


'Prosperity theology': Poverty and implications for socio-economic development in Africa

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Poverty is a complex subject in traditional African cultures. It is the lack of provision to satisfy the basic human needs of the population. The prosperity gospel as part of Pentecostal Christianity, with origins in the United States of America, presents itself as a new model for poverty eradication. Pentecostal Christianity and the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Africa, many of whom are adherents of prosperity theology over a period of more than three decades, have not translated to a more prosperous continent, and sub-Saharan Africa is still notably one of the poorest regions of the world. Poverty is a concept with many dimensions that attempts to ascertain the varying degrees of deprivation experienced by populations, individually or collectively. However, certain subjective and sometimes arbitrary interpretations of biblical texts on prosperity as the basis for prosperity theology have encouraged capitalist impulses that often supplant the pursuit of spiritual advantages, leading instead to an increase in crimes including robbery, financial fraud, kidnapping, ritual killings and many other social vices. This article examines the different perspectives of the prosperity gospel, the biblical sources and interpretations used as well as its interpretation of poverty. It shows how prosperity theology, with its own interpretation of poverty, erodes the valuable indigenous resources available to fight poverty within African religious communities, which emphasise community, positive family attachments, social support networks, moral values and accountability, and it examines the implications this has for socio-economic development in Africa.

Contribution: This article challenges the theology of prosperity that characterises Pentecostal Christianity and is pervasive in Africa. It contributes to the discourse on how the challenges of poverty require the more community-centred approaches that traditional African values offer as against the self-centredness and greed promoted by the prosperity theology.

Keywords: prosperity gospel; Africa; poverty; socio-economic development; culture.

Introduction

The descriptions of the nature of poverty are inextricably linked to the efforts societies make to alleviate it (Desmond & Wester 2018). The prevalent narrative about poverty in every culture has a big impact on how people think it should be handled. In other words, how poverty is conceptualised, and subsequently measured, not only affects how the challenge is understood but also dictates policy direction and actions (Saunders 2015). Poverty is often discussed from an economic perspective (Martinez Jr & Peralez 2017), with implications for how its challenges are being tackled, particularly in Africa. For instance, it often refers to a situation in which someone's income is so insufficient as to make it impossible for them to enjoy a reasonable level of life, and it exists when people's actual income is below the poverty line (Saunders et al. 2007:viii). Scholars like Townsend (1979) define poverty not only as a lack of money or material possessions but also as a lack of access to resources, which makes it extremely difficult for people to participate in and be accepted by larger social groups. This deprivation approach, which forces the question of the extent to which people's living standards match the current social climate (Reeves, Panel & Liu 2020), is better suited to the African poverty situation. The majority of the world's poor live in lower-middle-income nations, resource-dependent nations and fragile conflict-affected states like those in Africa, notably sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia (Touray 2016:1). Socio-economic deprivation, particularly poverty, has contributed to insecurity and instability in Africa (Newman 2006).

While the majority of the literature concentrates on deprivation indicators like income, food, access to housing and some others, the selection of indicators to access levels of deprivation can

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frequently be arbitrary and may not reflect a full-scale estimate of unmet fundamental requirements in various socio-economic circumstances (Touray 2016:1). This disagreement leads to the interchangeability of terms like poverty, social exclusion and vulnerability in development discourse. While poverty is typically regarded as a measure of deprivation of the essential necessities that an individual, home or society require in order to have a basic level of living, taking into account variances in indications of unmet basic needs, deprivation can be quantified in two ways: either as a lack of resources (such as money or property) and capabilities (such as expertise, knowledge or technology) or both (Touray 2016:1). According to international convention, it is described as a forced dearth of things that society considers vital. Social exclusion, on the other hand, occurs when individuals refrain from taking part in important social activities. Contrary to the idea of deprivation, which emphasises what individuals cannot afford, social exclusion emphasises what people are unable to do (Saunders et al. 2007:viii). In a deeply religious continent such as Africa, afflicted with extreme poverty, it is common to see populations pursue a search for answers to hardship and poverty in religion, and Pentecostals now represent a significant portion of Africa's population.

