

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Prosperity Gospel in Liberia: A Theological Alternative to the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of School of Divinity  
In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of  
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by  
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Lynchburg, Virginia

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**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Many indigenous Liberian pastors are not theologically grounded on a solid biblical foundation. As such, many Liberian Christians lack foundational knowledge of the truths of the Gospel of Christ for salvation. The prosperity gospel or “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia is a significant deviation from the Gospel of Christ that undermines sound hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture. This study examines why a growing number of pastors in Liberia are replacing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the prosperity gospel. An anonymous survey research study of 12 pastors from Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Kakata, Liberia, West Africa found that most Liberian pastors view the prosperity gospel message as the most critical threat to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the spiritual growth of the church. However, this study concluded that preaching the prosperity gospel in the church increases quantitative growth.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Many books and articles have been penned about the prosperity gospel (Faith, Wealth, and Health) message in sub-Sahara Africa.<sup>1</sup> However, a lot of scholastic works have not been written within the scope of the Liberian context. Christianity, in post-colonial Africa, has been highly influenced and shaped by the prosperity message.<sup>2</sup> Lausanne Theology Working Group posits that the prosperity gospel “teaches that believers have a right to blessings, health, and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”<sup>3</sup> This explosive growth of a popular materialistic gospel is sweeping across the Continent because of the massive nature of African Christianity and the exploitation that poor Christians need to think positively and ignite the Godly power within them to get material possession.<sup>4</sup> The prosperity gospel is very complex and diverse; it is a global phenomenon that is not unique to Africa but is almost always synonymous with the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches with its roots in the United States.<sup>5</sup> The prosperity gospel is not confined to a particular denomination or a specific school of thought.<sup>6</sup> It overlaps both the charismatic and non-charismatic spectrum as a blend of positive thinking and

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<sup>1</sup>Thinandavha D. Mashau and Mookgo S. Kgatle. “Prosperity Gospel and the Culture of Greed in Post-Colonial Africa”, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40:1 (2019), 208.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Heuser. “Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies”, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Vhumani Magezi and Peter Manzanga, “Prosperity and Health Ministry as a Coping Mechanism in the Poverty and Suffering Context of Zimbabwe”, *In Die Skriflig* 50, no. 1 (2016):1-10.

faith healing ministries that promise health and wealth.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the effect of the prosperity gospel in contemporary African Christianity cannot be overstated.

As defined previously, the Lausanne Theology Working Group, the prosperity gospel “teaches that believers have a right to blessings, health, and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”<sup>8</sup> A study on mapping African prosperity gospel details the vital debate on prosperity gospel in Africa and its relevance for socio-economic change.<sup>9</sup> The prosperity gospel message centers mainly on speech acts surrounding faith, wealth, and victory combined with ritual enactments around divine blessings, claiming worldly success and material well-being as signs that grace has created an African religio-scapes of prosperity.<sup>10</sup>

The prosperity gospel finds its theological roots in what is called the New Thought Movement.<sup>11</sup> The prosperity gospel promises material blessings to believers; hence, the promise of material wealth to the believer who seeks first the kingdom of righteousness is a constant refrain across the African Pentecostal universe, which places an indecorous emphasis on wealth and personal accumulation.<sup>12</sup> Correspondingly, material blessings are signs of divine blessings.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, “*Prosperity and Health Ministry*”

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Heuser. “*Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies*”, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>11</sup> Costi Hinn. *God, Greed, and the (Prosperity) Gospel: How Truth Overwhelms a Life Built on Lies.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2019, 153.

<sup>12</sup> Obadare. “*Raising Righteous Billionaires*”, 1-8.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Kangwa. “The Role of the Theology of Retribution in the Growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in Africa”, *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (2016):1-9, 4.

Prosperity gospel message promises material wealth, health, and happiness to all believers.<sup>14</sup> The materialistic prosperity gospel is sweeping across the African continent because prosperity gospel message encourages poor people to think positively and ignite the Godly power within them to instruct their checkbooks or bank accounts yield abundance or to embrace the spirit in the “name it and claim it” movement when it comes to material possession.<sup>15</sup> As such, prosperity gospel churches believe strongly that the gospel must go along with material blessings.<sup>16</sup> Thus, proponents of the prosperity gospel message assert that material blessings are a good thing.<sup>17</sup> The prosperity gospel (theology) aims to help Africans (including Liberians) improve the quality of their lives by teaching them various improvements strategies.<sup>18</sup> The feature of the prosperity gospel in Africa can be generally outlined as follows:<sup>19</sup>

1. A mindset of hope in a positive future.
2. An entrepreneurial attitude of ‘winning ways’, which in Africa usually means breaking with the past and the broader claims of extended families and culture.
3. The use of life enhancement strategies that might include an ethic of hard work or how to cope with life through ‘strong prayers.’

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<sup>14</sup> Randell J. Stephen. “Understanding the Prosperity Gospel,” *Fides Et Historia* 47, no. 2 (Summer, 2015):55-9, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Mashau and Kgatle. “Prosperity Gospel and Culture of Greed”, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Asea Wilson and Rantsoa Letsosa. “Biblical Principles Towards a Pastoral Strategy for Poverty Alleviation Amongst the Youth in Uganda”, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*. 70, no. 2 (2014):1-7, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Daisy L. Machado. “Capitalism, Immigration, and the Prosperity Gospel”, *Anglican Theological Review*, 92, no. 4 (Fall, 2010): 723-30.

<sup>18</sup> Frahm-Arp, M. Pentecostalism, Politics, and Prosperity in South Africa. *Religions* 2018, 9, 298.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

4. Consistent tithing or utilizing various means to sow ‘seed’ offering gives money to the church.
5. Preacher-prophets gifted with extraordinary powers to speak against and fight the ‘spirit of poverty.’

Prosperity gospel (theology) strongly encourages its followers to engage in rigorous positive thinking, confession, and faith to get results from God on their prayers.<sup>20</sup>

### **Faith and Positive Confession**

Some tenets of the prosperity gospel (faith, health, and wealth theology) are as follows:<sup>21</sup>

1. Faith-the belief system of the Prosperity Gospel Movement that portrays a misinterpreted understanding of faith as actually “positive thinking”; as such, faith is exercised to get things from God.
2. Positive Confession-The spoken word has the power to translate things into reality. This reality can either be a positive confession or negative confession. Accordingly, each time one confesses positively, God realizes it; positive confessions cause God to bring into existence what one desires for his life. Hence, one must first visualize, and then speak into reality, what one desire.

Faith is not a positive confession. Faith, as defined in Hebrews 11:1, “is the reality of what is hoped for and the proof of what is not seen.” Faith is possible because God is faithful.<sup>22</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, faith without deeds is dead (James 2:26).

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<sup>20</sup> Magezi, Vhumani and Peter Manzanga, “Prosperity and Health Ministry as a Coping Mechanism in the Poverty and Suffering Context of Zimbabwe”, *In Die Skriflig* 50, no. 1 (2016):1-10.

<sup>21</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

<sup>22</sup> Walter A. Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2001, 432.

Faith rests on God's promise; thus, faith in God involves the right belief about God.<sup>23</sup> Biblical faith is not about visualizing whatever one wants, and it comes to pass. Biblical faith "always acknowledges God as God at all times and it must rest on God, not what one wants; hence, the believer must approach God in total obedience and trust, recognizing his sovereign will in every situation."<sup>24</sup>

### **The Seed Faith Principle (Material Wealth)**

The "seed-faith" principle is one of the teachings of the prosperity gospel that is greatly infiltrating indigenous Liberian churches. The seed faith principle persuades church members to bring their money or anything of value (seeds) to the 'man of God' (sometimes a pastor) to be prayed over for multiplication. The seed faith principle assumes that what one gives to God must always multiply and that those that sow big will reap big.

### **Multiplication Factor (Hundred-fold Return)**

The multiplication principle persuades church members that what one gives to God will always be multiply. MacArthur summarizes the formula for seeding and multiplying as:<sup>25</sup>

"... take out the largest bill or check (cheque) you have ...\$100, \$50, or \$20 bill... Hold it in your clean hands and say, 'In Jesus' name, I declare this gift to God's work... and expect a return of this money. Through this Gift of Discernment... God is showing me a large check coming...in the next short while. I mean large... looks like over a 1000 dollars".

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<sup>23</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*.

<sup>24</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur. *Charismatic Chaos*, 324.

Four arguments against “the seed-faith principle”:<sup>26</sup>

1. Preachers assume God’s position to conceive ‘whatever’ and do ‘anything’; there is no room left for God at all.
2. Biblical faith is not about ‘conceiving whatever’; it can put our confidence in God to accomplish what he wills.
3. The seed-faith teaching opposes the truth that our giving to God is, first and foremost, an act of worship.
4. Galatians 6:7, used by Oral Roberts as the basis of the seed-faith principle, is treated out of context.

### **Health (Healing)**

The Prosperity Gospel teaches that God will grant wealth and good health to people who have enough faith.<sup>27</sup> The prosperity gospel incorrectly teaches that there is healing in the Atonement. As such, proponents of the prosperity gospel teach Christ died for our sickness and our sins, and on that basis, Christians may claim health.<sup>28</sup> Jesus died for our sins and not our diseases. However, “the gift of healing is based on the authority Christ gives the apostles (Matt. 10:7-8; Mark 6:7-11; Luke 9:1-6); thus, healing and deliverance from demonic power are integral parts of evangelism”.<sup>29</sup> According to Paul Enns, “teaching and healing are together considered preaching the gospel (Matt.14:14; Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11).”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Adeleye, *Different Gospel*.

<sup>27</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Enns. *The Handbook of Theology*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 675.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 675.

The New Testament presents healing in several ways: <sup>31</sup>

1. Healing may occur through preaching the Word.
2. Those preaching the Gospel may have the gift of healing to effect salvation.
3. Healing may occur through prayer and the ministry of elders.
4. Select people may possess the gift of healing within and outside the community.

The most divisive theological characteristic of divine healing is its relationship to the Atonement. One view maintains that the privilege of physical healing is governed by the will and sovereignty of God; however, most supporters of divine healing believe that physical healing, like salvation, is an inheritance of every believer through the atoning death of Christ; thus, one receives his physical healing by faith just as he receives his salvation.<sup>32</sup>

### **Gospel of Jesus Christ**

The heart of the ministry of the church is the Gospel of Christ. It is the Good News of Jesus Christ described by the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The one factor that shapes everything the church does and lies at the heart of all its functions is the Gospel, the Good News.<sup>33</sup> When Jesus started his ministry, he announced that he had been explicitly anointed to preach the Gospel, and later, he charged the apostles to continue his ministry by spreading the Gospel.<sup>34</sup> Jesus entrusted to the believer the good news that has characterized his teachings and preaching from the very beginning.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Enns. *The Handbook of Theology*.

<sup>32</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*, 432.

<sup>33</sup> Millard Erickson. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2001.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1069.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Jesus placed particular importance on the commitment of his followers to preach the Gospel to the poor (Luke 7:22), teaching the Gospel in the synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing disease and sicknesses (Matt. 9:35). Jesus also requires loyalty and faithfulness to preaching the Gospel of Christ by connecting it with allegiance to him:<sup>36</sup>

Truly I tell you, Jesus replied, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, along with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Jesus proclaims that the Gospel of Christ, the good news, must be preached to all nations or throughout the world before the end (Matt.24:13; Mark 13:10). Preaching the Gospel of Christ is particularly important because Jesus thought of himself not only as declaring, but also consist of the good news.<sup>37</sup> The gospels are good news in that they represent the proclamation of Jesus' actions for our salvation written from a specific theological perspective.<sup>38</sup> The writers of the gospels wanted to convince readers that their proclamation is true and requires a decision.<sup>39</sup> It is the exuberant proclamation of God's redemptive activity in Christ Jesus on behalf of humans enslaved by sin.<sup>40</sup> As such, the Gospel of Christ is also a message of salvation, justification, and sanctification.

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<sup>36</sup> Erickson. *Christian Doctrine*.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Lea and Black. Thomas D. Lea and David Alan Black. *The New Testament its Background and Message* (2nd ed.). (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman), 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*, 513.

## The Comprehensiveness of Salvation

The comprehensiveness of salvation may be shown in several ways: <sup>41</sup>

1. By what we are save from. This includes sin and death; guilt and estrangement; ignorance of the truth; bondage to habit and vice; fear of demons, of death, of life, of God, of hell; despair of self; alienation from others; pressures of the world; a meaningless life. Salvation also extend to society, aiming at realizing the kingdom of God; to nature; ending its bondage to futility (Rom. 8:19-20); and to the universe, attaining final reconciliation of a fragmented cosmos (Eph.1:10; Col. 1:20).
2. By noting that salvation is past. That is, salvation includes what is given freely by God's grace (forgiveness, friendship, or reconciliation; Atonement, sonship, and new birth).
3. By distinguishing salvation various aspects: religious (acceptance with God); emotional (strong assurance, peace, courage, hopefulness, joy) practical (prayer, guidance, discipline, dedication, service); ethical (new moral dynamic, freedom, victory); personal (new thoughts, convictions, motives, satisfactions, self-fulfillments); social (new sense of community and compassion toward all, overriding impulse to love as Jesus has loved) <sup>42</sup>.

## Justification

The basic fact of biblical religion is that God pardons and accepts believing sinners; the doctrine of justification determines the whole character of Christianity as a religion of grace and faith, it defines the saving significance of Christ's life and death by relating both to God's law.

## Sanctification

Sanctification is the process of becoming holy; to be purified or free from sin.

The Apostle Paul gives testimony that salvation brought him peace with God, access to God's favor and presence, hope for regaining the glory intended for me, endurance in suffering, steadfast character, an optimistic mind, inner motivations of divine love, and power of the spirit, ongoing experience of risen Christ within his soul and sustaining joy in God (Rom. 5:1-11).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1050.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 1050.

<sup>43</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*,948.

It is imperative to preach the Gospel of Christ because preaching is the communication of truth; manifestation of the Incarnate Word from the written word; it is interpreting life with light from Scripture to meet the needs of the hearer now guide the hearer in doing God's will tomorrow.<sup>44</sup> Nothing in the Bible is more important than the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the savior of the world. It is also essential to preach the Good News of the Gospel of Christ because Jesus commanded it: "He said to them 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'(Mark 16:15)."

For many Christians, no study of the Word of God can be more important than Jesus and the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) because Jesus is the focus of the Christian faith.<sup>45</sup> The early church recognizes that the understanding of Jesus' nature and identity is essential to Christianity and a prerequisite for experiencing salvation and enjoying a relationship with God.<sup>46</sup> Whereas the Old Testament predicted the coming of Jesus and later portions of the New Testament frequently refer to Jesus, the most thorough description of Jesus' life and teachings are in the four canonical gospels of Christ.<sup>47</sup> The Apostle Paul summarizes the Gospel of Christ as a message of the death, burial, and appearance of the resurrected Christ. (1 Cor. 15:1-8).

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<sup>44</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*, 948.

<sup>45</sup> Andreas J Köstenberger. L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles. *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group), 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Köstenberger et. al., *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown*.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

### Ministry Context

Prosperity gospel (Faith, Wealth, and Health) message in Africa, especially Liberia, is a theological deviation from the Gospel of Christ based on the core belief that faith, wealth, and health lie in the power of positive confession. Believers can claim those mentioned above in the name of Jesus Christ because Christians have authority over health, wealth, and prosperity. Charismatic teaching of prosperity preachers addressed concerns of spiritual and moral poverty but gave Christians the belief that they have the power to make their futures.<sup>48</sup> Prosperity gospel (Faith, Wealth, and Health) message is “biblically flawed; it emotionally damages believers and is often blasphemous because its teachings and claims demean Christ and exalt man to the deity which is outside historic, biblical Christianity and must be rejected as stated by Jesse Shipley<sup>49</sup> and Paul Enns.”<sup>50</sup> Prosperity gospel (Faith, Wealth, and Health) message is a travesty of the Gospel of Christ that undermines sound hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture.

There are many unreached peoples in the world today. Over 7000 people groups remain unreached, and the churches in their areas lack the necessary resources to evangelize their people.<sup>51</sup> The Scripture teaches that God is a missionary God, and He desires to be worshiped by peoples of all nations, races, and tongues (Mt. 24:14; Ps. 96:3; Gen.12:3). Although Christians in Liberia have continued to decrease, there are still many unreached people in Liberia.

Unity Light Ministries, International is a non-denominational international Christian ministry (Unity Community Church) headquartered in Fredericksburg, Virginia (USA).

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<sup>48</sup> Jesse Weaver Shipley. “Comedians, Pastors, and the Miraculous Agency of Charisma in Ghana.” *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 3 (08, 2009): 523-52.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*.

<sup>51</sup> Joshua Project. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/>(access August 10, 2019).

Unity Light Ministries, International has partnered with other churches and organizations working in Liberia to plant a non-denominational ministry (church) called Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church). One challenge to the spiritual growth of the Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Kakata, Liberia, is the prosperity gospel (Faith, Wealth, and Health) message. The prosperity gospel (Faith, Wealth, and Health) message proliferates in Africa, where there are challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problems.<sup>52</sup> The prosperity gospel preaching on wealth, health, and success provide believers with hope.<sup>53</sup> According to Heuser, the prosperity gospel comprises a complex flow of theologies of hope.<sup>54</sup> Prosperity Gospel (Faith, Wealth, and Health) message in sub-Saharan African countries, like Liberia, thrives around enactments of tithings and offerings.<sup>55</sup>

The Republic of Liberia is black Africa's oldest independent nation; unlike the rest of Africa, Liberia was never colonized.<sup>56</sup> The American Colonization Society (settlers) purchased the area known today as "The Republic of Liberia" in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as a settlement for freed slaves from the United States.<sup>57</sup> Liberia is located in West Africa, roughly the size of the State of Ohio. Before the arrival of the Americo-Liberians (free slaves from the United States) who introduced Christianity to Liberia in the nineteenth century,

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<sup>52</sup> Joshua Project.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>55</sup> Magezi, Vhumani and Peter Manzanga, "Prosperity and Health Ministry as a Coping Mechanism in the Poverty and Suffering Context of Zimbabwe". In *Die Skriflig* 50, no. 1 (2016):1-10.

<sup>56</sup> Luasanne World Pulse [http:// www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/1064/12-2008](http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles-php/1064/12-2008) (accessed August 10, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> The Unreached Peoples Prayer Profiles-Liberia website. <http://www.prayway.com/unreached/countries/liberia.html> (accessed August 15, 2019).

Liberia was a land that was deeply entrenched with African traditions, native religions, and institutionalized secret societies characterized by spirituality and rituals.<sup>58</sup>

Even though Liberia was founded as a Christian nation by the American settlers, numerous indigenous peoples do not yet have a viable church planting movement.<sup>59</sup> In addition to its Christian heritage, “Liberia was founded on the principles of freedom and democracy that mirrors the United States, but after one and a half centuries of its existence, the country descended into destruction in which both democracy and human rights was compromised.”<sup>60</sup> The church has the responsibility to speak for the voiceless and the marginalized, and its ministry should be inclusive for all people.<sup>61</sup> Relating to a recent census (2008) of Liberia, 85.5% of the respondents called themselves Christians.<sup>62</sup> The 2008 census further shows that the Muslim population in Liberia was about 12.2 %, and the indigenous religious beliefs population was about 0.5%.<sup>63</sup> The Christian church in Liberia is often taking radical and uncompromising stands against some social-ills or sins and often ignores the rest.<sup>64</sup> Liberian churches mostly preach against adultery, fornication, drunkenness, and theft, but is entirely silent on sin about discrimination, corruption, political assassination, and unfair distribution of the country’s wealth in favor of the elite.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> The Unreached Peoples Prayer Profiles-Liberia website.  
<http://www.prayerway.com/unreached/countries/liberia.html> (accessed August 10, 2019).

<sup>60</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>62</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 6

The church is silent on the institutionalized sin of oppression, marginalization, subjugation, and exploitation.<sup>66</sup> In 1989, Liberia descended into a 14-year civil war. According to Gbote and Kgatia, Liberia lost about 250,000 citizens during the civil crisis, and the war had a significant impact on the country's economy and people.<sup>67</sup>

A paradox lies in the fact that with the perception of a nation built on Christian precepts, the force of disunity and destruction steered the country to the worst human catastrophes.<sup>68</sup> Since the end of the war, Liberia struggles with a high rate of inflation, high unemployment rate, and the value of life continues to diminish.<sup>69</sup> It difficult for one to understand the Unity Light Ministry context without understanding that Unity Light Mission in Liberia is a thriving Christian ministry network (church) that is a combination of Evangelical (based on its American Evangelical heritage) and African Indigenous Charismatic (based on its African heritage) church. Accordingly, there is a wide range of Christian views and cultural practices that indigenous African Christians in Unity Light Ministry (Liberia) follow, including a form of “neo-Pentecostal Charismatic worship characterized by an emphasis on prophecy and divine revelations, the power of the Holy Spirit to heal, and Liberian cultural rites of passage such as birth, marriage, sickness and death which have spiritual significance and in some cases, are purposive acts of spiritual forces that are evil forces that limits or hinders one's physical and/or spiritual well-being.

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<sup>66</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Consequently, some activities that are central to the congregation's culture include fast and prayers, intercessory prayers, healing services, and continuous community outreach programs such as crusades and revivals and an insatiable need to have the power to overcome disease, poverty, and human sufferings. The prosperity gospel has spread in Africa, especially Liberia, not because African Christians are religiously illiterate, but they are traditional in character based on the influenced African traditional religion; there is no distinction between the sacred and secular; religious and non-religious traditions; between spiritual and material.<sup>70</sup> According to Magezi and Manzanga, the prosperity gospel gives hope to distressed people.<sup>71</sup>

Accordingly, "prosperity teachings flourish in contexts of terrible poverty; and that for many people it presents their only hope, in the face of constant frustration, the failure of politicians and NGOs, etc. for better future, ore even for the more bearable present".<sup>72</sup> Prosperity gospel promises material wealth (blessings), health, and happiness to faithful Christians.<sup>73</sup> However, the prosperity gospel is a faulty interpretation of Scripture that asserts that God wants believers to get rich or healthy. Still, He cannot bless them unless they first send money known as "seed-faith" to the spiritual leader or pastor who tells them about God's plan for their lives.<sup>74</sup> Prosperity Gospel in sub-Saharan African countries, like Liberia, thrives around enactments of tithings and offerings; it proliferates in Africa where there are challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problem.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Mashau and Kgatle. "Prosperity Gospel", 208.

<sup>71</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

The prosperity gospel preaching on wealth, health, success provides believers with hope.<sup>76</sup> It comprises a complex flow of theologies of hope.<sup>77</sup> The prosperity gospel finds its theological roots in what is called “New Thought.”<sup>78</sup>

According to Costi, the prosperity gospel is essentially a metaphysical healing cult founded on the idea that the mind is key to unlocking true reality.<sup>79</sup> The prosperity gospel is so dangerous because it distorts the interpretation of the biblical Gospel by making it all about you and your staff.<sup>80</sup> False teachers use deception in the interpretation of scriptures to get rich; Costi warns of the dangers that the church faces when false teachers are disguised as good guys, and Christians believe them.<sup>81</sup> As such, we need a well-thought-out approach to interpreting the Bible so that Christians do not get fool by misinterpretation of scriptures.<sup>82</sup> We believe in the interpretive process of the Bible based on the sound hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture.<sup>83</sup>

According to Costi, the prosperity gospel is essentially a metaphysical healing cult founded on the idea that the mind is key to unlocking true reality.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>78</sup> Hinn. *God, Greed, (Prosperity) Gospel*, 153.

<sup>79</sup> Hinn. *God, Greed, (Prosperity) Gospel*.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Hinn. *God, Greed, (Prosperity) Gospel*, 153.

<sup>82</sup> William Klein, Blomberg, Craig and Robert L. Hubbard. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), 2004.

<sup>83</sup> Walter Kaiser and Moises Silva. *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 10.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

The prosperity gospel is so risky because it distorts the interpretation of the biblical Gospel by making it all about you and your staff.<sup>85</sup> False teachers use deception to interpret scriptures to get rich, and Costi further warns of the dangers that the church faces when false teachers are disguised as good guys, and Christians believe them.<sup>86</sup> One needs a well-thought-out approach to interpreting the Bible so that Christians do not get fool by misinterpretation of scriptures.<sup>87</sup>

Christians also believe in the interpretive process of the Bible based on the sound hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture.<sup>88</sup> Prosperity gospel teachings should follow the guidelines above. David W. Jones asserts the prosperity gospel is reinforced by numerous individuals, including members of evangelical churches, who possibly unknowingly, regularly watch prosperity gospel teachers on television.<sup>89</sup>

Correct theological beliefs are essential to one's relationship with God, and the biblical Gospel must be correctly proclaimed to the world.<sup>90</sup> The prosperity gospel misinforms Christians by taking a lot of scriptural reading out of context for its purposes. One example of the aforesaid is the prosperity gospel interpretation of Galatians 3:14, which is fundamentally flawed. In Galatians 3:14, the prosperity gospel preachers/teachers ignore the second half of the verse: "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

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<sup>85</sup> Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics*.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Klein, Blomberg, Craig and Hubbard. *Biblical Interpretation*.

