

## Prosperity Gospels and Money Worship in Nigeria: Exploring Miracles for Poverty Alleviation

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**Abstract:** The prosperity gospel, which promises material wealth and success as evidence of divine favour, has gained widespread popularity, especially among those facing economic hardship in Nigeria. This doctrine, propagated by influential religious leaders, encourages the belief that faith, positive confession and financial contributions to the church can lead to miraculous financial breakthroughs.

**Purpose:** This study examined the phenomenon of prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria, probing how these religious practices are perceived as mechanisms for poverty alleviation.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The study adopted an explanatory research design and utilized the documentary method to collect data from secondary sources, while a textual analysis rooted in systematic logical induction was employed to test the hypotheses.

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**Findings:** The study critically analyzed the socio-economic context that has given rise to this religious movement, emphasizing how poverty and economic instability have made the promises of prosperity gospels appealing to a large segment of the population. However, it also revealed the controversies surrounding this practice, including accusations of exploitation, materialism and the commercialization of religion. The research is grounded in Max Weber's theory of religion and capitalism, Marxist theory of religion, social exchange theory and spiritual capital theory to explore how prosperity gospels shape economic behaviour and perpetuate social inequality. While prosperity gospels may offer temporary hope and psychological relief, they often fail to address the structural causes of poverty in Nigeria, potentially exacerbating economic disparities and diverting attention from sustainable solutions.

**Originality/value:** The study contributed to the ongoing discourse on the connection of religion, economics and social justice in Nigeria, offering insights into the intricate role of religious practices in addressing or perpetuating poverty.

**Keywords:** divine favour; economic disparity; commercialization of religion; social justice; miraculous financial breakthrough

**Paper Type:** Article-research

## **Introduction**

The rise of prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria has become a significant socio-religious phenomenon, particularly in the context of widespread poverty and economic instability. As Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria is characterized by stark socio-economic challenges, including high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Despite the country's abundant natural resources, the majority of its population remains impoverished, with the World Bank estimating that over 40% of Nigerians live below the national poverty line (World Bank, 2020). In this environment of economic

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desperation, the prosperity gospel has emerged as a compelling narrative that promises divine intervention in the form of material wealth and financial success.

The prosperity gospel, also known as the “health and wealth gospel” or “name it and claim it” theology, is a Christian doctrine that asserts that financial blessing and physical well-being are the will of God for believers. This doctrine teaches that faith, positive confessions, and generous giving particularly to religious leaders or churches can unlock divine favour and result in material prosperity (Gifford, 2004). In Nigeria, this message has been widely propagated by charismatic and Pentecostal preachers who claim that poverty is a curse that can be broken through acts of faith, often exemplified by monetary donations to the church (Ukah, 2011).

The appeal of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria is deeply rooted in the socio-economic realities faced by many Nigerians. In a country where the government and formal economic structures often fail to provide for the basic needs of the population, religious institutions have stepped in to fill the gap. Churches have become not only places of worship but also centers of social and economic activity, offering various forms of support to their congregants. This has led to a situation where religious leaders wield significant influence over their followers, often using the promise of miracles and divine favor as a means of encouraging financial contributions (Marshall, 2009).

The concept of money worship, closely associated with the prosperity gospel, refers to the excessive focus on wealth and material possessions within religious contexts. This phenomenon has been criticized for promoting a form of materialism that contradicts traditional Christian teachings on humility and the spiritual dangers of wealth (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005a). In Nigeria, the commercialization of religion has become a contentious issue, with religious leaders and institutions often accused of exploiting

the hopes and fears of their followers for financial gain. This has led to growing concerns about the ethical implications of such practices, particularly in a society where many people are vulnerable due to economic hardship (Obadare, 2018).

Despite these criticisms, the prosperity gospel continues to thrive in Nigeria, largely because it offers a form of psychological relief and hope to those struggling with poverty. The promise of miraculous financial breakthroughs provides an attractive alternative to the often bleak realities of the Nigerian economy. However, there is ongoing debate about the long-term impact of these teachings, with some scholars arguing that they may contribute to further economic disparity by diverting attention away from systemic issues and sustainable solutions to poverty (Ojo, 2013).

