The prosperity ethic
The rise of the new prosperity gospel

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Introduction
A new prosperity gospel has arrived. It promotes an individualized work ethic, backed by a religious conviction that promises financial returns. We call this the prosperity ethic. It has two features: sacralizing self-help and celebrating consumption. By offering a message that combines spiritual renewal, wealth creation, and happiness, the new prosperity gospel attempts to reinvent well-being from one that is collectively attained to one that is individualist, faith-based, and work-oriented. That it sacralizes work ethic with a conviction that God wants to bless people is how the new prosperity gospel has evolved from its older version. Invoking various biblical texts as guidelines to be rich and successful, the prosperity ethic aims to ensure financial growth and freedom from debt.

We argue that the prosperity ethic is the new prosperity gospel. The old prosperity gospel, as we explain below, is miracle-oriented. A message of hope for the poor, it preaches that breakthroughs are achieved through giving and positive confession. The prosperity ethic, by contrast, expects its followers to adopt practical skills related to investment and financial management. To do so follows the will of God who wants His people to be rich and happy. As a result of this emphasis, the prosperity ethic attracts aspirational middle class followers. The combination of a hopeful message for a hardworking segment is appealing to a precarious middle class given turbulent and uncertain economic situations.

This chapter makes the case for the rise of the new prosperity gospel as follows. First, we will discuss the original forms of the prosperity gospel and its roots in Pentecostal Christianity and the New Thought Movement. Second, ideas about self-help will be revisited to map the current spiritual and work-oriented innovations in the practice and preaching of the prosperity gospel. Finally, we explain the prosperity ethic in terms of its features: sacralizing self-help and celebrating consumption. This section will provide some illustrations to demonstrate the differences. We propose in the end that these developments, shaped by the global neoliberal economic regime, are religious innovations that address economic insecurity and build on personal aspirations for spiritual growth and material success.
The prosperity gospel

At its core the prosperity gospel is a ‘wildly popular Christian message of spiritual, physical, and financial mastery’ preached around the world (Bowler 2013, p. 3). It professes that material and spiritual provisions from God are a result of faith-driven obedience to His commandments (Hunt 2000a; Mboya 2016, p. 16). Thus faith, wealth, health, and victory punctuate its messages proclaimed in preachings, books, radio and television programs, and now social media. Oral Roberts, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, and Kenneth Hagin are some of the names associated with prosperity preaching. While megachurch pastors tend to be its most prominent figures, their counterparts in smaller congregations are no less influential. This is how the prosperity gospel has gained traction not just in the US but also in many places in the Global South. The rise of megachurches in Southeast Asia, for example, is worth investigating in this light (Chong 2018). At the same time, Christians from different denominations one way or another subscribe to the tenets of the prosperity gospel. In this section we briefly discuss these themes and relate them to its influences in Pentecostalism and the New Thought Movement.

Faith and the spoken word

Faith is the foundation of the prosperity gospel. It is an ‘activator, a power that unleashes spiritual forces and turns the spoken word into reality’ (Bowler 2013, p. 7). Faith enables victory which renders the ‘material reality as the measure of the success of immaterial faith.’ This shows a ‘special form of Christian power to reach into God’s treasure trove’ where believers can elicit physical and financial miracles. Here, the power to shape life chances through faith can be seen as a ‘negotiating’ activity between God and individuals (Machado 2010). The working assumption is that material blessings are automatically included in salvation as the rightful inheritance of Christians (Hunt 2000b). Faith, which is the means to claim blessings from God, thus becomes the central tenet of prosperity messages (Attanasi 2012). Manifesting one’s faith, the spoken declaration is vital in this regard, a principle derived from New Thought. We will come back to this point shortly. What matters at this point is that making declarations follows the ‘the law of attraction,’ which asserts that ‘human beings create their own future through their thoughts and words’ (Maritz and Stoker 2016).

