



**A missiological evaluation of the contribution of  
Prosperity Gospel in the socio-economic  
transformation of Mahikeng**

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***"God of the mountain, is still God in the valley***

***God of the day, is still God in the night"***

## **DEDICATION**

I have not reached the peak yet, BUT in this journey of life, I have learned and at times with a bleeding heart, to completely depend on God – **through it all**. In doing so, I have heard His reassuring voice saying “...I will never leave you nor forsake you”. In my darkest hour, I have seen Him as:

Jehovah<sup>1</sup> el Shaddai – Almighty God – Genesis 17:1; 49:24

Jehovah el-deah – God of knowledge – 1 Samuel 2:3

Jehovah el roi – God who sees – Genesis 16:13

Jehovah Jireh – The Lord provider – Genesis 22:13-14

Jehovah el ‘olam – The eternal God – Isaiah 40:28-31

Jehovah Rapha – The Lord who heals – Exodus 15:26; Psalm 6:2

Jehovah Shalom – The Lord is peace – Judges 6:24

Even as I reflect on my not so distant past, I’m still inspired by the Apostle Paul: “...all things work together for good to those who love God...” (Rom. 8:28)

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of the late Solomon Mohapi. I say: Oom Sol – R.I.P. – Resurrection Is Promised!!!

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<sup>1</sup> Jehovah is the name/word used in the American Standard Version (ASV)

## DECLARATION

I, OBAKENG GEORGE THEBE, hereby declare unconditionally that this thesis was written by me and that it is a true reflection of my own research effort. It has never been submitted to any University before in any application for a degree or equivalence. I also solemnly declare that all borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged as such by means of proper referencing and quotations marks.

.....  
OBAKENG GEORGE THEBE

.....  
DATE

The afore-mentioned declaration is confirmed by:

.....  
PROF. SAREL JACOBUS VAN DER MERWE  
PROMOTER

.....  
DATE

## **ABSTRACT**

The principal objective of this study was a missiological evaluation of prosperity gospel on the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

Prosperity gospel has its roots in the charismatic movement or Pentecostalism. The charismatic movement and Pentecostalism were born as an eschatological movement with the primary aim and objective of ensuring that the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and spread to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19-20) to save or rescue souls and humanity in general from imminent damnation.

Prosperity gospel continues to mark rapid and outstanding growth globally, in South Africa and in Mahikeng in particular. In fact, some pastors in Mahikeng use prosperity gospel to lure people and believers from other denominations to their churches. Souders (2011:97) postulates that in prosperity gospel God is intimately linked with the daily events of every believer. Through His divine favour, God dispenses economic and social justice here and now in material and not metaphoric terms. It is a theology of immediate hope in which blessings are manifested by a windfall of wealth, promotions and relationship success.

The proliferation of prosperity gospel and gossellers in South Africa, more particularly in Mahikeng, can be attributed to two main factors. The first is Pentecostalism, which taps into African religio-cultural conditions, and the second, which is equally important, is the promise of material abundance that in itself is a promise of escape from socio-economic hardship. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005a:408) also notes that Pentecostalism and prosperity gospel draw attention to the fact that the gospel is about restoration and as such it is expected that transformation must manifest in spiritual as well as physical abundance (wealth). In agreement, Lioy (2007:47) puts it more profoundly when he says this health and wealth tune plays right into the traditional African value system that tends to link material success and abundance (wealth) to spiritual growth.

This study's primary focus and/or spotlight fell on a literature study on the subject of prosperity gospel as well as empirical research. The respondents of the empirical research were church leaders. The researcher also interviewed, until saturation point, ordinary Christians of Mahikeng who have encountered this phenomenon either positively or negatively. The ordinary church members were also required to fill in a questionnaire, which sought to establish their views on prosperity gospel.

Key terms: Mahikeng, prosperity gospel, missiological evaluation, socio-economic transformation

## OPSOMMING

Die hoofdoelwit van hierdie studie was 'n missiologiese ondersoek van die welvaartevangelie in terme van die sosio-ekonomiese transformasie van Mahikeng.

Die welvaartevangelie het sy oorsprong in die charismatiese beweging of Pentekostalisme. Die charismatiese beweging en Pentekostalisme het as 'n eskatologiese beweging ontstaan, met die hoofdoel om te verseker dat die evangelie van Jesus Christus tot die uithoeke van die aarde verkondig word (Matt. 28:19-20) om siele en die mensdom in geheel van dringende verdoemenis te red en bewaar.

Die welvaartevangelie toon snelle en ongewone groei wêreldwyd, in Suid-Afrika en veral in Mahikeng. Sommige pastore in Mahikeng gebruik die welvaartevangelie om mense en lidmate van ander kerkverbande na hulle kerke te verlei. Souders (2011:97) maak die stelling dat by die welvaartevangelie word God nouliks met die daaglikse lewe van elke gelowige verbind. Deur Sy heilige guns deel God ekonomiese en sosiale geregtigheid hier en nou in materiële en nie-metatoriese terme uit. Dit is 'n teologie van hoop op seëninge vergestalt in 'n onmiddellike oorvloed in rykdom, bevordering en verhoudingsukses.

Die verspreiding van die welvaartevangelie en -evangeliste in Suid-Afrika, en meer spesifiek in Mahikeng, kan aan twee faktore toegeskryf word. Die eerste is Pentekostalisme wat op die godsdiens-kulturele omstandighede in Afrika inwerk, en die tweede, en net so belangrik, die belofte van materiële oorvloed wat opsigself verligting van sosio-ekonomiese swaarkry inhou. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:408) bemerk dat Pentekostalisme en die welvaartevangelie vestig die aandag daarop dat die evangelie oor herstel gaan en wek as sulks die verwagting dat transformasie in geestelike sowel as fisiese oorvloed (rykdom) gestalte sal vind. Liroy (2007:47) stel dit aangrypend as hy sê hierdie gesondheid-en-rykdom deuntjie is reg in die kraal van die tradisionele Afrika waardesisteem wat geneig is om materiële sukses en oorvloed (rykdom) aan geestelike groei te koppel.

Hierdie studie se primêre fokus val op 'n literatuurstudie oor die welvaartevangelie asook empiriese navorsing. Die deelnemers van die empiriese navorsing was kerkleiers en die navorser het ook onderhoude met gewone Christene in Mahikeng wat negatiewe of positiewe ervarings met hierdie verskynsel gehad het, gevoer. Die gewone lidmate is ook versoek om 'n vraelys te voltooi om hulle opinies oor die welvaartevangelie te bepaal.

Sleuteltermes: Mahikeng, die welvaartevangelie, missiologiese evaluasie, sosio-ekonomiese transformasie

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

### 1.1.1 BACKGROUND

The gap between the rich and the poor, between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, is continuously widening across the whole world. Be that as it may, prosperity gospel preachers seek to address this colossal problem with the teaching that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ can prosper materially and live a life of abundance. The principal question is: Is this prosperity gospel really addressing the problem or simply feeding the masses with unrealistic and unattainable dreams.

Given the fact that I am addressing a gospel, it is of critical importance to return to where it all started – the church.

It is widely believed that the first indication of what would later become “the church” can be traced to a revelation Simon Peter received of who Jesus truly was. The Gospel according to Matthew records that this occurred in Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus enquired from His disciples as to who the people were saying He is. After Peter answered Him that “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, Jesus prophesied in Matthew 16:18: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Bible, 2006).

Though the name Peter is commonly translated or interpreted to mean the rock, in this instance, Jesus Christ’s prophesy is not necessarily about Peter the person, but that the foundation of His church would be built on the confession of Peter that “He is the Christ the Son of the living God”, thus making Him the key to salvation. In other words, salvation is about accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and personal saviour in line with His declaration in John 14:6: “...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” This indisputable and/or incontrovertible fact of Jesus being the sole key to salvation is again revealed to Peter who points out emphatically in Acts. 4:12: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven (besides Jesus Christ) given among men by which we must be saved.” (Bible, 2006)

In line with the afore-mentioned, the Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” In simpler words, the righteousness of any individual or humankind in general is directly imputed or accredited on account of Jesus Christ. Paul later cements this conviction in his letter to his

spiritual son, Timothy. In 1 Timothy 2:5, the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that “for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”.

For Jesus Christ to be a redeemer of men, to be the source and key to salvation, as already alluded to, His blood had to be shed on the cross to cleanse men from sin. Now after His crucifixion, Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

This is the great commission and the beginning of the expansion of the church of Jesus Christ.

The word “nations” comes from the Greek word *thnos*<sup>2</sup> which means “common groupings”. The Oxford English dictionary 2016 defines nation as “a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture or language, inhabiting a particular country or territory”. On the other hand, the word “church” is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia*<sup>3</sup>. Baker's Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology (1996) defines the word *ekklesia* as “the called out ones”. Predominantly, *ekklesia* (both in the singular and plural) applies to a local assembly of those who profess and acknowledge faith in and total allegiance to Jesus Christ. Secondly, *ekklesia* denotes the universal church (Acts 8:3, 9:31; 1 Cor.12:28, 15:9; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Lastly,

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<sup>2</sup> “11.55 ἔθνος, οὗς η; λαός<sup>a</sup>, οὐ μ: the largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community—‘nation, people.’ ἔθνος: καθελὼν ἔθνη ἑπτὰ ἐν γῆ Χανάαν ‘he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan’ Ac 13.19. λαός<sup>a</sup> : ὁ ἠτοιμάσας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν ‘which you have made ready in the presence of all peoples’ Lk 2.31. In a number of languages, a term meaning basically ‘tribe’ has been extended in meaning to identify ‘nations.’ In other instances, different nations are spoken of simply as ‘different peoples.’” (Louw & Nida, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> “ἐκκλησία [ekklesia /ek-klay·see-ah/] n f. From a compound of 1537 and a derivative of 2564; TDNT 3:501; TDNTA 394; GK 1711; 118 occurrences; AV translates as “church” 115 times, and “assembly” three times. 1 a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly. 1A an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating. 1B the assembly of the Israelites. 1C any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously. 1D in a Christian sense. 1D1 an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting. 1D2 a company of Christian, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs, according to regulations prescribed for the body for order's sake. 1D3 those who anywhere, in a city, village, constitute such a company and are united into one body. 1D4 the whole body of Christians.” (Louw & Nida, 2006)



*ekklesia* is God's congregation (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). Having said that, Roberts (1972:28) believes the word church comes from a Greek adjective *kuriakos*, which means "that which is the Lord's".

Now Jesus' "teaching them to observe all things" speaks not only of educating them, but of transformation as well. Hence Bosch (2011:67) suggests that "it is important to recognise that for Matthew, teaching is by no means a merely intellectual enterprise. Jesus' teaching is an appeal to His listeners' will not primarily to their intellect, it is a call for a concrete decision to follow Him and to submit to God's will".

Bowler (2013:28) holds the view that correct doctrinal beliefs are of the utmost importance to the relationship between the believer and God. The flip-side of this coin is that incorrect doctrine and theology will in turn result in an incorrect relationship between humanity and God. However, Lioy (2007:60) has observed that contrary to the wishes of Jesus Christ, there are self-appointed and self-anointed church leaders who twist scriptures to advance their own egotistical aspirations. In the process they prey on the unsuspecting and the destitute to build their own fiefdoms wherein they and they alone reign supreme.

This in essence means that in accepting the teachings and/or gospel of Jesus Christ, the recipients should change their way of life. Luke puts it so plainly in the Book of Acts 17:30: "Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent." For his part, the Apostle Paul takes it a bit further in Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Following the afore-mentioned, it wouldn't be far-fetched to then suggest that the church is a distinctive community and/or gathering of people who are brought together for the definite purpose of spreading the message of redemption, salvation and reconciliation. Goodall (1953:241) postulates that the missionary requirement of the church comes from the love of God in His active relationship with men. The very existence of the church springs from God's love, which He demonstrated by sending forth His son. God sent forth the church to spread His message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5: 18-21) to the ends of the earth, to all the nations and to the end of time.

Church history records that (Kuiper 1964:163) in 1517 the Catholic German cleric Martin Luther rose up against the 16<sup>th</sup> century belief of the Roman Catholic Church that purported that God's grace could be bought. Berkhof (2009:217) states that Luther was deeply engaged in works of penance, upon reading Romans 1:17: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith

to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.” The truth came to him that man is justified by faith alone and he learned to understand that repentance is needed from Matthews 4:17: “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Acocella (2017:69) also notes that upon understanding that God gave His only-begotten Son to die on the cross, Luther reasoned that the act of the cross is sufficient for a person to be found justified. This gave birth to the two guiding principles of Luther’s theology, namely that a person is justified by faith alone (*sola fide*) and that Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*) is the only source of truth.