This study seeks to explore the role of prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria, focusing on their potential as perceived mechanisms for poverty alleviation. By examining the socio-economic context in which these religious practices have flourished, the study aims to provide a critical analysis of their impact on the lives of ordinary Nigerians and the broader implications for social and economic development in the country.

The proliferation of prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria has raised significant concerns regarding their impact on poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. While these religious practices offer hope and promise financial breakthroughs to millions of Nigerians facing economic hardship, there is growing skepticism about their effectiveness in addressing the root causes of poverty. The central issue is whether the prosperity gospel and the associated practice of money worship truly contribute to sustainable poverty alleviation or whether they exacerbate existing economic disparities by exploiting vulnerable populations.

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Many Nigerians, driven by desperation and a desire for financial stability, are increasingly turning to religious institutions that preach prosperity theology. These institutions often promote the idea that financial success is directly tied to one's faith and generosity, leading followers to make substantial financial contributions in the hope of receiving divine blessings. However, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the claim that these practices lead to long-term economic improvement for adherents. Instead, there is concern that these practices may perpetuate a cycle of poverty, as individuals may deplete their limited resources without achieving the promised financial success.

Furthermore, the commercialization of religion, evident in the lavish lifestyles of some prosperity preachers, raises ethical questions about the exploitation of faith for personal gain. This phenomenon challenges the integrity of religious institutions and has potential implications for social cohesion and economic justice in Nigeria. The research problem, therefore, centers on understanding the actual impact of prosperity gospels and money worship on poverty alleviation in Nigeria. This study seeks to explore whether these religious practices provide genuine solutions to poverty or if they represent a form of exploitation that hinders sustainable socio-economic development. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on the role of religion in society, particularly in contexts where economic hardship is prevalent.

1. What is the relationship between prosperity gospels and the financial behaviour of their followers in Nigeria?
2. How do prosperity gospels and money worship impact the socio-economic status of their followers in Nigeria?
3. What are the ethical implications of prosperity gospels and money worship on poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria?

The general objective of this study is to critically examine the role of prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria, with a

focus on their impact on poverty alleviation and socio-economic development, to assess whether these religious practices provide sustainable solutions to poverty or contribute to the perpetuation of economic inequality. Specific goals of the study include the following:

1. To analyze the influence of prosperity gospels on the financial behavior and decision-making of followers in Nigeria.
2. To assess the impact of prosperity gospels and money worship on the socio-economic status of followers, particularly in relation to poverty alleviation.
3. To examine the ethical implications of prosperity gospels and money worship within the context of poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

### **Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework**

#### **The Concept of Prosperity Gospel**

Prosperity gospel, also known as the health and wealth gospel, is a religious doctrine that has gained significant traction, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. It is predicated on the belief that faith, positive confession, and financial contributions to religious institutions are divinely rewarded with material wealth, physical health, and overall success. This section reviews the existing literature on the concept of the prosperity gospel, tracing its origins, key tenets, and its impact on adherents, particularly within the context of developing countries like Nigeria.

#### **1. Origins and Theological Foundations of Prosperity Gospel**

The prosperity gospel emerged in the United States during the mid-20th century, with roots in Pentecostalism and the teachings of figures like Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and Oral Roberts. These leaders emphasized the power of positive confession and the idea that faith could manifest material wealth (Bowler, 2013). The theological foundation of the prosperity gospel is built on an interpretation of the Bible that sees material

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success as a sign of God's favour and poverty as a curse that can be overcome through faith and giving (Gifford, 2004).

2. The Major Tenets of Prosperity Gospel

The concept of prosperity gospel, often referred to as the "health and wealth" gospel, is a theological doctrine that links material wealth and physical well-being directly to God's blessings. Proponents of this belief argue that faith, positive declarations, and financial contributions to religious causes can lead to financial prosperity and success (Bowler, 2013). In Nigeria, where economic challenges are prevalent, prosperity gospel has gained significant traction as many view it as a pathway to financial success and social mobility (Gifford, 2004). It transcends mere religious belief, becoming a widespread social phenomenon that deeply influences the practices of many Pentecostal and charismatic churches. These churches place a strong emphasis on practices like tithing, seed sowing, and various forms of giving, promoting them as key to unlocking divine blessings. This has fostered a culture where financial contributions are viewed as both a spiritual obligation and a means to achieving material success (Ojo, 2013).

