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Ernest Jnr Frimpong, Grace Sintim Adasi & Jonathan E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

Despite the exercise of faith, positive confessions and donations towards prosperity as featured in the “prosperity gospel” teaching, some contemporary Ghanaian-African Christians have socio-economic challenges. The prevalence of “anti-work” perspective coupled with the rise of poverty among some contemporary Ghanaian Christians raises the question: “What will be the socioeconomic impact of balancing faith and work and its relation to achieving prosperity among contemporary Ghanaian Christians?” Using a qualitative approach with secondary and empirical data, this paper contextually reexamined the “prosperity gospel” in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity for poverty reduction and combating religious laziness through balancing faith and work. First, data were sourced from historical-critical exegesis of the biblical texts of Philippians 4:6-7 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 for empirical theological basis.

Keywords: faith and work, prosperity gospel, cost of discipleship, poverty reduction, religious laziness, Ghanaian Christianity, Christian discipleship, socio-economic development, positive confession, akan culture.

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ABSTRACT

*Despite the exercise of faith, positive confessions and donations towards prosperity as featured in the “prosperity gospel” teaching, some contemporary Ghanaian-African Christians have socio-economic challenges. The prevalence of “anti-work” perspective coupled with the rise of poverty among some contemporary Ghanaian Christians raises the question: “What will be the socioeconomic impact of balancing faith and work and its relation to achieving prosperity among contemporary Ghanaian Christians?” Using a qualitative approach with secondary and empirical data, this paper contextually reexamined the “prosperity gospel” in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity for poverty reduction and combating religious laziness through balancing faith and work. First, data were sourced from historical-critical exegesis of the biblical texts of Philippians 4:6-7 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 for empirical theological basis. Next, it adds document analysis of the writings and theological perspectives of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1979 edition and John R.W. Stott’s *Men With A Message*, regarding Christian discipleship, discipline and suffering towards glorification (prosperity). Also, from case study readings, this paper makes references to some Akan-Ghanaian proverbs and dynamic notions such as “Sika ye mogya – money is blood,” adopted by Akan Christians concerning work, wealth and poverty and its contextual relevance for reexamining the “prosperity gospel” in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. Strengthening the proposition for a balance between faith and work, this paper considered and analyzed the theological concepts*

of the “cost of discipleship” in Mark’s Gospel (Mark 8:34-38) and “Christian suffering and discipline” in the Petrine Epistles. Last, using structured interviews with purposive sampling, the study engaged the contemporary perspectives of thirty-one Ghanaian Christians from the Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal/Charismatic and African Independent Churches and Traditional Religio-Cultural leaders. These participants were ethically considered on the assurance of the confidentiality and usage of their responses for academic research, and nondisclosure of their identities. All findings resonate a necessary balance between faith and work towards genuine prosperity. The paper contributes to scholarship in prosperity theology, Biblical theology of work, African Christian Theology of development, Christianity and human development; liberation, reconstruction, poverty-reduction and mother-tongue theologies, and financial freedom among Christians through building balance between faith and work.

Keywords: faith and work, prosperity gospel, cost of discipleship, poverty reduction, religious laziness, Ghanaian Christianity, Christian discipleship, socio-economic development, positive confession, akan culture.

Author a: MPhil, is a Religious Scholar and Research Associate at the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, GHANA.

o: PhD, is a Senior Lecturer and the Principal at the Agogo College of Education, Agogo, Ghana.

p: Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor, PhD, is an Associate Professor and the former Head of Department at the Department of Religious Studies,

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, GHANA.

I. INTRODUCTION

Arguably, the roots of the “prosperity gospel” could be traced to the American Neo-Pentecostalism in the 19th-20th centuries.¹ Young indicates that Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Robert Tilton, Joel Osteen are mentioned among others as chief proponents of the “prosperity gospel”.² In addition to other proponents, Soboyejo acknowledges the above-stated names as proponents of the phenomenon.³ In explaining the elements of the “prosperity gospel,” Wilson indicates that, unlike poverty, proponents advocate that wealth is a blessing from God and it is obtained through positive confessions, visualization and donations.⁴ One could understand that its basic elements include positive words, imagining oneself in a state of wealth, and giving, in faith. Moses Asamoah observed that the “prosperity gospel” encourages believers and adherents to prioritize acts of faith by positively confessing the promises of God and expecting God’s response to their confession.⁵ Brown indicates that these positive statements, known as positive confessions, are made in anticipation for miraculous changes in some aspects of the lives of adherents if spoken with faith.⁶

¹ Constantine Mwikamba and Stephen Akaranga Ifedha, "Blessed Are the Rich and Prosperous For Theirs Is the Kingdom of the World: The Kenyan Challenge," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 5, no. 14 (2015): 138. See also: Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² Peter R. Young, "Prosperity teaching in an African context." *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 15, no. 1 (1996): 4.

³ Josephine O. Soboyejo, "Prosperity Gospel and Its Religious Impact on Sustainable Economic Development of African Nations." *Open Access Library Journal* 3, no. e3153 (2016): 3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1103153>.

⁴ J. Matthew Wilson, *From Pews to Polling Places: Faith and Politics in the American Religious Mosaic* (Georgetown University Press, 2007), 141-142.

⁵ Moses Kumi Asamoah, "Penteco/charismatic worldview of prosperity theology," *African Educational Research Journal* 1, no. 3 (2013): 198.

⁶ Candy Gunther Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 88.

Cited in the work of Joshua Barron, Ernst Conradie has remarked that the prosperity gospel “is undoubtedly the fastest growing form of religion on the African continent.”⁷ Ebenezer Obadare has explored the milieu in the African context and concluded based on findings that the “prosperity gospel” as a form of neoliberalism, “offers no realistic path out of the African economic crisis.”⁸ Thus, he argues that Africans may become susceptible to the woes and realities of poverty which devastate the African economy if people subscribe to the message and promises of the “prosperity gospel” which does not regard work, savings and judicious consumption.

The intersection of faith, prosperity, and the impact of the prosperity gospel in contemporary Ghana is raising research concerns. While its historic origin in Ghana is not very clear in scholarship, the “prosperity gospel,” from its American origin, emerged in Ghana through both western and African preachers whose ministries were significant to Ghana’s religious revival in the 20th century. While dynamic and impactful preachers like Rev. Francis Akwasi Amoako of “Resurrection Power and Living Bread” are known for a religious revival in Ghana in the 1980s that saw soul-reviving liberation in many Ghanaians⁹, the “prosperity gospel” in Ghana is mostly associated with Archbishop Benson Idahosa of

⁷ 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. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003147909-15>; See Joshua Robert Barron, "The Prosperity Gospel in African Christianity," *African Christian Theology* 2, no. 1 (2025): 64.

⁸ Ebenezer Obadare, "Raising righteous billionaires: The prosperity gospel reconsidered," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3571>.

⁹ Francis Akwasi Amoako, https://www.google.com/search?q=Rev+Amoako+of+Resurrection+power+and+living+bread&oq=Rev+Amoako+of+Resurrection+power+and+living+bread&gs_lcp=EgZjAHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQRigATIHCAIQIRigATIHCAMQIRigATIHCAQQIRiPAjIHCAUQIRiPAjIBCTIxMjcxajBqN6gCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:a538add8,vid:EPo6aRsPhqY,st:o

Benin City in Nigeria,¹⁰ Bishop David O. Oyedepo, “The Pastorpreneur”¹¹ of Nigeria’s Winners Chapel, and from Ghana, Archbishop Nicolas Duncan-Williams of Action Chapel International. In contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, other preachers include Archbishop Salifu of the Jesus Is Alive Evangelistic Ministry, Archbishop Charles Agyin Asare of the Perez Chapel International, Dr. Mensah Otabil of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC)¹² and some leaders of the Neo-Prophetic and Neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana, especially those who have English-speaking congregations. Some studies reveal that these preachers seem to share similar sermonic ideas with their American counterparts.¹³ Some of the factors that have contributed to the thriving of the “prosperity gospel” in Ghana include: economic, emotional, spiritual and health reasons.¹⁴

Despite the relevance of the “prosperity gospel” in promoting the elements of faith and positive confessions for Christian development, the concept of relating the Christian faith and wealth is seemingly out of balance for many Christians in Ghana. It fosters an unbalanced view.¹⁵ While the Bible emphasizes the crucial role of “work” in the material and financial success of believers, the “prosperity gospel” ignores real work. Cited in the

work of James Kwarteng-Yeboah¹⁶, Asamoah-Gyadu iterates the inclusion of “hard work” as a necessary factor for prosperity.¹⁷

The advent of the “prosperity gospel” from the American Neo-Pentecostals¹⁸ into the Ghanaian-African terrain has not done better in relating faith and prosperity. It is as if “prosperity” is all about faith, as though, the Akan-Ghanaian religio-cultural maxim that: “*Sika ye mogya* – money is blood,”¹⁹ is not compatible with biblical evidence. In that, whereas the disciples of Jesus are not exempted from the cost of following the Lord Jesus Christ in their quest to please him as well as seeking financial/material freedom, the contemporary Ghanaian Christian, on the other hand, often subscribe to the popular “I claim it, I receive it” kind of positive confession as a sure way to prosperity. Therefore, instead of balancing faith and work, like in Nigeria and other African countries, some able young Ghanaian Christians pray almost all hours, being idle in churches, and at some prayer camps.²⁰ Some women leave their “capital-invested” shops for prayer camps, whereas some preachers craftily exploit ignorant members in the name of “special

¹⁰ Benson Idahosa, *I Choose to Change: The Scriptural Way to Success and Prosperity* (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1987).

¹¹ Dominic Umoh, “Superstition and Syncretism: Setbacks to Authentic Christian Practice in Africa,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 2, no. 7 (2013): 38.

¹² Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 58.

¹³ Isaac Boaheng, Clement Amoako and Samuel Boahen, “A Critique of Prosperity Theology in the Context of Ghanaian Christianity,” *E-Journal of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences* 4, no. 11 (2023): 1357. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20234114>

¹⁴ Boaheng, Amoako and Boahen, “A Critique of Prosperity Theology in the Context of Ghanaian Christianity,” 1360-1362.

¹⁵ Justice Anquandah Arthur, “The Gospel of Prosperity and its Concept of Development: A Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic experience,” *Religion* (August 2020): 2. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1792050>.

¹⁶ James Kwateng-Yeboah, *A Re-appraisal of the Prosperity Gospel in African Neo-Pentecostalism: The Potency of “Multiple Modernities” Paradigm* (Master’s Essay, submitted to the School of Religion, Queen’s University, 2017), 6.

¹⁷ Johnson K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 202. See: L. Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in African Contexts of Poverty: An Appraisal,” *Exchange* 40 (2011): 340. (336-350).

¹⁸ Cornelius Johannes Petrus Niemandt, “The Prosperity Gospel, the Decolonisation of Theology, and the Abduction of Missionary Imagination,” *Missionalia* 45 (2017). Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322611191_The_Prosperity_Gospel_the_decolonisation_of_Theology_and_the_abduction_of_missionary_imagination.

¹⁹ Emmanuel K. Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination,” *Pentvars Business Journal* 4, no. 2 (2010): 67.

²⁰ Adewale J. Adelakun and Oluseye E. Ajadi, “No Work No Food: An Interpretive Analysis of Paul’s Admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13 in the Context of the Discourse on Religion and Poverty,” *European Scientific Journal* 16, no. 23 (2020): 128.

programmes and seed-sowing.”²¹ However, in his investigation about the effects of the “prosperity gospel” in Africa, Glyn Williams found that the “prosperity gospel” poses a problem as it has had very little, if any, positive effect in Africa, with more and more people being deceived and poverty increasing.²²

With reference to the contemporary socio-economic challenges facing some Ghanaian-African Christians despite the exercise of faith, positive confessions and donations towards prosperity as featured in the “prosperity gospel” teaching, several scholarly concerns are ongoing regarding the impact of the “prosperity gospel” and the need for its contextual reexamination. The incidence of “anti-work” perspective coupled with the rise of poverty among some contemporary Ghanaian Christians raises the question: “What will be the socioeconomic impact of balancing faith and work and its relation to achieving prosperity among contemporary Ghanaian Christians?”

With Christianity having the major religious representation in Ghana²³, coupled with the impact of religion on the socioeconomic development of Ghanaian Christians, this paper is a reexamination of the “prosperity gospel” in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity for poverty reduction and combating religious laziness through balancing faith and work. It employs a qualitative approach. Significantly, the paper is relevant for academic literature in Biblical theology of work, African Christian Theology of development, Christianity and human

²¹ Edwin Adutwum Owusu, “Religious Extortion” and Poverty among Ghanaian Christians in Bantama Sub-Metro of Ghana: Exploring a Nexus,” *A Bachelor of Arts Thesis* (Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi-Ghana, August 2024), 36.

²² Glyn Williams, “The Prosperity Gospel’s Effect in Missions: An African Perspective,” *Bachelor Thesis* (South African Theological Seminary, 2017), Abstract. Available at: DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29699.02081.