Luther noted with disgust that the Roman Catholic belief system was completely inconsistent and at variance with the Word of God. This conviction of Luther and his subsequent action heralded the process of reformation and subsequently other different reformational movements. The Pentecostals emerged towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In terms of Christianity, (Moore 2013:172) Pentecost is commemorated or celebrated 50 days after Easter in remembrance of the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in Acts 2:1-4.

Therefore, the charismatic or Pentecostal movement is a phenomenon that puts greater emphasis on the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially preaching and praying in tongues and miracles. Anderson (2004:124) also traces the origin of Pentecostalism to Acts 2:4. Put more plainly, Coleman (2000:20-21) says:

The term Pentecostal is derived from Pentecost, the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks that is related to the Passover of the Jews. For Christians, this event celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts.

In other words, Pentecostalism is a religious phenomenon or ideology that gave rise to churches in the United States and Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Robbins (2009:120), this movement was started by the African American preacher William Seymour who abandoned the African Methodist Episcopal Church to begin a revival in Asuza Street.

In Pentecostalism a personal experience and other signs, such as speaking in tongues, are essential to prove redemption. Dunn (1977:620) explains that Pentecostals tend to see Christ in four roles: As Saviour, Baptiser in the Spirit, Healer and soon-to-come King. The distinctive dogma is that speaking in tongues is an initial sign of Spirit baptism. Meyer (2004:453) also observes that Pentecostal churches emphasise the importance of the Holy Spirit, at times over and above the Biblical doctrines, and as such provide ample room for prophetism, dreams, speaking in tongues and deliverance from evil spirits.

Jenkins (2006:12) concurs with Meyer (2004) and states: “The movement mostly emphasised a prophetic, inspired and mystical teaching, and often applied prophetic exegesis to a scriptural text. To every part of Scripture, the movement tends to attach prophetic meaning and interpretation. In this case, it is believed that to every phenomenon, there is a spiritual meaning and interpretation.”

A new movement, called the charismatic movement, broke away from the Pentecostals after a time. The term charismatic is derived from the Greek *charismata*, which means or refers to the spiritual gifts. Buys (1986:19) is emphatic that “anyone who seeks to understand the charismatic movement should have a thorough knowledge of Pentecostalism. There is a strong bond that exists between the two movements. That is basically why this movement is also referred to as neo-Pentecostalism.” Interestingly, Erickson (2001:282) also refers to the charismatic movement as the neo-Pentecostals. He goes on to say that neo-Pentecostalism is more of a trans-denominational movement, drawing many of its participants from the middle and upper classes. Park (2010:5) is of the view that the separation may have come as a result of the differences in affiliation and/or doctrine between the two.

However, LeMarquand (2012:78) is emphatic that Pentecostalism and the charismatic movements are difficult to set apart, because they originate from the same movement, though they have slightly different manifestations in theologies and social formations.

According to Golo (2013:367), “charismatic churches in Africa are an offshoot of classical Pentecostalism...they are, rather direct results of the general evangelical renewal movements that swept over Africa, mostly within the mainline churches during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s”. Ojo (2008:15) observes that these Pentecostal and/or charismatic churches constituted the swiftest growing phenomenon in West Africa during the 1980s and 1990s. Lest we forget, the scripture admonishes every believer and every Christian (1 Thess. 5:21; Acts 17:11) to examine all things based on the word of God and to then hold on fast to that which is good.

This trend of Pentecostalism and charismatic movement is still continuing to this day in Africa, in South Africa and Mahikeng is no exception. This is mainly due to the fact that Pentecostal preachers and pastors commercialise the gospel by harping on prosperity gospel to attract wealth to themselves, at times even at the expense of their own congregations.

The gap between the rich and the poor, between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, keeps on widening and it has nothing to do with the racial composition of the area. In fact, the annual report of Mahikeng Municipality (2011:28) records some of the households in the jurisdiction of the

Municipality rely solely on various social grants from government, whilst those employed are mainly fill position in the public service sector.

In defining poverty, the Oxford English dictionary (2016) says the adjective of poor can best be defined as: “lacking sufficient money to live at a standard considered comfortable or normal in a society.” On the other hand, the noun speaks of “deficiency of necessary or desirable ingredients, qualities etc.”. The adjective is perceived to be used widely in the Bible. Biblically the term poor refers to people of low socio-economic status, the meek and the humble who look up to God for deliverance from the prevailing situation.

Notwithstanding, some churches in Mahikeng use prosperity gospel, which is firmly rooted in Pentecostalism and charismatics, to lure people and believers to their churches and thus the need for a missiological evaluation of prosperity gospel in terms of the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

These prosperity-driven churches entice, ensnare and lure people in the same manner that some churches used liberation theology during apartheid in South Africa. Smith (2000:204) explains that “liberation theology may be defined as that theological endeavour which sees God’s continuing work in the world from the viewpoint of the oppressed and understands that work to involve the reconstruction of persons and societies according to the mold of the Master”.

During the struggle against apartheid and segregation in South Africa, some churches embraced liberation theology as a tool to fight what was perceived as heresy and oppression. In fact, in 1973 the general assembly of the United Nations declared apartheid a crime against humanity. De Gruchy (1991:215) cites article 4 of the Belhar Confession, which was embraced by some churches, which says: “Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.”

In other words, liberation theology was and is firmly rooted in the socio-economic circumstances of those perceived as oppressed. Similarly, prosperity gossellers consider their task as that of rising against poverty, sickness, depravation and lack which in essence are socio-economic circumstances.

Golo (2013:368) says these churches teach their members or followers that all human needs were met in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The fact that He has risen victorious means that believers should share in that triumph over sin, sickness and poverty. They accentuate that according to their understanding, the believer has every right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ on the cross. One prosperity gossellers of note Fred Prince is cited by

Hanegraaff (2009:226) as insisting that believers have to be wealthy because, according to him: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, that the blessings of Abraham might come upon us.”

In other words, the literal translation or interpretation of what Fred Prince is insinuating is that on the cross Jesus Christ took away poverty and left humanity with the earthly wealth and riches of Abraham. This too is further evidence of prosperity gospel equating poverty with sin.

According to Schieman and Jung (2012:738-739), some scholars identify the origin of prosperity gospel in North America around the 1960s. It is attractive and appealing to the masses, because it is a gospel that promises believers success. It is a trans-denominational doctrine that emphasises and over-accentuates the fact that God grants material prosperity, good health or relief from sickness to those who have and demonstrate enough faith. Similarly, financial strains or poor health may be perceived as divine punishment for sin or inadequate faith and devotion.

The African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group (2010) defines prosperity gospel as “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the sowing of seeds through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings”. Ukah (2007:12) describes prosperity gospel as a teaching of new Pentecostalism that advocates a specific doctrine that singles them out from other groups of Christians, for they believe that they constitute a special group of people who alone are saved and blessed abundantly with material wealth by God, whilst the rest of humanity is doomed to perdition.

To Hunt (2000:332-333) prosperity gospel denotes a doctrine of the assurance of divine material wealth and physical health through faith that is at the forefront of this expression of Christian faith. What this means is that wealth and health are the natural divine privileges of all Bible-believing Christians and may be procured by faith as part of the package of salvation, since the atonement of Christ includes not just forgiveness and removal of sin, but also the removal of poverty and sickness.

As a result of the afore-mentioned, there seems to be a very thin or blurred line between Pentecostalism and African traditional religion. African traditional religion practice is more based on consulting the oracle before engaging in any major social activity and seeking material benefits. So it could be said that some Pentecostals, in their bid to arrest the interest of their members, translate what their members are used to from their traditional religious setting into Christian spirituality. This is done by overreliance on prophecy and consulting the pastor as a spiritual guide. Mbewe (2016:par. 11) observes that the “man of God” replaced the witchdoctor,

for it is him who oozes mysterious power that enables him to break through the impregnable layers that lesser mortals cannot penetrate.

This represent a total shift, because many pastors have now turned the message from the good news of salvation, the good news about Christ and His crucifixion to good news about their personality, raising their ego and reducing Christ to a simple tool they use to lure people away from other established churches to their churches. This practice leads to unnecessary tension in the body of Christ. Lee (2007:231) observes that:

prosperity preachers often have adversarial relationships with other pastors in their communities. We can attribute some of this to resentment from pastors who lose members to popular word churches every year. The offensive tone of many prosperity preachers on their television broadcasts produces more contention among local pastors. The preachers often mock traditional black churches publicly for selling chicken dinners to raise money and for overlooking the principles of Biblical faith as they see them.

As alluded to earlier, instead of sermons being about the gospel, preachers tend to be motivational speakers and that may well be the reason why Dearborn (2006:93) contends that

the church is not an underground railway to heaven, hiding people on earth until they can escape to glory. Nor is the church to be another philanthropic organisation, kindly doping good works and dispensing aid to those in need...The church is to be consciously and explicitly Christ's regardless of the activity. Therefore, we extend both hands of the gospel: the hand inviting people to repentance, faith and eternal reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus, and the hand manifesting deeds of mercy and compassion.

### **1.1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

As already mentioned, the central business of the church is to be both spiritual and also to be an agent of transformation, hence the boldness of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." The emphasis is on transformation.

This transformation does not speak of consumerism (I will deal with this phenomenon in chapter 6), greed and self-centredness, but of the love for God and other human beings. It is a clarion call that one ought to care about one's own spiritual life and so too about the total well-being of

others. Jesus Christ commands this in Mark 12:31: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself...”

Green (2010:128) concurs and states categorically that “God is certainly a God of prosperity but definitely not a God of consumerist values and materialism”. Emphasis is about caring for each other as exemplified in the communal life of the apostles; as recorded by Luke in Acts 4:34: “There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”

Van der Walt (2008:224) argues that “it does not imply that the Christians were obliged to part with everything they possessed. It is also important that charity was not the only motive, but that it was a sign of gratitude towards God to whom the Christians owed everything. Their liberality sprang from deep religious commitment – love towards God and their fellow humans – to eradicate poverty amongst members of the church”.

However, Gathogo (2011:150) observes that “when Christianity went to Athens, it was philosophised. When it went to Rome, especially during the time of Emperor Constantine, it was reduced to a mere organisation. When it went to Europe, it became a culture. When it went to America, it became a business”. Almost in total agreement with Gathogo, Buys (2017:87) notes that “when churches fail to proclaim the whole council of God with fervency and effectiveness, a seed-bed is created and a foundation laid for the growth of movements that are poor substitutes, since they inevitably preach a reductionistic gospel. Such movements then overemphasize some part of the truth as the whole truth of God’s word and may neglect core aspects of the gospel”.

It is worth noting that this phenomenon, as observed by Gathogo (2011) and Buys (2017), of changing Christianity to business cuts across various churches in the world and in Africa. This holds true for South Africa and Mahikeng in particular. According to Solomon (2017:70), proponents of prosperity gospel firmly believe that faith in Jesus Christ is a way of obtaining miracles of healing, success in business, wealth, being blessed with the fruit of the womb, marrying the right spouse and so on.

In fact, to Koch (2009:1) the logical interpretation and/or suggestion of prosperity gospel is that poverty is the result of a lack faith. As a result, poverty is the error of the poor themselves. In this sense, proponents of prosperity gospel strongly believe that God is interested in their material prosperity and wealth and that poverty is far from being a blessing, but a serious sign of God’s disfavour. Wright, Azumah and Asamoah-Gyadu (2010:100) cite the African Chapter of

the Lausanne Theology working group as saying: “We reject the unbiblical notion that spiritual welfare can be measured in terms of material welfare or that wealth is always a sign of God’s blessings or that poverty or illness is always a sign of God’s curse or lack of faith.”

Expanding on the views held by Solomon (2017) and agreeing with Koch (2009), Buys (2017:89) reports that “the Pew Research Centre conducted a survey in 2006 in which individuals were asked whether God would ‘grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith’ and whether ‘religious faith was very important to economic success’. Roughly nine out of ten participants in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa agreed wholeheartedly”. As if this is not enough, Wale (2013:19) says that the 2013 report of the South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey reflects that after almost 20 years of democracy in South Africa “the top three institutions as far as citizen confidence is concerned are religious institutions (67%) the Public Protector (64.4%) and the constitutional court (59.3%)”. Wale (2013) continues to site prosperity gospel as the reason for the rating of religious institutions.