At the heart of prosperity gospel is the concept of "seed faith," where believers are encouraged to "sow" financial donations with the expectation of reaping divine blessings in the form of wealth and success. This practice is often supported by scriptural references such as Malachi 3:10, which speaks of bringing tithes into the storehouse to receive blessings, and Luke 6:38, which promises that giving will result in receiving (Hunt, 2000). Additionally, the doctrine emphasizes positive confession, where believers are urged to speak their desires into existence. This aspect of prosperity theology asserts that words hold creative power, and by declaring wealth, health, and success, believers can manifest these outcomes in their lives (Coleman, 2000). Prosperity gospel's tenets reflect a distinctive blend of faith, financial

practices, and positive thinking, which together form a powerful appeal, particularly in contexts like Nigeria, where economic difficulties are widespread.

### 3. The Spread of Prosperity Gospel in Africa

Prosperity gospel has spread rapidly across Africa, particularly within Pentecostal and charismatic Christian movements. This theological doctrine, originating from the United States, has found fertile ground in various African countries due to a combination of economic, social, and religious factors. One of the key reasons for the spread of the prosperity gospel in Africa is the pervasive economic hardship experienced by many on the continent. In countries where poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services are widespread, prosperity gospel offers hope and a promise of upward mobility through divine intervention (Kalu, 2008). As such, it resonates deeply with individuals who seek practical solutions to their material struggles, framing faith as a means to achieve financial success and social status.

Pentecostalism, which is the fastest-growing branch of Christianity in Africa, has been a major vehicle for the dissemination of prosperity gospel teachings. Many African Pentecostal churches emphasize messages of wealth, success, and health, often linking these outcomes directly to spiritual practices such as tithing, seed sowing, and positive confession (Gifford, 2004). These churches frequently highlight testimonies of members who have experienced financial breakthroughs, thereby reinforcing the belief that material wealth is a sign of God's favour.

The influence of global media and technology has also played a significant role in the spread of prosperity gospel in Africa. Television evangelists, many of whom are based in the United States, broadcast their messages across the continent, reaching millions of viewers (Adogame, 2013). In addition, the rise of the internet and social media has enabled African preachers to

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share prosperity gospel teachings with a wider audience, further accelerating its growth.

Moreover, prosperity gospel's emphasis on individual empowerment and success appeals to the entrepreneurial spirit that is prevalent in many African societies. The gospel's promises of wealth and success resonate with those who are eager to improve their economic situation and achieve personal ambitions (Van Dijk, 2002). As a result, prosperity gospel has become intertwined with the broader socio-economic aspirations of many Africans, making it a powerful and enduring religious movement on the continent.

In Nigeria, prominent Pentecostal pastors like David Oyedepo, Enoch Adeboye, and Chris Oyakhilome are leading proponents of this doctrine, drawing large congregations with promises of wealth and success (Ukah, 2011). The spread of prosperity gospel in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors, including the failure of the state to provide basic social services, the rise of Pentecostalism, and the influence of American televangelists (Marshall, 2009). The appeal of the prosperity gospel lies in its ability to offer a spiritual solution to material problems, making it particularly attractive in a context where poverty is widespread, and government support is limited.

#### 4. Impact of Prosperity Gospel on Followers

The impact of the prosperity gospel on its followers has been a subject of debate among scholars. Some argue that it offers psychological benefits by providing hope and a sense of control over one's circumstances (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). For individuals facing economic challenges, the promise of divine intervention through faith and giving can be a source of comfort and motivation. However, critics contend that the prosperity gospel can lead to disillusionment and financial ruin when the promised blessings fail to materialize (Togarasei, 2011). There is also concern that this doctrine promotes materialism and undermines the

traditional Christian values of humility and selflessness (Gifford, 2004).

#### 5. Controversies Surrounding Prosperity Gospel

Prosperity gospel has been widely criticized for its emphasis on wealth and its perceived exploitation of vulnerable followers. Obadare (2018) argues that the commercialization of religion through prosperity gospel teachings has led to the commodification of faith, where religious leaders profit from the desperation of their congregants. This has raised ethical concerns about the role of religious leaders in promoting a gospel that prioritizes material gain over spiritual growth.