²³ Ernest Jnr Frimpong, Jonathan E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Makafui Margaret Tayviah and Michael Frimpong, “Religious Cooperation in Plural Ghana: Challenges and Ways for Improvement,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 10, no. 5 (2024): 123. <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20241051>.

development; liberation, reconstruction, poverty-reduction and mother-tongue theologies and financial freedom among Christians through building balance between faith and work. The subsequent sections of this paper follow this outline: the review of related literature for discussion, the methodology employed, findings and discussion from analyzed data in relation to the objective of the study and the study’s conclusion and recommendations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History and Definition of the “Prosperity Gospel”

The emergence of Pentecostalism,²⁴ Neo-Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements in global Christianity²⁵ and their influence on socioeconomic development, social welfare and politics has attracted several scholarly engagements.²⁶ Scholars continue to share varying concerns on the relationship between the Judeo-Christian Scriptures (JCS) and human socioeconomic lives.²⁷ One of the major themes in the JCS is the subject of prosperity and poverty.²⁸ In an attempt to inform believers about God’s desire for all believers to be prosperous and

²⁴ Wolfgang Vondey, “Pentecostal Theology,” *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, Edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (2023). Available at: <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/PentecostalTheology>.

²⁵ Justice Arthur, “The gospel of prosperity and its concept of development: A Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic experience,” *Religion* 51, no. 3 (2020): 1. (1-15). DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2020.1792050. See Francis Benyah, “Commodification of the Gospel and the Socio-Economics of Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana,” *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 29, no. 2 (2018): 116–45. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48816065>.

²⁶ Anderson George Jnr, “Ghana’s Neo-prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity: Future Prospects,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 5 (2019): 16. (16-27). DOI: 10.32051/02211902.

²⁷ Clive Beed and Cara Beed, “Applying Judeo-Christian Principles to Contemporary Economic Issues,” (2006): Abstract, Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228287319_Applying_Judeo-Christian_Principles_to_Contemporary_Economic_Issues#:~:text=Abstract,as~sessed%20in%20the%20final%20section.

²⁸ Isaac Boaheng, Alexander Boateng and Samuel Boahen, “Exploring Theological and Biblical Perspectives on Wealth and Poverty,” *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)* 5, no. 1 (2024): 82. (82-93).

healthy in financial success, material substances and general well-being, the “prosperity gospel” became a vibrant teaching in the 20th century. This teaching was focused on creating a pathway of liberation from the challenges of poverty, diseases and failures in life.²⁹ In view of its teachings, proponents of the “prosperity gospel” created several synonyms, describing it as the “health and wealth gospel, the gospel of success,”³⁰ “Name it and Claim it,” ‘prosperity message’ and ‘Faith and Word movement’.³¹ Confessing these promises to be true is perceived as an act of faith, which God will honor. Normally, Pentecostal-charismatic churches are encouraged to speak positive statements about aspects of their lives that they wish to see improved. These statements, known as positive confessions, are said to miraculously change aspects of people’s lives if spoken with faith.³² However, in his investigation about the effects of the “prosperity gospel” in Africa, Glyn Williams found that the “prosperity gospel” poses a problem as it has had very little, if any, positive effect in Africa, with more and more people being deceived and poverty increasing.³³

2.2 Its Challenge against the Theology of Work

This teaching, however, disregards the Christian theology of work which emphasizes the “meaning and value God places on work”³⁴ towards the development of all humanity including Christians. It lacks a balance between financial prosperity and work. It seems to relegate the basic realities of

²⁹ Moses Kumi Asamoah, “Pentecostal-charismatic worldview of prosperity theology,” *African Educational Research Journal* 1, no. 3 (2013): 198.

³⁰ R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America* (ABC-CLIO, 2010), 81.

³¹ Larry Eskridge, “Prosperity Gospel is Surprising Mainstream, 2013,” see Maxwell David, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 6, 11.

³² Candy Gunther Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 88.

³³ Glyn Williams, “The Prosperity Gospel’s Effect in Missions: An African Perspective,” *Bachelor Thesis* (South African Theological Seminary, 2017), Abstract. Available at: DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.29699.02081.

³⁴ T. R. McNeal, “Work, Theology of,” in Trent C. Butler, ed., Entry for ‘Work, Theology of’ *Holman Bible Dictionary* (1991). Available at: <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/w/work-theology-of.html>.

life such as one’s conscious responsibility/work towards wealth creation, health and good living. Indicated by A. Lindsley, some adherents of the “prosperity gospel” are of the view that work is a punitive consequence of the fall of man in Genesis 3: 17-19.³⁵ In contrast to their view, God’s primary task given to Adam before the fall was “to work in the Garden of Eden and to take care of it” after which Adam had access to eat from the garden (Genesis 2:15, 16). Work preceded the fall. Theological evidence supports that God values work. For example, McNeal’s theological perspectives about work reminds Christians about God’s delight in work and the value he places on work so that all of humanity including Christians are able to manage the realities of life’s challenges.³⁶ According to William Diehl, there is Christianity and there is a Real Life, and one needs to decide on a balance.³⁷ While God might have imagined “a world,” he worked for six days in order to make that visualized world a reality (Genesis 1:1-31). Being in the image of God, humanity is designed for work. In his *Theology of Work*, Art Lindsley argues that “Work is not a result of the fall; we were all created to work. Work is only made harder because of the fall. The ground will yield thorns and thistles. There will be much blood, sweat and tears in the context of work. However, redemption can impact our work.”³⁸ T. R. McNeal shares a similar theological perspective on Christianity and work.³⁹ Therefore, while God requires that humanity expresses faith in him, he requires that “work” would augment faith in such a way that humanity becomes more responsible and productive towards having fruitful, healthy and successful living. Though God

³⁵ Art Lindsley, “Theology of Work,” Available at: <https://www.transform-world.net/newsletters/2014/TheologyOfWork.pdf>.

³⁶ McNeal, “Work, Theology of,” <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/w/work-theology-of.html>.

³⁷ William E. Diehl, *Christianity and Real Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), Cited in Lindsley, “Theology of Work,” <https://www.transform-world.net/newsletters/2014/TheologyOfWork.pdf>

³⁸ Lindsley, “Theology of Work,” <https://www.transform-world.net/newsletters/2014/TheologyOfWork.pdf>

³⁹ T. R. McNeal, “Work, Theology of,” in Trent C. Butler, ed., Entry for ‘Work, Theology of’ *Holman Bible Dictionary* (1991). Available at: <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/w/work-theology-of.html>.

was distant from Adam, he required from Adam a great deal of obedience, responsibility and accountability as caretaker of the garden. Lacking a companion – a helper for the work, God gave Eve to Adam to give him the exact assistance.⁴⁰

2.3 Its Theological Mix-match against Christian Responsibility and Accountability

Worth-noting is the fact that a good Christian doctrine of God is to ensure a balance between the theological dimensions of immanence and transcendence. While the former explains the closeness of God within the world and therefore encourages a direct faith-relationship between Christians and God, the latter emphasizes the remoteness of God and therefore admonishes humanity, especially Christians, to go beyond faith alone and to include responsibility and accountability through work.⁴¹ This duo reminds Christians to balance faith and work as emphasized in the theology of James. According to Kuwornu-Adjaottor, “James emphasizes the work of the believer in relation to faith.”⁴² Paul also admonishes the believers in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 to embrace work so that it would make them productive and responsible. He cautioned them to shun idleness that would result in poverty and hunger. This, according to Adelakun and Ajadi, “compelled Paul to advocate No-Work- No-Food rule.”⁴³

However, the “prosperity gospel” seemingly ignores the theological dimension of God’s

transcendence which emphasizes that God is beyond the created world and therefore expects human beings to be responsible and accountable in life in order to enjoy life’s goodness.⁴⁴ This problem seems to create some socioeconomic challenges for some faithful Christians in Africa of which Ghana is included. In a collaborative exercise to create an evangelical awareness and stance against the gradual influence of the American Neo-Pentecostal teaching of the “prosperity gospel” in Africa Christianity and its gradual challenge to socioeconomic development among African Christians, the Lausanne Theology Working Group formed by the Lausanne Movement resolved on a definition. The Group has defined the “prosperity gospel” as “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”⁴⁵ As an African evangelical movement that believes in both the spirituality and socioeconomic development of African Christians, the Group resolved to reject any prosperity teaching that ignores the place of hard work and the utilization of skills, talents and ability, education and wisdom for the betterment of human living. Also, they do not accept that “poverty, illness or untimely death” are signs of God’s curse, human curse or lack of faith, as upheld by advocates of the “prosperity gospel.”⁴⁶

III. METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative approach, this study combined secondary literature with empirical data. First, data were sourced from an examination of the biblical texts of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 and

⁴⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Garden of Eden,” ed. Melissa Petruzzello: In *Religious Beliefs* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.), Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Garden-of-Eden> Accessed on May 1, 2025.

⁴¹ Nicholas L. Polito, “ABD AL-KARĪM AL-JILĪ: Tawhīd, Transcendence and Immanence,” PhD Thesis (Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, 2010). Available at: <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk//id/eprint/1193/1/LoPolito10PhD.pdf>.

⁴² Jonathan Edward Tetteh Kuwornu-Adjaottor, *New Testament Theology for College Students and Pastors* (Accra, Ghana: Noyam Publishers, 2020), 27.

⁴³ Adewale J. Adelakun and Oluseye E. Ajadi, “No Work No Food: An Interpretive Analysis of Paul’s Admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13 in the Context of the Discourse on Religion and Poverty,” *European Scientific Journal* 16, no. 23 (2020): 117.

⁴⁴ Stephen M. Kim, “Transcendence of God – A Comparative Study of the Old Testament and the Qur'an,” *PhD Thesis* (Department of Library Services, University of Pretoria, 2009). Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/28792>; <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/28792>.

⁴⁵ Lausanne Theology Working Group, “A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel,” *Theology Working Group* (16 January, 2010): Available at: <https://lausanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel>

⁴⁶ Lausanne Theology Working Group, “A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel,” <https://lausanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel>

Philippians 4:6-7 for empirical theological basis through the tools of historical-critical exegesis and morpho-syntactic analysis. Next, it included document analysis of the writings and theological perspectives of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship, 1979 edition* and John R.W. Stott's *Men With A Message*, regarding Christian discipleship, discipline and suffering towards glorification (prosperity). Also, from case study readings, this paper makes references to some Akan-Ghanaian proverbs and dynamic notions adopted by Akan Christians concerning work, wealth and poverty and its contextual relevance for reexamining the "prosperity gospel" in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. Strengthening the proposition for a balance between faith and work, this paper considered and analyzed the theological concepts of the "cost of discipleship" in Mark's Gospel (Mark 8:34-38) and "Christian suffering and discipline" in the Petrine Epistles.⁴⁷ Last, using structured interviews with purposive sampling, the study engaged the contemporary perspectives of thirty-one Ghanaian Christians from the Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal/Charismatic, African Independent Churches and Traditional Religio-Cultural leaders. These participants were ethically considered on the assurance of the confidentiality and usage of their responses for academic research and nondisclosure of their identities.⁴⁸

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Historical-Critical Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13: Theology for Work and Prosperity

Despite the several arguments regarding the authorship of the second epistle to the Thessalonian believers, a majority of scholars support Paul's authorship of 2 Thessalonians. Paul is noted to have written it⁴⁹ in c. A.D. 51 or 52 in Corinth, after Silas and Timothy had delivered

⁴⁷ D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Suffering and Triumphant Christ: An Exposition of 1 Peter 3:18-22. Selected Studies from 1 Peter, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (1982): 146-158.

⁴⁸ Jenny Fleming and Karsten E. Zegwaard, "Methodologies, Methods and Ethical Considerations for Conducting Research in Work-Integrated Learning," *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* 19, no. 3 (2018): 205-13.

⁴⁹ See internal evidence from 2 Thess. 1:1; 3:17.

the first letter, 1 Thessalonians, and had returned.⁵⁰ The book comprises three chapters. Chapter three has a majority of eighteen verses which follow a thematic structure: (i) Paul's request for intercessory prayer (vv. 1-2), (ii) Paul's warning to the believers against idleness (vv.6-15), and (iii) Paul's final greetings (vv. 16-18). In this chapter, Paul is seen as a denominational leader who is discharging "injunctions." He makes a "Call to Prayer" towards the effective and fruitful spread of the Gospel and the team's deliverance from evil traps (vv.1-2).⁵¹ He appreciates the importance of the congregation and encourages them that God loves them and Christ suffered for them (vv.3-4).⁵² Encouraging them on God's intent towards earthly prosperity while waiting on the Lord's return, Paul emphasized the necessity of work. He therefore warned them against idleness in the name of "waiting for the Lord." He outlawed any believer who forsook "work for a living" and warned that if anyone would not work such a person should not eat (v. 10). Paul was compelled to rule that: "No-Work-No-Food." This outlaw was probably ruled as caution against "able Christians refusing to work but begging for food when they could equally and capably feed themselves honourably." Exegetical focus of this text is on v. 8 and v. 10. The table below provides the Greek Text from the Nestle Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition, Greek New Testament, and its transliteration for 2 Thessalonians 3:8, 10.

⁵⁰ See "Introduction to 2 Thessalonians," in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 1792.

⁵¹ Adewale J. Adelakun and Oluseye E. Ajadi, "No Work No Food: An Interpretive Analysis of Paul's Admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13 in the Context of the Discourse on Religion and Poverty," *European Scientific Journal* 16, no. 23 (2020): 117.

⁵² See 3 Thess. 3: 6-10.

