough with the elements identified as belonging to postmodernity: the rapid alternation of environments, and the passage across what were the conventional frontiers of culture and ethnic identity."[36] He asserts that societal circumstances and religious developments are inevitably intertwined. The form of self that is cultivated through the prosperity orientation allows these Pentecostals to adapt better to globalization processes. "Charismatics who embrace this particular style are effectively laying down their own specific tracks across the shifting sands, creating their own mutually recognizable style of transnational, nondenominational identity, and expanding the self to complement an expanding globe."[37] Simon Coleman also asserts that prosperity orientations accommodate well to overwhelming economic pressures in the current climate of globalization.[38]

In addition to highlighting connections between prosperity theology, work, and the religious self, this research also emphasizes the centrality of congregations for bringing these together. The majority of the Oasis workers pursue celebrity in their day-to-day lives as a part of managing their own career paths. The pursuit of fame in and of itself does not contradict or counter believers' sincere pursuit of their faith. Instead, through involvement in the congregation the people of Oasis come to see the pursuit of fame as a means of dutifully fulfilling their deepest beliefs and values as a community. Oasis is a congregation that demonstrates a corporate religious accommodation to a particular organization of society. Pentecostal congregations are therefore

important for actualizing a cohesive religious identity as the "prosperous self " can only be rooted and supported within a face-to-face, voluntary community of believers who face an uncertain world together.

Oasis demonstrates the vitality of religion when it affirms striving in a profane world as a sacred calling. Here we have a transformed millennialism; instead of waiting for the coming of Christ to transform the world, individual believers can be a part of making the kingdom of God real through their concrete, everyday, intentional actions. The power of congregation is found not so much in the transformations that occur in the moments of the meetings but rather in the reframed "life plans" of believers. Beyond church meetings, we see self-sacrificial, self-effacing, self-constraining, self-motivating conduct as members view themselves as extensions of the moral community, namely, in the vernacular of the Oasis Christian Center, as "champions of life."

Here I again highlight the relevance of Beck's framework for understanding religion's ongoing development, adaptation, and accommodation to the very real structures of the world. Life becomes experimental when established recipes for roles no longer work. Because of "prescriptions" of what our lives should be like, there is an increasing number of "construction kits of biographical combination possibilities."[39] The labor market requires individualization, which manifests in the acquisition of a variety of work skills; but for church members, congregational participation mediates the negotiation of the complex processes of the self. This is certainly where the possibilities of religion play an enormous role among American workers. Religion provides a sense of one's life plan and even helps to reinforce the actualization of it through the operation of congregational communities. And the prosperity orientation in contemporary Pentecostal churches is an especially powerful resource for providing a proactive life plan well suited to the exigencies of an advanced, globalized, and uncertain capitalist system.

Endnotes

1. See Gerardo Marti, *Hollywood Faith: Holiness, Prosperity, and Ambition in a Los Angeles Church* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Gerardo Marti, "Ego-affirming Evangelicalism: How a Hollywood Church Appropriates Religion for Workers in the Creative Class," *Sociology of Religion* 71:1 (2010): 52–75.
2. All otherwise undocumented direct quotations of Oasis members derive from my interviews with members.
3. For more on the people and history of Oasis Christian Center, as well as the research methodology used to analyze them, see Marti, *Hollywood Faith.*

4. Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
5. Overall, Beck's theoretical orientation is similar to that which is developed from the sociology-of-knowledge tradition of Karl Marx and Karl Mannheim in which forms of social life, particularly the ideational aspects of life, are formed in relation to the concrete circumstances of human life.
6. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London and Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992); Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (London and Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2002).
7. Scott Lash, "Foreword: Individualization in a Non-Linear Mode," in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, vii.
8. Beck, *Risk Society*, 130.
9. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 25.
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Chapter 7

Urban Property as Spiritual Resource: The Prosperity Gospel Phenomenon in Coastal China

Nanlai Cao

Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 and the subsequent withdrawal of foreign missionaries, Protestant Christianity has been thoroughly indigenized in China by weaving itself into ritual forms, sets of cultural assumptions, and the fabric of power relations derived from immediate local realities. In the absence of a central interpretative authority, organizationally independent church groups are often divided along rural/urban lines, by theological differences, and due to varying relationships with the state apparatus. Pentecostalism has been the most active and dynamic of all Chinese Christian groups outside the officially controlled church system in part due to its ability to adapt to changing local circumstances and its emphasis on people's direct religious experience. In the last few decades of dramatic economic development, the growth of the Pentecostal sector of Chinese Christianity seems to have become increasingly pronounced in certain regions. This has to do with the rapid expansion of new urban church space informed by the emerging prosperity gospel movement. This chapter explores the socioeconomic dynamics of urban Christian revival in post-Mao China with a focus on the rise of the prosperity gospel in developed coastal regions. I first place this prosperity gospel in the historical context of Pentecostal development in modern China. I then draw on a case study to argue that the aggressive appropriation of church space by the upwardly mobile class of believers through the urban real estate market is an integral part of the prosperity gospel phenomenon that is spreading in contemporary coastal China.

Background

In the context of Asia, Pentecostalism refers to Spirit-oriented forms of Christianity, and Pentecostals are usually evangelical in theological orientation.[1] Pentecostal-type Christianity developed rapidly in China's rural provinces in the early twentieth century under the influence of some nationally known Chinese revival preachers.[2] A common feature of early Chinese Pentecostal groups and communities was their strong antagonism toward foreign mission churches, although in their early stages of development they were often influenced by Western Pentecostal missionaries.[3] As it often draws on popular cultural resources in local communities, Pentecostal-influenced Chinese Christianity has tended to flourish in places where there are already well-established indigenous churches and church networks. Although urban-oriented modern Chinese Christians increasingly emphasize the systematic study of theology and a hierarchical, professionalized structure of church management, the longstanding rural-based Pentecostal tradition lingers in the present-day Chinese church and has been revived and strengthened from the 1980s on by clandestine evangelical activities of overseas Pentecostal preachers in China as well as by the introduction of Pentecostal teachings from Chinese-speaking Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Reflecting continuities with the phenomenon of revivalism in the early twentieth century, speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy are frequently viewed as personal spiritual gifts. Even among modern Chinese church groups today that emphasize and promote Christianity as a rationalistic, systemized, theology-driven religion, people desire the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.[4] As China's pace of urbanization and rural industrialization accelerates, this Pentecostal energy has taken on new manifestations in the evolving urban Chinese Christian community. This can best be seen in the case of entrepreneurial church leaders' frenzied pursuit of urban church property as a main spiritual resource for church renewal in the coastal city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province.

The chapter examines this religious property practice as it relates to the rise of the prosperity gospel among urban Wenzhou Christian communities. A new entrepreneurial class-driven Christianity is flourishing on the industrialized southeastern coast thanks to the post-Mao economic reforms. In particular, in the last quarter century the city of Wenzhou has become the largest urban Chinese Christian center with a Christian population estimated to be as many as one million. The reform-era revival of Wenzhou

Christianity has accompanied the city's dynamic industrialization and modernization process. This is not a historical coincidence. A majority of Wenzhou Christian businesspeople today were born into a local faith tradition derived from the early Western missionary enterprise in the region. They became suddenly rich through production and trade after China began to integrate into the global market economy in the reform period. After getting rich, they became increasingly attached to the Christian community because they considered their business success a direct result of God's blessing for Wenzhou's Christian tradition and their own Christian family background. The popular notion of divine causality directs many loosely committed entrepreneur Christians to the Bible for meaning and subsequently fuels their passion for evangelism. Through the popular rhetoric of "Redeeming God's blessing," local church leaders are able to mobilize resources and energies from even formerly half-hearted Christian businesspeople to support a variety of church work but mainly church building and planting. As members of local business elite, these Christians often present themselves as God's stewards and consider their financial contributions to the church as investment in God's miracles. By channeling commercial wealth into church building projects, they forge new notions of wealth and property in local society.[5]

The circular logic of "property Christianity" emerges as people simultaneously strive to redeem the divine blessings and ask for continuing business success. Newfound wealth generates religious commitment. The committed must be wealthy because God does not want his children to stay poor. The wealthy make monetary contributions to the church as repayment so as to spread further the prosperity message that links one's economic condition to personal religious commitment. As the "Christianity fever" expands under the postsocialist context of neoliberal economy, church members—both new converts and longtime believers—continue to draw parallels between commercial wealth and Christian faith. Newly rich members of the church provide business success stories to attest to God's glory and grace while the marginalized poor are led to believe that their poverty is due to their lack of solid faith and spiritual life. On the one hand, Christianity seems to provide a moral framework through which Chinese people can make sense of displacement, inequalities, social vulnerability, and suffering especially in highly industrialized and commercialized coastal regions. On the other hand, the identity of Chinese Christians is also unsettled and transformed by rapid marketization. The intense popular desire to get rich has contributed to

the church's redefinition of what is morally acceptable and religiously correct and what is not. It will become clear that the growing real estate market plays the most important role in empowering young and middle-aged, and newly rich church members against those elderly church leaders who avoid secular engagements and embrace religious resistance and martyrdom.

The new rich entrepreneurs and merchants not only actively advocate church property acquisition but also provide the vital financial capital for many church building projects. These projects and initiatives tend not to be founded, financed, or directed by full-time preachers, pastors, or other Christian leaders. The Wenzhou church enjoys a triumphalist air for its unique entrepreneurial model of development that is best characterized by the aggressive practice of property acquisition and the dramatic growth of church sites. For this entrepreneurial class of church leaders, Christianity and prosperity are indispensable to each other and should ideally be combined.

Although some local Christians have expressed their concern about the overly pragmatic nature of the prosperity belief, the general lack of theological training combined with Christian businessmen's enthusiasm about evangelism continue to facilitate the spread of the prosperity gospel. The most commonly used justification for those who convert for material benefits and personal economic success is that "God uses different methods to bring people to him." The original motivation and initial attraction thus become unimportant. Indeed, Christian conversion promises future economic prosperity especially for those who are driven to succeed in the market economy but have no social resources or connections immediately available. As a well-known local prosperity preacher proclaimed in a sermon, characteristically, "the kind of prosperity we have discussed is different from that of the world, it is promised by God and is real. So we must prosper as God will bless our brothers and sisters."[6]

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Wenzhou, this study shows that local Christian entrepreneurs have spearheaded local church development through the massive production of urban Christian space. The following analysis explores how this entrepreneurial class of church leaders plans for church property acquisition, engages with the state regulation of religious venues, and finances new church projects in order to redeem God's blessing and pursue greater material prosperity in China's fledgling market economy. The analysis also shows how Christians connect building churches with spiritual vitality and evangelism.

Promoting Urban Christian Revival by Constructing Church Sites[7]

Wenzhou's advantaged urban believers are keenly aware of the external image of Wenzhou Christianity and are often unabashed in their enthusiasm of promoting the city's fame as "China's Jerusalem."[8] I myself have heard several times that Wenzhou preachers cite overseas visitors' praise about Wenzhou's Christian revival and the authenticity of "China's Jerusalem." In sermons, Wenzhou preachers intentionally compare the Wenzhou church with the church of Jerusalem. When meeting with outside church visitors, they are more than happy to proclaim Wenzhou's leading status in Chinese Christianity. Although there are also seemingly self-deprecating remarks about the Wenzhou church made by local believers themselves, they always take the title for granted by saying things like "we are so unworthy of the title of China's Jerusalem," "how can we still be called China's Jerusalem?" and "what has happened to China's Jerusalem?" Nevertheless, the notion of "constructing 'China's Jerusalem' " has become a recurring slogan that unites local church communities and forms a common basis for their various coordinated ministries. However, when they talk about constructing "China's Jerusalem" specifically, they mean constructing grand church buildings, a rather concrete way to promote urban Christian revival.

When church leaders share with one another in year-end church council meetings, they frequently mention the acquisition or construction of new church sites as both a main strategy and the most tangible outcome of evangelism. Individual church members tend to see the acquisition of new church property as an expression of faith, a main indicator of Christian revival, and a reflection of the church leader's personal charisma. This is why Wenzhou church leaders like to talk about the high costs of their church buildings. The "fever for church building" highlights the dynamic process of Wenzhou Christian development in which regional political economy, local cultural tradition, and religious meaning have been closely intertwined.

For Wenzhou Christians, the notion of the Wenzhou church not only means Christian sites in Wenzhou itself but also in other parts of China and in other countries. This is well captured by a proud local Christian saying, "where there are Wenzhou businesspeople, there are Wenzhou Christians, and where there are Wenzhou Christians, there are Wenzhou churches." Wenzhou Christians doing business in other places are eager to establish their own churches and are reluctant to cooperate with local churches in the host society in their

church building projects. A Christian businessman who does business in a north China city provides a typical explanation of this phenomenon, "I advocate that we Wenzhou people build our own Wenzhou church in other places to establish a brand; if this is a brand, then others would say Wenzhounese is powerful, the people can build such a luxurious church elsewhere to let others attend. This is very good testimony."

This Christian businessman is the vice head of the Wenzhou chamber of commerce in that northern city, and he told me how he used the chamber's network to spread the gospel in the city in order to "let the city be blessed due to our Wenzhou people." He firmly rejected the request from the city's officially sanctioned Protestant organization to erect a building together with a local church already in that city. By constructing an independent church building, he can hang the sign of "the Wenzhou church." According to him, "building churches is more influential than evangelization" and "using the name of Wenzhounese and of the Wenzhou church to show the positive image is more meaningful." Despite reservations, the official municipal government-sanctioned Protestant organization has approved the purchase of land for the new Wenzhou church project in this north China city.

There are already large Wenzhou churches in Europe, particularly in Italy, Spain and France, the three main destinations for Wenzhou migrants.[9] These costly immigrant churches are the great pride of local Christians in Wenzhou, as the buildings maintain the distinct Wenzhou place-based identity overseas. Overseas Wenzhou Christians tend to maintain close transnational ties to the church communities back in Wenzhou.[10] These immigrant Wenzhou churches regularly invite Wenzhou preachers to preach there in Wenzhou dialect and pay their travel expenses.[11] The worldwide expansion of the Wenzhou church space seems to have nurtured a distinctive local place-based identity and pride. Thus, the subjective notion of "China's Jerusalem" is not a bounded spatial entity but a product of Chinese Christians' ongoing self-fashioning across local, regional, and national borders.

The Prosperity Vision Develops into Christian Architectural Reality

Regional capitalist development has triggered the expansion of Christian influence in Wenzhou society in the last few decades of post-Mao liberalization. This development has also played a mediating role between local meanings and transnational social processes

in the making of Wenzhou Christian landscape.[12] Currently there are more than 1,200 churches in the greater Wenzhou region.[13] The Wenzhou Christian architecture represents a huge investment by different individuals, enterprises, and church organizations, domestic and overseas. In the last quarter century, the Wenzhou church has been focused on building its institutional structure and establishing and expanding religious space. According to a local church preacher, after the churches were allowed to open and church properties were returned in 1979, there was a wave of church building in the 1980s, mainly to meet the needs of local church gatherings. But since the 1990s, a fierce competition has developed among local Christian communities to "build the most costly church, the most beautiful church, and even the tallest cross." In Wenzhou's industrialized and prosperous areas, most house churches have erected church buildings. The house churches in the central city have all purchased real estate; some spent around 5–6 million yuan or close to 1 million USD (1 USD is equivalent to 7 yuan) and some even over ten million yuan (close to 1.5 million USD) to purchase their gathering sites, in defiance of the central state regulation of religious venues.

Connections to Western Life

Christian churches have become a fixture of the local community since the early twentieth century. Local church buildings are usually among the tallest edifices and overlook the local community. The tall Gothic bell tower together with the large red cross on top of it tends to reflect religious meanings (to be close to God in heaven and to guard the local community) and reinforce a sense of spiritual superiority among Wenzhou Christians. The grand church buildings can be read as a result of Wenzhou's extensive history of political marginalization and commercialization. They can also be seen as monuments erected in remembrance of the entrenched local faith tradition and as calling for more freedom and space for local Christian development in the contemporary postsocialist context.

The aggressive expansion of Christian sites within Wenzhou reflects the specific way local believers simultaneously negotiate social identity and divine power.[14] The deeply Western architectural style of most Wenzhou church buildings embodies local believers' claim to a cosmopolitan modernity. Yet this architectural style is more specifically due to Wenzhou's extensive historical exposure to Western missionary influences. It has always impressed overseas Christians who came for a visit for the first time.

Profound socioeconomic and technological advancements in reform-era China have contributed to the fancy exterior and interior designs of the local church, testifying not only to the members' strong sense of religious identity but also to their attitude toward the accumulation of wealth and the display of status distinction. The popular use of English characters in decorating churches is a public display of prestigious Western connections to the faith. I have been to a Wenzhou outer-suburban church that has the gilded English verse "return to Jehovah to be holy" on the façade and English "up" and "down" signs in the stairs, even though most of its members are illiterate elderly people who cannot speak Mandarin properly not to mention English. For many, the Christian faith's Western connections embody modernity and thus naturally constitute a way to display prestige and to produce distinction in a region where transnationalism has been underway since ancient times. The Wenzhou Christian architecture with its deep Western connection has become a site in which local believers actively and knowingly lay claim to cosmopolitan modernity.

Brother Fu, a former businessman, expressed his vision for building a large modern new church in cosmopolitan terms,

> I have suggested several times to build a big church. In Hangzhou, the city government has approved 18 *mu* (3 acre) land to build a church. Liushi Township of Leqing County also has prepared several dozen *mu* for new church construction. But in Wenzhou, popularly known as "Jerusalem" and "Antioch," we still don't have a good one, and the current ones are all old styles. For example, the Chengxi Church used to be the largest one, but now it is not good. It is only good for elders, while young people have motorcycles, bikes and cars but cannot find space. So the current church development should first consider building a basement [underground parking garage]. When they were planning to build the Yongguang Church, I proposed to build a basement as a top priority, but they all have old brains (*lao naojin*), just wanting to have a place for gathering. They have no visions for the future development. In Singapore we can see the city's sanitation, traffic and parking are all so good. I have been to a shopping mall where they have a multistory underground parking lot. In the residence I stayed, there is an underground garden that has such a big parking space . . .

Fu is a transnational who has relatives in Singapore and Spain and who has recently immigrated to Spain to join his daughter and to lead a Wenzhou immigrant church there. This was not the first time I heard local churchgoers talking about the plan of building a big,

luxurious landmark city church that would fit Wenzhou's status as "China's Jerusalem." I overhead a group of middle-aged Wenzhou Christian entrepreneurs discussing the problem of their church parking lot over a fancy dinner banquet in a four-star-rated hotel. They were planning to build a modern landmark church in the city centre of Wenzhou, which would require an enormous parking lot. One former factory boss who had just attended a seminary in California immediately referred to a church in the United States where, according to him, "the church parking space may exceed the actual worship space." Those who have extended overseas life experiences are always in a privileged position to share their visions about church construction.

The Wenzhou Christians desire to build churches so intensely that some even enjoy just dreaming about or planning church buildings, for church property acquisition is often considered a main indicator of church development. Many Christian leaders are themselves real estate bosses, who are commonly known in the church community as having "the (spiritual) gift of buying church buildings."[15] They have profited from dealing in real estate in Wenzhou and across China. Some have left their enterprises and rely on rental income from their factory workshops, stalls, shop fronts, and apartment buildings. Simply sharing and promoting a big church building plan can be thrilling for many who like to dream big. Brother Luo is a Christian businessman who has an investment company in Shanghai and made a fortune through investing in real estate. Luo always carries a portfolio in his leather business case that contains a project description titled "the proposal for constructing a ten-thousand-person church in Shanghai," and he is always ready to share this big plan with great zeal in meetings and encounters, formal or informal. According to him, thinking about this great vision makes him too excited to sleep at night. On a number of occasions, he has also shared a dream of building such a large church in central China that it could be included in the Guinness Book of Records. To secure their status and display their wealth, Christian entrepreneurs often prefer big church buildings to small house church spaces.[16]

The big church dream also reveals local Christians' desire to worship in large group settings: the fervent spiritual atmosphere in such environments helps induce charismatic experiences.[17] Almost all major local churches periodically hold mass prayer sessions as a type of church service to achieve spiritual renewal. Local Christians also use regular large-scale spiritual cultivation meetings deliberately to create a Spirit-filled atmosphere and seek the "presence of the Holy

Spirit" among a big crowd of participants. Such Pentecostal meetings usually take place in spacious local churches and can last for several days. According to some church leaders, the church badly needs a renewal movement to help today's churchgoers gain a deeper spiritual experience. These emotionally charged meetings provide a medium for participants to express freely both their aspirations and despair in the post-Mao context of marketization as well as find a renewed purpose in life. The Pentecostal-style worship is employed to achieve such a renewal, and urban Christian space becomes an indispensable spiritual resource for this use.[18]

Negotiating with the State

In creating new urban Christian structures Wenzhou Christians are not only able to take advantage of opportunities granted by the state, but they are also able to create opportunities for the church community that are in opposition to the state religious policy. At the macroinstitutional level, the revival of Christian sites in the last quarter century in the Wenzhou area has benefited from the laissez-faire governance of religion during the reform era. At the microinteraction level, it has a great deal to do with individual believers' strategic engagement with the local state's regulation of religious venues.

Unlike corporate organizations, churches often lack the legal status to purchase real estate and have great difficulty in obtaining land. The state-approved formal procedures for church property acquisition require churches to lodge their applications with the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) first at the local county level. After the county-level RAB reviews and approves the application, it also needs the approval of both city- and provincial-level RABs.[19] Furthermore, the church must have its legal status as a state-registered church in the first place. Not surprisingly, very few local churches have observed or been able to observe this lengthy and complicated official procedure since the ultimate purpose of the state regulation of religion (particularly Christianity) is to discourage its further development. Most local churches bypass state religious governance by following the capitalist market logic in acquiring space for gatherings. They usually have individual church leaders or members act as the legal persons who hold the deed.

Individuals—rather than the church—are listed on the deeds of most church buildings. In the church circle it is deemed an extremely risky thing for individuals to hold the deeds for church property.

Ideally, the church selects the most trustworthy person to assume the role of the person who legally signs the real estate contract on behalf of the church. The common practice is for the person to sign two different contracts: a formal one to obtain the property and an informal one for the church to claim its ultimate ownership. This arrangement helps the church circumvent the state's restrictions on church property acquisition.

