



In Search of Health and Wealth

The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective

*A Special Edition of the Word & Context Journal
Justo Mwale Theological University College, Lusaka, Zambia*



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Dedicated to
the memory of

Rev. F.D. Sakala
(1934-2012)

&

Rev. L.Z.B. Mwale
(1931-2012)



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Introduction

The prosperity gospel is very influential in Africa, in Pentecostal churches and in Reformed churches as well. But what is the prosperity gospel? Where did it originate? Is it biblically sound? How should we evaluate the prosperity gospel? Does it represent a wrong way of looking for health and wealth, or can we learn something from it? In this book the authors provide an analysis from different perspectives on the highly debated topic of the prosperity gospel. It is intended to be accessible and helpful both to academic colleagues and to ordinary ministers. Most of the authors are lecturers at Justo Mwaile Theological University College in Lusaka, Zambia. Together with Prof. Lovemore Togarasei from the University of Botswana, they use their theological skills to examine and assess this important topic from an African and Reformed perspective. The articles in this book will help anyone who wants to deeply explore and evaluate the intriguing phenomenon of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

In the first part of the book a background examination of the prosperity gospel is provided. Here Victor Chilenje discusses the historical and missiological background of the phenomenon. The main teachings are outlined, as are the attraction of and the problems with the prosperity gospel. This is followed by a second part which presents a biblical analysis of the prosperity gospel. Edwin Zulu investigates the roots of the phenomenon in the Old Testament. In a critical examination he shows the ways in which the prosperity gospel can and cannot be said to be based on Old Testament teachings. The use of the New Testament in the prosperity gospel is analysed by Dustin Ellington. First, Ellington challenges all sides of the prosperity gospel debate to go beyond hurling biblical proof texts back and forth at each other. Second, he illustrates his argument, critiquing the message of prosperity by addressing its neglect of one of the New Testament's most prevalent themes: union with Christ.

Whereas the first part of this book looks at the historical background and the second part provides a biblical analysis of the prosperity gospel, the third part provides a theological reflection on the prosperity gospel. The issue of health is dealt with by investigating Jesus as Healer within an African context. The arrival of the prosperity gospel has challenged mainline churches to address the issue of health more seriously. Devison Telen Banda, in his article, provides the basis for an African Christology that pays due attention to the importance of health, especially in Africa. The African context is addressed by Lameck Banda as well. He uses the local African concept of 'mphala' to mediate between the idea of faith in the prosperity gospel and in the work of John Calvin. 'Mphala' is an encompassing concept which refers to a space for social networking. As such it may very well

serve as a foundational concept, particularly in the Africa context, toward building bridges between the prosperity gospel and mainline churches from the Reformed tradition. After the theological treatment of the themes of health and faith, Hermen Kroesbergen theologically discusses the idea of prospering, using the work of Sören Kierkegaard. He investigates both what is eccentric and what is valuable in the prosperity gospel. He concludes by proposing a litmus test to distinguish a genuine prosperity gospel from theologically unacceptable forms of it.

A cultural analysis of the prosperity gospel is provided in the fourth and final part of this book. Lukas Soko investigates its relationship to the rise of mass media, using Zambia as an example. The prosperity gospel's importance is connected to the ability of its adherents to use globalised mass media. Soko urges churches to take seriously the challenges of globalisation and accept the prosperity gospel as a given reality. Discernment is needed, so he concludes. A different type of discernment is addressed in the next article. Johanneke Kroesbergen-Kamps discusses the intriguing link between modernity and Christianity in the Zambian context by analysing the confession of a former Satanist. Is it a coincidence, she asks, that especially in churches with an emphasis on prosperity, testimonies of involvement in Satanism are quite popular? Kroesbergen-Kamps places these testimonies in the context of the search for modernity, health and wealth. Lovemore Togarasei introduces the term 'gosprenneurship' to highlight the close connection between prosperity teachings on God and on entrepreneurship. In light of Jesus' teaching on earthly possessions Togarasei assesses the possible contribution of the prosperity gospel to entrepreneurship. With this article discussing the relevance and biblical soundness of the prosperity gospel, in the African context of entrepreneurship as a means of poverty alleviation, our volume, *In Search of Health and Wealth*, ends on a hopeful note.

