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Sarah Paik   April 12, 2016

The Effects of Prosperity Gospel Theology on Generosity

by

Sarah Paik

Kelli Lanier
Adviser

Economics

Kelli Lanier

Adviser

Andrew Francis-Tan

Committee Member

Bobbi Patterson

Committee Member

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Abstract

The Effects of Prosperity Gospel Theology on Generosity
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Using a modified version of the dictator game, this paper examines the effects of theology, specifically a prosperity gospel theology which focuses on God's desire for Christians to be materially wealthy, on giving behavior. 59 students from Christian gatherings on Emory's campus were exposed to short sermons and then played a version of the dictator game in which they could choose to transfer money to the Christian organization at which recruitment took place. Participants were randomly placed in a control group, which was shown a sermon that focused on God's grace, or a treatment group, which was shown a sermon which emphasized God's desire and ability to make Christians rich. We observed a statistically significant and negative effect of the treatment on giving behavior. Participants who were primed with the Prosperity Gospel gave less than those who were primed with a theologically conservative sermon. Our research suggests that an explicit focus on God as a source of wealth does not encourage increased generosity toward religious causes.

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I. Introduction

The increasing popularity of the "prosperity gospel" is a relatively recent trend in North American Christianity. The main premise of the prosperity gospel (also referred to as the "name-it claim-it" or the "health and wealth gospel") is the belief that God desires for his followers to be prosperous, and therefore will grant material wealth and good health to those who have enough faith (Schieman and Jung 2012). Does this type of theology, which focuses on God's ability and desire to make his followers prosper, cause people to be more generous to the church?

The current literature on the effects of prosperity theology on giving behaviors is quite sparse and lacks breadth and depth. Though there is substantial sociological and economic literature regarding denomination and generosity, few have looked specifically at the adherents of the Prosperity Gospel, which is transdenominational. Furthermore, looking only at Prosperity Gospel adherents does not address the isolated effects of such a theology on giving behavior, since there is a high likelihood of endogeneity – naturally generous (or stingy) people may self-select into churches that preach the Prosperity Gospel. This paper will use an experimental method to find the effects of a prosperity gospel theology on giving behaviors.

II. Literature Review

The Prosperity Gospel and Its Adherents

Historically, Christian orthodox belief has considered avarice, or greed, as it is more commonly known today, a sin. Jesus says in the New Testament, "Again I say to

you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matt. 19:24). And the apostle Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:10 that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." However, such statements should not be taken as to imply that Christianity espouses asceticism or poverty. On the contrary, there are many segments of Scripture that draw a natural connection between God's chosen people and wealth. Throughout the Old Testament, God promises material wealth to Israel if they are obedient to their covenant with God. For example, God says to the Israelites in Exodus 23:25-26, "'So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.'" In exchange for the Israelites' obedience, God promises them material wealth as well as physical health.

With the emergence of the prosperity gospel, in certain circles, living a lavish life has become a moral virtue rather than a vice, since it is God's explicit will for His children to be wealthy. By extension of this belief, poverty and illness can be seen as a result of a lack of faith or devotion. While Christianity of this nature has been very popular in developing countries around the globe over the last fifty years, it has become especially popular in North America over the last three decades (Ma 2011). A prime example of the Creflo Dollar, pastor of World Changers Church in Georgia, told his congregation, "I own two Rolls-Royces and didn't pay a dime for them. Why? Because while I'm pursuing the Lord those cars are pursuing me" (Bowler 134). Material wealth is a sign of God's favor in a believer's life, and the more ostentatious the wealth, the greater the believer's faithfulness must have been in receiving such blessings. As Kenneth Hagin

said, "If God wants His children to eat the best, He wants them to wear the best clothing, He wants them to drive the best cars, and He wants them to have the best of everything" (Perriman 49). Some scriptures that have historically been used to support the Word of Faith theology regarding prosperity are listed below:

- Psalm 112:1-3: "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, Who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, And his righteousness endures forever."
- Proverbs 10:22: "The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, And He adds no sorrow with it."
- Deuteronomy 8:18: "'And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.'"
- 3 John 2: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."

Two of the most widely recognized pioneers of the faith movement, which preceded and became today's Prosperity Gospel, are E.W. Kenyon and Oral Roberts (Randall 2013). Kenyon was a radio preacher who drew from the divine healing movement of the early 20th century to launch the faith movement. He believed that Jesus' work on the cross secured wisdom, righteousness, and healing for believers, and that believers need not ask for these things, but only to confess what they wanted and to receive from God (hence the title "name-it claim-it") (Mumford 2011).

Oral Roberts, who founded Oral Roberts University, was the preacher primarily responsible for introducing the idea of a divine economy, an economic system based on the belief that God wants his believers to prosper materially. Roberts was one of the first preachers to use the concept of "seed faith", which claimed that God had replaced the standard of tithing (which required believers to donate ten percent of their income to the church) with a "give and be blessed" model (Gbote and Kgatla 2014). Roberts' ideas about God's willingness and ability to bless Christians financially are an important part of health and wealth teaching today.

Kenneth Hagin is also considered a pioneer of the prosperity gospel, though his contributions were not completely unique or original. He began preaching in the early 1960's, and many of his teachings were identical to those of Kenyon. Hagin, originally a Southern Baptist, converted to Pentecostalism because of his belief in divine healing (Mumford 2011). He published his teachings in the "Word of Faith" Magazine, and "Word of Faith" became the name of the movement (Mumford 2011). Hagin played a large role in the propelling of the faith movement into the American mainstream because of his work as a televangelist. The "Word of Faith" Magazine is still in circulation today.