<sup>88</sup> Walter Kaiser and Moises Silva. *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 10.

<sup>89</sup> Kaiser and Silva. *Biblical Hermeneutics*.

<sup>90</sup> David W. Jones. *Health, Wealth, and Happiness: How the Prosperity Gospel Overshadows the Gospel of Christ*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 2011.

Paul was reminding the Galatians of the spiritual blessings of salvation, not the material blessings of wealth.<sup>91</sup> There is a serious problem in how prosperity gospel preachers/teachers view scriptures.<sup>92</sup> Some proponents of the prosperity gospel deny the inerrancy of scriptures; they adjust scriptures that completely change the meaning of the passage.<sup>93</sup> Hence, the prosperity gospel in Liberia is a significant deviation from the Gospel of Christ that undermines sound hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture.

### **Problem Presented**

The prosperity gospel in Africa, especially Liberia, is a theological deviation from the Gospel of Jesus Christ based on the core belief that faith, wealth, and health lies in the power of positive confession, and believers can claim the aforementioned in the name of Jesus Christ because Christians have the authority over health, wealth and prosperity.<sup>94</sup> Many Christians in Liberia lack the foundational knowledge of the truths of the Gospel of Christ because they are hostile toward theological training, resulting in vulnerability among Christians to teachings that are not theologically grounded on a solid biblical foundation.<sup>95</sup> The problem is a growing number of pastors in Liberia, in Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church), are replacing the Gospel of Christ with the prosperity gospel.

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<sup>91</sup> Jones, David. *The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics*. Online 1/1/2009.

<sup>92</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*.

<sup>95</sup> Aaron B. Phillips. "An Examination of the Prosperity Gospel: A Plea for Return to Biblical Truth." Liberty University, 2015, 1.

### Purpose Statement

Some prosperity preachers/teachers adjust scriptures verses to accommodate their particular doctrines or even deny the inerrancy of Jesus Christ.<sup>96</sup> The prosperity Gospel offers distorted teachings of the Gospel of Christ that views success in terms of status, wealth, and position rather than holiness, faithfulness, and obedience to God.<sup>97</sup> The purpose of this research is to survey a representative sample of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) pastors, to build a report on the current ministry problem of preaching and teaching the prosperity gospel, that helps the researcher critically analyze the survey results and suggests ways to improve the ministry situation.

In addition to the misinterpretations and misapplications of scriptural passages, the prosperity gospel preachers/teachers have promoted a faulty view regarding the Atonement to support their prosperity gospel message. Proponents of the prosperity gospel message falsely claim physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the Atonement.<sup>98</sup> This view is consistent with Kenneth Copeland, who believes that “the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sins, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary.”<sup>99</sup> Copeland is wrong because, in the Atonement, we come to is a crucial point of the Christian faith; reconciliation of God and humankind through Christ.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Phillips. “*Examination of the Prosperity Gospel.*”

<sup>97</sup> Jones. *Health, Wealth, and Happiness.*

<sup>98</sup> Ken L. Sarles. “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (Oct.-Dec. 1986):339.

<sup>99</sup> Kenneth. Copeland, *The Troublemaker.* (Publisher: Kenneth Copeland Publications), 1996.

<sup>100</sup> Millard Erickson. *Introducing Christian Doctrine.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2001.

The prosperity gospel in sub-Saharan Africa is highly influenced and shaped by the prosperity message. This research contributes to ministry leadership because there is no academic study in the Liberian context on why pastors replace the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the prosperity gospel message. Moreover, this research examines the teachings of the prosperity gospel in Liberia and communicates findings to contemporary Christians to make informed decisions about how the prosperity teachers interpret Scripture and the authenticity of teachings of this Gospel to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding, all of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) pastors in Kakata, Liberia, have been trained to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup> This research project will survey twelve (12) pastors associated with Unity Light Ministries, International, to understand why these pastors are preaching the prosperity gospel.

### **Basic Assumptions**

The first assumption of this thesis project is that the pastors who will respond to the survey questions will answer truthfully.

The second assumption is that the survey's pastors are a representative sample of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church).

### **Definitions**

*African Christianity* – a combination of Christianity and African Traditional Religion.<sup>102</sup>

*African Traditional Religion (ATR)*- a worldview that condenses certain culturally-inborn sense that includes a belief in a world in which the physical is indicative of spiritual truths, in contrast to western Christianity, that, to a certain extent abandoned belief in wicked powers.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Jones. *Health, Wealth, and Happiness*.

<sup>102</sup> Joel Mokhoathi. From Contextual Theology to African Christianity: The Consideration of Adiaphora from a South African Perspective. *Religions* 2017, 8, 266.

<sup>103</sup> Marius Nel. *The African Background of Pentecostal Theology: A Critical Perspective*. In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi. (2019) 53.

*Christian* - “a person who has accepted the Christian faith and made a decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ.”<sup>104</sup>

*Christianity*, “as a ‘non-cultural entity,’ encompasses different cultures as an institution that regards the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”<sup>105</sup>

*Prosperity gospel (Prosperity Theology)*- refers to “bringing into existence what we state with our mouth since faith is a confession.”<sup>106</sup>

*Word of Faith*- refers to “the ability to speak words to produce positive results in life, whether a preferred parking place or wealth.”<sup>107</sup>

*Revelation*-refers to “claims that one receives direct revelation from God.”<sup>108</sup>

### **Limitation and Delimitations**

This doctoral research study has several self-imposed limitations intended to refine the problem by establishing its boundaries. This project was limited in the following ways:

First, this doctoral thesis project did not include pastors of all denominations in Liberia. It only had a sample of pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network in Kakata, Liberia.

Second, this project included a limited sampling pool because it will only include pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) who are willing to openly express their honest opinions and attitudes toward the teaching of “prosperity gospel” on the survey instrument.

Third, this study focused on specific tenets of the prosperity gospel and did not examine every nuance of the prosperity gospel message (Word of faith theology) because such a study would require time and resources beyond the scope of the research study.

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<sup>104</sup> Mokhoathi. *Contextual Theology to African Christianity*, 266.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Enns. *The Handbook of Theology*, 676.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 678.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 678.

### Thesis Statement

The pProsperity gospel focuses on teaching that believers have a right to a blessing of health and wealth; they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and sowing to faith (tithes and offerings); prosperity gospel in Africa thrives around ritual enactments of tithings and offerings that have caused intense debate as an academic discourse.<sup>109</sup> Prosperity Gospel is more than a fundamental adjustment to the theological views to the essence of Christ. Still, an integrative motif of prosperity being imposed over the sound hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture.<sup>110</sup> Prosperity gospel in Africa, especially Liberia, is a major deviation from the Gospel of Christ that undermines sound hermeneutical interpretation of scripture.

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<sup>109</sup>Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>110</sup> Phillips. *Prosperity Gospel*, 1

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Literature Review

Philosophy can be viewed as the essential activity whose purpose is to embrace an examination of its nature and meaning.<sup>111</sup> Olatuni Oyeshile asserts that African philosophy directly relates to history and culture, which reflect African intelligentsia upon total historical being representative of a significant moment in Africa's intellectual response.<sup>112</sup> Oyeshile further asserts that “ the process of constant self-reflection, inherent in the nature and practice of philosophy bears not only upon its purposes, objectives, and methods, but upon its relation to the world and human experience in its multiple expressions, upon its status among other disciplines and forms of intellectual pursuit and discourse, but also, most radically upon its very nature as an activity and as an enterprise.”<sup>113</sup> Lewis Gordon posits that “Africana philosophy (African philosophy) involves theoretical questions raised by critical engagements with ideas in Africana cultures and their hybrid, mixed, or creolized forms worldwide.”<sup>114</sup>

Bruce Janz argues that most African philosophies have been concerned with defining African philosophy’s ethnophilosophical limits and recognizing what distinguishes it from other philosophical traditions.<sup>115</sup> Shahadah posits that the African philosophy and spirituality history has been there since time immemorial.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Olatuni A. Oyeshile. ‘On Defining African Philosophy: History, Challenges, and Perspectives’, *Humanity & Social Sciences Journal* 3 (2008) (1), 57-64.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Lewis R. Gordon. *An Introduction for Africana Philosophy*. (Cambridge University Press), 2008.

<sup>115</sup> Janz, Bruce B., 2009, *Philosophy in an African Place*, Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, <https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0739136682> Accessed date 9/10/2020.

<sup>116</sup> Shahadah, A., 2016, *African Spirituality*, viewed in [africanholocaust.net/africanspirituality/](http://africanholocaust.net/africanspirituality/).

African spirituality is culturally formed and involves profound human principles and beliefs based on the African perspective. Dalian Adofo states that African spirituality is a fascinating tapestry of philosophy; it is such a brilliant thing to observe because it's about connecting oneself to one's higher self. Adofo states:<sup>117</sup>

In the African worldview, the nature of being does not comprise solely of what we can perceive with our visual sense, that is, our eyes. There are two aspects to the created universe; the physical and spiritual. The spiritual realm is also stratified into various spaces or abodes those of departed ancestors, spirits (deities), and that of the penultimate source of Creation of all things in existence. Adofo further asserts that these two realms are in constant interchange with each other, and what happens in one realm can have an impact on the other, in doing so, keeps order and harmony in the cosmos and on earth.

Kourie and Kretzschmar assert that:<sup>118</sup>

African spirituality is identified as reflecting the wholeness of life and is important in harmonizing life in all its fullness. African spirituality has to do with the concept of nation-building and the integrity of creation. In that life, everyone is involved in rebuilding, spirituality in the lives of others ancestors are also involved in this process.

Maake Masango affirms that:<sup>119</sup>

African spirituality is holistic, and it impacts on the whole of life. It is not considered as an individual affair because it is expressed in all levels of society, socially, economically, politically as well as among people, therefore it contributes in the building of a nation".

Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding the ultimate questions that relate to sacred or which may lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of the community, we cannot divorce spirituality from religion and religion from spirituality.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Dalian K.Y. Adofo, 2016, *Ancestral Voices: Spirit is Eternal*, [www.ancestralvoices.co.uk](http://www.ancestralvoices.co.uk) Date of Access 9/10/2020.

<sup>118</sup> Kourie, C., and Kretzschmar L, *Christian Spirituality in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2000, 3.

<sup>119</sup> Maake Masango. African Spirituality that Shapes the Concept of Ubuntu, *Verbum et Ecclesia Journal*, (2006), 27(3): 930-943.

<sup>120</sup> Hufford, J.D., 2005, *An Analysis of the Field of Spirituality, Religion, and Health*, <https://www.metanexus.net/analysis-field-spirituality-religion-and-healthdavidjhufford/> Date of Access 9/10/2020.

## Prosperity Movement

The prosperity gospel has its early origin in New Thought and Christian Science.<sup>121</sup> According to Paul Enns, E. W. Kenyon popularized this teaching with a source in New Thought. This doctrine is traced to Phineas P. Quimby, who studied spiritism, occultism, and hypnosis and was influenced by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science.<sup>122</sup> Accordingly, Kenyon's Gospel is labeled a 'Pentecostal Christian Science' because he taught the same doctrines of healing, positive confession, and prosperity that New Thought and Christian Science had been preparing for decades".<sup>123</sup> In claiming to receive direct revelation from God, the health and wealth preachers have made a radical departure from historical or orthodox Christianity.<sup>124</sup>

Modern-day proponents of the prosperity gospel include the following persons:

1. Kenneth Hagin, who says, "[God] also put teachers in the church to renew our minds and bring revelation and knowledge of God's word. 2. Reverend Ike infers the apostle Paul was in error when in said, 'the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim 6:10). Ike asserts that 'the lack of money is the root of all evil. 3. Kenneth Copeland says, 'you are all-God. 4. Earl Paulk suggests believers are 'little-gods.' 5. Creflo Dollar believes that people cannot only claim wealth, but they will receive wealth from unbelievers. 6. Joyce Meyer, the most popular female teacher in the movement, follows the prosperity teaching although her doctrinal views fluctuate."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Paul Enns, *Handbook of Theology*, 681.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

Some teachers of the prosperity gospel in Africa include Prophet Emanuel Makandiwa, Prophet Walter Magaya, and Uebert Angel, all in Zimbabwe.<sup>126</sup> Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye and Dr. Daniel Kolawole of Nigeria<sup>127</sup> and other prosperity gospel teachers throughout Africa.

According to Christopher A. Stephenson, “the prosperity gospel or word of faith movement is mostly associated with famous figures like Kenneth E. Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and Frederick K.C. Price teaches that believers should ‘claim their inheritance’ as children of God by using carefully articulated prayers as ‘positive’ or ‘faith’ confessions.”<sup>128</sup> Stephenson further asserts that a study from the Pew Research Center indicates 78 percent of self-described Pentecostals and Charismatics in the United States, Latin America, Africa, and Asia affirm that God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith.<sup>129</sup>

On the other hand, Jones posits that: E.W. Kenyon greatly influenced Kenneth E. Hagin, and in turn, Hagin has influenced a host of other ministries in the Word of Faith movement, including Kenneth Hagin, Jr., Kenneth Copeland, Frederick Price, Robert Tilton, Benny Hinn, Charles Capps, and Jerry Savelle.<sup>130</sup> According to Jones, the Trinity Broadcast Network, founded in 1973 by Paul and Jan Crouch along with Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, serves as a platform for numerous prosperity teachers, including Rod Parsley, Creflo Dollar, Paula White, Kenneth Copeland, Jesse Duplantis, and Kenneth Hagin, Jr.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, “*Prosperity and Health*”.

<sup>127</sup> Ebenezer Obadare. “‘Raising Righteous Billionaires’: The Prosperity Gospel Reconsidered.” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*. 72, no. 4 (2016):1-8.

<sup>128</sup> Christopher A. Stephenson. “Proclaiming the Mystery of Faith Together: Toward Greater Common Witness between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics on the Lord’s Supper,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 48, No. 1 (Winter 2013): 85.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Jones. *Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, 54.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 54.

David Jones further asserts “that ‘soft’ advocates of the prosperity gospel such as Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, and T.D. Jakes are well-known names that have large followings, especially in South America and Africa.”<sup>132</sup> Andreas Heuser states that Kenneth E. Hagin posits that prosperity gospel is not an ‘American gospel.’ It will work in Africa, India, China, or anywhere else where God’s people practice the truth of His Word. If it is not true in the poorest place on earth, it is not true at all!<sup>133</sup> The prosperity gospel is not confined to a single source, denomination, or school of thought. Prosperity gospel originated from the New Thought Movement around 1895.<sup>134</sup> The pioneer of the movement mentioned above was Emmanuel Swedenborg and Phineas Quimby.<sup>135</sup> The prosperity gospel is a broadly based movement that overlaps both charismatic and non-charismatic spectrums.<sup>136</sup>

According to Magezi and Manzanga, the Prosperity Gospel Movement's belief system traces its roots to Kenneth Hagin.<sup>137</sup> Accordingly, Kenneth Hagin described faith as positive thinking.<sup>138</sup> In the context, as mentioned above, faith can be exercised to get things from God; the prosperity gospel also teaches that “spoken words” has the power to translate something into reality.<sup>139</sup> This reality can be either a positive or a negative confession.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Jones. *Health, Wealth, and Happiness*.

<sup>133</sup> Andreas Heuser. “*African Prosperity*”, 1.

<sup>134</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

Kenneth Copeland asserts that specific laws govern the prosperity gospel in God's Word, and faith causes them to function.<sup>141</sup> Gloria Copeland agreed and further argued that these laws would work when put to work and stop working when one-stop the force of faith.<sup>142</sup> Prosperity gospel strongly encourages its followers to engage in rigorous positive thinking.<sup>143</sup>

According to Magezi and Manzanga, there is a thin line between prosperity gospel preachers who practice it and magicians.<sup>144</sup> The "seed faith principle," for instance, is one of the teachings that secretly infiltrating the Protestant churches.<sup>145</sup> Magezi and Manzanga further assert that the "seed faith principle" assumes that what one gives to God must always multiply and that those that sow big seeds will reap big.<sup>146</sup> For the above reasons, the "seed-faith principle" is often called the "hundred-fold return."<sup>147</sup> Gloria Copeland, the wife of Kenneth Copeland, further explained "hundred-fold return" as "if you give \$1.00 for the gospel sake and the full hundredfold return would be \$100, Ten dollars would be \$1,000, and a hundredfold return on \$1000 would be \$100,000, et cetera."<sup>148</sup> The hundredfold return is a multiplication factor of "100" for every dollar one gives to the gospel.

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<sup>141</sup> Kenneth Copeland. *The Laws of Prosperity*. Fort Worth: (Kenneth Copeland Publications), 1974, 15.

<sup>142</sup> Gloria Copeland. *God's Will is Prosperity*. Fort Worth: (Kenneth Copeland Publications), 1978, 71.

<sup>143</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Copeland. *God's Will*, 71.

## Overview of Prosperity Gospel

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, groups of freed slaves and mulattoes from the United States immigrated to Liberia and was later known as the Americo-Liberians.<sup>149</sup> Colin Waugh asserts that Liberia was established on the principles of freedom and democracy that mirrored that of the United States.<sup>150</sup> According to Gbotoe and Kgatla, the Americo-Liberian arrival led to a transformation of tribal lands into a predominantly Christian country.<sup>151</sup> Before the advent of Christianity in Liberia, the country was firmly entrenched with African traditions, native religions, and secret societies characterized by spirituality and rituals.<sup>152</sup>

A literature review revealed a vast amount of resources available on the prosperity gospel (theology). There are very few resources on prosperity gospel (theology) in the Liberian context. Paul Enns asserts that prosperity gospel is a theological aberration that refers to “bringing into existence what we state with our mouth since faith is a confession.”<sup>153</sup> Enns further asserts that progressive gospel places emphasis on “health or healing, abundance or prosperity, wealth and happiness.”<sup>154</sup> Lausanne Theological Working Group (2010) posits, “prosperity gospel is defined as the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth through positive confessions of faith and payments of tithes and offerings” (n.p.).<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Fred P.M. Kraaji. *The Past and Present: Liberian Perspective*. African Studies Centre. Leiden, 2014.

<sup>150</sup> Waugh, Colin. M. *Charles Taylor and Liberia: Ambition and Atrocity in Africa's lone Star State*. (Zed Books, London, 2011.

<sup>151</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*, 676.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 676.

<sup>155</sup> Luasanne Theology Working Group, 2010. *A Statement on Prosperity Gospel* accessed August 10, 2019, from <https://www.luasanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel>.

Thinandavha D. Mashau and Mookgo S. Kgatle write about Christianity in post-colonial Africa. They report that Christianity in post-colonial Africa is highly influenced and shaped by the prosperity message in their article *Prosperity gospel and the culture of greed in post-colonial Africa: Constructing an alternative African Christian Theology of Ubuntu*.<sup>156</sup> This paper argues against previous missiological perspectives on the prosperity gospel and the culture of greed and proposes an African theology of Ubuntu as an alternative to prosperity gospel because it is a practical theology of life, care, solidarity, economic justice, hope, and accompaniment.<sup>157</sup> The authors assert that prosperity gospel is a popular and materialistic gospel that is sweeping across the continent like a gale-force wind, which is irresistible and the authors argue for the critical need for theological scrutiny and reflection concerning these current unconventional practices from new Charismatic churches.<sup>158</sup>

The authors suggest that to boost phenomenal growth in terms of membership in their churches, prosperity preachers in America and elsewhere in the world have developed a theology of affluence called prosperity gospel. Hence, the author defines prosperity gospel as “more significant than motivation in bringing about success is a theology that is called the prosperity gospel, or faith gospel, or the health and wealth gospel, according to which a Christian (through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross) is already healthy and wealthy, and all he or she must do to take possession of health and wealth is to claim possessions.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Thinandavha D. Mashau and Mookgo S. Kgatle. “Prosperity Gospel and the Culture of Greed in Post-Colonial Africa”, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40:1 (2019), 2.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

Andreas Heuser argues that prosperity gospel in Africa is relevant for socio-economic change. In his article, *Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies*, Andreas Heuser asserts that prosperity gospel mainly centers on speech acts surrounding faith, wealth, and victory, combined with ritual enactments around secondary evidence of divine blessings.<sup>160</sup> According to Heuser, prosperity gospel claims worldly success and material well-being as signs of grace that has captured public spheres and created African religio-scapes of prosperity.<sup>161</sup> Andreas Heuser asserts that “prosperity gospel indicates a decisive, if not paradigmatic change in Pentecostal theologizing.”<sup>162</sup>

According to Heuser, this paradigmatic change comprises two radical breaks in Pentecostal theology:<sup>163</sup>

1. The first is connected to a reframing of being in the world;
2. The second is connected to the discovery of the spiritual value of material substance and wealth.”

Andreas Heuser further asserts that a survey on the socioeconomics of African prosperity-oriented Pentecostalism firstly traces the historic genealogy of Prosperity Gospel as a transposable message.<sup>164</sup> According to Heuser, prosperity gospel appears to be a generic formula in paradigmatic reinventions of Pentecostalism in post-second and cold war America and its globalization in post-colonial Africa.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

*Prosperity and Health Ministry as a Coping Mechanism in the Poverty and Suffering Context of Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Evaluation and Response*, by Vhumani Magezi and Peter Manzanga is about how the preaching on prosperity and health has significantly increased in Zimbabwe.<sup>166</sup> The authors claim that while preaching of prosperity, the Gospel gives ‘hope’ of prosperity, wealth, health, and success to its followers, poverty and suffering are also increasing, which is a contradiction.<sup>167</sup> The authors also argue that the prosperity gospel movement tends to multiply where there are challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problems.<sup>168</sup> This newly conceived Gospel focuses on human potential for successful living, emphasizing health and wealth rather than glorifying God's grace in salvation.<sup>169</sup>

The prosperity message is not alien to the Africans because the notion of salvation among the indigenous African people emphasizes abundant life, prosperity, vitality, and financial and material security.<sup>170</sup> However, the challenge of faith care as life care is to develop a theological perspective that fosters realistic hope founded on a constructive and appropriate attitude of God.<sup>171</sup> The authors challenge practical theology to be evaluative of theological perspectives because failure to do this will result in a ‘bubble faith’ devoid of an appropriate and constructive conception of God’s working as revealed in Scripture.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi focus on an overview description of the nature of the spiritual insecurity which still grips African Christians by delving into the traditional African worldview of spiritual powers (such as the notions of a Supreme Being, lesser divinities, spirits, and ancestors) and the centrality of traditional powers such as diviners in addressing this insecurity.<sup>173</sup> In “*A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses to the Challenge of Spiritual Insecurity in African Pastoral Ministry and Christianity*,” the authors posit that “there is a form of Christian syncretism operating in African Christians’ use of traditional African powers to address their spiritual insecurity challenges that arise from their former traditional African worldview of spiritual powers.”<sup>174</sup>

The authors assert three prevalent views offered by theological scholars as a response to the spiritual insecurity of African Christians as follows:<sup>175</sup>

1. The first stance calls African Christians to discontinue anything that is linked to traditional African spiritual worldview because Christianity involves a complete new ontological being.
2. The second stance criticizes African Christians’ dependence on traditional African powers and argues that Christian ministry should not import anything positive from the African spiritual world system for contextualizing the gospel.
3. The third position advocates for Christians’ continual reliance on traditional African spiritual powers in addressing their African contextual needs.

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<sup>173</sup> Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi. “A Pastoral Evaluation and Responses to the Challenge of Spiritual Insecurity in African Pastoral Ministry and Christianity,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi conclude this article by drawing from various theological reactions to the spiritual insecurity of African Christians to ensure a Christian ministry that is thoroughly biblical and contextual in African Christianity.<sup>176</sup>

Christopher Magezi and Jacob T. Igba highlight in their article, *African Theology and African Christology: Difficulty and Complexity in Contemporary Definitions and Methodological Frameworks*, the complexity of defining African theology and its methodological approaches through a background sketch of the development of African theology.<sup>177</sup> The authors acknowledge that African Christian theology, as a theology, should be derived from the interplay between Scripture, Christian tradition, and African cosmology.<sup>178</sup>

The authors also acknowledge an ongoing challenge in defining African theology because of two critical reasons:<sup>179</sup> 1. the quest for a definitive African theology is a relatively recent pursuit and 2. the vastness and diversity of the African continent. The authors also assert that many scholars have identified a need to clarify the question of Jesus' identity in the African theological space.<sup>180</sup> The authors further claim that Scripture's centrality is necessary for the African theological endeavor to engage globally to have some shared reference point with other Christian theologies to contribute unique African perspectives to global theological discourse.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Magezi and Magezi. "A Pastoral Evaluation."