Greek Text	Verse	Transliteration
οὐδὲ δωρεὰν ἄρτον ἐφάγομεν παρά τινος, ἀλλ’ ἐν κόπῳ καὶ μόχθῳ νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαι τινα ὑμῶν	8	Oude dōrean arton ephagomen para tinos, all' en kopō kai mochthō nuktos kai hēmeras ergazomenoi pros to mē epibarēsai tina humōn
καὶ γὰρ ὅτε ἦμεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, τοῦτο παρηγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ὅτι εἴ τις οὐ θέλει ἐργάζεσθαι μηδὲ ἐσθιέτω.	10	Kai gar hote ēmen pros humas, touto parēngellomen humin, hoti ei tis ou thelei ergazesthai mēde esthietō.

Source: Authors' construction, 2025.

In v. 8, the conjunction *οὐδὲ* “nor” or “neither” introduces the adverb *δωρεὰν* “without payment” and the accusative singular masculine noun *ἄρτον* “bread or loaf” and the aorist active indicative first person plural verb *ἐφάγομεν* “we did eat” or “we ate” from the present active indicative *ἐσθίω* “I eat.” The preposition *παρά* is relative to the genitive singular masculine indefinite pronoun *τινος* “anyone or someone.” Therefore, *παρά* will take the genitive form “from” instead of its accusative forms: on or at. The speaker emphasizes his principle/action through the conjunction *ἀλλ’* “but.” The preposition *ἐν* “in” is dative to the singular masculine nouns: *κόπῳ* “labour” and *μόχθῳ* “hard work.” Their connection is introduced by the conjunction *καὶ* “and.” He introduces the genitive singular feminine nouns: *νυκτὸς* “during night-time” and *ἡμέρας* “during day-time,” connected by *καὶ* “and.” He expands further using the nominative plural masculine present middle participle verb *ἐργαζόμενοι* which means “we ourselves have been working” or “we ourselves have been trading.” The preposition *πρὸς* “to,” is in reference to the accusative singular masculine indefinite pronoun *τινα* “anyone” which is related to the genitive plural person pronoun *ὑμῶν* “of you.” The aorist active infinitive verb *τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαι* “to be a burden,” is preceded by *τὸ* “the” and the adverb *μὴ* “not or otherwise.” Therefore, *πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαι τινα ὑμῶν* becomes “not to be the burden to anyone of you.” With that, v. 8 shall have the translation: “Not without payment did we eat anyone’s bread, but in labour and hard work during night-time and day-time we ourselves have been working [trading], not to be the burden of any of you.”

In v. 10, the phrase *καὶ γὰρ ὅτε* means “and for when” or “even for when.” From the present indicative *εἰμί* “I am,” “I exist” or “to be”, the first person plural imperfect active indicative verb *ἦμεν* means “we were.” The preposition *πρὸς* shares accusative relation with the plural pronoun *ὑμᾶς* “you.” Therefore, *πρὸς ὑμᾶς* means “with you” or “toward you.” The word *τοῦτο* is an accusative singular neuter demonstrative pronoun which means “this.” From the present indicative *παραγγέλλω* “I notify, command, charge,” the first person plural imperfect active indicative verb *παρηγγέλλομεν* means “we commanded, charged.” The dative plural pronoun *ὑμῖν* means “to you.” This is followed by the charge: *ὅτι εἴ τις οὐ θέλει* which means “since/because/that if not will” or “since/because/that does not.” From the root word *ἐργάζομαι* “I work, trade, do,” the present middle indicative verb *ἐργάζεσθαι* means “work/trade for himself/herself.” The negation *μηδὲ* means “not even.” The speaker closes the command with a third person singular present active imperative *ἐσθείω* “I eat.”

4.2 Exegetical Translation of 2 Thessalonians 3: 8 and 10

Therefore, a dynamic equivalence from the morpho-syntactic analysis of v. 8 and v. 10, the translation should be:

Neither did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but we ourselves have been working [trading] in labour and hard work during night-time and day-time, not to become a burden for any of you.⁵³

⁵³ A deconstructed translation for 2 Thessalonians 3:8.

For even when we were with you, we commanded [charged] you this: “That if anyone will not work [trade] for himself [herself], he [she] must not even eat!”⁵⁴

It should be noted that the conjunction “even” in the phrase “not even eat” emphasizes how Paul warns that even “food,” which is the most primary among the basic needs of life including clothing and shelter, should not be in the reach of a lazy believer, who does not want to work for a living. The injunction stresses the speaker’s anathematization of “laziness and idleness” among believers. His response shows someone who was ostracizing lazy believers. A commentary has it this way: “A Christian must not be a loafer.”⁵⁵ This command is what Adelakun and Ajadi defined as the “No-Work-No-Food” rule.⁵⁶ The imperative mood used by the speaker is one that explains his frustration about the believers’ “anti- work” perception. He, perhaps, was provoked by how some “able” believers who could work and provide for themselves and their families rather preferred to stay idle, getting busy with religious activities as an excuse for begging for financial help from others. The command seems to inform the reader about Paul’s theology of work. Paul is seemingly theologizing that; one’s religiosity does not warrant their financial freedom but rather one must balance faith with income-generating work/trade.

He also warned against those who were not doing any business for a living but were idle, wanderers and “busybodies” that they should be well-settled and earn their daily meal. He calls the consciousness of settling down and genuinely earning a living as “doing what is right” (vv. 11-13). As one of Paul’s main eschatological epistles, 2 Thessalonians was an emphasis on the *Parousia* (the Lord’s return) and “to correct a misconception among the believers concerning

the Lord’s return (2:1-12)⁵⁷, which is identified as one of the reasons for their “anti-work” perspective. Lioy has indicated that the lack of accurate hermeneutical aptness can result in wrong interpretations and theologizing among believers.⁵⁸ Paul did not want their Christian faith to be a reason for their poverty and irresponsibility. Religion (faith) and poverty are regarded as being related. According to Beber, some religious persons intentionally deprive themselves of material gains as a result of their spiritual awareness and ascetic lives. A research conducted by Mirrell Miller revealed how the people in the poorest counties in the United States of America were engrossed in religious consciousness about heaven and hell, rapture and the coming of the anti-Christ so severe that they found consolation in their deprivation for religion. One could ask whether such religious devotees have some misunderstanding about their devotion and its requirements that makes them find such consolation. As antagonized by Marxism, religion is seen as a vehicle that impoverishes adherents through the promise of relatively better life hereafter for believers who suffer and endure the coals of economic hardship and some seclusions on earth.⁵⁹ This sense of eschatological hope could make some believers see no need to make a worthy living on earth, neither will desire to work. Some studies reveal that misunderstanding and misappropriation of religious texts and teachings could be among the reasons for religious idleness and impoverishment.⁶⁰ While scholars in favour of religion such as Adams Smith and Max Weber support religion’s impact on socioeconomic development, the antagonist perspective of Karl Marx describes religion as one that can be a spur for poverty among adherents if faith is not understood in the context of responsibility.⁶¹

⁵⁴ A deconstructed translation for 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

⁵⁵ “Study Notes to 2 Thessalonians 3:10,” in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 1795.

⁵⁶ Adelakun and Ajadi, 117.

⁵⁷ See “Introduction to 2 Thessalonians,” in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 1792.

⁵⁸ D. Lioy, “The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel,” *Conspectus* 4 (2007): 48.

⁵⁹ Adelakun and Ajadi, “No Work No Food: An Interpretive Analysis of Paul’s Admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13 in the Context of the Discourse on Religion and Poverty,” 117.

⁶⁰ Adelakun and Ajadi, 117.

⁶¹ Adelakun and Ajadi, 117.

Consequently, there is a possibility that misconception and misappropriation of Christian texts and teachings by adherents could result in living below the expectations and intentions of God as coded in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. The exegetical findings of Adelakun and Ajadi revealed that “some Christians in Thessalonica misunderstood Paul’s teaching about the imminence of the *parousia*, (that is, second coming of Jesus Christ). Consequently, they abandoned their work while waiting for Jesus to come.”⁶²

4.3 Religious Errors toward Prosperity: A Theological Mix-match

Inasmuch as religiosity requires devotion, Christian prosperity should not be confused with Christian spiritual growth. That could be a severe mix-match. One’s religious devotion in prayers, fasting, attending programmes after programmes and receiving prophetic messages without due diligence, responsibility and accountability through work should not be a fitting grounds for prosperity. Health, food, peace and wealth are human responsibilities.⁶³ As much as Paul emphasizes faith as the element for one’s spiritual justification, salvation and worthiness before God (Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 11:6), he emphasizes also the need for the believer to embrace responsibility and diligence through work in order to enjoy the yields of prosperity (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13). In the Jewish culture, religious laziness was discouraged among devotees. In that, every Jew was supposed to be engaged in a learning, vocation, trade or manual labour. Paul highlighted this Jewish culture in his admonishment to the Jewish Christians in Thessalonica when he stated: “...we were not idle when we were with you...We worked night and day...” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-8).⁶⁴ James theologizes a balance between “saving” faith and “fruit-producing” work. He emphasizes the work of the believer in relation to

⁶² Adelakun and Ajadi, 117.

⁶³ Wael K. Al-Delaimy, Veerabhadran Ramanathan and Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, eds., *Health of People, Health of Planet and Our Responsibility: Climate Change, Air Pollution and Health* (Switzerland AG: Springer Nature, 2020).

⁶⁴ Adelakun and Ajadi, 128.

faith.⁶⁵ According to Adelakun and Ajadi, some Christians and churches organise 30-day prayer vigil. Miracle services are organised from Monday to Friday during working hours. Some able and working Christians go to Prayer Mountains on weekdays instead of going to their places of work. Also, some believers abandon their work and places of work to consult religious leaders, prophets or clerics to collect charms for prosperity.⁶⁶ Far from this religious attitude that has the potency of breeding poverty through negligence, the caution of St. Augustine of Hippo rings a necessary relevance: “religious activities are not a replacement for diligence; a mistake many religious people make these days.”⁶⁷

4.4 Self-induced Poverty among Christians: A Theological Misuse of Faith

It is interesting to realize how religious activities could be used as a guarantee for one to expect prosperity. The Thessalonian believers were devoted in religious activities just like Paul. However, in order to save them from being vulnerable to the provision of basic needs and certain daily financial responsibilities, Paul distinguished himself through “working with his hands” – a bi-vocational ministry, which was evident in his preaching and tent-making business. He was a preacher-tentmaker.⁶⁸ Instead of relying solely on the financial help from churches he served, Paul carved an enviable path in ministry for himself through trading as a tentmaker.⁶⁹ He wanted them to emulate and appropriate his work ethics and professional discipline as a model and leader “who worked with his hands” in addition to his missionary activities (vv. 6-8). It is believed through some studies that the apostle’s choice of the

⁶⁵ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, *New Testament Theology for College Students and Pastors*, 27.

⁶⁶ Adelakun and Ajadi, 128.

⁶⁷ Cited in Adelakun and Ajadi, 128.

⁶⁸ Kelvin Onongha, “Tentmaking in the Twenty-First Century: Theological and Missiological Implications for Contemporary Adventist Missions,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 187.

⁶⁹ Kelvin Onongha, “Tentmaking in the Twenty-First Century: Theological and Missiological Implications for Contemporary Adventist Missions,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 185-186.

“tentmaking” trade was a consciously calculated strategy for missions and his survival,⁷⁰ and he wanted his followers to learn. Unfortunately, they would not listen. Their eschatological presumption had turned them into “busybodies” who were only concerned about “what to do” to get to heaven and escape hell when the Lord returns, and therefore would see working as a waste of time and a distraction.⁷¹ They probably lacked understanding in the fact that, while waiting on the Lord’s return, their families and personal development became immediate responsibilities which they had to take care of. Such responsibility is what Paul wanted them to realize by earning their livelihood through work, as the Lord tarries. Also, commentary points out that, they were interfering in other people’s affairs with their religiosity, making them “busybodies”⁷² at the expense of their families. Their getting themselves busy with religious activities seemingly might have become some sort of “excuse” to not work. Meanwhile, Paul worked “night and day.”⁷³ However, Paul’s ethical teachings on diligence are meant to discourage believers from substituting industriousness with indolence. Therefore, he emphasized his displeasure toward their seemingly “anti-work” attitude through his outlaw: “If anyone will not work [just as we do], he [she] shall not eat” (v. 10). The Christian must not be a loafer.⁷⁴

It becomes a note-worthy observation in v. 9 that Paul became aware of a “beggarly” attitude of some of the believers who were busybodies about religious activities. Though they had faith in God and in the return of the Lord, they seemingly

⁷⁰ Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for The Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 90.

⁷¹ Donald Hagner, *The New Testament, a Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2012), 468.

⁷² “Study Notes to 2 Thessalonians 3:11,” in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 1795.

⁷³ Onongha, “Tentmaking in the Twenty-First Century,” 187.

