HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 6. NO 1. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Wealth and Generosity in Yoruba Tales and the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21)

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a comparative theological exploration of wealth and generosity as presented in the parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21) and traditional Yoruba oral narratives. It argues that while separated by time, geography, and theological context, both sources articulate a coherent moral critique of greed, hoarding, and individualistic accumulation. Through the lens of African biblical hermeneutics, the study highlights the shared ethical imperative of using wealth for communal benefit and spiritual accountability. Yoruba tales, proverbs, and moral wisdom traditions depict wealth as a socially embedded gift governed by the virtues of generosity (ifunra) and honourable character (omolúàbí). Similarly, Luke's parable warns against the illusion of self-sufficiency and insists on being "rich toward God." The analysis uncovers convergences in moral imagination and contrasts in eschatological orientation and theological language. The paper also critiques contemporary prosperity theology, which often distorts biblical teachings on wealth in African churches. By re-reading the parable through Yoruba cultural frames, the paper proposes a contextual ethic of stewardship that resists consumerism, reinforces communal responsibility, and envisions wealth as vocation. Furthermore, it argues for the recovery of storytelling as a didactic and spiritual practice in African Christian formation. This interdisciplinary dialogue between Scripture and oral tradition not only enriches African biblical interpretation but also provides theological tools for *addressing economic injustice and corruption in modern society. Ultimately, the*

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study concludes that generosity is not merely a moral act but a sacred calling that mirrors divine grace and builds just communities.

Keywords: Wealth, Generosity, Yoruba, Parable, Hermeneutics

Introduction

The human relationship with wealth remains one of the most complex and contentious in both sacred texts and cultural narratives. Across time and traditions, wealth has been perceived as both a divine blessing and a potential spiritual hazard. In the biblical parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21), Jesus confronts the illusion of self-sufficiency and the moral dangers of material accumulation. Within African thought, particularly in Yoruba traditional wisdom, stories and proverbs reflect a communal and ethical vision of wealth, critiquing hoarding and elevating generosity as a social virtue. These two traditions—biblical and Yoruba—though arising from distinct socio-cultural and theological contexts, converge on significant ethical principles concerning wealth, generosity, and the human disposition toward material possessions.

Africa's encounter with Christianity has necessitated a cross-cultural engagement between biblical texts and indigenous thought. While Western theological frameworks dominated early Christian interpretations, recent African biblical scholarship has advocated for readings that reflect the continent's socio-cultural realities.[4] This contextual turn has paved the way for comparative hermeneutics that engage African oral traditions alongside biblical narratives, recognising the pedagogical, theological, and moral insights embedded in African proverbs, folktales, and communal wisdom systems. In particular, the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria possess a vast repertoire of tales and sayings that function as ethical commentaries on life, including the prudent use of wealth. Their worldview, rooted in the values of communalism, hospitality, and spiritual accountability, critiques the notion of wealth as a private, self-contained asset.[5]

The present study seeks to explore the ethical and theological visions of wealth and generosity in both the Parable of the Rich Fool and Yoruba oral tales. By placing these two narrative traditions in dialogue, the paper identifies convergences and dissonances that illuminate not only their moral visions but also their implications for contemporary African society. In an age where prosperity preaching, economic inequality, and cultural shifts continue to challenge both religious and communal ethics, a return to these narratives offers necessary critique and direction.[6] The aim is not merely to juxtapose two

[4]Gerald O. West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 109–112.
[5]Akinwumi Isola, "Yoruba Moral Values and Proverbs," in *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity*, ed. Isidore Okpewho (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 234–238.
[6]Jesse N. K. Mugambi, "Religion and Social Reconstruction in Africa," in *Theology and Poverty Reduction*, ed. D. G. Gifford (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2007), 35–40.

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traditions, but to allow each to shed light on the other highlighting, in particular, how Jesus parable functions as both a spiritual and socio-economic rebuke, and how Yoruba tales reinforce or reframe the moral imperative of generosity.

The primary research question guiding this paper is: How do the Parable of the Rich Fool and selected Yoruba tales reflect and inform ethical attitudes towards wealth and generosity in their respective contexts and in contemporary African societies? The study also seeks to answer the following subsidiary questions: (1) What theological critique does Luke 12:13 21 offer concerning material wealth and human mortality? (2) How do Yoruba oral narratives present generosity and condemn hoarding or selfish accumulation? (3) What parallels and contrasts can be drawn from both traditions? (4) How can these insights shape present-day African Christian engagement with issues of wealth, prosperity, and social responsibility?

