

The Quest of Prosperity Gospel and its Impact on Christianity: Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – South Western Diocese

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Abstract

The quest of prosperity gospel is a theological controversy that currently exists in the Church. Lay preachers, trained theologians, and ordained preachers emphasize the productivity of prosperity theology. However, members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), specifically in the South Western Diocese, have varying opinions on accepting this belief. This debate has led the writer to investigate this subject matter. Undeniably, prosperity gospel and its teachings have both positive and negative effects on people's lives. It is questionable whether individuals become more industrious or passive by waiting to receive material wealth through prayer. This article examines why prosperity gospel prospers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and presents the ELCT's stance on how to approach the teachings of prosperity gospel.

1. Introduction

Christianity is rapidly growing in Africa, and according to Boubakar Sanou, one of the reasons for this growth is the focus on achieving success in Pentecostal or new-Pentecostal churches.¹ As African Christianity continues to spread, the teachings of the prosperity gospel have also become widespread.² The prosperity gospel has both positive and negative impacts on people's faith, heating their hearts and feelings when preached about. People believe that economic wealth can be obtained through their faith in Christ, which is a faithful accomplishment. However, many preachers, including lay preachers, have been preaching about success in the area of material wealth. Believers seem to be relying on these preachers rather than on God's blessing to be successful. This article, titled "*The Quest for Prosperity Gospel and its Impact on Christianity: Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania*," aims to help believers and the Church redefine teachings about prosperity gospel and challenge teachings brought by various preachers.

1.1 Background of the Problem

The prosperity gospel is a global phenomenon that has been discussed by many theologians and scholars. According to Bowler, this movement has become a decisive force shaping global Christianity by

¹. Sanou Boubakar (2021). *The Prosperity Gospel and the Church in Africa: A Missiological Assessment in the Light of the Great Commission*. In *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* Vol.23, pp 18-46, February 28,2021 @2021 mission and society Research Institute <https://doi.org/10.21806/aamm2021.23.02>

². Barron Joshua R. *Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity*. *South African Theological Seminary* 2022:88 article: <https://www.sats.ac.za/prosperity-gospel-african-christianityhttps://doi.org/10.54725/conspectus.2022.1.6> accessed on 10.7.2022

emphasizing spiritual, physical, and financial mastery.³ The history of the prosperity gospel dates back to the 19th century in America, where it emphasized worldly materials and promised riches to its followers. Those who did not become wealthy were considered to have weak faith. In the 1990s and 2000s, prosperity theology was adopted by influential leaders in the charismatic movement and promoted by Christian missionaries worldwide.⁴

In Tanzania, Christians, especially Lutherans, were encouraged to leave their former denominations and join churches that preached the prosperity gospel because of its emphasis on abundance life.⁵ Mbilu, supported by Hunt in Niemandt (2012: 205), traces the historical roots of prosperity gospel to Christian-oriented movements in North America. This message has spread across the Global South, where harsh economic situations and low quality of living have caused the rapid growth and expansion of prosperity gospel.⁶

Maltese considers prosperity gospel as the fastest-growing strand of global Christianity,⁷ which has now spread to various continents, including Africa. The prosperity gospel preachers, with their worldly agenda, have been preaching the message of prosperity with strong emphasis regardless of the hearer's economic situation, portraying success and riches as a state of being.⁸ According to Sanou, the preachers promise that God will provide abundantly whatever believers need, and the only requirement is to have enough faith to demand what they need. Similarly, they teach that God increases the material blessings of those who give abundantly.⁹

The prosperity theology has spread rapidly worldwide, and its message is linked to the theme of salvation or deliverance from economic poverty. Emphasis on material wealth and good health predominates the message preached by the preachers. In the *Wanji* ethnic language, the prosperity gospel means '*iimola inofu ijavumofu*,' where '*iimola*' means gospel, '*inofu*' means good, and '*ijavumofu*' means wealth. Christians and non-Christians receive this message by the influence of lay preachers who have Pentecostal backgrounds. The gospel emphasizes having faith in olive oil and water, believing that they can possess material wealth instead of working hard to become wealthy.

As an experienced pastor for several years, the author heard a scenario about prosperity gospel from one of the congregants. The preacher used (Proverbs 19:4 that reads, "Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend."). The preacher invited people to come forward, and the author was among them. The preacher then asked the hearers to take oil that would help them become rich soon. They were required to be faithful, and if they needed the oil, they had to give offerings for blessings. Despite receiving the sacred oil, the financial income of the author's congregant was worse than before.¹⁰ From this scenario, the author questions whether such preachers bring meaningful teaching to the people and what would happen if preachers preached a holistic gospel to let the message speak into the hearer's faith.

³ . Bowler, Catherine. *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013: 9

⁴ . Theme: Charismatic: Speech by Mbilu Msafiri, Lecturer at Tumaini University Makumira 18/5/2015) Makumira.

⁵ . Theme: Charismatic: Speech by Mbilu Msafiri, Lecturer at Tumaini University Makumira 18/5/2015) Makumira.