Because of the lack of any official terminology, there is no one denomination that has exclusive claim to the Prosperity Gospel, and no entire denomination explicitly espouses such theology. According to Ma, "any stream of Christianity which has a strong emphasis on God's immediate intervention in human life with his provision and care is often thrown into this category" (141). To make matters more complicated, most Prosperity Gospel preaching churches label themselves as non-denominational, and there

are circles within denominations that either embrace or oppose these teachings, making it incredibly difficult to categorize all Pentecostals as Prosperity Gospel adherents or vice versa. Prosperity theology can be found in even typically conservative congregations. These characteristics of prosperity gospel adherents make it difficult to study prosperity gospel believers exclusively through questions about denomination and theological conservatism. Prosperity Gospel believers are also hard to identify through metrics such as race, and class, though they are correlated with belief in the Prosperity Gospel.. The chart below, based on data from Spirit and Power: Survey of Pentecostals in the United States shows that even many self-identifying Evangelical Christians, who are usually considered to be more orthodox or conservative than the average Christian, believe in the statement "God will grant material prosperity to those who have enough faith."

God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith	evangelical 0	1	Total
Completely agree	189	74	263
Mostly agree	189	63	252
Mostly disagree	154	51	205
Completely disagree	182	61	243
Don't know	41	9	50
Refused	3	0	3
Total	758	258	1,016

Schieman and Jung found that education was negatively correlated with belief in health and wealth doctrine (2012). A quick regression using the same dataset titled Spirit and Power: Survey of Pentecostals in the United States yielded similar results. The first model regressed belief in a health doctrine on an education index, income index, and

dummy variables that were generated for race. Because the coefficients for race were insignificant, the next model omitted race identifiers and instead took into account the effect of being Pentecostal or Charismatic as well as whether the individual regularly watched Christian television. While being Charismatic seemed to be significant in an individual's belief in the health doctrine, being Pentecostal was not. The next model then regressed belief in a prosperity doctrine on education, income, media, Pentecostalism, and Charismaticism, and all of these coefficients were found to be significant at the 10 percent level. The large coefficient on the variable media suggests that regular viewing of Christian television is a strong predictor or indicator of health and wealth beliefs.

VARIABLES	(1) healthyes	VARIABLES	(1) healthyes	VARIABLES	(1) prosperyes
I_EDUC	-0.040***	I_EDUC	-0.041***	I_EDUC	-0.050***
	(0.010)		(0.010)		(0.010)
I_INCOME	-0.017**	I_INCOME	-0.023***	I_INCOME	-0.024***
	(0.007)		(0.007)		(0.007)
black	0.109	media	0.148***	media	0.199***
	(0.102)		(0.034)		(0.034)
white	-0.107	pentecostal	0.076	pentecostal	0.110**
	(0.095)		(0.053)		(0.054)
asian	0.098	charismatic	0.111***	charismatic	0.074**
	(0.196)		(0.035)		(0.036)
hispanic	0.047	Constant	0.757***	Constant	0.686***
	(0.101)		(0.054)		(0.055)
media	0.142***				
	(0.033)				
Constant	0.832***				
	(0.103)				
		Observations	825	Observations	812
Observations	825	R-squared	0.112	R-squared	0.144
R-squared	0.130	Standard errors in parenthese		Standard errors in parenthese	
Standard errors in parenthese		*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.:		*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.:	
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.:					

Another interesting feature of this dataset is the high correlation between belief in the health doctrine and belief in the wealth doctrine (2001). This tabulation shows that

most people have a similar degree of belief or disbelief in the health doctrine as they do in the prosperity doctrine.

```
 God will grant
health and relief
  from sickness to    God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have
 believers who have                          enough faith
      enough fait    Completel  Mostly ag  Mostly di  Completel  Don't kno   Refused      Total
─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────
  Completely agree       198         62         25         32         17          0         334
      Mostly agree        36        149         64         31         11          0         291
   Mostly disagree        15         29        100         39          3          2         188
Completely disagree        9          9         14        135          1          0         168
        Don't know         5          2          2          6         17          0          32
           Refused         0          1          0          0          1          1           3
─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────
             Total       263        252        205        243         50          3       1,016
```

Generosity

Regarding giving behaviors, Lunn, Klay, and Douglass (2001) found that among Presbyterians, specifically members of the denomination PC (USA), theologically conservative Presbyterians gave more than liberal Presbyterians. They also found that increased church attendance was correlated with increased giving to the church. This suggests that church attendance could be an indicator of religious fervor or devotion, and greater devotion results in greater giving. In his summary of literature on Christian generosity, Chavez (1999) also found a clear positive trend between religious involvement and giving, as well as a positive relationship between income and giving. This finding suggests that we should take income into account when looking at giving behaviors.

Prosperity Gospel and Generosity

One study that has looked at health and wealth beliefs and giving behaviors was done by Bradley Koch, who used data collected by SRBI for a TIME magazine cover

story "Does God Want You to be Rich?" (van Biema and Chu 2006) to analyze the characteristics of self-professing believers of health and wealth doctrines. He expected that the Prosperity Gospel's promise of immediate material rewards would cause individuals to give greater percentages of their income. His hypothesis was nuanced in that whereas he expected greater religious giving from prosperity gospel believers, he predicted that he would find lower levels of nonreligious charitable giving among them, since the premise of the prosperity gospel hinges on giving "seed money" to religious institutions rather than directly to the poor. However, his results were insignificant. Koch's findings were likely affected by a lack of controls (e.g. no items about denomination), since the survey was conducted to glean general demographic attitudes toward health and wealth beliefs. Another possibility is that believing in God's desire and ability to grant good health and great wealth to Christians has no significant effect on people's giving behaviors. However, it is still worth investigating the effects of this theology on generosity because Koch's study had large endogeneity. Exposure to health and wealth doctrines was not random in the survey because people naturally select into churches whose teachings appeal to their own personal beliefs. This study will use an experimental method in order to find the unique effect of name-it claim-it theology on generosity.