The methodology employed in this study is interdisciplinary, drawing from biblical exegesis, African oral literature, and contextual hermeneutics. The analysis of Luke 12:13 21 will employ a literary-theological approach, highlighting the structure, historical background, and rhetorical purpose of the parable within Luke s Gospel. Simultaneously, the study draws upon selected Yoruba tales especially those preserved in collections of oral literature and ethnographic studies to identify recurrent motifs and moral frameworks related to wealth and generosity. Comparative hermeneutics will then allow for a dialogical reading between both traditions.[7]

This study is particularly urgent in the context of contemporary Nigeria, where economic aspirations often collide with moral and communal values. In many urban and rural settings, wealth has become synonymous with divine favour, and generosity is often practiced for social display rather than ethical conviction.[8] Against this backdrop, both the parable and Yoruba tales provide resources for reimagining wealth not as an end in itself but as a means toward justice, accountability, and communal flourishing. In doing so, this paper advances the theological claim that wealth, while not inherently evil, demands stewardship and orientation toward others.

The central thesis of this paper is that both the Parable of the Rich Fool and Yoruba oral tales present wealth as a moral test, and they converge in affirming generosity as a virtue rooted in communal consciousness and divine accountability. By exploring this thesis through textual and cultural analysis, the paper contributes to ongoing efforts within African theology to recover

[7]Madipoane Masenya, An African Womanist Reading of Luke 12:13 21, *Journal for Gender and Religion in Africa* 20, no. 2 (2014): 90 94.
[8]Sunday Agang, *The Impact of Religion on Sustainable Development in Africa* (Carlisle: Langham, 2020), 153 157.

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indigenous ethical resources and to critique economic practices that foster alienation, greed, and spiritual emptiness.[9]

Exegetical Analysis of Luke 12:13–21

The Parable of the Rich Fool, unique to the Gospel of Luke, serves as a pointed critique of materialistic obsession and spiritual complacency. Set within Jesus' broader teachings on discipleship and the Kingdom of God, the parable arises from a seemingly mundane request: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13, ESV). Jesus' response, however, reveals a deeper concern—not merely the resolution of familial disputes, but the existential danger of covetousness. This pericope encapsulates a Lukan theology of wealth that emphasizes vigilance, generosity, and the prioritization of God over possessions.[10]

Literary and Historical Context

Luke's Gospel consistently portrays wealth in ambivalent terms: as a resource for the poor and a temptation toward spiritual ruin. The parable in Luke 12:13–21 is prefaced by a teaching moment prompted by a dispute over inheritance, a common issue in Jewish society, where elder brothers often acted as custodians of family property.[11] Jesus, however, refuses to be drawn into the legal dispute and instead turns the situation into a platform for teaching about the dangers of greed. The warning, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness" (v. 15), signals a transition from legal arbitration to spiritual admonition.

The setting is rural, and the protagonist—a wealthy farmer—is introduced without moral qualification until his internal monologue reveals his true character. He speaks only to himself and about himself: "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?... I will tear down my barns and build larger ones" (vv. 17–18). The first-person pronoun dominates his speech, occurring multiple times, which Luke employs to expose the man's narcissistic preoccupation.[12] As Craig Blomberg notes, the "I-my" language indicates a solipsistic worldview, devoid of community or divine acknowledgment.[13]

Theological Significance and Semantic Features

The parable's theological force lies in its divine interruption. Just when the man believes he has secured his future, God declares, "You fool! This night your

[9]Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum, 1992), 219.
[10]David Tiede, *Luke* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 230.
[11]Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1122.
[12]Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 487.
[13]Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 108.

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?□ (v. 20). The Greek word translated as □fool□ (*aphron*) implies moral and spiritual bankruptcy, not merely intellectual deficiency.[14] The man is not condemned for being rich, but for being rich without reference to God or others□a sentiment reinforced by the closing remark: □So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God□ (v. 21).

The parable confronts a worldview that equates material security with existential security. The man assumes control over time (□many years□), self-indulgence (□relax, eat, drink, be merry□), and wealth (□my crops... my barns□), while God interrupts with the reality of mortality and divine judgment.[15] The parable thus contrasts human plans with divine sovereignty, exposing the fallacy of autonomy in matters of life and death.[16] Joel Green observes that the farmer fails to recognize the social dimension of wealth and the responsibility it entails within the covenant community.[17]

Furthermore, the parable functions as a critique of the ancient ideal of *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing), which often involved wealth accumulation and leisure. In contrast, Luke emphasizes spiritual flourishing and communal generosity as markers of the good life. The call to be □rich toward God□ can be read as an invitation to engage in practices that honor God□especially acts of charity, justice, and humility.[18]

Lukan Economic Ethics and the Kingdom of God

Luke□s Gospel has long been recognized for its distinctive emphasis on economic justice and the reversal of fortunes. From Mary□s Magnificat (Luke 1:46□55) to the beatitudes (Luke 6:20□26) and the Zacchaeus narrative (Luke 19:1□10), Luke consistently presents a kingdom ethic that reconfigures power and wealth. In this context, the Parable of the Rich Fool exemplifies the Lukan theme of divine reversal□the wealthy man who appears secure is exposed as spiritually impoverished and temporally fragile.[19]