Before, during, and after the church property acquisition, well-connected, economically powerful Wenzhou Christian elites play a prominent role in avoiding undesirable state intervention. The entrepreneurial class of church leaders actively seeks the state's formal or informal recognition of their technically illegal new churches by using smooth social connections they have cultivated with local party cadres in the "socialist market economy."[20] As main beneficiaries of the economic reform and consummate businessmen in the post-Mao state, Wenzhou Christian entrepreneurs hold a very positive attitude toward the reform-era state and take a rather pragmatic approach to religious governance by the state. Through their maneuvers, many newly acquired local church sites are able to operate openly without a license, even though they hold an ambiguous legal status in between the officially registered church and the traditional "unauthorized" house church.

Sometimes the Christian entrepreneurs not only dream big but also know how to use the formal institutional channels to make those dreams come true. This is particularly true for those who hold certain political influence in local society. Brother Tang, a real estate boss and the head of a district-level Christian Council proposed a church building project on behalf of the local Christian community at a district-level meeting of the Wenzhou Political Consultative Conference in early 2006. The proposal, entitled "On the Further Implementation of Religious Policy," states,

> The Zhangli Church of Qidu Township in this district is an overseas Chinese-dominated church (*qiaoxiang tang*). According to statistics, there are about 500 believers residing in 16 countries like the U.S., France, and Italy. The overseas Chinese Christians want strongly to build a church in Qidu that can fit Wenzhou's development, link up with the international track (*yu guoji jiegui*), promote Lucheng district's economic development, and enhance the overall image of Lucheng.[21]

Tang has been to the Middle East and South Korea. He has registered a Christian organization called "China International Evangelization

Centre" in Hong Kong. Impressed and inspired by South Korea's world's largest church, Yoido Full Gospel Church, which was founded by Pentecostal pastor Yonggi Cho and can accommodate tens of thousands of people at once, he has been an avid advocate for the local church building plan. He firmly believes that Korea's big church project triggered its dramatic spiritual revival. Tang's proposal has adopted the goals and language of modernization offered by the state and has stressed the demand of overseas Wenzhou Christians. The district-level RAB responded to Tang's proposal in a very positive tone and even reaffirmed his basic assumption on the link between Christianity and urban development. The following constitutes the official state response:

> Lucheng district is the political, economic and cultural centre of Wenzhou. To build a big and high class church in this district not only can fit the district's modern urban face, but also can further open the city up, strengthen international communication, enhance the overall image of our district. Qidu is a famous overseas Chinese-dominated town. Many overseas patriotic Chinese all believe in Christianity. When they return to visit their relatives on the Chinese New Year or other festivals, they need a place for worship. But the current scale of the Zhangli Church cannot meet their demands. We have contacted the local township government and suggested them to incorporate the building of the Zhangli Christian church to the overall development plan of Qidu Township. It is reported that the Wenzhou Planning Bureau has requested permission from the municipal government to draw up a plan on the sites of religious architectures in Wenzhou city and will try to carry out the detailed church project as soon as possible based on this plan.[22]

The Christian businessman's proposal appeals to the local state authorities due to the wide consensus that Christianity is a deeply embedded feature of cosmopolitan modernity and that a grand local church building can play a role in creating ties with the international community, thus improving the face of a rapidly modernizing and globalizing Chinese city. More importantly, this case shows that the economic power, strategic vision, and cosmopolitan experiences of Chinese Christian entrepreneurs gives them particular leverage in negotiating with the local state on behalf of the church. The consent and support of local state agents acquired by such resourceful entrepreneur believers enables many local churches to achieve their goals directly through the market without being hindered by the intervention of political power.

Property Acquisition and the Prosperity Message

While the practices of financing church property acquisition have remained distinctively local place-based, they are also used to build Wenzhou churches in other parts of China and in the Wenzhou diaspora in Europe. The way Wenzhou Christians seek to establish new churches parallels how Wenzhou businesspeople set up their own firms. I was often reminded by the business-oriented local people that a unique Wenzhounese virtue is that "everyone wants to be a boss" and "everyone can be a boss."[23] One can be easily overwhelmed by the local reality and legacy of petty capitalism in this entrepreneurial city. Such a spirit of entrepreneurship is also shared by ambitious local Christian leaders in the face of various challenges and restrictions on church development.

In fact, the main source of funding for most local church building projects comes from the private entrepreneurs and individual merchants, who are usually the strongest advocates of such plans. Some Christian entrepreneurs even promise a great amount of money well before the idea of a building plan is finalized. One big garment factory boss, who also has real estate in several parts of the country, announced in a church meeting that if his church decided to purchase a local badminton stadium as a new church site (which would cost about 7 million yuan or 1 million USD), he would contribute 1.5 million yuan immediately. Local believers earnestly view and boast of such performances (a public display of both piety and wealth) as a reflection of both "God's grace" and the individual's "great confidence in God's plan."[24] Though the whole congregation theoretically contributes to the church in different ways (e.g., financial support, unpaid labor, offer of building materials, and obtaining permits using social connections), there is heavy dependence on private entrepreneurs. That Christian businessmen donate millions of yuan to church property acquisition is now a commonplace in Wenzhou. Local Christian groups interpret it as a highly spiritual practice based on their Christian faith.

This sort of informal lending also enables a great number of Wenzhou Christians who lack immediate financial capital or ministry and pastoral resources to set up their own churches. The practice of taking informal loans greatly shortens the period between the planning for the new church and a church space purchase or the completion of church construction. These practices are consistent with broader trends in Wenzhou financial life outside the church: Wenzhou people commonly pool their money together in a single investment

project; using "hui" (literally "meeting," a form of financial mutual help among relatives and friends) is the most popular means of grassroots fundraising. Wenzhou has become the hub of informal lending in China. Outside the official banking system, money flows around in the form of informal loans to finance the starting of small local enterprises. This partly explains why family-owned enterprises have dominated the Wenzhou model of economic development.

I have frequently observed a combination of donations and informal lending in financing new Wenzhou church projects. Quite often, the acquisition of new church property rests on the decision of a few or just a single entrepreneur. This greatly expedites the process of acquiring a new church space. Without a license from the RAB, these new urban churches are representative of a wave of newly emerging but fast-growing independent churches in Wenzhou. Many local churches follow the capitalist market logic in acquiring space for gatherings. They usually take loans from multiple sources such as banks, other local churches, individual believers, and private enterprises. Bank loans are usually obtained by individual church members in the name of personal housing mortgage. Though such religious space is supposedly not for productive use or real estate speculation, the congregation often views it as collective commercial assets that will continue to appreciate in China's booming real estate market.

Through acquiring large church space, new independent churches in Wenzhou can gradually gain legitimacy among local church communities and establish their own independent institutional structure. In some cases, church membership has risen from several dozen to a few hundred in a short period following the construction or acquisition of a new building. This is an example of how the acquisition of church worship space has greatly facilitated the formation and development of Christian subjects.[25] A middle-aged pastor reiterates this connection between the expansion of church space and the growth of church membership. "In Wenzhou, if you build a new church, it immediately fills up," he said. "You build another church, and it fills up too. That's the way it is here."[26] Indeed, Wenzhou Christianity has expressed its intense religious energy and expanded its influence through the massive "reappropriation of sacred space."[27] The economic logic of fixed-asset investment and the entrepreneurial spirit of multiplication have greatly facilitated the founding of a rising number of independent churches that used to be small groups and fellowships affiliated with larger churches in Wenzhou.

The skyrocketing appreciation of the church property in the real estate market also allows forward-looking entrepreneurial believers to

accrue great popularity within their congregations. Unlike Buddhist and Daoist temples that usually honor donors by displaying lists of their names and their donation figures on plaques or steles, church members are supposed to make anonymous financial contributions to the church for the sake of God rather than for showing off in front of people. However, this is often not the case when it involves a large amount of money (anonymity is also technically impossible in the case of large payment). The huge contributions business people make to church property acquisition are a good example of this. Big donors rarely go unnoticed or unacknowledged in the church circle, despite the popular local Christian saying that "glory belongs to God." This is partly why today's middle-aged entrepreneurs are highly represented on committees of local churches and assume the church leadership:[28] they are, in the local congregation's view, most capable of "bringing glory to God." The perceived connection between urban wealth and spiritual leadership speaks to a prosperity belief that seems to be dominating Christian communities in China's entrepreneurial coastal zones. It goes without saying that as the church's space further expands, the entrepreneurial class of Christians will enjoy increased power and authority in the church community.

Conclusion

Church property acquisition plays a pivotal role in the urban Chinese Christian revival. It also has an intrinsic connection to the rise of a prosperity-oriented Pentecostalism in the post-Mao era. Both the Pentecostal desire for large emotion-filled meetings and the lack of a centralized church authority contribute to the widespread church building and planting movement depicted here. The emerging urban Christian landscape in prosperous coastal China has been shaped by local believers' desire to create their own space for spiritual life as well as by their entrepreneurship embodied in the logic and practice of property acquisition. Undoubtedly, post-Mao reforms have set a macro-institutional parameter for Chinese Christians to engage with market forces and state agents and discourses. The market economy enables them to find new and creative ways to appropriate church space and refashion local church landscape. They have not only enthusiastically promoted their vision for property acquisition but also developed practical strategies to turn the vision into reality. So far I have illustrated the complex processes of such spatial production and the underlying sociospiritual meanings in one locality. The fact that advantaged Chinese Christians embrace the notion of urban

property as spiritual resource can have profound implications for the future development and identity of Chinese Christianity.

The nature of the urban religious revival in contemporary coastal China is best understood as a celebration by entrepreneurial lay leaders and believers of their post-Mao business success and an imbuement of spiritual and moral significance upon their newfound wealth in the market transition period. Through building grand Western-style churches, these Chinese Christians aim at constructing a new "Jerusalem" that they believe will mark China's rise in not only the international economic domain but also the global spiritual sphere. This ambitious project may not always be carried out as envisaged. Nevertheless it signals their local power, moral rectitude, and spiritual prestige. Local entrepreneurs who make huge financial contributions to church building projects are often said in the local church community to possess lofty spiritual qualities and their testimonies are circulated widely in local church circles. Church property acquisition thus becomes a spiritually inflected practice of capital investment that sublimates unequal access to commercial wealth and opportunities.

As this study shows, the urban Christian church has become one of the vehicles by which local economic elites vie for status and power. This class of newly rich urban Christians can be contrasted with elderly, rural Chinese Christians who derive their charisma and authority from Mao-era experiences of persecution and suffering and who thus embrace a culture of martyrdom. The tension between spiritual and secular, God and Mammon, that used to be so central to rural Chinese Christian identity, has been resolved in the feverish movement of producing Christian space and sites in coastal urban China. This identity shift subsequently allows Chinese Christians to attain a sense of social significance in the state-engineered modernization process. They no longer need reject the secular; they may now marshal its resources for the good of Christianity.

Empowered by the reformist state ideology of "getting rich is glorious," the rising prosperity gospel attests to the ambitious attempt of those who seek to create coherence in the religious–economic world in which they find themselves. The Western, imposing church buildings in the reform era enable the new entrepreneurial class to display their newfound wealth more effectively; these buildings are likely to foster a new Pentecostal-style Christian revival. For many local believers, the grand church buildings are already a main indicator

of Christian revival in the area and are as important as (if not more important than) evangelism itself. This unique pattern of the Chinese church's real estate practice allows entrepreneurial believers to translate their economic power into power in church governance and networks as well as to channel their entrepreneurial logic into the daily workings of the church community. Within this context, many newly rich entrepreneurs have become part-time volunteer preachers and lay church leaders who consciously or unconsciously disseminate the prosperity theology. The entrepreneurial production of church space thus embodies newly rich Christians' self-conscious and deliberate endeavor to bring the prosperity gospel into reality. In sum, the post-Mao revival of urban church sites can be seen as both an expression of the explosive growth of privatized spirituality and a means to symbolically accommodate and promote mass participation in a new entrepreneurial world in the reform era.

By examining the underlying entrepreneurial logic and practice of the Wenzhou Christian development, I have also offered an opportunity to understand Chinese Christian revival in the broader context of an emerging post-Mao entrepreneurial modernity. It is important, however, to note that this inquiry does not necessarily draw a causal relationship between economic intention and Christian revival. Instead, this case study of the Chinese Christian revival and the local subjects who are active participants in creating it reveals instances of both religious production and consumption under rapid marketization and commercialization. All of this attests to the mundane logic, strategies, and reactions that contribute to producing the social and material context of the post-Mao spiritual renewal. This focus on the economic organization of the religious movement helps demystify the sudden phenomenal growth of Chinese Christianity in the last three decades. As this case shows, at the core of urban Christian revival is the newly ascendant capitalist class of Chinese Christians that uses its newfound economic muscle to assert its religious interests against tight state regulation and position itself as an agent of change not only in economic terms but also in the religious and spiritual sphere.

Fueled by utopian dreams of capitalist success that are so prevalent in Chinese society today, the prosperity gospel both characterizes and further shapes the pattern of post-Mao Christian revival, which can be traced back to early indigenous Pentecostal networks. Given the current national context of political-economic configurations, I would predict that the prosperity gospel represented by the practices

of Wenzhou Christian entrepreneurs today is likely to take similar forms in other Chinese regional economies that are undergoing rapid rural industrialization and modernization in the future.

Endnotes

1. Allan Anderson, "The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia," in Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds., *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (London: Regnum Books International, 2005), 2.
2. Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 126–35.
3. Daniel Bays, "Indigenous Protestant Churches in China, 1900–1937: A Pentecostal Case Study," in Steven Kaplan, ed., *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 124–43.
4. For a discussion of native revivalism in the early twentieth century and its continued impact on contemporary Chinese Christianity, see Daniel Bays, "Christian Revival in China: 1900–1937," In Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer, eds., *Modern Christian Revivals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 161–79.
5. For a more complete view of the economic–religious dynamics of Christian Wenzhou, see Nanlai Cao, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).
6. Names of individual informants and churches have been changed in this paper to ensure anonymity.
7. A portion of the material presented in this section and the next is drawn from my earlier article, "Boss Christians: The Business of Religion in the 'Wenzhou Model' of Christian Revival," *The China Journal* 59 (2008): 63–87.
8. See David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2003), ch. 9, for a journalist account of Wenzhou Christians' pride of their city's reputation as "China's Jerusalem." An outspoken elder Wenzhou church leader claims that he first used this term in the 1990s in an essay titled "Wenzhou: China's Jerusalem," which later circulated in the Western Christian world, see Zheng Datong, *Shen de jiaohui zai Wenzhou* (The Church of God in Wenzhou), unpublished manuscript.
9. Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, ch. 9, also notes the rising number of Wenzhou Chinese churches in Europe.
10. Many Wenzhou Christians are conscious about this Wenzhou model in church development. Some proudly use the term "the Wenzhou model" when referring to the autonomy of the immigrant Wenzhou churches in Europe. See Wang Chunguang and Jean Philippe Beja,

"Wenzhou ren zai bali: yizhong dute de shehui rongru moshi" (The Wenzhounese in Paris: A Unique Model of Social Integration), *Chinese Journal of Social Science* 6 (1999):106–19, for a comparison.

11. Usually, the Wenzhou preachers and church leaders travel on business visas with invitation letters issued by Wenzhou Christian firms overseas. This convenient arrangement circumvents certain state restrictions imposed on cross-border religious exchange and greatly facilitates the circulation of people, resources, and ideas between the Wenzhou churches overseas and those back home.
12. See Helen F. Siu, "The Cultural Landscape of Luxury Housing in South China: A Regional History," in Steven Kaplan, ed., *Locating China: Space, Place, and Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 73–93, on the role of a regional political economy in shaping and refashioning urban space.
13. Cunfu Chen and Tianhai Huang, "The Emergence of a New Type of Christian in China Today," *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 2 (2004): 183–200.
14. See Jeanne H. Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), for an extended discussion of the connection between church architecture and religious experience and practice.
15. Most big Wenzhou entrepreneurs are also real estate bosses. They respond to uncertainty in the transitional economy by diversifying their assets and investment.
16. Besides acting as the main donor, many Christian businessmen often supervise the whole process of design, finance, and construction of the new church building.
17. Cf. Adam Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), ch. 8. The Christian notion of *huo re* can be compared with the term *honghuo* (social heat) that characterizes the most desirable mode of peasant sociality.
18. During my stay in the field, I heard many proposed Wenzhou church building plans, not only focusing on sites in Wenzhou but in other parts of the country including Shanghai, Henan, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Shandong.
19. See Zhejiang Provincial Religious Affairs Regulations (revised edition, 2006), part 4.
20. Nanlai Cao, "Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State: An Ethnographic Account of Church-State Relations in China's Economic Transition," *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 1 (2007): 45–66.
21. Documents obtained from the Third Meeting of the Lucheng District Committee of Wenzhou City, the Sixth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Wenzhou, 2006).
22. Ibid.

23. Cai Kejiao, "Wenzhou renwen jingshen chutan" (An Analysis of the Humanist Spirit of the Wenzhou people), *Bulletin of Zhejiang Normal University* (social science edition) 2 (1999): 28–31.
24. To dream big and be flamboyant is a modern urban virtue nowadays not only in Wenzhou but across China. It helps boost one's confidence in business practices and presents the essential capacity and credibility in the transitional economy that is full of uncertainties.
25. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).
26. Quoted in Nicholas D. Kristof, "Christianity is Booming in China Despite Rifts," *The New York Times* (February 7, 1993), A16.
27. Mayfair M. Yang, "Spatial Struggles: Postcolonial Complex, State Disenchantment, and Popular Reappropriation of Space in Rural Southeast China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 3 (2004): 719–55.
28. Cao, "Christian Entrepreneurs and the Post-Mao State"; Chen Cunfu, "Shimin shenfen jidutu yanjiu" (A Study of the Christian Townspeople), in Luo Bingxiang and Jiang Peisheng, eds., *Jidujiao sixiang yu 21 shiji* (*Christian Thought and the 21st Century*) (Beijing: zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001), 367–94.

Chapter 8

The Prosperity Gospel among Filipino Catholic Charismatics

Katharine L. Wiegele

Introduction

Although the Philippines remains overwhelmingly Catholic, the growing popularity of Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, and charismatic Catholicism has become a major current in the religious scene. El Shaddai, a popular and now global Catholic charismatic group based in Manila,[1] is the largest of the Catholic charismatic groups in the Philippines today. The prosperity gospel features prominently in El Shaddai's appeal.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this chapter explores the discursive transformations that make El Shaddai's prosperity theology appealing to its Roman Catholic adherents. It shows how a revaluation of the socioeconomic self within society often occurs alongside spiritual renewal. Deliberate and critical reflections on aspects of lifestyle and mainstream Roman Catholicism accompany this new model of self. This personal change takes shape within new narratives of life trajectories and aspirations through both a reassessment of personal conditions of poverty and an orientation toward individual rather than societal transformation.

After giving a brief background of the El Shaddai movement, I describe the main features of its prosperity message. I then show how El Shaddai's mostly lower-middle-class and aspiring middle-class Catholic members put the prosperity gospel to practice by reframing overly determined discourses of class and poverty to create alternative understandings of self and a renewed sense of personal agency. In my conclusion I note that the shift in orientation toward an individualistic view of prosperity has produced some ideological

friction with the more collectively oriented strands of the Philippine Catholic Church.

Background

El Shaddai is one among many renewal groups in the Philippines.[2] While the percentage of Filipinos who identify themselves as Catholics in the Philippines has remained largely stable at around 81 percent since at least the 1940s, charismatics (Pentecostals and charismatics in Catholic or mainline Protestant denominations) and Pentecostals (people who belong to Pentecostal churches) have accounted for an increasing segment of the Christian population since the 1970s.

According to an extensive 2006 nationwide survey, 19 percent of all Christians in the Philippines are involved in the Pentecostal or charismatic renewal (15 percent of all Catholics and 39 percent of all non-Catholics).[3] Because of the Catholic majority, this means that the renewal movement is largely a Catholic one, as 70 percent of all renewalists are Catholic in the Philippines.[4] The Pew Research Center's multination survey done in the same year offered slightly different but equally striking results.[5] It found that 44 percent of the Philippines population is now part of the renewal movement (4 percent are Pentecostal and 40 percent are charismatic).[6] The same study found comparable distributions in Brazil and Guatemala, with charismatics accounting for a large portion of the renewal movement in each country, possibly due to the presence of large Catholic charismatic groups.[7]

El Shaddai began in 1984 as a nondenominational Christian radio program in Manila; within a few years it described itself as a Catholic lay group, in keeping with the affiliation of its founder and the majority of its followers. Within fifteen years, the group had become a substantial movement with a followership in the millions.[8] The group has chapters in nearly every province in the Philippines and in almost forty countries, with overseas participation comprising around 30 percent of the total followership. The group is best known for its massive outdoor Saturday night rallies in Manila, which attract a half million to a million followers each week. These "prayer and healing rallies," which feature emotional preaching by "Brother Mike" Velarde, the group's charismatic founder and "servant-leader," are broadcast on television and radio throughout the country. Tapes of Velarde's sermons circulate widely among Filipino overseas workers, as do El Shaddai monthly magazines and newsletters. Neighborhood chapters hold weekly prayer meetings in barrio locations, which are usually led

by El Shaddai-trained preachers who circulate between chapters in the capital, throughout the provinces, and internationally.

Brother Mike is a businessman turned preacher, without any formal religious training. His evocative and entertaining preaching style, his populist persona and message of prosperity, and the belief that he can channel miracles to the faithful, however, allow him to attract crowds and monetary collections that are the envy of Catholic clergymen.[9] The El Shaddai congregation and Velarde himself have been influential in national politics during successive presidencies beginning with the term of Fidel Ramos (1992–8). While members do not vote as a block, Brother Mike's endorsement is highly sought after, and he often voices his opinions publicly on matters of national significance. Equally important are El Shaddai's mass mobilizations of members for rallies and public rituals, which are often organized as a form of civic action or discursive involvement in response to current political and social issues.

In recent years, El Shaddai has begun to focus energies on institutional development, civic engagement, and longer-term influence in wider Filipino society through (1) systematizing preacher formation, (2) building a large worship center, (3) establishing the "College of Divine Wisdom," which combines higher education and professional training with "El Shaddai spirituality," (4) engaging in national politics through representation in Congress, and (5) developing higher-profile discursive engagement mainly in Catholic hot-button social issues such as birth control and abortion (population control) and issues of morality (such as corruption). In 2010 Brother Mike publically explored running for president of the country, but eventually he decided against it. In 2007, El Shaddai was represented in the Congress of the Philippines under the party-list system with its pro-life *Buhay* party, which topped the party-list polls in 2007, winning three House of Representative seats; in 2010 it retained two seats.