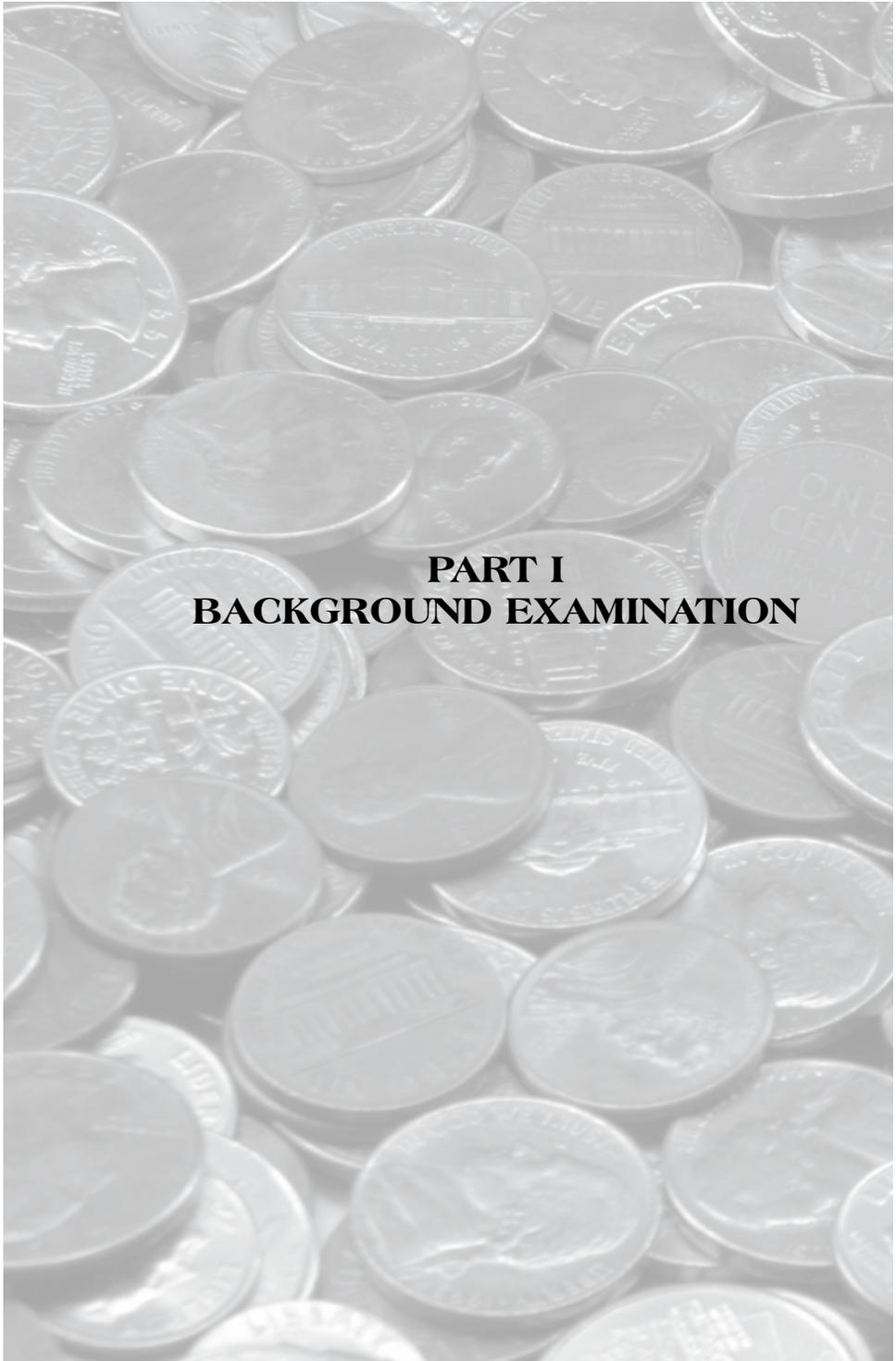
This book mainly resulted from discussions we had on the prosperity gospel theme at Justo Mwale Theological University College in 2012. Academically, educationally and personally, 2012 was a good year for our institution; this book is intended to share some of the institution's accomplishments. However, there was sad news as well. In 2012 Justo Mwale Theological University College lost two of its former principals. On 12 June Rev. F.D. Sakala passed away. His life was honoured at a very well-attended service in the Anglican Cathedral. Ten days later his friend and colleague Rev. L.Z.B. Mwale died as well. May they rest in peace. We will always remember these two heroes who helped make JMTUC what it is today. This book is dedicated to the memory of these two high-regarded former principals as a tribute to their major contributions to the institution, the church and society at large.