Using data from Spirit and Power: Survey of Pentecostals in the United States, the variable 'prosperyes' was created as a dummy variable that indicates a participant's response to the statement "God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith" as being either "completely agree" or "mostly agree" (1) or "completely disagree" and "mostly disagree" (0). The same process was used to create the variable

'healthyes' in indicating responses to the statement "God will grant health and relief from sickness to believers who have enough faith." These two statements capture the essential beliefs of prosperity gospel adherents. The results of these preliminary regressions concur with previous literature which found that higher education was negatively correlated with belief in the health and wealth gospel (Schieman and Jung 2012). This finding suggests

VARIABLES	(1) prosperyes	VARIABLES	(1) healthyes
I_EDUC	-0.061***	I_EDUC	-0.050***
	(0.010)		(0.010)
I_INCOME	-0.028***	I_INCOME	-0.026***
	(0.008)		(0.007)
Constant	0.906***	Constant	0.948***
	(0.045)		(0.044)
Observations	815	Observations	828
R-squared	0.093	R-squared	0.071
Standard errors in parenthese		Standard errors in parenthese	
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	

that in our experiment, we should account for income and education levels of participants.

Not only is there insufficient data to draw strong conclusions about the effect of prosperity theology on giving behaviors, but there is also a strong likelihood of endogeneity in that church attendees of a certain disposition with certain innate levels of generosity also have innate preferences for certain denominations of churches. What we want to capture in this study is the unique effect of a belief in God's desire for believers' health and wealth on individuals' giving behaviors. Therefore, we will use random assignment to create an economic experiment by exposing a randomly chosen treatment group to sermons with certain theological content. This method was used by McClendon

and Riedl (2014) in order to account for the fact that many Christians may self-select into denominations that appeal to their personal beliefs.

Dictator Game

The use of the dictator game as a measure of altruism and social behavior is a popular practice in experimental economics. The first instance of the dictator game was conducted by Daniel Kahneman (Engel 584), in which students were matched with two other students. The dictator could choose to allocate $5 to himself and to a student who had chosen to split money evenly, or $6 to himself and to the other student who had chosen to split money unevenly by taking a larger sum for himself. 74% of participants chose the first option, even though they lost a dollar by doing so (Engel 584). Since this first dictator game experiment in 1986, many more have been conducted, and with several variations.

Today, the standard version of the dictator game does not include the punitive option of allocating less money to an 'unfair' student. Instead, randomly matched pairs consist of a dictator and a recipient, and the dictator is endowed a sum of money (commonly a sum of ten dollars), and can choose to share a portion of that money with a recipient, thus giving the dictator total control over the allocation of his endowment (Engel 586).

What makes the literature on the dictator game so intriguing is that while traditional economics considers individuals to be rational income-maximizers, experimental results show that many people will give non-zero sums to recipients. While a significant portion of participants does, in fact, give nothing, there are very few

instances in which this is the majority choice. From a meta-analysis of dictator games (n=20813), Engel found that mean generosity was 28.35%, and the null hypothesis that the give rate is zero is rejected at z = 35.44, p < .0001 (Engel 588). The vast literature on the dictator game suggests that individuals are more willing to share money than traditional economic theory would lead us to believe. Another trend in these studies is that generosity in the dictator game is malleable and is subject to demographics and situational manipulations.

There have been many variations introduced to the dictator game, such as introducing uncertainty about the dictator's payoff[1], paying dictators at random[2], setting up groups as dictators rather than individuals[3], using double-blind procedures to hide the identity of dictators from experimenters[4], making dictators and/or recipients work for the endowment[5], using deserving recipients[6], etc. The effect of many of these variations were found by Engel to be insignificant. However, several variations did create significant effects. Increasing the stakes (e.g. changing endowment sum from $10 to $100) had a negative effect on giving, hiding the identity of the dictator from the recipient decreased

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[1] Andreoni, J., & Bernheim, B. D. (2009). Social image and the 50–50 norm. A theoretical and experimental analysis of audience effects. Econometrica, 77, 1607–1636.

[2] Oleg Korenok & Edward Millner & Laura Razzolini, 2014. "Taking, giving, and impure altruism in dictator games," Experimental Economics, Springer, vol. 17(3), pages 488-500, September.

[3] Franzen, Axel and Pointner, Sonja, Giving According to Preferences: Decision-Making in the Group Dictator Game (July 10, 2014). Soziale Welt (2014).

[4] Eckel, Catherine and Grossman, Philip, (1996), Altruism in Anonymous Dictator Games, Games and Economic Behavior, 16, issue 2, p. 181-191.

[5] Oxoby, R. J., & Spraggon, J. (2008). Mine and yours. Property rights in dictator games. Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 65, 703–713.

[6] Eckel, C. C., & Grossman, P. J. (1998). Are women less selfish than men?: Evidence from dictator experiments. Economic Journal, 108, 726–735.

giving, and using recipients that seemed worthy or deserving of help had a positive effect (Engel 593). Eckel and Grossman replicated the dictator game but used charities as the recipient. This use of deserving recipients halved the number of dictators that kept everything, and more than 20% of dictators gave the total sum to the charity.

Eckel and Grossman also tested the effect of gender on decisions in the dictator game and found that women tend to give more (Eckel and Grossman 1998). Another demographic factor that has been found to have a significant effect is age, which is positively correlated with generosity.