As in other charismatic and Pentecostal movements worldwide, El Shaddai religiosity emphasizes the workings of the Holy Spirit (e.g., faith healing, miracles, and emotional worship experiences) over doctrine.[10] However, the Philippine Roman Catholic Church officially recognizes El Shaddai as a Catholic lay movement. Catholic members of El Shaddai do not convert to another denomination, nor must they opt out of traditional Catholic cultural practices such as godparenthood and barrio fiestas (many such Catholic cultural practices—such as All Soul's Day celebrations, rosaries, and the prominent role of Jesus's mother, Mary—are nevertheless downplayed). El Shaddai's Catholic affiliation confers some legitimacy within this predominantly

Catholic country. Although El Shaddai ministries generally operate as if they were an independent church, local chapters are linked with local Catholic parishes, and the movement has a Catholic clergy member as a spiritual advisor. A portion of its collections go to the Catholic Church, and mass is said at El Shaddai rallies.

In local neighborhood chapters, part-time El Shaddai healers merge prosperity theology teachings with shamanic, charismatic, and Roman Catholic-style rituals as evidenced in the healing, exorcism, and spiritual counseling I witnessed in homes and at small prayer meetings. "Counseling" house calls, for example, involve healing rituals lasting for hours in which subjects are "slain in the spirit" and healers channel the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues. They also exorcize evil spirits through healing, praying-over, and "binding" with holy water. Locally specific ritual styles (such as the use of a folk incantation and the incorporation of modified Catholic ritual elements) and local social concerns (engaging, for example, local cosmology, the challenges of dislocation, changes in family and gender roles) make these practices locally resonant. They also produce a revitalized spiritual arena in which so-called authentic healing power has shifted to El Shaddai contexts, which in turn lends power and credence to the prosperity theology.

El Shaddai's prosperity message has been the most publically salient point of divergence with mainstream Catholic theology. Its emphasis on worldly over eternal concerns has been a major point of contention with mainstream Filipino Roman Catholics and clergy. Critics accuse Velarde of preying on the needs and desires of a class of Filipinos for whom survival itself is often a struggle. Although different renewal communities and churches cater to different social classes, El Shaddai, which has shaped the public image of the charismatic movement in general in the Philippines, draws predominantly from the lower classes. According to El Shaddai's Social Services Department, approximately 80 percent of El Shaddai's membership falls below the national poverty line. My own nonrandom survey of 259 people at several El Shaddai rallies supports these estimates. In response to some of these criticisms, Velarde established a variety of social services for members during the 1990s.

El Shaddai's Prosperity Gospel

The El Shaddai group is arguably the poster child of the prosperity approach in the Philippines. It shares with other prosperity groups an acceptance of material prosperity and an emphasis on healing and

miracles, which appeal across social classes and denominations.[11] Velarde teaches that "El Shaddai's Master Plan" (God's plan) for us is prosperity, good health, and success in this life, ultimately because "He [God] wants us to be a part of His plan to build His Kingdom on earth."[12] Velarde's prosperity theology was likely shaped by Pat Robertson's religious talk show/news program *700 Club* and Kenneth Hagin, an American pastor known for his "health and wealth" gospel. Hagin's booklet *El Shaddai* was the inspiration behind this movement's name, which Velarde translates as "the God who is more than enough."[13] Hagin is the most senior of the "positive confession charismatics" and more generally of the contemporary "health and wealth movement."[14] The "health and wealth gospel," also called the "prosperity gospel," has three distinctive features: a belief in spiritual healing of physical ailments, an emphasis on material prosperity, and the use of positive confession.[15]

Like Robertson, Velarde emphasized physical healing from the beginning. His sermons have long been self-described as "healing messages," and from the movement's inception as a radio program, physical healing through the Holy Spirit and by means of positive confession has been a priority. Miraculous healing often becomes the subject of public testimony.

The idea of positive confession is based largely on Mark 11:24: "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours."[16] In Velarde's words, "...brothers and sisters, the word of faith is right in your tongue...So whatever it is you would like to say or believe, truly those things will happen."[17] Positive confession at times resembles "positive thinking." In one live rally broadcast, Velarde said:

> Say this: Think great! *[Think great!]* Think right! *[Think right!]* Do you understand what "think great" means? *[Yes!]* Just think of things that are remarkable or worth praising. Do not think of your situation. Forget about your situation. Because if we constantly think of our situation, then we constantly think of ourselves, and so Satan overcomes/beats us. Amen? *[Amen!]*.[18]

Miracle of Seed-Faith Principle

According to El Shaddai's prosperity theology, good things happen to you if you follow the "principles" of Yahweh El Shaddai (God). As in Robertson's *700 Club*, Velarde preaches that the benefits of this commitment include tangible rewards.

> . . . you have heard the Good news of Salvation, healing and deliverance from sickness and afflictions, and the message of success and prosperity . . . This means an assurance of financial prosperity, good health, and spiritual maturity and stability to them who believe and serve![19]

El Shaddai particularly emphasizes the principle that one must continuously give tithes and offerings.[20] Eliciting blessings through giving donations "to God," as many members think of it, is central to what Velarde calls the "seed-faith principle." Oral Roberts used the same concept, also calling it "seed-faith" in the 1970s.[21] Robertson identified it as a "kingdom principle."[22] In a free pamphlet, Velarde explains,

> The *miracle of seed-faith principle* that I have been sharing in this ministry and encouraging everyone to believe and practice *is giving, not as an obligation we have to do, but as a miracle seed we sow.* It is an act of "faith expressing itself through love." The Lord in return, speaking through St. Paul, promised "to meet or supply all our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."
>
> *And believe me, God's glorious source of miracle supply in Christ Jesus is not affected by recession, political unrest, inflation, strikes, fire, bankruptcies, earthquakes, and other calamities . . . And as naturally as a seed of palay [rice] sown on fertile soil grows and multiplies, so does your seed-faith offering, given to the right mission or ministry, open God's source of miracle supply!* (emphasis in original)[23]

Thus, believers should tithe not necessarily in gratitude for miracles nor out of obligation, but as a way to *elicit* miracles from God. The notion of directly initiating an exchange with God that results in God's benevolence is apparent in the title of the first volume of El Shaddai's newsletter: "Miracles by Appointment and Request Only."

El Shaddai members are also expected to follow other lifestyle teachings of Velarde, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Bible. For example, Velarde instructs followers not to abuse alcohol or drugs, smoke cigarettes, gamble, borrow money, complain, commit adultery, or say bad things about the El Shaddai ministry. Furthermore, according to Velarde, saving money and striving to improve one's lot are godly.

> Financial and material prosperity is not a sin nor a hindrance to spiritual maturity and well-being for as long as this is acquired and managed according to God's master plan, which is for our own good . . . Wealth and success, according to God's plan for you and me, include all our financial, material, physical, and spiritual needs. The Will of God for

> us is to remain successful, healthy, and strong all the days of our lives here on earth, as well as enjoy Eternal Life in heaven . . . This means that God has prepared *a master plan for real success and prosperity* for you and me (emphasis in original).[24]

In 1995 Velarde encouraged every El Shaddai member to open a bank savings account. He suggests in a free booklet that while 10 percent of one's income (including gifts and regardless of debts) should go to tithes, an additional 10 percent should be saved. An accounting guide therein suggests how the remainder should be allotted (food, 20 percent; shelter, 30 percent; etc.). My informants were very familiar with the allotment for tithing, while only some knew of the allotment for savings. Indeed, in a survey of El Shaddai participants, 73 percent claimed they tithed regularly.[25]

Though not a major preoccupation, Velarde cites Romans 13:8 (among others) on the subject of borrowing: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law." Velarde writes, "The message of the Scriptures about borrowing is very clear: Do not do it. If you are in it, stop now and get out of it," otherwise the result will be financial bondage.[26] Research has yet to show whether or not these teachings have any concrete effect on the way members actually manage their money.

Love offerings (donations), the blessing of objects associated with money or jobs, buying shares in El Shaddai's radio station and foundation, or membership and investment in one of El Shaddai's Golden Rule Company programs also put the seed-faith principle into action. Objects associated with finances or career moves, when they are brought into the El Shaddai ritual sphere and blessed, become catalysts for upward mobility. Using objects to ensure good fortune is not new in Filipino religious experiences; for example, Tagalog fishermen and fish vendors have long used fishing-associated objects as *anting-anting* (luck charms).[27] However, the items held up in El Shaddai rallies and prayer meetings are not *anting-anting*; rather they are direct conduits for God's benevolence or even for profound life transformation.

Preacher of Generosity: Brother Mike's Example

Brother Mike is fond of saying, "people call me a preacher of prosperity, but I would rather be called a preacher of generosity." Aside from biblical support, Brother Mike's own life has long been used as evidence for the validity of the prosperity gospel, especially the notion

that charitable giving results in prosperity and material blessings. El Shaddai ministries now teaches more self-consciously what it brands "El Shaddai spirituality," loosely defined by Brother Mike as "based on my own experience,"[28] in its new school, the College of Divine Wisdom. El Shaddai preachers are trained at the college in "El Shaddai spirituality." Students enrolled in bachelor degree courses, whether they are majoring in evangelism or some other course (e.g., education, psychology, information technology, or accountancy), receive the same teachings.

Although the college had just begun in 2010, it was clear in my visit later that year that Brother Mike's life examples of charitable giving feature prominently in its nascent curriculum. The preacher training classes assign Brother Mike's recent book (published to mark the ministry's twenty-fifth anniversary), which emphasizes Velarde's own acts of charitable giving in his adult life. According to the book, Brother Mike's large donations to the Catholic Church in the Philippines and sponsorship of Catholic charismatic and Pentecostal rallies shortly thereafter resulted in his profitable and miraculous real estate sales to Filipino entrepreneurs, including land used to develop the Manila Bay Casino and land sold to the state.[29] Even though some of these sales have been legally controversial, Velarde uses them as examples of the seed-faith principle: "the more we give, the more we receive blessings after blessings from God."[30] "The tithes and offerings we give," writes Velarde, are "credited to our account in the kingdom of heaven. And through it, God is able to make all grace abound to us."[31]

Giving is central to Velarde's spirituality, and the real estate sales are seen as harvests of the seed-faith in action. By fruitfully investing the real estate profits in the El Shaddai ministry in the early days, the ministry eventually became, in effect, a profit-generating enterprise itself. Brother Mike's style of entrepreneurship exemplifies some features of neoliberalism. Although some aspects of his investment deals seem to be exempt from ethical oversight, they are described within a spiritual logic that seems to say that the ends justify the means: the money is put to the work of God. Although Velarde preaches that gambling is against the will of God, he still profits by selling land to casino developers. Devoid of structural critique and shunning liberation theology, Velarde's prosperity preaching (and blessing of passports and overseas contract work applications) does all but encourage Filipino workers to leave home and family and take work abroad as they seek "prosperity" in the global market without ever questioning why the Philippine economy cannot sustain its own population, and

without expressing outrage at the toll that such heavy reliance on overseas contract work takes on Filipino families and communities. While anticorruption and morality in politics are supposedly central to the group's political agenda, working from within the economic and political *status quo* often seems to be their preferred mode.

"Let the Weak Say 'I Am Strong'"

The prosperity gospel's attractiveness lies beyond the prospect of getting miracles. It figures substantially in members' sense of "renewal," and it appeals in part because it rejects deterministic class labels, encourages self-reliance, and results in a life-changing sense of optimism. Kessler and Ruland note that the dedication to the practice and theology of tithing (as they call the prosperity gospel) is widespread among charismatic and Pentecostal Filipinos and is independent of their level of active participation in renewal groups and churches. In other words, the prosperity gospel is a specific mindset rather than a practice carried out in response to social pressure.

> Tithing is embedded in a special doctrine shared by many Charismatic [renewalist] groups, although not by all of them and not to the same extent. According to this doctrine, tithing is prescribed to practice giving instead of taking, of praising the Lord instead of praying for one's own well-being. This change of attitudes is seen as a basis for new strength, as liberation from the humiliating role of the beggar and the obsession with material gain . . . if you let go of material things, if you stop holding on to money, if you stop striving for economic security, and if instead you trust the Lord to provide for you, He will . . .[32]
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> This conviction and expectation underlying tithing is that if one surrenders one's life to Jesus, Jesus will provide for His followers. This basic conviction is shared by all charismatics [renewalists], by those who tithe as well as by those who do not expect their members to tithe because they consider this an excessive burden on their poor members.[33]

Filomeno Aguilar analyzed narratives of both El Shaddai members and members of the largest Filipino independent Pentecostal church, Jesus Is Lord (JIL). He found "a sense of efficacy and confidence in dealing with life's problems" to be a recurring theme in both groups.[34] The prosperity gospel instigates changes in individuals' view of their personal histories, of their current life potential, and of their own place within society at large.

In addition to a sense of socioeconomic empowerment, El Shaddai teachings share an element of moral self-determination with other

renewal groups. Aguilar's narratives revealed that in both El Shaddai and JIL, members describe a new way of engaging with society in the form of a "palpable turn to moral responsibility."[35] One JIL member described, for example, a conscious decision to refrain from illegal activities; another, a former activist, made a conscious choice to forgive and let go of hatred for former president Marcos. The "ability to make deliberate moral choices" of self-control, personal accountability, and forgiveness, for example, was not automatic for the activist, but it was an outcome of studying his situation.[36] Similarly, my El Shaddai informants articulated a heightened self-awareness, reflection, and effort in upholding family responsibilities and roles. One woman focused daily intentional effort on controlling feelings of anger toward her in-laws, while others described purposeful efforts in performing the roles of supportive husband or wife.

The idea that people can—and should—rise above their inherited status in life is part of the accommodation to modernity and capitalist moralities that David Martin describes as integral to Pentecostalism. Members deliberately choose a different sort of metaphysical view on life. These song lyrics, sung at nearly every El Shaddai gathering, articulate it well: "Let the weak say 'I am strong,' let the poor say 'I am rich.'" Velarde explains to a rally congregation in February 1996 the transformation these words express:

> Many are coming to me saying, "Brother Mike, for four years my husband and I lost our jobs, and until now we cannot find jobs." And I ask her, "How many are your children?" She says four. "What are they doing?" "They are studying." Then praise God and be thankful to God because for four years you had no job, and yet your children are able to go to school and until now you are still alive. [Applause.] Praise God! Alleluia, glory to God! These are the things we cannot see. We cannot see the good news of the Lord to all of us because our mind and soul was blinded by the spirit of darkness so that we would not see the greatness and love of God for you and for me. Brothers and sisters, this is where new life begins, so that it will grow and be strong, so that the evil spirit will not defeat you anymore . . . He can drive away the spirit of hunger, He can drive away the spirit that robs you of your work.

Velarde speaks here of a change in outlook. He tells the jobless woman to see a history of blessings where before she saw a history of hardship. "This is where new life begins," he says. El Shaddai and other religious groups even retell the story of the 1986 prodemocracy People Power Revolution in renewalist language."What happened,"

writes Velarde, "...was not the result of people's power, but of God's Power—the power of the Living God—Yahweh-El Shaddai."[37] In a similar way, El Shaddai members' stories of transformation involve retelling or reevaluating one's life using the newly acquired, prosperity-oriented, Pentecostal, and charismatic language. Their testimonies, as is true of many Christian conversion narratives, are not solely or even primarily stories of things that occurred in the past, but they are the reinvention of one's history—both past and present.[38]

"People are more receptive to God when they are weak," Velarde once told me and a small group of friends dining after a rally one Saturday in 1996. His followers, many of whom are weak in more than one sense (economically, politically, physically, etc.), are receptive to the message that faith and tithing will bring about God's plan of miracles and prosperity for individuals, and that speaking and affirming one's aspirations (e.g., "I am rich!") will make them true. Even people whose lives have not improved materially in any obvious way remain convinced of the transformative power of Velarde's teachings because they now view their lives differently—they now see prosperity or blessings where before they saw poverty or suffering. This change may also have positive effects in other areas of their lives, which can in turn confirm the validity of the transformation.

Vangie, an El Shaddai member for six years, understands her transformation by comparing El Shaddai to other groups such as the Bread of Life (a large independent indigenous Pentecostal church):

> Those in the other groups do not preach about prosperity, unlike Brother Mike...But for me, I like that prosperity. At least I can see if I'm prospering, while instead they say, "I'm so poor." The Lord doesn't have children who are poor. You want to have it, but you just don't want to rise from poverty. The Lord has given you to rise, but you are the one who doesn't want to. You will not really prosper if you will not work. But in prosperity, I know the Lord is giving prosperity to us. He did not create a person to become very poor.

Like many others, she believes one must work to be prosperous; in fact, Velarde preaches this. But it is clear that to Vangie, prosperity is about more than hard work because God is the source of prosperity. As one El Shaddai preacher said, "If we strive hard to earn money, we should acknowledge the One whom that money comes from because it all came from Him. We should thank him." More significantly, Vangie also describes a new self-image. "At least I can see if I'm prospering, while instead they say, 'I'm so poor.'" The problem lies in the

others' outlook: "You just don't want to rise from poverty . . . you are the one who doesn't want to."

Luz, an El Shaddai member and a fifty-two-year-old ambulant newspaper vendor, has a chronically ill husband and has been homeless in the past. Responding to my question "What kind of people are drawn to El Shaddai?" she says, "The poor, because the poor don't know God. They think that because they are poor, they'll remain poor. But the Lord doesn't want you to always be poor. He also wants you to progress." For Luz, seeing oneself as poor signifies a state of distance from God, "blinded by the spirit of darkness," as Velarde puts it. But a person who "wants to rise from poverty" is closer to God.

Luz tells me she tithes to El Shaddai ministries because "it is good to give to the poor." Although her neighbors would describe her as poor, she no longer identifies herself with the poor. She embraces a religious language that allows her to articulate her needs and desires while opening up a space for an alternative identification. Luz's poverty now represents potential, a miracle or blessing waiting to happen. As such her poverty becomes temporary and personal, rather than determining.

Velarde's concept of a blinding "spirit of darkness" shares something with liberation theology, developmental economics, and other discourses on culture in the Philippines that identify what some have called a "culture of poverty"—an attitude of hopelessness and fatalism—that in their view prevents the poor from rising up, organizing, or striving for upward mobility. However, as David Martin has observed, "Pentecostals belong to groups which liberals cast in the role of victim, and in every way they refuse to play that role."[39] The prosperity gospel in the case of El Shaddai, far from facilitating a consciousness of collective oppression, rather provides a language for casting off the "victim" identity. Furthermore, Velarde and his retinue resist entrenched class identifications by emphasizing a lack of class distinctions in El Shaddai gatherings. Velarde often points out that at rallies "you can see an engineer standing next to a domestic [worker]," and stories abound of illiterate preachers who can miraculously read the Bible. When asked about the composition of a huge rally, a woman in attendance told me ambivalently, "[Here] we are all from different walks of life. No one is rich nor poor in the eyes of God. But," she added, "I see mostly the poor ones here." A recently unemployed lower-middle-class woman, who each weekend travels seven to nine hours from Baguio City to Manila for the rally, recounted her first rally experience: "I felt something I can hardly

express, the feeling I had," she said, crying. "Because I felt that I was one of those people, that I was already in the community. They don't mind who I am or what I am . . . " While she may have felt an identification with her "own kind," this feeling is most often expressed as being in an atmosphere where social and class distinctions are leveled or irrelevant. While members see that the group attracts the *masa* (the masses) and *mga mahirap*, (the poor), both El Shaddai members and Brother Mike downplay the group's demographics and resist identifying with any specific class or moreover, any ideology or theology of class struggle.

Conclusion: Church of the Poor?

Outsiders' positive evaluations of the El Shaddai movement stress its role in helping the poor become self-reliant. They say movement gives poor people a positive attitude and something to hope for, and it teaches them to save their money, not to gamble, and to be responsible, which may serve larger national aspirations. Indeed, the aspirations expressed in Velarde's prosperity theology seem to cohere with national development efforts, especially during the decade or so immediately following the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution when El Shaddai experienced its most rapid growth. In addition, the power vacuum created by the end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, the ultimate disappointment with the subsequent leadership's effectiveness in dealing with poverty, corruption, land reform, and human rights abuses, and the weakening of the communist insurgency in the 1990s and 2000s provided the sociopolitical context for the emergence of Brother Mike and his populist message of prosperity and self-reliance.

However, many Filipinos on the street criticize El Shaddai for what they see as a capitalistic morality or a self-interested market approach to religion. As Vic, a tricycle driver and former member put it, "The people are giving [money] in order to receive. More capital, more return. [Velarde] is motivating the people to give more. Does the Lord ask for payments?" Vic feels that El Shaddai followers' material motivations and a seed-faith principle driven by the desire for "returns" have polluted what he sees as an authentic relationship with God.

Some Catholic Church leaders fault Velarde's teachings for ignoring "the wisdom of evangelical poverty"[40] and for their lack of a concept of social justice. These Catholic leaders have an understanding of the Church that "embraces and practices the evangelical spirit of poverty,

which combines detachment from possessions with a profound trust in the Lord as the sole source of salvation. While the Lord does not want anyone to be materially poor, he wants all of his followers to be 'poor in spirit'."[41] The "church of the poor" is an approach within segments of the Catholic Church in the Philippines that recognizes that poverty has traditionally been a privileged site of God's grace and intervention. It also reflects the dedication on the part of the mainstream church to make more meaningful connections with the poor. Basic ecclesiastic communities (basic Christian communities—community organizing) have been part of this effort, but like liberation theology and similar efforts to construct more just societies in Latin America, these efforts have not sustained mass interest.[42]

The mass appeal of religions that cater to private concerns over collective societal ones, especially in free religious markets (as opposed to religious monopolies), has been noted by Peter Berger and has been demonstrated in multiple contexts in Latin America by Andrew Chesnut.[43] The transition from a Catholic religious monopoly to a largely open free religious economy in the twentieth century has produced a similar religious market share distribution in the Philippines.

Within the mainstream Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, church officials sometimes emphasize "taking up the cross"—the idea that there is spiritual value in suffering and enduring hardships. Predictably, Velarde offers a more triumphant image of Christ, and condemns the notorious Filipino folk Catholic practices of self-flagellation and self-crucifixion done by a few dedicated Filipinos in Pampanga Province during Holy Week. One Manilan priest understood El Shaddai's overall positive message to be its attraction:

> They're given hope, while if you go to the [Catholic] parish, the priest there is scolding you. And [Velarde] is giving you hope. They'll [the priests] tell you to carry your cross daily, and here the man is suffering from cancer or TB or whatever. And Mike Velarde says "We'll pray over you and you're going to get well." You see? And he gets well! Now maybe it's from God, but he gets well. So he's for Mike Velarde now! He's not going to go back to his parish priest.[44]

As noted, the prosperity theology appeals across class lines, and different groups cater to different social classes. The foci of various groups shift to tap into the aspirations and concerns of their particular constituencies. El Shaddai's particular take on prosperity theology reflects the concerns, afflictions, and aspirations of the *masa*,

who apparently find more efficacy in belonging to a church of the self-proclaimed blessed than a "church of the poor."[45]

As a result, full engagement with El Shaddai's prosperity theology involves choosing an apolitical and ahistorical interpretation of inequality that emphasizes personal action, self-reliance, and faith in divine action over other ideologies, such as those that emphasize structural, societal, or historical causes of and solutions to poverty and sickness (or, conversely, those, like mainstream Catholicism, that accept suffering as an aspect of spirituality).