To conclude, I want to express my gratitude to Sherri Ellington and Johanneke Kroesbergen-Kamps for the many hours they spent editing and proofreading the text of this book, and to Edwin Zulu, Rector of Justo Mwale Theological University College, and Gideon van der Watt, Editor for the publisher, CLF, for their contributions to make this book possible.

Hermen Kroesbergen

Editor

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**PART I
BACKGROUND EXAMINATION**

The Challenges of the Prosperity Gospel for Reformed/Presbyterian Churches in the 21st Century

Victor Chilenje

Abstract:

This article analyses the challenges that the prosperity gospel poses for Reformed/Presbyterian churches in the 21st century. People are in search of wealth and healing, areas that these mainline churches seem not to focus on. As a result, many of our Christians turn to prosperity churches in times of need. In this article I will begin by providing an introduction to the topic under discussion; this will be followed by a historical overview of the prosperity gospel. I will then consider the main teachings of the prosperity gospel; the attraction of the prosperity gospel; problems of prosperity gospel teachings; the way forward; and will end with a conclusion.

The prosperity gospel poses many challenges for Reformed/Presbyterian churches in the 21st century. I will discuss the historical and missiological background of the phenomenon, using both secondary literature and oral interviews to illustrate the prosperity gospel with first hand experiences. The main teachings are outlined, as well as the attraction and the problems of the prosperity gospel.

‘Prosperity’ is generally defined as a prosperous condition, material wellbeing and success (Webster 1998:1013). ‘Gospel’ is the story that brings good news about Jesus as our Lord and Saviour of the whole world (Webster 1998:545). The challenge of the prosperity gospel is that people are attracted to its message of wealth and health, and do not recognise that the message is not biblical. Because of the attraction of the prosperity gospel message many Reformed church members, especially in urban areas, have dual membership. In the morning they attend worship services in their established Reformed/Presbyterian churches, but in the afternoon they go to churches where they feel they may receive health and wealth (Mwanza 2012; Kachali 2012). When told to ‘sow a seed’ (this is a concept that pastors use when raising money in their congregations and ministries) they do not hesitate to contribute financially to the prosperity congregation because they believe by doing so they will receive blessings from God.

The prosperity gospel may also be called the Word-Faith movement. It is frequently also called word of faith, the faith movement, or name-it-and-claim-it. It is the belief that Christians have, within themselves, the supernatural power to create reality by speaking a word (Walker 2007:347). This faith movement gives hope to the people, mostly the marginalised or hopeless.

The prosperity gospel poses a big challenge to Reformed/Presbyterian churches in the 21st century, a challenge so enormous that it requires attention by the entire church. The prosperity gospel has crept into the Reformed/Presbyterian churches, and the results are increasingly distorted biblical principles – a terrifying development which must be addressed. Proponents of the prosperity gospel preach physical well-being that is measured by the amount of wealth an individual has. This includes good food, clothing, vehicles and houses. It should be noted that how someone acquires the wealth does not matter; people are normally told to believe that all the blessings are received by faith. Issues of health and wealth are also promised by these proponents of the prosperity gospel (Sakala 2012).

When the prosperity gospel creeps into Reformed/Presbyterian churches, a second result is conflict – between minister and Presbytery/Synod leadership, minister and congregational members, and/or within the church membership. Conflict arises between minister and Presbytery/Synod leadership when the leadership assigns a pastor to a poor rural congregation. The rural congregation is unable to support the pastor at the level of prosperity gospel pastors seen first-hand in urban areas or on television. The rural pastor resents the Church leadership for ‘punishing’ him by assigning him to a rural congregation.