Interestingly, this phenomenon knows no race. In fact, Heuser (2015:23) has observed that “Pentecostal prosperity gospel successfully traverses religio-scapes in which diverse traditions of Christianity, African religions and Islam merge into a sacred economy of the material”

Prosperity gospel, which is at times referred to as the word-of-faith gospel, is largely dependent on its promises, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the charm of its teachers and/or preachers. Given the ever-increasing number of prosperity-driven churches here in Mahikeng, one would have expected that they would impact and/or contribute positively to the socio-economic transformation of the area, but ironically enough the 2011<sup>4</sup> census of Statistics South Africa present a gloomy picture of Mafikeng’s economy.

In fact the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (2016:6) has observed that “in recent years, scores of churches, religious organisations, and traditional healing practices have mushroomed throughout the country, changing the face of the religious communities and practice irreversibly. Streets are marked with signs and advertisements with promises of miracles, ranging from healing to prosperity”.

Togarasei (2011:340-341) notes that the teachings of prosperity gospel are appealing to the rich, for they feel more at home in that environment as opposed to missionary work that seems to be pronouncing blessings on the poor. He goes on to say that the poor members of these

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<sup>4</sup> Latest statistics available



churches are there in the hope that they are on a journey to prosperity and that those who aspire to be rich, are constantly encouraged by the doctrine of prosperity.

Togarasei's (2011) views are in line with the observation Lee (2007:230) makes that prosperity gospel teaches its adherents that poverty is a curse from the devil and that the power to transform their oppression resides in them appropriating their faith and taking their rightful place in the kingdom of God. Prosperity theology teaches people that the only way to escape poverty is to build up their faith and be aware of Biblical promises.

Now if the afore-mentioned was remotely true, it would then suggest that these faith communities or believers would be playing an important role in poverty alleviation, because they would be generating a very high level of social religious capital that would enable them to provide personal development of its members and the community in general. If that was the case, then the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng would be totally different from what the reality is.

Solomon (2017:71) has observed that some of the ambitious individuals who seek easy ways of making money leave the mainline churches or at times even other Pentecostal churches, with the intention of starting their own churches where they will be the all in all. They would then control the finances of the church and be able to from time to time spend church funds on their own selfish interests. Hunt (2000:334) postulates that nothing separates prosperity gospel from the global franchise of McDonalds, because they are greatly similar in their fundamentalist doctrines. To a large extent, what Hunt (2000) is referring to also speaks of consumerism. Phillips (2015:121) puts it so profoundly when he says "The true gospel of Jesus Christ has always been to 'whoever will let him come and drink of the water of life freely'. This invitation should never be bottled and brokered as merchandise that can only be received and accessed by those who can afford to pay a monetary price."

In other words, churches are turned into the personal property or into money-generating tools for the few, in exclusion of the many. Solomon (2017:118) takes this matter even further by suggesting that many of these Pentecostal prosperity-preaching churches establish educational institutions that are too expensive for and beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. In fact, the exorbitant fees of these private institutions may inevitably confirm that their owners are in the main businessmen more than men of God or servants of the Lord.

The phenomenon of which Solomon is referring to has reared its head here in Mahikeng.

Some of these institutions of learning have been established in predominantly poor RDP settlements<sup>5</sup>, yet they charge fees unaffordable to the very community in which they are situated. From the researcher's personal (2019) observation, almost all learners of the primary school based in Smarties-RDP settlement are bussed in from more affluent suburbs. One matter of concern is that at times even members of those very churches cannot afford the tuition fee of the schools they toiled to build. In other words, donor funds and funds raised from the very poor congregation are used to build these institutions, yet the other hand is fully stretched out to receive government subsidies for the services they purport to render to the poor.

Due to a lack of social conscience on the part of the leaders of these churches, their institutions can only be accessed by the rich and famous. Inevitably they contribute to the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Having only the rich accessing these institutions, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that they are used as money-spinning machines for the enrichment of the pastor and his family. Niemandt (2017:213) agrees with Hunt (2000) and goes on to argue correctly that "some of prosperity gospel churches are modelled according to the North American churches and represent a kind of McDonaldisation of the church. Others, perhaps such as those currently being investigated by the CRL Rights Commission, are churches that exist solely for the financial benefit of the church leadership – sometimes called 'prophets for profit'".

On this score the community around these institutions are not necessarily transformed, since even the majority of the teaching staff comprises of desperate foreign nationals (Zimbabweans in the case of Mahikeng) who are exploited in the knowledge that they have other recourse. Cleaning posts are reserved for local members of the congregation who are paid next to nothing and continuously fed the line "you are not working for man but you are working for God". In other words, pies are built in the sky for the very members of their congregation who laboured to have those institutions in the first place.

It is disheartening and dejecting that ordinary members of the congregation are fed pie-in-the-sky and wealth-in-heaven nonsense, while the pastor and his cohorts do not live that same "theology", a "theology" that seeks to perpetuate a narrative of "do as I say and not as I do".

Money is not only generated by these institutions, Bowler (2013:44-46) notes that prosperity gospel gives rise to the law of faith that inevitably promotes the "cause-and-effect" relationship between a believer and God. This at times fuels a misguided belief that the blessings of the Lord are locked somewhere in heaven and that they can only be unlocked by what a believer

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<sup>5</sup> A term referring to small government-built houses that are given to the poor for free, as part of the government's Reconstruction, Development Programme (RDP)

puts in as offering, be it money or material benefit to the ministry and by extension to the pastor's fiefdom. According to Heuser (2016:2), "this theological construction of sowing and reaping imagined an intimate link between divine blessing and financial contributions to God and the church, it quantifies blessings by preaching that the more you sow the more you will reap".

Supposing that this teaching is correct, it begs the question whether the teaching and/or practice has any impact on the socio-economic status of the community or does it only benefit the pastor and his/her family?

Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:79) postulates that prosperity gossellers have a transactional rather than a sacrificial understanding of giving. According to him, the transactional understanding of giving views offerings and tithes as a means to entice God into blessing them. This particular method of giving is no different from the sales of indulgences in the Middle Ages where salvation was sold to whoever could afford it.

In agreeing with Asamoah-Gyadu, Salinas (2014:7) argues that prosperity gospel has changed the true meaning of salvation. To them:

salvation is material and not spiritual, it is to be free from having little to getting more. Hell is poverty and heaven is wealth...there are no demands for developing a Christ-like character, leaving behind worldly ways of life. There is no eternal punishment of sinners, no hope for an impending return of Christ. The only salvation offered by prosperity theology preachers is about getting wealthy. The saviour is an investment firm, the church is the banking venue and the preacher is your financial advisor. You save yourself depending on how much money you are able to give.

In fact, Maxwell (1998:360) observes that the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God teach Christians that they are freed by their giving and that blessings come only through giving love offerings and/or freewill offerings. Lee (2007:230) postulates that:

the prosperity movement introduced a new culture of giving which convinces Christians to view their financial support to the church as investment opportunities to sow their way out of debt to receive God's bountiful blessings. Under such an ideology, preachers train their members to applaud when it is time to collect offerings because God loves a cheerful giver.

Of interest is that while God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), the question that remains unanswered is whether that giving brings about equality between the rich and the poor, between the “haves” and the “have-nots”.

Now it is of critical importance to understand the community and the history of Mahikeng on which this study is focused. Before the dawn of democracy in South Africa, South Africa was divided into four provinces: the Cape Province, Natal Province, Free State Province and Transvaal Province. Apart from these provinces, homelands for indigenous Africans were also scattered throughout the country. Four of those homelands were said to be independent states created within the state. At that time Mahikeng fell under the control and administration of the “independent” Bophuthatswana Government. However, these independent states and all other homelands ceased to exist after 1994 and nine provinces were introduced, of which one is the North West and Mahikeng its capital city.

Geographically, Mahikeng is located in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality of the North West Province of the Republic of South Africa. It is approximately 160km south of the capital city of Botswana, Gaborone, and approximately 300km west of Pretoria.

The 2011 census of Statistics South Africa rate Mahikeng as the 24<sup>th</sup> densely populated municipality in South Africa, with 87.3% formal dwellings and 44.4% female-headed households. On the economic front, the general unemployment rate is at 35.7% and the youth unemployment rate is 47.1%. Households that have no income at all come to a shocking 17%. The highest number of households in Mahikeng, which accounts to 19%, have an income of between R9 601 and R19 600 per month.

Given this gloomy economic scenario, it is no wonder some residents here find themselves vulnerable to the lure that is best described by Heuser (2013:52) as the unnecessary emphasis on promises of instant material wealth that has fascinated the entire landscape of Christians, particularly those who flock to the charismatic movement.

In the same vein, Solomon (2017:58) is of the view that prosperity gospel serves as a consolation for the people and encouragement that life can get better. The poor abandon their mainline churches for Pentecostal churches because of their “practical nature” and readiness to address their bread and butter issues. Kroesbergen (2015:84) has observed that “prosperity gospel might be a genuine protest against certain tendencies in the mainline churches, such as to discredit prospering...the prosperity gospel might be a celebration of the dignity in pure, spontaneous religious impulses and the dignity in enjoying or wishing to enjoy the good things of life”.

One of the richest pastors in Africa and a prosperity gospeller of note, Nigerian David Oyedepo (2005:6), told his congregation:

Oh, I thank God for blessings, but God's ultimate is to make you a blessing. God wants to see you prosper! It gives Him great pleasure! God is excited when you prosper. What an encounter this will be for you! God will usher you into strange realms of prosperity, sorrow-free and God-given kingdom prosperity. God takes pleasure in your plenty! No father is happy to see his children lack. Why then do you think that your lack excites God.

In contrast, Adelaja (2008:148) argues that Christians must learn to wait on the Lord. Inasmuch as prayers are important, believers must allow themselves to be guided by the Lord. God is pleased by those who humble themselves before Him and see hope in Him. Adelaja's views are in line with the words of the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 40:31: "But those who wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint."

Witherington (2010:57) has a very strong view on this matter. He says:

Jesus has been used by affluent modern Christians to justify the lifestyles of the rich and famous. This is the same Jesus who said "Blessed are the poor" and warned "do not store up treasures on earth". Simple phrases like "You have not because you ask not" or "Ask and you shall receive" have been turned into mantras that are thought to produce nearly instant material benefits.

Magezi and Manzanga (2016:14) are in complete agreement with both Adelaja's (2008) and Witherington's (2010) views. They reason that Jesus Christ is not necessarily opposed to Christians being materially prosperous and enjoying a healthy life. Christ, however, cautions people not to store their treasure on earth where rust and moth destroy and where thieves can break in and steal.

In fact, a survey or analysis of the Bible will show that there is not a single chapter or even a verse for that matter that warns against the detrimental or negative spiritual effect of material poverty. There is, however, a multitude of texts in the Bible warning against the negative effect of wealth or the love of money. Togarasei (2015:120) postulates that:

Though earthly possessions are not evil, Jesus shows that they are dangerous. He describes them as 'unrighteous mammon' (Luke 16:9-11), they are a source of anxiety and worry (Matt 6:25-34) and a deception (Mark 4:19), they enslave (Matt 6:24) and they

also choke the Word (Mark4:10) and prevent people from seeking the Kingdom (Matt 6:33).

The afore-said must however be understood in its right perspective. I am in no way suggesting that the New Testament or Jesus Christ for that matter, is advocating poverty. In fact, it is Jesus who said “man shall not live by bread alone” (Luke 4:4). The flip side of this statement is that man indeed needs bread. He also taught His disciples to pray “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11).

Obedience and trust in the Lord runs throughout Scripture, both in the Old and the New Testament.

Isaiah 40:31 states:

But those who wait on the Lord, Shall renew their strength, They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Zulu (2015:32) is also in total support of this view. In fact, he avers that prosperity in itself does not negate the presence of suffering. People in good relationship with God may experience pain, suffering and want, but that does not mean that they are not blessed. In other words, inasmuch as it is a given that God is the one who blesses, it is completely irresponsible to expect that wealth can or will fall from heaven like manna. For even the Bible suggests that it is crucial that one works hard to attain the desired wealth. This is replicated in texts such as Proverbs 10:4 and Proverbs. 21:17 respectively:

He who has a slack hand becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent Makes rich.