Criticisms, of course, have been set against these claims. Among theologians, controversies revolve around the basis for such proclamations and around the question as to whether it is self-serving or God-serving (Ma 2011). There are also a lot of scriptural debates that surround prosperity in relation to Christ’s atonement (Mbamalu 2015). Others argue that such teachings are a ‘commercialization of the gospel’ and that giving was never a prerequisite to receive blessings from God (Gbote and Kgatla 2014). The centrality of the power of the mind (or positive thinking) predominantly defines the shape of the prosperity gospel in the West.

What accounts for its success around the world? For some scholars, the key to understanding its wide acceptance lies in the prosperity gospel’s functions (Hasu 2006, p. 685): (1) to satisfy human wants and needs, which God did not intend to be evil in the first place, and (2) to support church activities and evangelism. In a concrete sense, the prosperity gospel has sacralized personal desire. Applying it in one’s life can be an individualized spiritual technique to face uncertain material situations without feeling guilty about the evils of being rich. At the same time, it affords one an entrepreneurial mindset in
which personal actions can unlock not only economic breakthroughs but also stable physical well-being and spiritual maturity (Haynes 2012, pp. 125–128). We will come back to this point later to propose how the entrepreneurial mindset is taking on a new form among prosperity preachers.

**Roots of the prosperity gospel**

The prosperity gospel in the West was largely influenced by Pentecostal Christianity and the New Thought Movement (Coleman 2000; Robbins 2004; Albanese 2007; Barker 2007; Attanasi 2012, p. 3; Hutchinson 2014). Both have shaped the contents of prosperity teaching and the expectations of its followers.

Pentecostal Christianity highlights the work of the Holy Spirit within individual believers. This comes with having a deep personal relationship with God. The work of the Spirit is embodied in several gifts which are accorded to the faithful such as speaking in tongues, the power of healing, and prophecy. A report from Pew Research (2006) states that compared to Christians who come from other denominations, Pentecostals tend to be more believing of the reality of the rapture, miracles, the inerrancy of the Bible, and mission. They also adhere to a ‘fourfold gospel of divine healing, personal salvation, Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and Christ’s [soon] return’ (Bowler 2013, p. 21). In addition, Pentecostalism is different from other denominations with its egalitarian church structure by challenging hierarchical and gendered spiritual or religious roles in worship (Robbins 2004, Barker 2007, p. 415). In turn, Pentecostalism has widened the opportunity for ordinary people to experience spirituality although in a more individualized form.

Explanations for the spread of Pentecostalism range from theological to sociological (Kay 2013, pp. 21–23). First, Pentecostalism can spread easily because its beliefs and practices are ‘transposable’ and ‘portable,’ attributes that pose no radical threat to the default value systems of a receiving social environment (Csordas 2007, p. 261). Second, its focus on ‘power evangelism’ strengthens lay ministers who serve as a democratizing force rooted in the belief that God is working directly in the lives of individuals. Lastly, the exercise of spiritual gifts also makes people more active in discovering their own contributions, which then account for church participation and growth. Pentecostalism also has the capacity to foster personal discipline that suits the current neoliberal economic paradigm (Barker 2007, p. 408). In effect, Pentecostal churches act as an institutional alternative to state-led agencies. They do this by valuing material well-being as a result of personal salvation. Economic affluence is thus understood as a consequence of personal beliefs and miracles. Hence, the increasing number of Pentecostals rides on the progress of neoliberalism as it ‘normalizes the transnational nature of contemporary life’ (Barker 2007, p. 425). For example, preachers interpret labor migration as a holy move by God to transfer one group of believers from one place to another (Barker 2007, p. 425). From this, one can directly attribute the quality of life—which includes success and prosperity—to the kind of relationship one has with God. Spiritual mediators are no longer needed to interpret spiritual messages and to channel blessings.