<sup>177</sup> Christopher Magezi and Jacob T. Igba. "African Theology and African Christology: Difficulty and Complexity in Contemporary Definitions and Methodological Frameworks," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>178</sup> Magezi and Igba. "African Theology".

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

Although there are challenges associated with doing African theology, the authors conclude that the centrality of the Bible in the African Christian theological endeavor should not be sacrificed.<sup>182</sup>

In *Charismatic Religions and the Demise of Development and Africanism*, Phemelo Olifile Marumo examines the aftermath of the partitioning of Africa and how that led to the introduction of religion, which advocated liberalism.<sup>183</sup> Marumo asserts that one of Africa's facets is a liberal religion combined with colonial violence to display as a source of inspiration, strength, and belonging for the disorientated Africans.<sup>184</sup> As an alternative to these religious structures articulating what Africans aspire to become, these churches' charismatic heads are money-driven.<sup>185</sup> The author posits that African people are not religiously illiterate but are traditionally based on a particular tribe or clan worldview in Africa; hence, African traditional religion emanated from there.<sup>186</sup> The author also posits that African traditional religion permeates all areas of life.<sup>187</sup> There is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between spiritual and material.<sup>188</sup> This article implies that the rituals, ancestorism, and belief in the supreme power form the African religion's cornerstone.

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<sup>182</sup> Magezi and Igba. "*African Theology*".

<sup>183</sup> Marumo. "*Charismatic Religions*", 207-23.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 207-23.

<sup>185</sup> Oliver and Oliver. "*African Reformation*."

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

The author concludes by suggesting a developmental approach that could contribute towards bringing back the dignity and identity of Africans through an Afrocentric religion.<sup>189</sup>

The African Reformation must indeed be about deeds, in line with the 44th thesis of Luther: Because love grows by works of love, man thereby becomes better.<sup>190</sup> The authors further argue that Africa needs a Reformation, created through a thorough reading of the Bible and understanding of God's message within its pages.<sup>191</sup> Hence, the African Reformation must break away from creeds and dogma, pointless endeavors without practical influence and empowerment.<sup>192</sup>

Ebenezer Obadare deconstructs the Pentecostal prosperity gospel in Africa in *Raising Righteous Billionaires: The Prosperity Gospel Reconsidered*. According to Obadare, two overlapping arguments are advanced:

1. first, in atomizing the individual, Pentecostal prosperity gospel discounts power relations and the political, effectively dislocating the individual believer from the social matrix within which his or her agency is forged.<sup>193</sup>
2. Secondly, the Pentecostal prosperity gospel suggests that this attitude towards both the individual and the state puts Pentecostalism firmly within the orbit of neoliberalism.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Oliver and Oliver. "African Reformation."

<sup>190</sup> Eric Gbote and Selaelo T. Kgatla. "Prosperity Gospel: A Missiological Assessment," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 1-10.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Obadare. "Righteous Billionaires".

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

Erna Oliver, and Willem H. Oliver, in *An African Reformation*, represents a breakthrough in the life of the Church of the Reformation and also in the life of Christians worldwide.<sup>195</sup> For the past decade, the megachurch trend is very much alive in Africa, with churches mostly belonging to the Pentecostal groups, modeled on their counterparts in the United States and Charismatic groups. According to the authors, some of these megachurches can hold up to 200 000 worshipers.<sup>196</sup> However, the authors argue that the African Christian context needs reformation, transformation, and change.<sup>197</sup>

Eric Gbote and Selaelo T. Kgatla in *Prosperity Gospel: A Missiological Assessment* endeavors to establish that prosperity gospel is rooted in the faulty interpretation of several biblical passages.<sup>198</sup> The authors posit that the fundamental teaching of the prosperity gospel is that “God wants believers to get rich or healthy, but he cannot bless them unless they first send money known as ‘seed-faith’ to their spiritual leader or pastor who tells them about the plan.”<sup>199</sup> The authors examine the teachings of prosperity gospel from a missiological perspective, a gospel that promises material wealth, health, and happiness to faithful Christians.<sup>200</sup>

Contrary to the prosperity gospel, Lutheran believes that the doctrine of justification by faith teaches that God's gracious will saves Christians without merit. God bestows his saving grace upon humanity at no cost or price, and the salvation of humankind comes purely from God

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<sup>195</sup> Oliver and Oliver. "*African Reformation*."

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

for Christ's sake.<sup>201</sup> The authors posit that the teaching of justification by faith is at the core of the Reformation, rooted in the mandate Jesus gives the disciples to go on a mission and make more disciples (Mt. 20:28).<sup>202</sup>

The authors also posit that Jesus gives his disciples an explicit mandate to bring the Gospel to the nations; therefore, any form of preaching that contradicts the original message of the Gospel needs urgent attention.<sup>203</sup> Thus, the authors declare that the prosperity gospel is contrary to the teaching of justification by faith and explaining the Gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>204</sup> In Africa, where most of the population lives on one dollar a day, churches promoting religion's practical benefits such as preached by the prosperity gospel are generally full.<sup>205</sup>

In contrast to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the authors assert that the prosperity gospel uses faith to decree health, wealth, and happiness that depict religion as a matter of believing in created things rather than believing in God as the Savior, the Lord, and Liberator.<sup>206</sup> The authors deduced that the prosperity gospel is detrimental to the sound teachings of Scripture, which state that salvation and God's blessings are the gracious and merciful work of the Creator.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

Prosperity gospel contradicts the teaching that humanity is not saved by the merits of our deeds but by faith through Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>208</sup> The author concludes that “We must be content with what we have and serve God without any condition.”<sup>209</sup>

Akiki Gloria Alamu states that scholars thoroughly discuss the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in the contemporary and topical issue.<sup>210</sup> Pentecostalism of African Christianity has become a new phenomenon that engages many scholars' attention since the mid-1960s. Alamu also contends that Africa, perhaps, Nigerian Pentecostalism, has constituted the fastest-growing Christianity in the world.<sup>211</sup> African indigenous churches strongly believe in the Holy Spirit's endowments, prophecies, and the ability to speak in strange tongues.<sup>212</sup> Thus, many African indigenous churches, especially Nigerian Pentecostalism, combines a personal relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit with the possibility of dramatic transformation.<sup>213</sup>

Alamu further acknowledges that as African Christianity has found comfort in African indigenous churches, so also it has become a breeding ground of Pentecostal/charismatic activity.<sup>214</sup> In African indigenous churches, there is a compelling belief in visions and dreams and the ability to interpret these phenomena.

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<sup>208</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Akiki Gloria Alamu. ““Putting Old Wine in New Wine Skins”: The Place of African Indigenous Churches in the Nigerian Pentecostals.” *African Renaissance* 16, no. 2 (06, 2019): 165-85.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 174

<sup>214</sup> Alamu. “*Old Wine*”, 165-85.

Pentecostals have re-invigorated the power of visions and dreams as efficacious in the strife for church growth.<sup>215</sup> Andreas Heuser emphasizes uncertainties in Pentecostal social capital's transformative character that traditionally kept distance from worldly affairs.<sup>216</sup> The rituals of prosperity gospel cause numerous interpretations of the character of the Pentecostal social agency.<sup>217</sup> Prosperity gospel in Africa, especially Liberia, has grown with both its positives and negatives.<sup>218</sup>

### **Deeper Understanding of Prosperity Gospel in Africa**

Liberians referred to the prosperity gospel message by different names, including Faith Movement or the Faith-Formula Movement, the Positive Confession Movement, Word of Faith theology, the Wealth, Health, and Faith Gospel. However, the most used name is the Prosperity Gospel. Prosperity Gospel (Word of Faith theology) is not limited to a particular denomination or a specific tradition of faith (indigenous Liberian churches); it has assimilated into many evangelical churches and even some liberal mainline churches. The prosperity gospel has incorporated into many evangelical churches and even some liberal mainline churches.<sup>219</sup>

Lausanne Movement (Cape Town Commitment 2010) defined the prosperity gospel as “... the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth, and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through financial or material gifts.”

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<sup>215</sup> Alamu. “*Old Wine*”.

<sup>216</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*, 2.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Mashau and Kgatle. “*Culture of Greed*”, 3.

<sup>219</sup> Van Biema D & Chu J. 2006. Does God want you to be rich? Online article: [www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448,00.html), 2010- 07-15.

Paul Enns describes prosperity gospel (also known as the Health and Wealth Gospel) as a movement that “adherents believe that Christ died not only for our sins, but also sickness, and for that reason, believers can claim health.”<sup>220</sup>

Paul Enns further asserts that the prosperity gospel also views believers as ‘little gods,’ and believers have the same authority through the “word of faith” to claim health and wealth.<sup>221</sup> On the other hand, Andreas Heuser argues that the prosperity gospel teaches that “God will grant wealth and good health to people who have enough faith.”<sup>222</sup> Farah posits that the word of faith message is possibly the most attractive message being preached in the contemporary church.<sup>223</sup>

Anderson claims that the prosperity gospel (word of faith theology) is so popular until it is often modified to suit the particular context of the adherents; thus, producing various hybrid strands of the movement.<sup>224</sup> On the other hand, Bruce Baron asserts that the Gospel of healing and prosperity (prosperity gospel) is the parent and child of the modern “faith movement” that has enticed millions of people and has also produced some highly noticeable and controversial ministries.<sup>225</sup> Barron also asserted that this purpose for writing about the movement is to describe it and evaluate it as accurately as possible to “lay the groundwork for meaningful dialog and resolution of conflict” between the movement and its critics.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*, 720.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>223</sup> Farah C. *This Cancer Kills: A Critical Analysis of the Roots and Fruits of Faith Formula Theology*. (Portland, OR: Charis Life), 1982.

<sup>224</sup> Anderson A. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*. Cambridge, UK: (Cambridge University Press), 2004.

<sup>225</sup> Bruce Barron. *The Health and Wealth Gospel* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1987.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 12.

Andreas Heuser writes that “throughout history, the prosperity gospel represents a rather controversial strand of global Christianity, and it cannot be labeled or bound up in a single definition; it is ‘transformative in nature and adapting to contexts ...’”<sup>227</sup>

Heuser further asserts that the quality of the prosperity gospel covers a sense of spiritual advancement, but, in most cases, the emphasis is on material prosperity.<sup>228</sup> Heuser argues that: the “Prosperity Gospel in sub-Saharan Africa highlights the Pentecostalisation of African religious landscapes.”<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, the emergence of trans-religious beliefs and practices around concepts of material salvation has created what I called ‘religio-scapes of Prosperity Gospel’ in Africa”.<sup>230</sup>

Many Christians may argue that prosperity gospel finds its origin in the Pentecostal and Charismatic faith traditions, but McConnell disagrees; he claims that this belief is not historically accurate.<sup>231</sup> McConnell further maintains that some of the prosperity gospel teachings and some of the early proponents of the movement emerged from Pentecostalism at large; however, certain tenets of the word of faith theology do not support a classical Pentecostal worldview.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Heuser, Andreas. ‘Religio-scapes of the Prosperity Gospel: An Introduction’ in Andreas Heuser (ed.), *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-scapes of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond* 2015, p. 15–30, Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 16.

<sup>228</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> McConnell D. *A Different Gospel* (updated ed). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.xx.

<sup>232</sup> McConnell, *A Different Gospel* .

Andreas Heuser disagrees, and he claims:<sup>233</sup>

Prosperity Gospel indicates a decisive, if not paradigmatic change in Pentecostal theologising. The paradigm consists of two radical breaks in Pentecostal theology: the first is connected to a reframing of being in the world; the second is connected to the discovery of the spiritual value of material substance and wealth. In short, the new 'gospel message' cultivated the classical 'prospects of faith-healing and wellbeing and counted on the self-motivation of a believer to act against all desperate reality.'

Stephen Hunt asserts that "there is Pentecostal basic of the prosperity gospel and he summarizes it by identifying the emphasis on the 'second baptism' (of the Spirit), the so-called 'gifts of the Spirit' (charismata such as speaking in tongues, the importance of prophecy) and the enthusiasm for revival."<sup>234</sup> Notwithstanding, Eric Gbotoe emphasizes "a problematic issue regarding the image of God – respondents in his research have redefined God as a God who wants everyone to be rich and wants humanity to be affluent and enjoy the good of all things in the world."<sup>235</sup> Andreas Heuser asserts that in "the African context, and especially in African Pentecostalism, 'claiming domains of prosperity has become a generic theme...'"<sup>236</sup>

Eric Gbotoe posits some factors that caused the propagation of the prosperity gospel in Africa: poverty, consumerism, utilitarianism, and globalization.<sup>237</sup> Gbotoe also argues that traditional African religious beliefs created a fertile ground for propagating the prosperity gospel's core elements.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Heuser, 'Religio-scapes', 17.

<sup>234</sup> Hunt, Stephen. "Winning Ways": Globalization and the Impact of the Health and Wealth Gospel', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* (2000)15(3): 331–347.

<sup>235</sup> Gbotoe. 'Commercialized Gospel', 109.

<sup>236</sup> Heuser, 'Religio-scapes', 20.

<sup>237</sup> Gbotoe, Eric Z.M. 'Commercialized Gospel: A Missiological Assessment of Prosperity Gospel', M.A. (Theology) Dissertation, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 2013, 56.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

Prosperity gospel in Africa takes place within varying contexts. Keum asserts that the Gospel takes root in different contexts through engagement with specific cultural, political, and religious realities.<sup>239</sup> Respect for people and their cultural and symbolic life-worlds are necessary if the gospel takes root in those different realities.<sup>240</sup>

### **Theological Foundations**

The theological foundations for this thesis project are based on several passages of Scripture dealing with the importance of preaching the Bible. The project researcher intends to determine why some pastors of the Unity Light International Ministry (church) are preaching prosperity gospel (theology) rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Ministers of the Gospel must correctly interpret scriptures because God chooses to speak and commissions His servants to preach scriptures that are both authoritative and trustworthy. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.<sup>241</sup>

Without a shadow of a doubt, pastors of Unity Light International Ministry Network (Church) need to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Apostle Paul admonished to “preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.”<sup>242</sup> Thus, preaching the Word of God should be done as an act of obedience rather than a means to get one’s message to his or her congregation. When one preaches the Word of God, he must proclaim Christ biblically. As the Apostle Paul states, “For

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<sup>239</sup> Keum, Jooseop (ed.). *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, with a Practical Guide, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2013.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>241</sup> (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

<sup>242</sup> (2 Tim. 4:2).

when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach; woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”<sup>243</sup> Pastors of Unity Light International Ministry (Church) need to preach the Gospel of Christ. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to diving soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”<sup>244</sup> There are so many ways that God could have made himself known, but He chose preaching. Apostle Paul lived in Rome for two whole years at his own expense. “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance!”<sup>245</sup> Many publications by various authors have noted the significance and importance of Africans in the evangelicalism of the African continent.<sup>246</sup> The first church in tropical Africa was not a missionary creation.<sup>247</sup> Most Africans have always heard the gospel from other Africans, and virtually all the great movements towards the Christian faith in Africa have been African led.<sup>248</sup> However, in North American and European circles, the story of Africa's evangelization has little acknowledgment of the African's participation. On the other hand, Africa's religious map was permanently changed as new religion was carried into numerous communities by African agents' wide-varying activities.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> (1 Cor. 9:16).

<sup>244</sup> (Heb. 4:12).

<sup>245</sup> (Acts 28:3)

<sup>246</sup> Martin Klauber and Scott M. Manestch, eds. *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*. (Nashville: B & H Academic), 2008, 165.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Andrew F. Walls. *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), 2002, 45.

<sup>249</sup> Lamin Sanneh. *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books), 1983.

This African factor was not unique to West African countries like Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.<sup>250</sup> Harris, a Liberian Methodist/Anglican preacher, teacher, and catechist, established the foundation of subsequent missionary work in West Africa.<sup>251</sup>

One of the cornerstones of this theological foundation texts is the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:16-20:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

According to Klauber, the Great Commission is the ongoing imperative for world missions.<sup>252</sup> Klauber posits that the controlling verb is to make disciples not make decisions or entertain the sheep.<sup>253</sup> Klauber further asserts that three supporting participles for carrying such imperative force require us to go, baptize, and teach the disciples everything Jesus has commanded.<sup>254</sup> Another form of the Great Commission is found in Luke 24:46-49 as follows:

He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Klauber posits that this form of the Great Commission in Luke 24:46-49 is cast as fulfillment and prediction; a fulfillment in that Jesus Christ's passion and resurrection was predicted in

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<sup>250</sup> Klauber and Manestch, *Great Commission*, 167.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Klauber and Manestch, *Great Commission*, 167.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 176.

Scripture, and prediction for the consequence of Jesus' death and resurrection, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.<sup>255</sup> Similar themes are found in other passages of Scripture. Acts 1:8 is a geographical extension of the ministry of witness to "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."<sup>256</sup>

The Lord's biblical command to carry and proclaim his Gospel to all nations is recorded in both the Old Testament (Isa. 45:22, Gen 12:3) and New Testament (Matt. 9:37-38; 28:19; Acts 1:8).<sup>257</sup> The message to be carried out the historical events of Jesus Christ's life, particularly his crucifixion (1 Cor. 15:3; Col. 2:14-15), his resurrection and ascension (Luke 24:46-48; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Eph. 1:20-23).<sup>258</sup> Christ is an excellent example of carrying out the Great Commission. Jesus went around doing good (Acts 10:38), proclaiming his message of redemption (Mark 10:45), and seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10).<sup>259</sup> Jesus also taught and preached the good news of the Kingdom (Matt. 4:23), so that his disciples should teach and proclaim Jesus and his resurrection (Acts 4:2).<sup>260</sup> The method in carrying out the Great Commission involves preaching (2 Tim. 4:2) and teaching the Word (Matt. 28:20), with accompanying good works extended to all people (Acts 9:36; Gal. 6:9-10; Eph. 2:10) for the glory of God.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Klauber and Manestch, *Great Commission*, 167.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Walter A. Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2001, 524.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

Mortimer posits that the Great Commission from Matthew 18:16-20 has been the obligatory reference in the discussion of mission and evangelism during most of this century.<sup>262</sup> Sim asserts that the Great Commission is a fitting end to the evangelist's narrative.<sup>263</sup>

Jesus was evident in the Great Commission that the church needs to go into the world and make disciples of all the nations. Jesus stated in John 17:18, "as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." In Mark 16:15, "He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." As such, Jesus made it clear what he wanted the church and members of the church to do. However, many churches today have chosen to look inward and isolate themselves from the world.

The basis of the Christian worldview is truth-telling. The Christian worldview, like many other worldviews, at its deepest level, is a system of truth claims, or assertions about reality.<sup>264</sup> Like the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the prosperity gospel must adhere to the Christian worldview, which tenets must consist of truth claims or assertions about reality. Christianity claims to be true. Apostle Paul said if Christ has not been raised from the dead, Christians are not the most deceived and miserable urchins on the planet (1 Cor. 15:17-19). Christians throughout history and today differ in their understanding of what convictions should be.

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<sup>262</sup> Arias Mortimer. "Church in the World: Rethinking the Great Commission." *Theology Today* 47, no. 4 (01, 1991): 410.

<sup>263</sup> David C. Sim, "Is Matthew 28:16-20 the Summary of the Gospel?" *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 70, no.1 (2014): 1-7.

<sup>264</sup> Douglas Groothuis. *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2011, 75.

Notwithstanding, the Christian biblical worldview tries to capture Christianity's essential ideas, its fundamental doctrines, and how they hang together in explaining God.<sup>265</sup> A Christian worldview begins with the basis of authority; for Christians, it is appropriately interpreting and applying the Bible.<sup>266</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the center of the Christian worldview and Christian devotion.<sup>267</sup>

Apostle Paul makes it abundantly clear that the Gospels do not end with the death of Jesus:

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:14-19).

Douglas Groothuis posits, “If Christ has not been raised:<sup>268</sup>

1. Christian preaching is useless;
2. Christian faith is useless;
3. Christians are false witnesses about God;
4. Christian faith is futile;
5. Christians are unforgiven and left in their sins;
6. Those who have died in Christian hope are lost;
7. Those who hope in Christ are supremely pitiable since their hope ends with this life”.

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<sup>265</sup> Groothuis, “*Christian Apologetics*”

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

The history of the church and the history of preaching leads us to believe that there is little transformation without the Word of God.<sup>269</sup> Throughout the scriptures, especially in the New Testament, preaching was the primary means that God used to transform people from those under God's wrath to a people made new by his grace.<sup>270</sup> The ministry of the Lord Jesus was characterized by preaching and teaching.<sup>271</sup> Thus, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ is pivotal to the Christian faith.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Christian preaching dates back to the first-century, originating from the divine instruction of the Great Commission.<sup>272</sup> According to Klauber and Manetsch, "the 11 disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw Him, they worshiped, but some doubted. Then Jesus came near and said to them, all has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:16-20)".<sup>273</sup> Pastors of Unity Light International Ministry (Church) need to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ as God commanded Christians to do. Caldwell asserts that we must understand the primary function of a pastor is to feed the Word of God to the people.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Paul Pettit. *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 2008.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> (Mt. 28:16-20)

<sup>273</sup> Martin Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch, eds. *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*. (Nashville: B & H Academic), 2008,1.

<sup>274</sup> Happy Caldwell. *The Heart of a Pastor: Understanding and Pastoring Supernaturally*. Tulsa, OK: (Harrison House Publishers), 1982,184.

Jesus told Peter three times to feed His sheep; the number one priority for a pastor is to feed people the Word.<sup>275</sup> Jesus said to Simon Peter: If you love me more than these? Yes, Lord, he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “feed my lambs.”<sup>276</sup> Sheep are very needed; they depend on the shepherd to feed and care for them.<sup>277</sup> In the New Testament, a preacher is a person who has the inner call from the Holy Spirit and the external call from the church and has been duly set apart to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>278</sup>

The primary task of a preacher is to speak as a personal witness to God’s revelation, interpreting it, explaining it, and applying it to the needs of the people.<sup>279</sup> Preaching is also a divine truth voiced by a chosen personality to meet humanitarian needs; thus, preaching means interpreting life today with light from scriptures to meet the hearers' daily needs by guiding the hearer in doing God’s will.<sup>280</sup>

In the Old Testament, the preacher's word is “to tell the good news”; to call or proclaim.<sup>281</sup> Preaching in the Old Testament has the essential elements of proclamation and announcing.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Caldwell. “*The Heart of a Pastor*.”

<sup>276</sup> (John 21:15).

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Walter A. Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2001, 948.

<sup>279</sup> Walter A. Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 2001, 948.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 948.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

The preacher is one who tells the message which the preacher receives from God.<sup>283</sup> John, the Baptist, was the connecting link between the Old Testament and the New Testament; he was the last and the greatest of the prophets and the first preacher of the new era.<sup>284</sup> Jesus preached in various locations and to various sizes of audiences. Sometimes he spoke to small groups; sometimes, he interpreted scripture in a synagogue service while preaching in the fields or by the sea. Jesus blended parables, aphorisms, arguments, and scriptural expositions in his preaching.<sup>285</sup> Jesus also sends out his disciples (apostles) on preaching missions to preach God's kingdom and heal the sick (Luke 9:1-3). Moreover, Jesus gives them practical instructions on how to carry out their ministry in Matthew, chapter 10.

Two crucial elements of Christian preaching are evangelism and instruction.<sup>286</sup> Other aspects of Christian preaching includes a free presentation to all people of the claims and demands of the gospel of Jesus Christ and orderly public teaching of believers in worship based upon scriptures.<sup>287</sup> According to Walter A. Elwell, “the preaching of John was transitional, the preaching of Jesus was unique, while the preaching of the apostles and the early church becomes our model.”<sup>288</sup> Elwell posits “contemporary trends in preaching include liturgical preaching, holistic preaching, preaching based on communications theory, liberation preaching (some homileticsians include black and feminist preaching in this category), preaching build around

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<sup>283</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 948.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

language theory, life-situation preaching, inductive preaching, narrative preaching, and a renewed interest in theological preaching.”<sup>289</sup> Elwell further asserts that “so long as Christianity remains a religion of the Word of God, the preacher will be needed to interpret the Word of God so that people may have God’s help in their daily life.”<sup>290</sup>

The Christian church will grow, flourish, and accomplish God’s purposes as long as people respond to God’s call to preach His Word.<sup>291</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction (2 Tim. 4:2).