Pentecostal Christianity is a Protestant charismatic Christian movement that represents the fastest-growing Christian population in the 21st century, and about 86% of Pentecostal Christians are in the Global South (Johnson 2020). In Africa's religious and political scene, Pentecostalism has grown in prominence (Afolayan, Yacob-Haliso & Falola 2018). It is important to consider the rise of Pentecostal churches in recent decades in Africa as the culmination of renewal movements that have occurred throughout the past century (Kalu 2008). The diverse denominations of charismatic spirituality of African Christian churches were moulded and enhanced by Africa's crucial involvement in these Pentecostal movements (Moon 2021:2). Prosperity theology, which stresses material benefits of health and money and promises financial blessings in return for generous giving, is one of the key modern themes among Pentecostal organisations in Africa (Owojaiye 2019). There are three schools of thought on prosperity theology – the fierce proponents who hold tenaciously to its biblical interpretation, the fierce opponents who argue that this type of biblical interpretation is a threat to orthodox Christianity and so should be rejected completely and the middle group who hold that it contains useful aspects as well as dangerous aspects, advocating a balance (Soboyejo 2016). Most of the criticisms come from the fierce opponents. However, this discussion is approached by considering the aspects that pose a threat to socio-economic development in Africa. For the purpose of this article, socio-economic development refers to a process of quantitative, qualitative and structural changes that are brought about by subject's actions in relation to social (economic) practices which have an impact on life conditions in material terms. These conditions include the ability to satisfy needs associated with consumption of goods and services related to the

phenomenon of economic growth, access to public goods and services, positive changes in educational levels and other social factors (Litwiński 2017:451).

Understanding prosperity theology

Prosperity theology, a Christian doctrine, holds that God desires for his followers to be wealthy and in excellent health (Mumford 2012:371). It is also known as the 'gospel of success' or the 'gospel of health' (Niemandt 2017:203; Soboyejo 2016:1) or 'the gospel of greed' (Koch 2009:1). Although it gained root in the Pentecostal movements of the post-World War II years and reached maturity in the late 1970s, prosperity theology has historical roots in the faith movements in the United States of America (USA) and may be traced back to the late 19th century (Bowler 2010:iv; Nel 2020). E.W. Kenyon, the founder of the faith movement, promoted the notion of faith, positive confession and healing that underpins prosperity theology (Bowler 2010). His theology of faith finds expression in the writings and sermons of healing evangelists like Kenneth Hagin (Bowler 2010:41; Mpigi 2017:35). Kenneth Hagin was an American preacher whose experience of divine healing from a life of sickness and disease turned him into a faith preacher (Hagin 1985:3–4). Kenyon also served as an inspiration for other healing evangelists like Kenneth Copeland, Oral Roberts, John Osteen and Robert Tilton (Mpigi 2017:35), to mention a few. Oral Roberts promoted the idea of the 'divine economy', a secular economic alternative founded on the notion that God desires to bestow material wealth upon his people (Perriman 2003:51).

Faith in God's goodness and the law of sowing and reaping, or 'seed-faith', are said to activate the divine economy (Roberts 1970:37). The doctrine of the 'divine economy' is founded on the conviction that God desires to grant his people material prosperity (Swoboda 2015:7). It supports a theological viewpoint that favours health and human or material prosperity above anything else. It teaches that through positive thinking, adherents can attain a change in their socio-economic status, because God intervenes in the daily struggles of the poor by offering a route out of their situation, both physically and financially (Jong & Schieman 2012:739). The 'divine economy' projects an economy that is based on an open system of limitless resources (Swoboda 2015). The sowing and reaping of seed faith is considered to be the main means by which the economic principle of the divine economy is implemented (Roberts 1970:37). Faith, therefore, is the primary means through which one can escape the constraints of poverty and physical limitations (Swoboda 2015:9). The idea behind prosperity theology is one of all-encompassing success that is rooted in all of God's blessings on earth. It is interpreted as that aspect of Christian doctrine that emphasises overall physical well-being, including good health, financial security, status and personal empowerment, as well as longevity, tranquillity and happiness without the need for suffering (Omavuebe 2021:389). The gospel presents itself as a divine weapon against insecurity, unemployment, poverty, failure, sickness

and barrenness (Ehioghae & Olanrewaju 2015). The Abrahamic blessing and salvation concepts found in the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively, are used to interpret the prosperity gospel (Pickering 2013). According to the proponents of the prosperity gospel, release from all socio-economic problems was also brought about by the death and triumph of Jesus Christ's resurrection in the New Testament (Amechi 2014). It is a popular Christian teaching that emphasises achieving spiritual, material and financial mastery – a mastery of overcoming a life tainted by poverty and death (Jong & Schieman 2012:738).