The other main influence of the prosperity gospel was the New Thought Movement (Bowler 2013). Some of its most influential American figures were Phineas Quimby, Norman Vincent Peale, and E.W. Kenyon. Their writings inspired the message of such preachers as Kenneth Hagin, Pat Robertson, and Oral Roberts (Coleman 2000). Influential female speakers also contributed to strengthening belief in the power of the mind and its spiritual capacities. Mary Baker Eddy and Aimee Semple McPherson were known for their
initiatives that emphasized mind-power, healing, and emotion-based preaching (McDonald 1986; Stackhouse 1988; Blumhofer 2004; Hall 2007; Maddux 2012). While they have been criticized for entering the male-dominated sphere of religion and theology, their influence cannot be discounted. For example, Eddy’s focus on healing inspired her to found Christian Science (Hall 2007, p. 81). Mary Baker Eddy’s book, *Science and Health*, was used in various churches since ‘Christian theology had to be practical’ (Hall 2007, p. 82). In her attempts to revive Christianity’s importance for the lost, Aimee Semple McPherson did not confine herself to any denomination. Her Pentecostal orientation centered on the belief that ‘both human need and Jesus Christ remained the same.’ In this light, the ever-present power of God in Jesus could meet the needs and desires of his children anytime (Blumhofer 2004, p. 225).

Harnessing the power of the mind, New Thought is often characterized as a metaphysical religion ‘that claimed some unity of God and individual mind, with the ability to manifest change in the world’ (Hutchinson 2014, pp. 28–29). Metaphysical religion has been an important dimension of the present religious landscape of the US (Albanese 2007). Four principles underpin New Thought: the power of mind-as-consciousness, the belief in multiple corresponding cosmic worlds, the dynamism of psychic energy, and salvation based on healing and therapy (Albanese 2007, pp. 13–15). In addition, this movement emphasizes the superiority of spiritual reality over matter and the belief in the generative power of positive thought (Bowler 2013, p. 12). It teaches that the mind has the capacity to make things happen in the physical world.

In effect, the prosperity gospel cannot be taken as a singular moment in the history of contemporary Christianity. It traces its roots back to the New Thought Movement and older forms of Pentecostalism. But taken together, these influences fueled individualism and sanctified people’s desire for upward mobility, which, as far as the US is concerned, materialized in the latter half of the 20th century. The result has been the unparalleled success of the prosperity gospel in the US and around the world (Bowler 2013, p. 11). Moreover, its theology took time to take shape, become coherent, and be transported around the world, with the help of influential religious groups such as the Word of Faith Ministries in Sweden (Coleman 2002, p. 8). The theological foundation is that God, through the death of Christ, has already provided all the needs of humanity including success over spiritual, physical, and economic problems (Hasu 2006, p. 679). This belief could provide means for individuals to interpret their life struggles and aspirations, thereby dismissing economics and politics as more viable viewpoints. Put differently, the prosperity gospel, for emphasizing the power of the mind, places the burden on the individual to solve problems. It enables believers to take control and manage the effects of uncertainties in their own lives. By the same token, financial misfortune and health problems are explained as a result of one’s quality of thinking.

**The new prosperity gospel?**

In this section, we propose that the prosperity gospel is once again undergoing a process of change. Following the account above, we agree with Bowler (2013, p. 7) that it is ‘a popular religious imagination that has not yet ended.’ Indeed, as it gains traction around the world, the prosperity gospel takes on its own life with varying consequences on politics, culture, and society. For example, the conviction that God has predestined His people to become rich might be a typical story among Pentecostal churches and other denominations in Zimbabwe and other countries in the Global South (Gunda 2018). But these contexts
have also fostered the undisputed role of prophets who receive direct revelations from God not only to perform miracles but also see into the future. Although supernatural aspects remain ever present, what we wish to highlight in this section are noticeable shifts that call for sociological assessments. These observations are based on our ongoing project on the prosperity gospel in the Philippines, but we see resonances elsewhere: *sacralizing self-help* and *celebrating consumption*.

**Sacralizing self-help**

In older forms of the prosperity gospel, one’s task is to simply believe, profess, and give money to the Lord’s anointed individuals and their ministries. In this light, subscribing to the gospel is an investment in miracles (Wiegele 2005). In recent years, we notice that individual responsibility has become more pronounced in the messages of contemporary prosperity preachers (Obadare 2016, p. 4). This they do through self-help, which emphasizes practical steps to achieve individual prosperity.