III. Methods

In order to recruit Christian subjects, the experimenter obtained permission from two Christian groups on campus (Missional Community and Journey Church of Atlanta) to give a verbal announcement after small group gatherings asking for volunteers to stay after the gathering to participate in an experiment with a chance of winning earnings. Missional Community is the campus group associated with Blueprint Church, which is a mid-sized multicultural church located in Atlanta. Journey Church of Atlanta is a similarly sized church that consists primarily of Korean-American students and young adults (though a significant portion of attendees are not Korean-American). Volunteers who chose to remain were given consent forms as well as index cards with ID numbers. The ID numbers were used to keep track of individual data without the loss of confidentiality. Over six sessions, 59 individuals (32 males, 27 females) participated in the study. Participants were then split into two groups: a control group and a treatment group. The two groups were placed in separate rooms. Then, both groups were shown

five minute video clips of sermons by Jentezen Franklin, senior pastor of Free Chapel Church in Gainesville, Georgia. The identity of the speaker was not made known to subjects, and a question was placed in the survey to control for whether participants recognized the speaker. No significant effects of recognition on generosity were found. The sermon clip shown to the treatment group had several prosperity-focused teachings, while the clip shown to the control group was a non-prosperity sermon which focused on the grace of God. After being shown the respective video clips, participants then took part in the economic game used in the experiment, which was a variation of the dictator game. Players were endowed with ten dollars each. However, instead of being paired with another participant for the dictator game as in the dictator game as used by Bolton, Katok, and Zwick (1994), each participant was "paired" with the organization at which the gathering had taken place and were given the option to give any integer amount from zero to all ten dollars of the endowment. For example, volunteers recruited from Missional Community were all labeled as Player A, and Player B was the organization Missional Community, and individuals could determine what amount of their own ten dollars to give to Missional Community. The purpose of using this method was to allow us to capture participants' generosity toward religious causes, which is a logical application of generosity toward God.

Part 1: Decisions   ID#: _____

Game 1

Each of you has been assigned $10. You can transfer to the organization any integer number of your own ten dollars, from 0 to all 10, and keep the remainder. Any amount transferred will be recorded by the experimenter and transferred to the organization.

Instructions for Player A: In the table below, write down the amount that you would like to transfer to the organization.

(1) A's decision (amount transferred to organization)

At this time, do you have any questions? If so, please raise your hand.

After participants finished making their decisions in the dictator game, they filled out a short survey. The survey questions were used to control for several factors that the literature suggests can impact giving behaviors, such as theological conservatism/liberalism, income level, and the impact of religion on daily decisions, as well as family upbringing. There were also questions to check whether participants recognized and could identify the speaker (as mentioned above), as well as to gauge their general impression of the speaker (favorable or unfavorable), as the likeability and credibility of the speaker could impact individuals' receptiveness to the message and in turn, their willingness to give.

To determine which participants were paid the amount that they earned in the game, participants were assigned ID numbers, and at the end of the session, a volunteer was asked to come and draw a card from a deck. Participants whose ID numbers ended in

the digit found on the chosen card were asked to come meet the experimenter privately after the experiment was dismissed. Those randomly selected participants were then given envelopes with the amount that they had chosen not to transfer to the organization.

IV. Results

Because this is a study looking at the effects of theology on Christian behavior, we dropped the data from subjects who did not identify as Christian. Only one participant did not identify as Christian. After dropping data from this subject, we were left with the results of self-professing Christians to use for data analysis (n=58). It should be noted, however, that the participant whose data was dropped because they identified as agnostic transferred all ten dollars to the organization. Perhaps only non-Christians that feel some level of affinity for a Christian organization would self-select into attending Christian gatherings, and therefore display the same or greater generosity toward the organization than self-profession Christians. Gender was almost an even split with 31 females, 27 males. Racial identification was primarily Asian and Black (Figure 1) as a result of the racial compositions of the campus groups from which participants were recruited (identifying as Asian did not have a significant effect on generosity). Most participants identified as non-denominational (Figure 2). Table 1 contains the summary statistics.

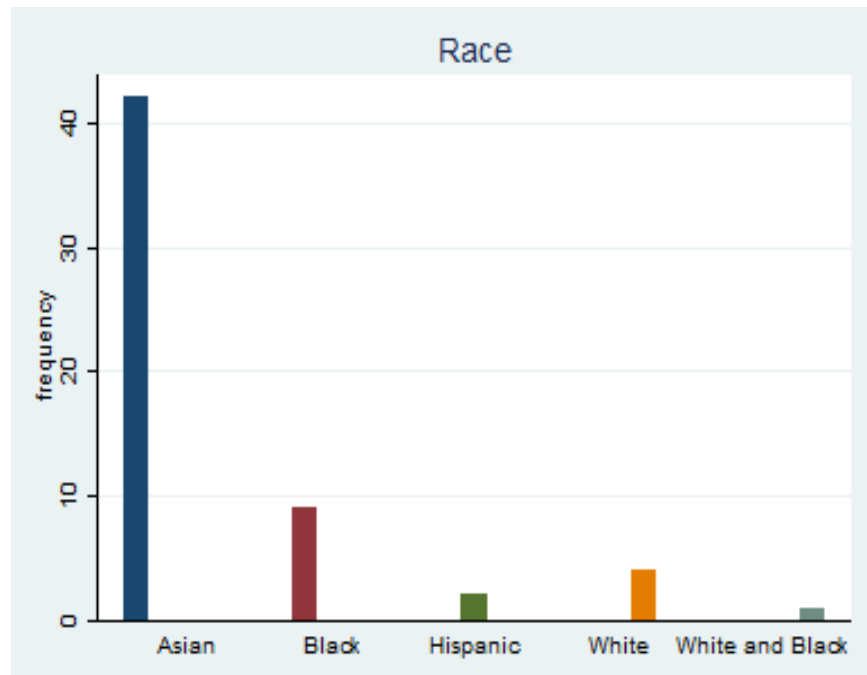*Figure 1: Frequency Distribution of Race*
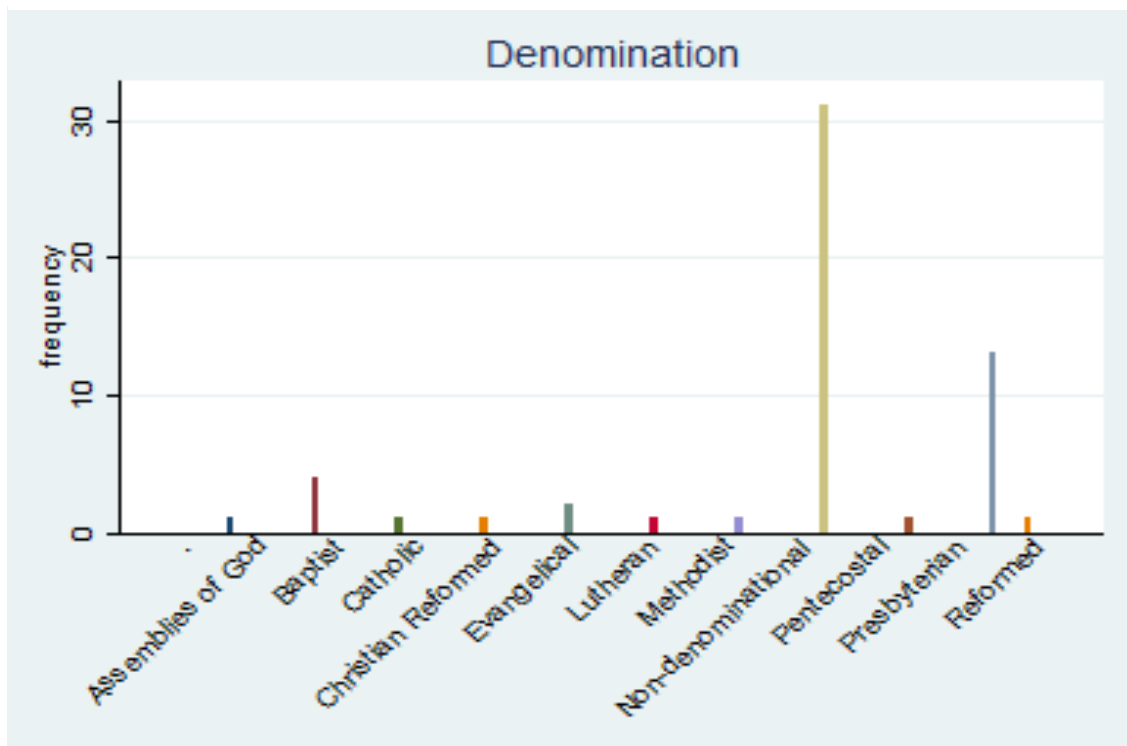