⁶ . See Bowler 2013:3; Lausanne Movement 2010: para 5; see also Sanou Boubakar,2021

⁷ Maltese Giovanni, *Prosperity Gospel*. In book: Brill's Encyclopedia of Global Pentecostalism Online; Publisher: Brill, (2020: para 1).[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342338432 Prosperity Gospel](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342338432_Prosperity_Gospel) June 2020 accessed on 08.08.2021

⁸ Cowie, A.P. (editor), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. New Addition: Oxford University Press 1989: 1002

⁹ See Sanou Boubakar, 2021

¹⁰ Interview with Lusungu Kihali,15 July, 2022

Three specific objectives were used to investigate on "*The Quest of Prosperity Gospel and its Impact on Christianity: A Case of the ELCT*"

- i. To explore the origin and meaning of prosperity gospel and why the prosperity message is growing in the ELCT dioceses.
- ii. To evaluate the positive and negative impacts of prosperity gospel on Christianity as a whole.
- iii. To identify the role of the ELCT regarding prosperity, as it is emphasized more by lay preachers.

1.2 What motivated Author to write this Article?

The author was motivated to write this article by a quote from Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania, who stated that the division of mankind into rich and poor is the root cause of misery, wars, and hatred.¹¹ While poverty is not the only problem that people face, it is still a significant issue that can cause physical and psychological illness. The author attended an Easter festival sermon in 2017 by a lay preacher in one of the ELCT parishes, who used white handkerchiefs as part of the prosperity message to help people remove curses of economic poverty. This experience raised questions about whether people need material possessions more than spiritual needs and whether preaching prosperity gospel is a holistic approach to preaching the gospel.¹²

1.3. The Approach and Methods applied to Collect Data

The article adopted a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the social life under study.¹³ The author used ethnography, specifically descriptive anthropology, as the methodology to collect data, and interviews were one of the tools utilized. Thus, by investigating it helped to understand the Christian's attitudes and experiences on prosperity gospel closely to individuals and to the church itself. The sampling population primarily comprised Christians, and the author aimed to interview 80 individuals, with 60 ultimately being interviewed. In-depth interviews were conducted to allow respondents to explore their perceptions, motivations, and feelings in detail, providing the author with valuable insights into their experiences with prosperity gospel.

2. MEANING OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL

The term "prosperity" generally refers to a state of being successful or financially rich.¹⁴ In theological terms, Koch defines "prosperity gospel" as the belief that God desires financial prosperity for people.¹⁵ Thus, prosperity gospel is a Christian doctrine that promotes financial blessings as God's will for faithful believers. This doctrine suggests that one's material wealth can increase as a result of following God's will.¹⁶

¹¹ Nyerere Julius. *The Church's Role in Society*. In (A Reader in African Christian Theology). by Parratt John. Printed by Great Britain; Latimer Trend & Company Ltd Plymouth, 1987: 117

¹² Based on adherents of Christians, these are the members of the church belong in Christianity belief. According to Sinclair et al defined that; Christianity is a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and on the belief that he was the son of God (Sinclair John, Fox Gwyneth, Bullon Stephen *et al* (ed), (1992) *BBC English Dictionary*. Page 195, BBC; Harper Collins Publishers.

¹³ Woods Peter. *Qualitative Research*. Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth, 2006: 3

¹⁴ See Cowie 1989: 1002

¹⁵ Koch Bradley A. *The Prosperity Gospel and Economic Prosperity: Race, Class, Giving, And Voting*.

Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology, Indiana University 2009: v

¹⁶ Wealth this is the large amount of money or property that someone possesses or the fact that they possess (Sinclair John *et al* 1992: 1333

2.1. Why Prosperity Gospel in the ELCT

The term "prosperity" refers to a state of being successful or wealthy, and in theological terms, prosperity gospel is defined as the belief that God desires financial prosperity for believers. This doctrine has gained acceptance among Christians worldwide, not only in America, due to the perceived benefits it offers in addressing spiritual, physical, and financial needs.¹⁷ Consequently, many preachers in various countries focus on preaching this gospel, emphasizing personal empowerment and joy as God's will to let people be joyful. As it is accepted with various Christians, it makes the church to have its phase which has its historical background. This has led to a historical background of prosperity gospel in Tanzania, rooted in New Pentecostal teachings, which hold that believers who trust in God's providence will prosper in health, spirituality, and material possessions. For example; according to Lugazia, the New- Pentecostals have introduced prosperity theology in Tanzania. Whereby, a born-again person trusts in God's providence then he or she will prosper in terms of health, spirituality and materials. Those who are preaching about prosperity gospel believe that poverty is not the will of God; poverty is the outcome of sin or lack of faith.¹⁸ From that background, poverty, bad condition in terms of health, and lack of faith among believers are some of the reasons attracting people to accept prosperity gospel as a means of answering and solving challenges they face.

Believers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) live in a globalized world and are able to access information using new tools such as smartphones and internet facilities, even in rural areas. As a result, globalization is unavoidable for the ELCT, and the movement of people, including preachers, from towns to villages, has helped to spread the message of prosperity gospel. With such technological advancements, lifestyles are also changing, socially, economically, spiritually, and mentally.

The aim of this study was to investigate how and why the prosperity gospel was implemented in the ELCT Dioceses. During interviews with 54 respondents, questions were asked about the historical background of the study, the meaning of the prosperity gospel, and its impact on the Christian faith. The majority of respondents (40 out of 54) did not accept prosperity theology as it is taught in the church, as they believe it causes people to work below their full potential. However, 14 respondents felt blessed when hearing preachers preach about the prosperity gospel, and saw the love of God upon them. Five respondents suggested that the church should supervise the preaching and teachings of prosperity gospel to ensure it has a positive impact on church growth. Among the seven who replied do not accept prosperity added that having strong faith and personal ability on working hard assured them to be blessed from what they do in their daily lives. The interview which was done was to the individual persons and to groups of fifteen to twenty people as follows: 10 Pastors, 12 evangelists, 5 lay preachers, and 27 ordinary Christians were interviewed.