In the Philippines, similar market lessons combined with Christian teachings can also be observed. They deviate from the older prosperity gospel of El Shaddai preacher, Brother Mike Velarde for whom giving money is key to becoming rich (Wiegele 2005; Kessler and Rüland 2006). Chinkee Tan and Bo Sanchez provide an interesting case. They are well-known wealth coaches and mentors who speak religious messages while teaching life lessons focusing on finances. Chinkee Tan is a celebrated preacher and mentor in the Filipino Evangelical community. His books discuss spirituality and financial freedom. On the other hand, Bo Sanchez, a Catholic lay worker, has established his own ministry called Light of Jesus Family (LOJ), which has attracted a significant number of followers. They have a weekly gathering called The Feast in a stadium in the middle of one of Manila’s most successful commercial complexes. On its website, the Feast is described as a Sunday assembly where people attend prayer and worship activities and listen to ‘practical Christian living’ messages. Its growth is spearheaded by other ‘feast builders’ who are also into writing spiritual books for evangelistic purposes. Bo Sanchez, as the founder, has written a number of bestselling books about financial and spiritual success.

Bo Sanchez’s group, LOJ, is worth describing in detail. On its website, the group declares itself to be Catholic but also welcomes attendees from other churches. LOJ, which began as a prayer group in Manila in the 1980s, now has a global reach. The predominance of English preaching in The Feast deviates largely from the typical Sunday Mass in the Philippines. Its services are held in ‘malls, movie houses, restaurants, civic centers, offices, and homes’ to reach the ‘unchurched.’ The group also has a publishing arm, Shepherd’s Voice. It publishes Bo Sanchez’s books and other writing, most of which tackle financial security and getting rich.

Apart from its weekly services and publications, the group is also known for organizing spectacular events that blend spiritual growth with financial concerns. For example, in December 2018, The Feast adopted a month-long series titled ‘G: Winning the Game of Money.’ The series focused on gift (earning money), goal (purpose of having money), and grit (money management). LOJ also hosts the *Kerygma Conference*, an annual event that promises ‘an overflowing experience of change and inspiration.’ This conference partners with the most successful companies in the country and other financial organizations. Sessions focus mainly on three themes: family relations, investment and money matters, and spiritual lessons. Taken together, LOJ’s services, publications, and events are all spectacular feats that serve as avenues for Bo Sanchez to sacralize self-help.
What makes Tan and Sanchez notable is that even though they belong to different churches, both of them have transformed the prosperity message into an aspirational one filled with practical tips to achieve their life goals. Theirs is aspirational first in terms of upward mobility while aiming for a fulfilling spiritual life. Second, their message is practical as they offer specific and concrete financial pieces of advice to become successful. These rules are then justified by Biblical passages regarding wealth, money, and giving. For example, Bo Sanchez suggests investing 20–30% of his readers’ money in retail treasury bonds, mutual funds, and the stock market (Sanchez 2013). He believes that profit is encouraged in the Scriptures. He cites the Parable of Talents as an illustration (Matthew 25:25–26). In his book, the Catholic lay preacher instructs his readers to ‘monetize’ their God-given gift to overcome financial difficulties. Similarly, for Chinkee Tan, to be rich demands following necessary steps. What steps does he propose? Aside from having a correct money mindset, one must learn the specific practices of the rich. For Tan, productivity can be achieved by instilling work ethic and discipline to counter procrastination (Tan 2014). In other words, a change in lifestyle must be accompanied with proper investments in knowledge and skills about getting rich. Attending seminars about financial management and reading financial literacy books are strategic investments.

In effect, these authors are asking their readers to have the ‘right’ mindset to achieve prosperity. To receive blessings, practical steps must be followed like a blueprint. According to Tan and Sanchez, whom their followers consider ‘life mentors,’ it is possible to combine spiritual and financial abundance at the same time. People can have financial freedom while maintaining a good spiritual well-being. Their books are filled with themes concerning wealth and blessings, and faith and positive thinking. Indeed, the prosperity ethic espoused by Tan and Sanchez has behavioral consequences. According to Neubert et al. (2014, p. 141), ‘with confidence that their work is honoring God, people may be willing to take more risks or, conversely, to take only risks with a high likelihood of positive results’ in their work or business initiatives.