⁷⁴ See Study Notes to 2 Thessalonians 3:10 in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 1795.

lacked behind in terms of material provisions. Paul reminds them that: “We worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden [responsibility] to any of you. We did this [working], not because we do not have the right [equal privilege] to such help [begging], but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow” (vv. 8-9). It is obvious that Paul knew the possibility of believers inducing poverty on themselves by avoiding the discipline and responsibility toward work and rather professing faith only or engaging in religious activities only. It is as though some believers do not realize that life is both spiritual and physical which requires one to meet both spiritual and physical needs. For Militz, “prosperity,”⁷⁵ like prayer and faith, is spiritual too, and that, God is the primary source. Therefore, Christians should be diligent toward it.⁷⁶ In addition to faith, work is a necessity for the prosperity of religious persons such as Christians.⁷⁷ A Christian who therefore ignores this necessary balance between faith and work is prone to the coals of poverty and could be described as religiously lazy. Solomon advises that while diligence makes “a leader,” laziness makes “a slave (cf. Proverbs 10:24). Also, lazy hands makes one poor, but diligent hands bring wealth (cf. Proverbs 10:4).”

4.5 Morpho-Syntactic Analysis of Philippians 4:6-7 and the Concept of Prayer for Prosperity

In relation to the element of prayer as one of the basic elements of the “prosperity gospel,” some responses were obtained from some interviewees in relation to why they would prioritize prayer despite the need to work hard and be diligent to their capital-invested jobs. Seemingly, the Ghanaian-African Christian has been made to believe that faith, prayers and positive confessions are enough to make one’s financial needs solved.

⁷⁵ Brian Kluth, “30 Biblical Principles for Financial Peace & Freedom,” *Biblical Generosity and Financial Resources and Training* (n.d.), Available at: <https://www.kluth.org/church/30-Biblical-Principles-for-Financial-Peace-and-Freedom.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Annie Rix Militz, “Prosperity through the Knowledge and Power of Mind,” In *Lectures and mental Treatments* (USA, Los Angeles: The Master Mind Publishing Co. Inc., 1913), 8-10.

⁷⁷ An excerpt from an interview on April 24, 2025, at 10:53 AM in a face-to-face conversation with the respondent.

A respondent who is a non-working believer in one of the African Independent Churches (AICs) in Kumasi, popularly known in Ghana as “One-man churches” replied confidently that: “The Bible says in Philippians 4:6-7 that we should not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we should present our needs to God, and we shall have peace in our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. So for me, prayer is everything, and prayer can solve every problem including financial needs.” However, it is

somehow possible that some of these believers either overlook or are unaware of the thematic context within which the author is making the discourse. Hence, this calls for a reexamination of the text towards its contextual meaning of “prayer” in relation to prosperity and the concept of the “prosperity gospel.”

The table below provides the Greek Text from the Nestle Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition, Greek New Testament, and its transliteration for Philippians 4:6-7.

Greek Text	Verse	Transliteration
μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετ’ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωριζέσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν.	6	<i>Mēden merimnate, all' en panti tē proseuchē kai tē deēsei met' eucharistias ta aitēmata humōn gnōrizesthō pros ton Theon.</i>
καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.	7	<i>Kai ē eirēnē tou Theou ē huperechousa panta noun phrourēsei tas kardias humōn kai ta noēmata humōn en Christō Iēsou.</i>

Source: Authors' Construction, 2025.

The study accepted the above-tabulated Greek Text as synchronically accurate for analysis in the context of prosperity and the concept of prayer in this specific biblical *pericope*. Exegetically, Paul was making a discussion in the context of “anxiety” or “being anxious” and how its corresponding healing is related to prayer. John MacArthur shares that “Just as Matthew 6 is Jesus’ great statement on worry, Philippians 4 is Apostle Paul’s charter on how to avoid anxiety.”⁷⁸ From a Morpho-Syntactic analysis, the Greek word: *μεριμνᾶτε* (*merimnate*) is a second person plural verb in the present active imperative form, which is from the indicative *μεριμνάω* (*merimnaō*) “to be anxious, distracted, confused.” Being in an active imperative mood means a direct command. Therefore, *μεριμνᾶτε* conveys the meaning “you must be anxious,” “you must be distracted” or “you must be confused.” This is predicated by an

accusative neuter singular adjective: *μηδὲν* (*mēden*) which is from the root: *μηδεῖς* (*mēdeis*) “no one.” Therefore, *μηδὲν* conveys the meaning “in or about nothing.” Resultantly, the phrase: *μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε* has the translation “You must be anxious about [in] nothing!” In a dynamic equivalence, this can better be interpreted as “You must not be anxious about [in] anything!” The author introduces a pointer, the conjunction: *ἀλλ’* (*all'*) a contrasted form of *ἀλλά* (*alla*) which means “but, except” to redirect their attention to what they should do instead. The prepositional phrase: *ἐν παντὶ* (*en panti*), comprises a dative preposition *ἐν* “in” and a dative neuter singular adjective *παντὶ* which means “all, every, all things.” The words *τῇ προσευχῇ* (*tē proseuchē*) and *τῇ δεήσει* (*tē deēsei*) are feminine singular nouns in the dative case joined by the conjunction *καὶ* “and”. Therefore, the former has the meaning “through prayer” and the latter means “through entreaty, supplication, pleading.” The two seem to have been used intentionally by the speaker. They represent a fusion that conveys a picture of productivity (fruitfulness) in results. This fusion seems to have a lubricant from the genitive feminine singular noun: *μετ’ εὐχαριστίας* (*met'*

⁷⁸ John MacArthur, “Avoiding Anxiety through Prayer,” in *Anxious for Nothing: God’s Cure for the Cares of Your Soul* (Colorado, CO, USA: David C. Cook, 2012), Available at: <http://hcf-india.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Anxious-for-Nothing-Gods-Cure-for-the-Cares-of-Your-Soul-by-John-F.-MacArthur.pdf>.

eucharistias) which means “with thanksgiving.” Although the preposition *μετ’* could also have the accusative meaning “after,” yet since its noun *εὐχαριστίας* is in the genitive case, it should agree in such lexis. Therefore, it takes the meaning “with” instead. The definite noun: *τὰ αἰτήματα* (*ta aitēmata*), is a nominative neuter plural which means “the requests.” It is from the singular noun: *αἴτημα* (*aitēma*) which means “a request.” The genitive second person plural pronoun: *ὑμῶν* (*humōn*) is from *σύ* (*su*) which means “you.” As genitive pronoun, *ὑμῶν* has the translation “of you” which is dynamically interpreted as “your.” Therefore, the phrase: *τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν* could be “the requests of you.” Syntactically, it should read as “your requests.” The phrase: *γνωριζέσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν* carries the meaning: “to make known unto God.” In relation to *τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν*, the interpreted translation becomes: “make your requests known unto God” as though God is not ready to listen to you, or, God is seemingly busy but you should continue to plead his attention to listen to your need. This looks like the “context” from which the speaker is admonishing his immediate audience. Consequently, he goes on to imperatively affirm the cardio-psychological benefits that follow.

In v. 7, the expression: *καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ*, has the nominative feminine singular noun *ἡ εἰρήνη* “the peace” and the genitive *τοῦ θεοῦ* “of [the] God.” The phrase carries the translation: “And the peace of God” or “And God’s peace.” It should be noted that this “peace” is definite and therefore reflects the speaker’s probable pointer to some specific peace that God only gives to someone who follows the call to prayer with thanksgiving towards his or her anxious moment(s). Moreover, this, probably in the thought of the speaker, could refer to some kind of peace which only God could give. Therefore, one may call or refer to this as a comparable peace that is true and not a false peace.⁷⁹ John McArthur refers to the self-generated peace produced through alcoholism, a

⁷⁹ John McArthur, “A Prayer for God’s Peace,” in *Anxious for Nothing: God’s Cure for the Cares of Your Soul* (Colorado, CO, USA: David C. Cook, 2012), Available at: <http://hcf-india.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Anxious-for-Nothing-Gods-Cure-for-the-Cares-of-Your-Soul-by-John-F.-MacArthur.pdf>

pill, nap, deliberate deception or pretense, as “incomplete” and “false” peace.”⁸⁰ In his *2000 Easter Message from the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference* during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the president of the conference cited this text. He concluded that, this is the kind of peace that “will not allow us [God’s children] to stay behind closed doors” with fears and despair⁸¹ but it is a symbol of God’s absolute care for and about the worries and plights of humanity and Christians especially.⁸² In *ἡ ὑπερέχονσα*, the definite *ἡ* “the” is relative to the feminine noun *ἡ εἰρήνη* “the peace”. Therefore, it carries the pointer “that” or “which”. The present active participle third person nominative singular feminine verb *ὑπερέχονσα* means “surpasses.” The noun phrase *πάντα νοῦν* means “all understanding.” The future active indicative third person singular verb *φρουρήσει* means “will [shall] guard.” The plural nouns *τὰς καρδίας* and *τὰ νοήματα* mean “the heart” and “the mind” respectively. The genitive plural personal pronoun *ὑμῶν* means “of you,” which has the dynamic equivalent interpretation: “your.” The phrase: *ἐν Χριστῷ Ιησοῦ*, means “in Christ Jesus.” Therefore, altogether, v. 7 produces an interpretative translation as: “And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding shall guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.” Concerning the ability of this God-producing “peace,” John Carmichael writes on the speaker’s usage of the military context of the verb “shall guard”:

In the original Greek, the word for “guard” is a military term, describing a garrison or a sentinel. This peace stands like a soldier at the gates of our hearts and minds, defending us

⁸⁰ McArthur, “A Prayer for God’s Peace,” <http://hcf-india.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Anxious-for-Nothing-Gods-Cure-for-the-Cares-of-Your-Soul-by-John-F.-MacArthur.pdf>

⁸¹ Most Rev. Philip Naameh (Metropolitan Archbishop of Tamale and President, Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference), “2020 Easter Message from the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference,” *Office of the President, National Catholic Secretariat* (Issued on Monday, April 06, 2020): 3. Available at: <https://www.cbegha.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-EASTER-MESSAGE-FROM-THE-GHANA-CATHOLIC-BISHOPS-CONFERENCE.pdf>.

⁸² Naameh, “2020 Easter Message from the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference,” 1.

against the attacks of fear, doubt and despair.⁸³

4.6 Exegetical Translation of Philippians 4:6-7

From the morpho-syntactic analysis above, Philippians 4:6-7 should be read as:

You must be anxious about [in] nothing! But, in all things, through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding shall guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

4.7 Interpretation

Beyond the immediate audience, the narrative in Philippians 4:6-7 is admonishing Christians to heal their anxieties about the cares of this world which in turn destabilizes their minds and troubles their hearts.⁸⁴ The issues concerning the heart and mind are what the paper refers to as “cardio-psychological.” This healing to the heart and mind, according to Paul, is the inner-peace and sense of hope that only “a productive prayer – through supplication with thanksgiving” can bring.⁸⁵ Thanksgiving along with prayer and petition, form the “antidote to worry.”⁸⁶

Therefore, even though prayer is required as a spiritual discipline for Christian growth, its usage by Paul in this context is to be an “anxiety relief” and “peace instiller” for the troubled heart and confused mind. Paul’s admonishment could be a real starter towards prosperity since the inner peace that would come through ‘prayer’ could settle the minds and hearts of Christians,

⁸³ John Carmichael, “Anxiety-Free Living: The Path to God’s Peace,” *evangelnorth.net*, 1-2. Available at: <https://evangelnorth.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Anxiety-Free-Living-The-Path-to-Gods-Peace.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians, An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987). See David Guzik, “Philippians 4 – Joy and Peace in All Circumstances,” Available at: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/philippians-4/>

⁸⁵ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975).

⁸⁶ See “Study Notes to Philippians 4:6,” in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 1774.

guarding and arming them to be focused and healthier towards income-generating work so that they could provide food for themselves. It is possible that some contemporary Ghanaian Christians are unable to accurately interpret and apply the text, especially without adequate hermeneutical insight. D. Lioy emphasizes the fact that inadequate hermeneutics through ignorance towards semantics, grammar, genre and/or historical context of biblical passages, forms a leading cause for potentially inadequate interpretations and theologizing, some of which are out of context.⁸⁷ Moreover, in relation to some possible causes of “anxiety,” studies reveal that poverty attracts stigma, economic hardship and psychological trauma. This relation is best comprehended in a Yoruba proverb: “*Aisi owo baba ijaya*” which means “lack of money is the father of all anxiety.”⁸⁸ Therefore, it makes a contextual inference that for the African, poverty and anxiety are related. In that case, one could think that Paul probably had an idea about the anxiety that comes from lack of material provisions, including money. Therefore, probably previewed to that, he admonished believers in Philippi to first “pray” for the peace of God to stabilize their minds and hearts so that they could see and brainstorm clearly the actual root causes of their anxiety. This means that, after having received the “all-surpassing peace of God” to have their minds and hearts calmed and restored, Paul indirectly might have expected them to work on the red flags that cause such worries so that they prosper in health, emotions and possessions. So, for Paul, mental stability through “prayer” is a foundation for focus, productivity and prosperity. Annie Militz posits that, in attaining prosperity, one should first have the right attitude of mind and heart.⁸⁹ Therefore, by praying, Christians set

⁸⁷ D. Lioy, “The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel,” *Conspicetus* 4 (2007): 48.

⁸⁸ Adewale J. Adelakun and Oluseye E. Ajadi, “No Work No Food: An Interpretive Analysis of Paul’s Admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3: 6-13 in the Context of the Discourse on Religion and Poverty,” *European Scientific Journal* 16, no. 23 (2020): 118.