Figure 2: Frequency Distribution of Denomination

Table 1: Description of Variables and Summary Statistics

Variable Name	Description	Mean (Std)
amount	Amount passed in dictator game to religious organization. Maximum is 10, minimum is 0	8.66 (3.03)
male	Sex of the subject. Dummy: 1 Male, 0 Female	.466 (.503)
asian	Race of the subject. Dummy: 1 Asian, 0 Other	.724 (.059)
black	Race of the subject. Dummy: 1 Black, 0 Other	.155 (.048)
hispanic	Race of the subject. Dummy: 1 Hispanic, 0 Other	.034 (.184)
income	Answers to the question, "Please specify your family/household's annual income" Answers are 1. $50,000 or less 2. $50,001 - $70,000 3. $70,001 - $90,000 4. $90,001 - $120,000 5. $120,001 - $150,000 6. $150,001 - $200,000 7. $200,000 or more	3.59 (2.44)
participation	Answers to the question, "In what percentage of the organization's activities (e.g. prayer meetings, large group gatherings, Bible studies, etc.) did you participate within the last month?" Answers are 1. 0-20% 2. 20%-40% 3. 40%-60% 4. 60%-80% 5. 80%-100%	4.07 (1.27)
charitable_giving_yn	Answers to the question, "In the last 12 months, have you given money to charitable causes?" Answers are 1. Yes 2. No	.828 (.381)
religiousgiving	Answers to the question, "During the last year, approximately what percentage of your household's income did you and other family members in your household contribute to any places of worship?"	.063 (.080)
denomination	Answers to the question, "[Answer only if the answer to Question 5 was Christian]: With what denomination do you most closely identify?"	--
conservative	Theological conservatism of subject based on variable 'denomination' Dummy variable: 1 Conservative, 0 Other	.362 (.485)

Out of 58 subjects, 49 donated the entire amount of ten dollars to the organization. Though a high level of generosity was expected due to the design of the experiment in which the recipient was an organization with beliefs that likely aligned with those of participants, that such a vast majority of subjects would donate the total endowment to the organization was unexpected. The distribution of the amount given was not significantly different between the treatment and nontreatment groups. The table below shows the results of a two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test which returned a p-value of .996, with which we failed to reject the null hypothesis of the two means being equal (Table 2).

Table 2: Hypothesis Test for Difference in Means

Summary statistics:

Variable	Observations	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Nontreatment	30	0.000	10.000	8.933	2.852
Treatment	29	1.000	10.000	8.414	3.191

Two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test / Two-tailed test:

D	0.107
p-value	0.996
alpha	0.05

An approximation has been used to compute the p-value.

There was also no significant difference between the mean amount given by the treatment group (mean=8.357) and the nontreatment group (mean=8.9333), since a two-tailed t-Test returned a p-value of p=0.5128.