Moreover, the prosperity gospel's focus on individual wealth can exacerbate social inequality, as it often places the blame for poverty on the lack of faith or insufficient giving (Ojo, 2013). This perspective ignores the structural causes of poverty and can lead to victim-blaming, where those who remain poor are seen as lacking in faith or divine favor. The prosperity gospel represents a significant shift in Christian theology, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. While it offers a message of hope and empowerment, it also raises important ethical and theological questions. The literature suggests that while the prosperity gospel may provide temporary psychological relief, its long-term impact on followers and society at large is more complex and potentially problematic. In the Nigerian context, where economic challenges are pervasive, the prosperity gospel has both captivated and divided opinions, making it a critical area of study for understanding the interplay between religion, economics, and society.

#### **The Concept of Money Worship**

Money worship, often associated with materialism and consumerism, is a concept that has gained attention in both religious and socio-economic studies. It refers to the excessive prioritization of money and material wealth, sometimes to the

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detriment of spiritual, moral, and social values. This literature review explores the origins, implications, and criticisms of money worship, particularly in the context of modern societies, including its intersection with religious practices like the prosperity gospel.

### 1. Origins and Conceptual Framework of Money Worship

The concept of money worship can be traced back to the rise of capitalism and the increasing emphasis on material wealth as a measure of success. Max Weber's seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930), laid the groundwork for understanding the relationship between religious beliefs and the pursuit of wealth. Weber argued that the Protestant work ethic, which emphasized hard work and frugality, inadvertently led to the accumulation of wealth and the rise of capitalism. This laid the foundation for a cultural shift where money began to be seen not just as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. In modern times, money worship has evolved beyond its religious roots to encompass a broader societal phenomenon. Belk (1985) describes it as a form of materialism, where individuals place excessive importance on acquiring and possessing material goods, often equating financial success with personal worth. This behavior is reinforced by consumer culture, which promotes the idea that happiness and fulfillment can be achieved through the accumulation of wealth and possessions.

### 2. Money Worship and Religion

The intersection of money worship and religion is particularly evident in the prosperity gospel movement, where financial success is often equated with divine favor. As noted by Piff and Moskowitz (2018), the prosperity gospel promotes the belief that God rewards faithful followers with material wealth, thereby legitimizing the pursuit of money within a religious framework. This fusion of spiritual and material goals can lead to a form of money worship, where religious adherents prioritize financial success as a sign of spiritual righteousness.

Critics argue that this form of money worship distorts the core teachings of many religious traditions, which often emphasize humility, generosity, and the impermanence of material wealth (Gifford, 2004). In the context of Christianity, for instance, the New Testament frequently warns against the dangers of wealth and the pursuit of money, with passages like Matthew 6:24 stating, "You cannot serve both God and money."

### 3. Implications of Money Worship

The implications of money worship are far-reaching, affecting both individual behavior and societal values. On an individual level, money worship can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, as people constantly strive for more wealth without finding true fulfillment (Kasser, 2002). This pursuit of material wealth can also result in ethical compromises, as individuals may engage in dishonest or exploitative practices to achieve financial success.

On a societal level, money worship can exacerbate economic inequalities and undermine social cohesion. As noted by Durvasula and Lysonski (2010), societies that prioritize wealth accumulation often experience greater disparities between the rich and the poor, leading to social tensions and a weakening of communal bonds. Furthermore, the focus on material wealth can detract from other important social goals, such as education, health, and environmental sustainability.

### 4. Criticisms of Money Worship

Money worship has been widely criticized for its negative impact on both individuals and society. From a psychological perspective, Kasser (2002) argues that the pursuit of material wealth is inherently unsatisfying, as it is driven by extrinsic rather than intrinsic goals. People who prioritize money and possessions over relationships and personal growth tend to experience lower levels of happiness and well-being. From a moral and ethical standpoint, money worship is often seen as a form of idolatry,

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where material wealth becomes an object of reverence, replacing traditional religious and moral values (Belk, 1985). This shift can lead to a devaluation of human life and dignity, as people are judged based on their financial status rather than their character or contributions to society.