⁸⁹ Annie Rix Militz, “Prosperity through the Knowledge and Power of Mind,” In *Lectures and mental Treatments* (USA, Los Angeles: The Master Mind Publishing Co. Inc., 1913), 10, 11. Available at:

their minds and hearts ready for activities that will produce happiness and stability. Therefore, working to earn “money” would be tangible evidence of one who has a clear cardio-psychological focus and understanding of the relevance of prosperity through earning a living. This intentional commitment and discipline to endure suffering through “work” is the missing element in the “prosperity gospel” which is creating some anxious, religiously poor Christians in Africa and Ghana. Therefore, after exercising faith followed by positive confessions and thanksgiving through prayer, one would need to be intentional about work and job searching. This is what Kiki Hayden defines as “Trusting God while Job searching.” According to Hayden, one needs to be proactive and intentional about making sufficient preparations towards job application, and this includes writing a resume and putting in the application letter after praying and believing in God.⁹⁰ Peace in life could be earned through faith in God and embracing responsibility and accountability after praying. Consequently, faith and prayer should not be the end but as means to an end that is responsibly enhanced through intentional activity “work” towards prosperity.

4.8 Work and Wealth Creation toward Prosperity and Poverty Reduction

Following an interview question regarding whether positive confession and faith are enough for wealth creation and prosperity among Christians, some important responses are worth-quoting. The 15th respondent, who is a Presbyterian Minister and a Lecturer in Theology and African Studies responded this way:

“Yes, God has given us the power to prosper, but it does not make ‘wealth creation’ a hundred percent (100%) responsibility of God as though humanity has no role to play in its realization. What is that power to prosper? That power includes knowledge, skills and the inherent talents and abilities He has given us

⁹⁰ Kiki Hayden, “A Future and A hope: Trusting God while Job Searching,” *Culture* (2024). Available at: <https://www.radiantmagazine.com/2024/06/03/a-future-and-a-hope-trusting-god-while-job-searching/>

so that we can use them diligently without laziness to make a better living for ourselves. After having given us all these resources, what is left is utilization. We must work by making them useful in solving human problems and in exchange we get wealth and prosperity. Yes, prayer is good, but it only shows our dependence on and faith in God. After faith and prayer, work must occur. God even hates lazy people.”⁹¹

Notably, even though the Bible and Christianity convey that God is the one who gives the power and the might to make wealth (Deuteronomy 8:17-18; cf. Psalm 90:17; Genesis 13:2),⁹² humanity is responsible for the utilization of that power to make a better living. This possibly comes through working. God delights in and establishes the “work of our hands.”⁹³ Therefore, this should reorient the prosperity concept and attitude of Christians toward the creation and possession of wealth.⁹⁴ In exploring the role of Public Theology as a vehicle for churches in Ghana to promote genuine wealth creation, Opuni-Frimpong identifies the need for social responsibility towards a more holistic and sustainable approach to wealth creation.⁹⁵ In the context of prosperity, Opuni-Frimpong argues that “wealth creation” should be the product of an “activity that increases money, profits, property, goods, education, skills, and quality of attitude of the individual or country.”⁹⁶ He adds that the essence of success and prosperity is embedded in the act of making a person more skillful in arts/vocations such as agriculture, weaving, carpentry, medicine and engineering among many others.⁹⁷ Simply,

⁹¹ An excerpt from an interview on April 25, 2025, at 11:51 AM in a face-to-face conversation with the respondent.

⁹² Opuni-Frimpong, “The Participation of the Church in Wealth Creation in Ghana,” 291.

⁹³ See Psalm 90:17 in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 866.

⁹⁴ Opuni-Frimpong, 291.

⁹⁵ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, “The Participation of the Church in Wealth Creation in Ghana: A Reflection on the Role of Public Theology,” *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies (ERATS)* 9, no. 7 (2023): 288. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.2023974>

⁹⁶ Opuni-Frimpong, 292.

⁹⁷ Opuni-Frimpong, 292.

securing a job, art, vocation or producing an innovation are activities through which one could responsibly earn a successful wealth-filled living that overcomes poverty.

4.9 *Faith, Prayers and Positive Confessions toward Tomorrow's Financial Security*

In relation to reducing poverty among Christian ministers and church members in their retirement periods, interviewees were asked whether Christian clerics or church members should have financial plans toward their retirement or, faith and prayers are enough. An Independent Church Evangelist (the 11th respondent), who admitted to be struggling financially as a result of his reluctance towards having a "salary-paying" work, made this genuine response:

I admit that I am the cause of my family's financial problems today. I had many friends and families who advised me in my early years as a young Evangelist in my 30s, but I told them I have faith that God will provide all my needs even if I do not get a salary job. Countless times I turned down job offers from friends and people who cared about my future. Little did I know that the wellness of my body affects my spiritual commitment, and that God delights in my financial wellness as much as in my spiritual wellness. I failed to discern this balance. Today, I am over 55 years old with a wife and three children. If not for my hard-working wife who understands my situation, my children and I would be in some more trouble than today. Retirement age is closer and yet I do not have anything. Even though I have faith in God, I think I have wasted my years with the excuse of just 'looking up to God' without doing nothing apart from preaching. I wish I could change the hands of time...⁹⁸

Emphasizing the need for active and intentional preparation towards one's livelihood today and in the future, Opuni-Frimpong iterates Tenkorang's value on retirement plans. Tenkorang asserts that, "having a meaningful retirement plan is of crucial

⁹⁸ An excerpt from an interview on April 26, 2025, at 10:02 AM in a face-to-face conversation with the respondent.

importance to everyone." Hence, in the context of prosperity, one could understand that "faith in hoping for a happy and fruitful future and retirement age" requires the confessing believer to balance his or her hopes with "active and intentional plan of wealth-generating activities."

B. Credit highlights that a personal wealth-creating strategy is based on specific goals which should be realistic, time-bound, and well-planned.⁹⁹ Also, wealth-creation and its management are linked to access to the right information, planning¹⁰⁰ and one's ability to make wise choices about credit and debts; about what to save and what to spend.¹⁰¹ Savings accounts and retirement plans are examples of wealth-creating assets.¹⁰² The Christian could take advantage of this.

4.10 *The Concept of "God said" as an Excuse for Anti-Work Attitude and Begging*

Seeming unwilling to appropriate planning, preparation and work towards wealth-creation in order to realize the hope of a prosperous living, some African, Ghanaian Christians somehow refuse to work. Unfortunately, while ignoring work, some of these individuals resort to begging and/or borrowing. Eventually, some of them create societal problems for themselves as debts and financial struggles continue to burden them. When some are respectfully approached and advised to consider working, advisers are turned down with several convictions such as "God said No" or "God does not want me to work" which they hold personally. One may however regard such "convictions" as excuses. In relation to this, two interviewees who were Pentecostals/Charismatics and overseers of newly founded churches gave some shocking responses. One (the 9th respondent) indicated:

God does not want me to work. If I go to work, the Holy Spirit will not allow me. Besides, I do

⁹⁹ B. Credit, "Building Wealth: A Beginner's Guide to Securing Your Financial Future," *Federal Reserve bank of Dallas*, 4. Available at: <https://www.dallasfed.org/~/media/documents/cd/wealth/BuildingWealth.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Credit, "Building Wealth: A Beginner's Guide to Securing Your Financial Future," 1.

¹⁰¹ Credit, "Building Wealth," 18.

¹⁰² Credit, 2.

not want anyone to employ me and oppress or maltreat me. Besides, my Calling is a holy one. Working will defile my calling. I want to stay full-time. This is where my prosperity is.¹⁰³

Another (the 10th respondent) revealed:

“I was not born to work. Mine is to pray and trust God for others to take care of me.”¹⁰⁴

While the 9th respondent indicated that God is the reason, the 10th respondent similarly blamed his “anti-work” attitude to “destiny and his make-up from birth” as a biological cause. However, the former seems to have an “unholy” perspective toward work, and the latter seems vulnerable to a beggarly lifestyle, an attitude that Paul would condemn.¹⁰⁵ One might ask whether or not the context of work is wrongly understood by these individuals and whether or not their “anti-work” attitude is fueled by some misconceived and preconceived teachings and religious experiences. For example; some ancient monks, through their religious experiences, took a strong stance against any association with society.¹⁰⁶ Also, some Christians regard work as somewhat evil, and as a punishment and separation from one’s spiritual awareness and duty.¹⁰⁷ Eventually, some Christians may not consider work at all. Jeremy Posadas explored the “anti-work” perspective of some Christians by interpreting “work” from its intrinsic worth and its corrupted form. His findings revealed that some religious individuals (Christians) may have “anti-work” perspectives due to some form of oppression and unpleasant

labour that they go or could go through.¹⁰⁸ However, he observes that “work in its intrinsic nature is good and profitable for human living. Therefore, its wrong practice by others through corrupt and oppressive means do not disqualify its original value and necessity placed on it by God. One could redeem such value by embracing the goodness that genuine work brings as well as the happiness it adds to human experience.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, regardless of one’s spiritual experience and sense of revelation or intuition, the demands of basic needs as defined by Abraham Maslow¹¹⁰ and the necessity of management by Adams Smith¹¹¹ requires that every Christian considers some form of income-generating work that is genuine. Some are ignorantly deceived to follow some kinds of “directions and rituals” as options for freedom from poverty and to have financial breakthrough, yet they are poor.¹¹²

4.11 Discipline, Suffering and Perseverance towards Prosperity and Success in Life

When asked whether one needs to uphold the intentional and active virtues of discipline, suffering and perseverance in his or her pursuit for prosperity, all thirty-one interviewees indicated that these virtues were necessary. Moreover, a majority of twenty-six respondents specifically emphasized that these virtues are the “makers of great people.” A participant who is an Akan chief and a Christian Pentecostal made this emphasis: “Without discipline, suffering and

¹⁰³ An excerpt from an interview on April 23, 2025, at 11:06 AM in a face-to-face conversation with the respondent.

¹⁰⁴ An excerpt from an interview on April 23, 2025, at 2:11 PM in a face-to-face conversation with the respondent.

¹⁰⁵ See 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10.

¹⁰⁶ Christina M. Gschwandtner, “Ascetic Experience,” In *Ways of Living Religion: Philosophical Investigations into Religious Experience*, pp. 14 – 55 (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 14. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/ways-of-living-religion/ascetic-experience/7E46C05F3AE33E9A4F552F062AFEF84E> Accessed on April 23, 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Lindsley, “Theology of Work,” <https://www.transform-world.net/newsletters/2014/TheologyOfWork.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Jeremy Posadas, “The Refusal of Work in Christian Ethics and Theology: Interpreting Work from an Anti-work Perspective,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 45, no. 2 (2017): 330, 331. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26455684>.

¹⁰⁹ Posadas, “The Refusal of Work in Christian Ethics and Theology: Interpreting Work from an Anti-work Perspective,” 332.

¹¹⁰ Azizi Hj. Yahaya, *Abraham Maslow: The Needs Hierarchy* (Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia), 1-13. Available at: <https://eprints.utm.my/6091/1/aziziyahbrahamMaslow.pdf> See: Saul McLeod, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs,” *Preprint* (April 2007): 1-30. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15240896. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383241976>.

¹¹¹ Philip C. Koenig and Robert C. Waters, “Adam Smith on Management,” *Business and Society Review* 107, no. 2 (2002): 241-253. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1467-8594.00135>

¹¹² Adelakun and Ajadi, 128.

perseverance in life, there is no way a person can develop or prosper in this life, unless they want a cheap way. Cheap way is the way of death, and only lazy people choose a cheap life. Poverty is an inevitable result if anyone seeks prosperity without committing to a life of discipline, embracing the pains of suffering and staying resolutely persevering. Those who are genuinely rich and prosperous in this life have a painful story filled with sacrifices and determination. Indeed, *Sika yε mogya*. Money or wealth is bloody, and it only comes to those who pay the price of sacrifice, hard work and determination despite their religiosity. Apply these right principles of life and you will certainly be prosperous.”

V. DISCIPLESHIP, SUFFERING AND PROSPERITY: THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES

5.1 *The Conceptualization of the Prosperity Gospel in Ghana*

In an interview conducted by Moses Asamoah on some seven (7) charismatic clergy in Accra-Ghana, a respondent shared his perspective on Christianity and prosperity in these wording:

It is biblical for the believer to live a prosperous life because prosperous life gives glory to God and so the church members should not live a life of mediocrity but live the life of abundance and be thinking big all the time.¹¹³

However, cited in the work of Emmanuel Larbi, a more clarifying view is shared by Pentsil, a foremost Pentecostal cleric and Bible teacher. Although it is God's will to prosper His children (Philippians 4:19; Cf. 3 John 2), Pentsil emphasizes the significant role of hard work (2 Thessalonians 3: 10-12) as a necessary factor that should complement one's faithful tithing (Malachi 3:8-10), prayer life (Philippians 4:6-7), giving (Luke 6:38; Cf. Acts 20:35) and obedience to God

(Deuteronomy 38:1-2).¹¹⁴ Therefore, despite the fact that the Bible teaches believers to pray in all situations (Phil. 4:6-7), give and they shall be given (Luke 6:38), tithe faithfully (Mal. 3:8-10), and to have faith in God that whatever they ask they shall receive, God expects believers to appropriate the *right knowledge* and *wisdom* that balances these acts of faith with work that will produce and sustain the flow of financial substances. Hosea 4:6 warns God's children to seek knowledge for their liberation since “ignorance” is a destruction. Some studies have seen a relationship between the inadequacy of, or absence of knowledge (i.e. ignorance) and poverty. In his investigation, S. Mabitsela identified some four key variables that are responsible for South Africa's economic crisis. Two among them are ignorance and poverty, and these have a direct relationship.¹¹⁵ As God empowers Christians with inherent ability to make wealth and prosper (cf. Deut. 18:18), it is necessarily incumbent on individuals to access such “power.” Knowledge, proven by research, is “power.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, one could advise that, in addition to his or her faith in God, the Christian needs “financial knowledge” which will serve as evidence of their inherent power to make wealth. To this necessity, a collaborative study led by A. Lusardi indicated that “financial knowledge is a key determinant of wealth.”¹¹⁷ Explaining how individuals who lack financial knowledge end up becoming “consumers” who always spend and consume to make the financial intellects rich, Lusardi and Mitchell explained that: “many

¹¹⁴ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, 2001).