The parable also functions didactically, warning disciples about the temptation to misplace trust. Jesus presents wealth not as evil per se but as spiritually dangerous when isolated from the divine economy. As Justo González writes, □In Luke, wealth is to be used for the benefit of the poor, and hoarding is not

[14]I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 526.
[15]John Nolland, *Luke 9:21□18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 685.
[16]R.T. France, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 101.
[17]Green, *Luke*, 489.
[18]Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 67.
[19]Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 38.

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just bad economics but bad theology.[20] The parable's closing phrase, "not rich toward God," affirms this theology: true wealth consists in generosity, dependence on God, and attentiveness to eternal matters.

Moreover, the parable's eschatological undertone reminds readers of the brevity of life and the need for vigilance. It serves as a microcosm of Luke's broader eschatology, where the present is always evaluated in light of the coming kingdom.[21] The contrast between temporary wealth and eternal realities calls believers to a different calculus of value—one shaped by divine rather than worldly standards.

Narrative of Warning, Not Mere Instruction

Unlike some of Jesus' more parabolic teachings that invite reflection through metaphor and ambiguity, this parable is sharply didactic. It functions as a warning, almost prophetic in tone, echoing the judgment narratives of the Hebrew prophets who warned against trusting in riches and ignoring the plight of the poor (cf. Amos 6:1–7; Isaiah 5:8).[22] The farmer's tragic end is not an arbitrary punishment but a consequence of a life lived without relational or spiritual anchoring. In this way, the parable moves beyond moral instruction to offer a theological rebuke.

Yet, embedded within the warning is an implicit call to repentance. The structure of the parable, beginning with a question and ending with divine pronouncement, invites the reader to consider their own relationship with wealth, mortality, and community. As Sharon Ringe notes, "The power of the parable lies in its capacity to destabilize the listener's assumptions and provoke ethical self-examination."[23] In this way, the parable serves not only as a window into first-century Judean attitudes toward inheritance and wealth but also as a timeless mirror reflecting human proclivity for self-centered accumulation.

Wealth and Generosity in Yoruba Oral Narratives

Among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria, the concepts of wealth (*owo*) and generosity (*ifunra* or *ifunni*) are deeply embedded in the oral traditions that have shaped communal identity, ethical norms, and spiritual worldviews for centuries. Yoruba folklore, proverbs (*òwe*), praise poetry (*oríkì*), and allegorical tales (*àlóàpagbè*) serve not only as repositories of cultural memory but also as instruments of moral instruction. These narratives consistently reveal that wealth is both a blessing and a test—its use or misuse determining one's honour, legacy, and relationship to the community and the

[20]Justo L. González, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 62.
[21]David E. Garland, *Luke* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 503.
[22]John Barton, *The Theology of the Book of Amos* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), 112.
[23]Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 177.

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unseen world.[24] In this way, Yoruba oral literature shares a striking moral kinship with biblical wisdom literature and parabolic teaching, offering a rich reservoir for comparative theological reflection.

Communalism and the Moral Economy of Wealth

At the heart of Yoruba moral cosmology lies the principle of communalism—the belief that individual prosperity should serve the welfare of the group. This is captured in the common saying: *Eniyanniaso mi* ("People are my covering"), emphasizing social networks as the truest form of security.[25] Wealth, in this worldview, is not a private commodity but a communal resource that affirms one's *omolúàbí* status—being a person of honour, discipline, and social responsibility.[26] Accumulation of wealth without generosity, therefore, is not only socially frowned upon but spiritually precarious.

Yoruba tales often portray wealthy characters who become tragic figures due to their failure to share their resources. In one popular tale, a rich man named Baba Onílù is known for his stinginess and refusal to host guests. When a famine strikes, his wealth becomes useless, and the community, remembering his lack of generosity, withholds assistance.[27] Such stories function not merely as cautionary tales but as vehicles of communal conscience—reinforcing generosity as a virtue that preserves both social harmony and personal honour.

Folktales and Proverbs on Generosity and Hoarding

Yoruba proverbs succinctly encode communal wisdom. One well-known saying, *A fi ọwọ́ kan ra ògèdè , a fi mejìgbà á* ("We use one hand to buy a banana, but need two to receive it"), reminds individuals that giving requires more effort than receiving, and generosity enlarges the soul.[28] Another instructive proverb warns, *Eni to nikómọẹlòmîì, igbaọjọ́ la fi n t'árò* ("The one who hoards and does not consider others will eventually carry their burden alone").[29] These sayings echo the moral logic found in the parable of the Rich Fool, where isolation, self-centeredness, and hoarding lead to ruin.