He who loves pleasure will be A poor man, He who loves wine and oil Will not be rich.

For its part, the African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group (Wright *et al.*, 2010:100-101) records these points as their major concerns:

- Prosperity gospel enriches those who preach it, yet leaves multitudes of its audience no better off than before and also with the additional burden of disappointed hopes.
- Though it emphasises various alleged spiritual causes of poverty, it gives no serious attention to those causes that are economic or political.
- It tends to further victimise the poor by making them feel that their poverty is their own fault, whilst at the same time it fails to condemn those whose greed inflicts and perpetuates poverty on others.

In the simplest terms, the above-mentioned concerns indicate in no uncertain terms that the working group is of the opinion that prosperity gospel does not address in anyway the socio-economic situation of the poor.

Ukah (2013:145) concurs with the African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group. He puts it even more profoundly in that some founders of Pentecostal churches use prosperity gospel to transform their churches into economic and entrepreneurial fiefdoms, which are completely controlled by their families. Many pastors have in fact turned the message from the good news of salvation, the good news about Christ and His crucifixion, to good news about their personality, raising their ego and reducing Christ to a simple tool they use to lure people to their churches. Sermons are no longer Christo-centric, but puffed up motivational speeches that are ego-centric.

To this end, Salinas (2014:6) has observed that:

Prosperity Theology has dethroned Christ, it has removed Him from the right hand of the God and converted Him into a servant. He is not the Lord of the universe and the Head of the church anymore. He exists only to fulfil my dreams, to attend to my needs, to grant my wishes. He has no other purpose than to be ready to take our orders and to do exactly as we tell Him.

However Mbewe (2016:par 18) is quick to caution that Christians should never lose sight of the fact that it is Jesus Christ who is actually the mediator between man and God and all others who seek to claim that role are simply imposters and religious gangsters who must be rejected with the contempt that they deserve.

What Mbewe (2016) is trying to put across is that Jesus Christ is not only the mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), but He is also the sovereign Lord of the whole universe with limitless power and whose actions do not depend in any shape or form upon what humanity does or does not do. Salinas (2014:6) urges us that our prayer should never be “Jesus, I am sowing this much and you better give me back 100% times more”. Rather we should say “everything I have, everything I am, everything is yours, take it. Not my will but your will be done”.

These above-mentioned views are echoed by Lauterbach (2016:19) who notes that as a result prosperity-gospel young men and young women are able to rise in societal circles and amass wealth by making careers out of pastoral-ship. They and their ilk is what Greenway (1999:149) calls proselytisers. He goes on to say that:

Proselytism is different from evangelism in its character and methods. Proselytizers seek to win converts in order to glorify themselves and their group. Proselytizers use any method they can find to win converts, they may deceive them by telling them only part of the truth. They appeal to emotions and exploit muddled thinking...the common motives behind proselytism are money and the power to control others.

Lauterbach (2016) and Greenway (1999) therefore suggest that in an endeavour to achieve their selfish interests, these preachers are prone to elevate their Jesus Christ of experience at the expense of the Jesus Christ of Scripture. Their speeches or sermons are centralised around their personal encounter with God, more than Biblical and theological teachings.

The fact is, most of them lack theological education or training. Perhaps what is fuelling the status quo is that in most cases the leadership of these churches is not required to undergo any training or even have any particular qualification apart from proclaiming that they are born-again Christians who have been called into the ministry by God. Hence, the derogatory term “BO KE BIDITSWE”<sup>6</sup>.

The saddest part of this story or what seems to be aggravating the situation is the lack of a self-regulatory system in the charismatic world, where in most cases the pastor and his wife are the sole owners of the church and its assets. As a result, they are vested with the audacity of chasing away anyone who attempts to call them to order. In the very rare instances where such a pastor is expelled, he simply crosses the street and starts his own what-what international ministries and continues with his mischief.

Several authors and commentators are at odds with the hermeneutics of prosperity gospel. They argue that it leaves much to be desired. Sarles (1986:339) notes that the method prosperity gospel employs to interpret Biblical texts is highly subjective and arbitrary. Bible verses are quoted randomly and in abundance without paying attention to semantic nuances, literary or even historical context. The result of this interpretation is a bunch of ideas and principles based on the distortion of proper textual meaning. In agreement with Sarles, Salinas (2014:4) says in postmodern hermeneutics the preacher has control over the meaning. In the past the Bible would be consulted to ascertain what God seeks to tell us, since God is the author of the Bible. However, of late, we hear preachers' interpretation of a text.

This is exactly what Van der Walt (2008:210) decries. He says that “instead of rousing the members of the church and inspiring them to live positively for God, the barren sermons are

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<sup>6</sup> Meaning “the called”



only deepening their slumber. The church concerns itself too often with all sorts of trivialities, it majors in minors”.

Given the afore-going, Ocaña (2014) argues that in concrete terms prosperity gospel suggests the following: “(1). The Bible is not enough or sufficient as the authority in what regards faith, doctrine and praxis, (2) The word of God is not limited by the canon that is expressed in the scripture but goes beyond it and (3) God speaks today by other ways, supposedly a fresh voice which can in some cases be audible.”

What this means in essence is that Martin Luther’s *Sola Scriptura* is exchanged for “sola experience”. In most cases, prosperity gossellers seem to be driving a message that completely betrays the Pentecostal interpretation and understanding of the Bible. Spiritual issues are to a large degree disregarded in favour of material wealth. Mbewe (2014:17) rightly cautions that it is important to stick to the principles of *sola Scriptura* and avoid being what he calls “ecclesiastical witchdoctors”. He strongly believes that *sola Scriptura* is the only bolt that can totally lock out self-deluded shenanigans.

Robbins (2009:53) argues that the principal reason for the expansion of this gospel among those most disenfranchised by capitalism is its ability to create social cohesion with ease. This argument does not hold water, however, because (from the researcher’s personal observation) it creates divisions and cliques with ease in that the “haves” tend to associate with the “haves” to the exclusion of the “have-nots”. Even Lindhardt (2009:56) notes that “prosperous members who donate large amounts of money and lend their cars for evangelization trips also hold leading positions within the movement. During fellowships they are seated up front and in more comfortable chairs than ordinary members”.

The rapid and exceptional growth of prosperity gospel in South Africa has caught the attention of the government. This necessitated an official investigation into certain questionable practices of Christian churches by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. The government announced this investigation on 20 August 2015 and described it as an investigative study into the commercialisation of religion. At that time, the chairperson of the commission, Mkhwanazi-Xalavu (2015), said: “We are launching an investigative study on the commercialisation of religion and the abuse of people’s belief system in terms of when these institutions are being run, how are they being run, where is their funding going into, who collects how much and what do they do with the money, where does the money eventually go to, what are the governing principles that are there.”

It goes without saying that if prosperity gospel was indeed contributing to the enhancement of the quality of life of the poor and the eradication of poverty and lack, it would not have attracted the negative attention of the government as it seems from the afore-going paragraph.

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities was commissioned in 2016 to:

- investigate and understand further issues surrounding the commercialisation of religion and traditional healing;
- identify the causes underlying the commercialisation of religion and traditional healing;
- understand the deep societal thinking that makes some members of our society vulnerable and gullible to views expressed and actions during religious ceremonies;
- assess the religious framework and its relevance to deal with the prevailing religious challenges;
- formulate findings and recommendations that address the status quo on commercialised religion and traditional healing;
- investigate what the spread of religious institutions in the country is;
- establish what various miraculous claims are made by religious leaders and traditional healers regarding the powers to heal and do miracles; and
- assess what form of legal framework regulates the religious and traditional sectors currently. (CRL Rights Commission, 2016:3-4)

Perhaps it is important to concede that not all of the above goals are relevant or related to prosperity gospel, but the fact is it is its precipitous growth that necessitated the investigation in the first place.

Mbewe (2016:par. 1-4) applauds the stance taken by the government because according to him, the church has done nothing to stop the rot that is taking place within its own ranks. He holds the strong view that the fountain of this rot is the charismatic movement that has failed to regulate who should become a pastor. If the state does not intervene, this growing monster of charlatans who purports to be men of God will continue to consume the little that is left of the reputation of the church.

Mboya (2016:36) is of the view that prosperity gospel goes against one of the basic principles of *mission Dei*, which is *koinonia* in that those who allegedly receive material wealth as a blessing from God tend to group and classify themselves at a higher social status than those who have not received wealth. The questions that beg answering is whether the latter do not have the blessing of God? Does this global phenomenon that conditions God's blessings on material and monetary donation and salvation on excessive giving in support of the church, and by extension to the pastor and his family, make any contribution to the transformation of the socio-economic situation of its adherents and or the community at large in Mahikeng? Is prosperity gospel a real true gospel or a "get-rich-quick" scheme for some, clothed as a gospel?

## **1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The main research question is: Does prosperity gospel make any contribution to the socio-economic transformation of its adherents and the community of Mahikeng or simply advocating consumerism values?

Other questions that also require clarity are:

- What is the history and teachings of prosperity gospel?
- What is the experience of the community of Mahikeng with regards to prosperity gospel?
- What is the socio-economic situation in Mahikeng?
- How does the *missio Dei* address the issues of poverty and lack?
- What is the evaluation of prosperity gospel with regards to transforming the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng?
- What is a preliminary answer to the missiological challenge posed by prosperity gospel?

## **1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.3.1 AIM**

The aim of this research is to evaluate missiologically whether prosperity gospel has made any contribution to the partaking in the *missio Dei* and the socio-economic transformation of its adherents and the community of Mahikeng in general.

### **1.3.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this research are:

- to study and analyse the history and teachings of prosperity gospel;
- to analyse and evaluate the experience of the Christian community of Mahikeng with regards to prosperity gospel;
- to analyse the socio-economic situation in Mahikeng;
- to broadly expound on the *missio Dei*;
- to evaluate prosperity gospel with regards to the transformation of the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng; and
- to provide missiological/Biblical guidelines to address the challenges emanating from prosperity gospel.

### **1.4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT**

When churches and Christians understand the Biblical providence of God, they will fully participate in the *missio Dei*, embrace Biblical stewardship and the problems of lack, sickness and poverty in Mahikeng will be addressed Biblically.

### **1.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY**

This study is crucial in academic research, because in the past most scholars in this field of research concentrated and focused only on the origin of prosperity gospel and none has studied its contribution to the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng. Secondly, in this study the researcher evaluated the contribution of this gospel in the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng and whether it empowers its adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei* and alleviate poverty.

Effort was not spared in critically evaluating how God's Word is manipulated and distorted in an endeavour to exploit unsuspecting people in Africa (Mahikeng), as observed by the African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group:

We are distressed that much use of the Bible is seriously distorted, selective and manipulative. We call for more careful exegesis of texts and a more holistic bible hermeneutic, and we denounce the way that many texts are twisted out of context and

used in ways that contradict some plain Bible teachings...we deplore the fact that in many churches where the prosperity teaching is dominant, the Bible is rarely preached in any careful or explanatory way, and the way of salvation, including repentance from sin and saving faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, and hope of eternal life is misrepresented and substituted by material wellbeing.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

According to Newman (1997:38), methodology refers to the techniques and systems that a particular discipline use or employ to manipulate data and acquire certain knowledge. For the purpose of this research, the method of research consisted of both a literature study and an empirical survey.

### **1.6.1 LITERATURE STUDY**

A literature study is earmarked at contributing towards a clear understanding and perception of the nature and the meaning of the identified problem. De Vos (1998:64-68) is of the opinion that a literature study affords the researcher comprehensive background information on the subject at hand in order to undertake meaningful and dependable research. In the process of a literature study some crucial information may come to the fore that indicates that the subject was researched before. Fouche and Delport (2005:123) note that a researcher can plan in a scientifically valid, significant and meaningful way after having performed a proper and relevant literature study on the topic.

There is a large amount of literature on prosperity gospel and there is also literature on Pentecostalism and charismatic churches, but there is no literature on the possible contribution of prosperity gospel on the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng (cf. Nexus research report, 2017).

As indicated earlier, there is a great deal of literature concerning and around the issues of prosperity gospel. In support of the prosperity gospel, Walker (2007:337-338) argues that Christians as children of God are little gods who possess all or at least some of the attributes of God. So as little gods, they have all the right to emulate God who spoke all things into existence. This means that their words command power and whatever they speak will occur.