### 5. Money Worship in Nigeria

In Nigeria, money worship has become increasingly visible, particularly within the context of the prosperity gospel and the broader culture of consumerism. The emphasis on wealth as a measure of success has led to a proliferation of practices and behaviors aimed at acquiring money at all costs, including corruption, fraud, and other unethical activities (Ojo, 2013). This trend has been criticized for undermining traditional values and contributing to social and economic instability.

As Uka (2020) notes, the rise of money worship in Nigeria is closely linked to the country's socio-economic challenges, including widespread poverty and unemployment. In a context where opportunities for legitimate financial success are limited, the pursuit of wealth through any means necessary becomes more appealing. This has led to the normalization of practices that prioritize wealth accumulation over ethical considerations, further entrenching the culture of money worship.

The concept of money worship highlights the growing importance placed on material wealth in modern societies, often at the expense of spiritual, moral, and social values. While it can provide short-term satisfaction, the long-term implications of prioritizing money over other aspects of life are generally negative, leading to increased stress, social inequality, and ethical compromises. In the Nigerian context, money worship is particularly problematic, as it exacerbates existing socio-economic challenges and undermines efforts to promote social cohesion and moral integrity. Understanding the roots and consequences of

money worship is essential for addressing its impact on both individuals and society.

### **Prosperity Gospel and Money Worship in Nigeria**

The relationship between the prosperity gospel and money worship has been a subject of considerable debate, particularly within the context of Nigeria. The prosperity gospel, a religious belief that financial success is a sign of divine favor, is closely linked with the concept of money worship, where wealth becomes a central focus of religious practice. This literature review examines the interplay between these two concepts, with a particular emphasis on their implications for poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

### **Money Worship in the Context of Prosperity Gospel**

Money worship, in the context of prosperity gospel, refers to the undue emphasis on material wealth as a measure of spiritual success. This form of worship can manifest in the prioritization of wealth accumulation over other spiritual and moral values. Critics argue that the prosperity gospel encourages money worship by equating financial success with God's favor, leading followers to pursue wealth with religious zeal (Belk, 1985). In Nigeria, this dynamic has been particularly pronounced due to the socio-economic context. With widespread poverty and unemployment, the promise of financial miracles through religious means becomes an attractive prospect for many. As Nwankwo (2016) points out, the prosperity gospel often exploits the economic vulnerabilities of its followers, offering them hope in the form of financial breakthroughs while simultaneously encouraging practices that prioritize wealth over ethical and spiritual development.

### **The Role of Prosperity Gospel in Poverty Alleviation**

The relationship between the prosperity gospel and poverty alleviation is complex and controversial. On one hand, proponents argue that the prosperity gospel empowers individuals by

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encouraging positive thinking, entrepreneurship, and generosity (Ukah, 2007). They contend that by fostering a mindset of abundance, the prosperity gospel can inspire individuals to take proactive steps toward improving their financial situation.

On the other hand, critics argue that the prosperity gospel can perpetuate poverty by promoting unrealistic expectations of financial miracles, leading followers to neglect practical approaches to economic empowerment (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). In Nigeria, where many people already struggle with limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, the prosperity gospel's emphasis on financial miracles can divert attention from systemic issues that need to be addressed for sustainable poverty alleviation (Adogame, 2010).

### **Prosperity Gospel and Money Worship in Nigeria: Tracking the Nexus**

The interplay between prosperity gospel and money worship in Nigeria is shaped by the socio-economic realities of the country. With a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line, the promise of wealth through religious means becomes a powerful motivator. This has led to the proliferation of churches that preach the prosperity gospel, often focusing on money as a central theme of their teachings (Gifford, 2004). However, the emphasis on money within these religious practices has also led to a form of money worship, where wealth is not only desired but revered. As Chilwa (2012) notes, the language and practices of prosperity gospel often reinforce the idea that wealth is a sign of God's favor, leading to the deification of money. This creates a paradox where the pursuit of wealth, ostensibly for the purpose of alleviating poverty, can lead to an unhealthy obsession with material gain, potentially exacerbating social inequalities and moral decay.