The study also involved participatory observation, during which the author attended Sunday services and open-air spiritual meetings to observe how prosperity gospel is being preached and taught to believers. This was done over four weeks, during which the concept of prosperity gospel was explored. It was found that some preachers try to emphasize prosperity gospel even when the text does not have such a theme. The concept of prosperity gospel was identified as *iimola inofu ijavumofu*, which means prosperity that is good news for possessing good things, not necessarily money. Its meaning was not for the possession of money economy but other products. Probably this definition is very closely connected with a *Wanji* term *iimota* to mean getting plentiful and the person who harvested a plentiful of material such as maize, they call *aamotile*. But all in all, those words do not relate with prosperity gospel as it is emphasized and defined today. The needy of money economy changed even the sensitivities of the words to be used by preachers in the church. In facts, wealth has its pitfalls. The ELCT, itself is not an isolated institution. That means wealth and other possession of the church and of the individual Christians are to be observed carefully. This is because, the theology of wealth as explained with some preachers through prosperity gospel causes some theological misunderstandings among the

¹⁷ See Bowler 2013: 5

¹⁸ Lugazia Faith (2011). *The current Lutheran response to the epoch and popularity of neo-Pentecostalism in Tanzania*. Presentation on the charismatic challenge for ecumenical partnerships: Insights from different contexts and churches; 10th October 2011, Arusha Tanzania, 2011: 13

people.¹⁹ However, the study found that wealth and possession can cause theological misunderstandings among people and must be observed carefully.

One respondent mentioned that prosperity gospel was practiced in their area for daily personal environments, and that success was associated with respecting someone. However, another respondent was against prosperity gospel in Lutheran church, as it is more of a Pentecostal view. They believed that true teachings come from working hard for economic gain, not through cheap grace promoted by prosperity message. And for the *Wanji* they associated respecting someone was part of bringing success too. The one who had respect expected to get better things. It is quite possible that they associated it with the commandment to “Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be many”. On the contrary, if one doesn't respect them, he/she is cursed by his/her parents. With such explanations people showed obedience and respect to their God appreciating that he is the giver of all things.²⁰ However, on the other wing Msigwa was against with what we had in Lutheran church. As far as I know, Lutherans do not have such a gospel of prosperity as one of the key messages in preaching. It is more of a Pentecostal view. Parishioners need true teachings by working hard in economic gain, not by means of cheap grace through prosperity message.²¹

3. THE IMPACTS OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN CHRISTIANITY

Prosperity gospel has both positive and negative impacts on Christianity, which will be discussed in this article. As part of addressing the objective to assess the positive and negative impacts of prosperity gospel in the church, we will examine its effects on people's faith, socio-economic well-being, and theological interpretations.

Preachers have a significant influence on people, and their teachings can be hard to forget, particularly messages related to faith. Some Christians believe that prosperity gospel brings good news to the poor, and that the church's mission is purely spiritual. By preaching prosperity, a person can gain hope for material blessings. However, the emphasis on socio-economic issues also attracts those who are in need, and many young people and those who feel poor believe they can achieve an upper-class lifestyle by following the principles of prosperity taught by preachers.

For example, according to Taylor, through prosperity gospel there are Christians who believe that “good news to the poor is news of spiritual salvation” or “the church’s mission is exclusively spiritual and should concentrate on spiritual issues”²² By preaching the message of prosperity explores a person to have a physical salvation whereby a receiver of a message will have hope to receive material blessings as it was taught or preached with a preacher. However, according to Gifford, in prosperity gospel the emphasis is not only its functionality but its general socio-economic context that is significant to the human beings.²³ Therefore, emphasizing on socio-economic areas attracts the majority of people who are in need. The message preached or taught through prosperity attracts a number of young people and those feeling that they are poor believing they can now walk out of the bitter grip of poverty and attain an upper-class lifestyle if they only practice principles of prosperity received from preachers. According to Corrie, to fulfill it has some principles such as a person who believe the expiatory work of Jesus Christ guarantees to all who believe, divine healing, the riches of this world and happiness without sufferings.²⁴ On the other hand, Mkilindi argues that the desire for wealth is an interest of

¹⁹ See Mkilindi 1995:31-32

²⁰ Interview with, A. Mbena, 15 July 2022

²¹ Interview with B. Msigwa. 22 August, 2022

²² Taylor M. 2003. *Christianity, poverty and wealth*. Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2003: 27

²³ Gifford Paul, 1998. *African Christianity: Its Public Role*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998:39-40

²⁴ Corrie John (ed.) (2007). *Dictionary of Mission Theology*. Nottingham: England, Inter-Varsity Press, 2007: 322

individual persons who are alive whether they are youth or adult.²⁵ The ELCT Dioceses face the same impacts as mentioned in the background but with some differences of prosperity elements. During interview Malila explained that; regarding the themes of prosperity gospel into peoples' minds to earn more materials by neglecting hard working to the listeners of the gospel, it causes people to find alternatives of getting money even by using un-proper methods or actions in the society they belong. Even some of the Christians whom one may regard as having fear of God amongst they decide to damage life of other people by killing and taking their parts of the bodies believing that they will earn more money. And other believe that by praying and receiving olive oils and other physical things they become wealth.²⁶

On the other hand, some argue that prosperity gospel can lead to negative outcomes, such as encouraging people to seek money through improper means or actions. In extreme cases, individuals may resort to harming others to gain financial gain, believing that they will become wealthy by doing so. Such teachings are contrary to the principles of hard work and may lead to damaging theological interpretations.