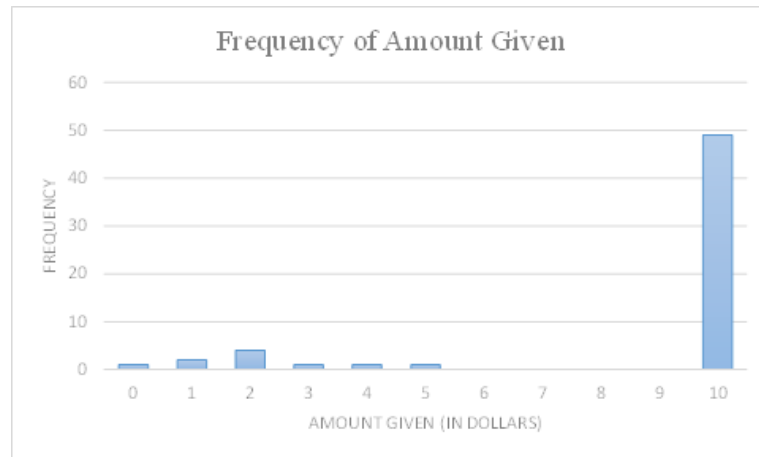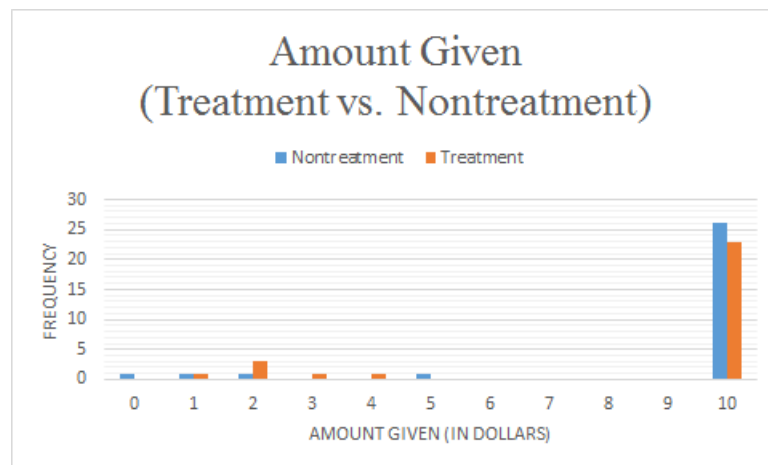*Figure 3: Frequency of Amount Given*

Figure 4: Frequency of Amount Given (Comparison)

Ordinary least squares (OLS) was used to perform a linear regression. The first model was used to test the effect of hearing a prosperity-themed sermon as opposed to a grace-themed sermon, in which 'amount' represents the amount (out of a possible ten dollars) passed on to the organization and β_1 is the effect of being exposed to a prosperity sermon, and ε is the error term.

$$amount = \beta_0 + \beta_1 treatment + \varepsilon$$

$$H_0 : \beta_1 = 0$$

$$H_1 : \beta_1 \neq 0$$

The second model was used to control for demographic factors that could potentially affect generosity. This model was derived by running a preliminary regression using all the information available to us through survey answers, then dropping insignificant variables, using F-test and r-squared adjusted values as guidelines (Table 6).

$$amount = \beta_0 + \beta_1 treatment + \beta_2 male + \beta_3 black + \beta_4 hispanic + \beta_5 participation + \beta_6 income + \beta_7 conservative + \epsilon$$

Because participants were randomly assigned to treatment and non-treatment groups, the first regression was done without any controls in order to show the causal relationship between the sermon shown and generosity (Table 3). The effect of being exposed to the sermon about God's desire for his followers' prosperity on giving behaviors was not significant (p=.474). However, after controlling for several demographic factors, the effect of the treatment was significant at the 10% level (see Table 4). Not only was the effect of the prosperity treatment significant, but it was also negative. This result was unexpected, since intuition would lead us to believe that framing a deity as a source of material wealth who desires to make his followers rich would increase generosity. Possible explanations for this finding will be further explored in the discussion.

Table 3: Regression of Treatment on Amount Given

VARIABLES	(1) amount
treatment	-0.576
	(0.799)
Constant	8.933***
	(0.555)
Observations	58
R-squared	0.009

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4: Regression of Variables on Amount Given

VARIABLES	(1) amount
male	-1.734**
	(0.787)
participation	1.168***
	(0.418)
treatment	-1.341*
	(0.775)
income	8.95e-05
	(0.00222)
hispanic	3.632*
	(2.061)
conservative	0.855
	(0.821)
black	-1.184
	(1.081)
Constant	4.618**
	(2.027)
Observations	58
Adjusted R-squared	0.207

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The coefficient of the variable treatment was negative and significant at the 10%

level ($\beta_1 = -1.341$, *p=.091*) after controlling for the subjects' gender, race,

participation in the organization, income, and theological conservatism. Participation in

the subjects' respective organization was positively correlated with the amount

transferred to the organization (p=.008) and was significant at the 1% level. Males tended

to give less than females ($\beta_2 = -.1733, p = .033$), a trend which has previously been

observed in the literature (Engel 2011, Eckel and Grossman 1998, Andreoni and

Vesterlund 2001). Identifying as Hispanic had a positive and significant effect on the

amount that was transferred to the organization.

Another variable worth noting is the variable 'religiousgiving', which was created

with the answers to the question, "During the last year, approximately what percentage of

your household's income did you and other family members in your household contribute

to any places of worship? (Write a value between 0 and 100; write N/A if unknown)."

While the variable 'amount' was used as a measure of the observed generosity of

participants, the survey item 'religiousgiving' was used to measure self-reported

generosity. Approximately half of all participants chose to respond to the religious giving

item. The distribution of responses is displayed in Figure 4. The most commonly reported

percentage of income given to religious organizations was 10%. The greater level of

generosity from the experiment could be a result of house money effects, as participants

have a higher propensity to consume with money that is given to them (Clark 2002).

To analyze the factors that affect self-reported giving, a preliminary linear

regression was run by including all demographic and theological variables from the

survey portion (Table 6). Then, variables that were insignificant were dropped, using F-test and adjusted r-squared values as guidelines. The results of the linear regression are shown in Table 5.