The Catholic Church in the Philippines has made a number of decisive contributions to democracy building in the postrevolutionary, postauthoritarian era.[46] It will likely continue to support a collective ethos and remain the dominant institution in Philippine society. Therefore the ideological chafing with its charismatic members, especially those of the prosperity type with its neoliberal undertones, will continue. However, because El Shaddai members and other renewalists are typically highly engaged and religiously active compared to their mainstream counterparts, the prosperity gospel's focus on the individual and its articulation of modern desires of self-determination and material prosperity will likely remain a strong force within Filipino Catholicism and Philippine society generally.

Endnotes

1. El Shaddai DWXI Prayer Partners Foundation International, Inc.
2. Renewal is used as an umbrella term to encompass both charismatics and Pentecostals.
3. Christl Kessler and Jurgen Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand! Charismatic Christians: Populist Religion and Politics in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 93. The Working Group on Global Church Affairs of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Germany sponsored this study of charismatic Christians in the Philippines. They have also done extensive research on the rise of new forms of religiosity in Costa Rica, Hungary, and South Africa. Kessler and Ruland of the Arnold Bergasser Institute in Germany did the Philippines portion of the research, which included around 1,200 respondents.
4. Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 93.
5. "Spirit and Power: A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2006. The Philippines portion of this survey included 1,000 respondents.
6. The different results of the two studies may be due to varying criteria used for renewal involvement or different sampling methods. The Kessler and Ruland criteria and sampling methodology were

particularly rigorous and self-conscious, with multiple cross-checking strategies.

7. The Pew study found that Brazil's population was 15 percent Pentecostal and 34 percent charismatic, while Guatemala was 20 percent Pentecostal and 40 percent charismatic.
8. El Shaddai estimates of its own "followership" have been based on crowd estimates at mass rallies and other events, prayer requests and tithes, prayer group attendance, chapter membership, radio listenership surveys, and official membership. "Followership" numbers around 5 million (or even 9–10 million at one point in time), according to El Shaddai officials, were also confirmed through presidential election results. Given the nature of El Shaddai participation and the fact that official registration of members is not stressed by the group, many participants/followers are not "official" members. Therefore, official membership numbers are much smaller: 252,463 as of September 19, 2005 (personal interview at El Shaddai headquarters, Makati City, September, 2005).
9. For a full discussion, see Katharine L. Wiegele, *Investing in Miracles: El Shaddai and the Transformation of Popular Catholicism in the Philippines* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).
10. Karla Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity as Global Culture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 2.
11. Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
12. Brother Mariano "Mike" Z. Velarde, "El Shaddai's Master Plan for Real Success and Prosperity for You and Me," *El Shaddai God Almighty* 3:3 (Makati City: El Shaddai DWXI-PPFI, Inc., 1993), 3.
13. Kenneth E. Hagin, *El Shaddai: The God Who Is More than Enough, the God Who Satisfies with Long Life* (Tulsa: Faith Library, 1980). That Velarde draws on the teachings of Hagin was confirmed by Cesar Roxas (who was once known as the cofounder of El Shaddai) in a personal interview. While Velarde acknowledges Hagin's booklet in the naming of the El Shaddai group, in a personal interview in 1996 he dismissed any similarities between his teachings and either of these American preachers as coincidence and "the result of having read the same Bible." I have not found direct references to Robertson in Velarde's preaching or published materials.
14. Nigel Scotland, *Charismatics and the Next Millennium* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 14, and Steve Bruce, *Pray TV: Televangelism in America* (London: Routledge, 1990), 152.
15. Bruce, *Pray TV*, 153.
16. Scotland, *Charismatics and the Next Millennium*, 38.
17. Mike Velarde, live broadcast of a rally from PICC in Manila on DWXI, Holy Thursday, April 4, 1996, translated by Miren Sanchez.
18. Ibid.

19. Brother Mariano "Mike" Z. Velarde, *An Invitation to Store Riches in Heaven and Enjoy El Shaddai's Prosperity Plan on Earth Now* (Makati City: El Shaddai DWXI-PPFI, Inc., 1993).
20. Brother Mariano "Mike" Z. Velarde, *El Shaddai's Miracle Assurance Policy against Sickness, Famine, and Bankruptcy* (Makati City: El Shaddai DWXI-PPFI, Inc., 1993), 33.
21. Frances FitzGerald, "Reflections: Jim and Tammy," *The New Yorker* (April 23, 1990): 74.
22. Bruce, *Pray TV*, 150.
23. Brother Mariano "Mike" Z. Velarde, "The Miracles of Believing and Doing Likewise," *El Shaddai God Almighty* 4, no. 1 (Makati City: El Shaddai DWXI-PPFI, Inc., 1994), 1.
24. Velarde, "El Shaddai's Master Plan for Real Success and Prosperity for You and Me," 3.
25. Grace Gorospe-Jamon, "The El Shaddai Prayer Movement: Political Socialization in a Religious Context," *Philippine Political Science Journal* 20, no. 43 (1999): 83–126, at 107.
26. Velarde, *El Shaddai's Miracle Assurance Policy*, 41–42.
27. Katharine L. Wiegele, "Men Who Chant and Women Who Pray: Luck and Ritual in a Philippine Fishing Village" (MA thesis, Northern Illinois University, 1993).
28. Personal communication, August 2010.
29. Brother Mariano "Mike" Z. Velarde, *With El Shaddai Miracles are Forever: 25 Years of Faith, Love and Unity* (Makati City: El Shaddai DWXI-PPFI, Inc. 2009), 56.
30. Ibid., 54.
31. Ibid., 54.
32. Kessler and Ruland, *Give Jesus a Hand!*, 128.
33. Ibid., 129.
34. Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., "Experiencing Transcendence: Filipino Conversion Narratives and the Localization of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity," *Philippine Studies* 54, no. 4 (2006), 585–627, at 611.
35. Aguilar, "Experiencing Transcendence," 598.
36. Ibid., 599.
37. Brother Mariano "Mike" Z. Velarde, *El Shaddai God Almighty* 3:3 (Makati City: DWXI-PPFI, Inc., 1993), 16. The EDSA People Power Revolution of 1986 was a popular uprising in the Philippines that ousted the military dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, and restored a democratic form of government. It was the culmination of many populace-based and church-based efforts, though it was a military coup that tipped the scales in the final days of the Marcos regime.
38. Peter Stromberg, *Language and Self-transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.
39. David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 10.

40. Sheila A. Samonte, "As They Say, Religion is Good Business," *Business World* (online ed. April 3, 1996).
41. Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, "Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines," 20 January–17 February 1991 (Manila: Secretariat, Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, 1992), 47–48.
42. R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12–13.
43. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969), 147, cited in Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, 12.
44. This priest requested anonymity.
45. See Katharine L. Wiegele, "Catholics Rich in Spirit: El Shaddai's Modern Engagements," *Philippine Studies* 54, no. 4 (2006): 495–520. Indeed, resisting class identification is itself part of a class-based discourse, as the dominant discourse is deployed in its very resistance.
46. Antonio F. Moreno SJ, *Church, State, and Civil Society in Postauthoritarian Philippines: Narratives of Engaged Citizenship* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 6.

Chapter 9

Pentecost and Prosperity in Eastern Europe: Between Sharing of Possessions and Accumulating Personal Wealth

Daniela C. Augustine

Introduction: The Rise of Global Neoliberal Capitalism and Its Message of Prosperity in Eastern Europe

The terms "neoliberal" and "neoclassical" economics are often used interchangeably in contemporary economic jargon. Historically, they have emerged as identifiers of the contextualization of Adam Smith's classical economic theory within the conditions of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Therefore, there is nothing truly "neo" in economic neoliberalism. By the end of the nineteenth century Smith's assertion of "the invisible hand" had been stripped of metaphysical implications and had become the impersonal "hand of the markets" capable of "mobilizing even the basest of human instincts such as gluttony, greed, and the desire for wealth and power for the benefit of all."[1]

The origins of the twentieth-century reiteration of Smith's economic dogmatics could be traced to 1938 when a group of intellectuals met in Paris to discuss the rising threat of German National Socialism under Hitler and of collectivist economic planning (e.g., the British Keynesian and American New Deal policies). This meeting (organized by Louis Rougier) coined the term "neoliberalism" as an update of nineteenth-century liberalism "by introducing the idea that governments play an important role as guardians of 'free markets' by securing the rule of law."[2]

During the 1980s, neoliberalism experienced a new boost as Thatcherism and Reaganomics introduced policies that represented

" 'rolling-back' of regulations, state ownership and welfare services."[3] In 1989, the year in which the world witnessed in disbelief the fall of the Berlin Wall and the lifting of the Iron Curtain that had partitioned the East from the West for almost half a century, John Williamson outlined ten policy reforms toward market deregulation that consequently became known as the Washington Consensus. They served in the next decades as the universal programmatic of the global advancement of neoliberal capitalism and included the following elements:

> . . . an imposition of a tight fiscal discipline (. . . no public budget deficit allowed); an end to subsidies and redirection of public expenditure on basic health, education and infrastructure; tax cuts; financial liberalization; free-floating exchange rates; trade liberalization with an unified low tariff; openness to foreign direct investment; privatization; deregulation; and secure private property rights.[4]

These were precisely the measures demanded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund as the conditions for their financial intervention in Eastern Europe. The Washington Consensus promised renewed growth and prosperity to the uttermost parts of the globe by "the unleashing of markets—the basic enabling reform from which all the potential benefits of transition follow."[5] However, instead of the anticipated results, the countries within the region experienced an unprecedented scale of depression that ranged between 30 and 60 percent.[6]

The ideology of transition from planned to market economy was also identified as the only guarantor of the democratic political process. The proponents of neoliberalism (e.g., Milton Friedman) insisted that "because profit-making is the essence of democracy, any government that pursues anti-market policies is being anti-democratic."[7] Of course, no government in the postcommunist Eastern European countries wanted to be labeled as antidemocratic. Therefore, regardless of the unstable political environment and the often-changing successions of Right and Left governments, all political competitors were eager to meet the demands of the West for the liberalization of the markets. Robert W. McChesney has argued that the assertion of the "sacredness" of the market actually had a demoralizing and deconstructive effect on the democratic process because it eventually depoliticized the citizens. "If electoral democracy affects little of social life, it is irrational to devote much attention to it."[8] Such logic would naturally lead to political apathy. This was precisely the case in the Eastern European countries. In the first decade of transition, there

was a gradual depoliticization of the population as it realized that new elections would not produce significant change in socioeconomic life. McChesney further insists that:

> Neoliberal democracy with its notion of the market *über alles*, takes dead aim at this sector. Instead of citizens, it produces consumers. Instead of communities, it produces shopping malls. The net result is an atomized society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless.[9]

Amid this context of transition toward deregulated markets, the prosperity gospel was introduced in Eastern Europe as the Western religious counterpart of neoliberalism.[10] As Eastern Europe struggled to make the transition from planned to deregulated market economy, it wrestled ideologically and ethically with the pressure of market-driven life and its demands both for conversion from communitarianism to individualism and from emphasis on production to preoccupation with consumption. The prosperity gospel offered a coping mechanism amid the turmoil of this overwhelming societal change. It offered a scriptural justification and moral foundation for the embrace of capitalist market economy, and it promoted capitalist values by encouraging private enterprise, consumer choice, personal responsibility, and entrepreneurial initiative. By placing a Christian sanction upon the individual pursuit of wealth and consumerist indulgence, the prosperity message accommodated the conditions of the market crowning it with a "halo" and connecting it to the providential justice of God.

In spite of its accommodation of capitalism's demands, today the prosperity gospel is relatively marginalized and demographically insignificant in the majority of the Eastern European countries. Among the reasons for its limited influence is the widespread suspicion toward Protestantism in general and Western Pentecostalism in particular within this predominantly Eastern Orthodox region. This negative attitude is accompanied by the rise of nationalism that views Protestantism as endangering the ethnic identity of the post-communist nations. This anti-Western sentiment is combined with an overarching disillusionment with the democratic process and the capitalist market economy, which are perceived as Western impositions that jeopardize any possibility of developing indigenous models of political and economic life.

The Eastern European negative attitude toward Western neoliberalism clearly has its roots within the secular and religious communitarianism that has shaped this part of the world. In light of the

apparent contrast between the ideological backgrounds of the East and the West, this chapter briefly examines the religious and economic foundations of Western neoliberal capitalism and Eastern European communitarianism. Further, it reflects on the difficult transition of the Eastern Block countries from planned to market economies and concludes with a discussion of the socioeconomic effects of the prosperity gospel within this part of the world.

Ideological Foundations of Western Neoliberal Capitalism: Adam Smith and the Calvinist Accommodation of the Spirit of Capitalism

The development of Adam Smith's political economy is situated within the context of the eighteenth-century Calvinist "Protestant ethic." As Karl Polanyi points out, while serving as a professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow, Smith "publicly ascribed his assent to the Calvinist Confession of Faith before the Presbytery" of the city.[11] While a superficial reading of his work in economics may give an impression of a secular rationale in support of his analyses and corresponding conclusions, many researchers have suggested that we view Smith as a "life-long moral philosopher, who never casts aside his earlier concerns about human morality in his later pursuit of economic truths."[12] Such an understanding of Smith necessitates keeping in dialectical tension his two main works, namely, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, and it assumes that the second text is somehow informed and shaped by the first. If this is true, "then Smith can be seen as promoting an economic model that is based on socially sanctioned ethical norms supported by appropriate and just social institutions."[13] Some authors go as far as to suggest that Smith is in fact a moral theologian and that his elaboration on the "invisible hand" is "his particular contribution to eighteenth-century theodicy."[14] For example, Kathryn Blanchard insists that Smith's anthropology, as articulated in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, "presents not self-interest but intellectual approbation and natural sympathy as the primary characteristics of the human being."[15] She summarizes Smith's conclusion: "At the bottom it is sympathy people want, not material pleasures."[16]

Smith's moral philosophy renders visible the tension between the individualistic impulse of the separate human being and the unavoidable social dimensions of human existence. Smith views the urge for social acceptance and interhuman connectivity as having been prewired in human conscience and manifested in a shared commitment to

justice for one's own sake. Therefore, one's personal happiness and well-being motivates one toward justice. Smith asserts that

> Every man is, no doubt, by nature, first and principally recommended to his own care; and as he is fitter to take care of himself, than of any other person, it is fit and right that it should be so . . . Though it may be true, therefore, that every individual, in his own breast, naturally prefers himself to all mankind, yet he dares not look mankind in the face, and avow that he acts according to this principle.[17]

Smith continues by stating that in the "race for wealth" a person may "outstrip all his competitors," but if in the process he "injures" any of them, society will sympathize with the victim and direct its "hatred and indignation" toward the one who has caused their misfortune.[18] The threat of social isolation, public shame, and consternation motivate moral restraint in relation to one's passions and desires. Thus, ultimately love of self (not love of neighbor) helps moral agents navigate between sociality and natural hedonistic tendencies.

Wealth, however, also secures social acceptance based on fame and envious admiration.[19] Thus, Smith states his thesis that "we make parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty" because the world is predisposed to sympathize more with joy than with sorrow, and we long for its sympathy.[20] Reflecting upon Smith's emphasis on the human need and capacity for sympathy, Blanchard points out that Smith identifies "humanity" not in terms of *homo economicus* but as *homo sympatheticus*.[21] Yet, Smith's thesis mediates an overwhelming sense of loneliness. As the separate individual faces the predicates of social acceptance and approval, he/she is caged by the internal struggle between self-indulgence and propriety, between self-love and the need for the sympathy of others. Perhaps, this nuance of Smith's anthropology can be viewed as an outcome of its broader context shaped by Calvinist soteriology, with its introverted preoccupation with personal salvation and outward competition in proving one's position among the elect.

In his famous (and continually debated)[22] reflection on the social and psychological effects of Calvin's doctrine of election, Max Weber points out that this doctrine resulted in "a feeling of tremendous inner *loneliness*" and despair that demanded an intervention.[23] This intervention according to Weber was "work"—diligent persistence in one's calling (or vocation) in the world as an act of worship to God and proof of one's belonging among the elect.[24] Weber argued that this fusion of the doctrines of predestination and vocation birthed

a form of asceticism expressed in hard work and abstinence from worldly pleasures that produced a new form of economic life associated with the rise of capitalism. However, it also created the ideological foundations for the shift from communitarianism to individualism within the spiritual, political, and economic dimensions of human existence, and deconstructed the religious and secular motivation for search of social redemption.

In contrast to Roman Catholicism's traditional suspicion and disapproval of accumulation of personal wealth, Calvinism offered a justification of the bourgeois economic vision and solidified the ideological foundations of the emerging middle class. While advocating moderation in relation to earthly pleasures, Calvin asserted that "gold and riches" are "good creations of God, permitted, indeed appointed, for men's use by God's providence" and insisted that all wealth in society is distributed according to God's justice.[25] The last assertion, however, has led scholars to believe that Calvin's primary concern was maintaining social stability and securing the existing status quo between the bourgeoisie and the poor. Therefore, his theological ethic promotes not economic equality but the elimination of social discontent, which could potentially result in a demand for redistribution of wealth through civic, revolutionary, or (motivated by economic despair) criminal activity. However, most scholars would agree that Calvin's "work ethic" was motivated by "creating justice, sobriety, moderation, and true worship of God among believers."[26] Personal accumulation of wealth, therefore, was an unintended side-effect of the hard work and spending discipline of the Protestant population. As George Thomas has argued, it may be a mistake "to speak of Calvin or his early followers as defenders of economic individualism."[27] After all, he also insists on just prices and emphasizes a moral obligation toward good stewardship in the use of wealth.[28] Likewise, as Thomas Neil points out, if the later followers of Calvin had ascribed to his words against extortion, greed, exploitation, and high interest rates, "Calvinism might have been a deterrent rather than a promoter of the capitalistic spirit."[29]

Both Calvin's and Adam Smith's reflections on the economic life proceed from the particularity and limitations of their personal economic experience. They both belonged to the economically privileged classes of their day. Calvin's theology did not adopt the perspective of the poor and economically marginalized. As Blanchard points out, Calvin "seems to be writing for the rising bourgeoisie . . . who suddenly found themselves possessing a growing amount of worldly wealth and are in need of advice how best to manage it."[30] In a similar

manner, Smith's conclusions ignore the staggering misery of the poor in eighteenth century England and develop the faulty assertion that "the wages of the meanest labourer can supply" all of his/her existential need and further afford even various conveniences and occasional luxuries.[31] As Smith discusses the principles of the division of labor in the *Wealth of Nations*, he points to the relativity of wealth across different national and continental contexts, but fails to compare the economic conditions of the extremes present in his own country and the rest of Europe.[32] The division of labor, according to Smith, is motivated not by ingenuity, efficiency, and idealistic commitment to progress but by individual self-interest, for

> . . . man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will more likely prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favor, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them.[33]

The motive of self-interest permeates also Smith's discussion of the pros and cons of giving home market monopoly to domestic production versus imported goods. This is the context within which his argument introduces the legendary concept of the "invisible hand" promoting the common good through the prioritization of one's personal benefit.[34] Smith insists: "I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good."[35] Smith continues the passage with a statement against government regulation of the movement of private capital describing any intervention in the natural flow of the market process as unnecessary, dangerous, and presumptuous. Thus, he sums up the very essence of neoliberal economics.

Regardless of its various theological and secular interpretations, *The Wealth of Nations* clearly establishes Smith as the father of neoclassical economics and the forerunner of a deregulated global market. Thus, Smith is credited with supplying not only the foundations of the laissez-faire approach but also with giving it the moral justification needed for its flourishing in the West. Reflecting on the indebtedness of nineteen-century political economy to Smith, Eric Mount Jr. points out that the individualism fostered by its ideological effects "remains a formidable force among us after two hundred years of our history . . . In many ways it is our myth and our religion, our ethos and our ethic. It is manifestly, at least for now, our destiny."[36]

Ideological Foundations of Eastern European Communitarian Economics: Between God-Created and "Godless" Economics

Eastern Europe is historically and geographically removed from the ideological context of the Reformation (and its preoccupation with personal salvation) and is predominantly[37] positioned within the Eastern Orthodox tradition with its emphasis on cosmic redemption initiated by the protocommunity of the social trinity and carried forth by the church. The community of faith that continues the divinely mandated ministry of reconciliation is called to consecrate the world through its life as an extension of Christ and, therefore, as an icon of the triune God within the created order.

While the twentieth-century communist regimes in this part of the world appropriated Marx's secular dogmatics and numbered religion among the ideological enemies of the proletarian state, they still advocated communitarianism of shared possessions and prioritization of the common good over one's personal interest. Marxism represented a secularized version of the Pentecost communal economics of apostolic Christianity. Marx's motto, "From everyone according to their abilities to everyone according to their needs" was directly inspired by the narrative of the *Acts of the Apostles*. Early Marxist critiques of institutionalized religion continually engaged the images of the post-Pentecost transformation of the community's economic life and insisted on the failure of the institutionalized ecclesia to fulfill its own mission in the world as an instrument of political and economic justice. In fact, this failure is used as one of the moral justifications of the historical rise of communism. However, many Marxist thinkers have questioned the sustainability of the Pentecost economic model and have identified the sharing of products without sharing the means of production as the primary reason for its decline and eventual disappearance.[38] Therefore, Marxism outlines among the immediate objectives of the proletarian revolution the nationalization of the means of industrial production, followed by the deprivatization of the land and all natural resources.