Krosesbergen as cited to Gifford (1998:335) underlines that prosperity gospel is basically connected with the middle-class religious entrepreneurs of the major cities.²⁷ It is not a phenomenon in the cities only but also because of technology the impacts of prosperity gospel spread even in rural areas. One respondent replied, prosperity gospel is linked with as an example of NGOs for gaining financial income of the preachers and teachers of it. It is a very smooth source of income to the beneficiaries of its message as they believe it. It is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) which is covered with a gospel cloth on it that believers do not have chance to ask its criteria's how to get rich in material except by believing.²⁸ Similarly, Goliama argues,

“It can be said that the Prosperity Gospel presents itself as a faith-based poverty reduction alternative consequent to the failure registered by the various poverty reduction strategies...the Prosperity Gospel finds its niche to flourish, since it is perceived to be a development alternative along with the NGOs and the other new players in the field.”²⁹

This news of the gospel of success exists in the Lutheran Church. This type of the gospel is preached in towns but also even in village areas like here in Uwanji. The preachers have been preaching with all of their strength, although not in the way that the gospel wants them to do, what I know in my pastoral experience, after preaching the gospel, it should liberate the person himself and not by forcing its harvests in front of the pulpits. So today those who are being taught gospel faithfully and in time have had positive success.³⁰ Namkonda in her BD thesis quotes one evangelist who was preaching by saying “ God is good and once you believe him he is able to provide you with everything you like, even furniture in your home will not be a problem”³¹ It shows the evangelist was telling people something which is impossible to be fulfilled by faith. It is not practical (Namkonda 2008:31-32). For the receivers of the message of prosperity gospel is better to work hard than depending much on faith. It is not practical, though it needs to work hard so that a person can have a chance to be blessed as he/she is working hard for economic activities.

²⁵ Mkilindi Zawadiel, J. *The New Testament Attitude to Wealth and its Implications for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania*. Unpublished Bachelor of Divinity Thesis; Lutheran Theological College Makumira, 1995: 1

²⁶ Interview with Nahumu Malila, 15 June, 2022

²⁷ Krosesbergen Hermen . *The Prosperity Gospel: A Way to Reclaim Dignity*. Available in: https://www.academia.edu/43637263/The_Prosperity_Gospel_A_Way_to_Reclaim_Dignity 2014, In Search of Health and Wealth; The Prosperity Gospel in African, Reformed Perspective

²⁸ Interview with F. Mpalala, 18 January, 2021

²⁹ Goliama Castor M. *The Gospel of Prosperity in African Pentecostalism: A Theological and Pastoral Challenge to the Catholic Church – With Reference to the Archdiocese of Songea, Tanzania*. Unpublished Doctor der Theologie; Studienkennzahl It. A080011 Studienrichtung It. Studienblatt: Katholische Theologie Betreuer: em.O.Univ. 2013: 40

³⁰ Interview with Mbena A, 15 July 2022

³¹ Namkonda Felister (2008), *The Impact of Poverty on the Pastoral Vocation in the ELCT-Konde Diocese*: Unpublished Bachelor of Divinity Thesis; Lutheran Theological College Makumira, 2008: 31-32

According to Barron, the prosperity gospel has a fault that is why it gets criticism as it is delivered to the believers. It undermines the formation of Christian charisma.³² Even if, the ideology of prosperity is accepted mostly by the neo - Pentecostals, still the teaching about wealth success is under criticism in and out of denominations theologically. Christians are challenged with it because, it shows every interpreter can come up with his own revelation knowledge of the text itself even the meaning of prosperity.³³ As preachers of prosperity gospel emphasize its theme, on the other side people receiving theological impact because of the wrong theological interpretations. Its teachings arouse unhelpful human inclinations which contradict the teaching of the Holy Scriptures as explained in (1Tim.6:1-10). It explains about the motives of loving money greed and materialism. Also, prosperity gospel mislead faith in God by focusing people's faith to money and other physical material possessions.³⁴ On the other hand, Mahali in his discussion about *Church Leadership and the Development of a Spirit of Reformation in Africa* argues that, failure to recruit and sustain qualified theologians and church administrators for the ministry resulted on the church to be led by undereducated ministers who are not well able to interpret their surroundings and turn challenges into opportunities.³⁵ That means, as Heuser emphasizes, the prosperity gospel represents a rather debated strand of global Christianity, and it cannot be characterized up in a single explanation. It is 'transformative in nature, adapting to contexts, and travelling through history...'³⁶ However, by observation you can observe that the texture covers a sense of spiritual advancement while on the other side of a door put more emphasis on material prosperity.³⁷

In Namibia as part of Southern African countries, Horn underlines that the prosperity gospel did not prove to be that harmful that surely un-Biblical and not harmful to the poor. It is meaningless to have an idea preaching that all Christians should be rich³⁸ in material possession. Because of its impacts into people's faith, the Reformed and Evangelical Churches do not take a strong opposition to the prosperity gospel instead they do not consider the prosperity message as the gospel which cannot be explained to the hearers.³⁹ On other hand, Mbilu reacts on the effects of the prosperity gospel, which is syncretism in that it is mixed with magical aspects. For example, perception of the use of sacred oil and sacred water from Jordan used to sprinkle around people's houses as a means of security.⁴⁰ As Barron as cited by Ehioghae and Olanrewaju asserts that,

Prosperity gospel makes the poor to unnecessarily bear the weight of guilt. Though there is no inherent virtue in being poor it is equally wrong to regard poverty as a reflection of one's spiritual status. There is a serious implication when God's blessings are reduced to material gain: those who are not rich are

³² See Barron 2022:94.