The relationship between the prosperity gospel and money worship in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted. While the

prosperity gospel offers a framework for understanding wealth as a divine blessing, it also carries the risk of fostering money worship, where financial success becomes the primary focus of religious life. This dynamic has significant implications for poverty alleviation in Nigeria, as it can both inspire and hinder efforts to address the country's socio-economic challenges. Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing a more nuanced approach to addressing the spiritual and material needs of Nigerians.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored in several theoretical perspectives that help explain the socio-religious and economic dynamics at play. The two most relevant theories for this study are Max Weber's theory of religion and capitalism, particularly his ideas about the "Protestant Ethic," and Marxist theory of religion. Additionally, social exchange theory and spiritual capital theory offer useful lenses for understanding the economic and social behaviours associated with prosperity gospels and money worship.

### **Max Weber's Theory of Religion and Capitalism**

Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) provides a foundational theory for understanding how religious beliefs can influence economic behavior. Weber argued that certain Protestant denominations promoted values such as hard work, thrift, and rational economic activity, which, in turn, facilitated the development of capitalism. Although Weber's analysis was focused on Western Protestantism, his theory can also be applied to the phenomenon of prosperity gospels in Nigeria. In the context of prosperity gospels, the theory can explain how religious beliefs about divine favor and material wealth can influence followers to adopt economic behaviors that prioritize financial success and material accumulation. The prosperity gospel, which teaches that faith, generosity, and

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positive confessions lead to financial breakthroughs, resonates with Weber's notion of a "spirit of capitalism." This perspective suggests that prosperity gospel adherents may view wealth not only as a blessing but as a sign of divine favor, which is tied to personal success and spiritual growth (Marshall, 2009). Weber's theory thus provides a critical lens to understand the socio-economic motivations of prosperity gospel followers in Nigeria, as they engage in practices of faith and money worship in hopes of achieving financial success and alleviating poverty.

### **Marxist Theory of Religion**

Karl Marx's theory of religion, particularly his view of religion as the "opium of the people" (Marx, 1844), offers a critique of religious practices that mask or justify socio-economic inequalities. Marx argued that religion often functions to pacify the oppressed and distract them from the material realities of their lives. In the case of prosperity gospels, religion may serve as a tool for maintaining the status quo by promising spiritual rewards (like wealth) in the afterlife or as a result of faith, rather than addressing the structural causes of poverty and inequality. In Nigeria, prosperity preachers often suggest that poverty is a curse that can be broken through acts of faith, such as tithing and offering donations to the church. This aligns with Marx's notion of religion as an ideology that distracts people from the material conditions of their lives and places the responsibility for their economic well-being on individual faith rather than on systemic economic reform. The emphasis on individual prosperity within the prosperity gospel narrative can be seen as a form of religious commodification, where followers are encouraged to spend their limited resources in exchange for promises of financial miracles, which may never materialize. Marxist theory thus helps to critique the ways in which prosperity gospels may perpetuate economic disparities by focusing on individual faith and charity rather than structural economic reforms.

### **Social Exchange Theory (SET)**

Proposed by scholars like Homans (1958) and Blau (1964), focuses on the interactions between individuals and the perceived rewards or costs that come with those interactions. The theory posits that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis, seeking to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. In the context of prosperity gospels, the exchange is seen in the form of financial contributions (tithes, offerings and donations) made by followers in exchange for the anticipated “blessings” or miracles that prosperity preachers promise. Prosperity gospel adherents are often led to believe that their financial sacrifices will result in divine financial breakthroughs, improved health, or other material blessings. The theory suggests that followers engage in these religious exchanges because they expect tangible rewards in return, making it a form of economic and social transaction (Brown, 2015). Social Exchange Theory also highlights the emotional and psychological rewards that followers may receive in the form of hope, community, and a sense of spiritual fulfillment. However, the theory can also shed light on the potential costs of such exchanges, namely, the depletion of limited financial resources with no guarantee of the promised outcomes. This theory thus provides a framework for understanding the decisions made by followers within the context of the prosperity gospel movement.

### **Spiritual Capital Theory**

As articulated by scholars such as Swatos (2006), refers to the non-material resources that individuals and communities possess, which can be utilized for social and economic advancement. Spiritual capital includes religious beliefs, practices, and networks that can influence an individual’s life choices, behaviors, and economic status. In the case of prosperity gospels, the theory posits that faith and spiritual practices themselves are seen as forms of capital that can be “invested” to gain material

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returns. In this framework, adherents of prosperity gospels are believed to engage in religious acts, such as giving offerings or making positive confessions, believing that these acts will yield spiritual and material rewards. In essence, followers view their faith and religious participation as forms of capital that can be used to secure financial success. This theory can help explain how prosperity gospel adherents view financial contributions as investments in divine favor, which will result in a “return” of material wealth. Spiritual capital, therefore, functions as both a source of motivation and a tool for navigating socio-economic challenges, particularly in environments where formal economic systems may fail to meet the needs of the people (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005).