Both the Christian and Marxist communitarian visions insist on the need for a "new humanity" with "new consciousness" that prioritizes the well-being of neighbor over personal interest. However, these visions identify different origins of this new saintly human being. In Christianity, he/she is God's new creation in Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit who steps into history as an instrument of social transformation advancing the sociopolitical reality of the

Kingdom as a movement of the Spirit from the innermost being to the uttermost parts of the world. In Marxism, on the other hand, the appearance of the new humanity is a product of a social evolution in which labor and ideological formation induce the birth of the new human consciousness that brings about the ultimate elimination of all classes and of the state itself into one global egalitarian society. In the first case, society is transfigured by the sovereign reign of God within humanity while moral responsibility for just social transformation resides with the believer and his/her community of faith within the world. This vision generates an extroverted movement of spiritual change that apprehends the world into its future one person at the time. In the second case, a violent proletarian revolution interrupts history and seizes its paths, insisting on its moral right to establish a dictatorship over the present based on its self-designation as the only class of the future. By eliminating all dissenting voices and systematically exterminating all independent sociopolitical imagination capable of envisioning alternative worlds, the communist vision of the proletarian state establishes the proper conditions needed to garden and grow the new human consciousness that will secure its uncontested ideological rule on earth. The first vision is that of God transfiguring the world into his likeness—the likeness of the social Trinity as diversity in unity. The second is that of humanity compressing the world into its own likeness until it is molded into a single, easily manageable homogeneity.

Orthodox Christianity views one's material existence (including one's personal possessions) as an outward extension of the person's inner life. Matter is understood as originating from the realm of the spirit—from the creator God who reaches into the world through the synergy of his Word and Spirit bringing forth reality out of nothing. Marxism, on the other hand, views all spiritual (intellectual, ideological, artistic) life of humanity as proceeding from its material existence. Economics represents the fundamental base of the human experience and all other dimensions of individual and corporate human life are built upon this foundation as its ideological extension and reflection.

Traditionally, Eastern Orthodox theology has taken a critical stand toward both capitalism and Marxist socialism. Nicolai Berdyaev, one of the most prominent Russian Orthodox thinkers of the early 1900s, summarizes this dual critique in his reflections on the Marxist revolution. Berdyaev asserts that both capitalism and socialism are ultimately motivated by individualism, and their displays of concern for the common good cannot be separated from this prioritizing of self-interest.[39] Both capitalism and socialism have substituted the

spiritual goals of life with material means; both economic models are therefore unable to sustain authentic human rights and freedom (since these represent high spiritual goals and have a spiritual origin).[40] Berdyaev points out that "the historical material force is a part of the spiritual historical reality" and that "the entire economic life of humanity has a spiritual base, a spiritual foundation."[41] According to Berdyaev, the individualist inversion of social vision, as well as the secularization and fetishism of materialism and economism is "a violation of the natural hierarchism of human society."[42] Economic individualism substituted truth with mammonism by presenting itself as superior in the pursuit of truth and attaining freedom from illusions. "Economic materialism," in turn, "has formulated this in a most perfect way by declaring the entire spiritual life of the human as being an illusion and a fraud."[43] In view of this, "socialism is only a further development of the industrial capitalist system; it is the final celebration of its beginnings and a triumph of their universal spread."[44] Berdyaev concludes that both "Capitalism and Socialism are accompanied by decline and deflaming of spiritual creativity, as a result of the recession of spirituality in human society."[45] Therefore, any expectation of social transformation that facilitates authentic human freedom and justice would demand a "revolution of the Spirit."[46] Only the Spirit creates a brotherhood and sisterhood that are a realization of true freedom—as freedom in Christ. In the Christ-centered spiritual togetherness (*sobornost*)[47] there is no "mechanical equality." There is also no contradiction and difference between "a right and an obligation."[48] The personal freedom in the Spirit's *sobornost* does not contradict the freedom of the other, for it is not based on competition for the limited resources of the material reality. It is based, rather, on the eternal and infinite reality of divine love and grace. In this divinely initiated and infused *sobornost*, the hospitality of God is incarnated in the community of Christ as a gift of the Spirit, a gift of freedom to the other to be and to become.

It is ironic that Eastern Europe, the location of Marxism's experimentation, finds itself today in the loops of a historical spiral in which its future is its "already past."[49] If social transformation could be understood as the "future invading the present,"[50] then facing the already past (capitalism) as the only option for one's future represents the ultimate end of the possibility for societal change. It is the end of sociopolitical and economic imagination. This is, indeed, a depressing thought for the Eastern Europeans.

In order to understand the function of the prosperity gospel within the context of transition from communism to capitalism in

Eastern Europe, we now consider some of the particularities of the socioeconomic change in this part of the world.

Coping with the Stresses of Transition

Reflecting on the economic developments under the transition from communism to capitalism in Central Europe, Andrew Stroehlein does not hide his disappointment with the effects of market liberalization as he asserts that in Czech society, "money making defeated morals hands down in the 1990s, as those with connections scrambled to get the rich pickings offered by privatization."[51] The era was well summarized by Vaclav Klaus's infamous statement: "There is no dirty money."[52]

Under the ironic transformation of capitalist political economy, the former communist elite became the new capitalist oligarchy due to their exclusive access to the financial resources needed for the privatization of the formerly state-owned means of production. Exploiting the vulnerability and confusion of the populous in its disillusionment with the new capitalist reality, the former communist elite renamed its political party, revocabularized its pre-election platform, and (by the mid-1990s) succeeded to emerge once again as the leading political power in most of the Eastern European countries.[53]

The shift from communism to deregulated markets introduced new disturbing and depressing socioeconomic realities. The "shock therapy" approach "strongly advocated by the U.S. Treasury and the IMF"[54] found the population unprepared to cope with the transition. Amid staggering unemployment and escalating inflation rates, the Eastern European countries experienced the systemic mass impoverishment and economic displacement of entire demographic groups (for example, the elderly, single parents and their children, the Roma ethnic minorities, etc.). The former vice president of the World Bank, Josef E. Stiglitz, asserts,

> Globalization and the introduction of market economy has not produced the promised results in Russia and most of the other economies making the transition from communism to the market…in many respects, for most of the people, the market economy proved even worse than their Communist leaders had predicted.[55]

Eastern Europeans further witnessed the appearance of various negative social subproducts of the capitalist economic arrangement, namely: feminization of poverty[56] and commodification of femininity,[57] child

and adult homelessness, juvenile alcoholism and drug abuse, escalating crime, and violence.[58]

Accumulation of personal wealth often became associated with illegal activities: from acts of corruption and tax evasion to misappropriation of governmental funds and organized crime. The early stories of personal economic success often had a dark and hidden side. While the illegal origin of the wealth of many new capitalists was a matter of common knowledge, they were rarely summoned to responsibility in the public domain. The population felt traumatized by the criminalization of economic life. During the first decade of the transition, racketeering was often quoted as one of the causes for bankruptcy of small businesses and as a reason contributing to the difficulties in the development of the middle class in the postcommunist countries.[59] The lack of stable institutions and corresponding legislation regulating economics in the new postcommunist conditions contributed to the flourishing of criminal activity in the economic sector and in society at large.

The Czechs have a saying: "If you don't steal from the state, you are stealing from your family." This statement illustrates the population's general attitude in postcommunist countries toward the state. In the current conditions of the Eastern European market economy, the interests of the state are often seen as standing in conflict with personal interests. The state is viewed as an incompetent manager of communal capital and competition for material resources. Therefore, avoiding paying taxes, conducting business "under the table," and falsifying data on financial statements are common practices in many of these countries—even among Christians.

Corruption is another prevailing symptom of the negative attitude toward the state within the socioeconomic realities of the majority of the postcommunist countries. Its scope is astounding as it permeates all strata of government from city and county to the national level. The study of the causes of corruption in Eastern Europe gives insight into the crises of transition from planned to free market economy. Both the legacy of communism, with its strict hierarchism and centralization that discouraged initiative and personal responsibility, and the moral void in society after its fall contributed to the rise of corruption. As Leslie Holmes points out,

> This underdevelopment of personal initiative for people who might otherwise have been expected to shoulder more responsibilities applied also in the moral sphere . . . the communist world discouraged religion

> in various ways . . . They claimed that communism provided answers to all existential questions, including appropriate ethics. Hence there was a moral void once communist power collapsed and many of its basic premises were discredited.[60]

Further, civil society was virtually nonexistent in the communist past of the Eastern European countries. Holmes suggests that ". . . most cases in which the masses played a significant role in overthrowing communist power should be seen as examples of protest politics, not the power of civil society."[61] The process of developing and empowering civil society in the former Eastern Block has been a complex and difficult task. The advent of neoliberalism with its emphasis on individualism over against the pursuit of the common societal good further complicated the process of nurturing and developing civil initiative and responsibility.

The attitude of the radical market-oriented rhetoric broadcasted within the newly freed world of the East could be summarized by Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase, "There is no such thing as the social. There are only individuals and families."[62] This view was quickly adopted by prominent pragmatic political voices who displayed an open hostility toward the concept and function of civil society. The current president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus, in contrast to his famous predecessor, Vaclav Havel,[63] has openly rejected civil society and called it "aberrant." According to Andrew Stroehlein, "He has consistently refused to accept the idea that nonprofit organizations could help the country as much as profit-making ones."[64] Recognizing the influence that nongovernmental organizations are gaining in the Czech Republic and reflecting on their impact on the political process, Klaus took an offensive stand against the role of NGOs arguing that they claim political power they never received in elections, and stated that they represent a "threat to democracy."[65] This obvious lack of understanding of the role of civil society is symptomatic of the absence of legacy of multilateral dialogue and collaboration in the pursuit of the common good within the frame of a civil covenant.

The transition to neoliberal capitalism in Eastern Europe has been a difficult and turbulent process of adaptation to new ideological, economic, and political realities often perceived as necessary evils for one's survival in the contemporary global village. The prosperity gospel has played a particular role within this process of adaptation that deserves further reflection.

The Effects of the Prosperity Gospel in Eastern Europe's Time of Transition

The prosperity gospel can be viewed as a spiritual platform for neoliberalism's ideological assertions in the Eastern European socioeconomic life. It articulates neoliberal capitalist values and demands the corresponding transformation of individual and corporate existence. It points to the overarching transition within the economic identity of this part of the world that moves society's ethos from idealism to pragmatism, from spirit to matter, from communitarianism to individualism, from production to consumption.

To those who have embraced it amid the pains and travails of sociopolitical and economic change, the prosperity gospel has offered a coping mechanism that enables people to adapt to capitalism and its values successfully.[66] It constructs a dogmatic bridge from the egalitarian classless communist past to the capitalist present. The prosperity message holds these two seemingly contrasting ends together by offering an ideological justification and moral legitimization of the appearance of social classes as well as economic inequality, while advancing a different form of redistribution of wealth—not from the rich to the poor but from the "uncovenant" to the "covenant" members of society. In addition to this "divinely ordained" redistribution of wealth, the prosperity gospel insists on the magical appearance of riches in the life of Christians as a result of God's creative provision. Wealth is to be generated by a faith-confession of what is believed to be God's will for the believer, thus empowering its manifestation in the present as a way of evoking the eruption of the future into the now.

Strangely enough, the prosperity message's futuristic optimism and ethical justification resonate with the Marxist past. Its teleological utilitarianism is consistent with the methods of moral justification utilized by Marx in defense of the ethical grounds of the proletarian revolution. According to Marx, the dictatorship of the proletariat over the rest of the classes was justified by the historical inevitability of being the single class of the future. This self-perception of "being the future of the world" and being entitled by destiny to rule over its material resources and govern it according to one's interests is not foreign to the prosperity gospel ethos. If the Christians are the future of the world, they have the moral right to take over its resources here and now.

The idea of personal wealth creation as an extension of God's care for the individual believer affirms a positive view of reality amid

the escalating socioeconomic pessimism within Eastern Europe. Paradoxically, however, the optimistic prosperity message produces different responses in its recipients. Some receive it as a mandate to take personal responsibility for their economic condition and not to rely upon the intervention of the state, thus breaking with the legacy of the communist past. For these individuals, the promises of the prosperity gospel translate into an affirmation of personal initiative and industriousness, which will be marked by a special blessing of God. Therefore, believers are encouraged to focus on their acclimation to the particularities of market economy and invest time and effort in attaining business literacy. Hard work, fiscal discipline, and excellence in vocational performance are praised, while idleness is rebuked and viewed as lack of cooperation with God's divine plan. Perhaps this type of response to the prosperity gospel could be viewed as standing in loose continuity with some of the assertions of the Protestant work ethic and its adaptation to the conditions of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century global neoliberal capitalism.

However, such an association would be partial and one-sided. While the prosperity gospel and Calvinist piety share the view that creation of wealth is a side effect of the fulfillment of one's God-given calling and articulate a form of an "activist salvation ethic,"[67] they differ in the nuances of their moral argumentation and spiritual priorities. They share the affirmation that fulfilling one's calling glorifies God, and they emphasize individual versus communal participation in "proving" one's belonging among the elect. However, the prosperity gospel does not exemplify the overarching ascetic emphasis in the Weberian depiction of the "spirit of capitalism" and in the teleological motivation of Calvinist pragmatism and pietism. On the contrary, the ones who practice the prosperity principles of "sowing and reaping" are noted for their intentional display of material riches and extravagant lifestyles.[68] The unabashed display of one's personal wealth is considered an authenticating witness of God's existence, his providential care in the life of the believers, and the validity of the prosperity principles and practices. Examples of personal economic success are used, therefore, to advertise the prosperity message. Further, in contrast to Calvinism's association of wealth with the elect's persistence in their calling and worship to God, a number of the propagators of the prosperity gospel in Eastern Europe insist on the universality of the principles of divine prosperity and their applicability to all who recognize and practice them even if they themselves are not members of the Christian community. While on the one hand this message argues that prosperity and health are provided for all believers in the covenant as

a result of the redemptive work of Christ, on the other hand (as many critics have observed) it disassociates "the spiritual laws" of acquiring wealth from the personal confession of Christ as a savior.

Whereas some have received the prosperity message as motivation to hard work, it has induced in other recipients a very different response. For example, in some Central European postcommunist countries, the prosperity preachers encouraged, in the past, the believers "to live by faith" beyond their means, taking insecure loans in order to increase their level of lifestyle and acquire a taste for their true economic calling. The congregations were instructed to anticipate God's miraculous provision of the difference between their actual financial means and their new spending practices. This fiscal irresponsibility was designated as living by faith and therefore glorifying to God because it did not limit his ability to act on behalf of his children. As people continued to go deeper in debt, they were told that this is God's debt and he always takes care of his accounts.[69]

This lack of financial realism and discipline nurtured by both religious and secular market ideology of self-indulgent consumerism conveniently coincided with the explosion of bad (unsubstantiated) loans that the banks were eager to provide. In the first few years of transition to deregulated market economies, Eastern Europe almost overnight grew its own host of credit millionaires, the majority of whom by the end of the decade declared bankruptcy and denied any responsibility for poor business practices and low ethical standards. The banks were bankrupted as well, and while some were rescued by the state's intervention, a significant number had to permanently close their doors.

In light of these developments, the Eastern European economic crises from the early '90s can be viewed as a precursor to the most recent global economic crisis. The forceful push of neoliberalism upon the postcommunist world transformed it into a social laboratory which previewed the conditions of the current crises almost two decades earlier. Unfortunately, the West was too excited with its project of transforming the East into its new market and service area extension to pause and register the warning signs. Eventually, the Eastern European countries had to develop a balancing act between the deregulatory demands of their Western creditors (mostly the IMF and the World Bank, which imposed the ideological formulations of the Washington Consensus) and the obvious need of intervention and regulation of the national economic policies and corresponding practices.

Following their interpretation of "the principles of sowing and reaping," early on, the prosperity protagonists instructed believers to

sow only in "good ground" in order to guarantee an abundant financial harvest. Therefore, the poor, the widows, the orphans, the handicapped, and unemployed were viewed as "bad soil." Benevolence, in its classical sense was discouraged and neglected. The poor were ignored as unworthy of the heavenly investment banking practiced by the prosperous. While the majority of classical Pentecostal denominations invested themselves in benevolence (opening orphanages, soup kitchens and counseling centers, etc.) and stood in solidarity with the vulnerable and the weak in the midst of the agony of transition,[70] the prosperity gospel churches invested in businesses that could bring revenue to their ecclesial budgets. In doing so they often displayed great diligence and economic ingenuity; they used excellent marketing techniques while targeting sectors of highly relevant services such as foreign language studies, computer literacy, business study programs, private kindergartens, and elementary schools, etc.

"Lending to the Lord" was understood as an exchange of one's life for material possessions on earth. By "giving one's life to God" the believer in return was promised health and wealth for this life. If health and wealth did not come, this was considered to be an indicator of believers' lack of faith; therefore, their sickness and poverty were their own fault. Thus, salvation took a form of transaction (via the currency of faith) the goal of which was satisfying one's heart's desires through consumption of goods and services personally provided by God. In addition to the treatment of God as a dispenser of earthly blessings, this version of the prosperity gospel joined the capitalist ethos in promoting the commodification of the individual human life. However, the price tag on individuals' souls was determined not by the exchange value on the liberalized labor markets but by the limits of their consumer desires.

As mentioned above, the prosperity gospel shares with Calvinism the idea that wealth is an indication of election.[71] However, the emphasis shifts from productivity through hard work to acquiring wealth magically through accessing by faith God's creative power and ability to bring about reality out of nothing. Election is therefore defined not by productivity but by the level of consumption. Well-being is defined not in terms of peace and contentment or in view of satisfied basic physical, mental, and spiritual needs, but in terms of indulging desires and realizing extravagant fantasies.

Overall, in continuity with capitalist spirituality, the prosperity message nurtured a continual discontent with one's economic condition and an aggressive pursuit of one's consumerist identity perpetually enlarged by intentionally provoked covetousness. The

secret to be content with much or with little was not considered a virtue but a compromise with one's economic destiny in the global market society.

However, in the midst of its obsessive preoccupation with the accumulation of personal wealth, the prosperity gospel did offer a noncriminal alternative for economic success within the transition of the postcommunist world. It reunited the realm of business with the practice of Christian moral integrity. This merging of economics and Christian faith commitment promotes an uncompromised fusion of public and private life and emphasizes bringing one's religious values to the marketplace as an authentication of personal faith-witness. Therefore, the prosperity gospel offered higher ethical standards and guidance amid the moral void left after the fall of communism within the Eastern European social setting, which was exhausted by ideological tension and economic travail.[72]

Conclusion

At the end of its second decade in Eastern Europe, the prosperity gospel has adapted to local particularities and is taking ownership of its environment. Instead of nurturing dissatisfaction with the state, it has promoted self-initiative to create what is needed but lacking in one's life. In some local contexts, it has successfully combined the pursuit of personal economic desires with meeting communal demands and needs. The prosperity churches model a creative engagement of their socioeconomic environment by developing both products and markets; at the same time, they function as service centers for their surrounding communities and provide them with tools for socioeconomic adaptation within the new capitalist existence.

It may be argued that by emphasizing personal responsibility for one's material conditions, the prosperity message has contributed also toward the development of civil society through empowering the population to cultivate and manage social capital through nongovernmental structures. The various business ventures of the prosperity churches often rise out of the needs of their own constituencies that overflow into the broader community.[73] In the process they strengthen their internal social networks while accumulating corporate economic wealth (for their religious fellowships) and offering tools for the improvement of individual economic conditions.

However, with its overarching emphasis on personal economic interest and well-being, the prosperity gospel not only complements the neoliberal capitalist agenda but contributes to the social effects

of the deconstruction of communal identity through its promotion of individualism and unrestrained consumerism. The prosperity gospel offers a spiritualization and moral justification for the capitalist primacy of greed and self-indulgence, and it blinds its subscribers to the value and dignity of human life "in its most distressful disguise" (Mother Theresa)—embodied in physical and economic suffering and in social marginalization and exclusion from the bliss of capitalist affluence.

Functioning as a religious extension of neoliberalism, the prosperity gospel in Eastern Europe has not engaged critically the capitalist economic dogmatic and has not provided an inspiration for its creative revisioning in response to the populace's disillusionment with capitalism's all-commodifying grasp. Therefore, the prosperity message do not satisfy the longing of these countries to develop indigenous socioeconomic identities that are compatible with their Eastern Orthodox spiritual heritage and its communal ethos.

The biblical vision of Pentecost and its communal economics, on the other hand, offers precisely the type of challenge to the sociopolitical imagination needed in this part of the world.[74] After fifty years of living in the nightmare of the distorted secular version of Pentecost, perhaps it is time for society to find a renewed inspiration in its original paradigm for social transformation. Pentecost's communal ethics offers an ideological model that reunites economics with its spiritual foundations in the Christ-like consciousness of the believers. The result is a new form of economic relationships, namely, relationships that embrace the other and prioritize their well-being as an extension of God's self-sharing with his world. Perhaps Pentecost's vision of radical inclusion of all God's creatures in his comprehensive socioeconomic justice is precisely the ideological substance that can birth hope within a hope-depleted context awaiting the social redemption of its economic life on this side of the eschaton.

Endnotes

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3. Ibid., 7.
4. Ibid., 9.

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6. Birch and Mykhnenko, "Introduction," 11.
7. Robert W. McChesney, "Introduction," to Noam Chromsky, *Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Steven Stories Press, 1999), 9.
8. Ibid., 10.
9. Ibid., 11.
10. The scope of the present work does not allow for a review of the rise and broad doctrinal spectrum of the prosperity gospel. However, this topic has been well researched and articulated elsewhere.
11. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975), 333.
12. Kathryn D. Blanchard, *The Protestant Ethic or the Spirit of Capitalism: Christians, Freedom, and Free Markets* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2010), 57.
13. Ibid.
14. Lisa Hill, "The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 8, no. 1 (2001): 1–29, at 22. Hill articulates the various interpretations of function of "the invisible hand" in Smith's work, e.g., lexical and metaphorical, critical and ironic, evolutionary Darwinian, theological assertion of divine providence, etc.
15. Blanchard, *The Protestant Ethic or the Spirit of Capitalism*, 65.
16. Ibid.
17. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1966), 119–20.
18. Ibid., 120.
19. As Smith states: "The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world, and that mankind are disposed to go along with him in all those agreeable emotions with which the advantages of his situation so readily inspire him. At the thought of this his heart seems to swell and dilate itself within him, and he is fonder of his wealth, upon this account, than for all the other advantages it procures him. The poor man, on the contrary is ashamed of his poverty" (ibid., 71).
20. Ibid., 70.
21. Blanchard, *The Protestant Ethic or the Spirit of Capitalism*, 67.
22. For a sample of critical engagement with Weber's work, see Robert W. Green, ed., *Protestantism and Capitalism: The Weber Thesis and Its Critics* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1959).
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32. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: William Benton Publisher, 1955), 6.
33. Ibid., 15.
34. The separate individual "intends only his own gain."'However, the individual is ultimately led "...by an invisible hand to promote and end which was no part of his intention...By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it" (Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 194).
35. Ibid.
36. C. Eric Mount Jr., "American Individualism Reconsidered," *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 4 (June 1981): 362–76, at 366.
37. An obvious exception in this regard will be the Central European postcommunist countries (Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Hungary), which were historically and culturally associated with the West, which places them within the influence spheres of Catholicism and Protestantism. However, the Eastern European countries are traditionally Eastern Orthodox and this is the religious affiliation of more than 90 percent of the population in this part of the world.
38. Rosa Luxemburg, "Socialism and the Churches," *Marxist Classics*, http://www.newyouth.com/content/view/152/68.
39. N. Berdyaev, *The New Middle Ages*, vol. 2 of *Collected Works* (Sofia: Zachari Stoyanov, 2003), 526, 530–31.
40. N. Berdyaev, *Philosophy of Inequality* (Sofia: Prozoretz, 1923), 110, 116.
41. N. Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, vol. 2 of *Collected Works* (Sofia: ZachariStoyanov, 2003), 313.
42. Berdyaev, *The New Middle Ages*, 531.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid, 532.
46. Ibid, 522.
47. The theological concept of *sobornost* is fundamental for understanding the commitment to communitarian life within the Eastern Orthodox tradition. The *sobornost* of the faith community is the work

of the Spirit who translates the communal life of the Trinity within the community of believers, making possible sharing life with the other in all of its wholeness. This wholeness involves also the sharing of material existence (including personal possessions).