What is also worth noting here is that the messengers themselves become the message. Their life trajectories exemplify what hard work, if done right, can accomplish for an individual. In her provocative work, Nicole Aschoff (2015, p. 10) refers to these individuals as ‘the new prophets of capital.’ Inspirational figures like Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, and Sheryl Sandberg criticize capitalism but do not call for its end. Instead, they want a better version of capitalism in which care of the self, among other aspirations, is emphasized. In our view, the preachers of the prosperity ethic are among these new prophets of capital. They present self-help as the means to achieving a full life, which, incidentally, is also the message of Jesus, at least according to the preachers we mentioned above. In the prosperity ethic, the full life is financially rewarding. It is, to use the name of Bo Sanchez’s gathering, a ‘feast.’ Self-help ideas are helpful in this regard as they make desirable goals in a market economy achievable for the individual (Peck 2010; Kenney 2015; Poon 2015). Self-help reading materials serve as a blueprint in transforming behavior and actions (Kenney 2015, p. 664).

Celebrating consumption

The other feature of the prosperity ethic is the unapologetic enjoyment of the good life. Older forms of the prosperity gospel have been arguably about overcoming one’s circumstances by experiencing God’s ‘breakthrough.’ In this sense, one is always waiting for a miracle to happen. Confessing one’s faith and giving money are means of investing in
miracles, which, at the divinely appointed time, will come soon (Wiegele 2005). By contrast, the declaration of the prosperity ethic is that life has to be enjoyed here and now. This is a nuance we wish to highlight here. The prosperity ethic teaches that God intends His people to be richly blessed. In other words, Christians must be unapologetic about prosperity and material benefits, which is ultimately tied to how Christians see themselves.

Some examples are called for. Joel Osteen, who himself has written a number of books about happiness and well-being, is a forerunner of the prosperity ethic that celebrates consumption. The Texas-based preacher asserts that happiness is tied to consumption. To consume and enjoy financial prosperity is central to Osteen’s theology of money and view of the Christian good life (Mundey 2017, p. 337). Osteen’s message suggests that God wants the faithful to enjoy luxuries in life by having consumerist blessings. In Osteen’s first book, *Your Best Life Now*, he explains that people’s ability to feel and enjoy God’s blessings are hindered by their own orientation as unworthy and undeserving of these favors (Johnson 2018, p. 30). Hence, changing their understanding of themselves is the key to receiving God’s material and non-material favors. In effect, they are not waiting for any miracle. Miracles are for God’s people to experience now, a point that Osteen’s counterpart in Singapore, Joseph Prince, also echoes. The pastor of New Creation Church is known for his book, *Destined to Reign*. Although Prince asserts that he does not preach any prosperity gospel, he nevertheless proclaims that the gospel of Jesus must result in success, restoration, financial achievements, and much more. Like Osteen, crucial for Joseph Prince is one’s self-understanding. Believers must see themselves as capable of accessing the ‘superabundant supply of grace’ (Goh 2018, p. 197). This self-care evident in their books and preachings is how Osteen and Prince come close to the sacralized self-help genre described earlier.

Similar observations are found in the South Korean context where contemporary prosperity preachers teach that God’s blessings must be enjoyed. It is ‘magical-speculative individualism’ (Suh 2019, p. 13). Here, success and prosperity are results of not only having a relationship with God but also an appreciative attitude towards His provisions. David Yonggi Cho, the famous pastor from Yoido Full Gospel Church, is known for his theology of blessings that emphasizes God’s miraculous intervention in people’s economic conditions (Ma 2011; Suh 2019, p. 12). Even in African American religious communities, research shows that the enjoyment of the good life has gained traction. This is in spite of the renewed call to revive African prophetic preaching in relation to social justice. Yet the popularity of prosperity theology has appealed more to the majority of African Americans primarily because teachings about faith, hope, and empowerment are now tied to upward mobility (Mumford 2012, p. 381). In other words, upward mobility entails the capacity to enjoy material things and afford a consumerist lifestyle. The spiritual value of faith, hope, and empowerment have been transformed in favor of the prosperity ethic.