Folktales further dramatize this ethic. In a tale documented by Nigerian folklorist UlliBeier, a wealthy man named Ologbon refuses to assist a travelling stranger, who later turns out to be an *òrìṣà* (deity) in disguise. The man is

[24]Akintunde Akinyemi, *Orature and Yoruba Rhetoric: Power and Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 102–105.
[25]Niyi Osundare, *The Word Is an Egg: Collected Essays* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2008), 148.
[26]Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief* (Ibadan: Longman, 1962), 134.
[27]Ulli Beier, *The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 72–75.
[28]Ayo Bamgbose, "Yoruba Proverbs and Social Values," *Nigeria Magazine* 104 (1972): 18–22.
[29]Akin Alao, "The Role of Proverbs in Yoruba Legal and Moral Thought," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 18, no. 2 (2006): 199–205.

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punished not only with the loss of his wealth but with public disgrace.[30] The motif of divine or ancestral judgment for miserliness underlines the Yoruba belief that generosity is not simply social etiquette but a spiritual imperative monitored by metaphysical forces.

Generosity is also connected to the belief in *àṣe*—the power of spoken word and moral action to effect change in the world. A generous act is believed to carry *àṣe* that multiplies blessings, both in this life and the next.[31] Consequently, oral traditions often depict generous characters as blessed not only with material increase but with communal remembrance and ancestral favour. Their stories become part of the community's didactic treasury, while those of the selfish are recounted with mockery or disdain.

Symbolism and Spirituality of Wealth

Yoruba tales frequently use symbolic language to express the transient nature of wealth. In one tale, wealth is likened to a masquerade (*egúngún*) that dances only for a while before disappearing—reinforcing the idea that wealth must be used meaningfully while it lasts.[32] This symbolism aligns with the biblical imagery in Luke 12, where the fool's wealth is shown to be temporary and ultimately irrelevant in the face of death. The notion that wealth, if not distributed, may attract cosmic retribution is reinforced by ritual performances, chants, and even naming practices that embody the community's values.

Spiritual beings—ancestors, deities, or the Supreme Being (*Olódùmarè*)—are also believed to observe the use of wealth. Wealth is not inherently evil but is morally evaluated by how it is used. As Yoruba philosopher Sophie Oluwole argues, wealth is meant to enhance life, not to separate individuals from their kin or from spiritual order.[33] Thus, wealth divorced from *iwapele* (gentle character) becomes a danger to the self and the society. This moral framework finds a remarkable parallel in the Rich Fool, who is condemned not for his riches but for failing to be "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

Narrative Memory and Intergenerational Teaching

In Yoruba culture, storytelling is a communal act that binds generations. Grandparents, mothers, and itinerant storytellers (*akópaàló*) use tales about wealth and generosity to educate children about values such as kindness, prudence, and social responsibility. These stories serve as informal theological education, embedding virtues that transcend economic theory into the lived

[30]Beier, *The Origin of Life and Death*, 63.
[31]Sophie B. Oluwole, *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patrons of Classical Philosophy* (Ijebu-Ode: Ark Publishers, 2014), 88.
[32]Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96.
[33]Oluwole, *Socrates and Orunmila*, 101.

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experiences of the people.[34] The oral medium also allows for adaptability, enabling contemporary challenges—such as urban greed, corruption, and class inequality—to be integrated into age-old tales, thereby keeping the moral message alive.

The didactic function of these tales ensures that they are not simply entertainment, but moral scripts for navigating the world. As Karin Barber notes, Yoruba stories operate as "cultural blueprints," offering models for how one ought to live, give, and relate to others in society.[35] In this sense, they perform a similar function to biblical parables, which use narrative to subvert common assumptions and call audiences to radical reorientation.

Comparative Hermeneutics: Parallels and Contrasts

Bringing the Parable of the Rich Fool into dialogue with Yoruba oral traditions unveils significant convergences and instructive contrasts. Although separated by geography, language, and religious frameworks, both traditions articulate a moral economy in which wealth is judged not by its quantity but by its purpose and its alignment with broader ethical or spiritual values. A comparative hermeneutic approach makes it possible to read across these traditions in order to discern common anthropological concerns—mortality, social harmony, accountability—and to highlight divergent theological emphases on divine agency, eschatology, and individual versus communal responsibility.[36]

Shared Ethical Critique of Greed and Hoarding

Both Luke's parable and Yoruba tales express a shared suspicion of wealth accumulated without regard for others. In Luke 12:13–21, the rich man's internal monologue betrays his isolation—he considers neither family nor neighbour in his grand plans. Similarly, Yoruba tales abound with wealthy protagonists whose failure to share or support their communities leads to their social downfall or cosmic punishment. In both traditions, greed is not merely a moral failing but a misalignment with the intended function of wealth. Wealth, ideally, ought to serve others and reinforce communal ties.