The prosperity gospel underscores materialism, individualism and greed as a vital element of capitalism (Jong & Schieman 2012:740). It tends to project a type of individualistic consumerism that views the material well-being of people as a salvific goal. Mumford (2012) rightly argues that because of this individualistic nature and the denial of oppressive systems, prosperity theology lacks the much-needed prophetic voice that calls for change and hinders the development of Christian character, as the virtues of self-denial are lost, promoting conceit. Prosperity theology has four key components: faith, wealth, health and victory (Bowler 2013:3). It teaches that followers can depend on God to grant them health, riches and success in this temporary world through renewed faith, optimistic thinking and action (Swoboda 2015:5). The basic tenets of prosperity theology can therefore be summarised in four topical issues, namely faith in God who can do all things, personal accountability to living a life pleasing to God in righteousness, the importance of the Holy Spirit in daily life and hope for a better tomorrow (Mumford 2012). These topical issues appear harmless and are in line with basic Christian theology; however, the shortcoming of prosperity theology and the reason why it is so often harshly criticised is that these topics are taught as a means to becoming materially rich, as opposed to the Christian theology that emphasises these topics as a means of getting to know God better through Jesus Christ and a life of reward in eternity (Mumford 2012:378). It aims to instil in its members visions of a better life (whether utopian or realistic) amid the chaos, by pointing its followers to a sort of optimism that society does not give them (Omavuebe 2021:399).

Some of the popular biblical sources from the King James Version used to support the prosperity theology include, but are not limited to, the following:

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (Jn 10:10)

Yet ye have not, because ye ask not. (Ja 4:2b)

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. (Gl 6:7)

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentile through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gl 3:13–14)

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. (2 Cor 8:9)

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. (Lk 6:38)

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. (Jn 3 1:2)

The interpretation given to these biblical verses to support the prosperity theology appears harmless and sincere in that they encourage believers to seek a good life. Similar to the Pharisees and Sadducees who desired a Jesus who would deliver the Israelites from Roman political oppression, proponents of prosperity theology desire a kind and compassionate Jesus who will free followers from socio-economic challenges (Omavuebe 2021:399).

There are four major principles of hermeneutics (the study of general principles of biblical interpretation), namely the literal principle, moral principle, allegorical principle and analogical principle (Wendland 2017). In order to promote the preacher's intended message, prosperity theology adopts a literal kind of biblical interpretation that accepts the literal translation of each sentence. The fundamental tenet of biblical literalism, as Alu (2020:104) explains, is that the Bible 'means what it says' and that it effectively conveys to humanity the truth and guidance of God. According to literal interpretation, a biblical passage should be understood in light of the 'plain meaning' that its linguistic structure and historical setting make clear; hence, it reflects the writers' intent (Alu 2020:104; Wendland 2017:52). Mumford (2012) also refers to a similar method of biblical interpretation called the proof-texting method. Proof-texting is the practice of utilising a biblical passage to support or defend a theological stance without taking into account the context of the passage being used (Allen & Swain 2011), and this method allows preachers to pick a theme for a sermon and use isolated verses to support the theme. It involves a very literal view of Bible verses without the need for context, as every sentence of the Bible is considered able to stand alone as a divinely inspired truth. The implication here is that Bible verses could potentially be taken out of context very often, given literal translations attributed to them, even when they are figurative texts. Most of the interpretations deemphasise the 'other-world' and emphasise the now; hence, they are at risk of being misapplied quite often. The literal method of biblical interpretation is subjective and highly arbitrary, as the verses are used without careful attention to grammatical clues, subtle semantic differences or literary and historical contexts (Soboyejo 2016:3).

The prosperity gospel in Africa

Prosperity theology, which originated from the USA, as acknowledged by scholars like Nel (2020), infiltrated and dominated the African religious space through miracle crusades, fire conferences and mass media such as television,

radio, printed posters and leaflets, as well as social media. According to current estimates, the majority of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa subscribe to the prosperity gospel movement (Omavuebe 2021:390). The emphasis on prosperity theology, according to academics like Ojo (2013) and Onwu (2006), may have been a reaction to socio-economic developments in the 1980s as a result of the detrimental effects of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). The World Bank and IMF mandated that developing countries establish conditions that benefitted Western governments and corporations in the 1980s, referred to as SAPs. Governments were required by the SAP to reduce public spending, which included subsidised health care, food and education programmes. In response, governments in Africa reduced government initiatives and programmes that aided the weak, the destitute, women, children and other vulnerable segments of society (Omavuebe 2021:391). As a result, the directed changes, according to Ojo (2013) and Onwu (2006), produced new socio-economic difficulties that served as a prelude to the spread of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