³³ Interview with A. Mbena, 20 January, 2021

³⁴ Kasera, M. Basilius (2012). *The biblical and theological examination of prosperity theology and its impact among the poor in Namibia*. A thesis submitted for the degree of master of theology at the South African theological seminary, 2012:11

³⁵ Mahali Faustin (2017) *Church Leadership and the Development of a Spirit of Reformation in Africa*. (Einorich Bedford-Strom, Tharcisse Gatwa, Traugott Jähnichen, Elisée Musemakweli (Eds) 2017, African Christian Theologies and the Impact of the Reformation. Symposium PIASS Rwanda February 18-23, 2016; page 233-234

³⁶ Heuser, Andreas, 2015, '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*, pp. 15-30, Peter Lang, Frankfurt. 2015: 3 & 16

³⁷ Niemandt, N.C.J.P., 2017, 'The prosperity gospel, the decolonisation of theology, and the abduction of missionary imagination', *Missionalia* 45(3), 203-219. <https://doi.org/10.7832/45-3-199> 2017: 204

³⁸ Horn, Nico. *Religious Freedom and Intimidation in A Secular State The Namibia Experience*. University of Namibia 2011: 14 article in <https://classic.iclrs.org/content/blurb/files/Horn%2020111002.pdf> accessed on 20.07.2021

³⁹ See Horn 2011

⁴⁰ See Mbilu Msafiri Lecturer at Makumira Theological College 18/5/2015

either guilty of sin or unbelief. In other words, if God's will be for everyone to be healthy and wealthy, then anyone who falls sick or remains poor is suffering from his own unbelief or disobedience...⁴¹

It is not true that our spirituality can be measured how poor or rich you are, but it is a matter of faith in God and how you believe in Him with obedience.

Another impact is the confusion and contradiction of theological interpretations among Lutheran parishioners caused some to escape to other denomination to seek answers on how they can overcome poverty. It shows they are not attracted with the Sunday services in their respective Parishes. To avoid such shift of the congregants resulted even, in some of the mainline churches like Lutheran and other Protestant churches, some preachers began to preach about prosperity gospel. It is the church which has to maintain its teachings but without forgetting basics of the church doctrines by looking on the current context of the hearers. Orogun D. and Pillay J. (2021) in their article *Africa New-Pentecostal capitalism Through the lens of Ujamaa* explains that the prosperity gospel takes the form of secular and capitalistic business activities whereby the consequences of it to the preachers is the profit making which drives the motives of many preacher of such kind of the gospel. As a result, the existence of it leads to the commodification of the gospel when preached.⁴² As one respondent replied on the use of Medias that the consequences of it, the prosperity gospel planted by the New-Pentecostal preachers worldwide recently affects even other churches because of the use of technological Medias used to spread the gospels e.g radio, television, YouTube etc. It is easy for the people to adopt various teachings including the teachings of prosperity gospel as we can see what is happening in our context today. People used to accept teachings by observing in their smart phones by believing that why not our church leader/preachers have such teachings.

As one means of avoiding negative impacts of the message and teachings of prosperity gospel Kadiva reminded the hearers of the word of God that in the last days people will be lovers of money and love themselves more than God as written in (2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 Tim.6:9-10). It is possible to hear many teachings that focus on giving money instead of working hard in order to earn money⁴³ And that priest (pastor) was entrusted with authority to translate and give the right meaning of the word of God are those who are educated and enlightened (Nehemiah 8: 12-17). It is written in Ps.128:2 "You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours".⁴⁴ In addition, as they use wealth, the wealthy fellows want to be praised and win the favour and confidence of the laity and clergy. People seek to be honored by using their resources.⁴⁵ Such faults its outcome might be lack of faith growth in Jesus Christ because people will be looking on their wealth that it helps them even to solve some of their spiritual need. What the church and the individuals could think about it, is the desire to be wealthy will never end as long as there is no limit to individual satisfaction in seeking for wealth.

Among of the positive impact of the gospel of prosperity is that, the believers who hear the preached word have a chance to read as much as possible the Word of God as a means of them to realize what was preached by the preacher. As an example, the emphasis on pneumatological soteriology can help followers of

⁴¹ Barron Joshua R. *Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity*. South African Theological Seminary 2022 article: <https://www.sats.ac.za/prosperity-gospel-african-christianityhttps://doi.org/10.54725/conspectus.2022.1.6> accessed on 10.7.2022; cited to Ehioghae, Efe M., and Olanrewaju Joseph A. 2015. *A Theological Evaluation of the Utopian Image of Prosperity Gospel and the African Dilemma*. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science 20(8, Ver. II):69–75.