John MacArthur asserts that:<sup>292</sup>

Among the varied responsibilities assigned to a pastor, that of preaching stands head and shoulders above the rest in importance. Paul repeatedly emphasized the importance of preaching to Timothy, sounding a note of echoes continually throughout the New Testament. High points in church history have verified the importance of biblical preaching.

According to MacArthur, God-ordained means to save, sanctify, and strengthen His church is preaching. The gospel’s proclamation is what elicits saving faith in those whom God has chosen (Rom. 10:14).

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<sup>289</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 949.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> MacArthur. *Pastoral Ministry*, 204.

MacArthur further proclaims that:<sup>293</sup>

The proper foundation of preaching is the Word of God, a foundation that is missing in much contemporary preaching. The content of preaching should include teaching matter as well as exhortations to behavior based on that teaching. Only preaching by one whose commitment is intense can be persuasive with listeners. Among other ways, that commitment exhibits itself in the hard work the preacher is willing to put into the preparation of his sermons.

Through the preaching of the Word comes the knowledge of the truth that results in godliness (John 17:17; Rom. 16:25; Eph. 5:26).<sup>294</sup> Preaching encourages believers to live in the hope of eternal life, enabling them to endure suffering (Acts 14:21-22).<sup>295</sup> The faithful preaching of the Word is the most critical element of pastoral ministry.<sup>296</sup> Preaching was central to the early church ministry.<sup>297</sup> Throughout history, the true church has strongly emphasized biblical reaching; according to John Macarthur, “no man’s pastoral ministry will be successful in God’s sight who does not give preaching its proper place.”<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> MacArthur. *Pastoral Ministry*.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Prosperity gospel movement<sup>299</sup> message is outside of historical, traditional, and biblical Christianity.<sup>300</sup> It is a theological deviation from the Gospel of Jesus Christ that claims that Christians have the authority over health, wealth, and prosperity.<sup>301</sup> According to Paul Enns, “a serious problem with making prosperity gospel an alternative to the Gospel of Christ is how prosperity teachers view the Scriptures.”<sup>302</sup> As a global phenomenon, the prosperity gospel rides on the wave of capitalism, which is sweeping the global economy.<sup>303</sup> The underpinning of the prosperity gospel is a theology of affluence; members are encouraged to give to receive God’s blessings.<sup>304</sup> The prosperity gospel found fertile soil in Africa the exploration of charismatic Christian churches.<sup>305</sup>

This doctoral thesis project seeks to explain why many Unity Light Ministry Network Church (Unity Community Church) pastors frequently preach the prosperity gospel message. This research project is an exploratory study that utilizes a researcher-designed survey instrument based on the literature review of Chapter 2. Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) pastors need to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. This qualitative research seeks to understand Unity Light Ministry Network Church Pastors’ understanding and attitudes towards preaching the prosperity gospel message in Liberia.

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<sup>299</sup> Prosperity gospel is also known as wealth and health movement.

<sup>300</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*, 676.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, 676.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 683.

<sup>303</sup> Mashau and Kgatle. “*Culture of Greed*”.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

The highlighting thesis for this research is the prosperity gospel in Africa, especially Liberia, which is a significant deviation from the Gospel of Christ, undermines sound hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture. As stated earlier in chapter one, many Christians (including pastors) in Liberia lack the foundational knowledge of the truths of the Gospel of Christ because they are hostile toward theological training, resulting in vulnerability among Christians to teachings that are not theologically grounded on a solid biblical foundation.<sup>306</sup>

This methodology section includes considering the subjects involved in the study, data collection, setting, and analysis techniques.<sup>307</sup> This study is designed specifically for pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network Church in Kakata, Liberia, a branch of Unity Light Ministries, International located in the United States of America. An ancillary goal of this study is to offer insights for other churches that are facing similar problems. This action research project focused on the need to understand how things are happening, rather than merely on what is happening, and to know how stakeholders, people concerned with the issue, perceive, interpret, and respond to events related to the problem investigated.”<sup>308</sup>

The prosperity gospel is a theological deviation from the Gospel of Jesus Christ; thus, a severe problem with making prosperity gospel an alternative to the Gospel of Christ is how prosperity teachers view the Scriptures. This doctoral thesis project intended to investigate and acquire an increased understanding of why increasing numbers of pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (UCC) preach the prosperity gospel rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>306</sup> Aaron B. Phillips. “An Examination of the Prosperity Gospel: A Plea for Return to Biblical Truth.” Liberty University, 2015, 1.

<sup>307</sup> Tim Sensing. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Oregon: (Wipf & Stock Publishers), 2011.

<sup>308</sup> Ernest T Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014), 36.

### **Intervention Design**

This intervention study seeks to develop broad explanations for why increasing numbers of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) pastors are shifting to the prosperity gospel message.

### **Objectives**

This doctoral thesis seeks to answer the research question of why a growing number of pastors in Liberia, in Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church), are replacing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the prosperity gospel message. As such, this survey research design and methodology are vital to facilitating the process. The research involves a biblical and theological analysis of some of the tenets of the prosperity gospel (Word of Faith) to comprehend why these Liberian pastors preach the prosperity gospel message. Even though this research study was conducted within an indigenous Liberian church's parameters, this study's findings apply to the broader Liberian Christian community. More explicitly, this study was divided into five chapters. This doctoral thesis begins with an introduction (Chapter 1), followed by three introductory chapters (Chapters 2-4), ending with a conclusion (Chapter 5).

First, an introduction is given (Chapter 1) in which the following considerations are detailed:

- a) Ministry Context
- b) Purpose Statement
- c) Basic Assumptions
- d) Definitions
- e) Limitation and Delimitations
- f) Thesis Statement

The first component of Chapter 2 is a literature review, which consists of a survey of scholarly sources such as books, journal articles, and theses related to the prosperity gospel in order to establish the research project relative to existing knowledge. The second component of Chapter 2 is theological foundations, which denotes the biblical underpinnings or foundation of this doctoral thesis project.

The third component of chapter 2 is the theoretical foundation, which outlined what sort of research that has been done on the prosperity gospel, and models of ministry related to the research topic, and how they relate to the topic at hand.

Chapter 3 is the research methodology. The first component is the intervention design that addressed the ministry context problem and the research question. In this section, the researcher kept the intervention simple to implement, and results could be measured. The second component of Chapter 3 is the implementation of the intervention design. The section above offered a narrative of the implementation and collection of data. The third component of chapter 3 outlined how the researcher will analyze once the data collection is completed.

Chapter 4 detailed the results of the research project's intervention plan. It includes illustrated graphs and charts to give the reader a glance at the measurable changes. The researcher used tables and diagrams to show changes that emerge that are directly traceable to the intervention plan. In Chapter 5, a conclusion is offered. This chapter also includes a summary of the research findings, recommendations for further study, and the contribution of the doctoral thesis project to practical theology and answered the research question why a growing number of pastors in Liberia, in Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church), are replacing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the prosperity gospel message.

## Participants

The Assistant Executive Director of Unity Light Ministries, International & Ministry Network for Global Missions, selected pastors to participate in this doctoral thesis project. The assistant director mentioned above is also the General Secretary of Unity Community Church in Liberia. The participants of this study consisted of active pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) who were willing to participate in this research study. The Assistant Executive Director of Unity Light Ministries, International & Ministry Network, encouraged pastors to participate in this research by personal letters to individual pastors inviting them to participate, at council meetings, from the pulpit, in the bulletins, and through the newsletter encouraging pastors to participate in the study.

The participants of this doctoral thesis project were a purposive sample of 12 pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Kakata, Liberia, a reasonably representative of the Unity Light Ministry Network Church's clergy in the Republic of Liberia. This sample's demographics varied in education, age, marital status, and years of pastoral experience. Twelve pastors from Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Kakata, Liberia, voluntarily participated in this study. Even though the researcher is a pastor in Unity Light Ministries, International, the researcher did not participate. Moreover, the researcher did not offer any money or financial incentives to pastors who participated in the study. This group of pastors was surveyed to answer the research question because there was no realistic alternative way to collect information about why pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) preach prosperity gospel message without seeking information and opinions sample of the pastors described above.

Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) is led by pastors with formal theological and biblical training so that their congregations are not at risk of hearing incorrect teachings and misunderstandings of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unity Light Ministries, International as an Evangelical Charismatic Christian Ministry, believes that training pastors with a combination of biblical knowledge of God's Word and theological truths will have a direct and profound impact in their local communities. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the most significant and most important news that any human being ever hears; this Gospel is the Holy Scriptures' central message and is crucial to understanding them. As evangelical pastors, the 12 pastors participating in this research study were trained to understand the primacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which focused on the message of salvation, justification, and sanctification, as explained by the apostle Paul in the Book of Romans; accurate interpretation of Scriptures and practical disciplines, such as missions, evangelism and church planting.

The 12 pastors who participated in this research project were selected pastors of a Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) congregations between 18-65, capable of giving consent. The researcher explained the purpose of the study in the recruitment letter, and the consent forms were placed on the first page of the survey/questionnaire. The participants were not required to sign and return consent forms because the research designed the survey to be anonymous. However, participants acknowledged consent to the terms of the surveys by proceeding to take the surveys.

## Procedure

This study's selected participants arrived at the Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) headquarter between Saturday, July 18, and Monday, July 20, 2020. The 12 pastors that participated in the study completed survey questions at the Unity Light Ministry (Unity Community Church). The completely anonymous surveys that lasted between 15 to 20 minutes; the survey did not include personally identifiable information about the participants, such as first name, last name, email address, and congregation name. Participants used one of two laptop computers provided by the researcher to access the online survey questions. The participants completed the surveys over three days.

The surveys required each participant to answer 15 questions and describe characteristics or understandings about why pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network Church preach the prosperity gospel. The researcher did not use surveys or questionnaires developed by other researchers for this project. The researcher used a researcher-developed study approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board for collecting data from the participants. All participants were asked the same questions under the same circumstances, and information from the survey was gathered utilizing participants' self-completion of the surveys. The researcher-designed survey employees fixed choices to describe characteristics and understandings of the pastor of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church).<sup>309</sup> As such, the main emphasis of the survey questions was on fact-finding.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Sensing. *Qualitative Research*.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

The researcher used this researcher-developed survey of lengthy questions that employ fixed choice responses to questions about the prosperity gospel with the main emphasis on fact-finding about various aspects of the pastors' beliefs about the preaching of the prosperity gospel. The researcher designed this anonymous survey on prosperity gospel to be eye-catching, uncluttered, clear, and readable to guide the participants' eye through the questions to help the pastors think about why a growing number of them are preaching prosperity gospel as an alternative to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The research project participants volunteered information about their attitudes, behaviors, opinions, and beliefs about preaching and teaching the prosperity gospel message in the Liberian context. The participants' answers closely matched, in a systematic way, the researcher's expectation based on information that the research had gleaned from past and present articles and academic research on the prosperity gospel. Data gleaned from the survey provided the researcher with an appropriate means of gathering information because this research's goals are both quantitative and qualitative.

### **Data Analysis & Evaluation**

The researcher used the data collected from the surveys to summarize data collected and interpreted through analytical and logical reasoning to establish patterns, relationships, or trends. The researcher further used data analysis to go from a massive amount of data to meaningful information. Moreover, a research analysis should make sense of data after they have been collected.<sup>311</sup> As such, the researcher understands that a well-chosen method for data collection and analysis is critical for all types of evaluations.

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<sup>311</sup> Charles, C. M., and Craig A. Mertler. *Introduction to Educational Research*. Boston: (Allyn and Bacon), 2002, 161.

The researcher conducted an inductive data analysis to build patterns, categories, and themes by organizing the data into progressively more intellectual information elements. This inductive process illustrated working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researcher had established an all-inclusive set of themes. After the researcher has demonstrated an all-inclusive set of themes, the researcher focused more on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the prosperity gospel rather than the meaning that the researcher brings to the project or what the researcher found in the literature review expressed by other writers. Hence, the researcher's critical focus is to learn why the pastors of the Unity Light Ministry preach the prosperity gospel message from the participants and address the research to obtain that information.

The researcher used data from the survey to specified themes, issues, and questions with a predetermined sequence that correlates with the project's problem and purpose statements.<sup>312</sup> The researcher then reviewed all of the data, made sense of it, and organized it into categories or themes gleaned from the surveys. The researcher systematically gathered data from the pastors participating in this project to make judgments about their use of prosperity gospel preaching in congregational worship services. The researcher delivered the survey questionnaire in an electronic format self-administered by the participants. The researcher used the method described above because Internet-based questionnaires are relatively low cost and practical for the prevailing Covid-19 situation in Kakata, Liberia. The researcher alone interpreted data from the surveys and issued a report at the end of the research. The researcher analyzed the data once it has been collected from the survey questions.

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<sup>312</sup> Sensing. *Qualitative Research*, 106.

The researcher also used differing approaches for analyzing data from the survey questions as follows:

1. Processes: the researcher organized and described critical processes that form an analytical framework for managing a qualitative description of data from the survey questions.<sup>313</sup>
2. Issues: the research analyzed vital matters as the primary evaluation of the survey questions.<sup>314</sup>

Data collection is a significant part of this project. The researcher's principal method for collecting data for this study is the Prosperity Gospel survey instrument driven by the research question. The researcher used a mixture of narrow-focused closed-ended and open-ended questions for some narrative response from each participant in the form of short answers response to open-ended questions.

Response from the prosperity gospel survey was unpacked, organized, and analyzed for evaluation. The researcher collected data from the study and discussed the areas of significant overlaps as themes and patterns. The researcher used data theme analysis that involves sorting, organizing, and index to generate themes and patterns for making sense of the problem. Collecting and identifying themes was the primary way the researcher processed, analyzed and interpreted the survey data. The researcher started with a logical summary of the data from the prosperity gospel survey to determine the main themes that emerge from each category to employ graphs, charts, tables, or matrices.

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<sup>313</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Oregon: (Wipf & Stock Publishers), 2011, 106.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

The researcher used generalizability, validity, and reliability to ensure the research project's credibility and understanding of the problem being studied with standards of consistency and accuracy. The evaluation of this research project was strictly focused on the pastors' use of prosperity gospel message rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The specific tool that the researcher used to gather data is the prosperity gospel survey questions. The researcher did not keep a reflective journal during the entire project to bracket any biases. However, the researcher wanted to keep a reflective journal to log information from the project participants while the researcher's memory is still fresh. However, the research was not able to do so due to unforeseen circumstances.

The researcher's criteria to evaluate the intervention are data collection of information from surveys to provide a complex view of the intervention to analyze and interpret why pastors of Unity Light International Ministry preach the prosperity gospel message. Successful outcomes in this intervention are as follows:

1. to prevent unintentional preaching and teaching of the prosperity gospel message as an alternative to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. to promote positive change by training pastors of Unity Light International Ministry Network (Church) on the dangers of preaching prosperity gospel messages to their congregations.

In the old approach, the pastors of the Unity Light International Ministry (Unity Community Church) had varying academic training levels. There is no comprehensive Ministry training program to guide against unintentional preaching or teaching of prosperity message.

After the intervention, the new approach will be different because every pastor, regardless of academic qualification, will train in proper principles of biblical interpretation to guide against unintentional preaching and teaching of prosperity gospel messages to their congregations.

Even though this exploratory research study was limited to the experience of an intact group of pastors at one church, the results represent a wide variety of congregational contexts, and generalizability may be used by churches of a similar size, socioeconomic background, and governing board structure. The nineteen questions was answered on a sliding scale that runs from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” and a short answer question. This survey served two purposes. First and foremost, to evaluate Unity Light Ministry Network Church pastors’ response to why they preach the prosperity gospel message. Second an overall evaluation of Unity Light Ministry Network Church pastors’ hermeneutical interpretation of Scriptures. Third, the short answer questions examine Unity Light Ministry Network pastors’ theological and biblical understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The researcher used responses from pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network Church to extrapolate why a growing number of pastors of this church are preaching prosperity gospel messages rather than the Gospel of Christ. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis to identify broad themes and common patterns from responses from the “short answer” question on the survey. The researcher used thematic analysis to understand Unity Light Ministry Network Church pastors’” perceptions and motivation for preaching the prosperity gospel message. The researcher used content analysis to evaluate responses of the “short answer” question for categorizing keywords, phrases, and sentences. The researcher used thematic analysis to study the responses of the “short answer” question for a correlation between the preaching of the prosperity gospel message to the African and Liberian socioeconomic contexts.

The researcher-designed survey effectively establishes a causal relationship and provides an in-depth understanding of why Unity Light Ministry Network pastors preach and teach the prosperity gospel message. The researcher used common themes to generate tables, graphs, and other visual aids to help the reader interpret the findings. Finally, the researcher summarized the results of the research and sought to evaluate and analyze the data.

Religion is of great importance in Africa. People engage in some form of religious practice from time to time, and many profess membership of some formal religious organization, Muslim, Christian, and otherwise.<sup>315</sup> Moreover, many Africans voluntarily associate themselves networks, which they use for various purposes; social, economic, and even political.<sup>316</sup> One of such networks is Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church).

Pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) are trained as evangelical pastors; yet, a growing number of pastors are preaching prosperity gospel messages rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. This doctoral thesis research project seeks to understand Liberia's prosperity gospel message and why a growing number of pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) are preaching prosperity gospel messages rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The researcher also seeks to identify any notion of cultural practices related to the prosperity gospel message and the social, political, or historical context of the prosperity gospel message that may influence or shape the views of the research participants. The researcher made an interpretive analysis in which the researcher interpreted what the researcher understands from the data gathered from the surveys.

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<sup>315</sup> Marumo. *"Charismatic Religions"*, 207-23.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

The researcher developed a holistic account of a complex picture of why pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) preach prosperity gospel messages. The researcher will then provide a research report of multiple perspectives that identify many factors facing pastors of the Unity Light Ministry in Liberia that emerges from the research project.

Finally, the researcher will print out each survey and place the surveys in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office. Only the researcher will have access to the original surveys. Moreover, the researcher will download and save copies of individual surveys on the researcher password-locked computer. Only the researcher will have access to these surveys.

Even though Unity Light Ministry Network Church (Unity Community Church) pastors are remarkably diverse, they are all trained to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. Despite Unity Light Ministry Network Church (Unity Community Church) pastors evangelical pastoral training, a growing number of pastors are now preaching prosperity gospel messages to their local congregations. The researcher is a pastor and co-participant with the Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) community to collect and interpret data to facilitate innovative and transformative modes of action. The prosperity gospel in sub-Saharan Africa is highly influenced and shaped by the prosperity message. This research project is not designed just to understand why is a growing number of pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Liberia are replacing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the prosperity gospel message but also to recommend a specific plan of actions to reverse this trend.

The researcher may recommend a training program for pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) pastors from the analysis that emerged from this problem. This research contributes to ministry leadership because there is no academic study in the Liberian context on why pastors replace the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the prosperity gospel.

This doctoral thesis research project was implemented a few weeks after approval from Liberty University Institutional Review Board. The survey was completed by a cross-section of 12 Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) pastors.

This qualitative survey research study was conducted in the natural setting of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church), and the information obtained from this research will be specific to Unity Light Ministry Network Church setting and ministry conditions. This type of survey research is especially important when focusing on understanding when exploring differences between the individual pastor's experience. This study's analysis provides a broad understanding of why pastors at Unity Light Ministry Network Church preach the prosperity gospel message. The actual impact on the prosperity gospel, in a more overall landscape, is growing;<sup>317</sup> Unity Light Ministry Network Church is feeling the effects of the prosperity gospel message. The researcher carefully kept "after-action" notes as the researcher proceed conventional planned event in the research project.<sup>318</sup>

### **Implementation of the Intervention Design**

The survey data was collected between Saturday, July 18, and Monday, July 20, 2020. The survey was initially scheduled to occur on Saturday, July 18, 2020, from 9:00-12:00. The researcher extended the study time to take place over three days rather than three hours due to the Coronavirus global pandemic (COVID-19) outbreak in Liberia. The COVID-19 epidemic was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the epidemic a public health emergency of international concern and March 11, 2020, a global pandemic.

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<sup>317</sup> Andreas Heuser, *African Prosperity*.

<sup>318</sup> Sensing. *Qualitative Research*, 439.

In March 2020, the Republic of Liberia's government closed the only international airport, Roberts International Airport, which made it impossible for the researcher to travel from the United States to the Republic of Liberia to conduct the survey research. The researcher had to postpone the survey research from February 2020 to July 2020. The Liberian government had a rapid response to the spread of the Coronavirus in Liberia. The government declared a state of emergency as Coronavirus cases begin to rise exponentially despite compulsory mask-wearing, and stay-at-home orders were implemented. The Government of Liberia banned religious gatherings, including church worship services and other in-person church programs. The government ban on religious programs also included the new Ministry of Health regulations mandating social distancing and numerical restrictions of pastors and church members' gatherings within local churches. The ban described above, and other government rules and regulations made it impossible for the researcher to conduct in-person survey research at the Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) on Saturday from 9:00 to 12 noon. At the end of May 2020, the President of the Republic of Liberia, George Weah, ease the restrictions and lifted the ban on religious organizations.

Even though the Government of Liberia lifted the ban on religious gatherings, the Executive Board of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) decided to air on the side of caution. The church continued to worship online and conduct telephone prayer conferences with limited members attending Sunday worship services. Notwithstanding, the survey was conducted at Unity Light Ministry (Unity Community Church) in Kakata Liberia, West Africa. Participants of the study were given the survey password. The researcher conducted this post-lockdown survey research over three days to ensure compliance with the Government

of Liberia social distancing, numerical restriction of gathering members of local congregations, and other public health protocols.

The survey consisted of 10 questions measured on a 5-point Likert scale and five short answer questions. The study was also divided into three parts, as follows:

- I. Part 1 consists of five questions to help the pastors determine whether the pastors preach or teach prosperity gospel message.
- II. Part 2 consists of five questions to help the researcher understand whether the pastors can correctly interpret concepts relating to the prosperity gospel (theology).
- III. Part 3 consists of five short answer questions about the characteristics of “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology and why it is prevalent in Liberia.

Each of the 12 pastors completed a password-protected anonymous survey at Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Kakata, Liberia, West Africa. Kakata is the capital of Margibi County, the sixth populous county in Liberia.<sup>319</sup> The Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) building is the Unity Light Ministries' national headquarter, International (Liberia).

The researcher analyzed the data collected from this survey in Chapter 4 of this research paper. The researcher used content and thematic analyses to glean information from the research once the 12 pastors from Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) have completed the anonymous surveys.

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<sup>319</sup> 2008 Population and Housing Census, 10.

## Content Analysis

The researcher used content analysis of the survey to categorize and discussed the meaning of certain words and phrases, in a systematic manner in part to find patterns that can be replicable in similar churches or Christian ministries. The researcher also used content analysis to gather information from the survey data in a non-invasive manner.

As a systematic research technique, the content analysis provided a qualitative analysis method that the researcher gleaned from the research study.<sup>320</sup> The researcher further used content analysis to describe the types of content measured, along with sampling considerations.<sup>321</sup> One of the sampling considerations that the researcher had to give a critical review was a small sample size of only 12 pastors. Even though 12 participants may seem like a small sample size, it was adequate for Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Kakata, Liberia, because the Church has only 12 pastors (excluding assistant pastors and evangelists) in Kakata. Moreover, the sample size in qualitative research tends to be usually smaller to support the depth of case-oriented analysis, which is fundamental to this mode of study.

This research study's flexibility and goals made it particularly suitable for content analysis for the researcher to gather, organize, store, retrieve, and disseminate information obtained from this research to answer questions about the underlying structure, form, and organization of the information contained in survey responses.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Ward, J.H. Managing Data: Content Analysis Methodology. Unpublished manuscript, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Bates, M.J. The Invisible Substrate of Information Science. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, (1999) 50(12), 1043-1050.

The researcher further used content analysis to determine pastors' beliefs of the prosperity gospel and predict how those views may drive adjustments to the gospel of Jesus Christ's message. The researcher also used content analysis to compare past research on the prosperity gospel with participants' current perceptions. Hence, the researcher cross-referenced participants' opinions of the prosperity gospel message, in the Liberian context, with the prosperity gospel message worldwide. The researcher performed a simple frequency count as manifest content analysis, supplemented by established similarity values, which provided latent content analysis. Although this content analysis has some constraints, in general, the researcher accomplished assessing the participants' opinions on the prosperity gospel and then cataloging their views.

The researcher used simple content analysis to examine manifest content, revealed latent content, and incorporated qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods into this study. Thus, the researcher used the thoughts of study participants about the prosperity gospel and mapped those themes that emerged to the current knowledge body.

### **Hermeneutical Analysis**

The researcher used the Hermeneutical Analysis to understand varying interpretations of the prosperity gospel concept or text in-depth with some level of abstraction to achieve objectivity and credibility of the study. The researcher analyzed responses from Part II of the survey, questions 1-5, to see if the participants could use the hermeneutical process to convey the right biblical meaning. Hence, the researcher analyzed part II to see if the respondents understood the biblical meaning of the scripture.