These theoretical perspectives, Weber’s theory of religion and capitalism, Marx’s theory of religion, social exchange theory and spiritual capital theory, provide a all-around framework for understanding the phenomenon of prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria. Together, these theories explain how religious beliefs can shape economic behaviour, how religious practices may serve as mechanisms for coping with socio-economic inequalities, and how the commercialization of religion may impact the socio-economic development of individuals and communities. By using this theoretical framework, this study critically assessed the role of prosperity gospels in poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria, examining both the potential benefits and the ethical concerns that arise from these practices.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative research approach utilizing an explanatory research design to explore the literature and examine the research problem. The qualitative nature of the study allows for a deep understanding of the socio-religious and economic phenomena under investigation, which are often influenced by complex human behaviours, beliefs and values. The

research design explained the relationships between prosperity gospels, financial behaviours and socio-economic outcomes. This approach is suitable for exploring the underlying causes, contexts and consequences of prosperity theology and its impact on poverty alleviation. The explanatory design allowed for a thorough investigation of how these religious practices function within the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria.

This study primarily relied on secondary data, gathered through the documentary method involving review and analysis of existing literature, including academic articles, books, reports, and other relevant materials, to generate insights into the topic. Secondary sources provided a rich repository of data that allowed for an extensive exploration of the prosperity gospel phenomenon in Nigeria, its proponents and the socio-economic conditions in which it thrives.

The documentary data includes studies on prosperity theology, religious practices in Nigeria, socio-economic conditions such as poverty, income inequality and unemployment, as well as ethical concerns related to the commercialization of religion. Furthermore, the documentary method helps provide a critical historical and socio-cultural context for understanding how prosperity gospels have evolved and impacted Nigerian society.

The methodology allowed for a thorough exploration of prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria, providing critical insights into their role in poverty alleviation and their broader socio-economic and ethical implications. By utilizing documentary research and textual analysis, this study offered a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between religious practices and socio-economic development in Nigeria.

### **Discussion of Major Findings**

The study on the relationship between prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria, particularly in the context of poverty alleviation, reveals a complex and multifaceted dynamic.

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The findings highlight both the potential benefits and the significant drawbacks of the prosperity gospel as it is practiced in Nigeria.

### **The Appeal of Prosperity Gospels in a Socio-Economic Context**

One of the key findings from the study is the strong appeal of prosperity gospels in Nigeria, which can be largely attributed to the country's socio-economic challenges. With widespread poverty, high unemployment rates, and limited access to essential services, many Nigerians are drawn to the promises of financial miracles and divine favor that prosperity gospel preaches. The belief that faith and generous giving can lead to material wealth provides a source of hope for individuals struggling with economic hardship. This finding aligns with existing literature that points to the prosperity gospel as a response to the economic vulnerabilities of its followers. As noted by Gifford (2004), in countries like Nigeria, where the state often fails to provide adequate social safety nets, the prosperity gospel offers an alternative means of coping with economic uncertainty. However, this also raises questions about the sustainability of such beliefs in genuinely addressing poverty at a structural level.

### **The Intersection of Money Worship and Religious Practices**

The study also reveals a significant intersection between money worship and religious practices within the framework of the prosperity gospel. The emphasis on wealth accumulation as a sign of God's favor has led to a culture where money is not only desired but revered. This form of money worship manifests in various religious practices, including tithing, seed sowing, and extravagant displays of wealth by religious leaders. While these practices are often justified as acts of faith, the study suggests that they can contribute to a form of religious materialism that prioritizes financial gain over spiritual and ethical values. This finding is consistent with the critiques of the prosperity gospel, which argue that it encourages a transactional relationship with

God, where blessings are seen as commodities that can be bought and sold (Belk, 1985; Chiluwa, 2012).