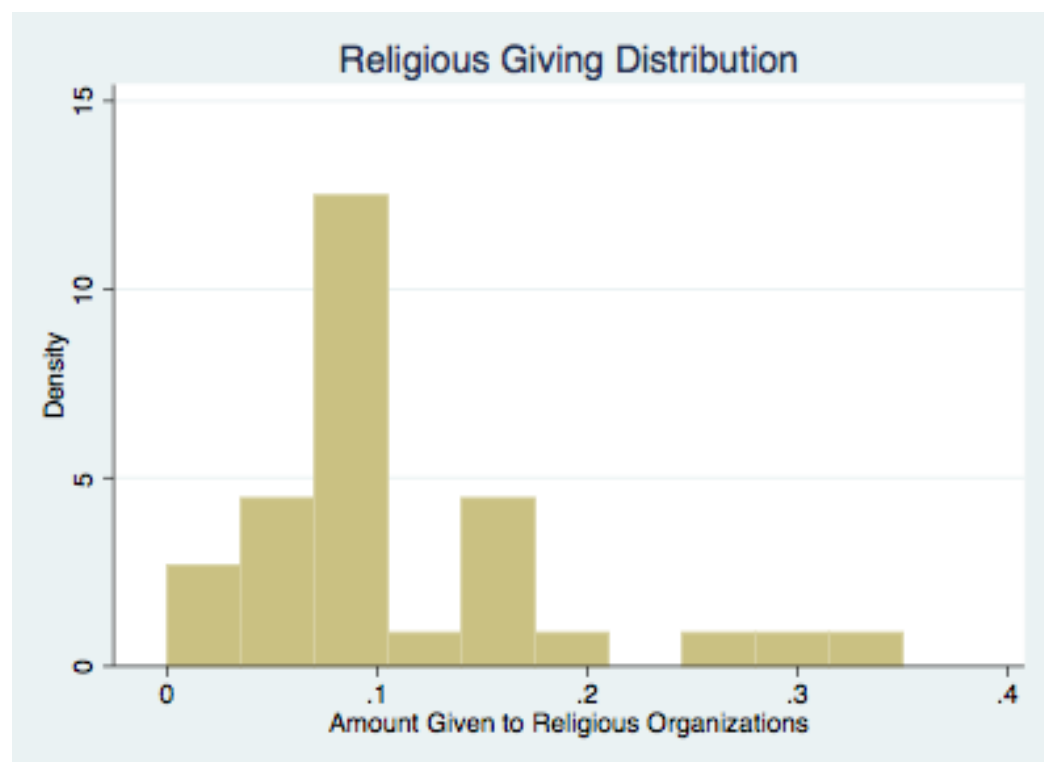*Figure 5: Distribution of Religious Giving*

Table 5: Regression of Variables on Religious Giving

VARIABLES	(1) religiousgiving
charitable_giving_yn	-0.0815**
	(0.0365)
conserv_index	-0.00389
	(0.0184)
black	0.0302
	(0.0461)
asian	0.0515
	(0.0480)
hispanic	0.122
	(0.0707)
income	-0.000152**
	(7.05e-05)
participation	0.0385**
	(0.0162)
rel_influence	0.0877**
	(0.0309)
rel_influence_daily	-0.0574**
	(0.0257)
male	0.0765**
	(0.0308)
fchristian	0.116*
	(0.0562)
Constant	-0.288**
	(0.125)
Observations	29
Adjusted R-squared	0.448

Standard errors in parentheses
*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$

Variables found to be significant at the 5% level include charitable giving, income, religious influence, and daily religious influence. 'fchristian,' a dummy variable for which a value of 1 was assigned to participants whose families identified themselves as

Christians, is significant at the 10% level (p=.054). The negative coefficient of 'income' (-.000152) is contrary to previous literature, which has found income to be positively correlated with religious giving. However, the negative coefficient of 'charitable_giving_yn' (-.0815) is consistent with literature that has found that among Christians, charitable giving and religious giving are substitutes. The positive and significant effects of religious influence on big decisions indicate that deep levels of engagement with religion correlate with increased religious generosity. The same can be said for the positive coefficient of participation on religious giving. Surprisingly, the effect of religious influence in daily life (rel_influence_daily) was negative and significant. Perhaps individuals whose religious beliefs play a big part in their daily decisions feel sufficiently justified in their everyday decisions that they do not feel compelled to give to religious organizations. Further study into this trend could be used to confirm this intuition.

Table 6: Preliminary Regressions

VARIABLES	(1) amount	(2) religiousgiving
treatment	-0.689	0.0118
	(0.800)	(0.0199)
male	-1.299	-0.00924
	(0.924)	(0.0229)
age	-0.209	0.0143*
	(0.299)	(0.00743)
black	-2.586*	0.0194
	(1.388)	(0.0344)
hispanic	0.333	0.121*
	(2.482)	(0.0616)
fchristian	-2.180	0.0468
	(1.564)	(0.0388)
conservative	2.063**	0.0470**
	(0.935)	(0.0232)
charitable_giving_yn	-0.706	-0.0464
	(1.186)	(0.0294)
income	-0.199	-0.00319
	(0.197)	(0.00489)
rel_influence	-0.161	0.0279
	(0.890)	(0.0221)
rel_influence_daily	0.697	-0.0389*
	(0.864)	(0.0214)
participation	0.254	0.0221**
	(0.390)	(0.00968)
recognizespeaker	0.197	0.0330
	(1.517)	(0.0376)
impression	0.967	0.00805
	(0.582)	(0.0144)
Constant	10.15	-0.336*
	(7.422)	(0.184)
Observations	58	58
Adjusted R-squared	0.070	0.173

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

V. Discussion

Though many of our findings were consistent with the existing literature regarding demographics and generosity (such as higher generosity in the lab among females and theologically conservative Christians), several of our results were unexpected. First and foremost, participants in this experiment were much more generous than was to be expected from looking at the literature on dictator games. According to Engel's metastudy (2011), the mean percentage given in dictator games is 28.35% of the amount initially endowed to participants. However, participants in our study gave a mean amount of $8.66, or 86.6% of the endowed amount. Part of the explanation for such a high rate of giving can be explained by the use of a worthy recipient. Eckel and Grossman found that in worthy recipient dictator games, in which participants could choose a charity to whom the money would go, the amount given increased, and over 20% of dictators gave the total sum to the charity (1998). In our experiment, 84.5% of participants passed on the total amount to the organization. Because we used the religious organization whose meetings the participants were recruited at as the recipient, we likely selected people who already felt some level of loyalty to or belief in the organization's cause, thereby increasing participants' perception of the recipient's deservingness. Another factor that set this study apart from other dictator games was the use of sermon clips before the dictator game, which was not used by Eckel and Grossman in their dictator game. Perhaps simply hearing a sermon before playing the dictator game influences generosity. If this study could be replicated with the use of another control group which did not watch any sermon clip before the game, we could find the effect of listening to a sermon on people's levels of giving.