¹¹⁵ Seane Mabitsela, “Relationship between Ignorance, Poverty, Greed, and Corruption in South Africa, 1999-2019,” *African Renaissance* 21, no. 2 (2024): 419. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2024/21n2a21>.

¹¹⁶ Laura Fogg-Rogers, Jacquie L. Bay, Hannah Burgess and Suzanne C. Purdy, “‘Knowledge Is Power’: A Mixed-Methods Study Exploring Adult Audience Preferences for Engagement and Learning Formats Over 3 Years of a Health Science Festival,” *Science Communication* (May 2015): 1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547015585006>.

¹¹⁷ Annamaria Lusardi, Pierre-Carl Michaud and Olivia S. Mitchell, “Optimal Financial Knowledge and Wealth Inequality,” *Journal of Political Economy* 125, no. 2 (2017): 431. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/690950>

¹¹³ Asamoah, 201.

consumers lack knowledge about key aspects of financial markets" and research indicate that a large proportion of the population is not financially literate.¹¹⁸ One could understand that, regardless of a person's faith, prayer and positive confessions, if he or she lacks the right financial knowledge, such could end in poverty. Even in the face of abundant resources, without any financial management, such resources could be misused and exhausted into poverty. Another study added that, to advance in human capital investment toward financial development, investing in financial knowledge is key.¹¹⁹

Therefore, when able young people are being idle in church or in their homes, praying for hours and making positive confessions, naming and claiming prosperity without having or acquiring the right financial knowledge to balance their words and hopes with real-life work, they mostly become distressed. They blame God for not honouring his words to them. In an interview with a Charismatic pastor, a Senior Pastor of an Assemblies of God church in Kumasi (the 4th respondent), who believes in prosperity of the believer, he cautioned that:

Even though I believe in prosperity, having faith alone is not enough. In fact, there is a lack of proper theology on the part of some believing members and some pastors on this prosperity teaching. There should be a balance with work.¹²⁰

Table 4.1 below shows the responses of the thirty-one (31) interviewees when asked whether God does not want Christians to work because of them serving Him. A majority of 23 interviewees representing 74.19% indicated "Strongly Disagree." While four interviewees, representing 12.9%, were "neutral," the remaining four

¹¹⁸ Lusardi Annamaria and Mitchell S. Olivia, "The Economic Importance of Financial Literacy: Theory and Evidence," *Journal of Economic Literature* 52, no. 1 (2014): 5-44. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.52.1.5>

¹¹⁹ Delavande Adeline, Rohwedder Susanne and Willis Robert, "Preparation for Retirement, Financial Knowledge and Cognitive Resources," *Working Paper* no. 190 (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Retirement Research Center, 2008).

¹²⁰ An excerpt from an interview on April 23, 2025, at 8:53 AM through a Phone conversation.

interviewees representing 12.9% indicated "Strongly Agree." Therefore, one could agree that God delights in the prosperity of Christians and does not delight in any assumption that Christians should not work. This majority of 74.19% resonates with McNeal's theological position that: "God places value on work"¹²¹ and that, it is not as if God never created mankind to work as some individuals consider work as God's punitive response to mankind's sin.¹²² Prior to the punishment, God had created mankind, Adam, to "work the garden and cultivate it."¹²³ The punishment only increased the "drudgery" that accompanied.¹²⁴ However, God honours a person who is skillful in his or her occupation, and promotes him or her before great people,¹²⁵ and he blesses the work of the diligent who fears him.¹²⁶ In Ancient Israel, those who were diligent and skillful in their works were craftsmen and artisans who were considered as wise people (Proverbs 8:30; Exodus 35:30-35).¹²⁷ These individuals were acknowledged as special individuals and were employed to serve before Kings – example: Joseph, as administrator (Genesis 41:46); David, a musician (1 Samuel 16:21-23); and Huram, a worker in bronze (1 Kings 7:14).

¹²¹ T. R. McNeal, "Work, Theology of," in Trent C. Butler, ed., Entry for 'Work, Theology of' Holman Bible Dictionary (1991). Available at: <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/w/work-theology-of.html>.

¹²² Art Lindsley, "Theology of Work," Available at: <https://www.transform-world.net/newsletters/2014/TheologyOfWork.pdf>

¹²³ Cf. Genesis 2: 15, 7-15.

¹²⁴ Cf. Genesis 3:17-19.

¹²⁵ Cf. Proverbs 22:29.

¹²⁶ Cf. Psalm 128:1-6.

¹²⁷ See "Study Notes to Proverbs 22:29" in *The Compact NIV Study Bible with Study Notes and References, Concordance and Maps* (London, Sydney, Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, 1987), 960.

Table 4.1: God's dislike for Christians to work

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	4	12.9
Agree	0	0.00
Neutral	4	12.9
Disagree	0	0.00
Strongly Disagree	23	74.19
Total	31	100

Source: Authors' Construction from Survey, 2025

The findings above provide some significant possibility that other-human related factors or attitude may be the direct reasons for the “anti-work” perspective among some Ghanaian Christians and Christians in general. In response to that, Table 4.2 shows a distribution of some causes/reasons: misunderstanding and misappropriation of faith (4), misinterpretation of God’s concept about prosperity (*i.e.*, a wrong theological concept and aptitude) (5), laziness (7),

preconceived dislike toward work (2), misconceived parallelism between spirituality and material wealth (3), excuse for “Full-Time ministry” (2), hiding under “Full-Time ministry” to cover personal laziness (2), wrong identification of their calling as either “Full-Time” or “Bi-vocation” (2), spiritual attacks against people’s prosperity (2), and the love for sheep exploitation/church merchandise as opportunity for wealth-making (2), and many others.

Table 4.2: Reasons for “anti-work” attitude among some Ghanaians Christians

Reasons	Frequency	Percent (%)
Misunderstanding and misappropriation of faith	4	12.9
Misinterpretation of God’s concept about prosperity (<i>i.e.</i> , a wrong theological concept and aptitude)	5	16.13
Laziness	7	22.58
Preconceived dislike toward work	2	6.45
Misconceived parallelism between spirituality and material wealth	3	9.67
Excuse for “Full-Time ministry”	2	6.45
Hiding under “Full-Time ministry” to cover personal laziness	2	6.45
Wrong identification of their calling as either “Full-Time” or “Bi-vocation”	2	6.45
Spiritual attacks against people’s prosperity	2	6.45
The love for sheep exploitation/church merchandise as opportunity for wealth-making	2	6.45
Total	31	100

Source: Authors' Construction from Survey, 2025

From the findings above, regardless of the many reasons that could represent why some Christians may frown at work, the study discusses that, “regardless of one’s spiritual experience and sense of revelation or intuition, the demands of basic needs as defined by Abraham Maslow¹²⁸ and the necessity of management by Adams Smith¹²⁹ requires that every Christian considers some form of income-generating work that is genuine. In this case, if a “Full-Time ministry” is genuinely subscribed to and does not render the “minister” as vulnerable and as beggarly as someone who solely depends on the congregation, church coffers and gifts/donations from others, then such a ministerial subscription is a “worthy path.” Nonetheless, if aside from all, a minister could live above support from others, his or her family could earn a respectable living. Living a life that depends solely on offerings and gifts can be even more unsettling.¹³⁰ The findings of J. Maina revealed that some churches fail to professionalize its human resources including full-time pastors, and this can threaten pastor’s welfare (which may include salary) and that of his family’s stability.¹³¹ Therefore, while he or she may be a “Full-Time minister” with some busy schedules, he or she could create other income-generating investments and venture-capital businesses and delegate his or her “management right” by hiring some responsible persons to manage them. There is possibly an inevitable fact that some of the church members could seek financial help from

¹²⁸ Azizi Hj. Yahaya, *Abraham Maslow: The Needs Hierarchy* (Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia), 1-13. Available at: <https://eprints.utm.my/6091/1/aziziyahbrahamMaslow.pdf> See: Saul McLeod, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs,” *Preprint* (April 2007): 1-30. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15240896. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383241976>

¹²⁹ Philip C. Koenig and Robert C. Waters, “Adam Smith on Management,” *Business and Society Review* 107, no. 2 (2002): 241-253. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8594.00135>

¹³⁰ Dag Heward-Mills, “Is a Salary from the Church Stolen Money?” in *Rules of Full-Time Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Parchment House, 2019), Chapter 4. Available at: <https://dagbooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/44.-RULES-OF-FULL-TIME-MINISTRY-2ND-ED2019.pdf>

¹³¹ Jaccobed Maina, Zipporah Kaaria and Gregory Kivanguli, “Effect of Pastor’s Church Ministry on their Family Stability in Nairobi County, Kenya,” *European Scientific Journal* 14, no. 29 (2018): 36.

the minister, coupled with his or her financial responsibilities at home. This puts loads of financial stress on pastors, according to a recent research in Ghana.¹³² Therefore, an intentional financial plan towards expanding income base for present and future¹³³ through genuine ventures, vocations and/or trades is recommendable, just as planning the financial management strategies of the church is important.¹³⁴

5.2 The Ghanaian Context: Objections against the Proponents

Elly Kansiime worries about some negative attitude of some faith-professing Christians toward work and workplace in the 21st century.¹³⁵ Since prosperity is a necessary good, there needs to be a balance between positive confessions (faith) and its realization such that the pivotal role of “work” becomes a genuine means through which one’s faith in prosperity could justifiably be realized. Unfortunately, some Christians are only concerned about positive confessions excluding the element of intentional commitment to “work”. Faith must have works (Ps. 90:17; cf. Jas. 2:17-20). Indeed, faith should have an integration with work in such a way that one’s faith and positive confessions could influence their attitudes toward work (duty and time), workplace and wealth-making positively. Neubert and Dougherty worry about how Christians sometimes see faith and work as totally two different fields, namely: spiritual and secular respectively. Their

¹³² Stephen Doh Fia, Charles Fosu-Ayarkwah and Bismarck Kusi, “Impact of Stress and Burnout on Quality of Life of Pastors,” *Universal Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2022): 160.

¹³³ Jessie Hyman Jackson, “Strategies Church Financial Leaders Use for Financial Sustainability during Economic Crises,” *Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies* (Walden University, 2018): 17. Available at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>. See also: N. F. Melao, Maria S. Guia and M. Amorim, “Quality Management and Excellence in the Third Sector: Examining European Quality in Social Services (EQUASS) in Non-Profit Social Services,” *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence* 28 (2017): 840-857. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14783363.2015.1132160>.

¹³⁴ Jackson, “Strategies Church Financial Leaders Use for Financial Sustainability During Economic Crises,” Abstract.

¹³⁵ Elly K. Kansiime, *Integrating Faith with Work: A Ministry Transformational Model* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2015), 1.

findings reveal that recent studies indicate that if a “faith-work” integration is emphasized in congregations, members experience work more positively and contribute to their workplace.¹³⁶ Even though proponents of the “prosperity gospel” are convinced that their messages and activities are biblical and relevant to the socio-economic and politico-cultural emancipation of the Ghanaian, not all Ghanaian Christians agree with that. The problem of improper hermeneutics, according to Asamoah-Gyadu, has led to a top-sided gospel that marginalizes the poor and the underprivileged in the Charismatic churches/Ministries (CM’s) prosperity gospel.¹³⁷ Critically, Koduah objects to this gospel, referring to it as “truncated gospel”, adulterated gospel, a gospel of Christian consumerism and problem-free life alien to true biblical teaching. In his view, the “prosperity gospel” stands to deny or refuse suffering as part of Christian life.¹³⁸

5.3 Suffering and Prosperity

Asking about whether or not suffering is part of Christian discipleship and practice, a respondent who is both a pastor and a staff for a public Building and Construction Institute in Kumasi gave this response:

Christianity is not a ‘come-and-die’ bid. Despite the realities of persecutions, biblical teachings uphold God’s delight in the prosperity of believers. However, any teaching that rejects the suffering aspect of the Christian calling into discipleship and obedience is not a sound teaching and should be discouraged. Christ is our highest model. Any teaching that lacks a balance between faith through positive confessions and the reality of work does not regard God’s value and purpose for work. Also, any believer that

¹³⁶ Mitchell J. Neubert and Kevin D. Dougherty, *Integrating Faith and Work* (Baylor University: Institute for Faith and Learning, 2015), 67.