This ethical convergence is not superficial. It is rooted in profound theological and cultural axioms. Luke's Jesus speaks from a worldview informed by Jewish traditions of justice and covenantal economics, where God's blessings are entrusted to individuals for communal benefit (cf. Deut. 15:7–11).[37] Yoruba thought, though not monotheistic in the Judeo-Christian sense, shares a cosmology in which wealth is a divine trust and social test. The parable and the

[34]Ropo Sekoni, "The Narrator, Narrative Pattern, and Audience Experience of Oral Narratives," *Journal of American Folklore* 103, no. 408 (1990): 451–466.
[35]Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 89.
[36]Tinyiko Maluleke, "African Theologies in the 21st Century: Identity, Trends and the Emerging Agenda," *Exchange* 43, no. 1 (2014): 15–29.
[37]Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 67–70.

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tale of Ologbon, who denied hospitality to a disguised deity and lost everything, express equivalent moral outcomes: wealth unused for others is rendered useless at best and dangerous at worst.[38]

Contrasts in Eschatology and Divine Judgment

Despite these shared ethical concerns, the two traditions diverge in their portrayal of ultimate accountability. In Luke 12, God directly interrupts the rich man's life and calls him to account: "This night your soul is required of you" (v. 20). This moment of divine judgment is eschatological—tied to notions of death, afterlife, and divine reckoning. The parable implies a monotheistic and personal God who evaluates moral choices and administers justice.

By contrast, Yoruba tales portray judgment more often in communal or cosmic terms. Punishment for greed may come through societal rejection, curses from elders, or misfortunes interpreted as the withdrawal of ancestral or spiritual favour.[39] The divine figures in Yoruba tales (like *òrìṣàs* or ancestral spirits) operate within a framework where wrongdoing disrupts cosmic balance (*àṣẹ*), rather than invoking the singular judgment of a transcendent deity.[40] As a result, Yoruba tales tend to emphasize immediate, this-world consequences, while the Lucan parable points toward eternal implications.

This divergence has implications for how moral education is conducted. The parable aims at conversion and eschatological awareness—warning listeners to reorder their lives before death. Yoruba tales, on the other hand, aim at socialization—encouraging right conduct through narrative repetition, cultural expectation, and metaphysical caution.[41] Both are didactic but differ in teleological thrust.

Individualism and Communal Ethics

Another point of contrast concerns the role of the individual in moral decision-making. The rich man in Luke's parable is portrayed in radical isolation. He neither consults others nor anticipates their role in his future. This isolation is both narrative and moral, highlighting the dangers of self-sufficiency.[42] Yoruba tales, however, rarely present characters in such individualistic terms. Even when focusing on a protagonist, the narrative includes family, community, or deities as stakeholders in that person's choices. The communal context is assumed and ethically binding.[43]

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[38]Beier, *Origin of Life and Death*, 63–64.
[39]Jacob K. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods: Ilé-Ifè in Time, Space, and the Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 211–215.
[40]Oluwole, *Socrates and Orunmila*, 94.
[41]Akintunde Akinyemi, "Narrating Self and Society in Yoruba Proverbs and Folktales," *Oral Tradition* 28, no. 1 (2013): 91–110.
[42]Green, *Luke*, 488.
[43]Isola, "Yoruba Moral Values," 235.

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ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

This difference is significant in terms of worldview. The parable speaks to an audience where wealth can become an idol of personal autonomy, while Yoruba tales address societies in which personhood is defined through relationality. The African proverb *omoènìyànl'ásọ̀run* ("a person is another's garment") reinforces the idea that life is interdependent, and one's wealth is meaningful only in relation to others.[44] Consequently, while Luke condemns individualistic materialism from a theological standpoint, Yoruba stories do so from a social and cultural imperative.

Didactic Structure and Narrative Form

From a literary standpoint, both the parable and Yoruba tales employ narrative to destabilize the hearer's expectations. The rich man believes he is secure; the wealthy Yoruba hoarder imagines they are self-sufficient. Yet both are exposed as shortsighted, and their stories become moral lessons for listeners. This is a classic technique in parabolic and folkloric literature—shocking the audience into reflection.

However, Luke's parable is more concise and abstract, designed for oral delivery in a religious context where brevity reinforces memorability. Yoruba tales, by contrast, are often more elaborate, including song, performance, and audience participation.[45] These structural differences affect the depth and reception of the message. The parable is theologically dense; Yoruba tales are culturally immersive.

Nevertheless, both share the power of narrative to convey moral truths in a form that is accessible, memorable, and persuasive. They are not philosophical treatises but lived wisdom encoded in story.