48. Berdyaev, *Philosophy of Inequality*, 115.
49. Eastern Europe's historical cycle in the twentieth century started with capitalism, moved through Marxist socialism, and ended once again in capitalism.
50. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), 1.
51. Andrew Stroehlein, "Three Vaclavs," *Central Europe Review* 1, no. 10 (30 August 1999): 3.
52. Ibid.
53. The former president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, made the following statement about this cynical twist in the political and economic life of the postcommunist societies: "Demagogy is rife, and even something as important as the natural longing of a people for autonomy is exploited in power plays, as rivals compete in lying to the public. Many members of the party elite, the so-called *nomenklatura* who, until very recently, were faking concern about social justice and the working class, have cast aside their masks and, almost overnight, openly became speculators and thieves. Many a once-feared Communist is now an unscrupulous capitalist, shameless and unequivocally laughing in the face of the same workers whose interests he once allegedly defended." See Vaclav Havel, "Politics, Morality and Civility," in Don E. Eberly, ed., *The Essential Civil Society Reader* (Cumnor Hill, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 391–401, at 392.
54. Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 141. Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel Prize in economics and former chief economist and senior vice president of the World Bank, offers a comprehensive analysis of the failure of the "shock therapy" approach in Russia (133–65).
55. Ibid., 6.
56. Swanee Hunt, "Raising Their Voices: Women in the New Democracies," *The Ambassadors Review* (Fall 1997); the full text is at. www.ksg.harvard.edu/wappp/happen/raising_voices.pdf
57. Regarding the gender dimension of exploitation and global feminization of labor see also Berch Berberoglu, *Globalization of Capital and the Nation-State: Imperialism, Class Struggle, and the State in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 4; Jill Steans, "Globalization and Gender Inequality," in David Held and Anthony McGrew, eds., *The Global Transformations Reader*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Polity, 2003), 455–463. See also Tiffany G. Petros, "Mop, Shop and Shut up: Feminism in the Czech Republic," *Central Europe Review* 2, no. 43 (11 December 2000)

at www.ce-review.org/00/43/petros43; and Lucy Ward, "After the Wall," *Guardian* (Thursday, 23 September 1999) at www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,3904787-103691,00.html

58. Concerning the negative effect the transition to capitalism and Western liberal democracy has had on Eastern Europe, see also Berberoglu, *Globalization of Capital and the Nation-State*, 10. The author sees the exploitation of raw materials in Eastern Europe by Western capitalism as a form of neocolonialism.
59. The story of Leonid Chernovet'skyi, described by Catherine Wanner in her book *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 236–39, illustrates the assertion that most of the new capitalists with a significant personal wealth were associated with the old communist regime as well as with some illegal activities.
60. Leslie Holmes, *Rotten States? Corruption, Post-Communism and Neoliberalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 183–84.
61. Ibid., 186. There are obvious exceptions to this statement. For example, one should consider the impact of *Solidarnost* in Poland upon the socioeconomic and political transformation of society before the fall of communism. Another particularity of the Polish case is the role of the Catholic Church in forming and maintaining the existence of civil society under communism.
62. Interview with Margaret Thatcher in the weekly periodical *Woman's Own*, London (July 1987). See also Stroehlein, "Three Vaclavs," 2.
63. Regarding the difference between the views of Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus see "Rival Visions: Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus," with commentary by Petr Rithart, *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 1 (1996): 12–23.
64. Stroehlein, "Three Vaclavs," 3. Carol Stalik Left, *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation Versus State* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), 157.
65. Jan Richter, "Vaclav Klaus: The Experienced and Predictable," Radio Prague, Special Edition (7 February 2008), 2, with transcript and audio available at http://www.radio.cz/en/section/election-special/vaclav-klaus-the-experienced-and-predictable.
66. Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 234.
67. Ibid., 243.
68. Wealth is a contextual and therefore relative reality. Yet, there is a notable difference in the practices of the advocates of the prosperity message, who try to distinguish themselves in society through an intentional display of their material affluence.
69. Pastor Wojtech Wloch, in a personal interview (Cleveland, Tennessee, August 2010). Pastor Wloch subscribed to the prosperity gospel message shortly after the fall of communism in Poland and spent

most of the following decade studying and practicing together with his congregation the prosperity laws. He eventually abandoned the prosperity teaching.

70. Daniela Augustine, "Bulgarian Pentecostalism," in William K. Kay and Anne Dyer, eds., *European Pentecostalism, Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies 7* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 238–44.
71. Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 243.
72. Ibid., 239–44.
73. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "An African Pentecostal on Mission in Eastern Europe: The Church of the Embassy of God in Ukraine," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 297–321. Both Asamoah-Gyadu and Catherine Wanner offer a case study of the same church in Ukraine: The Embassy of God, pastored by Sunday Adelaja (ethnic Nigerian). However, this is a rather exceptional case within the Eastern European context. While the membership of the church is impressive, it is still insignificant in relation to the general demographics of Ukraine. Yet, Protestantism has enjoyed a bit more freedom in this country due to the fact that the historical links of its Orthodox Church with Russia have made it a suspect of promoting pro-Russian influence and interest in Ukraine.
74. Daniela C. Augustine, "Pentecost Communal Economics and the Household of God," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19 (2010): 219–42.

Part III

Responses

Chapter 10

Prosperous Prosperity: Why the Health and Wealth Gospel is Booming across the Globe

R. Andrew Chesnut

The vast methodological and geographical scope of the chapters in this volume leads to several conclusions on the practice of prosperity theology around the globe at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In considering these salient points, I will draw on my own research on charismatic Christianity in Latin America in which I have sought to explain why Pentecostalism and charismatic Catholicism have mushroomed in Latin America over the past five decades. Here I will attempt to show why the "health and wealth gospel" has proven so appealing to millions of Christians throughout the world.

On the plane of macroeconomics it is clear that prosperity theology, in both practice and theory, reinforces and even promotes the existing global capitalist order. In fact, the health and wealth gospel was birthed in capitalism as a theology that was conceived and developed in the United States, the world's leading free market economy. Studies from China, the Philippines, Nigeria, Brazil, and many other nations reveal a theology that encourages adherents to realize their potential through hard work, entrepreneurship, sobriety, and wise investments. This could not be more obvious than in the leading neo-Pentecostal denomination of Brazil, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, in which two days of the weekly calendar of church services are dedicated to "entrepreneurs" and "prosperity." A number of members of this church whom I interviewed in the early 1990s had become microentrepreneurs, mostly street vendors, at the urging of their prosperity-preaching pastors. Nanlai Cao shows the same for

China where followers of the health and wealth gospel strive to be bosses at their workplaces.

Prosperous preachers such as Brother Mike of El Shaddai, Nigerian-born Sunday Adelaja, and Joel Osteen promote themselves as compelling examples of the theology that they preach and put into practice. Through their unwavering faith they were able to overcome poverty and self-doubt and become the champions that their flock strive to be. But "Joel," as he is affectionately known to his followers, Brother Mike, Brother Sunday, and their prosperous cohorts charted prosperous paths through the familiar waters of the capitalist marketplace. Naturally, they preach to their parishioners that their own paths to prosperity are to be navigated in the same seas of capitalism.

Such theology could not be more diametrically opposed to certain strains of Catholic liberation theology which condemned capitalism as sinful for its elevation of profit above all else. Here the path to prosperity for the downtrodden of Latin America lay in overthrowing an economic system that was viewed as inherently exploitative. Many who subscribed to this type of liberation theology practiced in the 1970s and 1980s believed that socialism, with its emphasis on the collective good, was more in harmony with the values of the gospel and thus would allow the disenfranchised masses of Latin America to realize themselves in a way that was next to impossible in economies based on profit and competition. Thus the obvious prescription for prosperity for impoverished parishioners was to join the struggle to overthrow capitalist regimes and replace them with socialist ones. Liberation theology, whose appeal was always very limited even its heyday, was for all intents and purposes delivered a coup de grace by the double blows of a Vatican offensive, led by the current pope Benedict, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite regimes in Eastern Europe.

Having established prosperity theology's impeccable capitalist credentials, we can now examine the main reasons for its widespread popularity across the globe. Of course religious freedom varies greatly across the world, but to a large extent believers who follow the health and wealth gospel do so because they have consciously chosen to practice this particular brand of Christianity. In countries such as Brazil and the United States, "religious consumers" can choose from a dizzying array of spiritual firms, both Christian and others, that freely compete with each other in the provision of supernatural goods and services. Those firms that offer the most appealing religious products in the free marketplace of faith are the ones that prosper the most. Failure to cater to the tastes and preference of consumers

in a competitive religious economy almost always means stagnation and demise. Mainline Protestantism, which has been on a decades-long decline particularly in Western Europe and the United States, provides a good example of firms that have failed to adapt rapidly to changing consumer demand.[1] In his illuminating chapter, Cao makes it clear that even in China, where organized religion is greatly restricted, a relatively robust "gray market" of faith operates in which Chinese believers can choose from a number of Christian and non-Christian options. If many Chinese individuals and others around the world have actively chosen to belong to churches that encourage them to name and claim their objects of prosperity, it is because such preaching and practice resonates with their own aspirations and ambitions.

In general, the resonance of the health and wealth gospel is based on a dialectic between the lack of prosperity among those who subscribe to the theology and their strong desire to acquire the abundance and fortune offered to them in the sermons, testimonials, and hymns at their churches. In other words, prosperity theology generally appeals to those who are not prosperous (such as the great majority of members of El Shaddai in the Philippines) but who possess a strong desire to improve their lots in life. In my own research on Latin American Pentecostalism, I have posited a similar dialectic between faith healing and poverty-related illness. More specifically, I have found that more than any other factor the promise of divine healing offered at Pentecostal and charismatic churches leads Latin Americans to convert to the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal denominations. A plurality of my informants in Brazil had converted at the time of a serious health crisis of their own or that of a family member.[2]

This, of course, is not to say that there are not prosperous adherents of the health and wealth gospel. Cao points to prosperous business people in China who are adherents of the theology and there are certain neo-Pentecostal denominations in Guatemala, for instance, that have many prosperous professionals on church rolls. But one need only briefly listen to the sermons of Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, and Brother Mike, among others, to discover that the content of their discourse is almost exclusively aimed at those who are not prosperous but yearn to be "champions" and "victors." So great is the discursive orientation toward the down and out, the unemployed, the sick, and substance abusers that there is almost no message of substance for those who already lead lives of abundance. Having lived in Houston for eleven years, I am all too familiar with Joel Osteen's preaching.

In my assessment, his prosperity-based sermons are completely aimed at those who wish to be champions, not those who already are. Similarly, Gerardo Marti shows how Oasis Christian Center gears its message toward Hollywood workers, who, although relatively affluent by global standards, do not feel like champions as they have yet "to make it" in the entertainment industry.

Marti's chapter leads us to another major reason for the great appeal of the health and wealth gospel to entertainment workers and millions of other Christians across the globe. Marti, drawing on the work of Ulrich Beck, convincingly shows that the theology's emphasis on individual prosperity jibes with the zeitgeist of the contemporary global labor market. Whether in Hollywood or Manila, we are compelled to compete as individuals in capitalist labor markets. Perhaps Hollywood workers must market themselves in more obvious ways than the rest of us, but securing employment and advancing one's career necessarily involve successfully developing and selling one's individual skills.

This is not to say that prosperity preachers ignore the fact that their congregants are also members of family and other social networks. However, the content of the messages of fortune and abundance is squarely aimed at the individual and not the family or other corporate bodies. And while there is quite a range of individualization throughout the world, the inexorable trend is a shift away from corporate identity toward that of the individual. Thus, there is near perfect convergence between preaching intended for individuals and Christians desirous of their own personal "breakthroughs" or miracles of health and wealth. Seemingly from another planet are the corporate concerns of liberation theology in which individual prosperity, insofar as it is even relevant, can really only be attained through socialist economies in which individual identity takes a back seat to matters of the common good. Given the hegemony of global capitalism today, theologies that address the aspirations and afflictions of individuals, especially in relation to the workplace, are far more relevant than those that speak to corporate bodies.

While there is an undeniable element of magic at play in some strains of the theology (alluded to by Nimi Wariboko, Daniela C. Augustine, and Katharine L. Wiegele), it generally functions as a tool of individual empowerment. Much of the magic preachers perform centers on the tithe. More than a few pastors preach of spectacular returns on tithes invested in church: fivefold, sixfold, sevenfold—a multiplication of talents that would rival the profits earned by narcotraffickers. Paradoxically, there is even an element of empowerment to be found

in the exaggerated claims regarding tithing. In giving money to their church, believers, who are usually on the receiving end of donations, charity, and assistance, become active investors often in the same institution that facilitated a miracle in their lives or even helped them to turn their lives around.[3]

Of course the more obvious source of empowerment is found in the messages of self-help in which congregants are encouraged to be proactive in their quest for prosperity. With regard to employment this might mean quitting a dead end job to start a business or going back to school to acquire new skills or sharpen existing ones. In the realm of health, it might mean going on a diet and losing forty pounds so that obesity-related ailments are eliminated. For the divorced and lonely it might mean joining appropriate singles' groups where the chances of finding new companionship are increased. Again the emphasis on self-help meshes with the global zeitgeist. In much of the developing world where the majority of followers of the health and wealth gospel live, there is nothing resembling the welfare state in which a government safety net exists for the most impoverished citizens. Citizens must fend for themselves if they are to survive, let alone prosper. The situation is by no means as extreme in the United States, Canada, and Europe, but after years of budget cuts in social services the welfare state is but a shadow of its former self, particularly in the United States where the theology in question was conceived. So in a global context where improving one's lot is heavily dependent on one's own efforts, a theology that sacralizes self-help and individual initiative is understandably appealing.

What we do not know at this point beyond anecdotal reports is if there have been any positive societal benefits in the countries where the health and wealth gospel is practiced by significant sectors of the population. The Centre for Development and Enterprise study in South Africa, for example, is optimistic about such potential benefits but does not offer any hard evidence indicating that a critical mass of followers of the health and wealth gospel have prospered sufficiently to make a positive contribution to the nation's social and economic well-being. Even those empowered by faith in their own prosperity face formidable structural barriers to realizing their dreams of plentitude. High unemployment, costly medical care, limited educational opportunities, and racism constitute major obstacles in the paths of millions who seek to better their lots in life. In the absence of major studies of the possible socioeconomic impact of the practice of prosperity theology, it is impossible at this time to draw conclusions on the larger secular impact, if any, of the health and wealth gospel.

Returning to the major reasons for widespread appeal of the theology, we would be remiss in ignoring its pragmatism. One of Max Weber's great contributions to sociology of religion was to demonstrate the importance of socioeconomic class in the practice of religion. Here, the relevance of Weberian thought lies in the idea that the religion of the working classes tends to be both salvationist and utilitarian.[4] With regard to the former, the health and wealth gospel is almost always preached within salvationist forms of Christianity, specifically Pentecostal and charismatic. Of course the immediacy and intensity of the message of salvation vary widely from denomination to denomination. According to Weber, the appeal of salvationist religion to the disprivileged classes lies in their desire to be saved from oppressive social, political, and economic systems.

More relevant to our discussion, however, is the observation that the religion of the working classes tends to be utilitarian, in contrast to the more abstract and esoteric forms of faith practiced by the privileged classes. With its emphasis on flourishing in this world in which capitalism reins supreme, prosperity theology could not be more pragmatic. It speaks to the immediate crises and afflictions that plague the disprivileged classes more often and more acutely than the affluent. The combination of faith in God's individualized plan for prosperity and specific action taken to help oneself offers a potential real-world solution for unemployment, debt, illness, and family problems. This is exactly one of the main reasons why liberation theology failed to become a mass movement. A change from one economic system, capitalism in this case, to another, socialism, is a monumental and risky undertaking that usually offers no solution to immediate suffering. Indeed in some cases, such as the Soviet Union under Stalin, it resulted in even greater misery. Thus, the health and wealth gospel has quickly become a top-shelf item in the supermarket of faith because of its promise to ameliorate if not heal many of the most common pathogens of poverty in a timely manner.

Speaking of healing, let us briefly consider this other half of the health and wealth gospel, which has been relegated to the back burner in our discussion of prosperity theology. Of equal if not greater importance in the twin gospel is health. For the great majority of subscribers to the health and wealth gospel around the world, the latter is predicated on the former. The Nigerians, Filipinos, and Guatemalans, among others who follow this gospel, largely make a living through physical labor or in the service sector. A serious illness can result in a significant loss of wages, especially in the typical work environment where "sick days" and "disability" do not exist.

Acute or chronic health problems can plunge families who already barely make ends meet into destitution. As mentioned above, faith healing not only constitutes an integral part of prosperity theology but is also the main reason why millions of Latin Americans, among others, convert to Pentecostalism in the first place. And the faith healing offered as part of the health and wealth gospel is available for all types of illnesses, not just physical ailments. Substance abuse, domestic discord, and trauma related to sexual abuse all figure among some of the afflictions that can be cured by faith in the healing power of Jesus.[5]

A distinct type of faith healing, exorcism, is also practiced with increasing frequency in many churches that practice prosperity theology, especially in the developing world. In Brazil and the Caribbean, the demons that possess Pentecostals and charismatics are believed to be the liminal trickster spirits known as *exús* in Brazil, of Umbanda, Candomble, Santeria, and other African diasporan religions. Many Christians in Brazil and the Caribbean believe that such spirit possession by the exús can cause all types of injury and harm in the lives of the possessed individuals and their family members. So the exorcisms performed by prosperity preachers are often charged with drama and involve "interviews with the demons" in which the pastors first determine the identity of the particular exú before expelling it from the tormented individual. Some Pentecostal denominations, such as the dynamic Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, even hold exorcism services on a weekly basis in which many worshipers become demon-possessed, and then delivered, during the two-hour affair.[6] Once delivered from bondage to the exús, believers are free to focus on the business of living the abundant life, whatever that might mean in specific socioeconomic contexts.

To conclude, this chapter is reflective of my larger research agenda in which I have sought to explain the appeal of particular religious groups, including Pentecostals, charismatic Catholics, practitioners of African disaporan faiths, and most recently devotees of the Mexican folk saint, Santa Muerte (Saint Death).[7] However, the primary reason for attempting to explain prosperity theology's great international appeal is not because it coincides with my own research agenda, rather it is due to the thrust of most of the chapters in this volume, which demonstrate the attractiveness of the health and wealth gospel in diverse global contexts. The obvious exception is the chapter by Augustine, which accurately describes prosperity theology as a capitalist-engendered and free-market-promoting set of beliefs and practices that has found very little traction in Eastern Europe.

Where I part company with Augustine is in her analysis of the reason(s) for the relative lack of the prosperity gospel in Eastern Europe. She argues that the procapitalist theology, with its emphasis on the individual, does not resonate among people of the region who are culturally more communally oriented. She posits the purported communitarian emphasis of Eastern Orthodoxy and the more recent experience of socialism as major contributing factors for the rejection and alleged inappropriateness of the prosperity message in Eastern Europe. In contrast, I would point to two interrelated factors relevant to the very small number of adherents of prosperity theology. First and foremost, with some degree of national variation, Europe is the most secularized region on earth. In general, Eastern Europe is less so than Western, but globally the region ranks second only to the western part of the continent in levels of secularization. One of the major reasons for this, of course, is nearly a half century of atheistic socialism. More than a generation of Bulgarians, Hungarians, among others, were taught the Marxist perspective on religion and learned that organized faith was an enemy of the state.

In a similar vein, the health and wealth gospel is preached almost exclusively by Pentecostals and charismatic Protestants in Eastern Europe, and since there is not a critical mass of Protestants in these countries, its reception is very limited. In both the heavily Catholic areas of Latin America and the Philippines, a critical mass of Protestants already existed when the health and wealth gospel surged in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed Christianity in general was already fully in the process of Pentecostalizing there when prosperity theology began its takeoff. Thus in the socioreligious context of a highly secularized Europe, where the greatest religious vitality is found among African, Middle Eastern and Caribbean immigrants, any religious movement, no matter how dynamic it is in the rest of the world, faces an uphill battle among the millions of nonbelieving and nonpracticing Europeans.

Lest I finish on a negative note, the main focus here is on the factors that have contributed to prosperity theology's appeal to millions of renewalist Catholics and Protestants across the globe. Beyond the analysis made here, both Amos Yong and Wariboko make the insightful observation that the theology under consideration is pluralistic and as such takes on different contours in diverse geographical and denominational settings. Just as Christians can choose from many different denominations in countries with at least some degree of religious liberty, those who are attracted to the health and wealth gospel can select from a variety of versions of the theology. Thus, as

a particular set of Christian beliefs and practices that offer the downtrodden and the down and out a very practical way to reclaim their health and improve the material and spiritual conditions of their life, the prosperity gospel will continue to thrive in many parts of the world, especially the global south.

Endnotes

1. R. Andrew Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
2. R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).
3. Ibid.
4. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 [1922]).
5. Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil.*
6. Ibid.
7. R. Andrew Chesnut, *Devoted to Death: Santa Muerte, the Skeleton Saint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Chapter 11

A Call for Careful Discernment: A Theological Response to Prosperity Preaching

Frank D. Macchia

I wish to thank the editors Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong as well as the other authors of this volume for presenting a very interesting and informative guide to so-called prosperity theology. I enjoyed reading each and every one of the chapters, though my response cannot mention them all due to the requirements of brevity. The question that would preoccupy many Christian theologians who discuss the prosperity message has to do with whether it is a valid contextualization of the gospel. If not, is it a syncretistic accommodation to an alien doctrine and ethical commitment that are at odds with the gospel of Christ? Such questions call for theological discernment, which, as with most cases of discernment, must be done carefully and charitably, with the possibility in mind that new movements can emerge among the churches that offer a novel way of contextualizing the gospel while still remaining essentially true to it. Such a possibility is the central focus of this theological evaluation of the prosperity message.