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## Thematic Analysis

The researcher also used thematic analysis for questions in part 3 to identify and examine themes and understand topics from part three questions of the research to sort broad themes for proper understanding. While there is no clear agreement about how researchers can rigorously apply thematic analysis in qualitative research, the researcher uses thematic analysis to produce trustworthy and insightful findings of why Liberian pastors preach the prosperity gospel.<sup>323</sup> Furthermore, the researcher used thematic analysis because it does not require thorough theoretical and scientific knowledge of other qualitative approaches, and it offers a more accessible form of analysis, especially for those early in their research career.<sup>324</sup>

In all of the analyses mentioned above, the researcher chose research analysis to reduce the volume of data collected, identify common or recurring themes, to seek an understanding of the survey data. The researcher also used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability.<sup>325</sup> The research analyzed all of the questions on the survey using the analyses mentioned above to find why a growing number of Liberian pastors are preaching the prosperity gospel message.

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<sup>323</sup> Braun, V., Clarke, V. *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*. Qualitative Research in Psychology (2006), 3, 77–101.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Lincoln, Y., Guba, E. G. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage (1985).

The researcher used the survey research questions in chapter five to describe certain aspects and characteristics of the pastors that made them more susceptible to preaching the prosperity gospel message.

The research further used surveys instrument as follows:

1. To gather a large amount of information from the pastors in a short period.
2. To maintain the anonymity of the pastors' responses because the researcher was also a pastor of Unity Light Ministries, International.
3. Because survey research is cheaper than other primary data collection methods, such as experimental research.
4. A limited sample of only 12 pastors.

Moreover, the researcher subdivided the survey into three distinct parts to avoid “first choice selection,” a common problem found in many survey research.

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) in Kakata, Liberia, the research had the following unexpected constraints:

1. Time Constraints-Limited amount of time to arrange and conduct survey research to collect primary data for reporting in chapter five.
2. Money Constraints-limited budget for international travel associated with conducting a scholastic research.
3. Schedule Constraints- inflexibility of the research process once the researcher received permission from Liberty University’s Internal Review Board (IRB) to conduct academic research.

The researcher used survey research because it was a practical and reasonable approach to the doctoral thesis project during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic.

The essence of the survey method can be explained as “questioning individuals on a topic or topics and then describing their responses.”<sup>326</sup> The researcher used a survey method for questioning the pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) their preaching of the prosperity gospel and then described their responses.

Generally, the survey method can be used in both quantitative as well as qualitative studies; hence, the researcher used the survey method to pursue two primary purposes:<sup>327</sup>

1. Describing certain aspects or characteristics of the population and
2. Testing hypotheses about the nature of relationships within a population.

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<sup>326</sup> Jackson, S.L. “Research Methods and Statistics: A Critical Approach”, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Cengage Learning (2011), 17.

<sup>327</sup> Jackson. “*Research Methods*”.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The survey on the prosperity gospel in Liberia was conducted in July 2020 at Unity Community Church in Kakata, Liberia. The researcher informed pastors of local congregations of the church, the group conferred and agreed to take part in this anonymous survey. The researcher then explained the purpose of the research in the recruitment letter and provided an informed consent form to the respondents before taking the survey. Participants for this survey comprised 12 pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) local congregations in Kakata, Liberia, West Africa. All 12 pastors responded in time to have their results included in the data analysis.

After analyzing the data, the researcher determined that 100% of the pastors had encountered the adversative effects of the prosperity gospel message. The survey provides insight into why pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) are preaching and teaching prosperity gospel messages as an alternative to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, one major limitation of this survey is that it involves a small sample of pastors. Another limitation is that the reliability of the data received from the study depends on the pastors' willingness to express their honest opinions and attitudes toward the preaching and teaching of "prosperity gospel" on the survey instrument.

A proforma copy of the survey is provided in Appendix A. The respondents of the research answered a researcher-developed survey on Prosperity Gospel. The results of the study are presented in Tables 1 through 10 and depicted graphically in figures 1 to 24.

## Results of the Prosperity Gospel in Liberia Survey

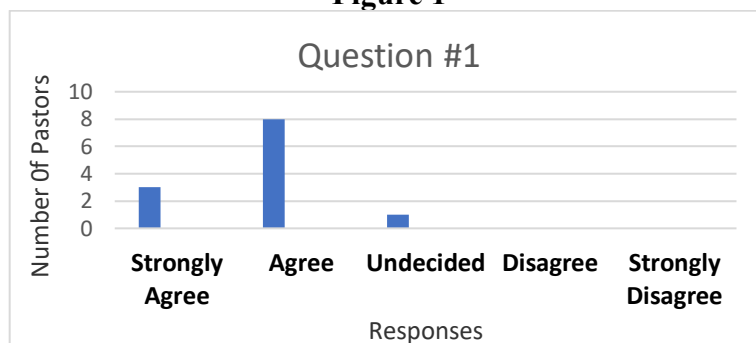
### Survey: Part 1

Responses to question # 1, “Do you preach/teach or believe that you or some members of your congregation receive direct revelation from God?”

**Table 1**

| Valid Responses   | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 3                      | 25%            |
| Agree             | 8                      | 66.7%          |
| Undecided         | 1                      | 8.3%           |
| Disagree          | 0                      | 0%             |
| Strongly Disagree | 0                      | 0%             |
|                   |                        |                |
| Total             | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 1**



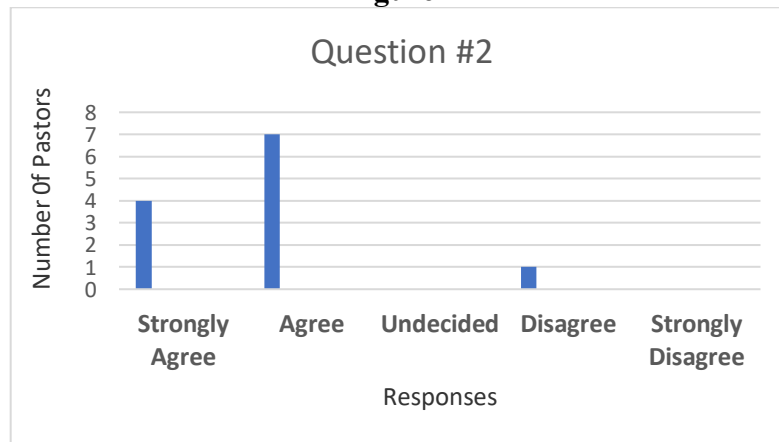
The first question of this survey concerned pastors' receiving direct revelation from God. Table 1 above shows the frequency and percentage for each category of respondents' answers. The findings indicate that of the total respondents, 12 pastors, three pastors (25%) strongly agree, and eight pastors (66.7%) agree that they preach, teach or believe that either the respondents or some members of their congregation receive direct revelation from God. One of the pastors was undecided, and no pastor reported that he did or someone in his organization did not receive direct revelation from God.

**Responses to question # 2, “Do you preach/teach or believe that if one gives tithes and offerings (sows seeds), in expectation of a harvest, he or she will reap resultant material blessings from God?”.**

**Table 2**

| Valid Responses   | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 4                      | 33.3%          |
| Agree             | 7                      | 58.3%          |
| Undecided         | 0                      | 0%             |
| Disagree          | 1                      | 8.3%           |
| Strongly Disagree | 0                      | 0%             |
| Total             | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 2**



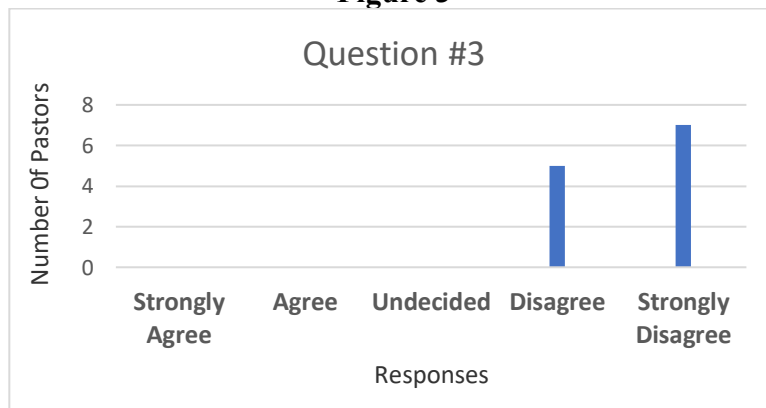
The second question in the survey concerned the giving of tithes and offerings (sowing seeds) in expectation of a harvest; thus, the giver expects to reap resultant material blessings from God. The findings from question 2 indicate that four pastors (33.3%) strongly agree, and seven pastors (58.3%) agree. Hence, 11(91.7%) out of the 12 pastors surveyed agree that either he and/or people in their congregation give tithes and offering in expectation of some form of material blessings from God. Only one pastor (8.3%) of the pastors did not give tithes and offerings in anticipation of material blessings.

**Responses to question # 3, “Do you preach/teach or believe that poverty could be a blessing from God because Jesus was not rich?”**

**Table 3**

| Valid Responses   | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 0                      | 0%             |
| Agree             | 0                      | 0%             |
| Undecided         | 0                      | 0%             |
| Disagree          | 5                      | 41.7%          |
| Strongly Disagree | 7                      | 58.3%          |
|                   |                        |                |
| Total             | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 3**



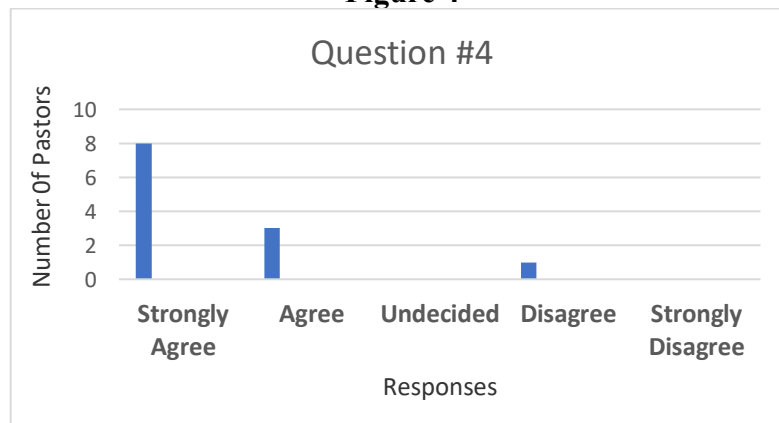
The third question of this survey concerns the belief that one being poor could be a blessing from God because Jesus was not rich. All 12 (100%) of the pastors disagree or strongly disagree that poverty could be a blessing from God. None of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed. None of the pastors was undecided. The paradox is the fact that all of the pastors disagree, and most of them strongly disagree, and that could be one of the reasons the prosperity gospel is fast-growing among impoverished communities in Liberia.

**Responses to question # 4, “Do you preach/teach or believe that Christians have authority over poverty, wealth, and health in the name of Jesus Christ?”**

**Table 4**

| Valid Responses   | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 8                      | 66.7%          |
| Agree             | 3                      | 25%            |
| Undecided         | 0                      | 0%             |
| Disagree          | 1                      | 8.3%           |
| Strongly Disagree | 0                      | 0%             |
| Total             | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 4**



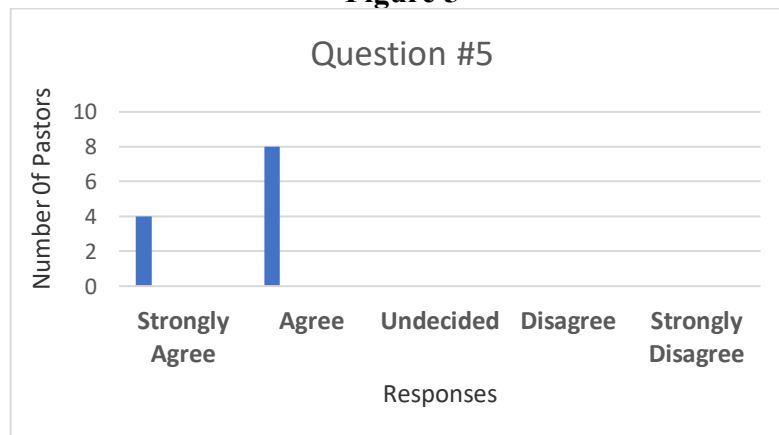
The fourth question of this survey concerned the belief that Christians have authority over poverty, wealth, and health in the name of Jesus Christ. The findings of the study eight pastors (66.7%) strongly agree, and three pastors (25%) agree that Christians have authority over poverty, wealth, and health. Only one pastor (8.3%) of the pastors' survey disagree. The majority of the pastors, 11(91.7%) of the pastors, believe that they had authority over poverty, wealth, and health in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Responses to question # 5, “Do you preach/teach or believe that Christians have the power to speak words to produce positive results in one’s life?”.**

**Table 5**

| <b>Valid Responses</b> | <b>Frequency (<i>f</i>)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly Agree         | 4                           | 33.3%                 |
| Agree                  | 8                           | 66.7%                 |
| Undecided              | 0                           | 0%                    |
| Disagree               | 0                           | 0%                    |
| Strongly Disagree      | 0                           | 0%                    |
| Total                  | 12                          | 100%                  |

**Figure 5**



The fifth question in the survey concerned the belief that Christians can speak words to produce positive results in one’s life. The findings of the study indicate that four pastors (33.3%) strongly agree and eight pastors (66.7%) agree that believe that Christians have the power to speak words to produce positive results in one’s life. None of the pastors that responded to the survey were undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree.

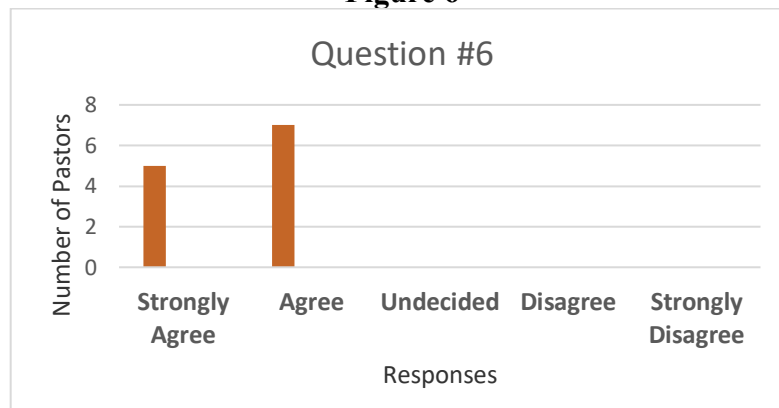
## Survey: Part 2

Responses to question # 6, “The gift of prophecy (divine revelation) continues today?”

**Table 6**

| Valid Responses   | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 5                      | 41.7%          |
| Agree             | 7                      | 58.3%          |
| Undecided         | 0                      | 0%             |
| Disagree          | 0                      | 0%             |
| Strongly Disagree | 0                      | 0%             |
|                   |                        |                |
| Total             | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 6**



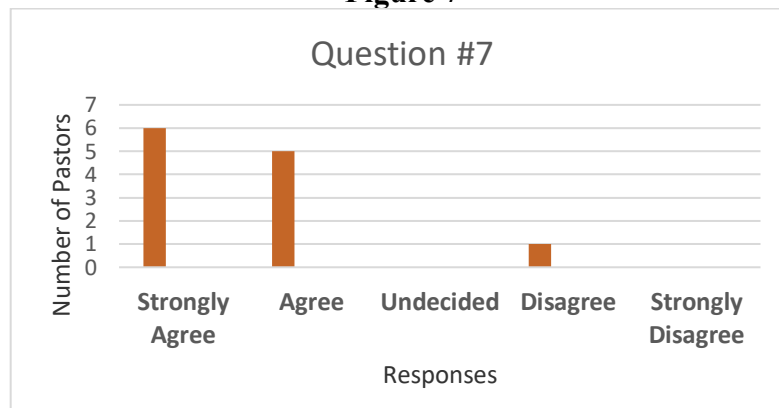
The sixth question in the survey concerned the belief that “The gift of prophecy (divine revelation) continues today. The findings indicate that five pastors (41.7%) strongly agree and seven pastors (58.3%) agree, “The gift of prophecy” continues today. None of the pastors were undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree. As such, all the pastors believe in prophecy or divine revelation.

**Responses to question # 7, “Christians can bring into existence what we state with our mouth because faith is a confession?”**

**Table 7**

| <b>Valid Responses</b> | <b>Frequency (<i>f</i>)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly Agree         | 6                           | 50%                   |
| Agree                  | 5                           | 41.7%                 |
| Undecided              | 0                           | 0%                    |
| Disagree               | 1                           | 8.3%                  |
| Strongly Disagree      | 0                           | 0%                    |
| Total                  | 12                          | 100%                  |

**Figure 7**



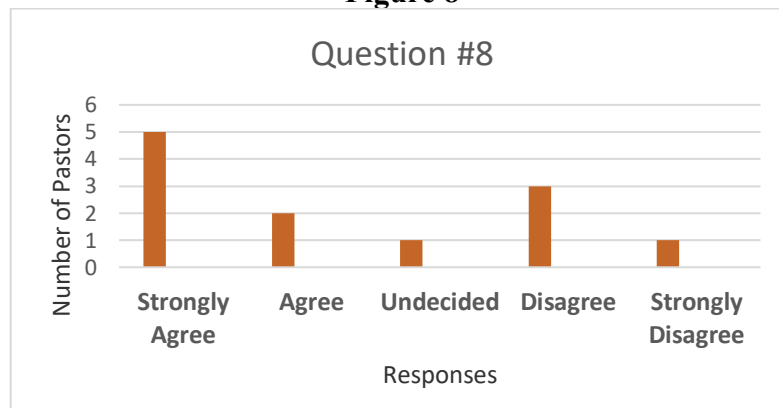
The seventh question in the survey concerned the belief that “Christians can bring into existence what we state with our mouth because faith is a confession.” The findings of this survey show that six pastors (50%) strongly agree and five pastors (41.7%) of the pastors agree that Christians can bring into existence what we state with our mouth because faith is a confession. Thus, most of the pastors, 11 pastors (91.7%), strongly agree and agree, respectively. Only one pastor (8.3%) disagree.

**Responses to the question # 8, “The gospel involves healing, holiness, and speaking in tongues?”**

**Table 8**

| <b>Valid Responses</b> | <b>Frequency (<i>f</i>)</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Strongly Agree         | 5                           | 41.7%                 |
| Agree                  | 2                           | 16.7%                 |
| Undecided              | 1                           | 8.3%                  |
| Disagree               | 3                           | 25%                   |
| Strongly Disagree      | 1                           | 8.3%                  |
|                        |                             |                       |
| Total                  | 12                          | 100%                  |

**Figure 8**



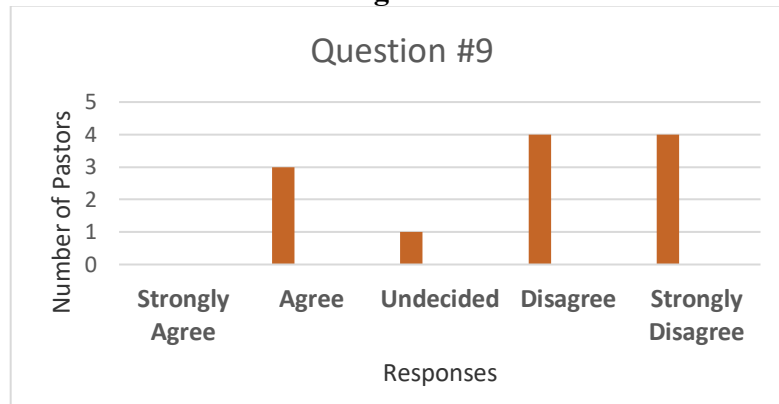
The eighth question in the survey concerned the belief that the gospel involves healing, holiness, and speaking in tongues. The findings of this survey show that five pastors (41.7%) strongly agree, two pastors agree (16.7%), one pastor (8.3%) undecided, three pastors (25%) disagree, and one pastor (8.3%). Hence, the majority of the pastors, seven pastors (58.3%), agree that the gospel involves healing, holiness, and speaking in tongues, while five pastors (41.7%) were either undecided or disagree.

**Responses to question # 9, “All suffering is a result of either sin or a lack of faith?”**

**Table 9**

| Valid Responses   | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 0                      | 0%             |
| Agree             | 3                      | 25%            |
| Undecided         | 1                      | 8.3%           |
| Disagree          | 4                      | 33.3%          |
| Strongly Disagree | 4                      | 33.3%          |
|                   |                        |                |
| Total             | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 9**



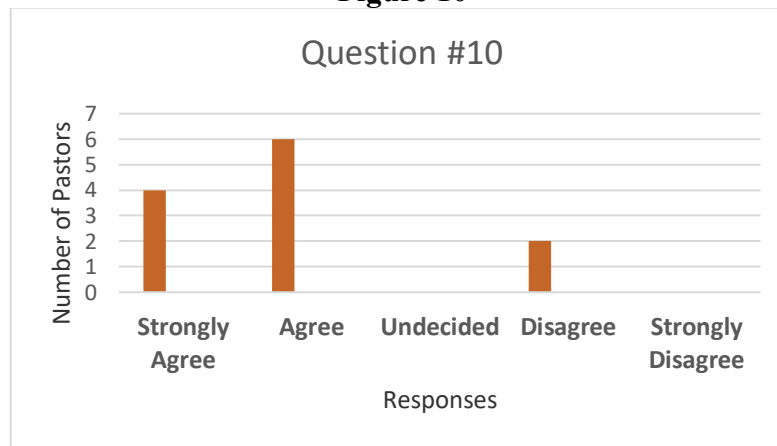
The ninth question in the survey concerned the belief that “All suffering is a result of either sin or a lack of faith.” The findings indicate that none of the pastors strongly agree that all suffering results from either sin or a lack of faith. However, three pastors (25%) agree, and one pastor (8.3%) was undecided. Moreover, 4 pastors (33.3%) disagree, and four pastors (33.3%) strongly disagree. Thus, 8 pastors (66.7%) did not believe that all suffering resulted from either sin or a lack of faith.

### Responses to question # 10, “Material wealth is a sign of God’s blessings?”

**Table 10**

| Valid Responses   | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agree    | 4                      | 33.3%          |
| Agree             | 6                      | 50%            |
| Undecided         | 0                      | 0%             |
| Disagree          | 2                      | 16.7%          |
| Strongly Disagree | 0                      | 0%             |
| Total             | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 10**



The tenth question in the survey concerned the belief in material wealth as a sign of God’s blessings. The findings indicate that four pastors (33.3%) strongly agree, and six pastors (50%) agree. Hence, most of the pastors, ten pastors (83.3%), believe material wealth is a sign of God’s blessings. Notwithstanding, two pastors (16.7%) disagree. Most of the pastors surveyed thought that material wealth is a sign of God’s blessings, yet none of them wealthy. Material wealth and riches are not signs of God’s blessings because not every rich person results from God’s blessings. Sometimes, it is quite the opposite. Material wealth is not the divine promise of God to His people as the prosperity gospel teaches.

## **Survey: Part III**

### **1. Why is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology so widespread in Liberia?**

The respondents to the survey offer various reasons why they believe that “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology is prevalent in Liberia. According to some of the pastors, this theology is widespread for material and financial gains and not because of the spiritual growth of the church. The majority of Liberians live in poverty; as such, many Christians believe in prosperity gospel messages. Many Liberians believe “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology because of a lack of proper biblical education in God's Word. Pastors do not have enough bible education to understand the difference between the prosperity gospel message and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

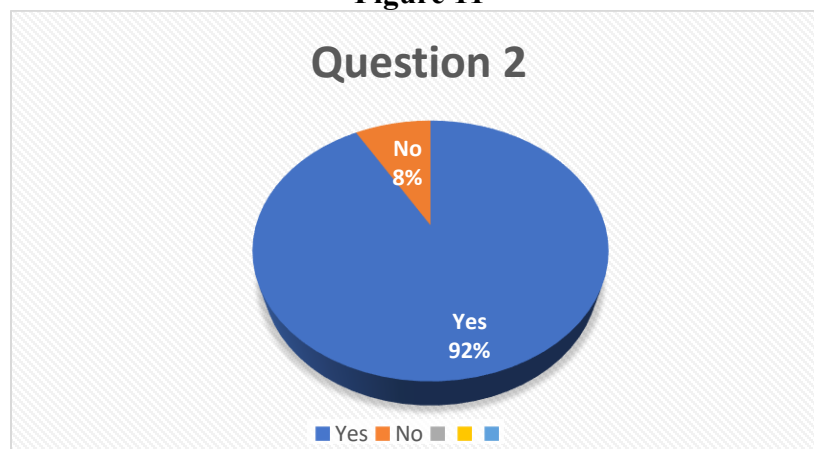
Faith, Wealth, and Health theology is widespread because of the infusion of the theology of foreign prelates, including pastors from the West (mainly the US and Europe), and other African countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. Many Liberian Christians accept the prosperity gospel theology because of a lack of support of pastors’ salaries (other benefits) and other church programs. The majority of Liberian Christians believe that God can heal any disease, and He is the provider of their needs. Christians also believe that faith is a gift from God that can work for anyone who trusts the Lord. Faith, Wealth, and Health theology is widespread in Liberia because Charismatic and Pentecostal are among the fastest-growing indigenous churches in Liberia. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Liberia mainly preach and teach prosperity gospel messages than evangelical churches. Faith, Wealth, and Health theology is widespread because, in most cases, pastors can use this theology to motivate church members to give and support church projects, etc. It is often the only means that indigenous Liberian churches have to help pastors and other church programs financially.