African Biblical Hermeneutics and the Parable in Context

The hermeneutical lens through which African readers engage Scripture has significantly evolved over the past few decades. No longer bound to Western exegetical models, African biblical hermeneutics has emerged as a contextual approach that draws upon the lived realities, oral traditions, cultural symbols, and indigenous worldviews of African communities.[46] This method acknowledges that interpretation is not a culturally neutral exercise but one that is deeply shaped by the existential conditions, communal identities, and moral horizons of the interpreters. In this regard, reading Luke 12:13–21 through a Yoruba cultural lens reveals new dimensions of the parable's meaning, not by distorting the biblical text, but by grounding its message within the socio-cultural fabric of African life.

[44]Bamgbose, "Yoruba Proverbs and Social Values," 20.
[45]Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts*, 90–92.
[46]Musa W. Dube, "Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 11–13.

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African readers, particularly Yoruba Christians, often approach the parable of the Rich Fool not merely as a text about wealth but as a story about spiritual and communal values. In a society where wealth is celebrated, but also socially regulated through proverbs, rites, and communal expectations, the parable resonates as both affirmation and warning. The man in the parable who hoards his surplus and plans for many years of ease would be instantly recognisable in Yoruba tales as one who has broken the unwritten moral code of *ifunra*□a refusal to share with others, even when capable.[47]

Yet, the Yoruba interpreter may also feel the tension between the parable□s spiritual thrust and the economic desperation in which many Africans live. In a context where poverty is widespread and wealth is associated with divine blessing or ancestral favour, the denunciation of a wealthy man can seem counterintuitive.[48] African hermeneutics navigates this tension by interpreting the parable not as a condemnation of wealth itself, but of wealth without *iwarere* (good character), wealth without responsibility. The critique, therefore, is directed at misaligned values□accumulation over generosity, self-indulgence over community.

The expression □rich toward God□ (Luke 12:21) becomes especially potent in Yoruba Christianity, where being rich is often interpreted not only in material but spiritual and social terms. To be rich toward God is to exhibit *omolúàbí*, to be generous, humble, and just. This theological reorientation reclaims the moral centre of the parable while making it resonate within an African ethical framework.[49]

Response to Prosperity Theology in African Christianity

The parable of the Rich Fool also serves as a theological counterpoint to the increasingly dominant prosperity gospel in many parts of Africa. This theology, which equates financial success with divine favour and often promotes uncritical consumerism, has reshaped the understanding of wealth among African Christians.[50] Prosperity preachers often cite texts such as Deuteronomy 28 and 3 John 2 to promote material blessings as signs of covenantal favour. However, such readings tend to ignore Jesus□ warnings about wealth□s moral dangers and the New Testament□s emphasis on generosity, justice, and detachment.

[47]Isola, □Yoruba Moral Values,□ 236.
[48]John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 79.
[49]Emmanuel A. Ayegboyin and S. Ademola Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Lagos: Greater Heights, 1997), 105□107.
[50]Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 240□242.

African biblical hermeneutics, particularly when grounded in indigenous wisdom traditions like those of the Yoruba, offers a corrective to prosperity ideology. By highlighting the communal purpose of wealth and the spiritual consequences of hoarding, African readings of Luke 12 challenge the view that divine blessing is measured by individual accumulation.[51] This reading is not anti-wealth, but deeply pro-justice. It calls for wealth to be evaluated not by its volume but by its use in sustaining communal life and advancing the values of God's kingdom.

This theological stance is consistent with the teachings of many African church leaders and theologians who have advocated for a responsible theology of wealth—one that emphasises stewardship, generosity, and ethical entrepreneurship.[52] The parable, when read within this context, becomes a prophetic critique not just of one man's foolishness but of systemic greed and spiritual materialism.

Toward a Contextual Public Theology

Beyond individual morality, the parable of the Rich Fool invites African readers to reflect on public ethics. In contemporary Nigeria, where corruption, political graft, and economic inequality persist, the image of a man stockpiling resources while others suffer is not unfamiliar. The parable thus becomes a mirror held up to societal structures that permit or even reward self-enrichment at the expense of others. When read contextually, it not only warns individuals but challenges communities and nations to reimagine wealth as a public trust.

African public theology, which seeks to bring Christian thought into dialogue with societal issues, finds in Luke 12:13–21 a powerful text for shaping civic virtues.[53] The parable insists that wealth must be judged not only by personal satisfaction but by communal impact and eternal significance. Yoruba tales reinforce this point by reminding the powerful that wealth without honour, without *ìbáṣe* (proper social conduct), leads to disgrace.