⁴² Daniel Orogun, Jerry Pillay (2021) *African Neo-Pentecostal capitalism through the lens of Ujamaa*. Available in <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/6577/19245>

⁴³ Kadiva Ernest W. *Tujihadhari Dhidi ya Manabii na Walimu wa Uongo*. Printed by Moshi Lutheran Printing Press 2021: 16-17

⁴⁴ *Ibd* 2021: 9

⁴⁵ See Mkilindi 1995:34

prosperity gospel toughen their faith too.⁴⁶ Also, according to Goliama, the message of prosperity gospel promotes economic stewardship to the members. What they get from economic activities they ran giving as offerings but also supports various activities such as evangelism in the church.⁴⁷ Also the prosperity gospel allows followers of such teachings to broaden economic chances by expanding also global economic networking among themselves.⁴⁸

4. PERSONAL SUCCESS WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

During the field interview, one respondent expressed that people are more focused on materialistic wealth than building personal relationships with God. They tend to believe only what they can see and not what is unseen. In my opinion, personal success should encompass human success in material, spiritual, and physical aspects.⁴⁹ However, as Christians, we acknowledge that poverty is a serious social concern and evil that affects a large number of people worldwide, but how we respond to it also matters.⁵⁰ Poverty is often caused by a lack of faith, knowledge, giving, or negative thinking and speech.⁵¹

As for the impact of prosperity gospel on Christianity, the respondent, Msigwa, explained that he did not understand that kind of gospel as he was raised in the Lutheran faith and served as a pastor. He believed that grace was given freely and not obtained through money or property. Our salvation is through Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for our redemption. Personal success is achieved by working hard and finding legitimate means of income, not through stealing or cheating.⁵²

Some preachers of the prosperity gospel admit that they may lack theological knowledge but are proud of their ability to perform miracles and predict solutions to problems.⁵³ They preach about sowing seed faith for their ministry, and those who accept it are promised financial abundance and blessings. Some Lutherans have been affected by this theology, believing that it can alleviate poverty among Christians.

In the same perspective on *kupanda mbegu* theology as explained by the preachers of prosperity gospel; Taylor (2019) explained in his article *The Gospel Is Not for Sale: Is Benny Hinn Abandoning the Prosperity Gospel?* However, Benny Hinn as a popular preacher on prosperity gospel, preached the prosperity gospel but then repented for the awful theology used to proclaim as he said feel well, do good and make money. Later Hinn realized he had done wrong, he said "it is an offense to the Holy Spirit to put a price on the gospel". Because of theological misconceptions, by saying; I'll never ask you to give a thousand or any amount again, because I think the Holy Spirit just got sick of it. . . I think it hurts the gospel. I will rebuke them. I think that's buying the gospel, it is buying the blessing and it is to hurt the Holy Spirit. With such reasons, the gospel is not for sale, blessings are not for sale, miracles are not for sale, and prosperity is not for sale. From Hinn's repentance, Mbena Aaron as a respondent replied; a person should give because of the love of God that he/she has in his soul with the inner faith and not because of his/her teachings of the personal needs of the preachers instead of the service of God. Let the gospel be preached to the people by avoiding eisegesis of the word of God.⁵⁴

4.1. Areas Christians need Answers

⁴⁶ Interview with Nyambo Geoffrey 15 March 2021

⁴⁷ See Goliama 2013: 331

⁴⁸ Ibid 2013: 332

⁴⁹ Interview with A. Mbena, 20, January 2021

⁵⁰ See Kasera 2012:1

⁵¹ Ibid 2012: 2

⁵² Interview with B. Msigwa, 22 August, 2021

⁵³ See Kadiva Ernest 2021: 39-40

⁵⁴ Interview with A. Mbena, 20, January, 2021

The Reformed, Evangelical, and older Pentecostal churches strongly oppose the prosperity gospel, but they also acknowledge the harsh reality of poverty in society and may sympathize with the message when it appears helpful. However, they do not consider the prosperity message to be the gospel. Pastors in the study area are educated enough to recognize the genuine spiritual, mental, physical, and economic needs of people, and it is their responsibility to address these needs. If they fail to do so, their congregations may continue to receive false teachings, including the gospel of prosperity.⁵⁵

The Word of God reminds us that those who do not work should not eat.⁵⁶ People struggle against three enemies: poverty, disease, and ignorance. Poverty is caused by various factors, including the lack of a sustainable system that provides opportunities to overcome it, inadequate health services, incurable diseases, poor nutrition, inadequate housing, and lack of energy.⁵⁷

In an African context, if prosperity gospel has spiritual indicators then, as Toit Cornel du; in his article *African Spirituality and the Poverty of Western Religious Experience* explains the needs of the people are linked to their struggle against oppression, poverty, exploitation, and dehumanization in the community.⁵⁸(p.47). African spirituality should be balanced by both preachers and non-preachers. Preachers of the prosperity gospel should provide a message that helps people overcome the challenges they face in their daily lives, while congregants should receive appropriate answers to their personal needs related to the prosperity gospel. The Church has the responsibility to preach a holistic gospel that addresses people's spiritual, physical, economic, and intellectual needs so that they can enter the kingdom of God. Waiting for faith to bring success without working hard is a strange thing for a Christian. Servants of the Word of God should respect their calling as preachers and be content with what God has given them in their lives. They should be disciplined in their use of wealth and money they have earned.⁵⁹

4.2. Areas of Emphasis as Prosperity Gospel is Preached

The teaching of prosperity has been incorporated into the main doctrinal stands of some Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches, posing both biblical and theological challenges. Therefore, those who consider prosperity theology to be erroneous should prove its error from Scripture, rather than resorting to militant actions. In this seminal project, it is crucial for the researcher to adopt the right attitude, hoping to initiate a dialogue with those who endorse this theology. The common error in polemics and apologetics is that it can drive away the very people we wish to reach, resulting in us chasing after the wind.⁶⁰