Conflict arises between minister and congregants when the minister disparages the small contributions poor congregants contribute as tithe and offering. The minister may encourage the congregants to go see how members of a large Pentecostal church care for or ‘bless’ their pastor.

Conflict arises between members of the congregation – especially between elderly and youth – because of their different understandings of the biblical message. Older members are likely to reject the prosperity gospel while youth will often consider it.

The Church in Africa is at a cross roads, not knowing how to choose between the teachings of the Reformed churches and the wealth and material blessings promised by the prosperity gospel as a sign of the faithfulness and righteousness of the recipients. The sad truth is that in Africa health and wealth are not equitably distributed in the church and the society. People found in impoverished urban and rural areas are attracted to the prosperity gospel message they hear on television or other media or during visits to churches. However, prosperity gospel pastors, seeking health and wealth as promised by proponents of the prosperity gospel,

refuse to preach in poor areas because people do not have the resources to ‘sow a seed’. Mainline church congregants, harangued by pastors to give beyond their means, feel the God being worshipped in the church is the God of the rich, not a God who cares for the poor (Chilembo 2012; Chunda 2012). For church members in typical rural areas, living in abject poverty, without support from government services or non-governmental organisations, hoping only in holistic Christian ministries, the prosperity gospel is pure nonsense. It contradicts the Bible. It is meaningless – only sand.

1. Historical Overview of the Prosperity Gospel

The origin of the prosperity gospel movement can be traced to the United States of America in the early 20th century. The founder of the prosperity gospel ‘faith movement’ was Mr Essek William Kenyon (1867-1948), a pastor and founder of Bethel Bible Institute. Mr Kenyon was an ordained Methodist minister. He left the Methodist church and founded several churches which he linked to the Baptist church. It should be noted that Mr Kenyon cherished and maintained good relationships with the pioneers of the Pentecostal movements in the United States of America and leaders on other continents (Walker 2007:252;347). However, he never accepted all their teachings and doctrines.

Subsequently, he came in touch with the ideas and teachings of the ‘New Thought’ which was founded by Phineas Parkhurst in 1838. Parkhurst taught that the mind has the ability to heal the body (Walker 2007:237).

The Christian Science movement, founded by Mary Baker Eddy, also influenced Mr Kenyon as he started the prosperity gospel movement. Eddy taught that sin, sickness and death are illusions and thus can be cured through right thinking (Walker 2007:100; Martin 2003:149-155).

Kenyon wrote that Christians could make a ‘positive confession’ to bring emotional and physical desires into being. He stated, “What I confess, I possess” (Phiri and Maxwell 2007). As the Pentecostal pastor and scholar J. Norberto Saracco from Argentina explains in his informative entry on ‘Prosperity theology’ in the *Dictionary of Mission Theology*, Kenyon believed that the spread of his teaching about the power of the human mind to overcome sin and sickness would result in human beings who would not be affected by evil spirits or by illness or poverty (Saracco 2007:323).

Kenyon in turn influenced the Pentecostal beliefs of Mr Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003). He added Kenyon’s teaching to his own to create what would become the Word-Faith movement. As an Assemblies of God pastor, Mr Hagin taught Christians they could get rich if they had enough faith. He preached that

words spoken in faith, related to health and wealth, must be fulfilled because God is required to honour the words. Hagin urged his believers to “Say it, do it, receive it, tell it” (Walker 2007:323; Phiri and Maxwell 2007). Many within the movement recognise Kenneth Hagin as one of the fathers of the movement, even referring to him as Dad Hagin.

It was Mr Kenneth Copeland (1936-present) who helped to restructure and organise the prosperity gospel movement. A young associate of Oral Roberts, Copeland began teaching in the 1960s that faith is a ‘force’ which brings material results when confessed out loud. Within a couple of decades, Word-Faith grew into a significant offshoot of charismatic faith (Walker 2007:90;347-348).

Other popular word-faith teachers include Kenneth Hagin Jr, Gloria Copeland, Charles Capps, Creflo Dollar, Frederick K.C. Price, Paul and Jan Crouch, Casey Treat, Marilyn Hickey, Jesse Duplantis and Earl Paulk (Walker 2007:348).