In not so many words, Oyedepo (2008:119) seems to share Walker's views. He asserts that "why must you be a tither and the devil is destroying your life with trials? Why must you be an investor in the kingdom and remain a beggar in the world? If you are genuinely serving God, then tell Him! Get on the testimony line and God will have no choice but to respond".

Quite interestingly a founder of a Ghana based International Central Gospel Church, Mensa Otabil (Ngong 2010:59), believes almost the opposite. Unlike his contemporaries, he holds the view that God created man in His image and empowered him to be creative in order to achieve a good life. For his stance, Otabil cites Genesis 1:28 that man was created to “be fruitful, to multiply, replenish the earth, subdue the earth and have dominion over the earth”. This is in stark contrast with those who believe in miraculous intervention.

Prosperity gossellers Bible verses (which will not be interpreted here, but in the subsequent chapters), such as the following, to justify their doctrine:

3 John 1:2

Beloved, I pray that you may **prosper** in all things And be in health Just as your souls prospers.

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 power to get **wealth**, That he may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Kalu (2002:54) is emphatic that the socio-economic struggle of believers is as a result of evil. He continues as follows:

Going through life is like a spiritual warfare and religious ardour may appear very materialistic as people strive to preserve their material sustenance in the midst of the machinations of pervasive evil forces. Behind it is a strong sense of the moral and spiritual moorings of life. It is an organic worldview in which the three dimensions of space are bound together, the invisible and the visible world interweave. Nothing happens in the visible world which has not been predetermined in the invisible realm.

In contrast, Van der Walt (2011:474) asserts that “we might add here that economic prosperity and human welfare are not necessarily identical. More income does not necessarily mean more happiness. Christ warns against the abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15). Humans cannot live by bread alone, but are dependent on the word of God (Mat.4:4). A full stomach and an empty heart will not bring happiness”. He (2011:490) goes on to note that in 1 Timothy 6:17-19

the Apostle Paul cautions rich people against being too arrogant and placing all their hopes in their wealth and not in God. Paul advises them to be generous and willing to share.

Green (2010:128) puts it more strikingly when he states that:

God is certainly a God of prosperity but definitely not a God of consumerist values and materialism. The materialistic orientation of the prosperity gospel means that the triumphs, glory and honour of the cross are emphasised to the neglect of its representation of pain and suffering. If triumph is always assured, it becomes nearly impossible to handle failure, defeat and suffering.

Green has the support of Golo (2013:375) who says that although there is nothing inherently wrong with wealth and prosperity, he cannot suggest that poverty be acceptable as Christian faithfulness. He adds that inasmuch as a “poverty” gospel cannot be accepted, because of the constraints it places on humanity, any unbalanced and uncontrolled prosperity gospel is equally unacceptable. Zulu (2015:32) also supports this view. In fact, he argues further that prosperity in itself does not negate the presence of suffering. People in good relationship with God may experience pain, suffering and want, but that on its own does not mean that they are not blessed.

Marshall (1991:157) puts it more profoundly when he says:

Are we to say that God intends His people to suffer? Hard though it may seem, the answer to this question is affirmative. It was God’s will that Christ should suffer to redeem His people, and Christ was obedient to that will. To be sure, the need arose only because of the evil in the world, but in a world where evil exists, its defeat is possible only through suffering...It is right to say that God’s will for us is suffering because there is no other way that evil can be overcome. When we suffer, it is not a sign of God’s lack of love or concern for us...those who suffer can confidently place themselves in the care of God.

Golo (2013:375-376) adds another dimension to the debate by arguing that these churches emphasising and equating salvation to wealth and prosperity goes hand in hand with the African primal worldview and cosmology and represents the sustenance of its imagination and emphasis of the here and now. It is of paramount importance to note that a people’s worldview creates or institutes a lens or a window through which they interpret the world around them. In fact Mbewe (2016:par. 3) postulates that “what the modern charismatic movement in Africa has done is to simply take this entire erroneous superstructure of African religious worldview and

baptise it with wrongly applied Bible verses and Christian language. The only difference is that the layer of dead ancestors and evil spirits is now one hotchpotch of confusion”.

While agreeing with both Golo and Mbewe, Buys (2017:1) seems to be of a stronger view. He says: “It has often happened that church leaders draw from pagan and occult ideas and ‘baptise’ it with Bible verses pulled out of context, leading to teachings that may eventually produce stumbling blocks in the progress of Christ’s kingdom.”

Besides the afore-going, this researcher also draws from the work of some reputable authors who speak to the issue of prosperity gospel, either in support or in opposition. The principal objective is to understand whether prosperity gospel addresses the socio-economic situation of the community and whether it alleviates poverty. Some of those sources are:

1. Pastoral leadership among African-led Pentecostal churches in the context of British society (Adu, 2015)
2. A Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Spirit, Scripture and Community (Archer, 2009)
3. Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Bosch, 2011)
4. Dictionary of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Movements (Burgess, Gary & Patrick, 1988)
5. Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project (Caputo, 1987)
6. The Laws of Prosperity (Copeland, 1974)
7. Perspectives of Syncretism and its Modern Trends: A case of Christians and African Religions (Ezenwake & Kanu, 2012)
8. Contemporary State of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria (Folarin, 2007)
9. The challenge of money and wealth in some East African Pentecostal Churches (Gathogo, 2011)
10. Prosperity Prophets (Gibson, 2006)
11. I believe in Visions: The fascinating personal story of a man whose life and ministry were dramatically influenced by visions of Jesus (Hagin, 1989)



12. The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics (Jones, 2014)
13. The Prosperity Gospel and Economic Prosperity: Race, Class, Giving and Voting (Koch, 2009)
14. Charismatic Chaos (MacArthur, 1992)
15. Moral exemplarity and relational atonement: toward a Wesleyan approach to discipleship (Maddix, 2015)
16. The most important person on earth (Munroe, 2007)
17. Voices of the poor: Crying out for change (Narayan-Parker, 2000)
18. One for all: The Tense of the Atonement (Le Poidevin, 2016)
19. Behind Benny Hinn's Healing Crusades (Shaffer, 2009)
20. Why, where and when to give? (Wommack, 2011)

### **1.6.2 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

The researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative research on the possible contribution of prosperity gospel on the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng. Anderson (2002:10) argues that this research method is a blueprint for research or the initial planning of a research. It is arrangement and preparation of conditions for collection and analysis of data. Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3) believe that "qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, consisting of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible by using interviews, conversations, photographs and recordings".

In other words, the main strength of qualitative research is its ability to birth knowledge about new phenomenon and complex interrelations that have not yet been researched thoroughly or at all.

The study design was exploratory and descriptive so that the researcher could gain valuable insight into the possible contribution of prosperity gospel on the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

### 1.6.2.1 POPULATION

The target population for this study was church leaders from different churches, people who have encountered prosperity gospel either positively or negatively and church members. The researcher also interviewed until saturation point as the outcome was the same, ordinary Christians of Mahikeng who may have encountered this phenomenon either positively or negatively. Ordinary church members were also requested to complete a questionnaire that sought to establish their views on prosperity gospel.

It should be recognised that it is the church leaders who are entrusted to guide a congregation and/or community in the implementation of church policy, but more importantly to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and invite the community to fully participate in the *mission Dei*. The researcher believes that views sourced from at least three to saturation of Pentecostal/charismatic church leaders would suffice, as they would give an overview of their churches' position with regards to prosperity gospel.

Given that this was a case study to evaluate the contribution of prosperity gospel to the socio-economic transformation of its adherents, the researcher interviewed at least four individuals to saturation point as the outcome was the same for those who have had a direct encounter with this gospel to solicit their views on the impact that prosperity gospel had on their lives and its possible contribution to the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

The views of ordinary church attendees from different churches were also sought. At least 100 church attendees were requested to participate through questionnaires. This number<sup>7</sup> is considered reasonable enough to sample the views of the Pentecostal/charismatic community.

### 1.6.2.2 SAMPLING

According to Parasuraman, Grewal and Krishnan (2007:356), sampling is the collection of a segment and or portion of the total number of units of interest for the ultimate purpose of being able to draw general conclusions about the entire body of units. Similarly, Sharpe *et al* (2011:33) postulate that sampling or samples are very important in research, because it would not be possible to consult the entire population. They go on to say that statistics and or information sourced from the sample will accurately estimate the corresponding parameters.

Church leaders and those who had a direct encounter with prosperity gospel were directly identified and interviewed. As for the remaining 100 members of the Pentecostal/charismatic churches, the researcher used a simple random sampling because Kerlinger (1986:110)

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<sup>7</sup> Twenty five per church of the four church leaders interviewed

advises that random sampling is a method of drawing a segment of a population so that each member of the population stands an equal opportunity of being selected. For his part Davies (2007:58) agrees that the notion of random sampling is at the centre of all scientific research. This is the case because it affords every member of the population an equal status of being included in the sample.

### **1.6.2.3 MEASURING TOOL**

Data for this study were collected by means of both a questionnaire and interviews. Although all interviews were recorded, the researcher made personal notes of very important points to ensure that they could be revisited if need be. To maximise proper understanding and eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding, the researcher reread every question to the interviewee.

It is worth noting that the researcher employed great care in the development of the questionnaire to ensure that the wording is clear, simple and easy to understand. This was done with great care to ensure that in the process the primary objective of the questionnaire was not lost.

In line with the topic, demographics as well as the living standard measure (LSM) were included in the questionnaire. According to Summers and Heston (1995:1-4), the term "Living Standard Measure refers to the levels of material well-being of people and countries".

### **1.6.2.4 PROCEDURE**

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from church leaders in respect to members of their congregations. A consent form was designed by the researcher and every participant was required to sign one. All participants were told that they could at any time opt out of completing the questionnaire or the interview.

## **1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher adhered to the following ethical considerations:

### **1.7.1 ESTIMATED RISK LEVEL**

The estimated risk level was minimal. No harm was caused to any participant.

### **1.7.2 WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF PARTICIPANTS**

- Participants were expected to observe ethical considerations, such as confidentiality.

- Participants were expected to be prompt and to respond to all questions.
- Designated or elected participants, i.e. those who have had direct encounters with prosperity gospel and church leaders, were expected to respond to questions through an interview process which took less than one hour.
- Selected church members were expected to answer questions by completing a questionnaire, which was expected to take thirty minutes.

### 1.7.3 RISKS AND PRECAUTIONS

Possible Risks	Precautions
Physical stress due to tiredness or fatigue	Short comfort breaks were provided.
Social injury or prejudice due to failure to honour and protect the confidentiality of responses by participants that hold leadership positions.	The participants' identity was kept confidential and the final document does not reveal the names of the participants. Information is saved on the researcher's computer, which is password protected.
Legal wrangling due to breach of ethical considerations, such as breach and violation of confidentiality.	Before the beginning of each session and/or meeting participants were informed of the ethical considerations and they were required to sign informed consent.

### 1.7.4 BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Direct benefits for participants

Throughout the research process participants acquired and gained knowledge that they did not have previously. The research offered an opportunity for induced introspection, which particularly benefitted the church leaders as they become more effective and efficient in their work.

- Indirect benefits for society at large or for the researchers/institution

The products of the research contributed to the existing body of knowledge for utilisation in building proper and exemplary church leadership. It has provided the prospect for church leaders to ponder and improve on their leadership qualities, character, skills and actions. The church benefitted from the increased skills and knowledge obtained from the study by the leaders and members.

#### **1.7.5 RISK/BENEFIT RATIO ANALYSIS**

The information collected has benefitted the church, because leaders and pastors have access to developmental knowledge which can improve their leadership character and actions. The risk to the participants was very low to non-existent and the benefits of having exemplary leaders outweighs the risk of discomfort. Therefore, the projected risk was very low, almost not existing and the benefits 100% percent.

#### **1.7.6 EXPERTISE, SKILLS AND LEGAL COMPETENCIES**

The research demanded communication skills, presentation skills, experience in conducting research and knowledge on the subject of leadership.

The researcher has these important skills for implementing the research having conducted interviews for a Master of Arts in Missiology degree, which was completed successfully using qualitative method of data collection.

#### **1.7.7 FACILITIES**

Church buildings of the selected churches were used to meet with the church leaders and the members, at different times. The participants were accustomed to using the church facilities, creating a comfortable environment. The venues were within the areas the participants normally travel to for fellowship.