**2. Is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia mixed with spiritual warfare, occultism (juju), and African Traditional Religion (spiritism)? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.**

**Table 11**

| Valid Responses | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Yes             | 11                     | 92%            |
| No              | 1                      | 8%             |
| Total           | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 11**



The twelfth question in the survey concerned with the belief that “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia is mixed with spiritual warfare, occultism (juju), and African Traditional Religion (spiritism). 11pastors (92%) answered yes, while one pastor (8%) answered no. Before the arrival of Christianity in Liberia, the country was deep-rooted with the African tradition characterized by African tradition, native religions, and secret societies.<sup>328</sup> Most of the secret societies in Liberia were characterized by spirituality and rituals; however, the arrival of the “Americo-Liberians” led to forming a predominantly Christian country.<sup>329</sup>

<sup>328</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

Liberian Christians respect African Traditional Religion as their cultural heritage. As such, indigenous Liberian churches still have Liberian culture as part of their worship services. Christians mixed with African Traditional Religion (spiritism) because they see it as part of the cultural background of the preachers and teachers of the prosperity gospel message in Liberia. Liberian Christians also preach the prosperity gospel message because they are spiritually blind; they are often misled by other Christians who still practice African Traditional Religious practices and Christian culture. Moreover, Liberian culture is characterized by spiritual warfare, juju, and spiritism. Today, the prosperity gospel has become part of the Liberian Christian worldview.

Some churches practice occultism as a means of making their members loyal and supportive of their greed. Prosperity gospel messages make members zealous and dedicated towards the head of the church because church leaders often promise protection for those who adhere to the prosperity gospel message. Some Liberian pastors preach prosperity gospel messages to prove that they are powerful spiritually than others. Prosperity gospel message makes pastors gain more material wealth. Prosperity gospel message also makes pastors get more members in the church because it is characterized by “Faith, Wealth, and Health” messages. Most Liberians Christians do not like to attend churches that do not preach about “Faith, Wealth, and Health” messages.

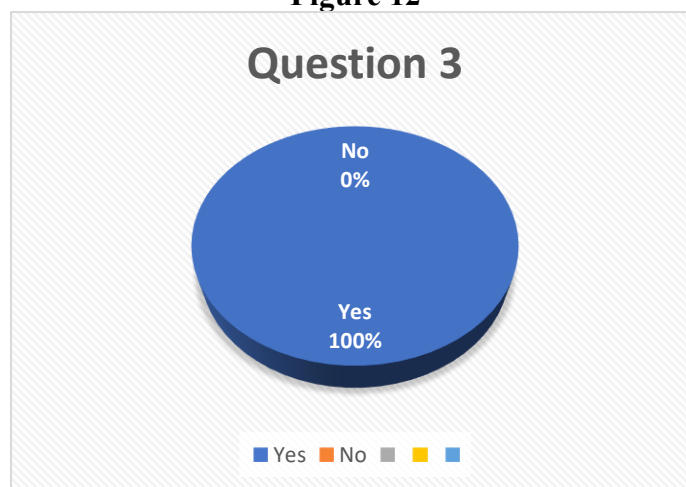
There are many churches in Liberia with different doctrines and beliefs. Liberians Christians believe all events in life have spiritual causes. Liberians Christians face the challenges of evil spirits intending to do them harm in their daily lives. Juju and spiritism are also part of the Liberian culture. Consequently, Liberians Christians look to the church to protect them from evil spirits and enemies who want to harm them.

**3. Is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia a system of belief, or a Christian culture in which Liberians live? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.**

**Table 12**

| Valid Responses | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Yes             | 12                     | 100%           |
| No              | 0                      | 0%             |
| Total           | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 12**



The thirteenth question in the survey concerned with whether “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia is a system of belief or a Christian culture in which Liberians live.

The findings indicate that 12 pastors (100%) answered yes, and no pastor answered no. The prosperity gospel in Liberia was preceded by Western Christianity. Western Christians founded missionary churches that were established by predominantly white missionaries and most of the theological faculties and seminaries, determined by Western theological endeavors that abandoned the belief in evil powers, which is prevalent in Liberian culture.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Nel. *The African Background*.

Faith, Wealth, and Health theology in Liberia is both a system of belief and Christian culture in Liberia. This theology is similar to the Liberian cultural worldview and also part of the Christian culture. Many Christians in Liberia experience both Liberian and Christian cultures, and Faith, Wealth, and Health theology has been a Christian culture in Liberia throughout our history. It is also a system of belief because of the Liberian culture of greed and the high poverty rate in Liberia. It is also a response to widespread poverty. On the contrary, some respondents believe that Faith, Wealth, and Health theology in Liberia is a system of belief and not a culture because it is taught directly from the Bible. It is also a system of belief in Liberia because the Bible itself contains so many doctrines and not only giving the life of Christ.

Faith, Wealth, and Health theology in Liberia has affected about 85% of the Christian population. It is taught/preached from the pulpit every Sunday. Some pastors do this so that they can become famous and wealthy. Some ministers use this means to have their needs met. Many Christians have gravitated towards seeking God's indulgence for material wealth. The reason is simple, faith is having trust in God that he cannot fail, lie, or change through these realities we believe. Many Christians in Liberia believe in churches with prophecies and expect to get quick results. It is a system of belief that the Holy Spirit and the world are all a part of biblical revelation. Others preach this theology in response to the challenges of evil spirits and people who want to harm them. Faith, Wealth, and Health theology also makes pastors receive good wealth and membership. Hence, Faith, Wealth, and Health theology is successful because many Liberian Christians do not enough Christian education to resist it.

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**4. Is there a link between “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia and challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problems? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.**

**Table 13**

| Valid Responses | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Yes             | 11                     | 92%            |
| No              | 1                      | 8%             |
| Total           | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 13**



The fourteenth question in the survey concerned whether there a link between “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia and challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problems. The findings indicate that 11pastors (92%) answered yes, while one pastor (8%) answered no.

The possibility of material prosperity to the believer who seeks first the kingdom of righteousness is a constant refrain throughout Liberian churches. Liberia, unlike Pentecostal and charismatic hotspots like Ghana, Nigeria (West Africa), Uganda, Kenya (East Africa), Republic of South Africa, Zimbabwe (South African), faces challenges with extreme poverty, massive unemployment, and poor health infrastructure.

There is a link because through faith, you can become wealthy and leave from the stage of poverty, and through faith, you can also receive your healing that solves your health problems. God is faithful to his word and can solve all of the challenges that we can encounter. Most respondents believe that there is a link between “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia and challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problems because of the Liberian mentality; Liberians believe that if we have faith in God, our health, unemployment, health problems will be solved. Another reason most respondents think that there is a link between “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia and other challenges is in spite of the believe, poverty, sickness/diseases, unemployment, divorces, and other ails still permeate our country/society, many Liberians believe that if you truly worship God, he will give you material wealth and He will heal you when you get sick. Most respondents also believe that there is a link between “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia and other challenges because of poverty and unemployment rate. Some people in Liberia don’t have time for God, so they do anything just to survive. Poor health condition; no more wealth. Many don’t even have the faith that God can change their problem. Liberians are excited to hear these messages but fail to follow the principles or applications.

Many Christians respond to this theology to receive material wealth. If you give to God more, God will bless you more. This theology is a response to high unemployment and poverty, and many Liberian Christians need healing and deliverance too. Moreover, a growing number of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches link faith to material blessings. Liberian Christians are encouraged to give to receive God's blessings. Every Liberian wants to be rich, and there are many sick and poor people in the church. On the contrary, bad health condition cannot make you receive good wealth. However, unemployment is one contributing factor.

5. Do you have a strategy to combat “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology teaching in your community? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.

**Table 14**

| Valid Responses | Frequency ( <i>f</i> ) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Yes             | 12                     | 100%           |
| No              | 0                      | 0%             |
|                 |                        |                |
| Total           | 12                     | 100%           |

**Figure 14**



The fifteenth question what strategies that the respondents have to combat “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology teaching in their communities. All 12 pastors (100%) answered yes. Even though all of the pastors surveyed had suggestions on how to combat the spread of the prosperity gospel, they all preached the prosperity gospel. Hence, they all expressed an implied need in some form of “African theology” that is essentially Christian and inclusive in the African culture, to replace the spread of the prosperity gospel. The unique history of Liberia, where Americo-Liberians”, who brought with them Christianity marginalized the indigenous culture.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>331</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

Many respondents to the survey suggested many strategies to combat “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology teaching in these communities as follows:

1. Churches need to take care of their pastors financially so that he/she does not feel the financial need to get money through prosperity gospel.
2. Churches also need to focus more on the qualitative growth of members than the numbers of believers in the church.
3. Teach members the principle of acquiring material wealth, health safety, and maintenance and how they can be demonstrated through faith.
4. Let People in the local communities and the church know that God is not manipulated by their prayers, faith, or giving to release material blessings.
5. Tell pastors to stop over-emphasizing material blessings at the expense of the gospel.

Other strategies that the respondents suggested included teaching local communities that having faith means having trust assurance or confidence in oneself; being a Christian does not mean that everything is bread and butter. Another strategy to combat wealth is to continually ask God to change our situation and get involved in doing something, be it business, agriculture, etc. We can also combat health by taking preventative measures. Teach biblical counseling as a way to make one understand other examples of acquiring wealth in the Bible. Ex: Isaac, Jacob, etc. Pastors need to teach them how to do business and direct them to the bank to take loans to get out of poverty.

Other strategies are 1. Teach members of my community sound doctrine that will enable them to know the truth for themselves. 2. Open the eyes of the people through the scripture that Christians having material possessions, wealth does not qualify you to go to heaven.

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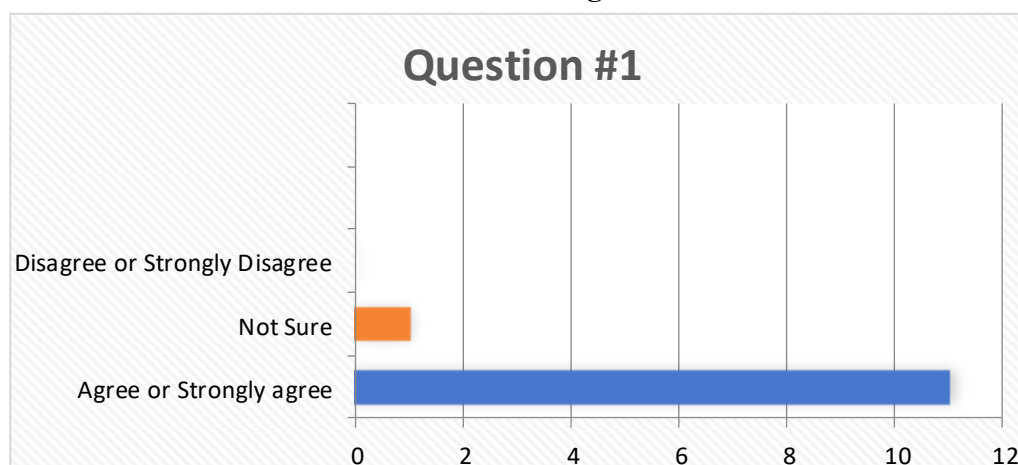
3. Teach the people that suffering for the sake of Christ is approved by scripture because even the early disciples suffered persecution for the sake of Christ.

### Data Analysis

Part 1 (Questions 1-5) of the survey deals with whether the pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) preach/teaching or believed in the prosperity gospel. According to question #1, 91.7 percent of the pastors preached/taught or believed the pastor (s) or some members of the congregation received direct revelation from God, and 8.3 percent was not sure. Hence, none of the pastors did believe in direct revelation from God.

**Question #1:** Do you preach/teach or believe that you or some members of your congregation receive direct revelation from God?

Figure 15



According to Walter A. Elwell, the term revelation intrinsically means the disclosure of what was previously unknown.<sup>332</sup> In Judeo-Christian theology, the term is used primarily of God's communication to humans of divine truths, his manifestation of himself, or his will.<sup>333</sup>

<sup>332</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1021.

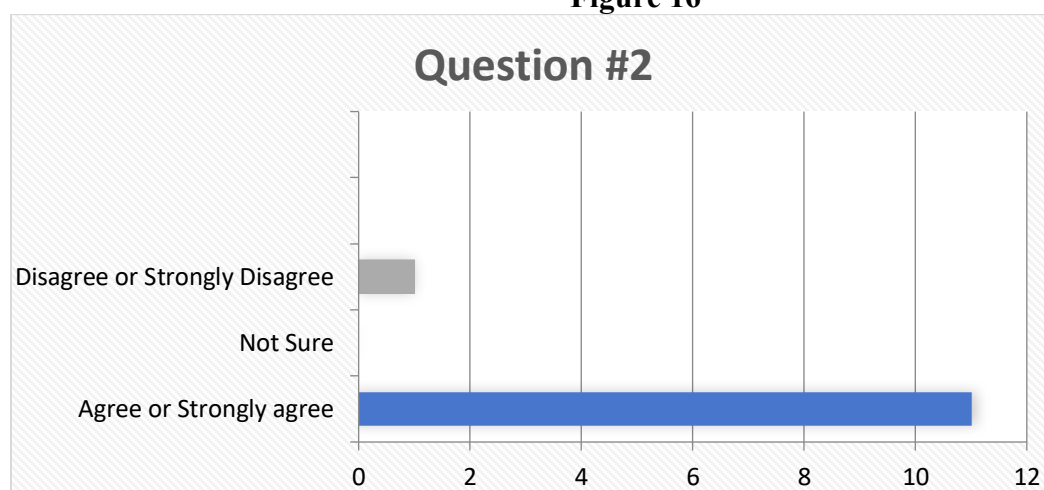
<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

Eleven of the twelfth pastors surveyed believed that the pastor or someone in his congregation receives direct revelation from God; only one of the pastors was unsure.

According to question #2, 91.6 percent of the pastors preached/taught or believed that if one gives tithes and offerings (sow seeds) in expectation of harvest, he/she will reap material blessings from God. 8.3 percent disagreed, and none of the pastors were not sure.

**Question #2:** Do you preach/teach or believe that if one gives tithes and offerings, in expectation of harvest, he or she will reap resultant material blessings from God?

**Figure 16**



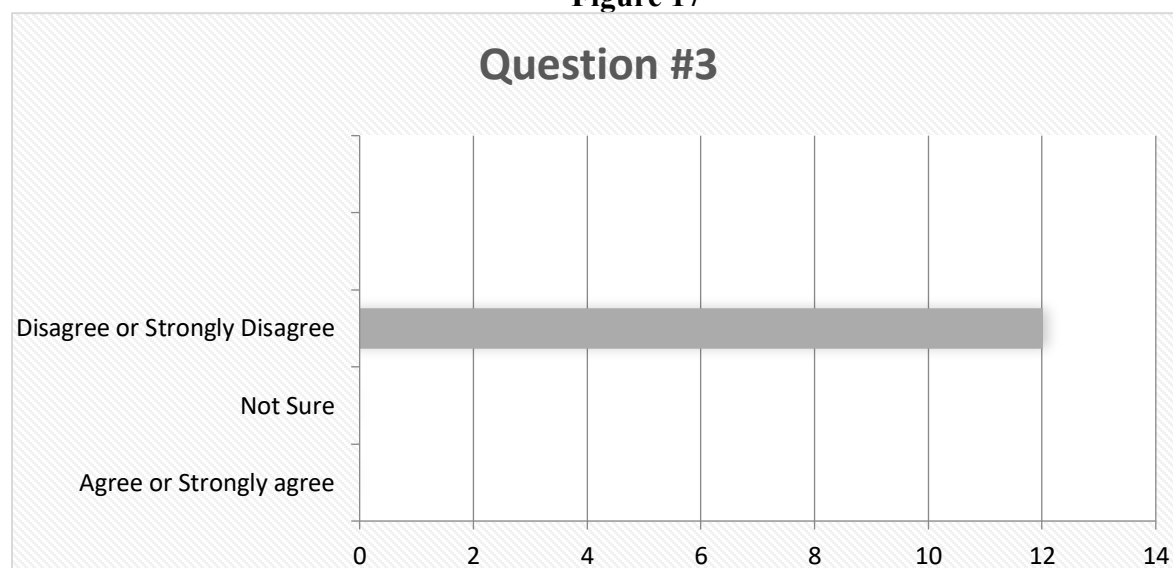
According to question #2, eleven of the pastors surveyed preached/taught or believed that if one gives tithes and offerings (sows seeds), in expectation of harvest, they will reap resultant material blessings from God and only one of the pastors disagreed. The promise of material prosperity to believers who seek first the kingdom of righteousness is a constant refrain across the African Pentecostal universe.<sup>334</sup> The Bible does not teach that if one gives tithes and offerings (sows seeds), in expectation of harvest, they will reap resultant material blessings from

<sup>334</sup> Obadare. "Righteous Billionaires"

God. The prosperity gospel acclimates carefully chosen verses from the Bible like Malachi 3:10 to persuade people to give charitably; but, the context of this verse has nothing to do with tithing.

**Question #3:** Do you preach/teach or believe that poverty could be a blessing from God because Jesus was not rich.

**Figure 17**



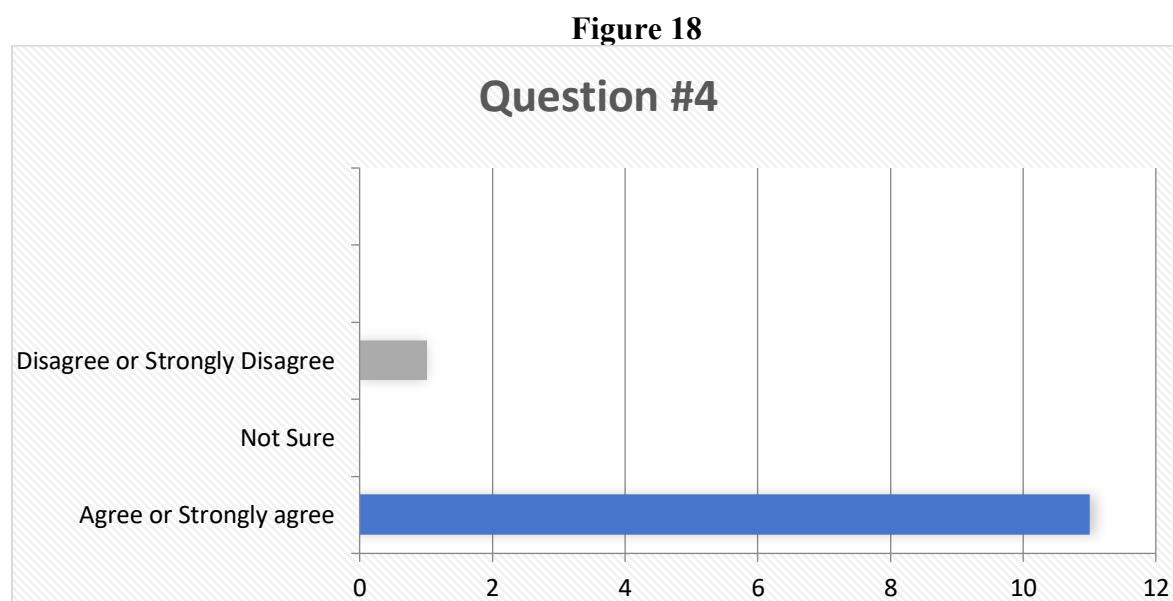
According to question #3, none of the pastors preached/taught or believed poverty could be a blessing from God because Jesus was not rich. None of the pastors was unsure; all of the pastors (100%) disagreed with the notion that poverty could be a blessing from God.

Jesus is not against Christians, been prosperous (materially). However, Jesus encourages Christians not to store up treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19), and He also challenges Christians to put their primary focus on God and not money (Matt.6:24) because righteous, upright Christians also suffered (Job 1:1), and even Christ suffered (1 Pet. 2:22-24). Consequently, prosperity in Christ means to have faith in Him and obey him personally.

According to Jesus' teachings, life is more than just being content with material wealth; Jesus taught that the world and its riches are transient; people should strive for something that lasts into eternity.<sup>335</sup>

According to question #4, 91.7 percent of pastors surveyed in the study preached/taught or believed that Christians have authority over poverty, wealth, and health in the name of Jesus Christ. None of the pastors was undecided, and 8.3 percent disagreed.

**Question #4:** Do you preach/teach or believe that Christians have authority over poverty, wealth, and health in the name of Jesus Christ.



According to Question #4, eleven of the pastors preached/taught or believed that Christians have authority over poverty, wealth, and health in the name of Jesus Christ. None of the pastors was unsure, and only one of the pastors surveyed disagreed.

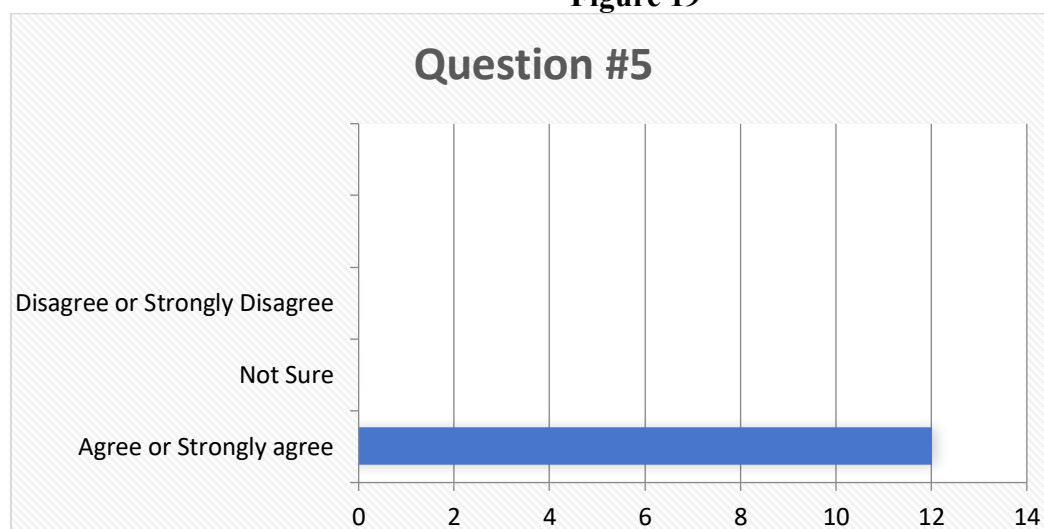
<sup>335</sup> Magezi and Manzanga, *Prosperity and Health*.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to ‘me’. As such, Jesus delegates his authority to Christians to preach the word and make disciples of all nations, baptize people, in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching to obey everything that I have commanded you”. All authority is given to Jesus.

According to question #5, all of the pastors (100%) preached/taught or believed that Christians can speak words to produce positive results in one’s life. None of the pastors was undecided, and none of the pastors disagreed.

**Question #5:** Do you preach/teach or believe that Christians have the power to speak words to produce positive results in one’s life.

**Figure 19**



According to question #5, All twelve (100%) of the pastors agree or strongly agreed that they preached/taught or believed that Christians can speak words (Positive confession) to produce positive results in one’s life. Positive confession is one of the tenants of the prosperity gospel. The Bible speaks about “confessions” as an agreement with what God has said in His Word, not what one which to happen. Thus, Christians should confess in agreement which what God has promised and not “positive confessions” demanding human desires.