One Gospel, Many Voices?

Discernment of the possibility of valid contextualization is done by Christian churches within their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This recognition of one gospel at the heart of the proclamation and other core practices of the different churches is difficult to define with very much precision. Though defining the gospel involves ambiguity, the ecumenical movement has reached broad consensus

that there is only one gospel at the center of what binds the churches together. Perhaps for my purposes here I can agree with the Roman Catholic–Lutheran Joint Commission that "together we confess the faith in the triune God and the saving work of God through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, which binds all Christendom together" (#13).[1] One need only read the classic creedal affirmations such as the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed to note that the faith of the church focuses on the work of the triune God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to bring all things under the liberating reign of God. This definition could be expanded and even qualified in a number of ways as different confessional families read the scriptures together in the light of shared tradition and in the context of different social and cultural settings.[2]

The level of ambiguity in defining the gospel Tradition at the core of the different Christian traditions[3] leaves considerable space for novel expressions and understandings of this gospel in the living witness of the churches throughout various settings. Some understandings may be viewed as questionable but not heretical (or as challenging without departing from the faith that binds the churches together to a common heritage). The line separating a challengingly new rendition of the gospel and a heretical departure from it can be fine indeed. Yet, the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer Huldrych Zwingli spoke—and continues to speak—for the majority of Christian churches when he wrote of the Christian Church in the Ten Theses of Bern, "born of the Word of God (Jesus the Christ), it rejects all foreign and strange voices calling it away from itself and from its Lord" (Thesis 1).

The Pentecostal and charismatic churches that lie at the base of the prosperity message have typically stressed in their unique telling of the gospel the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the blessings of salvation through Christ to bear on the material conditions of life. Not all such churches distinguish themselves by a narrow accent on prosperity, but they all typically share the conviction that faith in Christ should lead to material well-being. Their preaching has highlighted divine healing of the body as well as well-being and prosperity through faith in Christ. As Grant Wacker has noted, Pentecostals have ended up wedding an emphasis on the supernatural power of God with a this-worldly pragmatism that seeks to bring this power to bear on the concrete realities of the material and institutional life of their communities of faith.[4] Though typical of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, this rendition of the gospel parallels a larger ecumenical trend. For example, M. M. Thomas's main address to

the Bangkok Missionary Conference drew from Psalm 144:12–15 in describing salvation in strikingly material and this-worldly terms:

> [12] Then our sons in their youth
> will be like well-nurtured plants,
> and our daughters will be like pillars
> carved to adorn a palace.
> [13] Our barns will be filled
> with every kind of provision.
> Our sheep will increase by thousands,
> by tens of thousands in our fields;
> [14] our oxen will draw heavy loads.
> There will be no breaching of walls,
> no going into captivity,
> no cry of distress in our streets.
> [15] Blessed is the people of whom this is true;
> blessed is the people whose God is the LORD
> (New International Version).

Thomas then drew from Old Testament faith to describe salvation in terms of well-being and prosperity: "Peoples seeking a richer and fuller realization of the potentialities of their humanity through building a new society which will provide health and plenty, peace and justice—this secular pursuit of happiness is the context in which I must speak of spiritual salvation."[5]

In quoting from Thomas's address, Reformed theologian and ecumenist, Jan Milič Lochman, is careful not to *reduce* salvation to physical well-being and prosperity, but he does concede that the Bible, especially in the light of its Hebraic roots in the Old Testament, "consistently speaks of salvation in terms of basic human needs, even material needs."[6] Though more focused on personal well-being through faith than on secular social justice, the Pentecostal/charismatic movements share with the larger ecumenical movement the conviction that salvation through Christ does bring material blessing.[7]

Prosperity Messages: Variations and Contexts

One can legitimately ask whether this similarity with the larger ecumenical movement does not suggest that the Pentecostal/charismatic prosperity message is a valid contextualization of the gospel of Christ. The connection discussed above with the Jewish–Christian canon and the larger ecumenical reading of it with regard to the message of salvation would seem to suggest that the churches should regard

this message, at least in its major tendencies, as a valid contextualization of the gospel. If so, however, critical questions remain. Most importantly, the popular designation of this message as a "prosperity gospel" among the movement's critics assumes that at least certain extreme forms of this message seem to *reduce* salvation merely to personal well-being and prosperity. Such a reductionism, if truly descriptive of this message, would call it into question as a valid witness to the gospel message: Jesus Christ who gave all and was crucified for the ultimate (eschatological) fulfillment of the kingdom of God on earth. This Christ event implies both material and transcendent renewal, resisting all forms of reductionism that center on the personal rather than the social (or vice versa) or the material rather than the spiritual (or vice versa).

Relevant to this important challenge, the chapters of this book reveal a prosperity preaching that is more complex and diverse than a mere sanctification of the personal quest for material well-being and prosperity. In this light, calling it the "prosperity gospel" (or "health and wealth" gospel) is problematic, since many of those who highlight this theme, if pressed, would most likely claim that their central focus is really on faith in God or in Christ and on the blessings through the Spirit that God intends for the entire world. Their accent on prosperity or general health and well-being in Christ is only one important subtheme among others in a larger understanding of what the Protestant Reformer John Calvin called the *beneficia Christi* (benefits of Christ). In fact, in many cases the strong inflection on prosperity may be more contextually than materially driven, more a response to a particular challenge than determined by a reconstruction of the gospel exclusively or centrally around the attainment of human wealth. As my colleague Jerry Camry-Hoggatt has noted in personal conversation, something that represents a distinctive topic in a community's theology is not necessarily substantially central to that theology.

If one listens carefully to prosperity preaching, one can usually detect a very specific target audience, namely, "defeated" or discouraged Christians who do not yet know personally what Christ or his gospel can mean for their concrete life situation. Theirs is a kind of "higher life" message aimed at a sleeping church, similar to the classical Pentecostal stress on Spirit filling and divine healing. Prosperity preaching aims to help the body of Christ claim the full promises of the gospel so as to become better able to affect the world powerfully for Christ. As noted above, Wacker argues that these Pentecostals do something analogous to what Weber called the Protestant ethic.

They wed an otherworldly vision of eschatological fulfillment with a disciplined this-worldly pragmatism that boldly seeks to live out of this vision in the here and now and in a way that affects all of life, materially and spiritually.

Yet, though prosperity preachers do not necessarily reduce the gospel to personal well-being or prosperity or make this central to their understanding of the gospel, prosperity preaching still holds material well-being to be an essential subtheme within its larger message, a point that is potentially promising as an antidote for a Western theological heritage plagued by dualisms. How *central* material prosperity is to that message needs to be determined on a case-by-case basis. But prosperity tends to be a vital component of the message nonetheless. Those who develop a theology of prosperity usually do so in a way that reconstructs at least the practical implications of the gospel message with this theme in mind. The covenant relationship with God fulfilled in Christ includes deliverance from the curse of disease and poverty as well as the commitment to apply this freedom to one's life through faith and obedience. This message is not the only emphasis of most prosperity preachers, but it is a vital and formative theme nonetheless. It is thus similar to the liberation theology that has become popular in the ecumenical movement in that it reconstructs the gospel with the material and social effects of sin and redemption in mind, except that it is not aimed at transforming unjust social structures or global systems but rather at empowering one with the support of the community of faith to navigate the current system (or create alternative systems) so as to maximize the chances for material well-being.

Liberation theologians might well ask prosperity preachers to reach deeper to challenge the unjust structures that create poverty in the first place, but the prosperity advocates might ask the liberationists in turn what advice they would have for the poor while they wait for such vast and fundamental revolutionary changes in the world's global economy to occur. How do they feed, clothe, house, and educate their young? How do they prepare them for a meaningful use of their talents in obedience to Christ in *this present world*? Who among the churches is prepared to tell their young that they should not seek ambitiously to cultivate their gifts so as to flourish in their vocational lives and material well-being? Who would ask them to detach this passion from their faith in Christ? How are they expected to generate the kind of material resources necessary to accomplish these things? Such questions are relevant everywhere but are particularly urgent in places like China (as Nanlai Cao notes) that has a history of restrictive

government policies and where personal and communal initiatives to generate wealth can create meaningful space for the flourishing of human gifts and the effective furtherance of the gospel message for the charismatic churches there.

Hence, the question remains an important one: "Is this prosperity message a faithful rendition of the gospel of Jesus Christ or is it another gospel?" I cannot answer this difficult question with the same ease by which others have answered it. I especially appreciate Yong's point about the hypocrisy involved among white male critics of the prosperity message who live what is considered by the majority world to be a wealthy or privileged life style. Of course, critics of the prosperity message come not only from Western academic elites but from a variety of settings. The prosperity message in its bolder expressions understandably tends to provoke controversy from local sources as well. I recall a visit to Brazil in which local Brazilian Pentecostal pastors complained about what they considered to be an imbalance in the attention paid among certain Pentecostal or charismatic churches to financial prosperity. The possibility of an imbalanced message is a genuine danger in prosperity preaching that must be addressed. How is one to judge this health and wealth teaching in relation to the *priorities* of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If the priority is to be placed on social justice over individual welfare, can a focus on the latter to the neglect of the former place a church in danger of advocating a message than can eclipse to a significant degree the social implications of the gospel?

Care must be taken in answering such questions so as to recognize the contextual diversity of the prosperity message. Not all prosperity advocates place their priority on private well-being or totally neglect the need for social justice. The chapters in this collection make it abundantly clear that the prosperity message is not monolithic but is rather directed to a person's (or a church's) life context. Additionally, divergent life contexts lead to varying definitions of prosperity. For example, there is a significant difference between a person from an impoverished area of Latin America or Africa requesting "prosperity" by faith and someone making the same request from a white upper-middle-class area of Newport Beach in Southern California. Moreover, not all prosperity advocates give the same attention to this theme in their message or are equally bold in their expectations of financial gain. As Yong notes, there are "pluralistic shades of prosperity embraced by Christians around the world" (p. 16). There tend to be dominant themes that prosperity advocates share in common, but as Gerardo Marti indicates, the improvisation of these themes takes place within diverse cultural and economic contexts.

The Capitalist Conversation Partner?

As the chapters of this volume affirm, prosperity preachers not only hold in common certain biblical themes, they also have a tendency to accept neoliberal or capitalist economic theory. Assuming that most prosperity advocates are not simply selling out to a culturally determined vision of prosperity and well-being (at least in their basic intention), the question still remains as to whether or not capitalism can be a valid theological conversation partner to communities of faith. In his *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Michael Novak assumes that capitalism provides a better framework than socialism for the development of diverse and free expressions of human initiative and potential.[8] As such, one might imagine that it can become a fitting dialogue partner for communities of faith seeking to engage the world in a way that creates meaningful space for the free expression of human gifts and the promulgation of the church's mission. Nanlai Cao's fascinating description of how Christian communities in coastal China use capitalist strategies to create space for the furtherance of their mission (perhaps we may add, toward creating "little platoons of democracy"[9]) within otherwise oppressive or restrictive government policies implies that Novak may have a point, at least in this particular part of the world. Nimi Wariboko also gives interesting examples from the African continent of how prosperity preaching produces similar results (generating the beginnings of what Yong terms renewal economics).

On the other hand, a capitalist framework is not simply a neutral space for the free and diverse exercise of human self-determination (as Novak assumes), since it has tended historically to market the necessities of life for profit in a way that causes certain populations to suffer significant hardship, and it has rewarded most prolifically those who by birth or cultural privilege are better able to compete for larger pieces of the financial pie. If a society characterized (or being transformed by) free market capitalism can be urged to view "capital" as more than crudely material but also as profoundly spiritual (or pneumatological) and as including human giftedness and potential, then it might be possible to direct systems toward valuing and cultivating these hidden and untapped human resources, not in order to exploit them but to release them for the benefit of all. Such a social vision shaped fundamentally by faith would direct the entire society to become a "gift-evoking" community that seeks to release and cultivate people's gifts and create conducive environments in which they can flourish. A Pentecostal prosperity message might be able to apply

such a charismatic theology of capital to the larger society in a way that challenges it just as radically as liberation theology challenged society with the help of a socialist hermeneutic. But these communities must be willing to extend their message beyond the realm of personal faith to allow for analogously free expressions of spiritual gifting within the secular or social realm of common grace under God as the Creator or within the Spirit's implicit witness to Christ in the world.

Contextualization of the Prosperity Message?

If this prosperity message does not reduce the gospel to personal prosperity or make material prosperity the central core of its message, there is potential for viewing it as a legitimate contextualization of the gospel message rather than as a heretical accommodation of the gospel to the larger cult of personal prosperity. Though the authors of the various chapters do not evaluate the various prosperity gospels in theological terms, there are theological implications to how communities use the biblical text to construct their identity in relationship to the world. For example, Daniela C. Augustine assumes that in an Eastern European context, some Christians seem to have deployed the prosperity message to adapt to capitalist economics. This description does not leave much room for a confrontation with this economics from the vantage point of a biblically formed faith. In this case, people have constructed a prosperity teaching something akin to an accomodationist model of contextualization that lacks faithfulness to vital elements of the gospel that might challenge the priorities of capitalist economics. Gerardo Marti implies something more dialogical when he writes of how the communities that preach about prosperity strive to form a religiously based persona that seeks to "fit" biblical themes with social challenges or conditions. This process implies more room for the community to maintain a critical distance from the dialogue partner (prosperity teachings) in the process of contextualization. Jonathan L. Walton also implies something dialogical between text and context, namely, a "correlation" in the prosperity message between scriptural themes and neoliberal economic policies. Correlation may imply a theological method by which believers avoid selling out to the culture while still granting culture its own place as a conversation partner to scriptural revelation. Walton even registers the formative role of the biblical text in the formation of the prosperity message when he writes that prosperity advocates situate themselves within the biblical text in order to derive "positive

penultimate visions of realized victories in the here and now" (p. 115). The community's use of the biblical text for explaining its vision of reality implies a theological method that grants the biblical text the dominant role in how believers view and engage the larger social setting. So, what is going on in these communities that advocate prosperity through faith, accommodation, or correlation, and which base is of greatest weight for this message: the church and biblical canon or the culture? Perhaps the answer depends on the specific community or the individuals of a community being examined. Again, the task of discernment needs to be context specific in the largest sense of this term.

There is the danger in contextualization, however, that the use of capitalist principles in reconstructing the Christian message and vision of redemption may produce an identification of the Kingdom of God with a particular vision of social renewal. This danger is always to be discerned and avoided. At the same time, the church is also to avoid a dualism between the eschatological Kingdom of God and a vision for the present renewal of material life. Avoiding both of these extremes gives way to a dialectical connection between the Kingdom and renewal movements that provides occasions for Christian witness so long as one avoids turning this witness in all of its ambiguity (which accompanies all forms of witness) into an idol. The witness to God's kingdom through efforts at renewal is not the Kingdom, though it may point by God's grace to the Kingdom in meaningful ways. As Karl Barth said in praise of Christoph Blumhardt (the pietist pastor turned social activist), "the prophetic in Blumhardt's message and mission consists of the way in which . . . the worldly and the divine, the present and the coming, again and again met, were united, supplemented one another, sought and found one another."[10]

Can prosperity preaching connect meaningfully with the Kingdom of God in a way that allows this preaching to bear fallible but meaningful witness to it? As noted earlier, the prosperity message taps into the Old Testament notion of salvation as *shalom* or well-being. In this context, there are numerous passages that link faith to a prosperity of life: "carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do" (Deut. 29:9). The framework for the teaching of Jesus that his mission as the man of the Spirit was to help the poor experience God's favor (Luke 4:18) has this Old Testament context as a background. There is no possibility of spiritualizing this mission so that it loses its material or social significance unless one wishes to detach Jesus from his Jewish background. Salvation involves a spiritual renewal of material existence and a material enhancement

of spiritual life. It ends in the resurrection of the flesh and a new heaven and new earth, and not in an ascent of an immaterial soul to a spiritual abode. Of course, this interchange of Spirit and matter is the work of the Spirit and is thus not reducible to easy formulas or guaranteed results as the prosperity teaching sometimes implies. But neither can life under the blessings of Christ flourish if believers resign themselves to their circumstances and fail to practice their faith boldly and relentlessly. What guides this active yielding to the flourishing of life in the Spirit in obedience to Christ? The answer to this question is what must be discerned.

Christological and Pneumatological Criteria

If the Christian gospel focuses on the redemptive work of the triune God through the person and work of Christ, the spiritual discernment process will pay attention to Christ in the context of the larger biblical canon as the chief criterion for judgment. Required as essential to this discernment process is thus a relentless application of the gospel of Christ to various examples of prosperity preaching. Since prosperity contrasts so dramatically with the poverty of the cross, the challenge in my view theologically is in discerning how well a certain use of the prosperity message bears witness to this chief event of Christ's gospel. Paul applied the cross to the Corinthian claims of worldly gain and accomplishment (1 Cor. 2:2; 4:8–13). Of course, the cross must be interpreted in the light of Easter and Pentecost as a vital step in the procurement of the Spirit and all of Christ's benefits. But in the face of any potential triumphalism that attempts to leap too hastily to the blessings of Pentecost, it behooves the church to linger at the cross in order to understand more deeply the nature of the path to Pentecostal blessing. For example, does not the cross indicate that the path to blessing involves a life self-sacrificially committed to the mission of God, especially to the most needy and vulnerable of the earth? Many prosperity advocates do indeed stress the need for giving and self-sacrifice as the path to blessing. As both Yong and Wariboko have shown, they can even be known to locate this self-sacrifice in the context of furthering the mission of God in the world in relation to the lost and the needy. There are testimonies among prosperity advocates that movingly support giving financially so that the work of God can be multiplied in the world. There are testimonies celebrated in prosperity preaching, however, where the particular sacrifice finds its happy ending merely in the welfare or success of the person making the sacrifices. If left truncated in this way, prosperity preaching

can seem like nothing more than a guide to survival and personal success in this world rather than the path of the cross in the service of a new world to come, which does not exclude personal flourishing but is certainly not limited to it. In the Spirit, believers experience the benefits of Christ as they participate in God's mission in the world.

Thus, the missional aspect of prosperity teaching requires greater and clearer emphasis so as to avoid the real danger of confining one's goals too narrowly to individual, familial, or even church community success. I am reminded of how Christoph Blumhardt reacted to the penchant of his father's pietist community to concentrate too much on personal healing and victories in life without nourishing clearly enough the broader New Testament vision of a new world transformed by the power of God into a place of hope for all.[11] The blessing of prosperity preaching needs to find continual expansion with this larger eschatological goal in mind so as to involve prayed-for renewal in one's community and in the larger social and global context. This expansion of the understanding of blessing does not preclude personal well-being and flourishing, but it does set it within a larger framework of solidarity with the needy and the suffering of the world so as to grant that flourishing much-needed ethical guidance and to explain why self-sacrifice continues to characterize the life of faith.

Pneumatologically, care must also be taken to respect the sovereignty and freedom of the Holy Spirit and to nurture utter dependence of faith on the Spirit's leading. Though there are numerous passages in the Bible that promise prosperity to the faithful, there are others revealing that the righteous in specific contexts suffer hardship and are made to wonder why the wicked seem to prosper (Jer. 12:1). Indeed, both the righteous and the unrighteous can receive prosperity and hardship, sun and rain from God (Mt. 5:45). Divine providence follows a course that is not always clear. It is possible in this light to posit a relationship between faith (and faithfulness) and a prosperous or flourishing of life without reducing faith to a magical formula that guarantees imagined or expected results. God is sovereign over life and life itself under the direction of God's breath is too free to be fully mastered by anyone. Particularly in Pentecostal traditions, when it comes to life in the free Spirit of God who moves like the wind, sowing and reaping can never be reduced to a tried and true formula capable of manipulation. Such an illusion of control is not true faith and such is not the life of the Spirit. Ideally, faith relinquishes all such expectations or illusions of power and control and accepts without reservation the path willed by God. This is not resignation in the face

of adversity at the cost of a wise and active acceptance of blessings freely granted by God, but it is recognition that God's will (and not our own) in all things is the highest goal. The way of the cross is a grand adventure that no one can predict in advance but which one spends a lifetime preparing to accept and make the most of, whatever lies ahead. Improvisation is thus required of communities that stress prosperity, not only because of changing and different contextual challenges but also because of a free and sovereign Spirit and a faith that follows the Spirit's lead, wherever this takes them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as with many novel and controversial movements within the church, prosperity preaching is beset with ambiguity, potential imbalances, and dangers of reductionism and accommodation. Yet, theologians of the church will fail to guide it adequately if they simply reject it outright with sweeping judgments that are not charitable, contextually sensitive, or aware of the true gospel potential of its witness. The fact that millions have discovered fresh hope and a renewed appreciation for the renewing power of the biblical gospel through this movement should grant one reason to take it seriously as potentially a work of the Spirit. In applying the gospel of Christ to this movement, one should keep in mind that discerning theologians fall under the same judgment and will be evaluated by the same standards that they themselves apply to others. One can enhance the work of the Kingdom of God in the world if he or she exercises the kind of pastoral care toward this movement that will bring its witness to Christ toward brighter and clearer expression. Perhaps those who do so will be blessed by them in the process.

Endnotes

1. "All One in Christ, 1980: Statement on the Augsburg Confession by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission." This is quoted from Article 1 of the Augsburg Confession, the founding document of the Lutheran churches.
2. There are especially difficult challenges involved in how expansive the boundaries of this reading can be, as in the case of the Oneness Pentecostal movement that denies the classic doctrine of the trinity while still exalting Christ as lord and as the savior at the core of the gospel. See Frank D. Macchia, "The Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Dialogue: Exploring the Diversity of Apostolic Faith," *Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 3 (2010): 329–49.

3. In keeping with the World Council of Churches Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, I utilize the standard distinction between Tradition (upper case "T"), which is the gospel at the core of scripture that is preserved and cherished among the churches, and traditions (lower case "t") representing the various and nuanced confessional and contextual understandings of the gospel.
4. Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).
5. Quoted in Jan Milič Lochman, *Reconciliation and Liberation: Challenging a One-Dimensional View of Salvation*, trans. David Lewis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 18–19.
6. Ibid., 19.
7. See Miroslav Volf, "Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 437–67.
8. Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1990).
9. A term used by David Martin and quoted by "Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and Its Potential Social and Economic Rule" (p. 82).
10. Karl Barth, "Past and Future: Friedrich Naumann and Christoph Blumhardt," in J. A. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*, vol. 1, trans. K. R. Crim (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968), 45.
11. See Christoph Blumhardt, *Ansprachen, Predigten, Reden, Briefe: 1865–1917*, Bd. 2, hrsg. J. Harder (Neukirchen-Nuyn: NeukirchenerVerlag, 1978), 38.