The main causes of the rapid growth of the prosperity gospel in Africa in general were poverty, disease, inadequate healthcare facilities, insecurity, unemployment, high mortality rates and deteriorating infrastructure (Togarasei 2011) on one hand, and the promise of 'all-round financial success, peace, poverty alleviation, self-empowerment, longevity, divine security and divine healing' (Omavuebe 2021:396) on the other. The prosperity gospel grew as long as there were promises of a quick fix and the persistent belief that God was capable of resolving human problems and shielding a devotee from socio-economic challenges like unemployment, illness, high mortality rates and the lack of basic amenities. Sickness and poverty were perceived as punishment from God for a lack of faith (Mora 2008:404). As a result, many who were experiencing socio-economic hardships and those who were seeking spiritual protection, healing and provision or upward economic mobility found prosperity theology to be appealing (Kitause & Achunike 2015).

People often go to religion for comfort during difficult times, and therefore religious groups tend to flourish in the midst of socio-economic challenges (Maxwell 1998). Kitause and Achunike (2015) argue rightly that where socio-economic challenges are prevalent, there is a good chance that people will quickly accept and adopt a contextual theology model that speaks to their situation. This could explain why many Africans in the 1970s chose to embrace the gospel of prosperity as a way to overcome or escape their poverty, unemployment or illness. Consequently, using the elements of the prevailing socio-economic hardships, along with the African cosmological orientation of demonology, witchcraft and wizardry and faith in God's supreme ability to deliver the oppressed people, an indigenous theology of success developed to make it more relevant and appealing in the continent (Omavuebe 2021). Almost everything traditionally African was seen as demonic, hence the need for deliverance

and severance from family, family ties and consequently family and community values. Urban migration for greener pastures in many African societies meant that many people were separated from their families as they travelled far from home, and ties to traditional values suffered a hit.

As Nel (2019:5) observes, deliverance is viewed by Pentecostals as the outcome of a conflict between the Holy Spirit and the so-called 'ancestors', which offers some psychological comfort and has been a significant factor in the conversion of many Africans to Pentecostal Christianity. The avoidance of mishap, for instance, is referred to as a breakthrough in this context as well, and its acquisition may demand some form of recompense (Saracco 2007:323), mostly in monetary terms. Donations, affirmations, seed faith, the word of faith, faith healing and components of the American prosperity gospel, combined with elements of the African Pentecostal revivalism (regeneration, power of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives, power over evil forces and deliverance from demonic powers) characterise prosperity teachings in Africa (Kalu 2000). God is portrayed as a saviour who could deliver Christians from prevailing socio-economic challenges, such as poverty, as well as from the alleged demonic forces that were thought to have prevented their success in life (Kitause 2017). This spirituality forbids consideration of alternative explanations such as human choice and a failing political system, and places the blame for social tragedies like poverty, high mortality rates, illness, unemployment and frequent traffic accidents on fictitious spiritual entities (Omavuebe 2021:399). Poverty is seen as a curse from the devil that one must be delivered from.

Some of the notable prosperity preachers in Africa include David Oyedepo (Living Faith Church Worldwide aka Winners Chapel, Nigeria), Benson Idahosa (Church of God Mission International, Nigeria), Chris Oyakhilome (Christ Embassy, Nigeria), Shepherd Bushiri (The Enlightened Christian Gathering Church, South Africa), Paseka Motsoeneng – Mboro Bio (Incredible Happenings Ministries Church, South Africa), Emmanuel Makandiwa (United Family International Church, Zimbabwe), Aloysius Busingo (House of Prayer Ministries International, Uganda), Andrew Wutawunashe (Family of God Churches, Ghana), to mention a few (Adamo 2021; Gifford 2004:13). These churches, often referred to as megachurches with 'mega-sized auditoriums, with an attraction for Africa's upwardly mobile youth and professionals, innovative use of modern technology, large media ministries and technologically driven styles of worship' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2019:390), represent some of the richest and fastest growing churches in Africa (Gifford 2004:13). Many of them have a transnational presence across the continent and are located mainly in the urban cities. Common among these preachers and their churches is an attempt to project material success 'in an age of socio-economic and political decline' (Komolafe 2004:220) as evidence of God's approval and blessing. Adopting a literal principle of biblical interpretation, prosperity preachers in Africa easily communicate their teachings with Bible verses that appear to drive their messages home clearly enough,

and because they appear straightforward and easy to understand, the appeal increases for African populations who understand this simplicity and can relate to the positive promises in contrast to the negative circumstances they want to change.