How did the prosperity gospel find its way to Africa? Pentecostalism opened the door in the early 1900s. As a result of the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, ordinary but ‘called’ people fanned out to every corner of the globe as missionaries. They were untrained and inexperienced; their only qualification was baptism in the Spirit and a divine call. Through their efforts to win souls to Christ, Pentecostalism was planted throughout Africa, and became an integral part of African Initiated Churches (AICs) (Walker 2007:252-253; Mullin 2008:211-212).

In the early 1990’s Kenneth Hagin, his son Kenneth Hagin Jr, and Kenneth Copeland visited AICs across Nigeria preaching the prosperity gospel. The impact was immense. Churches after that grew into millions of members, and the gospel of wealth found its way into the heart of Africa’s church. For example, in a 2006 Pew survey, 85% of Kenyan Pentecostals, 90% of South African Pentecostals and 95% of Nigerian Pentecostals indicated that God grants prosperity to all believers who have enough faith. In addition about 9 out of 10 Kenyan, Nigerian and South African Pentecostals said religious faith is very important to economic success. And, according to Allan H. Anderson, professor of Global Pentecostal Studies at the University of Birmingham, “older (denominational) churches are struggling to keep up with the jet-setting entrepreneurs who head up these new (Pentecostal) organizations” (Phiri and Maxwell 2007).

The rise of television evangelism also contributed greatly to the spread and impact of the prosperity gospel. Prosperity gospel teachers embraced televangelism during the 1960’s, and grew to dominate American religious programming (Chunda 2012).

As Africans acquired television sets, viewers watched American programming, and African prosperity gospel teachers developed their own shows which were watched by millions of viewers across Africa (Mphande 2012).

2. The Main Teachings of the Prosperity Gospel

2.1 *Sowing a Seed*

The main teachings of the prosperity gospel are that faith results in health and wealth, that God wants His people to be blessed by security and prosperity, and that sickness and poverty are curses to be broken by faith. The doctrine teaches that faith, positive speech and donations to Christian ministries will increase one's material wealth (Hood 2004:57-65; Kachali 2012).

Prosperity gospel proponents teach that poverty is a curse (Deut 28:1ff). They state that God blesses those who live upright and keep his covenant. It is added that Jesus said: "According to your faith will it be done to you" (Matt 9:29). Psalm 112:3 supports this view by stating that: "Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures for ever." Ecclesiastes 5:19 is quoted as follows: "When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God."

Another verse prosperity gospel proponents very much quote is Joshua 1:7-8, which states that if you follow God you will receive blessings when going out and coming in. The prosperity gospel teaches that the Bible says: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (2 Cor 1:20). The prosperity gospel adds that "God did not create poverty, but it came as a result of the fall of man" (Gen 3:1ff). It is not His will for His people to continue living in poverty. Furthermore, prosperity gospel proponents use verses such Luke 6:38; Galatians 6:7; and 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 to justify their teaching that, as a Christian, you need to tithe, give to the poor, and promote the gospel with your money to receive God's financial blessings (Rouse 1999:115-117).

Prosperity gospel members are taught that when you give a financial contribution, you "plant a seed" which will multiply and return to you in abundance. In the same vein, prosperity gospel proponents teach that "you plough back", a phrase again meaning the donation multiplies and returns to the giver. The proponents emphasise that giving "gives an identity to God", a phrase used to indicate that by giving financially God will recognise you as His faithful child (Sakala:2012).

2.2 *The Law of Sowing and Reaping*

The prosperity teaching interprets Mark 10:29-30 in the sense that we will receive from God a hundred times what we put into his hands. The main exponents of prosperity theology emphasise that "whoever puts into practice this law would practically enter into a cycle of endless wealth" (Saracco 2007:323).

The believers' faith itself (independent of God's direct action or will) contains financial prosperity. Those who believe this tend to also believe it is a spiritual law that applies to both the believer and the nonbeliever (Walker 2007:337-338). Faith in the concept is fundamental, regardless of whether or not the individual believes in God. It is the faith itself that "creates" financial blessing.