Chapter 12

Prosperity, Theology, and Economy

Douglas A. Hicks

The chapters in this volume raise fascinating and important questions for understanding the intersection of prosperity, theology, and the economy. Applying sophisticated analyses from theology, biblical studies, ethics, cultural studies, anthropology, and the sociology of religion, they together provide multiple angles of vision upon Pentecostalism and the ideas and practices of prosperity theology. The authors raise points of tension and possible contradiction within this field; and, indeed, the chapters themselves represent divergent perspectives.

Thus, it is important to ask (paraphrasing the title of Alasdair MacIntyre's renowned book *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?*)[1]: Whose prosperity? Which theology? And, we should add, what economic practices? This chapter, then, is organized into three thematic sections—prosperity, theology, economy—followed by a brief concluding section on Christian faith and economic life. Writing as a Christian ethicist, my normative claims build upon a theologically informed approach to well-being that is grounded in an inclusive understanding of Reformed theology and which is also influenced by various Protestant and Catholic understandings of economic life.[2]

Prosperity

What does it mean to prosper, to live in abundance, or to have a flourishing life? So easily, in public discourse, prosperity gets reduced to the sphere of material goods, and condensed further still by assuming that material well-being can be accurately assessed by one common standard, or currency. Thus money becomes the measure of abundance (or scarcity). In practical terms, the most common

indicator of prosperity at the national level is gross domestic product (GDP) or GDP per capita. While economists, politicians, and academics have criticized the limitations of understanding well-being in terms of economic production, the GDP remains the default measure for public debate, policy making, and international comparisons of prosperity.[3]

Daniela C. Augustine, in her chapter in this volume, makes a fascinating argument about a possible causal influence of prosperity theology on the rise of an unbridled, crony-based capitalism in Eastern Europe in recent decades: "By placing a Christian sanction upon the individual pursuit of wealth and consumerist indulgence, the prosperity message accommodated the conditions of the market, crowning it with a 'halo' and connecting it to the providential justice of God" (p. 191). Her analysis helps expose the ways in which prosperity theology uncritically can accept and then reinforce a money-based definition of progress.

At the lower end of the economic distribution, closer to deprivation than abundance, the official standard of poverty in the United States is an income-based one. Poverty is falling short of a minimum threshold income figure, which is calculated based on one's household size and an estimate of what is needed to provide an essential "food basket" and other necessities, including shelter, clothing, and everything else. And likewise in the international sphere, the most common measure of poverty is a money-based threshold, which the World Bank has placed at $1.25 per day (and adjusted by country to reflect purchasing power in local currency). The bank estimates that 1.4 billion human beings, in fact, live below this astonishingly low threshold. Suffice it to say, then, that material prosperity is far from the reality on the ground for this significant share of the world population.[4]

Although an adequate income is surely fundamental for achieving sufficiency (much less abundance), escaping poverty requires more than income alone. Income-based measures of deprivation and well-being fail to account for so much of what life does, or should, entail. Criticism of income-based measures of poverty is widespread—and largely beyond the scope of this chapter. The key point for our analysis is that well-being in most public discourse is reduced to money terms.

Amos Yong and various others in this volume have aptly argued that the *contexts* of Pentecostalism and prosperity theology matter greatly—from nation to nation and, indeed, often from neighborhood to neighborhood. Prosperity theology is usually aimed at people

and communities who face economic deprivation along with other forms of marginalization. In other words, believers in the prosperity gospel—or at least those who listen to prosperity preachers—are often those who fall below or stand near the poverty thresholds just mentioned.

Given this economic deprivation, a central question becomes: Does prosperity theology offer genuine or false hope to the poor? A key contribution of this volume of chapters is the insight that it surely depends upon the specific ideas and practices of churches and their leaders placed under the label of prosperity theology. The following two sections specify further that it depends on the account of God's agency and of economic processes.

For now, let me put the question somewhat narrowly, in the spirit of at least some of the prosperity preachers: Does God want everyone to be a millionaire? The question brings into sharp focus the relation of prosperity to financial success. On some popular accounts, God showers bounty, including money, upon those whom he blesses, and this bounty might be increased by faithful living—specifically, by faithful giving.

Some aspects of this message of prosperity theology derive from the consumer culture that surrounds nearly all people engaged in the global economy. It connects to the basic assumption in standard economic models of human behavior, namely, that more of a good is preferred to less. Prosperity, then, is sometimes easily reduced to succeeding in economic terms—and even sharing that fact proudly as a sign of God's favor.

Gerardo Marti's analysis of the Oasis Christian Center in Hollywood raises this question—whose account of prosperity?—in a fascinating context. In Marti's analysis, Hollywood is America writ large, a place where self-presentation, self-promotion, and individual initiative are vital for economic success. Hence beauty and attire, for instance, can help one to project confidence and do well. To what extent is this Hollywood (or American) culture the norm that members of Oasis should follow, and to what extent should this be rejected as a "spiritually foreign" culture? As Marti describes it, Oasis staff members suggest that they should be normal so as their Christian lives can be attractive to their non-Christian colleagues and co-workers. This raises a question: To what extent should believers embrace the norms of the prevailing culture, and to what extent should they live a different sort of life? One's vision of prosperity—of one's understanding of a flourishing or abundant life—is tied up with this question. Notably, Marti's rich narrative captures the ambiguities of the Oasis members'

worldviews, both embracing but transforming the Hollywood understanding of prosperity.

At the same time, an understanding of flourishing should not only include but also embrace more than material well-being. Amos Yong's fivefold typology captures much of the variety in perspectives about prosperity, from the crass material-based approaches (which receive the most attention) to more reflective perspectives that demonstrate an understanding of prosperity or abundance that includes various aspects of life. I have written elsewhere on the importance of understanding multiple dimensions of human activity when assessing well-being, whether communal or personal. I argue for the value of the capabilities approach as consistent with, and a useful economic framework for specifying, Christian accounts of a flourishing life. In such a perspective, abundance refers to the manifold ways in which a human person is (or should be) able to act freely and genuinely within her own context. Money is an important means to various significant ends, but those ends or capabilities that matter include such things as: being well nourished and in good health, having adequate shelter, being literate and numerate, having friendships and family relations, and being able to participate in society and to worship freely.[5]

This capability-based view of humans who prosper in their societies is not the understanding typically ascribed to prosperity theology. Yet it is consistent with views of Pentecostalism that understand the Spirit of God to move within all aspects of the lives of believers, who should in turn seek to live faithfully, though nonostentatiously, in the situations in which they find themselves. I discuss this further, below, in the focus on economic consumption. It is possible to embrace the claim that God wishes all human beings to prosper without translating this claim into materialistic terms. Even if God's creation could sustain a world of almost seven billion people who are millionaires, the oversimplification of human prosperity into monetary wealth is a distortion of the Christian faith that, at the same time, gives people the wrong goals toward which to strive and fills many of them with the false hope that they will get there.

Theology

Prosperity theology is fundamentally about how we understand God's actions in relation to human actions, which requires us to reflect upon how God acts in the world. What is the relation between human prosperity and those divine and human actions? The authors in this volume present many perspectives on these questions. In Marti's

narrative about the Oasis community, God provides principles to follow and a good creation; humans must express their own initiative in order to flourish. "Congregants see prosperity as less a result of God's provision and more the result of a person's hard work" (p. 140).

Other perspectives reflect a much stronger sense of divine agency, of a God at work in everyday life to offer blessing to those who are faithful. Consider the notion of "reaping and sowing" that is central to many accounts of prosperity theology. As Jonathan L. Walton explains it, in the Word of Faith movement, for example, "adherents are contractually bound to give (sow), just as God is obligated to return one's gift at least tenfold (reap)" (p. 112). This view of divine–human interrelationship seems to place God and humans on the same level—as signatories on a contract, as parties who can bind one another to their promises. There is, of course, a long tradition of understanding God as the faithful God who continues to be dependable and true, even when God's people are unfaithful. Yet even if there were clear agreement among believers about a promise that God makes to return (material) blessings for giving—and there is not agreement—the suggestion that God is "contractually bound" characterizes divine agency as constrained by mutual agreement with humans. Briefly stated, this perspective underestimates the mystery and sovereignty of God.

Given that prosperity theology is often articulated by leaders addressing people who experience economic or other forms of suffering, questions of *theodicy*, or the "justice of God," arise. Many of the authors in this volume highlight some disconnect between leaders' articulation of prosperity and the understanding that followers take from the message. On accounts containing a "contractual" or mechanistic relationship between faithful actions and God's blessing, it is easy for people who remain impoverished to assume the converse: that they must be poor because they have been unfaithful, that they deserve their lot.

In practice, however, it appears that followers are able to embrace more ambiguous or indeed mysterious views. Walton's discussion of preacher and listener at the Southwest Believers' Convention in 2009 provides an illustrative vignette. According to Walton, Jerry Savelle urged his listeners in that massive audience: "Folks are upset with us because we won't join their recession . . . Say with me, 'I'm in this world, but not of it. I'm not normal' " (p. 114). The implication is that the recession cannot bring true believers down. Walton insightfully recounts his interview with a follower who resists Savelle's call not to be affected by the recession, stating that, indeed, the recession has

made him broke. In other words, the gospel may well call believers to reject some norms of consumer culture and economy, but it does not insulate them from economic processes and cycles. This follower, when interviewed by Walton, turned to theological talk of God's actions providing for people in their time of need. But he did not shy away from the fact that he was suffering. Compared to Savelle's confident declarations that God insulates believers from the recession, this follower's theodicy talk makes for a complicated but more grounded understanding. Believers need not blame themselves as being faithless for feeling the effects of the recession.

Seen in terms of the great biblical narrative of theodicy, the story of Job, some might describe God's agency by emphasizing that, ultimately, "Job's faithfulness was rewarded" (p. 19). But the fundamental theological lesson of Job is not that virtuous or faithful believers gain God's reward. Instead, the message is captured in God's grand statement from the whirlwind, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4, NRSV). Faith in God and virtuous living can neither explain nor mechanistically invoke God's action. Humans cannot fully understand their world, and they cannot earn prosperity or escape from the possibility of anguish. It is possible to express faith that God provides without wishing away or downplaying human suffering.

Prosperity theology tends to emphasize entrepreneurial initiative, which can certainly enhance a sense of human agency or ability to shape one's own economic future. Yet, consistent with the discussion of theodicy, it is important that adherents of prosperity theology also acknowledge that much is beyond their individual control. The vocabulary of theodicy names both moral evil (caused by humans) and natural evil (unexplained evil beyond human-caused evil). A misplaced faith in God—expecting divine blessing and overlooking moral and natural evil in the world—can give persons a false sense of security or divine sanction, leading them to act recklessly in the market. Both Augustine and Walton allude to this problem in their valuable analyses.

Faith in God can and should lead believers to act virtuously as well as creatively in economic life. As discussed above, participation in the market can be a vital part of well-being. The interconnection between divine agency and human agency is a complex one. More than trying to bind or even to determine precisely God's actions, we should approach these questions with a sense of the mystery, awe, and gratitude for God's work in the world. Faith requires not contractually obligating God to bless us, but rather it calls for grateful response to

God's grace through our own work for good in the world. That does not solve, nor should we try to solve, the problem of evil, including economic suffering. Likewise, we should recognize that no human economic system or institution is free from such evil, and no economic system provides a simple answer to suffering, including material deprivation. Prudence as much as risk taking can be a faithful response to God.

Economy

In his chapter, Amos Yong asks whether prosperity theology "has the potential to contribute to another form of the emerging global economy . . . and motivate a certain mentality that has the potential to transform the global economy," suggesting that economic theory itself might need to focus on a new form of "renewal economics" (p. 16). Our understanding of the connections between and among the prosperity gospel and economic ideas and practices varies according to the range of definitions of both prosperity and theology that we have already discussed. The connections also depend upon different aspects of economic life. Specifically, this section analyzes three aspects of economic life—consumption, production, and distribution. As we will see, this trifold specification complicates the conclusions about prosperity theology's role in economic life. For each of the three, advocates of prosperity make certain choices about their approach. Economic practices are disparate, and we need to know what aspect we are focusing upon.

In this section, I will focus briefly upon and contrast two expressions of Pentecostalism in Brazil—that of the Assemblies of God (A/G) and that of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. These illustrations draw upon the analysis of Eloy H. Nolivos in this volume; my purpose is principally to suggest that different faith communities can (and do) choose distinct approaches to consumption, production, and distribution. For example, I suggest that A/G believers (based on John Burdick's account) offer an effective critique of the prevalent consumption ethos, yet they are less clear about their relation to the production process itself and the distribution of economic benefits.[6] I focus less upon the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, precisely because Nolivos details this movement in that case study of his chapter.

Standard (neoclassical) economic theory distinguishes among consumption, production, and distribution. Consumption refers to the set of commodities (goods and services) acquired and consumed by

persons within a society. Consumption relates to the demand side of economic analysis. Demand is dependent upon what economists call "tastes and preferences," which include the various "subjective" factors. Basic needs and luxury cravings are lumped together in the basic economic theory as "subjective." Consumers vote with their dollars, whether they want diamonds or bread. Economic rationality says nothing about the various ends that people choose, taking them as given. Thus, unlike Christian theology, which should value basic needs over luxuries, neoclassical economic theory is neutral about what goods people desire or prefer.

Thus, behind demand curves is a set of "tastes and preferences" that persons hold. Yet these tastes and preferences do not just appear within people; their commitments and worldviews—including their religious understandings—shape their wants, desires, and needs. Consumption patterns are dependent upon these worldviews and commitments.

On a related note, the prior decision on how much to spend at all, in connection with how much to save and/or donate, is likewise partially shaped by religious worldviews. As Nolivos discusses in his chapter, this is the point at which Max Weber's analysis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* comes into the story, as one important attempt to draw causal linkages between religious belief and economic practice.[7] Specifically, capitalism arose when disciplined Protestants consumed little, moving their money into savings in order to accumulate capital.

If consumption deals with demand, production corresponds to the supply side of economic analysis. The production process concerns how commodities are created, with what inputs, in what combination, and under what conditions. In a market system, producers will produce the goods that consumers demand. In neoclassical economics, the various inputs of production—land, human labor, and capital—are treated symmetrically: the labor power of human beings, the work of a machine, and the use of land are considered merely to be valuable means to the end of production.

Questions of distribution in the market economy relate both to production and consumption. People are supposed to receive returns on their endowments of labor, land, and capital in the production process, so the initial distribution of endowments is thus critical for knowing the returns to various people in society. As I have noted, on the consumption side, people are supposed to be able to spend their money returns as consumers, or they can save or donate them. Although economic theory does not distinguish between wants and

needs—both are left to the freedom of consumers—there are clear distributional implications, since poorer persons tend to consume far fewer luxury goods than do the rich, in absolute and in proportional terms. If members of society believe that the current distribution of income or wealth is unjust, then that society can decide through its political process that some redistributive mechanism is necessary. Such a mechanism could be imposed through progressive taxes, social welfare programs, or in other ways. As Walton recounts from the Southwest Believers' Convention, prosperity preachers tend not to look favorably upon government redistribution.

With this overview of the three economic dimensions, let us now turn briefly to Brazil. There the A/G movement has offered a radical break from the contemporary youth culture of hyperconsumption. John Burdick's analysis points out well that it is cultural factors and the changing traditions and mores of Brazilian society, fueled by advertising dollars, that are altering Brazilian youth's demand for various consumer commodities.[8] The A/G provides an alternative to this material-based youth culture. The conversion required for membership calls for a change in worldview, including one's "tastes and preferences" for material goods. Excessively trendy commodities would reflect vanity, so A/G youth are encouraged to don plain, simple, full-length pants and unostentatious shirts. This saves these youth from costly social competition.

Thus, as Nolivos discusses, Pentecostalism in Latin America is often called a functional equivalent or contemporary expression of Max Weber's "Protestant ethic." Unlike other expressions of prosperity theology, on the consumption side this ethic is all about simplicity and austerity. We will see that the A/G economic ethic in Brazil is quite distinct from the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

Concerning the production process and economic distribution, A/G practices and worldview are more ambiguous and consequently relatively uncritical of market ideology and practice. A/G followers tend to come from lower- or lower-middle-class positions, and they receive their economic returns from labor earnings, rather than from capital investments. Economic firms typically count on A/G believers to be good and diligent workers for factory or workplace. Are they active, though, in struggling for decent working conditions and a more just economic distribution? Pentecostals in most cases are not social agitators; they prefer not to strike or protest. And there are virtually no public calls from A/G leaders or followers for government roles in redistribution. Burdick notes that while leaders do not encourage participation in strikes or labor movements, some believers

do join in these while others do not. Further, on the distribution question many Pentecostals tend to denounce rich believers as hypocritical, even while the pastors refuse to condemn rich persons who remain "humble of spirit."[9] (Here, again, we see a tension between what leaders teach and how followers actually live out their beliefs in tough economic conditions.)

Contrast the A/G position with the views of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. It is a difference between the simple living and serious, hard-work ethic versus the new style of conspicuous consumption and risk-taking individualism. While the A/G offers a powerful critique of the culture of consumption, the Universal Church seems to accept the demand-shaping practices of the modern media and advertising. The A/G shuns ostentation; the Universal Church has no problem with displaying God's blessings.

And what about distribution? The Universal Church's version of prosperity theology preaches that people who work hard and who have strong faith will be rewarded. This implies, of course, that people in poverty deserve their condition. Such a theology—while wrapped in biblical or moral arguments—amounts to a complete acceptance of the free market's "solution" to the distribution question, and it thus makes no claim for a redistributive mechanism.

In terms of the production process, the Universal Church's position is less a critique of the relationship of labor to capital than it is a recognition that worldly success is to be found by leaving the ranks of laborers and by becoming an entrepreneur. Such a get-ahead attitude toward the production process that focuses on transforming one's own life offers little critical edge with which to transform the system itself.

I want to argue that a Pentecostal critique of the market economy is bound to fail if focused only on consumption and not accompanied by a fuller critique. While A/G youth, for example, accept a strong break from consumer culture, they are shaped by those worldly influences more than they would know. Pastoral leaders and their congregants face this perennial challenge of how much to accommodate to worldly economic standards. Despite the best efforts of individual believers and congregations, the subjective "tastes and preferences" of the members are bound to change even if it takes a generation or two. Max Weber carefully and creatively maps a process by which believers begin, through their acquisition of capital through labor, to accept the ethic of consumption. Citing John Wesley, Weber asserts that the religiously inspired asceticism will give way to human "pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches."[10] And later Weber makes

his famous statement: "[T]he care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment' [quoting Richard Baxter]. But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage."[11]

Although Weber considers the Christian acceptance of consumerism to be "fate," it is possible to maintain a theological understanding and communal practices that indeed reject the excesses of market economics. But the consumption-in-moderation ethic cannot survive alone. It must be paired with a critique of the production process that sees human beings as more than mere inputs or means to some economic ends. If believers were to take a deeper look at the production process itself, they could insist on working conditions that allow for the possibility of meaningful work. This would mean, practically, the willingness to participate in movements to support workers' well-being. This would include traditional labor approaches, but we also need new ways to approach this question, given that labor unions extend to a very small percentage of current-day workers.

What would a critique of economic theory and practice imply for distributional issues? The Christian faith provides an understanding of moral equality—the equality of all persons before God—that can serve people to oppose those economic disparities that keep impoverished people from realizing their basic capabilities.[12] Connecting back to our earlier discussion, we should choose a theology in which prosperity is defined by the capability to function meaningfully in society over the increasing consumption of commodities for its own sake.

Conclusions

I have sought in this chapter, drawing upon the insights of the other authors in this volume, to add specificity to three key terms: prosperity, theology, and economy. I reinforce the point of various chapters by demonstrating multiple ways in which the interpretation of prosperity theology depends on what we mean and on whom we include under its purview. Beyond that general point, I have offered a number of critical questions about the choices that leaders and followers need to make as they proclaim and live out the Christian gospel in their individual and corporate lives.

My own perspective has provided more than analytical description of these choices. I have also provided, albeit briefly, a normative outline for a theologically informed approach to faith and economic life.[13] Christians should advocate and work for a world in which all

people have the capabilities—including the contextual supports and freedoms—in order to prosper. Such a vision is consistent with God's good creation and our call to be prudent and faithful stewards of it. This understanding of prosperity as capability should extend to every aspect of human activity; economic well-being is merely a part of that. Money is just a means and not the end of such prosperity. Indeed, the pursuit of wealth is a goal that can lead one to distort all other aspects of a well-lived life. Christians should denounce theologies that proclaim a gospel of wealth that function to sanction inhumane or reckless market practices.

Divine agency remains a key theological question that will continue to be elusive. Too-simple theological (or biblical) interpretations that profess to know God's obligations to humanity for its actions should be rejected. Accounts that acknowledge the reality of evil—including human suffering and deprivation—within a wider context of a good and bountiful creation should be embraced. Gratitude for life and purposeful use of our gifts can mark faithful economic action.

As readers reflect upon and evaluate the market economy, it is important to be appropriately humble in identifying goals to establish a perfect economic system. Yet market ideas or practices—whether consumption, production, or distribution—should not be accepted as unchangeable givens. The example of the A/G believers' anticonsumption ethic is a start to what a theology of economic life might look like for Pentecostals in that context. Those concerned about these issues should continue to work, on many levels, at meaningful transformations that make the economic system increasingly more humane, especially for those currently facing economic deprivation. In doing so, those theologies that offer false hope will be exposed and the theologies that offer genuine pathways—not for quick wealth but for enduring improvements in human well-being—may be embraced.

Endnotes

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
2. My theologically informed approach to economic well-being is developed in detail in Douglas A. Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and *Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully in the Global Economy* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).
3. For a helpful overview of the criticisms of GDP or gross national product (GNP), see Derek Curtis Bok, *The Politics of Happiness:*

What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

4. For a discussion of the measurement of poverty and its shortfalls, see Hicks, *Money Enough*, 2–4.
5. Hicks, *Money Enough*, esp. ch. 2; see also Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics*.
6. John Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil: The Progressive Church in Urban Brazil's Religious Arena* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
7. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 1930 [1904/5]).
8. Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil*.
9. Ibid., 213.
10. Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 175.
11. Ibid., 181.
12. Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics*.
13. A fuller statement of my approach is contained in Hicks, *Money Enough*.

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