**Sociological explanations**

How do we account for the rise of the prosperity ethic as a new form of the prosperity gospel? In our view, the answer lies in the global market economy that affects religious life in different parts of the world, especially among those who belong to the rising (and yet precarious) middle class.

One way of approaching this relationship is by recognizing how religion responds to people’s desire for upward mobility, stability, and the good life. These are questions that matter in religious societies that are at the same time undergoing massive economic shifts. This is the case in many parts of the Global South. Our immediate context is the Philippines
where we are conducting research on religious innovations and the shifts in the prosperity gospel and other forms of moral conservatism (Cornelio 2020a). It is very telling that the Philippines, for being increasingly embedded in global trade, is now projected to be among the biggest economies in the world by 2050 (Business World 2015). And yet this development leaves many far behind especially among the younger ones whose life chances are affected by varying access to education, healthcare, and other resources (Cornelio 2020b).

How relevant is the prosperity ethic? Self-help books, for one, thrive by telling readers what they need and how to achieve them. The assumption is that the self ‘can be contacted, explored, and empowered with the right knowledge and technique’ (Kenney 2015, p. 664). This message gains strong acceptance especially within a market environment where achieving economic mobility is framed as an effect of individual choice and personal will (Poon 2015, p. 140). It is also in this light that sacralizing it makes self-help a more acceptable approach to life especially in religious societies that are at the same time market-oriented.

Market societies demand that their citizens be fully equipped for the changing needs of the world. Making the burden heavier for individuals is the failure of the welfare model in many societies. In fact, in many parts of the Global South, it is impossible to fully implement the welfare model given that state resources are limited and exposed to corruption. In addition, market-oriented development expects people to fend for themselves through education, career planning, and financial investments. These are areas now sanctified by religion in the form of the prosperity ethic. Indeed, self-help necessarily invokes self-reliance, industriousness, and discipline (Poon 2015, p. 141). The combination of older prosperity messages and practical tips on financial literacy has gained popularity with the rise of an aspirational middle class. With the ‘correct’ mindset, the middle class is enjoined to change their attitudes (and therefore their work ethic) according to practical tips and biblical justifications for prosperity (Peck 2010, pp. 9–10). As a result, the prosperity ethic is blind to the larger social structures of inequality that may affect people, especially those who are disenfranchised from the benefits of a growing economy. The individualistic spiritual and prosperous life it fosters focuses on ‘positivity as life resource’ which compels ‘citizens to be self-constituting and resourceful’ (Bowler 2015, p. 631). Put differently, the continuous expansion of growth-oriented churches ‘blesses’ the market environment (Maddox 2012, p. 154). As far as its believers are concerned, the prosperity ethic blurs the line between religion and the market, as is the case for megachurches in Singapore (Yip and Ainsworth 2016).

Finally, the theology of consumption has become a new dimension of the contemporary prosperity gospel. The prosperity ethic, as we have been observing it, is not only about hard work that follows sound advice for career, money, and other investments. It also emphasizes the enjoyment of blessings. What is important is to make an evangelistic message through caring and making one’s own body beautiful and prosperous (Maddox 2013, p. 110). By instilling this preference for material luxuries, the ‘ideology and lifestyle of consumerism can be salvific in itself’ (Maddox 2013, p. 111). The irony, of course, is that it calls for a celebration of consumption that may not be tenable in the long run. This explains why, within the same US context, the call for self-sufficiency (and anti-welfare policies) is balanced with a message of compassion for the poor (Hackworth 2010, p. 103). These discourses for charity and compassion mitigate the crushing effect of neoliberal economics on those who cannot compete.
To summarize, the prosperity ethic, in our view, is an innovation among prosperity preachers that responds to the situation of an emerging middle class in many societies (especially in the Global South). The combination of self-help and consumption matches the delicate situation of the middle class, who, while benefiting from the rising economy, also feels the anxieties of competition—locally and globally. The reason is that while the middle class might be growing in the developing world, it is also precarious given geopolitics, uneven global trade, and corruption. Moreover, even in economic powerhouses like South Korea and Singapore, countries that play a role in the rise of the prosperity ethic, their middle class is now vulnerable to fierce competition among equally educated citizens in the region and the rest of the world. It is in this light that the prosperity gospel has a natural fit for a changing global economic environment that witnesses the emergence of the new (but precarious) middle class.