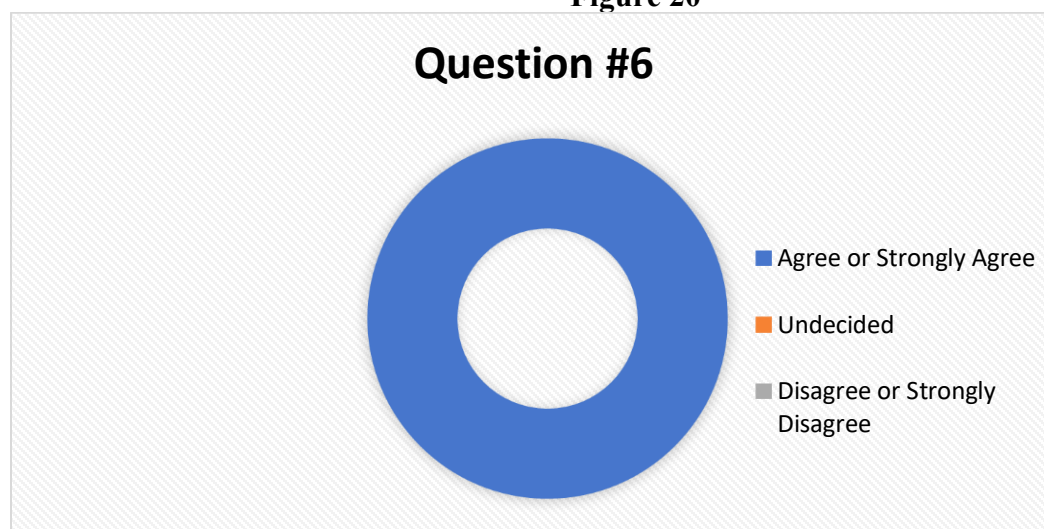
On the other hand, “negative confessions” does not renounce God’s blessings. However, there is nothing wrong with positive confession or reaffirming God’s promises, given God’s Word. Based on the responses from questions 1-5, the researcher believes that pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) are actively preaching the prosperity gospel.

Part II (Questions 6-10) of the survey deals with whether the pastors responding to the survey are using the prism of the prosperity gospel to interpret some biblical concepts often misinterpreted by proponents of the prosperity gospel.

According to Question, all (100%) of the pastors believed that the gift of prophecy (divine revelation) continues today. None of the pastors was undecided or disagreed.

**Question #6:** The gift of prophecy (divine revelation) continues today.

**Figure 20**



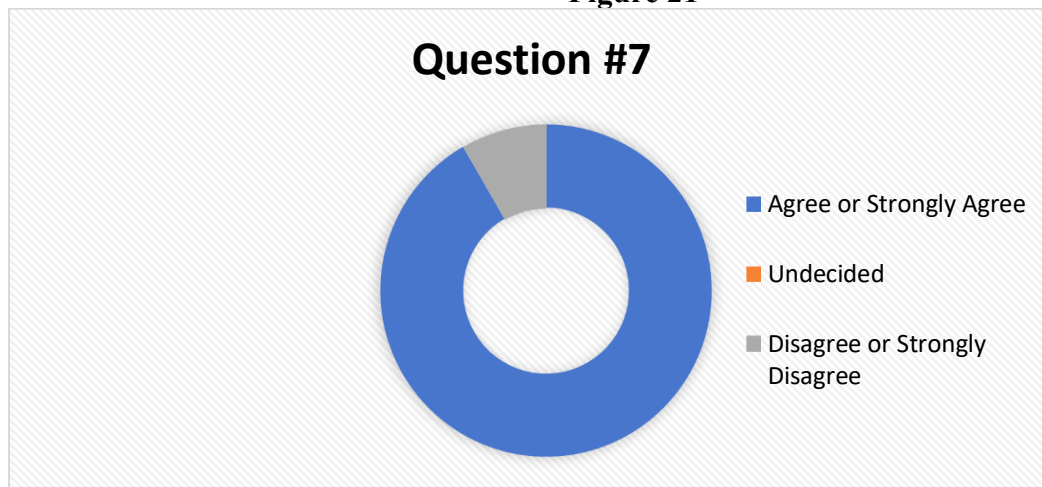
The gift of prophecy is a controversial issue among evangelicals, charismatics, and Pentecostals, and most Bible-believing Christians disagree on whether the gift of prophesy continues today. As a communicative act, authentic Old Testament prophecies always carry divine authority through the Holy Spirit (Num. 11:24-29; Joel 2:28).

The New Testament depicts prophecy as divinely inspired miraculous activities (Matt.7:22; Mark 6:14-15; Luke 7:12-16) empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-17). The New Testament expects the gift of prophecy to cease at some point; “continuationists” believe the gift of prophecy will continue until Christ return while “cessationists” believe the gift of prophecy is no longer operational. However, proponents of the prosperity gospel believe in the gift of prophecy.

According to question #7, 91.7 percent of the pastors agreed or strongly agreed that Christians could bring into existence what we state with our mouth because faith is a confession. None of the pastors were undecided, and 8.3 percent of the pastors disagree.

**Question #7:** Christians can bring into existence what we state with our mouth because faith is a confession.

**Figure 21**



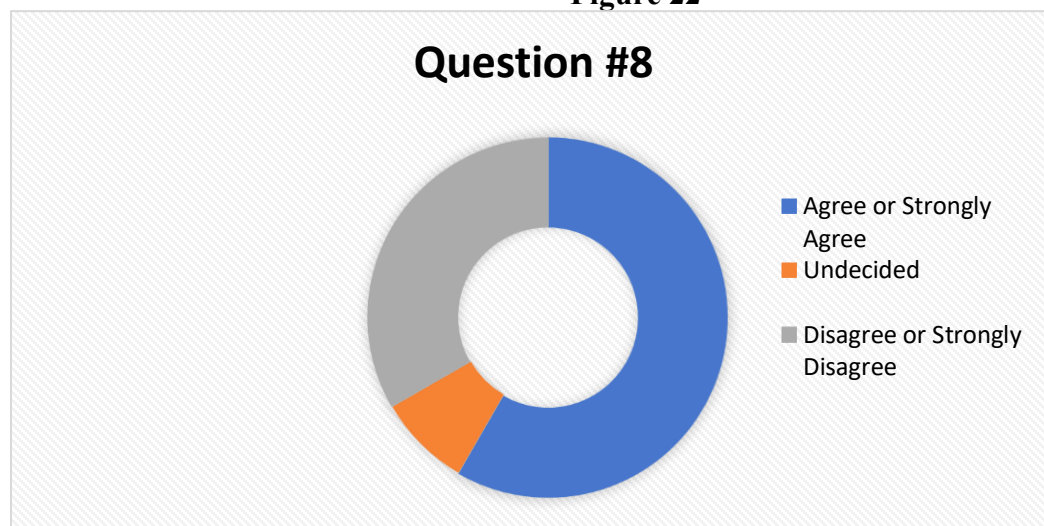
Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Heb.11:1). Faith also comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ (Rom. 10:17).

Walter A. Elwell describes the biblical idea of faith as follows: “1. Faith in God involves the right belief about God. 2. Faith rest on divine testimony. 3. Faith is a supernature divine gift”.<sup>336</sup> Authentic faith in God is about seeking God first and aligning our thoughts with his desire and thoughts for our lives. God is the only one who can speak things into existence. No man can speak things into existence, and it happens if the Lord has not decreed it (Lam.3:37). Hence, we need to conform our will to God’s will (Luke 22:42).

Accordingly, 58.3 percent of the pastors agreed that the gospel involves healing, holiness, and speaking in tongues. 8.3 percent were undecided, and 33.3 percent disagreed.

**Question #8:** The gospel involves healing, holiness, and speaking in tongues

**Figure 22**



People have been reading the New Testament for as long as the documents have been in existence.<sup>337</sup> As a pivotal part of the New Testament, The Gospels represent a unique style of

<sup>336</sup> Elwell. *Evangelical Dictionary*, 432.

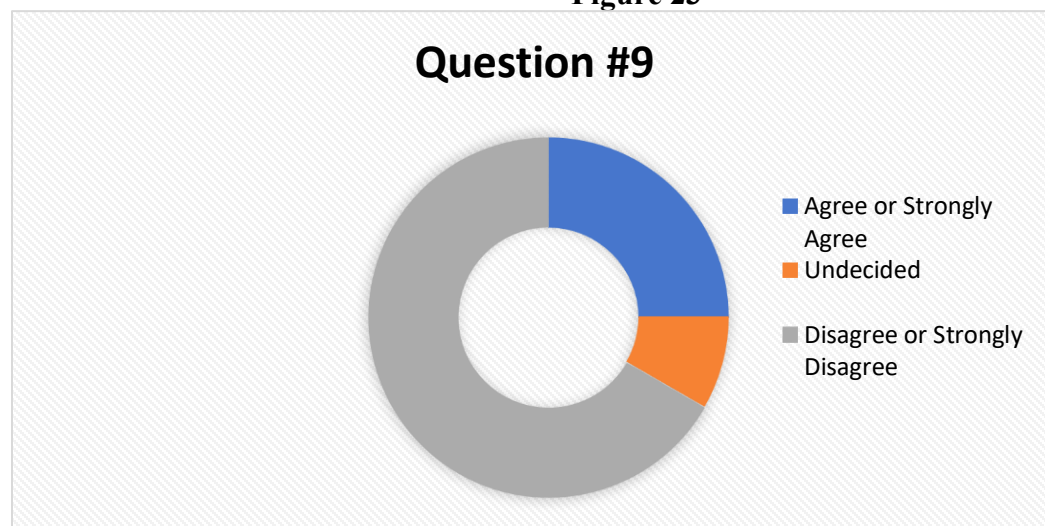
<sup>337</sup> D. A. Carson, and Douglas. J. Moon. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 23.

literature, different from the style of ancient writings and other modern writings.<sup>338</sup> To preach the gospel of Christ, preach sermons from the books of the gospel. The gospels are the Book of Matthew, Book of Mark, Book of Luke, and the Book of John. The gospel is the good news of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection; the gospel describes Jesus' message "repent and believe the gospel." The gospels represent a proclamation of Jesus' actions for our salvation written from a specific theological perspective.<sup>339</sup>

According to question #9, 25 percent of the pastors agreed that all suffering results from either sin or a lack of faith. 8.3 percent were undecided, and 66.6 percent disagreed.

**Question #9:** All suffering is a result of either sin or a lack of faith.

**Figure 23**



According to the Bible, all suffering is not a result of either sin or a lack of faith. Jesus and his disciples. Christians do not need to guess about the cause of suffering like the disciples of Jesus did; all suffering is not a punishment from God for sin.

<sup>338</sup> Thomas D. Lea. and David Alan Black. *The New Testament its Background and Message (2nd ed.)*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman), 2003, 131.

<sup>339</sup> Lea. And Black. *New Testament*, 132

According to John 9:1-3:

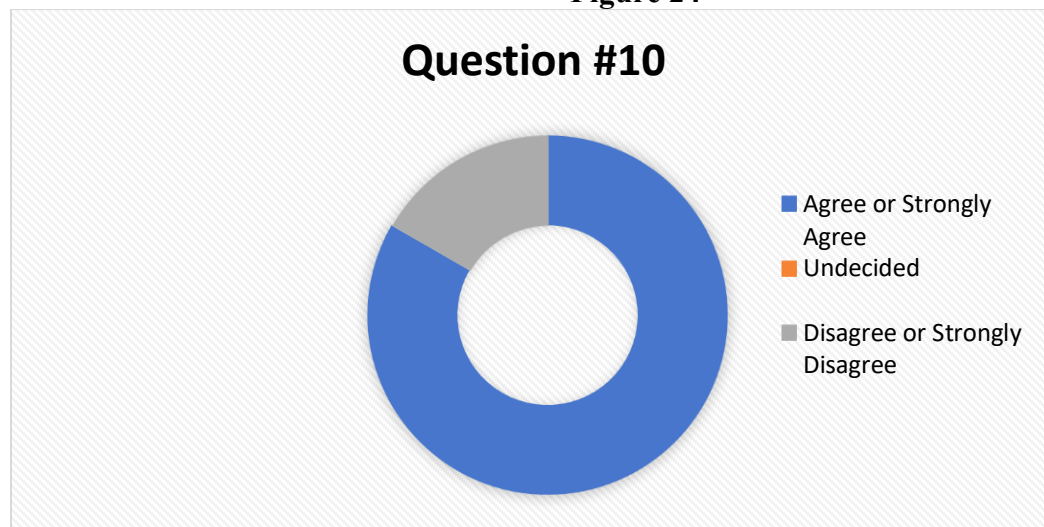
“As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’”

Jesus Christ did not lack faith, but he suffered. Jesus Christ suffered, and believers will also suffer in the flesh. According to 1 Peter 4:1a: “Therefore, since Christ suffered in the body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude...” believers are to rejoice in sharing the suffering of Christ so that they may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Pet. 4:13). If believers suffered as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God to bear that name (1 Pet. 4:16).

According to question #10, 83.3 percent of the pastors believed material wealth is a sign of God’s blessings. None of the pastors were undecided, and 16.7 percent disagreed.

**Question #10:** Material wealth is a sign of God’s blessings.

**Figure 24**



The love for material possessions and riches is a subtle form of idolatry (Col.3:5). Jesus emphasized the transitory significance of worldly (material) wealth and that Christians’ hearts should be filled with what is a most treasure, the love of God.

According to Matthew 6:19-21:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.

1 John 2:16:

“For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, comes not from the Father but from the world.” Not all material wealth is a sign of God’s blessings.

Christians should not focus on temporal things like material wealth, but instead store up treasure for themselves in heaven because where your treasure is, there your heart will also be. Based on the results of the survey, most of the pastors had a faulty interpretation of Scripture skewed by the underpinnings of the prosperity gospel even though all of the pastors were trained as evangelical pastors.

### **Common Themes and Strategies**

Part III (Questions 11-15) of the survey why the prosperity gospel message is prevalent in Liberia, and what strategies could the church do to reduce the proliferation of this gospel. The researcher has established the following common themes from questions 11-14 and suggested strategies from question 15.

#### **Common Themes**

**Question #11:** Why is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology so widespread in Liberia?

- Pastors preach the prosperity gospel to gain material and financial gains quickly (wealth).
- Pastors lack adequate theological education and biblical knowledge (Faith).
- Liberian Christians want instant miracles, and they believe God can heal their diseases (health).
- Pastors preach prosperity gospel to gain numerical growth of the church (evangelism).
- Because of the extreme poverty rate in Liberia, pastors preach the prosperity gospel to motivate members to give tithes and offerings for the pastor and church welfare (Stewardship).

**Question #12:** Is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia mixed with spiritual warfare, occultism (juju), and African Traditional Religion (spiritism)? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.

- Liberians believe that there is a relationship between Christianity, Culture, and tradition.
- The Liberian culture is characterized by spiritual warfare, occultism (juju), and African Traditional Religion (spiritism).
- Liberians believe that all events in life have spiritual causes; thus, Liberian Christians look to the church to protect them from evil spirits and their enemies.

**Question #13:** Is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia a system of belief, or a Christian culture in which Liberians live? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.

- The prosperity gospel is now part of the Liberian Christian cultural landscape.
- The prosperity gospel fits with the Liberian worldview.
- The prosperity gospel is also a system of belief because it is preached in the church

**Question #14:** Is there a link between “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia and challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problems? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.

- The prosperity gospel promise hope for solving poverty, unemployment, and health problems in Liberia.
- Many Liberian Christians look to the church for divine healing and deliverance from evil spirits.

### **Suggested Strategies**

**Question#15:** Do you have a strategy to combat “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology teaching in your community? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.

- Pastors need to preach/teach the primacy of the gospel of Christ rather than the prosperity gospel message.
- Pastors need to do community outreach programs to teach Liberian Christians the difference between the gospel of Christ and the prosperity gospel message.
- All pastors need to have formal education in theology and hermeneutical interpretation of scripture to prevent unintended prosperity gospel exegesis.
- Churches need to take care of their pastors financially so that they don’t feel the need to get money from church members through preaching the prosperity gospel.
- Churches need to focus more on the qualitative growth of members rather than the quantitative growth of the church.
- Pastors should not use the word of God as a means to acquire personal wealth at the expense of incorrectly interpreting scriptures for personal gains.

- Pastors need to teach church members and Christians in their local communities that they cannot force God by faith to grant prayers or give tithes/offering to release material blessings.
- Pastors should not preach any other gospel except the gospel of Christ through the following means:
  1. Sermons
  2. Bible Studies
  3. Seminars/workshops
  4. Pastor/leadership training
  5. Community outreach programs

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This doctoral thesis project has provided a brief overview of the prosperity gospel message from an African perspective. This research project is significant because there is no comprehensive doctoral research thesis on the prosperity gospel in the Liberian context. The researcher decided not to focus on proponents of the prosperity gospel in Liberia or Africa, but rather focus on why a growing number of pastors in Liberia, especially in Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church), are preaching prosperity gospel message rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. As such, the researcher did a thorough review of existing literature on prosperity, the gospel message, prosperity gospel in Africa, and the prosperity gospel in Liberia.

This doctoral researcher project offers a brief discussion of some of the central teachings of founders of the prosperity gospel (Health and Wealth Gospel) and a milieu of the central tenets of the prosperity gospel. The research further explored several teachings of the prosperity gospel message that evolved regarding “the creative power of the tongue to produce positive results,” “naming and claiming health and wealth,” and “sowing seed faith for multiplication of one’s tithes and offerings.” The researcher examined the preaching and teachings of the prosperity gospel message in Liberia. The research found that many pastors in Liberia have shifted from an evangelical view of Christian Ministry (church) as a sacrificial called to the body of Jesus Christ to an entrepreneurial view of Christian ministry (church) advanced by the prosperity gospel message.

The prosperity gospel message in Liberia is a blend of traditional African religion. African traditional religion mainly focuses on protection from evil spirits, sickness, and death, victory over one’s enemies, and prayer for long life, good health, and material prosperity with decrease concern for the deity of Christ. Hence, most proponents of the prosperity gospel

message in Liberia are less matured Christians and cultural Christians. They usually focused on worldly concerns rather than the deity of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, a vast number of entrepreneurial pastors, often from indigenous Liberian Christian churches presents a faulty hermeneutical exegesis of the Word of God because they lack formal theological education.

### **The Consequence of Prosperity Gospel Message**

The most significant consequence of the prosperity gospel message in Liberia is it has become a substitute to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors and Christians should preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to everyone. The “Great Commission” is an instruction of the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples to spread the Good News of the Gospel of Christ to all nations of the world, everyone. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).”

The “Great Commission” is significant in Christian theology because it emphasizes work, Christian ministry, missionary, evangelism, and discipleship. The “Great Commission” is significant because it is pivotal to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors should emphasize the gospel of Jesus Christ because it teaches about Jesus and his death and resurrection, which allows people into the kingdom of God (Heaven).

The gospel of Christ is not optional, and Jesus commanded his disciples to preach and teach the Good News of Jesus Christ (the Gospel of Jesus Christ). Put merely, and Apostle Paul explained the Gospel of Christ as the message of salvation, justification, and sanctification, it is a simple exposition of the central message of the Bible, Jesus Christ. Instead, many Liberian pastors are preaching the prosperity gospel as a substitute for the Gospel of Christ.

Many Liberian Christians lack foundational knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ because their pastors are preaching and teaching the prosperity gospel message.

The prosperity gospel message from an African perspective, which is relevant in the Liberian context, is paradoxically placed. The prosperity gospel is thriving in African settings of extreme poverty.<sup>340</sup> African Christians who embrace the prosperity gospel message continue to “name it,” “claim it” while they continue to drown in the unholy alliance of poverty, unemployment, and inequality.<sup>341</sup> The congregants continue to hope, even in their hopelessness, while their pastors are living prosperous lives.<sup>342</sup>

The pastors continue to preach “sowing and watering the seed of faith,” which is one of the basic tenets of the theology of the prosperity gospel.<sup>343</sup> Many Liberians give because their pastors taught them to “sow seeds of faith” to reap material rewards. Thus, they provide not out their love for Jesus Christ, but on the blessing motif: according to the prosperity gospel, Christians decide to give in expectation of God’s blessings, happiness, or material wealth.

### **The Focus of Prosperity Gospel and Liberia**

Research regarding the prosperity gospel message in Liberia needs to focus more on “African Christianity.” African Christianity draws from both the Christian faith and African Traditional Religion (ATR); it is an amalgamation of Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR).<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Mashau and Kgatle. “*Culture of Greed*”.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Mokhoathi. *Contextual Theology*.

Christianity, as a “non-cultural entity,” encompasses different cultures as an institution that regards the Lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>345</sup> A Christian is “a person who has accepted the Christian faith and made a decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ.”<sup>346</sup> Church or Christian ministry cannot be done in a cultural vacuum. As such, the prosperity gospel message in Liberia thrives on African spirituality. Spirituality is always culturally formed and informed.<sup>347</sup>

African spirituality involves deeper human values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices based on various African worldviews. Freed slaves founded Liberia from the United States, who also introduce indigenous Liberians to Christianity. Hence, Christianity in Liberia has African (Liberian) cultural practices and Western Christian underpinnings. The amalgamation of Liberian cultural traditions and Western Christian heritage has led to a unique blend of Liberian Christianity that is mostly influenced by ceremonial and charitable characteristics of Christianity rather than a lifestyle transformation of being “born again” (John 3:3).

Early Western missionaries would perceive Christian identity as equivalent to the Western cultural and religious heritage, which excluded African cultural practices, even if these practices were not against tenants of the Christian faith because they preferred their own culture. Hence, this misguided approach to evangelism has some negative consequences. One of these consequences is African (Liberia) converts were forced to live double lives: “on the one hand, they accepted the norms introduced by missionaries who saw nothing valuable in the African culture, on the other hand, converts could not deny their own cultural identity.”<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Mokhoathi. *Contextual Theology*.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Marumo. “*Charismatic Religions*”, 207-23.

<sup>348</sup> Mokhoathi. *Contextual Theology*.

African (Liberian) converts often had to abandon their traditional African (Liberian) customs and adapt Western ones. Culture is the “artificial, secondary environment which superimposes on the natural.”<sup>349</sup> Liberian cultural context, as a secondary environment, is relevant because Christian ministry (church) is carried out in this environment; put merely, Liberian culture provides the framework in which Christianity in Liberia is carried out. The prosperity gospel message is attractive to indigenous Liberian because it is favorable to the contextualization of Christianity to Liberian cultural and religious heritage. Hence, the prosperity gospel message in Liberia is synchronized with traditional practices.

It is not unusual for pastors and other church leaders who profess Christianity to revert to traditional African practices like traditional methods of healing, while still pretending to be “bona fide” Christians. The contextualization of Christianity in Africa mainly focused on integrating the positive aspects of the African cultural heritage into the Christian faith, and overlook two important, influential components:<sup>350</sup> 1. African cultural and religious heritage and 2. African traditional methods of healing. The culture and religious heritage of many African serves as they see the world (worldview) and understand wellness.<sup>351</sup> The results of this research project, compared to information from previous studies or published works analyzed in the literature review was similar, in many ways, to published studies on the prosperity gospel in Africa.

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<sup>349</sup> Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. (New York: Harper and Brothers), 1956.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Mokhoathi. *Contextual Theology*

Some notable differences were most pastors of indigenous churches believe that prosperity gospel is an alternative to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, they preach prosperity gospel in response to their congregational demand, healing of sickness and diseases, similarity to African cultural heritage, status (pastor's recognition as a "man of God), and material wealth (mostly intended to increase tithes and offerings). Most pastors, who preach prosperity gospel in indigenous Liberian churches, are less wealthy than their counterparts in other African countries (with a similar economic condition) because the purpose of preaching prosperity gospel is to improve stewardship rather than personal affluence.

### **A Snapshot of Prosperity Gospel Framework**

The prosperity gospel in Liberia, as an alternative to the gospel of Christ, represents a redirection from the primacy of the gospel of Christ for "salvation" to a reframing of Christian beliefs and practices around concepts of "material salvation" accentuated by the central belief that God will give wealth and good health to people who have enough faith. The widespread preaching and teaching of the prosperity gospel message further indicate a paradigmatic shift in the thinking of Liberian pastors and their local congregations. The prosperity gospel is a contraction of faith, triggered by copious misinterpretations of Scripture, that thrives around ritual enactment of tithings and offerings.

The prosperity gospel message is successfully changing the face of indigenous Liberian churches. The economic, governance and social challenges experienced by Liberians in the past years since the Liberian Civil War (1989-2005) have caused immense poverty and suffering. Poverty and unemployment are prevalent in Liberia, driven by a shrinking economy. In such a context, prosperity gospel preaching has increased to address the people's challenges and experiences.

The promises of the prosperity gospel message are highly convincing to the suffering and unemployed. The prosperity gospel message is prevalent in indigenous Liberian churches because it provides hope to their congregations in desperation and increases in tithes and offerings to these churches. When prosperity gospel promises fail to materialize, the followers are accused of not sowing enough seeds, lack of faith, etc. Prosperity gospel thrives in indigenous Liberia churches because it is more communicative with Liberian cultural and religious heritage characterized by prayers for material and physical blessings (material wealth), protection from sickness and death for longer life (Health), victory over enemies; protection from evil spirits and ancestral curses (Name it; Claim it). Common concerns about deities are usually associated with deliverance from demonic influence rather than emphasizing God's kingdom and Salvation. Hence, the prosperity gospel message thrives in such of environment.