If the church is to be an example in everything, believers must practice what it preaches in front of others. The prosperity gospel has almost spread throughout the world, even in African churches, albeit with different emphases. When the church initiates various independent projects, they become part of the learning process for its members. When a Christian prospers economically, it benefits the church as a congregation or diocese. Preachers cannot effectively deliver their message if their audience is hungry. Both preachers and hearers of the prosperity gospel need good pasture, and everyone strives to attain wealth or material possessions. However, wealth should not be used as a weapon to harm others or engender pride.⁶¹

A quest of the prosperity gospel emphasizes that as part of God's covenant Christians as members of the church enjoy unquestionable claims to certain blessings and the right relationship with God their giver, other

⁵⁵ See Kasera 2012: 9

⁵⁶ Interview with B. Msigwa 22 August, 2021

⁵⁷ See Kadiva 2012: 63

⁵⁸ Toit Cornel du. (1998). *African Spirituality and the Poverty of Western Religious Experience*. In Journal of Theology for Southern Africa. Number 100, 103 -105; 1998 -1999; 1998:47

⁵⁹ Interview with S. Konga, 23 August, 2021

⁶⁰ See Kasera 2012: 5

⁶¹ Interview with S. Konga, 23 August, 2021

human being as well as the nature created by God.⁶² This covenant is sealed by the death of Christ, that all who believes in the message of the gospel will along with the salvation of their souls obtain all good things in this world including wealth, health and total success.⁶³ According to Mbilu, the prosperity gospel emphasizes that Christians, as members of the church, enjoy unquestionable claims to certain blessings and a right relationship with God, other human beings, and nature. This covenant is sealed by the death of Christ, and all who believe in the gospel message will obtain all good things in this world, including wealth, health, and total success.⁶⁴ However, Mbilu notes that the prosperity gospel tends to focus on material gain, leading people to become spiritually and materially poorer. Lay preachers in the church tend to emphasize that faith in God will bring prosperity, and confessing that promise is an act of faith that God Himself honors to the people who believe in Him.⁶⁵

Furthermore, some Christians believe in prosperity theology as a religious belief, maintaining that financial blessing is God's will for them. They believe that faith, positive speech, and donations will increase one's material wealth. Attanasi and Yong argue that;

Prosperity doctrines of physical healing, material wealth and salvation are often summarized in a particular understanding of what Jesus accomplished through dying on the cross. This teaching says that sickness and poverty are the vestiges of Satan's dominion over the earth. Jesus's death paid the penalty for human sin, thereby breaking Satan's power over God's people. As a result, believers have been redeemed from poverty, sickness, and eternal death. Christ's death (both physical and spiritual) entitles believers to salvation, to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and to prosperity and material benefits. Each Christian should therefore be "physically healthy and materially prosperous and successful." Christians must then procure such blessing by faith, which is defined as more than just belief: faith means "acting on the word, speaking into reality what does not exist, and dreaming and envisioning the desired goals." God's people should claim their divine authority over their circumstances by confessing or declaring the Bible's promises. Healing and prosperity are available; indeed, they are the rewards of being followers of Christ. Nevertheless, it is up to believers to claim them⁶⁶

The teachings of prosperity emphasize personal empowerment, proposing that it is God's will for his people to be happy. It also includes the atonement as part of reconciliation with God, with its interpretation encompassing the alleviation of sickness and poverty, viewed as a curse to be broken by faith.

During the interview, one respondent stated that the prosperity gospel becomes meaningless to Christians if the holistic Gospel is not preached to believers. The inclusive gospel is the true meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, commissioned by the church to preach and teach to people. If believers are not taught the prosperity gospel well, it is seen as a part of spiritual success. From my point of view, it is wrong that the gospel aims for physical success more than spiritual success. What I know is that if a person receives a preached gospel and is taught well, the Good News brings blessings from God. They will live as an example economically, spiritually, and mentally.⁶⁷

5. WHAT ARE THE REAL NEEDS OF CHRISTIANS?

⁶² Attanasi Katherine and Yong Amos (Editors), *Pentecostalism and Prosperity The Socioeconomics of the Global Charismatic Movement*. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN in the United States — a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 2012: 5

⁶³ See Kasera 2012: 7

⁶⁴ See Mbilu Msafiri 18/5/2015

⁶⁵ Ibd

⁶⁶ See Attanasi K. and Yong A. 2012: 5

⁶⁷ Interview with S. Konga, 23 August, 2021

Individuals can identify their own needs or they can be identified by others. The church has a crucial role in understanding the genuine needs of people. Stott argues in his book *"New Issues Facing Christians Today"* that preachers should take note of issues such as self-fulfillment, poverty, wealth, equality, and who is considered poor. There are the "indigent poor," who lack basic necessities of life, and the "powerless poor," who are socially marginalized.⁶⁸ All these people require assistance from the church, which they believe they can receive through the teachings of preachers. The church must address these issues theologically. Msigwa also emphasized the importance of providing basic Christian education, Bible study, confession, and spiritual meetings that meet the needs of people.⁶⁹

One respondent in the study mentioned that in the past, people used to pay preachers in crops, such as beans and maize, as there was no money. However, with the introduction of cash crops like pyrethrum and livestock-keeping, people began to sell these items and use the money for their daily lives and offerings to the church.⁷⁰ The respondent also stated that material possessions are a result of God's grace and blessings, earned through hard work. The goal of the gospel is to save people and lead them to heaven. However, some prosperity preachers misuse the gospel by focusing on money rather than on eternal life.⁷¹ Kadiva noted that prosperity preachers often change their message according to their audience's response, which can be misleading them.⁷² People need happiness and peace, regardless of their economic status. Possessions do not guarantee peace; they can even lead to disobedience to God. The goal of the gospel is to provide spiritual salvation, not just material wealth.