Implication for socio-economic development in Africa

Statistically, the prosperity gospel is not delivering prosperity to Africa, even though the socio-economic context of the theology remains a significant allure for the continent's poor people. This has significant implications for socio-economic development in Africa.

The 'dualistic nature' of the doctrine of the divine economy

The 'dualistic nature' of the doctrine of the divine economy (Swoboda 2015:394) pushes adherents to disregard their own personal realities (Mumford 2012:379) and trust God for change in their material conditions, and it often absolves adherents of all responsibility in creating possibilities for themselves. The implication is that the values of hard work are no longer extolled in many African households, and the source of sudden wealth is not questioned by families or clergy as long as the 'money' keeps coming in. Church leaders also in most settings do not question the sources of tithes and offerings or seed faith, although they may teach the values of honest living. The emphasis on economic gains as a sign of the blessing of God has led to an inordinate pursuit of material wealth to the detriment of moral standards among the youthful populations of Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, with a significant Pentecostal presence, ritual killings are becoming more prevalent as a result of weakened state authority and growing impatience to achieve economic stability (Obadere 2022).

The individualistic nature of prosperity theology

The individualistic nature of this theology, where everyone is responsible for seeking their own prosperity, 'naming and claiming' for themselves, breeds selfishness and self-centredness, which lie at the root of crime and other societal vices. The crime rate among youths is on the rise because of the pressure to display material wealth as evidence of God's blessing; money rituals are carried out by members of communities who belong to churches. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) made a recent arrest of a Nigerian pastor on his way to a crusade in Nairobi, Kenya, for being in possession of about 54 sticks of drugs which tested positive for cannabis wrapped around his body (Odunsi 2022). The zeal to gain material wealth as a show of spirituality has resulted in a generation of young people who no longer care about Christian character or communal well-being as long as they can make money to show. Church leaders do not have a system of vetting the sources of wealth of their congregants as long as tithes and offerings and building donations continue to flow in. Ritual killings,

kidnappings and all kinds of social vices in Africa have been on the increase in the last few years (Obadere 2022).

The false sense of Christian entitlement conveyed by the prosperity theology

Prosperity theology conveys the idea that once a person becomes a Christian, the social ills of life should dissipate (Blake 2005). This false sense of Christian entitlement that conveys that if everyone just follows Jesus then social justice issues and other social problems would go away has created apathy towards engagement by many Christians in actions that would hold political and social leaders accountable in the society (Mumford 2012:381). Given the desire for such an expected outcome, adherents ignore their social responsibilities in dealing with these social ills. These manifestations are in opposition to the worldview about social problems held in traditional African contexts, where every member of the community has a responsibility to give back to that community and ensure that their duties are carried out in contribution to the collective well-being. Given the high population of African Pentecostals who adhere to the prosperity gospel, it should be expected that this impact would be widespread.

Traditional African values, prosperity theology and poverty

Family communities, made up of extended family members, alive and dead, are an aspect of African traditional culture (Theron & Theron 2013:391). The African family is essential to overcoming poverty and the risks that come with it (Mosoetsa 2011). The customary family in Africa is an expression of Afrocentric worldviews, and Afrocentric cultural paradigms underscore a collective and spiritual worldview that shapes values, beliefs, behaviour and practices (Schiele 2000:17). This worldview emphasises positive family attachments, social support networks and accountability (APA 2008:8). Also, it reveals spirituality or spiritual and communal coping as cultural strategies that moderate adversity and promote resilience (Theron & Theron 2013:395). Members of the family are raised to believe they are responsible for and functionally entwined with the family, including the living and the dead; as a result, they are taught respect for elders, obedience to instructions and participation in domestic routines (Theron & Theron 2013:399). The result of this upbringing is an understanding of the ethics of social duty and an appreciation of the contributions everyone is expected to make to the collective through hard work (Dandala 2009). Elders instil these qualities through tales, storied history, myths and/or moral instruction, and they serve as role models for how to cope well with adversity, cooperate and practise community-mindedness (Dandala 2009). These principles and practices are well captured by the concept of *ubuntu*.