¹³⁷ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Paper delivered at the “Awaken to the Word VIII: Challenging the Church for Meaningful Missionary Work.”* (Seminar held at the Bethany Methodist Church, Dzorwulu, Accra, Ghana. March 26, 2009).

¹³⁸ Alfred Koduah, *Who is Disturbing the Nature?* (Accra: advocate publishing Limited, 2008), 121-54.

shuns the realities of life and ignores hard work, dedication and suffering through perseverance does not understand the way to the genuine and lasting prosperity which God intends. Such a believer is only speaking and hoping in ‘words’ which have no ‘seeds and roots’ to materialize them. A person’s work is the evidence of his or her faith in God and the assurance of his or her expectation.¹³⁹

Another Ghanaian Christian woman who lives in the UK was interviewed via WhatsApp Call. She shared her sufferings that led to her financial breakthrough and traveling success. She indicated:

I was prophesied to by a pastor in Kumasi that I would travel to the UK. That was in 2014 then. I would always pray, fast, and make all kinds of positive declarations without any practical and meaningful actions towards it. One day, I had gone into the church auditorium to pray alone when an associate pastor who had also come there to pray asked me: ‘Young lady, what are you doing about your traveling which the Senior Pastor told you about? Do you have a passport? Do you have any specific country of your dreams, where you would love to go? What do you do currently? Are you working?’ All my answers were in the negative. I had no birth certificate, no passport, no country in mind, and no job. He said to me, ‘It’s going to be impossible if you do not work on these. Yes, God has told you. He only told you His plans for you. You are to figure out how you want that plan to materialize in your life. You’ve got to wake up, and work at it. But I would say, get a job first so that you can handle your financial needs including getting a birth certificate and a passport. Meanwhile take this money – GhC 100.’ I thanked him, and left in sober. After being employed for a year, I secured my passport and all the necessary documents. In 2018 I traveled as God intended. I learnt that God did not tell me the date, which country and how I was supposed to get there. I had to

¹³⁹ An excerpt from an interview on April 23, 2025, at 10:05 AM through an Audio call on the Phone. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theology.

balance my faith with taking the pain to search for a job for six months, sacrificing my appetites by enduring one meal a day in order to save enough money for my passport and traveling expenses. So, Ernest, Christians are to bear the pains and sufferings through hard work to prove their faith in God and their readiness to have a prosperous life of good health and sufficient wealth. Faith alone is not enough. Work is a necessary need.¹⁴⁰

5.4 The Akans of Ghana

The Akans of Ghana are Africans, from West Africa. Among Africa's four distinct native language families, namely: *Afroasiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo and Khoisan*, the Akans belong to the "Niger-Congo," which is considered as Africa's largest language family geographically, and the world's largest language family with about 1,554 numerous distinct languages, listed by *ethnologue*.¹⁴¹ Among its key branches – Kru, Grebo, Kwa, Bantu, Benue-Congo, the Akans belong to the "Kwa" branch. Following the *Kwa* root, most Ghanaian-Akan male names have *kwa*, namely: *Akwasi* (a male born on Sunday), *Kwadwo* (a male born on Monday), *Kwabena* (a male born on Tuesday), *Kwaku* (a male born on Wednesday), *Kwofi/Kofi* (a male born on Friday) and *Kwame* (a male born on Saturday), except a male born on Thursday, *Yaw*, probably named after the Mother Earth in Akan parlance *Asaase Yaa*, to denote the Akan reverence for Thursday as a hallowed day for the Earth.¹⁴² The Akans form the largest ethnic group in Ghana. The widely spoken language in Ghana – *Twi*, is their language. It is both a mother-tongue and an easily learnable language. Due to varying tonal and autographic variations, the Twi has dialects such as Asante Twi, Akuapem Twi, Bono Twi, Akwamu

¹⁴⁰ An excerpt from an interview on April 24, 2025, at 10:53 PM through a WhatsApp Call on the Phone. She is currently studying in the UK.

¹⁴¹ David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons and Charles D. Fennig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Twenty-eighth edition (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2025). Available at: <https://www.ethnologue.com/subgroup/47/>.

¹⁴² These are observable empirical findings from respondents about the realities concerning the Akans and their naming customs and traditions.

Twi, Kwahu Twi among others. The Asante Twi is the most popular Akan dialect.¹⁴³

5.5 The Concept of "Work" in the Akan Religio-Cultural Context

Historically, the religio-cultural Akans are "communal" people who value hard work and its corresponding virtues of diligence, honesty and responsibility.¹⁴⁴ The true Akan knows the pains of work, yet he or she would rather toil than to be called a lazy person or a poor person. They uphold Mbiti's concept of communal life of the African in his popular classic phrase: I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am.¹⁴⁵ Akans practice communal development towards national growth. They believe in unity in diversity.¹⁴⁶ This communalism is seen in some popular Akan sayings: "*Wonsom wonsom ne nipa* (literally means, unity and collaboration for development comes through people; or to build, we need everyone). Echoing the findings of Sarpong¹⁴⁷ and Gyekye¹⁴⁸ about the generosity of Akans, Appiah-Sekyere concludes that Akans are very welcoming. They entertain strangers with good meals and hospitality.¹⁴⁹

From youth, the Akan is trained to be diligent in work. The common pleasantries among working Akans is the one which the passive worker greets: "*Adwuma, adwuma*" (Work, work) after which the one active worker responds: "*Adwuma ye*" (work is good). Akans upholds that hard work

¹⁴³ Seth Kissi and Ernest van Eck, "Reading Hebrews through Akan Ethnicity and Social Identity," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 1-10.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Appiah-Sekyere, "Traditional Akan Ethics and Humanist Ethics: A comparative Study," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 3, no. 6 (2016): 110.

¹⁴⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989).

¹⁴⁶ Kwame Gyekye, *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*, (rev.ed.) (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, (reprint 2006) (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974).

¹⁴⁸ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996).

¹⁴⁹ Paul Appiah-Sekyere, "Traditional Akan Ethics and Humanist Ethics: A comparative Study," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 3, no. 6 (2016): 113. 110-120.

propels the wheels of success, and that laziness is highly abhorred.¹⁵⁰ So, to the religio-cultural Akan, the value and ontology of “work” can better be defined, explained and illustrated in relation to the consequences of not working such as poverty, whether by laziness or anti-work attitude.

5.6 Poverty and Prosperity in the Akan Religio-Cultural Context

In the Akan-Ghanaian ontology and culture, poverty is regarded as a curse and a disgrace (*ohia ye animguasee*) so severe that one would prefer to die instead.¹⁵¹ Moreover, to the Akans, prosperity includes good health, fertility and wealth. Also, long before the emergence of the “prosperity gospel,” Akan-Ghanaians knew that “*Sika yε mogya*,” literally meaning “money is blood.”¹⁵² Thus, money is a fruit, not a gift. It is a harvest from the seed of blood. This Akan cultural proverb conveys the relevance of hard work through sacrifice of one’s life (blood) and comfort zone. That is, the virtues of commitment and diligence toward physical, mechanical or intellectual labour, constitute the source of genuine wealth. This is in contrast to the “prosperity gospel” which upholds that adherents should only exercise “faith in God” without any balance with work. This necessitated a reexamination that considers the Ghanaian context. Therefore, it is necessary to contextualize the “prosperity gospel” by building a balance between ‘faith’ and ‘work’ toward true prosperity.

5.7 Dynamics of Contemporary Notions of Prosperity from the Ghanaian-Akan Context

In examining the various concepts (notions) of prosperity in the Ghanaian tradition, this paper engages the Akan context. It is thus essential that one understands the Akan worldview and some of the underlying religious beliefs and value systems

¹⁵⁰ Appiah-Sekyere, “Traditional Akan Ethics and Humanist Ethics: A Comparative Study,” 112.

¹⁵¹ Emmanuel K. Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination,” *Pentvars Business Journal* 4, no. 2 (2010): 69, 70. <http://pentvarsjournal.com/articles/july-sept-2010/prosperity-gospel.pdf>. <http://pentvarsjournal.com/articles/july-sept-2010/prosperity-gospel.pdf>

¹⁵² Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination,” 67.

upheld by the people, which govern the Akan culture.¹⁵³

The importance of a traditional cosmology or worldview in understanding contemporary religious phenomena has been noted by theologians, missiologists and anthropologists.¹⁵⁴ Anim indicates that, according to John Pobee, an eminent Ghanaian theologian, prosperity [well-being] in the Akan society includes; *Nkwa* “good health, longevity, vitality, life;” *adom* “God’s gifts of food, favour, life, peace of self (body and spirit);” the family; creativity/fertility; good eyesight and perception; good hearing power; rainfall and general increase the family. Therefore, to him, prosperity in Akan epistemology can consequently be said to embrace three main components: wealth, health and fertility or procreation.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, in Akan ontology, poverty is regarded as a curse and a disgrace – *ohia yε animguase*. The extent to which the Akan perceives the seriousness of poverty is expressed in the proverb: *Obi bε wo dua se, “ma onwu!” a, enyeyaw se ose “ma ohia nka no!”* which is translated as “If someone curses you saying, ‘Let this person die!’ he is not doing you as much harm as he would if he were to say: ‘Let poverty hold on this person!’”¹⁵⁶. Given, Because of this worldview of Akans and Ghanaians, “people would do all they could to escape poverty of any kind or form”. Sadly, the wrong prosperity gospel might have influenced the indigenes. Thus, instead of the virtues of hard work, faithfulness and correct moral and Christian values like integrity, time management, financial management; young men resorted to talisman and magic while able-and-trading women left their stores for prayer retreats and camps. Also, positive confessions and incantations became rituals towards prosperity and material wealth. Thus, Akan-Ghanaian Christianity needs a holistic prosperity gospel that installs in the people ethical and social values of work,

¹⁵³ Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination,” 68.

¹⁵⁴ Anim, 68.

¹⁵⁵ Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination,” 69, 70.

¹⁵⁶ Anim, “The Prosperity Gospel in Ghana and the Primal Imagination,” 69, 70.

faithfulness and commitment to God and not the current form of laziness spreading in the name of ‘I claim it’ as though God is a magician. The challenge is that African Christianity fails to draw the line which balances ‘Faith’ and ‘Wealth making’. If genuinely it is faith, then the obedience that comes with faith should somehow cause believers to act, and not go to sleep or remain idle. Some Christians experience poverty. One may relate such a crisis with the intuition received from “prosperity gospel” which often leaves some adherents of the Christian faith refusing to bear the sufferings of committing their time and energy towards work. One may think that such adherents fail to embrace the phenomena of discipleship and discipline, especially as narrated in the Petrine epistles and Markan literature.

In the Ghanaian context, prosperity gospel is seen in the Akan adage “There is no one who does not like to eat salt,” in other words, everybody wants to prosper.”¹⁵⁷ However, this good desire toward prosperity cannot be partially skewed towards comfortable expectation without the inclusion or expectation of discomforts sometimes. Theologically, Mark and Peter’s messages conclude that prosperity comes with suffering and sacrifices. There is a price to pay, a cost to bear, and a hope of glory.

5.8 Markan Gospel and the theme of Discipleship in the light of Prosperity Gospel

Mark’s purpose in writing the gospel is not to draw moral lessons of life, but lessons about God – the weakness of the disciples shows the strength of Christ; their self-importance is contrasted with his humility.¹⁵⁸ The Gospel of Mark is a prosperity gospel in the context of discipleship. The theme of discipleship in Mark is linked to bearing the cross – taking up the cross and following Jesus. Mark’s theological perspective questions a theology of

success and proclaims that the life of discipleship is lived with the reality of the cross.¹⁵⁹

Mark’s theology and Christology are closely connected to following Jesus and living the life of discipleship – suffering discipleship.¹⁶⁰ Generally, Mark’s gospel spreads on a two-in-one theme; the *faithlessness of the disciples* toward Jesus and the *faithfulness of Jesus* to the disciples.

VI. RELATIONSHIP WITH CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN CHRISTIANITY

6.1 A Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*

According to Bonhoeffer, “Discipleship means adherence to Christ.” The true mark of a disciple is obedience, not a mere confession. Bonhoeffer iterates, “The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus.”¹⁶¹ Moreover, Bonhoeffer asserts that, “When we are called to follow Christ, we are summoned to an experience of his person.”¹⁶² Relating this to Mark’s writing in (8.31-38), Bonhoeffer explains further what Christian followership means. Thus, he writes, “The call to follow is closely connected with Jesus’ prediction of his passion. Jesus Christ must suffer and be rejected.”¹⁶³ Thus, following Christ means *passio passiva*, suffering because we must suffer. The disciple is not above his master. This then agrees that the believer’s call is simply not all butter and sugar; instead, the call requires specific experiences with Jesus. Therefore, suffering/persecution should not be alien to the believer. Then also, it should be understood clearly that the prosperity of Christians is not exempted from the sufferings that come along. Here, both Mark and Bonhoeffer agree to Peter’s assertion, “Christ suffered for you; follow the same” and “If we share Christ’s suffering (cost), we shall certainly share Christ’s glory

¹⁵⁷ Marvin Meyer, “Taking Up the Cross and Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark,” *CTJ* 37 (2002): 231

¹⁵⁸ Meyer, “Taking Up the Cross and Following Jesus,” 233.