6. The Role of the ELCT

One of the objectives mentioned earlier was to identify the role of the ELCT in regards to prosperity, particularly with lay preachers. Mhando, in his article, argues that lay Christians have been deprived of proper biblical teachings and faith education, resulting in a lack of understanding. Therefore, the church has a greater responsibility to provide guidance to its congregations, ensuring that they are not swayed by new trends without fully understanding them. It is the duty of theologians and pastors to help their congregations with the right teachings and guide them to prevent them from suffering.⁷³

The church should be vigilant about false teachings and the pressures faced by congregations. While some preachers understand God's word and theology well, others may lack the necessary knowledge. The priority must always be the gospel, with personal needs taking a secondary role, regardless of the environmental and economic challenges.

One of the church's primary tasks is to teach the right theology, not the personal feelings of preachers. For example, as Kadiva commented, healing or miracles should belong to God at all times and should not be the investment of preachers⁷⁴ (2 Kings 5:14-16). Miracles give God glory and honor (Jn. 11:4).⁷⁵ The church must

⁶⁸ Stott John, *New Issues Facing Christians Today*. Marshall Pickering: Printed and bound in Great Britain. 1999: 264

⁶⁹ Interview with B. Msigwa, 22 August 2022

⁷⁰ Interview with A. Mbena, 20, January 2021

⁷¹ Interview with B. Msigwa, 22 August, 2022

⁷² See Kadiva 2021: 21

⁷³ Mhando Ernest. *Charismatic movement in our Church in Tanzania*. Pastoral Journal. VOLUME 3; NUMBER 1, Faculty of the Lutheran College of Theology Makumira. Usa River: Tanzania: Arusha S.J. Printers & Stationary, 1996: 18

⁷⁴ See Kadiva 2021: 95

⁷⁵ Ibid 2021: 97

oversee the correct teachings of God's word and the great commission of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 28:19-20; John 14:26).⁷⁶

The prosperity gospel should not be the church's priority; the gospel should come first, and the economy should follow. Preachers must not prioritize their personal needs through the believers as they preach the word of God.⁷⁷ The church must continue to train ministers in recognized theological colleges, even though some trained theologians may be preaching the same gospel of prosperity in their congregations.⁷⁸ What the church needs is to train preachers who can help avoid theological misconceptions that are brought into the church through teaching and preaching.

The church is the only official place where congregants can receive teachings and instructions through the gospel. However, many parishioners are seeking alternative teachings from various revival groups, both within and outside the Lutheran church. These groups often promote false teachings that are not controlled by church leaders. The church has also neglected to provide services for children and Christian education for students, leaving many adults without proper care or house-to-house services. Even within Christian families, the emphasis on prayer and worship has been forgotten, weakening people's faith. If these areas are properly managed, the prevalence of the prosperity gospel can be reduced.⁷⁹

Unfortunately, the church's main focus has become finding property and money, causing preachers to prioritize seeking funds over preaching the word of God. The sermons and teachings are often focused on personal wishes rather than the true gospel. The word has been used as an inducement to get money.⁸⁰ As a result, believers are receiving many wrong ideologies, trusting that the preacher's message is true because they believe in God. The church must strive to teach correct Lutheran teachings and address theological misconceptions among its congregants.

Also, the church had to be careful with the theological misconceptions which have been swallowed by the congregants. Believers receive a lot of wrong ideologies in their lives because they believe that what a preacher is preaching is faithful true because they trust God and the preached message preached by a servant of God. As a church, we should strive to teach the correct Lutheran teachings.⁸¹

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania has not dealt with theological matters of this kind to ensure its unity. No official statement has been made about the prosperity gospel, and only individual preachers or pastors have spoken about it when given the opportunity. The church is more focused on dealing with social issues than evangelizing the community with the right gospel through sermons and theological teachings.⁸² As a way forward, the ELCT should ask its theological institutions to study and make suggestions on how to address prosperity gospel teachings and preaching within the church.

7. Conclusion

The impact of prosperity gospel on Christianity has both positive and negative aspects due to theological misunderstandings. The author emphasizes the importance of considering its impact on Christians' faith. Preaching that being poor is a curse is concerning.

The study reveals that prosperity gospel has caused confusion among Lutheran parishioners by emphasizing the importance of giving to become wealthy. This has led some to perceive lacking wealth as a sign

⁷⁶ *Ibd* 2021: 101

⁷⁷ Interview with Bishop J. Mbwilo 22 March, 2018

⁷⁸ Interview with C. Ngogo 15 September 2019

⁷⁹ Interview with A. Mbena, 15 July 2021

⁸⁰ See Kadiva 2021: 101

⁸¹ Interview with B. Msigwa, 22 August, 2021

⁸² Interview with F. Ilomo 18 August, 2022

of being cursed. Such teachings have caused misunderstandings about God's grace and blessings. The more prosperity gospel becomes ingrained in believers' faith, the more confusion it creates, with the poor feeling inferior and the wealthy feeling superior. Congregants respond by sowing seeds (*kupanda mbegu*) to show acceptance of the teachings.

The church must take responsibility for correcting prosperity theology and addressing poverty positively. Proper biblical teachings on material possessions and prosperity should attract believers and minimize debates. The ELCT, including the South Western Diocese, should evaluate if they are fulfilling the work intended by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:16-20. True prophets are missing due to suppression of honest voices, and the church must preach the right gospel for transformation in faith and economics, regardless of economic status.