



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

# *The Prosperity Gospel in African Christianity*

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Ernst Conradie has commented that the prosperity gospel “is undoubtedly the fastest growing form of religion on the African continent.”<sup>1</sup> Andrew F. Walls noted a quarter of a century ago that increasingly, “anyone who wishes to undertake serious study of Christianity these days needs to know something about Africa. It follows that the student of Christian history not only must know something about Africa but also must consider the part that Africa plays in the total story of the faith.”<sup>2</sup> It in turn follows that anyone who desires to undertake serious study of Christianity these days must consider the role of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

As I have explained elsewhere,

Ordinary African Christians, and especially those whose life is full of economic uncertainty or health concerns, bring a particular set of questions to biblical texts. *If I will not give my child a snake for a fish or a stone for bread, then how much more must the Father delight to give good gifts to us his children? Does God desire to bless or to curse? Does God desire for us to die or to live?* Many African Pentecostals and charismatics have responded to the questions asked by holistic African worldviews by developing a theology of deliverance. Believing that God can deliver from sin, from demonic influence, from the curses of witchcraft, and from various illnesses and injuries, they are moved to ask: cannot God also deliver from

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst M. Conradie, “Climate change as a multi-layered crisis for humanity,” chapter 14 in *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change*, edited by Ezra Chitando, Ernst M. Conradie, and Susan M. Kilonzo, 215–234, Routledge Studies on Religion in Africa and the Diaspora (London: Routledge, 2022), 225.

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003147909-15>

<sup>2</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Eusebius Tries Again: Reconceiving the Study of Christian History,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 24, no. 3 (2000): 105–111, p. 106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/239693930002400303>

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poverty? Or, conversely, ‘If I can’t trust God for my money, why would I trust him with my salvation?’ Such questions have led many to embrace the Prosperity Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

As I note in that article, much popular discourse on the prosperity gospel comes from either its proponents (including those who financially profit from its practice) or from those who utterly reject it as heretical without fully understanding its contexts. Instead of either naïvely and uncritically accepting the claims of clearly abusive prosperity gospel proponents at face value or, conversely, taking “the polemical approach of asking ‘in what ways is this wrong?’,” it is far more helpful to ground our approach to this wide topic with two questions in mind: “(1) What cultural questions or problems does this theology or movement try to answer? (2) What is God doing through this movement?”<sup>4</sup>

There is an increasing abundance of studies examining the prosperity gospel in Africa, together with variations such as the productivity gospel that are considerably more balanced than the “health and wealth” and “name it and claim it” messages proclaimed by so many charlatans. As an aid to my fellow researchers and practitioners, I have compiled this bibliography. It includes articles, chapters, books, and select dissertations and theses. Whenever possible, I have included links to these works. For books and book chapters, I have included links to publisher’s product pages. Many of these books have digital editions available for purchase. Many of the works listed are open access; this is noted parenthetically after the links. Note that many of the DOI links resolve to a publisher’s page that hosts the article or chapter behind a paywall, and therefore are less accessible. However, many of these materials are also available via services such as EBSCOhost, Global DTL,<sup>5</sup> JSTOR, and Project Muse; check with a librarian to see whether you have access to those services.

Note that sometimes African publishers and journals lack funding to maintain ownership of their websites; it is possible that some of these links which worked when tested may have expired by the time you have found this

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua Robert Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel the Gospel? The Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 47, no. 4 (2023): 321–338, pp. 321–322; <https://www.academia.edu/108797143/>

<sup>4</sup> Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel the Gospel?,” 331. For this approach I am especially indebted to Mark Shaw, the director of the Centre for World Christianity (CWC) at Africa International University (AIU) and Professor of World Christianity at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology at AIU (Nairobi, Kenya), and also Kyama Mugambi, formerly assistant director of CWC and currently Assistant Professor of World Christianity at Yale Divinity School (New Haven, Connecticut, USA).

<sup>5</sup> Note that the Global Digital Theological Library offers a discount for institutions (e.g., seminaries, Bible colleges, universities) that have programs accredited by ACTEA. If applicable to you, contact ACTEA’s office at [info@ACTEAweb.org](mailto:info@ACTEAweb.org) for more information.

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bibliography. Sometimes such files are available via Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/>.<sup>6</sup> Also note that some books and articles may have been uploaded to Internet Archive.<sup>7</sup> You may use the advanced search to see if something is available there: <https://archive.org/advancedsearch.php>

Access to copies of articles archived on the Academia.edu or ResearchGate.net platforms<sup>8</sup> require registering for a free account on those platforms; some of the articles listed here may have been shared by their authors on those sites.

It is my hope that this bibliography will help you to investigate the prosperity gospel in Africa through the lenses of these two questions:

1. “What cultural questions or problems does this theology or movement try to answer?”

and

2. “What is God doing through this movement?”<sup>9</sup>

*Tolle lege, disce investiga.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In the Internet Archive search bar, enter the exact expired link. If the content has been archived, you will be able to access it.

<sup>7</sup> I have not checked to see whether any of these sources are available at the Internet Archive site or not, but items are being continually added its collection. Internet Archive functions as a public digital library. It may be necessary to create an account using your email address, but access is free. Previously I have found classic texts of African Theology there such as John S. Mbiti’s *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971) and Mercy Amba Oduyoye’s *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> The built-in search engines of Academia.edu and ResearchGate.net are inadequate. I recommend using the internet search engine of your choice to search those platforms. For example, in your browser address bar or on the search engine’s home page, you may search for “*prosperity gospel*” “*Africa*” *site:academia.edu* — this will find articles archived at Academia.edu that contain both the phrase “prosperity gospel” and the word “Africa.”

<sup>9</sup> Barron, “Is the Prosperity Gospel the Gospel?,” 331.

<sup>10</sup> The Latin phrase *tolle lege* means ‘take and read’; this phrase was part of a children’s song that helped lead Augustine of Hippo toward conversion to faith in Christ. Similarly, *disce investiga* means ‘study and research’. I thank Nathan Scott, a one of the journal’s peer reviewers, for ensuring that the Latin of the second phrase is correct.

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