#### **1.7.8 LEGAL AUTHORISATION**

Legal authorisation was requested from the church board or committee or authorised person, through the pastor, for the participation of the pastor and the members as well as the use of the venue.

#### **1.7.9 GOODWILL PERMISSION/CONSENT**

Written agreement was obtained from the church leaders identified to participate in the research.

### **1.7.10 INFORMED CONSENT**

The researcher contacted the participants and explained the following:

- That the nature of the research was academic
- The aims and objectives
- What was expected of the participants
- The benefits of the research
- The expected time for the research
- The confidentiality level
- Information about the way the outcomes of the research would be handled
- Their option to withdraw from the research and that there would be no consequences if they withdrew
- The consent form that they were required to sign

### **1.7.11 INCENTIVES/REMUNERATION**

Given the short duration of this study and the fact that the study was not funded or sponsored, the study did not have any provision for incentives and/or remuneration. Secondly, the exchange of money was thought to be a catalyst for adversely influencing the respondents or infusing bias.

### **1.7.12 PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

All data collected were treated as confidential and were viewed by the researcher only. Anonymity was ensured in that no reference to the identity or place of residence of the participants was made during the interview and in the process of transcribing the data. Participants' names are not revealed in the final documents. Participants' identity is coded. Data is kept in a locked cabinet. Electronic documents and transcripts are secured by a password known only by the researcher.

### **1.7.13 MANAGEMENT, STORAGE AND DESTRUCTION OF DATA**

- **Data management:**

Data was collected and stored by the researcher. Hard copies are kept in a locked cabinet. Interviews were recorded on an audio tape with permission from the participants and the information stored on a password protected computer, both the audio and transcribed data.

➤ **Storage and destruction of data:**

Both the hard copies and electronic data will be kept in a locked cabinet for a period of a year and then destroyed afterwards.

## **1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION**

The chapters of this research are as following:

### **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

This chapter served as an introduction to the study. It outlines the subject as well as the reasons for the study. It also raises some assumptions that form the basis and foundation of the research.

### **Chapter 2 – The history and teachings of prosperity gospel**

The chapter unpacks the history of prosperity gospel: the time and place of origin as well as the major teachings of this gospel and some of their Biblical references.

### **Chapter 3 – Experiences of the Christian community of Mahikeng with regards to prosperity gospel**

This chapter provides the views the research solicited, be they positive or negative, of the people who have had a direct encounter with prosperity gospel.

### **Chapter 4 – Brief analysis of the socio-economy of Mahikeng**

This chapter briefly looks into the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng and whether prosperity gospel has changed it. Mahikeng was the focal point of the study.

### **Chapter 5 – The *missio Dei*?**

This chapter forms the basis of the next chapter in that the research first established or unpacked the mission of God (*missio Dei*). What is it that God seeks and expects from His children and how are they to participate in His mission?

## **Chapter 6 – Evaluation of prosperity gospel and its impact on the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng**

Having established the mission of God, this chapter then evaluates whether prosperity gospel has contributed to the socio-economic welfare of Mahikeng and whether it is a different gospel from the gospel of Jesus Christ or whether it is a muddy mixture of both.

## **Chapter 7 – Summary, findings and recommendations**

This chapter presents a summary of the study, its findings and possible recommendations.



# **CHAPTER 2 THE HISTORY AND TEACHINGS OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapter briefly introduced prosperity gospel in line with the ultimate objective of this study, which is a missiological evaluation of prosperity gospel's impact on the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

Many pastors, preachers and church leaders lay claim to the fact they have received personal revelations from God and that they are engaged in a divinely ordered mission from God to preach and teach about prosperity. For those who do not claim to have regular conversations with God, rely on the idea that they have been "divinely called" to proclaim a gospel whose cause is to release God's people from the bondage of poverty, sickness and depravation. According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2005b:10-12):

Faith preachers during services or Christian gatherings habitually claim that they receive a special visitation, visions and supernatural revelations from God and that through the divine visitation God commands them to foretell the future to the audiences...the major element of these prophecies is the claim that if the audiences give their money to God by giving to the church, their prayers will be answered and their financial problems in the world of growing human needs will be solved.

Adherents of this gospel can be found or identified as Pentecostals, evangelicals, charismatics or simply just Christians. However, it is of paramount importance to point out that not all Pentecostals, not all evangelicals and not all charismatics subscribe to this gospel, but it is found in the whole spectrum of Christianity.

This chapter investigates the history and the teachings of prosperity gospel. As indicated earlier, though the adherents of this gospel are found in the broader spectrum of the Christian faith, it is widely argued that it has its roots in the Pentecostal and charismatic movement.

## **2.2 HISTORY OF PENTECOSTALISM**

Podolinska (2017:147) notes that the Pentecostal movement originates from the Greek word *Pentekosta*, which describes the 50-day period between the Easter weekend and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Act 2:1-4:

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Podolinska's definition is in line with the views of Asamoah-Gyadu (2005b:11-12) that Pentecostal movement is

a Christian group that emphasises salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit in which pneumatic phenomena, including speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, healings and miracles in general, are perceived as standing in historical continuity with the experience of the early church as found especially in the Acts of the Apostles, are sought, accepted values and encourage members as signifying the presence of God and experience of His Spirit.

LeMarquand (2012:78) finds it difficult to separate Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement, because they in essence originate from the same movement though they have slightly distinctive manifestations in their theologies and social formations. The Pentecostal churches emanated from Western missionaries who were inspired by the holiness movement that originated in the Azusa Street revival.

The first meeting of what was to be later called the Pentecostal movement was held in 1906 in an old dilapidated building that formerly housed the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Theron (2011:154) notes that the building was located in downtown business section, far from the residential area and as such it was ideal for the all-night gatherings. The other important thing about the state of the building was that it did not have the intimidating stained-glass trappings that most churches of the time had and so the poor felt completely welcome and comfortable there.

The stained-glass trappings of churches were considered intimidating in that they were associated with the rich and famous, making the poor feel out of place in that kind of environment.

William Seymour who is widely considered the founder or one of the founders of Pentecostalism was the son of a former slave who moved to Los Angeles in 1906. There, in an abandoned and dilapidated African Methodist Episcopal Church in Azusa Street, he opened a new ministry. Robeck (2006:66) relates that prior to the revival itself a prayer group, which included Seymour, had organised a ten-day prayer and fasting period during which their focus was studying and

internalising Acts 2:1-4, praying every single evening that they would have the same experience as described in the text. They did indeed have the same experience and according to Koch (2009:4), this marked the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement. He goes on to say that “Pentecostalism included those denominations and independent congregations that extended the Holiness claim to sanctification even further, arguing that individuals are in need of a ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’. As evidence of this spiritual baptism, adherents looked for signs, including the gifts of prophecy, healing and most notably tongues”.

Smith (2000:55-56) argues that the Pentecostal movement undoubtedly brought a renewed emphasis on and respect for the Holy Spirit to the universal church. He adds that it is pointless to deny that God has greatly used this movement to touch humanity in South America, Asia, Africa and the rest of the world. For his part, Archer (2009:113) insists that the drive of Pentecostalism is to enable Christians to eclipse modernity with the whole aim and purpose of returning to the pre-modern era in which the supernatural was more normal than abnormal. His stance and description of Pentecostal theology is crystal clear when he says that it is “an eschatological story of God’s involvement in the restoration of the Christian community and God’s dramatic involvement in both reality and the Pentecostal community”.

The rapid growth of the Pentecostal movement made a serious impact on Christianity. Anderson (1999:19) cites the well-known statistician of Christianity, David Barrett, as estimating that the worldwide figure of Pentecostals is likely to rise to over 1.1 billion by 2025. Anderson goes on to say that as a result of this forecast, Pentecostalism is fast becoming the dominant and prevailing expression of Christianity and the most peculiar religious phenomenon in the world. He (1999:21) then indicates that “in recent years, the greatest quantitative growth of Pentecostalism has been in sub-Saharan Africa, South East Asia, South Korea and especially Latin America, where the growth has been so phenomenal that scholars are asking whether the whole continent is turning Pentecostal”.

In agreement, Sounders (2011:30) suggests that:

Pentecostals have long believed in gifts of the Holy Spirit, gifts that included speaking in tongues, the exorcism of demons and faith healing. Although Pentecostalism was once shunned by mainline evangelicals and fundamentalist Christians for their beliefs, it is now widely accepted. Pentecostalism’ appeal has always been in its gifts, which have provided physical, manifest evidence of God’s presence and have provided key benefits to its believers.

Still on this subject, De Gruchy (1995:85) postulates that though Pentecostalism originated in America in 1906, the process that heralded its introduction in South Africa started in Wakkerstroom in Johannesburg with the introduction of the Zion movement. In fact, the Zionist movement had also started in America by John Alexander Dowie. Cochrane (1994:214) reports that Dowie was very flamboyant and a staunch healing evangelist who was more focused on a healing ministry. Zionism was brought to South Africa by Johannes B uchler in 1895, who later became disillusioned with Dowie, resigned and went back to America.

B uchler was part of the Azusa Street revival in 1906 and returned to South Africa in 1908 and introduced Pentecostalism in South Africa by establishing the Apostolic Faith Mission. This congregation (Apostolic Faith Mission) strongly believed in the spirit baptism and was multi-racial in its composition. However, its multi-racial composition came to an abrupt end in 1957 following the gazetting of the so-called “church clause” of the then Native Laws Amendment Bill.

The ceasing of the multiracial nature and composition of the Apostolic Faith Mission was in line with the Separate Amenities Act of 1953, which was part of the grand introduction of apartheid and racial segregation in South Africa following the victory of the National Party in 1948 under the leadership of Daniel Francois Malan, who incidentally was a Protestant cleric.

Koch (2009:4) notes that during the 1940s and 1950s roving Pentecostal preachers, who laid emphasis on the gift of healing, emerged. It is recorded that though the Pentecostal denomination did not disagree with these roving preachers on a theological level, they felt a need to distance themselves from the controversies and scandals that were following these roving preachers. Following this approach of the Pentecostal denominations, the healing ministries began to disappear.

### **2.2.1 NEO-PENTECOSTALISM OR CHARISMATIC**

Following the disappearance of some of these healing ministries, the 1960s saw the birth of what was to be known as the charismatic movement or neo-Pentecostalism. The term charismatic derives from the Greek word *charisma* which refers to spiritual gifts. Pearl and Davies (1980:vii) postulate that the link between the Greek word *charisma* and the charismatic movement is found in the emphasis that the movement places on a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit as well as the variety of spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit assigns to individuals. For his part Faricy (1983:91) notes that the charismatic movement denotes a movement within historic churches that manifest itself in the practice of praying for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the execution of the charisma, be it prophesy, speaking in tongues, praying for the sick or any other miraculous gifts.

It is thus important to know that the charismatics are the offshoots of Pentecostalism. They do however differ slightly, particularly in terms of Spirit baptism as well as ecclesiastically. Jentile (2016:22) observes that:

Pentecostals subscribe to a work of grace subsequent to conversion in which Spirit baptism is evidence by glossolalia<sup>8</sup>. Charismatics however do not always advocate either the necessity of a second work of grace or the evidence of glossolalia as an affirmation of Spirit baptism...Pentecostals describe those participating in classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Church of God in Christ etc. Charismatics would characterise persons outside these classical Pentecostal denominations whether they are within mainline denominations or are part of an independent group.

Anderson (2002:167) strongly believes that the charismatic movement is not fundamentally different from other Holy Spirit movements that placed emphasis on prophetic healing and preceded it in the African Initiated Churches (AIC). He in fact believes that the charismatic movement is a continuation of those movements in a rather different context. Omenyo (2002:252) is of the opinion that charismatic churches are a classic example of unique modern Christian expression of Christianity, because of its ability to adapt very well to the African context. The charismatic churches play a leading role in redefining African Christianity in terms of African culture. Omenyo (2002:268) also cites Akrong as saying: "The power centre of African Christianity is the dynamism of the Charismatic movement because it has helped redefine African Christianity in terms of African culture as a religion of salvation that can deal with all the peculiar salvation concerns defined by African traditional religion and culture."

In the same vein, Smith (2000:130-131) believes that much could be learned from the charismatic movement and especially with regard to total worship. He is of the view that the charismatics aim at a total involvement of every believer and openness to God at the deepest of one's being. Secondly, is their total commitment to the ministry as they believe that every believer must be harnessed for service to the Lord. Smith concludes that though the charismatic movement has its flaws, it has been a great blessing to the cause of Jesus Christ.