Clearly, the market economy is very much tied to the religious life (Moberg and Martikainen 2018). It is in this sense that the prosperity ethic as we have documented it finds continuities with the aspirational disposition of the old prosperity gospel and its origin, Pentecostalism. Taken together, these movements desired recognition for the disenfranchised. Pentecostalism and the old prosperity gospel appealed to people from the margins, in terms of class, race, and gender (Martin 2001). But what is remarkably different with the prosperity ethic is that it is not catered for the marginalized even if some of its messages might appeal to the least equipped. The reason is that the financial skills it expects from its followers demands competencies available to those who already have the resources and educational background. This is to be expected given that its messengers are themselves ‘overcomers’ of their own limitations, preachers who are successful as well in their industries. We agree with Aschoff (2015, p. 91) that these ‘prophets of capital’ advise their listeners to ‘turn [their] gaze inwards and reconfigure [themselves] to become more adaptable to the vagaries and stresses of the neoliberal environment.’

**Conclusion**

This chapter has proposed that a new prosperity gospel is rising. We have called it the *prosperity ethic*. As we have spelled out, the ethic has two features: *sacralizing self-help* and *celebrating consumption*. Taken together, these features value upward mobility and invoke Biblical and Christian principles to justify practical rules to acquire wealth. The prosperity ethic differs from the old prosperity gospel. The main difference is the content. The old prosperity gospel relies heavily on the promise of financial miracle, which is activated through the power of confession and giving. The prosperity ethic, by contrast, emphasizes financial growth through self-help and other practical tips concerning investment and resource management. As a result of these emphases, the old prosperity gospel and the new prosperity ethic have attracted different audiences. The former is a message of hope for the poor. The latter works for the aspirational (but precarious) middle class.

Although our work has been focused on the Philippine scene, we have drawn on illustrative cases elsewhere. It is important to note that the increasing presence of self-help ideas in achieving religiously motivated prosperity intertwines ‘spirituality, self-actualization, and stuff’ (Aschoff 2015, p. 63). By instilling concrete market techniques into the practice of spiritual prosperity, economic aspirations are fueled by spiritual dynamics through financial accumulation. All these are justified by Christian principles. Jesus, as it were, wants believers to live a full life.
We end on a critical note. The success of the prosperity gospel and its new form, the prosperity ethic, has taken place at a time when liberation theology and other convictions related to social justice have also declined. This is because the global market economy has engendered an individualistic ethos that demands agility on the part of any aspirational individual. In this sense, the preachers of the prosperity ethic we have mentioned here are all about ‘breakthroughs’ and ‘victories’ through careful planning of one’s life, aided by a theology that blesses wealth and consumption. Using the metaphors of religion and the economy, the ‘market’ has taken over the ‘kingdom’ (Nolan 2008). Does space still exist though for a theology of inequality? And what conditions might challenge proponents of the prosperity ethic to critically confront social justice (Sutterlüty 2016)? In fact, a new dilemma for the prosperity ethic is increasingly undeniable: the global disappointment over the market economy, as evidenced by the rise of illiberal regimes around the world. Recent theological reflections that revisit the communitarian elements of social teaching are promising. But their promise of ‘interrupting capitalism’ seems to be unpersuasive compared to the appeal of the prosperity ethic (Shadle 2018, p. 4).

Notes
1 See www.feast.ph/about/.
2 See http://feaststories.com/.
4 See https://www.feast.ph/g/.

References
The prosperity ethic