2.3 Proclaiming and Having

In today's global village the emphasis is on positive thoughts. In social media people most often write about the good things that happened to them, including issues concerning their health and wealth. Prosperity theology has been reinforced by this emphasis on positive thought. This theology focuses on being pragmatic or practical, meaning belief is required in order to achieve tangible results and concrete benefits in the material world. The power of positive thinking is encouraged in all members of their church so they can benefit from the results. It is strongly stated that "your belief will help create the fact". Positive thought attracts riches, success, health and happiness (Saracco 2007:323; Sakala 2012).

Saracco (2007:324) clearly explains the prosperity gospel's interpretation of

[t]he law of the proclaimed word. The formula is 'proclaim to have'. Hagin said, 'You can have what you say' (*Having Faith in Your Faith*). The text which is most used to back this idea is Mark 11:23-24. According to this interpretation, the force of faith is released by words. It is not sufficient to believe something in the heart, but for something to become real, it is necessary to confess it.

A believer needs to confess out loud what he wants to have. This implies that when we confess something negative it will become a reality and the positive the same. Therefore we live according to what we say (Mwanza 2012).

Believers are little gods or divine beings who possess all or some of the distinctive attributes of God. As little gods, believers can therefore emulate God, who spoke all things into existence. This means words are containers of power. Whatever one speaks will occur, be it negative or positive. Therefore one should only speak positive or faith-filled words (Walker 2007:337-338). Members are taught that positive thought and a positive verbal declaration create health and wealth, while a negative attitude and declaration lead to poverty and illness (Sakala 2012; Chilembo 2012).

2.4 The Power of Blessing

Many exponents of this faith movement agree that the power to secure wealth

comes from God. They base their belief on their interpretation of specific scriptures. For example, Deuteronomy 8:18 speaks of God's covenant with his people: "But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers." And Psalm 105:37 says, "He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no-one faltered." The Bible confirms this in Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Psalm 35:27 affirms: "The Lord be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant." Furthermore, exponents of the faith movement believe that the word of God brings blessings to his people so that they can enjoy them. "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it" (Prov 10:22). And in Psalm 1:1-3 we find: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

This law of blessing is based on God's covenant with Abraham. Prosperity theologians claim that the main reason God made the covenant with Abraham was to bless him materially. Therefore Christians, as spiritual sons of Abraham, are heirs of the blessings of the covenant. In view of this, Christians must affirm that prosperity is God's will because he wants us to prosper in all areas of life. This includes possessing the best homes, the best cars, the best clothes. These are the inheritance of the faithful servants of God (Saracco 2007:323).

2.5 The Work of Christ

The prosperity gospel movement believes both in divine healing and in material prosperity through Jesus Christ's redeeming work on the cross. They teach that in Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, God put our sins, illness, and poverty on Him so that we may be able to enjoy the blessings of our salvation (Walker 2007:337-338).

3. The Attraction of the Prosperity Gospel

The teachings of the prosperity gospel movement churches have attracted many adherents in Africa and elsewhere. These adherents believe that for religion to be meaningful, it must be practical, dynamic, and problem-solving. It should be noted that, despite negative criticism, these churches are attracting many members (Kubi and Torres 1981:120).

While many Reformed/Presbyterian churches are reported to be declining in membership, income, and staff in today's world, the prosperity gospel movement/church is the fastest growing body of Christian believers worldwide. Membership in Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa has risen from 17 million in 1970 to 147 million in 2005 (Phiri and Maxwell 2007).

The prosperity gospel movement offers tremendous promise to the 315 million sub-Saharan Africans living on less than a dollar a day. For them, teaching about the cross and about suffering may be unappealing. The promise of prosperity is hard to resist. The prosperity gospel is attractive to those from Reformed traditions who have been taught blessing must wait until the next life (Sakala 2012; Mwanza 2012).