During debriefing sessions which took place after the experiment, many participants expressed that the low expected value of earnings (since only one in every six participants would be selected to receive their earnings) caused them to be more generous. However, the literature suggests that introducing chance into earnings does not have significant effects on generosity. Engel found that while dramatically increasing the stakes (e.g. increasing possible earnings to $100) led to decreased generosity, decreasing the expected value from ten dollars did not have a significant effect on people's generosity.

As for the effect of the treatment, we found that participants in the treatment group who heard a sermon focused on God's intervention in providing material wealth for Christians in fact had a negative effect on participants' giving. Participants who were exposed to the prosperity sermon gave $1.34 less than participants who had not been exposed to a prosperity sermon. Whereas Koch predicted that Prosperity Gospel adherents might give less to nonreligious charitable causes than their non-Prosperity counterparts, our results show that hearing a sermon about God's desire for his followers' health and wealth actually decreases generosity to religious causes. One possible explanation for this result could be an artifact of the study design. Participants may have picked up on the purpose of the study after hearing the treatment sermon and then being put in a position to either give or withhold money from the religious organization. Participants in the nontreatment group who heard a sermon unrelated to finances may not have been as aware of the possible purpose of the study. However, this is unlikely, because had subjects been aware of what we as researchers wanted to accomplish, they would have given more money in order to "help" out the researcher. We can rule this out

because the treatment group, which was more likely to determine the purpose of the study than the nontreatment group, was less generous. It should also be noted that we did not use check the effectiveness of the video treatments on participants' attitudes for this very reason (preventing experimenter demand effects), though we could have done so through a survey item using a Likert scale.

Apart from the design of the study, the actual theological content of the sermons could have been the source of the different rates of giving between the two groups. Our results suggest that hearing about God's ability and desire to make his followers rich is not as effective of a motivator as hearing about the grace of God. One possibility is that some individuals could have an aversion to prosperity teachings if they come from a conservative theological background. Or perhaps the concept of a relational God who extends grace and forgiveness toward his followers creates intrinsic motivation to give whereas depicting God primarily as a source of material wealth creates extrinsic motivation. Our results somewhat align with Koch's findings, in which he did not find that Prosperity Gospel adherents to be more generous toward religious organizations than non-adherents. However, our findings go even further to suggest that a prosperity theology can lead to decreased generosity. Had we included an item measuring subjects' attitudes toward the Prosperity Gospel, we might have had a clearer explanation for this difference. This would be a good change to take into account for extensions of this study.

VI. Conclusion

Christians whose theologies emphasize material wealth may demonstrate lower levels of generosity. The results from our experiment are indicative of behavioral changes

from one instance of priming people's theological views through a short sermon. However, it is reasonable to assume that the effects of constant exposure to such teachings (such as those attendees of a prosperity gospel church would receive) could compound and lead to even more significant levels of decreased generosity. Another possibility is that we might see increased generosity as a result of self-selection: individuals who are convinced by prosperity preachers would be more likely to continue attending a prosperity-friendly church and might also be more generous to religious causes.

As discussed in the previous section of this paper, this study could be improved by adding another control group which would not be exposed to any sermon. By doing so, we would be able to compare the effects of the prosperity sermon and grace sermon to a base level of generosity. Furthermore, exposing prosperity gospel adherents to all three treatments (prosperity sermon, grace sermon, and no sermon) could give us an idea of the effects of a prosperity sermon on people who already believe in God's desire for them to be rich.

In order to gain further insight into what motivates generosity, there are several extensions of this study that could be useful. One modification to the experiment would include the following agree/disagree survey questions from the TIME Magazine survey which could be used to measure Prosperity Gospel beliefs through factor analysis:

1)   Material wealth is a sign of God's blessing (+)

2)   If you give away your money to God, God will bless you with more money (+)

3)   Poverty is a sign that god is unhappy with something in your life (+)

4)   God is not interested in how rich or poor you are (-)

5)   Jesus was not rich and we should follow his example (-)

6)   If you earn a lot of money you should give most of it away and live modestly (-)

7)   If you pray enough, God will give you what money you ask for (+)

8)   Giving away 10% of your income is the minimum God expects (+)

9)   Christians in America don't do enough for the poor (-)

10)   Poverty can be a blessing from God (-)

By using these measures of prosperity gospel beliefs, we could control for individuals' religious beliefs, giving us a clearer picture of the effect of one "dose" of a prosperity treatment on both prosperity gospel believers and non-adherents. Perhaps the negative effect of hearing a prosperity gospel sermon would be diminished for prosperity gospel adherents, or even positive. Perhaps people who do not believe in prosperity tenets would be particularly averse to such teachings and give even less.

Another extension of this study could use the same procedure but change the recipient from being a religious organization to a nonreligious charitable organization. Would Christians become more or less generous toward the needy when presented with prosperity gospel teachings?

The dictator game, including this study and extensions of it, gives us a richer understanding of people's incentives to be altruistic. If individuals are truly rational, there

must be something that they gain when they choose to be generous, whether it be a warm glow or an expectation that their generosity will return to them. If we can capture and document the incentives that cause people to give, we can encourage more pro-social behavior, even in religious contexts, through mindful selection of the framework with which churches or organizations choose to encourage generosity.

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