### **Impact on Poverty Alleviation Efforts**

One of the most contentious findings of the study is the impact of the prosperity gospel on poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. On the one hand, the prosperity gospel has empowered some individuals by promoting a positive mindset and encouraging entrepreneurial activities. For example, testimonies of financial breakthroughs often inspire others to pursue their economic goals with determination, believing that divine intervention is possible. However, the study also finds that the prosperity gospel can perpetuate unrealistic expectations about wealth creation. The belief in financial miracles can lead to a reliance on divine intervention rather than practical measures for economic empowerment, such as education, skills development, and investment in sustainable businesses. This reliance on miracles can divert attention from the systemic issues that contribute to poverty, such as corruption, poor governance, and inadequate infrastructure (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Adogame, 2010).

### **Social Implications and Ethical Concerns**

The study highlights several social implications and ethical concerns associated with the prosperity gospel and money worship in Nigeria. The focus on wealth as a measure of spiritual success can create social divisions, where those who are not financially successful are seen as lacking faith or divine favor. This can lead to stigmatization and social exclusion of the poor, further exacerbating inequalities. Moreover, the study raises ethical concerns about the practices of some prosperity gospel preachers, who may exploit the economic vulnerabilities of their followers for personal gain. The commercialization of religious services and the pressure to give large donations can place significant financial burdens on individuals who are already struggling economically.

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This exploitation can undermine the moral integrity of religious institutions and erode public trust in religious leaders (Ukah, 2007; Nwankwo, 2016).

### **The Role of Prosperity Gospels in Social Change**

Despite the criticisms, the study finds that the prosperity gospel has played a role in social change by challenging traditional beliefs about poverty and wealth. By promoting the idea that anyone, regardless of their background, can achieve financial success through faith, the prosperity gospel has contributed to a shift in attitudes towards wealth and poverty in Nigeria. This shift has, in some cases, encouraged greater individual responsibility and a more proactive approach to economic challenges. However, the study concludes that for the prosperity gospel to contribute effectively to poverty alleviation, it must be coupled with practical initiatives that address the root causes of poverty. This includes promoting education, healthcare, and social justice, alongside the spiritual teachings of prosperity.

The findings of the study underscore the dual nature of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria as both a source of hope and a potential obstacle to genuine poverty alleviation. While the prosperity gospel has empowered some individuals by encouraging a positive mindset and entrepreneurial spirit, it also risks perpetuating unrealistic expectations and diverting attention from the structural causes of poverty. To harness the positive aspects of the prosperity gospel for poverty alleviation, there must be a balanced approach that combines spiritual teachings with practical, systemic solutions to Nigeria's socio-economic challenges.

### **Recommendations**

To address the challenges associated with prosperity gospels and money worship in Nigeria and to enhance their potential for poverty alleviation, the following sustainable approaches are suggested:

1. **Integration of Practical Initiatives:** Religious teachings should be coupled with practical initiatives that address the root causes of poverty. This includes promoting education, healthcare, vocational training, and entrepreneurship alongside spiritual guidance.
2. **Balanced Religious Messaging:** Religious leaders should emphasize the importance of hard work, ethical behavior, and long-term planning in addition to faith. This balanced approach can help manage expectations and reduce reliance on miracles as the sole solution to economic problems.
3. **Social Support Systems:** Churches and religious organizations can establish social support systems, such as microfinance programs, job training, and community development projects, to directly assist their congregants in achieving economic stability.
4. **Ethical Religious Practices:** There should be increased accountability and transparency in religious practices, particularly concerning financial contributions. Religious leaders must prioritize the well-being of their congregants and avoid exploiting their economic vulnerabilities.
5. **Promoting Social Justice:** Religious institutions can play a critical role in advocating for social justice and systemic change, addressing issues such as corruption, inequality, and poor governance, which are major contributors to poverty in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that while the prosperity gospel in Nigeria has the potential to empower individuals and promote economic change, its effectiveness in alleviating poverty is limited by its focus on wealth accumulation and reliance on divine intervention. To make a meaningful impact on poverty alleviation, the prosperity gospel must be integrated with practical, systemic solutions that address the underlying causes of poverty.

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Additionally, ethical religious practices and a balanced approach to spiritual and material wealth are crucial for ensuring that the prosperity gospel contributes positively to the socio-economic development of Nigeria.

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