¹⁶¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship: Revised and Unabridged Edition Containing Material Not Previously Translated* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. Twenty-first Printing, 1979), 61.

¹⁶² Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 63.

¹⁶³ Bonhoeffer, 95.

¹⁵⁷ Anim, 68.

¹⁵⁸ Ernst Best, *The New Century Bible Commentary. 1 Peter* (WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Marshall, Morgan & Scott. Publishing Ltd. London, 1986), 123.

(prosperity)”. Thus, the prosperity gospel in the light of Christian discipleship means that there is a cost element if we seek to prosper. This is because Christ is and has given Christians an *example* – himself. Because of that, contemporary Ghanaian Christianity should not be a one-sided gospel as if “positive confessions and simple faith in Jesus” is all that is needed. It is as if “obedience, work, faithfulness, financial discipline and time management” have no bearing on prosperity.

6.2 Argument against Bonhoeffer

However, preaching the cost of discipleship and the cross of Christ without balancing with the prosperity and glory of the cross does not form a holistic gospel. Peter reminds that “if [indeed] we share Christ’s suffering; we shall certainly share Christ’s glory” (1 Peter 2.21). Moreover, it is not as if following Christ is an eternal “come and die” bidden.¹⁶⁴ Since there is suffering, after a while, there is victory – *restoration, empowerment, establishment and settlement* (1 Peter 5:10). Following Jesus does not mean death forever; discipleship rewards joy. Therefore, in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, though believers are to understand the inclusion of sufferings in their walk with Christ, they suffer a great disservice if they are not also told that Christ wants them to prosper and for that matter it is good for a Christian to be materially wealthy. It becomes necessary for the African church and contemporary Ghanaian Christianity to include in sermons and activities, appropriate training and education on how members could *make, manage* and *multiply* money sincerely and still be Christians, so that they, being wealthy, could support the church, the families, their communities and others as the Lord Jesus Christ would have done.

6.3 Peter’s Theme of Christian Suffering and Living Hope, and the Prosperity Gospel

The two letters, named after the Apostle Peter, are endowed manuals for both Christian doctrine and practice. Theologically, these letters have Christological and eschatological essences. The

two major themes (issues) discussed in these letters are (i) Suffering and Persecution, (ii) Christian behaviour and Living hope. Christologically, Jesus is the central persona presented as the *ultimate* example of suffering and rejection. Also, “Peter describes Jesus Christ as divine – God and Saviour.”¹⁶⁵ Eschatologically, Discipleship and fellowship are encouraged on the part of Christians to emulate how Jesus behaved towards and handled persecution. Moreover, the future hope of glory is assured to the Christians at the end of suffering and persecution just as tribulations will not last forever. Also, in his second epistle, Peter reveals that heaven and earth will be destroyed by fire and the elements will melt (3:10, 12).¹⁶⁶

Contextually, these two themes relate to the prosperity gospel preached by Jesus. As the disciples suffer and bear cost in following Jesus, they reap rewards in the form of both spiritual increase through faith, patience, perseverance and hope and material blessings.

This in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity means that instead of Christians seeing suffering and persecutions as aliens to Christianity, it should clearly be understood that if Jesus, the model for Christians according to 1 Peter 2:21, suffered persecution with unfailing endurance till he triumphed gloriously, Christians (disciples) should follow same.

6.4 A Dialogue with John R.W. Stott’s “Men with a Message”

For much of the past two centuries, critical scholarship has engaged in a long and arduous debate over the nature of persecution in 1 Peter.¹⁶⁷ Christian Persecution began and intensified under the Roman Empire which led to the scattering of Asia Minor. It is believed that Rome imposed an

¹⁶⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1996), 226.

¹⁶⁶ Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 226.

¹⁶⁷ Travis B. Williams, “Suffering from a Critical Oversight: The Persecutions of 1 Peter within Modern Scholarship,” *United Kingdom Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no.2 (2012): 230-238.

¹⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 95-104.

imperial cult.¹⁶⁸ By necessity, Peter was confronted with hard core questions about how Christians should behave in such unfavorable circumstances, Christian's attitude to undeserving suffering and how Christians cope with alienation from society around them.

From 1 Peter, John R.W. Stott shares five (5) pragmatic ways Peter instructed the persecuted Christians to follow.¹⁶⁹ These imperatively sum up the *themes* in Peter's two letters.

- *The Example of Jesus* – Peter mentions a Role model to Christians. Stott outlines three attitudinal changes in Peter – *no retaliation to insults, no threats, but instead he endured and entrusted himself to Jesus, the just judge* (cf. 1 Pet. 2: 23). He summarizes: “As Christ suffered for you; follow the same (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21)”. Contextually, contemporary Ghanaian Christians should understand that in their quest for prosperity, Jesus should be their focus in times of suffering instead of running away and resorting to shortcuts – magic, sorcery.
- *Knowing the reason for Jesus' suffering* – According to Stott, Peter instructed the suffering believers to know that God had an ultimate purpose behind Christ's suffering. Mainly, the mission of Christ's death was that of “reconciliation” – bringing humanity back to God, toward righteousness (2:24). Contextually, Stott reminds all believers, including contemporary Ghanaian Christians, to prioritize their desire to live unto God in their quest for prosperity and that they should use righteous and honest means to make wealth, hence redefining their prosperity concept.
- *Being God's people* – As God's people, Peter admonishes Christians to practice love (1:22), peace (3:8), hospitality, service and

¹⁶⁸ Williams, “Suffering from a Critical Oversight: The Persecutions of 1 Peter within Modern Scholarship,” 230-238.

¹⁶⁹ John R. W. Stott, *Men with A Message: Peter's Message* (Longmans. 4s, 1954). See also: John R. W. Stott, *Men with a Message: An Introduction to the New Testament and its writers* (London: Candle Books, 1997). https://archive.org/details/menwithmessageinoooostot_m5s1

faithfulness (4:8-10) toward one another during suffering times. Osborne supports this attitude amid suffering.¹⁷⁰ Contextually, according to Stott, prosperity gospel in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity can be related via the same instruction: “Ghanaian Christians should learn to love and welcome one another in times of need.

- *Living in hope* – Stott asserts that the Christian is assured of glorification and therefore, should have a living hope because “sharing in Christ's suffering means sharing in his glorification (cf. 1 Pet. 4:13.” Stott writes, “Present weakness merely points to future strength and our sufferings are purifying our faith as fire purifies gold.” Simon K. Kistemaker argues for the certainty of the *parousia*, the return of Jesus, regardless of mockery at Christians.¹⁷¹ Pertaining to the “prosperity gospel,” Stott assures contemporary Ghanaian Christians that “after suffering a little while, prosperity will come because the Lord himself shall restore, strengthen, establish and settle his people (1 Pet 5:10)”. According to Calvin, Jesus Christ will return to fulfill the hope of his people.¹⁷²
- *The Necessity for holy living in times of suffering* – Stott amplifies Peter's admonishment to believers to pursue the eternal virtues of goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, goodliness, concern, purity and love (cf. 1 Pet. 4:7). Emphasizing holy living, Stott writes on the necessity of Christians to desist from scepticism, sexual pleasure and teachings that reject the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. On this critical need for holy living, E. M. Sidebottom asserts that “become partakers of the divine nature” is the strikingly original note in 2 Peter.¹⁷³ Notwithstanding, as the Christian looks to the

¹⁷⁰ T. P. Osborne, “Guidelines for Christian Suffering: A source-critical and Theological study on 1 Peter 2, 21-25,” *Biblica* 64 (1983): 381-408.

¹⁷¹ Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter and Jude*, 226.

¹⁷² John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Peter*, 384.

¹⁷³ E. M. Sidebottom, *James, Jude and 2 Peter: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (W.B. Eerdmans, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982). https://openlibrary.org/books/OL3487839M/James_Jude_and_2_Peter

parousia, he or she should be mindful of his or her financial responsibilities toward physical and material needs, which require balancing faith and work.

6.5 Contextualization

Working Christians will suffer in their diligence to prosper. However, through the integrity of their hearts, guided by the example of Jesus, the gospel narrative of Mark and the epistolary admonishment from Paul and Peter, their hard work and genuine responsibility constitute a proof of their faith and hope. Ernst Best admonishes contemporary Christians to rather depend on the grace of God to stand and sail through as citizens (1 Pet. 2:13-17) and servants (1 Pet. 2:18-25).¹⁷⁴ Onyinah writes on this grace and argues that God's grace helps the believer in the form of healing or hope during suffering.¹⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer calls this life-changing grace "costly grace." This is because any gospel that advocates prosperity without cost and sacrifices is not a true gospel, and it lacks its holistic authenticity.

6.6 Some Extended Interview Findings

When asked to share their overall examination and perspectives about the concept of prosperity and the "prosperity gospel" as absorbed into the contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, a Christian cleric, an evangelical protestant and scholar in New Testament Studies and Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics, concluded that:

Yes, I am a Ghanaian and a Christian. Yes, God desires that we become prosperous in life. However, the idea of prosperity is not limited to financial gains. It depends on how you define prosperity; the Hebrew idea of prosperity is broad and includes financial success. The Bible gives evidence of a woman who became prosperous by her faith when she obeyed the Word of God through Elijah – 1 Kings 17:15-16. Yes, faith alone can transform

¹⁷⁴ Ernst Best, *The New Century Bible Commentary. 1 Peter* (WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Marshall, Morgan & Scott. Publishing Ltd. London, 1986).

¹⁷⁵ Opoku Onyinah, "God's Grace, Healing and Suffering," *International Review Mission* 95, no. 3761377 (2006).

life but not necessarily make someone materially rich or put money into our pockets. Faith alone is not enough and that it will require hard work for one to be prosperous in relation to riches. The Bible emphasizes the relevance of work in the book of Proverbs that sluggishness leads to poverty – Prov. 14:23; 24:33. Poverty is associated with work, however, there are some people who are diligent in their work but are still poor – Ps. 127:1-2. God wants us to work with our hands; it depends on the call of God on your life. The apostle Paul worked with his hands and was able to do the ministry God assigned him. God approves bi-vocational ministry. We should balance faith with work; Paul warns against idleness in 2 Thess. 3 that those who are idle should work to support themselves.¹⁷⁶

By citing 2 Thessalonians 3 as a biblical emphasis on the relevance of work against idleness, the respondent shares some similarities with the study's exegetical focus. Therefore, it stands to suggest that the study's selection of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 presents a verified theological basis for the necessity of work and its balance with faith towards a "God-intended" prosperity that streamlines the disciplines of sacrifice, suffering, faithfulness and integrity with the harvest of rewards, fruits and wealth.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study reexamined the prosperity gospel in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity for poverty reduction and combating religious laziness through balancing faith and work. Faith needs work. God values work. He created work as means for man to be responsible toward the garden and his daily living (Genesis 2: 7-15). The new believer is saved and called into an eternal life of discipleship, though costly yet rewarding. This reward is the evidence of work. While Mark calls this "the cost of discipleship", Peter describes it as "the suffering of the Christian and how he should behave or respond." Also, the Akan religio-cultural notion defines that, "Sika ye mogya –

¹⁷⁶ An excerpt from an interview on April 27, 2025, at 10:22 AM in a face-to-face conversation with the respondent.

money is blood.” This means that wealth-making is expensive. By this belief and practice toward prosperity, it underlines that “prosperity is a fruit (harvest) from labour/effort, and not a gift”. That is, one gets rich (prosperous) only if he or she sacrifices (sweats) – their time, energy and comfort; to do some money-yielding jobs. Theologically, Bonhoeffer and Mark emphasize that there is no free-zone, but the disciple of Jesus Christ should bear the costs of obedience, followership and suffering. John Stott and Peter admonish Christians to embrace obedience, obedience and suffering towards prosperity as Jesus suffered for glorification. Prayer, positive confession and giving without any income-generating work will lead to a disappointed hope in the face of physical and material needs. In curtailing religious laziness and unrealistic wealth, Paul gives an outlaw: if anyone would not work such a person should not eat. Therefore, the “prosperity gospel” in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity requires Christians to balance faith that saves and the work that yields the income. The absence of the latter encourages socio-religious laziness, fruitlessness and poverty. The study contributes to scholarship in prosperity theology, Biblical theology of work, African Christian Theology of development, Christianity and human development; liberation, reconstruction, poverty-reduction and mother-tongue theologies, and financial freedom among Christians through building balance between faith and work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was limited to the context of Christianity and the Akan religio-cultural ontology in Ghana in relating the place of work and discipline toward faith and prosperity. Further research could explore other religious contexts. Also, a mixed methods approach that considers a large sample size with quantitative and qualitative data could add extra significance. The findings provide that Christianity embraces the place of work and its relevance for faith. Therefore, in relation to prosperity, the exegetical findings, Akan religio-cultural notions, interviews findings and theological perspectives in this study propose that the concept of the “prosperity

gospel” in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity should be reviewed and redefined. In that, it should reform and produce diligent, responsible and faith-oriented Ghanaian Christians who balance their faith, prayers and positive confessions with genuine income-generating work towards a holistic prosperity theology. Even if a person’s faith and positive confessions win material gifts from others, he or she should understand that those who give such kindness sacrifice a lot through hard work to reap such benefits. Good health, wealth and success are costly. Christians should know better. Work is from God, the Creator, and he expects his children to work and keep the garden and their homes, and even to support their pastoral callings and daily living.

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