Omenyo (2002:266) explains that charismatic churches have gained significant growth in Africa because of their response to issues raised by the African primal worldview, which includes problems of evil and afflictions. This has led them to embrace issues like healing, deliverance, miracles and prosperity. This view is in line with Cox (1995:258-259) who notes that:

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<sup>8</sup> Speaking in tongues

A new and powerful expression of human spirituality and morality is also appearing in Africa. The indigenous churches draw on the past to prepare people for the future. They are not burgeoning just because they help people to reclaim ancient spiritual resources that seemed lost. They are growing because they help people apply those resources in a new and bewildering context...instead of wasting their money on expensive night clubs and cheap gin, the young people could dance and vent their pain and frustration at church...these churches give people a sense of dignity, a place in a community of friends which often stands as a surrogate for an extended family fractured by mobility and change, and the conviction that human beings are important and that whatever the sinister powers may try to do to them, they have a powerful cosmic ally and a secure standing in God's eye.

On the other hand, Dovlo (1998:65) notes that there is serious criticism levelled against the charismatics, criticism that emanates from the charismatics' claim of being "born-again" and the spiritual arrogance that goes with that claim. However, Pretorius (2002:60-61) is of the view that Christian spirituality is articulated differently according to the interpretation of Scripture within the different groups of the Christian tradition. As a matter of fact, charismatic spirituality will have a character of its own that signifies and/or denotes Christlikeness and relationship with God. He goes on to argue that charismatic spirituality is centred on the model of spirit-Christology.

Gadama (2015:41) says because of their spirituality, it is common to hear charismatic members in their testimonies pointing out that the movement has helped them solve many of their challenges, be it health-related matters or even financial. Some believed that they were in lack in one or more areas of their lives, but received what they sought soon after joining this movement.

### **2.3 HISTORY OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Stone and Duke (2006:72) postulate that in Greek the word *gospel* means "a public announcement of glad tidings", which may mean the news of a birth in a royal family, a peace treaty or even a victory at war. On the other hand, Ott, Strauss and Tennent (2010:96) elucidate that the gospel is a message of God's grace and the liberty that proclaims, declares and asserts what God has done and continues to do for mankind.

According to the Oxford advanced learner's dictionary (Turnbull, 2010:2332), prosperity is defined as a state of being successful especially in the accumulation of wealth. The Merriam Webster dictionary (2016) calls prosperity the condition of being successful or thriving,

especially in economic terms. Summing up the views expressed by Turnbull and the Merriam Webster dictionary and for the purpose of this study, prosperity can be defined as the accrual of wealth, material substances and good health. At times this teaching is based on an individual's giving power to the church and by extension to the pastor. This giving is mainly divided into two categories. Firstly, believers are encouraged to give 10% of their salaries and/or any income to the church as some sort of protection from daily challenges. Specifically, Malachi 3:10-12 is used to advance this notion that if a believer complies, then "God will rebuke the devourer".

Secondly, believers are also taught to bring offerings or seed to the church, with the understanding that it will be multiplied and returned to the giver. According to Osteen (2004:250):

If we want to reap good things, we too, must sow some good seeds. Notice, we reap what we sow. If you want to reap happiness, you have to sow some happiness seeds by making other people happy. If you want to reap financial blessings, you must sow financial seeds in the lives of others. If you want to reap friendship, you should sow a seed and be a friend. A seed always has to lead.

Oyedepo (2007:200) is in agreement. He is of the view that when a believer gives, he does not necessarily give away his substance, but is giving his way out of poverty.

From the afore-mentioned definitions of Turnbull (2010) and the Merriam Webster dictionary (2016), it is safe to assume that prosperity gospel is a message that links Christ, the kingdom of God and the accumulation of wealth and/or placing believers in a condition of thriving economically. In other words, prosperity gospel seeks to marry the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God with material wealth. According to Adeleye (2012:85):

The prosperity gospel focuses primarily on material possessions, physical well-being, and success in life: which includes abundant financial resources, good health, clothes, housing, cars, promotion at work, success in business as well as other endeavours of life. The extent of material acquisition and well-being is often equated with God's approval.

Now the origin of prosperity gospel or the faith movement, as it was known then, is accredited to Essek William Kenyon who was born in 1867 and died in 1948. According to Phillips (2015:11), Kenyon started as a member of the Methodist Church and later pastored and/or ministered several Baptist churches. In 1892 he enrolled at the Emerson College of Oratory, which was well known for its emphasis on the metaphysical school of thought and also taught the

transcendental meditations. It is widely believed that it was the teachings of this college that gave birth to Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science organisation which taught the mind science.

Farah (1980:13) notes that "from Kenyon comes a specific strand of religious humanism that is developed by the word of faith theology. It has been developed into a form of charismatic humanism. The result is a disproportionate emphasis on the present world, where revelation knowledge becomes the new hermeneutical principle".

In agreement with Farah, Walton (2009:97) postulates that given the fact that Kenyon was born in 1867, during the fast expansion of industrialisation revolution, his health and wealth inclination makes him a clear product of his time. This is so in that at the time the cultural atmosphere was one of greed, despair and anxiety.

Phillips (2015:27) cites Kenyon in one of his books, *Two Kinds of Faith*, as having taught:

The believer does not need to ask the Father to heal him when he is sick, because surely He hath borne our sickness and carried our disease, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. God laid our diseases on Jesus. Isaiah 53:10 states that it pleased Jehovah to make Him sick with our sickness so that by His stripes we are healed. If we are healed, then we do not need to pray for our healing. All we need to do is rebuke the enemy in Jesus' name, order him to leave our bodies and thank the Father for perfect healing. It is all so simple.

For Sounders (2011:29) the birth of prosperity gospel can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in North America, when the phenomenon of advocating the power of mind over the physical started. In 1899 Helen Wilmans came up with the concept of mental science or power of mind. Ellwood (1973:80) reminds us that what actually Helen Wilmans started was an off-shot of a new thought movement whose originator was Phineas Quimby and later expanded by Warren Evans. According to Ellwood (1973:79-80), this new thought movement believed that everything have its base from the internal, whereby the mind plays a pivotal role in conceptualising everything and that "if one holds thoughts of health, wholeness and success, these thoughts will create their corresponding physical realities".

It is not absolutely clear as to exactly when this gospel found its way into South Africa. However, Sharpe (2013:171) may shed a little light, explaining that "statistical data concerning global numbers of prosperity believers and the growth of the Word of Faith movement are hard to find. Nevertheless, studies on Pentecostalism in both Latin America and Africa closely associate prosperity gospel with a contemporary 'third wave' of Pentecostal evangelisation which began around 1980".



Given what Sharpe (2013) is saying, it can then be safely assumed that prosperity gospel started in South Africa around the 1980s.

Prosperity gospel goes by many names. Some refer to it as word-of-faith gospel, health-and-wealth gospel, name-it-and-claim-it gospel and faith gospel. Chilenje (2015:11) contends this faith movement provides hope to mostly the marginalised, the ostracised or the hopeless. Though this phenomenon is widespread across different denominations, it has its roots firmly planted in the charismatic and Pentecostal churches.

Earlier on mention was made of the history of prosperity gospel and to whom this phenomenon can be accredited. Before dealing with its teachings, it is of paramount importance to mention some prominent advocates of this gospel. They include, but are not limited to Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Shepherd Bushiri, Alph Lukau, Steven Zondo, Kingsley Ohene-Marfo, etc. I, however, address a number of them in detail later in chapter 6.

Prosperity gospel has its own teachings, which sets the gospel apart from any other teachings. Briefly, let's look at some of those teachings.

### **2.3.1 TEACHINGS OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

One of the major teachings of prosperity gospel is that the invisible faith has to lead to tangible material and financial rewards. It goes on to suggest that the size of one's wallet speaks of the size of his faith.

Although Essek William Kenyon is thought to have been the originator of what is known today as prosperity gospel, a number of preachers have contributed immensely to its phenomenal growth, especially in America. Some of those preachers<sup>9</sup> include Kenneth Hagin (b. 1917-2003), Benny Hinn (b. 1952-), T.D. Jakes (b. 1957-), Joel Osteen (b. 1963-) and Joyce Meyer (b. 1943). In Africa, we have David Oyedepo (b. 1954-), Enoch Adeboye (b. 1942-), Ray McCauley (b. 1949-), Shepherd Bushiri (b. 1983-) and Alph Lukau (b. 1975-). In Mahikeng in particular, we have Kingsley Ohene-Marfo (b. 1954-), Prince Osuchukwu, Pastor Tlholoe and others.

Central to the teachings of prosperity gospel is that poverty is both a sin and a curse. According to Chilenje (2015:14), prosperity gossellers believe that God blesses only those who live upright and those who keep His covenant.

Schieman and Jung (2012:739) postulate that:

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<sup>9</sup> I will briefly discuss some of these preachers in chapter 6 of this study.

prosperity gospel embodies a specific form of the more generalised belief in divine influence that explicitly identifies God's causal agency in two highly personal and highly practical – domains of peoples' lives: money and health. People who believe in the prosperity gospel have faith that God grant material prosperity or good health to those with sufficient faith.

Gifford (1998:62) notes that proponents of this gospel are rooted in the belief that God has met all the needs of every human being through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and as a result every Christian should now share in the victory and the triumph of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. They further believe that every believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ and that he/she can obtain those blessings merely by a positive confession of faith. Though not a prosperity gopeller, in his book, *Making ends meet: personal money management in a Christian perspective*, Klaus Nürnberger's (2007a:26) suggests that:

in Christ, God has shown Himself to be concerned about the plight of the guilty, the downtrodden, the outcasts, the poor, the sick, the dying – and this to the extent of joining them in their predicament. For Christians the rejection of Christ by His social environment, His suffering and His execution as a criminal are concrete manifestations of God's presence among the poor. But Christ did not join the poor to condone or sanctify their miserable condition. On the contrary, the poor are invited to link up with Christ at the lowest rung of the social ladder, and accompany Him on His way to full human dignity.

I must hasten to add that the views expressed by Nürnberger does endorse prosperity gospel, it just emphasises that everything is possible if one is a good steward of the Lord.

Sounders (2011:97) submits that in prosperity gospel God is intimately linked with the daily events of this world. Through His divine favour, God dispenses economic and social justice here and now in material and not metaphoric terms. It is a theology of immediate hope in which blessings are manifested by a windfall of wealth, promotions and relationship success.

Ngong (2010:63) is adamant that in principle there is absolutely nothing wrong with material well-being. To him wealth and prosperity should be emphasised within the Christian theology and within the framework of Christian eschatological vision.

In agreement with Sounders and Ngong, Togarasei (2015:122-126) presents an argument that whoever is opposed to prosperity gospel, does so because of misunderstanding. He says what is supposed to be understood is that prosperity gospel can be very helpful, especially in

alleviating poverty in Africa. He considers prosperity being able to afford the basic necessities of life such as enough food, sending children to school or even affording public transportation. Concerning poverty alleviation, he says prosperity gospel is the only gospel that encourages entrepreneurship, which is critical especially amongst Africans who are faced with the ever increasing levels of unemployment and poverty. It is an important encouragement that they can make it in business through the blessing of the Lord, instead of expecting handouts from Western donors.

Togarasei (2015) concludes that “the missionary period of a pie-in-the-sky or wealth-in-heaven theology, which the missionaries did not live but promoted among Africans, is surely no longer acceptable in post-colonial Africa”.

Here in Africa, African traditional religions have been wrestling with the issues of poverty, sickness and demon oppression from time immemorial. Folarin (2007:71) observes that in former times priests or traditional healers used to prescribe sacrifices against social ills, which even included against poverty. In fact, Chilenje (2015:16-17) holds the view that:

the teachings of the prosperity gospel movement churches have attracted many adherents in Africa and elsewhere. These adherents believe that for a religion to be meaningful it must be practical, dynamic and problem-solving...people are also attracted to the prosperity gospel because it reflects the traditional African concept of blessedness. In the African context, blessedness is understood in terms of the biological and material, not just the religious/spiritual aspects. Africans have always considered land, children, animals, good health and good harvest all as wealth and blessing from the supreme-being.

Views expressed by both Folarin and Chilenje that Africans perceived wealth and blessings as coming from the supreme-being, coupled with LeMarquand's (2012:81) observation that Africans are predisposed to prosperity gospel because of their worldview, may be linked with what Mbiti's (1975:56-57) assertion that Africans still hold dear their traditional customs and a religious belief that one's problems and challenges can only be solved if the believer or supporter performs certain prescribed rites of either sowing a seed or offering a sacrifice to the ancestors.