Ubuntu refers to a practice in South African culture 'that expresses compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and

humanity in the interests of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring' (Lefa 2015:15). Concepts such as *ubuntu* cut across ethnic groups and show the commonality of African values. The core of *ubuntu* is the pursuit of social justice, structural change and the eradication of the evils of capitalism that promotes greed and materialism (Methula 2017). It is in line with this that Mashau and Kgatle (2019) rightly propose a theology of *ubuntu* as an alternative to the prosperity gospel. The theology of *ubuntu*, as explained by Mashau and Kgatle (2019:7), incorporates a theology of life, care, solidarity and economic justice, as well as hope and accompaniment, that can potentially resist gospels of consumerism and idolisation of material wealth and physical health projected as ideals. The communal self that evolves from this context of traditional African values, as Dandala (2009) observes, has protective value. Closely related to *ubuntu* is a similar concept of *hembozana izinga*, meaning that the 'members of the community cover each other's back side' (Manci 2009:54). The interconnectedness that is emphasised here inculcates in members of the community a feeling of security and belonging that fosters tolerance and peaceful coexistence but also a responsibility to contribute to the collective. Neblett et al. (2010) explain that this interconnectedness also nurtures a purpose-driven life that encourages optimistic interpretation of challenges like poverty and hardship. External influences (religious, political or cultural), however, interfere with these African ethics and shape the way poverty is being tackled. One of these religious influences has been from Pentecostal Christianity and its prosperity theology. A reinforcement of these ideals is a more sustainable and effective way to tackle the challenges of poverty in Africa.

Traditional African values of *ubuntu* are ascribed to critical-mindedness, active engagement, flexibility and communalism as a way of life. They are cultural values that represent:

[T]hose forms of behavior, practice, or thought that are nurtured by a culture and held, cherished and maintained by the users of the culture as the most worthwhile, desirable, as having sufficient importance and relevance to their lives. (Gyekye 2013:159–160)

They frequently refer to culturally ingrained values that are inextricably linked to African religious practices where traditional deities and ancestors uphold truthfulness, honesty and integrity as virtues that promote societal harmony and cosmic harmony (Asamoah-Gyadu et al. 2022:162). The approach of African cultures to poverty, therefore, often serves to reaffirm the importance of community, meaningful relationships and the value of *ubuntu* (Manci 2009). This approach to poverty alleviation maintains an ethic that says 'real poverty results from the blockage of vital links' and wealth is 'conceived more as a means to establish and strengthen one's vital links' (Manci 2009:323). These vital links refer to the connection to family, immediate, extended and the entire community. Because of this, the celebration of human achievements must come before those of a material or economic kind. It teaches that politics and religion should be concerned with resource creation and distribution in addition

to other organisations that control people's lives. The concept of *ubuntu* is represented in many African societies. For instance, the South African phrase *batho pele*, which translates to 'people first', promotes service, not to oneself and not waiting to be served, but rather that everyone should be contributing in any way they can to the creation of the services (Manci 2009), thus emphasising the concept of work. Additionally, Gyekye (1995:132) argues that this moral goodness is primarily that which fosters social welfare, solidarity and harmony in interpersonal interactions within the context of Akan social and humanistic ethics of Ghana. These resources, if harnessed, would contribute significantly to mitigating poverty more realistically and thus promote socio-economic development.

Conclusion

The uncritical adoption of prosperity theology in Africa is a threat to sustainable socio-economic development. For genuine socio-economic development and sustainable prosperity to take place in Africa, the virtues of honesty, accountability, hard work, integrity, perseverance, community and delayed gratification, as emphasised by the African traditional values encapsulated in *ubuntu*, along with a more Christ-centred Christian theology that insists on social change, need to be taken seriously. By taking passages out of context and using a slavishly literal hermeneutic, adopting an overly pessimistic view of the end of the world and applying the scriptures incorrectly, prosperity preachers tend to distort the scriptures and take advantage of those who follow them. Prosperity theology, its interpretation of the sources and causes of poverty and the models put forward for its alleviation grossly underestimate the dynamics of poverty in Africa and tend to operate in opposition to the various opportunities offered by African traditional values of hard work, honesty, justice and equity, which emphasise community and togetherness. In the context of Africa's realities, this is a threat to socio-economic development. While it cannot be denied that Pentecostalism in itself appeals to African Christians, the realities of Africa's socio-economic conditions require ideas and practices like those expressed in *ubuntu*, which can practically and sustainably raise the standard of living of populations. The prosperity theology, as is currently seen, does not appear to be serving this purpose.

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D.U.W. is the sole author of this article.

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