Thus, contextual hermeneutics positions the parable as more than a personal morality tale. It becomes a theological and cultural resource for rethinking wealth in churches, institutions, and governance. In this sense, African biblical hermeneutics is not merely about reading the Bible through African eyes—it is about speaking to African realities with biblical truth, informed by the moral insights of African tradition.[54]

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[51]Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa*, ed. Gerald West and Musa Dube (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 28–30.
[52]Benezet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2001), 58.
[53]Sunday Bobai Agang, *Public Theology, the Church, and the Challenge of Modernity in Africa* (Carlisle: Langham, 2014), 141–145.
[54]West, *The Stolen Bible*, 212–215.

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6. Theological Reflections and Contemporary Application

The comparative engagement between Luke 12:13–21 and Yoruba oral narratives uncovers a deep well of theological and ethical wisdom relevant to contemporary African contexts. Both traditions compel a re-evaluation of wealth as a moral and spiritual trust, not a status symbol. Their converging critiques of greed, individualism, and social neglect form the foundation for a theological ethic of generosity, communal responsibility, and justice-oriented stewardship. In the context of contemporary West African societies—marked by widening inequalities, religious commodification, and socio-political corruption—this ethic assumes renewed urgency. The parable of the Rich Fool and Yoruba moral tales do not merely illuminate ancient wisdom; they beckon today's believers toward radical reorientation.

Reclaiming Generosity as Theological Virtue

The parable's conclusion—"so is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21)—serves as a theological hinge that redefines the meaning of wealth. To be "rich toward God" is to practice generosity in such a way that it reflects God's own character: self-giving, compassionate, and attentive to the needs of others.[55] This theological virtue aligns closely with Yoruba ideals such as *ìfọkànbalẹ̀* (contentment), *ìbáṣe* (social harmony), and *ifunra* (voluntary generosity). Generosity, in both frameworks, is not merely transactional but sacramental—it reveals one's moral and spiritual health.

In African theological discourse, this redefinition has implications for discipleship and spiritual formation. Churches must move beyond simplistic dichotomies of poverty versus wealth, and instead cultivate the character of generous living. As Kwame Bediako has argued, theology in Africa must be "incarnational, addressing the totality of human life."[56] This includes helping believers see their resources—money, land, time, influence—as instruments of divine mission. Such a theological vision invites believers to participate in the life of God through their economic decisions.

Generosity becomes a form of worship, a liturgical act that resists consumerism and self-centeredness. Just as Yoruba stories dramatize the spiritual dangers of hoarding and the blessings of open-handedness, so too does the parable urge believers to orient their possessions around kingdom values rather than personal comfort.

[55]González, *Faith and Wealth*, 64.
[56]Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 98.

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Modern African societies, particularly in Nigeria, are grappling with rapid social change economic hardship, digital capitalism, and religious commodification have transformed how wealth is perceived and pursued. In such a context, the parable of the Rich Fool remains piercing. It challenges contemporary believers to resist the narratives of accumulation that dominate both secular and religious discourse. As Matthew Michael warns, the proliferation of prosperity theology and deliverance capitalism within Nigerian Pentecostalism often promotes a distorted anthropology in which wealth becomes the primary indicator of spiritual status.[57]

The parable and Yoruba tales together offer a counter-narrative: wealth is a tool for community, not a trophy of individual blessing. They call for the moral reawakening of a society in which elites often live lavishly while many citizens lack basic necessities. In this light, biblical and indigenous ethics converge to promote moral accountability, urging Christians to evaluate their wealth in terms of usefulness, not accumulation. The image of the man building bigger barns only to die that night becomes tragically familiar in a society where embezzled funds are hoarded while public infrastructure crumbles.[58]

Therefore, the theological application of these stories is twofold: a personal call to spiritual responsibility, and a public call to structural justice. Preachers, catechists, and Christian educators must interpret the parable not only as a warning against greed, but as a summons to systemic generosity supporting education, health care, fair wages, and social reinvestment.[59]

Contextual Discipleship: Storytelling, Memory, and Moral Formation

A crucial insight from the Yoruba tradition is the pedagogical role of storytelling. Tales are not simply entertainment but moral instruments used to shape character and community values. This method aligns with Jesus use of parables, which employ narrative to convey theological truths and ethical challenges. For contemporary discipleship in Africa, reclaiming storytelling as a spiritual practice can foster a deeper engagement with moral formation.

Incorporating Yoruba tales alongside biblical parables in teaching ministries especially in children s and youth education can facilitate moral literacy rooted in cultural familiarity and theological substance.[60] When stories of Ologbon and other greedy figures are placed alongside the Rich Fool, listeners are more likely to perceive their relevance and embrace their lessons. In this way, African Christianity can decolonize discipleship, rooting ethical formation not in abstract imperatives but in culturally resonant narratives.