### **The Prosperity Gospel Message in the West**

The proponents of the prosperity gospel message in the West have made a radical departure from historic, orthodox Christianity in how they view the Scriptures.<sup>352</sup> Prosperity gospel preachers often deny the inerrancy of Scriptures and adjust Scriptures to change the meaning to suit their interpretation of Scriptures radically. This "Faith, Wealth, and Health" theology (prosperity Gospel) is biblically flawed because it presents an elevated view of humanity that one can claim health and wealth; after all, Jesus died not only for sins but also for sickness.<sup>353</sup> Most proponents of the prosperity gospel message in the West understand the gospel of Christ; they know the truth, but knowingly substitute "biblical truths" because of their worldly convictions.

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<sup>352</sup> Paul Enns. *The Handbook of Theology*. (Chicago: Moody Publishers), 2008.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

### **The Prosperity Gospel in sub-Saharan Africa**

Proponents of the prosperity gospel message in sub-Saharan African countries (like Ghana and Nigeria) and those above, concentrate on a more entrepreneurial version of the prosperity gospel. The proponents of the prosperity gospel message have fundamentally shifted their belief from one of anti-materialism preached by frugal heavenly-focused pastors, to a materialistic message of wealth and health, preached by extravagant earthly-focused pastors desiring amass personal wealth at the expense of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **The Prosperity Gospel in Liberia**

The researcher learned from implementing this project that prosperity gospel, in the Liberian context, is the motive for the preaching and teaching of prosperity gospel messages is somewhat different from the United States and other African countries. Notwithstanding, there is a common thread of materialism and flawed interpretations of Scripture. Two main reasons contribute to the widespread preaching of the prosperity gospel in Liberia.

#### **The Liberian Culture and Tradition**

The unique history of Liberia made the country more susceptible to any form of Christianity from the United States. Freed slaves from the United States (Americo-Liberians) and indigenous West Africans founded the Republic of Liberia as a Christian nation. The “Americo-Liberians” introduce Christianity to the indigenous population from the founding of the nation. Before the advent of Christianity in Liberia, the country was firmly entrenched with African traditions, native religions, and secret societies characterized by spirituality and rituals.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

Americo-Liberians' arrival in Liberia led to Liberia being predominantly a Christian country; the 2008 census of Liberia posits that 85.5% of the Liberian population identifies as Christian.<sup>355</sup> The Americo-Liberians introduced protestant Christianity (namely Baptist, Methodists, and Episcopal Churches) in Liberia. Some of these protestant churches were part of the evangelical movement. The Liberian Church mission is a product of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century missionary movement fascinated Western Europe and the United States. Most Liberian worship services today is a blend of Western and African traditions.

Early missionaries from the West to Liberia were too concerned with their own cultural and religious heritage; they did not understand much of the African culture; thus, their misguided understanding of African culture resulted in the perception that African Christian identity was equivalent to western cultural and religious heritage.<sup>356</sup> Thus, African converts to Christianity were expected to abandon their traditional African customs and adapt to western ones.<sup>357</sup>

Today, Liberian Christianity is a combination of Western religious heritage and traditional African customs and traditions. Thus, many indigenous Liberian Christians bear the strain of having to live double standards. Indigenous (Initiated, Independent, or Instituted) African Churches since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been sustaining African traditional beliefs with the power of evil that always interfere in human destinies for ills.<sup>358</sup> Nonetheless, in most missionary churches (Western Churches) in Africa, including Liberia, conversion to Christianity implies that the invitation to accept the Christian religion, as well as a call to

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<sup>355</sup> Gbotoe and Kgatla. *Role of Christianity*.

<sup>356</sup> Mokhoathi. *Contextual Theology*

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Nel. *The African Background*

participate in the western interpretation of reality because the missionary enterprise was seeking to implant Christianity by the method of Western (European) worldview.<sup>359</sup>

In the case of Liberian Churches, the American worldview. Hence, to become a Christian was to become less African and more civilized in Western terms.<sup>360</sup> However, in the indigenous churches that succeeded the missionary churches, the impact of the element of the African worldview can be seen with respect for African heritage.<sup>361</sup>

From an African cultural and traditional background, the prosperity gospel message in Liberia resonates with Liberians because it has common features with Liberian cultural and traditions such as the performing of miracles on healing and deliverance from evil spirits, the use of holy oil or holy water by followers, and the use of prayer handkerchief and other mantles as points of contact for the liberation of members from the curse of poverty, sickness, and people who want to do them harm. Other Liberian rituals that are prominent in prosperity gospel messages include the prayers for delivering followers from demons and witchery, warding off evil spirits, and the practice of magical skills, spells, and abilities present in sorcery or wizardry. The prosperity gospel message in Liberia is not limited to indigenous Liberian Churches; it is widespread in Liberian Christianity because Liberians can relate to the prosperity gospel. After all, it fits the Liberian worldview that encourages rigorous thinking because of the belief that “nothing happens for nothing” and “there is a reason behind everything that happens.”

Prosperity gospel in Liberia is prevalent in Liberia because of the increasing amount of indigenous Liberian churches (mostly Pentecostal or Charismatic).

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Nel. *The African Background*.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

Pentecostalism is effectively changing the face of African Christianity because of its pneumatic spirituality that relates to the primal African spirituality and worldview.<sup>362</sup>

In African Pentecostalism, salvation is translated holistically into prosperity and wealth, dignity, fertility, and a happy marriage, security, vitality, healing, and health, equilibrium in the cosmos, as well as eternal life that awaits the believer after death.<sup>363</sup> Moreover, Pentecostal Christians visit prophets to seek spiritual direction and acquire knowledge about the spiritual causes of their mishaps.<sup>364</sup> Hence, African Pentecostalism does not necessarily represent a syncretistic utilization of aspects of African primal spirituality. However, the possibility exists that it might and did happen, requiring the ability to discern spirits (1 Cor. 12:10) and to critically evaluate its theology and praxis.<sup>365</sup>

Because Americo-Liberians introduced Christianity from the United States and Western missionaries founded most denominational churches in Liberia, it is easy for Liberian Christians to accept the Prosperity gospel message as a new wave of modern Christian teaching from the United States. Furthermore, there are a lot of Liberian Christians, even evangelicals. They believe and sometimes support proponents of the prosperity gospel message in the United States (the West) and other African countries. According to Jones and Woodbridge, evangelical churches are full of people who, perhaps unknowingly, regularly watch prosperity gospel teachers on television.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Nel. *The African Background*, 53.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Jones and Woodbridge

Jones and Woodbridge posit that a common scenario:<sup>367</sup>

the polished, friendly, motivational preacher asks for money in order to support his ministry; in return, he promises prayers on the donors' behalf, as well as a financial blessing from God. The viewer send the money because they appreciate the positive teaching and could use a little bit more money to pay their bills. When an increase in income does not occur, however, consumer of the prosperity message often become self-critical, thinking that the failure rests in their own lack of faith, or they become disappointed and angry with God.

The research regarding why Liberian pastors preached prosperity gospel messages rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ needs to continue to find out what the Liberian churches feel about the prosperity gospel message. This scope of this research was limited only to why the Liberian pastors preached the prosperity gospel messages. The results of this research were similar to most of the previous studies or published works on prosperity gospel in Africa; however, the prosperity gospel in Liberia was different because of the Liberian Christians cultural heritage that has a direct linkage to the United States. As such, the prosperity gospel message in Liberia is prevalent in the indigenous churches as compared to the denominational churches which were established by freed slaves and missionaries from the West. Indigenous Liberian churches are mostly Pentecostal, Charismatic, or both Pentecostal and Charismatic. Thus, they are prone to accept the prosperity gospel message because prosperity gospel has its roots in the churches mentioned above. One thing that the researcher learned from implementing the project is the prosperity gospel message in Liberia is different from other countries because the main focus of many of the pastors preaching prosperity gospel was not mainly to get material wealth for themselves. The research shows that many of the pastors surveyed use the prosperity gospel message to raise funds (tithes and offerings) for the day-to-day running of their congregations, and not for themselves.

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<sup>367</sup> Jones and Woodbridge

Other pastors surveyed in the study claimed to preach the prosperity gospel message because members of their churches will not come to church service if the pastors do not preach the prosperity gospel message (Stewardship). In contrast, others claimed that they preached prosperity gospel messages for financial reasons since their congregations will not have enough money to support the pastors financially (welfare).

Unlike most of the information gleaned from published works analyzed in the literature review, most Liberian pastors do not preach prosperity gospel due to greed. As such, most of the proponents of the prosperity gospel in Liberia are not wealthy than other African countries. In most cases, Liberian pastors give most of the material wealth generated from prosperity gospel message to the church rather than using it for themselves; notwithstanding, there few exceptions where pastors are driven by greed. These pastors mostly use the prosperity gospel principle of “sowing seeds” for material wealth, intercessory prayers (usually against evil spirits or someone wanting to seek bodily harm to others), and handkerchiefs or holy water for spiritual healing.

The prosperity gospel message found fertile ground in Liberia is most people in Liberia identify themselves as Christians even though they do not truly observe the teachings of the Christian faith (born-again). About 85 percent of Liberians considered themselves Christians.<sup>368</sup> These people believe that they are Christians not because they have a spiritual connection with God and salvation by accepted Christ (John 1:12), but rather, their claim to Christianity is often based on societal relationships like family backgrounds, Christian rearing, marriage, charitable giving, and other long-time affiliation with a Christian church.

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<sup>368</sup> Gbotoe and Kkatla. *Role of Christianity*.

If one has not accepted Jesus, with associated surrender to His lordship, abide in Christ, and adhere to the Christian faith, it is easy for he/she to unintentionally accept the prosperity gospel as an alternative to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The researcher also found another reason why the prosperity gospel is widespread in Liberia is the lack of theological education (lack of knowledge). Most of the Seminaries and Bible Colleges in Liberia are affiliated with denominational churches for training their pastors. As such, most indigenous Liberian churches do not have access to these schools, and many of these churches cannot afford to pay for their pastors to study abroad. As a result, most of the pastors of the indigenous Liberian churches do not have college or graduate degrees; they are mostly high school graduate with some form of apprenticeship training. On the other hand, most pastors of denominational churches have at least a bachelor's degree in theology, and many have graduate degrees from both Liberia and the West.

Some prosperity gospel preachers/teachers take liberties with the Bible by adjusting Scripture verses to accommodate their particular doctrine or deny the inerrancy of Scriptures.<sup>369</sup> The prosperity gospel is a theological aberration; hence, the aforesaid knowledge gap makes it easier for pastors of indigenous Liberian churches to preach the prosperity gospel message. First, the results of this research may be applied in other Liberian churches to help them get a better understanding of the prosperity gospel from a Liberian context. Second, results from this research can be used for other pastors to understand why some pastors are preaching the prosperity gospel message rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Third, the results from this research study shows that the prosperity gospel is unique to the cultural heritage of Liberia.

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<sup>369</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

This doctoral thesis study capitalizes on extensive research of prosperity gospel in African countries; however, there is limited scholarly peer-reviewed doctoral research on prosperity gospel specific to the Liberian context. Hence this study was imperiled by limitations in conceptualization and measurements of the impact of prosperity gospel on Liberian pastors. There were no comparable studies on why Liberian pastors preach prosperity gospel from a Liberian perspective. The researcher gleaned information extrapolated from articles in numerous peer-reviewed academic journals, professional essays, and interviews on prosperity gospel in the African context. The research further used information a researcher-designed survey of a representative sample of pastors of Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) in Kakata, Liberia, to construct a critical framework for prosperity gospel in the Liberian context. Then the researcher used triangulation to assure the validity of the research by using a variety of methods to collect data on the prosperity gospel message in Liberia. The researcher was able to weave a picture of the prosperity gospel in the Liberian context from an amalgamation of similar aspects of the prosperity gospel message in Liberia and Africa.

Notwithstanding, the author also highlights aspects of the prosperity gospel message in Liberia that directly correlate to Liberian cultural heritage. The prosperity gospel message in Liberia is riddled with unique dimensions Liberian culture that is marginalized in the broader African contexts. Those mentioned above led the researcher to unique aspects of the prosperity gospel message in the Liberian context. Despite possible shortcomings of this research study, the researcher was able to use knowledge gleaned from extensive research of prosperity gospel in Africa to develop and analyze numerous themes and trends of the prosperity gospel in Liberia.

One area for future research on the prosperity gospel in Liberia is Liberian pastors' commitment to the importance of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Good News) as the basis and motivation for the Christian Ministry (Church) rather than the proclamation of the prosperity gospel message. The importance of the gospel of Jesus Christ should not be proclaimed only to non-believers so that they will embrace and believe it for salvation; it should also be widely disseminated to Christians individually and corporately inside and outside the church for teaching and shepherding believers. The gospel of Jesus Christ not only calls Christians to become witnesses to evangelize others but also commands Christians to proclaim the gospel to those around them, whether they believe it or not, because the gospel is the message of the whole Bible (Matt. 28:18-20). Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ should be pastors' primary motivation for Christian ministry (church). Pastors must use Scriptures in non-exploitative ways for teaching and fellowship to sustain their ministries rather than the prosperity gospel message as an alternative to an irreplaceable gospel of Jesus Christ.

The fundamental belief of pastors and indigenous Liberian churches is deeply rooted in the Liberian worldview that all events have spiritual causes: positive events are the blessing from God, and adverse events are based on evil spirits (devil). Hence, they believe that positive confession of adverse events in their lives and intercessory prayers to God, who has divine transformative power, can unlock miracles, healings, and material wealth. Tithes and offerings, including the prosperity concept of "seed-faith offering" (giving with the expectation of multiplication from God), to earn God's blessings, healing, and material wealth is prevalent in these churches because it is closer to the Liberian cultural worldview that coexists with western Christian worldview imported from the United States.

For the most part, members of indigenous churches often see the prosperity gospel message as yet another version of Christianity replicated from their Christian heritage brought to them by Americo-Liberians (freed slaves and their descendants) and missionaries from the West. Hence, they unknowingly embrace the prosperity gospel message as an alternative or replacement to the Gospel of Christ.

The prosperity gospel message in Liberia thrives because One of the founders of the prosperity gospel doctrine in the United States, Phineas P. Quimby, studied spiritism, occultism, and hypnosis.<sup>370</sup> As a result, the prosperity gospel is very appealing to Liberian Christians because it resonates with Liberian culture and traditions heavily influenced by spiritism and occultism. The prosperity gospel message in Liberia also thrives because the prosperity gospel message contains highly distorted biblical truths disguised as the “Word of God.” Prosperity gospel marginalizes many foundational biblical elements of the Gospel of Christ: Jesus, the cross, God’s judgment, and Salvation (the sinful state of humanity). The prosperity gospel theology does is not Christ-focus (points sinners to the Christ and his redemptive work on the cross); instead, it is human-focus (points people to positive confession to get material wealth and good health). Thus, the prosperity gospel effectively shifts the focus of the Gospel from the centrality of Christ to a doctrine that is focused on financial prosperity, health, and material wealth.

Many indigenous Liberian churches lack a general sense of biblical discernment because they are more influenced by a secular Liberian Christian culture that is more influenced by Western values that have been successfully exported to Liberia rather than Scriptures.

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<sup>370</sup> Enns. *Handbook of Theology*.

Some pastors of indigenous Liberian churches claim to receive revelations from God to preach prosperity gospel messages. However, one serious problem with the aforementioned is that most of these types of sermons are riddled with cultural and traditional underpinnings rather than the Gospel of Christ. Pastors of indigenous Liberian churches, influenced by Liberian cultural and traditional worldview, need to preach more of messages based on the Gospel of Christ and strongly discourage proponents of prosperity gospel unbiblical statements. It is difficult to deal with unbiblical prosperity gospel messages because unbiblical components of prosperity gospel messages or faulty interpretation of scriptures are not very clear-cut throughout the message.

### **Findings**

This doctoral research project found that prosperity gospel in the West (United States, Europe, etc.) and the prosperity gospel message in other West African differs from the prosperity gospel message in Liberia in many significant ways. Information glean from previous study or other published works analyzed in the literature review was very helpful in understanding the tenants of the prosperity gospel message and the underpinnings of the “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology (prosperity Gospel).

Prosperity gospel in Liberia is a travesty to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many Christians, in indigenous Liberian churches, are deceived by practices of the proponents of the prosperity gospel message they place their faith in these so-called “men of God” rather than Jesus Christ. Moreover, many pastors of indigenous Liberian churches unknowing substitute the prosperity gospel for the Gospel of Christ because of lack of sufficient theological and, in some cases, biblical education. These pastors essentially marginalize sound biblically teaching of the Word of God with promises of wealth, and health which does not result in healthier congregations.

## **Conclusion**

This doctoral thesis research found that most of the Liberian pastors view the prosperity gospel message as the most critical threat to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the spiritual growth of the church. Moreover, most pastors of indigenous Liberian churches preach/teach the prosperity gospel message. After all, their growing congregations want them to preach this message because Liberian Christians want it to fill a void in them because their traditional Christian way of worship, influenced by the West, is generally foreign to them. Christianity in Liberia, for the most part, is intermingled with African Traditional Religion which has a lot of similarities with some of the basic beliefs of the prosperity gospel message: deliverance and divine healing (faith and health) and material wealth; the prosperity gospel thrives in Liberia because of economic insecurity, inflation and political change (like the Liberian Civil War) that has caused uncertainty about the future.

Other reasons why Liberian pastors preach the prosperity gospel is many pastors of indigenous Liberian churches lack sufficient knowledge and training to interpret the Bible properly; they often have limited understanding of the tenets of the Christian faith; hence, they substitute the Gospel of Christ with the prosperity gospel message because they lack a foundational knowledge of the Word of God. Moreover, lots of indigenous Liberian churches are comprised of new converts; they profess Christianity but are not practicing Christians; as such, the percentage of Christians in Liberia is grossly inflated, and the need for urgent evangelism that Liberia so desperately needs is distorted.

Although there is no evidence, from this research study, that preaching/teaching the prosperity gospel increases qualitative growth, this research found that pastors of indigenous Liberian churches preach/teach the prosperity gospel messages to sustain quantitative growth.

The prosperity gospel has lured many pastors of indigenous Liberian churches because of their desire to get material wealth quickly amid rising poverty, unemployment, and the economic decline of the Republic of Liberia.

On the other hand, the central message of the Gospel of Christ in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Salvation that God has prepared for humankind through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross, and the justification following salvation. Simply put, salvation is the deliverance from sins and the consequence of sins by faith in Jesus Christ. As such, the core message of the gospel of Christ is for you to believe the gospel and repent from your sins. Apostle Paul preached/taught and believed the gospel of Christ. Paul writes:

“Now, brothers and Sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word, I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain (1 Cor. 15:1-2).”

The purity of the gospel is critical. According to Apostle Paul’s gospel of Christ (the gospel of grace), Christ did all that God required for the salvation of humans; thus, God wants us only to preach the gospel given to Apostle Paul for salvation (Gal.1:8-9).

The prosperity gospel is a historical departure from the gospel of Christ that is spreading throughout Liberia, far beyond its Pentecostal and Charismatic roots, where it has been traditionally strong, to the broader evangelical and even some mainline Protestant churches. The Prosperity gospel in Liberia is increasingly becoming an alternative to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The prosperity gospel (Faith, Health, Wealth theology) advocates: “if believers repeat positive confessions, focus their thoughts, and generate enough faith, God will release blessings upon their lives.”<sup>371</sup> The prosperity gospel also claims that God desires and even promises that believers live a healthy and financially prosperous life.<sup>372</sup> Today, many Christians In Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) are in danger of losing the central message of the Bible to the prosperity gospel message that excludes Jesus and ignores the cross. The central message of this alternative gospel is with enough faith; God wants believers to live a healthy and financially prosperous life.<sup>373</sup>

Some ways to improve Unity Light Ministry Network (UCC) the situation is as follows:

1. Leaders of Unity Light Ministry need to evaluate why pastors are preaching the prosperity gospel message to provide pastoral awareness and guidance.
2. Church leadership also need to propose an alternative practical theological message to refute the prosperity gospel message. This message needs not only to refute the prosperity gospel message but also to help Liberian Christians to have appropriate concepts about God and Salvation and a deeper understanding of the importance of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. To overcome the widespread preaching of the prosperity gospel message, an alternative practical theological message should envision presenting the gospel of Christ in a holistic view of the gospel that is not limited to Christ’s salvation and sin but encompasses the benefits of redemption relative to heaven and earth.

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<sup>371</sup> Jones. *Health, Wealth, and Happiness*.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> David W. Jones. *Health, Wealth, and Happiness: How the Prosperity Gospel Overshadows the Gospel of Christ*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), 2011.

Finally, the preaching/teaching of the prosperity gospel in Liberia indicates transformative reinventions of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches' believe that Christians have the right to health and material wealth through the power of positive confession of their faith and faithful payments of tithes and offerings to the "Man of God" or the church. Furthermore, some evangelical churches in Liberia unknowing support the prosperity gospel's spread by attending and supporting faith healing crusades that offer a faulty interpretation of scriptures and extra-biblical revelations from God.

Liberia's prosperity gospel is paradoxical since it is a gospel of affluence, placed in a Liberian context of extreme poverty. In a general African context, the prosperity gospel is thriving in a continent with home to some of the world's wealthiest religious leaders but paradoxically placed in the context of poverty, unemployment, corruption, and inequality. Hence, Liberia's prosperity gospel message is not a theological alternative, but a deviation from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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## APPENDIX A: Liberty University IRB Approval

From: IRB, IRB  
 Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2020 11:20 AM  
 To: Newman, Jerome Arnold  
 Cc: IRB, IRB; Faulls, Gregory S (School of Divinity Instruction)

Subject: IRB Exemption 4139.022520: Prosperity Gospel in Liberia: A Theological Alternative to the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Dear Jerome A. Newman, Sr.,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)<<mailto:irb@liberty.edu>>.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP  
 Administrative Chair of Institutional Research  
 Research Ethics Office [cid:image001.jpg@01D5EBC9.AE17D910]  
 Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

## APPENDIX B: Informed Consent

### CONSENT FORM

Prosperity Gospel in Liberia: A Theological Alternative to the Gospel of Jesus Christ  
Jerome A. Newman, Sr.  
Liberty University  
Doctor of Ministry/School of Divinity

You are invited to be in a research study on why a growing number of pastors in Liberia, in Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church), are replacing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the prosperity gospel message. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a pastor of a Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church) congregation in Kakata, Liberia. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jerome A. Newman, Sr., a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry/School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to find out why a growing number of pastors in Liberia, in Unity Light Ministry Network (Unity Community Church), are replacing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with prosperity gospel message.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to complete an anonymous survey which should take 15 to 20 minutes.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will not include their names, email addresses, congregation names, or other personally identifiable information on the survey. The surveys are anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. I will delete the data after three years.
- I will also download and print out the completed surveys and store them in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I will shred the data after three years.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Unity Light Ministry Network. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting your survey.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jerome A. Newman, Sr. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at (703) 582-0592 and [janewman2@liberty.edu](mailto:janewman2@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Gregory Faulls, at [gsfaulls@liberty.edu](mailto:gsfaulls@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I consent to participate in the study.

## APPENDIX C: Research Survey

### Part 1

1. Do you preach/teach or believe that you or some members of your congregation receive direct revelation from God?  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
2. Do you preach/teach or believe that if one gives tithes and offerings (sows seeds), in expectation of a harvest, he or she will reap resultant material blessings from God?  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
3. Do you preach/teach or believe that poverty could be a blessing from God because Jesus was not rich?  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
4. Do you preach/teach or believe that Christians have authority over poverty, wealth, and health in the name of Jesus Christ?  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
5. Do you preach/teach or believe that Christians have the power to speak words to produce positive results in one's life?  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )

### Part II

1. The gift of prophecy (divine revelation) continues today.  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
2. Christians can bring into existence what we state with our mouth because faith is a confession.  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
3. The gospel involves healing, holiness, and speaking in tongues.  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
4. All suffering is a result of either sin or a lack of faith.  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )
5. Material wealth is a sign of God's blessings.  
Check one: **Strongly Agree** ( ) **Agree** ( ) **Undecided** ( ) **Disagree** ( ) **Strongly Disagree** ( )

**Part III**

1. Why is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology so widespread in Liberia?
2. Is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia mixed with spiritual warfare, occultism (juju), and African Traditional Religion (spiritism)? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.
3. Is “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia a system of belief, or a Christian culture in which Liberians live? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.
4. Is there a link between “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology in Liberia and challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and health problems? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.
5. Do you have a strategy to combat “Faith, Wealth, and Health” theology teaching in your community? No ( ) Yes ( ) If yes, explain.