The prosperity gospel has incorporated many elements of the Reformed churches, and Reformed churches have incorporated some elements of prosperity gospel. As a result, worship in prosperity gospel churches is familiar to Christians from the mission churches (Chunda 2012; Mwanza 2012). However, worship services in the prosperity gospel movement churches also incorporate many elements of traditional African culture. These include oral liturgy, narrative theology and witness, and recounting visions and dreams. Their worship services are characterised by reconciliatory and participatory worship, liturgical dance and prayers of healing and exorcism, which are predominant African cultural features (Anderson 2000).

People are also attracted to the prosperity gospel because it reflects the traditional African concept of blessedness. In the African context, blessedness is understood in terms of the biological and material, not just the religious/spiritual aspects. Africans have always considered land, children, animals, good health and good harvest all as wealth and blessing from the Supreme Being (Mugambi and Wasike 1992:60).

In addition, traditional African thought acknowledges that man has to solicit spiritual help to protect and enrich his/her physical life. Prosperity gospel adherents do not hesitate to ask for physical riches and prosperity, which in a sense become a measure of favour or blessings from God and the departed. Africans traditionally also share their prosperity with God and the departed through sacrifices, thanksgiving, and other acts of remembrance (Mbiti 1975:56-57). These ideas resonate with the prosperity gospel.

The prosperity gospel attracts people from all social classes. It appeals to those who have possibilities of advancement in life, such as business men and women, public sector employees, and those employed with international non-governmental organisations. With emphasis on wealth, health and blessings, it promotes belief and expectation of economic and social progress among the

lower middle classes. It attracts persons from the higher middle classes who wish to increase their resources. Persons from impoverished lower classes, who tend to go to faith movements that emphasise divine healing or miracles, appreciate the emphasis on health. Some persons from the higher classes, who prefer experience with mystical emphases, are drawn to the overall theology (Saracco 2007:325). Wealthy people, who are able to “sow substantial seeds”, appreciate being held in high esteem by the prosperity gospel pastor, and are happy to claim their wealth as a blessing from God (Mwanza 2012).

This movement also meets the psychological needs of the people. Members of these congregations are divided into small groups where they are trained in prosperity gospel beliefs. They learn that, for a financial contribution, they can submit a prayer request to the pastor, and he will pray for them. Some detractors from the prosperity gospel movement would say that it is the idea that the pastor is praying for the individual’s specific concern that provides the individual with psychological relief (Mwanza 2012).

The prosperity gospel leaders preach blessings to people, and who does not desire wealth and healing? For example, in Nigeria, Rev. Felix Omobude promises crowds that “women will find husbands, audience members will buy new cars, and the barren will birth twins” (Phiri and Maxwell 2007).

At the same time, people want supernatural healing powers that counteract the forces of evil, diseases, and witchcraft, to mention but a few. The prosperity gospel churches offer spiritual and supernatural protection to members through their spiritual leaders (Kachali 2012). In addition, University of Calgary professor Irving Hexham suggests that the prosperity gospel fulfils the African desire for communication with the supernatural through visions and dreams. South African members speak of the wonderful dreams of Kenneth Hagin’s communication with God – understood by prosperity gospel proponents as the result of ‘sowing a seed’. Intellectual faith pales in comparison to a Christian faith described by prosperity teachers as a lifestyle of direct communication with God (Phiri and Maxwell 2007).

People perceived as rich, powerful leaders – from the local village headman to the paramount chief to the nation’s president – are honoured and respected in Africa (Mphande 2012). These categories of persons are known as ‘Big Men’ in Africa. Churches in which the prosperity gospel is taught are usually directed by a sole pastor or strong leader who commands authority similar to the traditional African chief and headmen. Pastors like Michael Okonkwo, bishop of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission based in Nigeria, are the ‘Big Men’ in modern day Africa, adorned with all the trappings of a successful tribal chief. They attract huge followings because of their wealth, power and showmanship (Phiri and Maxwell 2007).

4. Problems of Prosperity Gospel Teachings

The prosperity gospel is at best half truth. Saracco (2007:324) shows this very clearly:

Passages such as Mark 10:30, 11:22 and 11:23-24 are key to the prosperity gospel, and interpreted by forcing their [the prosperity movement's] arguments on the translation. For example, the hundredfold reward promised by Jesus in Mark 10:30 is not a formula for personal enrichment but a show of God's love toward those who have left all for his cause. Even so, the same passage clarifies explicitly that these blessings will not preclude adversity.