[57]Matthew Michael, *Christian Theology and African Traditions in Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 112 114.
[58]Agang, *Public Theology*, 146.
[59]Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic*, 63 65.
[60]Akinyemi, *Orature and Yoruba Rhetoric*, 137 140.

Additionally, storytelling as a communal event reinforces the relational dimension of discipleship. Faith is not merely intellectual assent, but participation in a moral community shaped by shared memory and communal obligation.[61] By reclaiming oral wisdom as theological resource, churches may reintroduce narratives that not only challenge but nurture—disciplining imagination and desire around God's justice and mercy.

Reimagining Church and Society Through Shared Ethics

If theology is to be transformative, it must inspire new ways of imagining church and society. The convergence of the parable and Yoruba tales offers such a vision. Churches can become spaces where wealth is redistributed through intentional generosity, mutual support, and social entrepreneurship.[62] Wealthy members can be encouraged to support scholarships, community farms, health initiatives, and affordable housing as part of their discipleship. Clergy and lay leaders alike must model integrity in the management of church funds and resist the spectacle of prosperity that fuels envy and competition.

At a societal level, Christian communities influenced by these moral narratives can act as conscience to the nation. When members internalize the lesson that wealth hoarded is wealth wasted, they are less likely to support leaders who accumulate for themselves and more likely to advocate for public transparency and economic justice.[63] The parable and the tales function as moral imagination—equipping believers to live faithfully in a world distorted by greed and inequality.

Thus, theological reflection on wealth must not be confined to the pulpit or the classroom; it must shape economics, politics, and communal life. The ultimate goal is not only the avoidance of divine judgment, as in the parable, but the construction of a society that reflects divine generosity—*a kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.*

Conclusion

The journey through Luke 12:13–21 and Yoruba oral narratives reveals a rich tapestry of theological and moral wisdom centered on the rightful use of wealth and the indispensable virtue of generosity. Though emerging from distinct cultural and religious contexts, both the parable of the Rich Fool and the traditional Yoruba tales speak with a common urgency about the dangers of hoarding, the illusions of self-sufficiency, and the inevitable consequences of a life that ignores community and transcendence. Their enduring relevance lies not in their ancientness, but in their capacity to speak directly to the ethical crises of our contemporary world.

[61]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 224.
[62]Ringe, *Luke*, 179.
[63]Dube, "Post-Colonial Interpretation," 18.

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At the heart of both traditions is a theological anthropology that affirms relational personhood. The rich man in Jesus parable is judged not for possessing wealth but for failing to acknowledge its divine source and communal purpose. He lives and dies in isolation, his barns filled but his soul impoverished. Similarly, Yoruba narratives denounce characters like Ologbon who misuse their fortune, ignoring the cries of their community and the unseen forces that govern moral order. These parallel narratives converge in their affirmation that true wealth is measured by one s responsiveness to others and to the divine whether through generosity, hospitality, or acts of justice.

This convergence offers a powerful theological corrective to the consumerist ideologies and prosperity-driven religious expressions prevalent in many African societies today. The fusion of biblical parable and indigenous oral wisdom invites both scholars and practitioners to reimagine a Christian ethic rooted not in accumulation but in stewardship, not in opulence but in generosity. Churches, as moral communities, are thus called to serve as counter-cultural witnesses to the kingdom ethic of being rich toward God a phrase that, when contextualized, signifies faithful living marked by communal responsibility, humility, and gracious sharing.

Moreover, the use of storytelling as a theological tool exemplified in Jesus parables and Yoruba folktales remains a profound resource for spiritual formation and ethical pedagogy. In an era where sermons are increasingly abstract and theological education often disconnected from lived realities, the recovery of narrative, particularly culturally familiar ones, offers a means of grounding doctrine in experience. The story of the Rich Fool, when placed in conversation with Yoruba tales, does not lose its power; it gains colour, texture, and resonance.

As African biblical hermeneutics continues to evolve, interdisciplinary engagements such as this where Scripture is read alongside oral tradition, where the sacred meets the storied will prove invaluable. They affirm that theology is not bound to one mode of knowing or one voice of authority, but flourishes where text meets context, and where faith seeks understanding in the vernacular of the people. The Rich Fool s tragic monologue and the Yoruba elders warnings echo a shared truth: wealth without wisdom is vanity, and life without generosity is futility. It is in giving, not storing, that the human spirit mirrors the divine.

Thus, the combined witness of Luke 12:13 21 and Yoruba oral tradition challenges believers, theologians, and societies to reframe their view of prosperity. It calls for a renewed moral imagination one that sees wealth as a gift to be shared, not a god to be worshipped. In this vision, generosity is not merely a moral suggestion but a sacred obligation, a path to honour, a sign of spiritual maturity, and ultimately, a reflection of God's own abundant grace.[64]

[64]Bauckham, *Bible and Mission*, 69.

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