In the Bible the emphasis is always on faith, and not on the audible expression of what we want to achieve. The words do not have power in themselves – it is God in his sovereignty who decides to bless us or withhold material blessings for now.

God does bless us, but it should also be noted that the so-called spiritual laws or principles which preach immediate and concrete blessing lack support from the scriptures. Blessings come because of the grace of God and God's sovereignty (Saracco 2007:324). According to biblical teachings found, for example, in stories of Abraham and Joseph, perseverance and patient waiting, perhaps for generations, are required for the blessing to be obtained (Kachali 2012).

To be blessed is to be granted special favour by God with resulting joy and prosperity. In the Old Testament there was considerable emphasis on material blessing; however in the New Testament, the emphasis is on spiritual blessing. Jesus Christ bore the consequences of the curse for believers (Gal 3:13) and blessed them with the forgiveness of sins (Rom 4:6). As a result of receiving God's blessings in Christ, believers are called to be a source of blessing to the world, especially in response to those who persecute them (Luke 6:27-28; Rom 12:14; 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Pet 3:9).

In some instances, prosperity gospel preachers take advantage of persons with limited education, few financial resources, and even intellectual disability. They sometimes visit lower income villages and towns where they induce persons limited in their understanding of the word of God to give almost everything they have to the church for the sake of receiving material blessings from God. People have given money, farms, houses, even their retirement package to the prosperity gospel preacher, who then leaves the community. The promised blessings do not materialise so the individuals end up destitute – without food, clothing or shelter (Kachali 2012). In addition, the situation of the now-destitute person is blamed

on their lack of faith and they become outcasts (Sakala 2012; Chunda 2012). The prosperity gospel can be used to take advantage of the poor, on the one hand, or to encourage greed and selfishness in others. Its approach is a scandal when it emphasises material rather than spiritual blessings, portraying Christ as the God of riches; neglecting Christian values of humility, sacrificial love, and commitment which characterise the kingdom of God; and emphasizing that proper relationship with God must be seen in physical as well as spiritual blessings (Saracco 2007:326; Mwanza 2012). The focus on storing up treasures on earth as a primary goal of faithful living is completely at odds with orthodox Christianity, which speaks of spiritual treasure stored in heaven (Falsani 2009).

People are attracted to the prosperity gospel because its emphasis on material blessing is comforting and easy. However, it ignores the role of suffering and sacrifice to which Christ calls his followers, and which he modelled for them. It ignores the blessings which are received through suffering (Gen 37:1ff; 38:1ff; 39:1ff; 40:1ff; 41:1ff; 42-47). It ignores that even when we are not receiving material blessings, God is there, watching and waiting for us to trust him, obey him, and learn that in loving him we have life's deepest blessing (McKnight 2009).

The prosperity gospel teaches that health and healing are also attached to giving – that is, 'sowing a seed'. The person seeking healing must donate financially to the church before and after healing prayer is offered (Kachali 2012).

In contrast to the above distortion of the gospel, the Bible has much to say about healing and health from a holistic perspective, totally divorced from monetary considerations. The Bible considers healthful living from the physical, the spiritual and the psychological standpoints (Mphande 2012). The physical strength and well-being of the body is never despised or dismissed, but is aptly summarised by the apostle's prayer: "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well", or "prospereth" as the KJV-translation reads (3 Jn 1:2). The concept of health includes all areas of the individual's existence – body, mind, and spirit – as the psalmist suggests: "Why are you downcast, O my soul?" (Ps 42:11).

Forgiveness and cleansing from sin will bring health and healing (Jer 30:12-17; 33:6-8). The redemptive work of Christ is the greatest healing force known to man, for guilt, bitterness, hatred, envy and other negative attitudes are removed, which are in themselves sickness, and which in turn cause all manner of mental and physical illness.

The prosperity gospel has already crept into the Reformed/Presbyterian churches, where ministers and members preach: "Give to brother and give to sister so that you can receive the blessings of God." This is done in the name of stewardship and is an abuse of the tithe. The tithes in these prosperity gospel