In fact, Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:44) states categorically that “giving is an important part of religious negotiation in traditional shrines. In African traditional religions generally, ancestors and deities are fed periodically as a way of sustaining cultic relationships that enable the

benefits of wealth, abundance, longevity and various forms of prosperity to flow from the transcendent realm towards the human realm”.

Tithes and offerings reign supreme in the teachings of prosperity gospel. According to Adeleye (2012:85), “this gospel asserts that believers have the right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confession of faith and the sowing of seeds through faithful payments of tithes and offerings”.

Some of those offerings are freewill offerings<sup>10</sup>, seed offerings<sup>11</sup>, first-fruit offerings<sup>12</sup>, thanksgiving offerings<sup>13</sup> and pastor’s appreciation<sup>14</sup>. In one of his services (in the presence of this researcher – 16 April 2017), Pastor X<sup>15</sup> scolded members of his church for having left their cheque books and purses at home when coming to worship God. He said that such practice was against Scripture and cited Exodus 10:25-26: “But Moses said ‘You must give us sacrifices and burnt offerings that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also shall go with us, not a hoof shall be left behind...’”

In other words, he implied that it is wrong and against Scripture to decide to offer only a certain amount of money and that one should rather bring all that he/she has to the church. Christians or believers who give large sums of money are assured of God’s blessings and happiness. In fact, any money given to the pastor and/or church is regarded as a seed that will multiply and return to the sower. This stance is justified with Mark 10:29-30: “So Jesus answered them, assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold...” So the more you sow, the more you reap.

According to Hanegraaff (2009:99-100), the originators of prosperity gospel or faith teachings, as he put it, coined their belief system out of the misinterpretation of Hebrews 11:1 that states: “Now faith is a substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen.” Hanegraaff says the word *substance* (from the New King James Version - NKJV) was then wrongly interpreted as meaning basic stuff or even material wealth. He cautions that the actual word which is translated in the NKJV as “substance” is actually a Greek word *hypostasis*, which means assurance.

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<sup>10</sup> The every-service offering (every-time there is a service, it must be given)

<sup>11</sup> Plant a seed for whatever you desire.

<sup>12</sup> This is the first salary after being employed or promoted at work.

<sup>13</sup> When appreciating God for something - it can be for passing exams or for end of the year

<sup>14</sup> A yearly function where every member of the church is expected to shower the pastor with presents – always in monetary form

<sup>15</sup> A pastor in Mahikeng – his identity and that of his church are withheld

Now what is hypostasis? Ramelli (2012:303) explains that the actual meaning of this Greek term is “essence” and/or “coming into existence”. Now if we were to translate the same Hebrews 11:1 according to the new meaning given by Ramelli, it would read: “Now faith is the coming into existence of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen.” The definitions of both Hanegraaff (2009) and Ramelli (2012) remove the word “substance”, as used by the NKJV, which can be misconstrued as meaning material wealth. The word “assurance” from Hanegraaff’s definition speaks of a guarantee. So in simpler terms, having faith in God is an assurance or a guarantee to the believer that he/she is destined for the kingdom of God, which is unseen with the naked eye.

Coleman (2000:150) argues that “the movement regards faith as the supernatural force which believers can use to get whatever success they desire in their lives. It is the instrument which believers can use for self-actualisation or achieving their dreams”. In other words, prosperity gospel teaches its adherents to use faith to decree or order wealth and material prosperity. It depicts faith as a matter of believing in material or created things more than believing in God.

In other words, adherents of this gospel believe that positive thoughts and/or words have direct impact over the spiritual and the physical universe. Positive thinking and positive words should and must guarantee positive outcome. They firmly hold on and maintain the belief that the Bible, which is the Word of God, is a contract between themselves and God through which they gain certain benefits from God. Sounders (2011:30) notes that proponents of this gospel are encouraged to just announce what they desire and they will receive it, hence the phrase “name-it-and-claim-it”.

In his book, *It’s Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, and Increase in God’s favour*, Joel Osteen (2009:70-71), also a prosperity gosseller of note, says:

Supersize your prayers, God want you to ask Him for big things. Ask Him for those hidden dreams planted in your heart. Ask Him even for the unborn promises that might otherwise never come to pass in the natural. Ask Him to restore your broken ties to family members and other loved ones. Ask Him for a life free from illness. Ask Him for a full blossoming of your talents. Ask Him to fulfil your highest hopes and dreams.

In other words, believers are taught and encouraged to just confess what they wants and that is what they will have. Osteen is very grounded in this name-it-and-claim-it theory, because in his other book (*Your best life now*) Osteen (2004:129) is emphatic that words are crucial in bringing dreams to pass. He believes that it is in no way enough to just have faith and an image of whatever it is that one wants or needs, one has to speak out for words have incredible creative

power. According to Osteen, this is not just a mere belief but a serious spiritual principle that whatever you say, be it positive or negative, you create it. Walker (2007:337-338) agrees completely, because to him:

believers are little gods or divine beings who possess all or some of the distinctive attributes of God. As little gods, believers can therefore emulate God who spoke all things into existence. This means words are containers of power. Whatever one speaks will occur, be it negative or positive. Therefore, one should only speak positive or faith-filled words.

One of his favourite parts of Scripture that depicts the power of the spoken word is 1 Samuel 17:45. The preceding verses indicate how Goliath had instilled fear in King Saul and the armies of Israel. They also record how well armed he was for the battle, while the young David wasn't. David says in verse 45: "You come to me with a sword, with a spear and with a javelin, But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

Osteen (2004:5) adds:

What you keep before your eyes will affect you. You will produce what you're continually seeing in your mind. If you foster an image of defeat and failure, then you're going to live that kind of life. But if you develop an image of victory, success, health, abundance, joy, peace and happiness, nothing on earth will be able to hold those things from you.

In fact one of the founding fathers of prosperity gospel, Kenneth Hagin, avers in his book, *I Believe in Visions* (1989:17-18), how in one of his visions he was told that Lordship (God and Jesus) have long delegated their powers of fighting satan and demons to Christians. He says God told him that in relation to prosperity all that the Christian needs to say is "Satan take your hands of my money".

Lioy (2007:44) relates how supporters and followers of prosperity gospel indeed believe that since it is the will of God for them to enjoy life to the fullest, including wealth and material prosperity, living in lack and poverty violates God's will and dishonour His name. According to this theology or gospel, a believer has to live a successful life otherwise something is drastically wrong. The affluence of believers is perceived and thought to be God-given and should be what they not only expect, but demand.

(Meyer 2008), in agreement with Hagin, takes it further:

Maybe you need to get your cheque book out and say, oh you cheque book hear the Word of the Lord, you are not going to stay empty all your life. Ah somebody says this is just too weird for me, well then just stay broke. What you're doing's not working! You listen to me cheque book, the first 10 percent of everything that goes into you is going to God's work, and you are going to be full to overflowing! And I am going to be blessed, and I am going to be a blessing.

Advocates and adherents of prosperity gospel refer to various Biblical passages to support and maintain their contention that God does indeed intend for Christians to be blessed and experience both financial and material prosperity. One of the most often cited passages is:

John 10:10

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

This is one of the texts used to the benefit of listeners who want to hear what is pleasing to them and not necessarily what the Scripture means. According to Adeleye (2014:9), the advocates of prosperity gospel prefer to use the term *bios* as an equivalent of the English term "life", which refers to the physical and material life instead of the term *zoe* which literally means "spirit" and "soul". In fact, the proper translation of this text ought to have meant: "I want you to have an abundant life in spirit." In other words, this text has nothing to do with beautiful spouses, cars or houses as it is sometimes conveniently overemphasised.

In his book, *I Believe in Visions*, Hagin (1989:95) claims that one of the duties of the angels is to serve humans financially. He interprets Hebrews 1:14 as meaning that the ministering angels are meant or purposed to serve the profitable benefit of humans. In fact, he goes on to claim that in his eighth vision of God, God revealed to him that he would personally receive money through the same ministering angels as their primary mission.

He also cites 3 John 2: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." He deems this text to totally, completely and plainly refer to prosperity, which includes money. He argues that the Greek term *euodoo*, which is translated to prosper, actually means "good road" or "good journey" and to him not only can there be no good journey without money, but without sufficient money.

Hagin (1989:95) defends prosperity gospel as the real gospel:

The Lord Himself taught me about prosperity. I never read about it in a book. I got it directly from heaven...we young preachers swallowed whatever our elders said about

prosperity, we didn't take the time to examine the Word of God on the subject. We were taught that if you are really humble, is when you are poor.

Interestingly, these are not the only Biblical texts that prosperity gossellers use. They also cite the following:

#### Deuteronomy 8:17-18

Then you say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth, and you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

#### Ecclesiastes 5:18-19

Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor - this is the gift of God.

#### Malachi 3:10

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts. "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

#### Luke 6:38

Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

As for the latter, (Jakes 2001) expands on this text. According to him, there is a certain truth that surpasses all principles and *giving to get* is one of them. It wouldn't make sense to him if you offered \$1000 and God gave it back. He says that is simply breaking even and as such there would be no need to go to the trouble of giving in the first place. So whatever you give, God multiples it and returns it to you.

In her book, *God's Will Is Prosperity*, Gloria (1978:54) is adamant that the literal meaning of the afore-mentioned text is that God is ready to double any offer a 100-fold. She appeals to her



followers to test this by giving \$10 and see it being increased to \$1,000 or give \$1,000 and see it rising to \$100 000. This is a classic example that prosperity gospel's emphasis is more on amassing material wealth.

LeMarquand (2012:77) says, if examined properly, prosperity gospel may have a point because:

throughout the scriptures God makes promises to His people, promises which include more than eternal life. In the words of Jesus, God's people are invited into abundant life. That abundant life includes innumerable blessings: the joy of marriage and family, health and long life, good food, peace, security, prosperity, the pleasures of the created world and of human-produced art and music.

This may be true, but it should be understood in the broader context of the whole Bible and not as part of the views promulgated by the advocates of prosperity gospel. Our focus should be a life lived in communion with God as a sovereign God who does as He pleases. He does not operate at the whims of humanity nor is He at the beck-and-call of humanity. What He gives to humanity is only out of His grace. God calls His children to abundant life, which means living in a close relationship with Him and to be content whatever the circumstances, be it in plenty or in need (Phil. 4:1-13).

Biblically, prosperity gossellers also point to Abraham as the embodiment of the prosperity upon which they base their theology. To further justify this position, prosperity gossellers cite Galatians 3:13-14:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree). That the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Their narrative is that seeing Adam had given his earthly authority to satan and excluded God from the affairs of the earth through the fall. God had to devise another plan for His re-entry to the earth. Accordingly, He fashioned His plan by entering into a prosperity-driven covenant with Abram, whose name He then changed to Abraham.

### **2.3.1.1 ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

Before discussing the Abrahamic covenant, it is of critical importance to sketch a bit of background on who Abraham is.

The story of creation in the book of Genesis records that after God made man in His image, He placed him in the Garden of Eden and ordered him to refrain from eating the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. However, with the persuasion and coaxing of the serpent, man disobeyed God and as a result the perfect and flawless life of a perfect human being was brought to an abrupt end. Eating the fruit of the forbidden tree made the first man subject to corruption, condemned to lose his life shamefully to death and decay. This happened because, as Wright (2010:40) puts it, man is alienated from God by rebuffing and snubbing His goodness and authority.

Following this dislocation between man and God, man continued to multiply and drift away from God notwithstanding God's desire to reconcile Himself with man. Because God detests and abhors sin and disobedience, He then in His holiness destroyed His creation with a flood and only spared Noah and his family. Once the flood ended, God made a covenant with Noah that "never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11).

Given God's deep-rooted desire to reconcile and have fellowship with men and following the afore-mentioned covenant that He entered into with Noah, God sought and devised a plan of executing His desire for reconciliation. In His infinite wisdom, He identified and chose Abram<sup>16</sup> son of Terah to be the foundation of His chosen nation. Genesis 17:1-27 records God making a covenant with Abram and changing his name to Abraham<sup>17</sup>.

In that covenant God promised to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him and to make his name great. It was in essence threefold covenant, namely: making Abraham into a great nation, blessing him personally as well as blessing all nations through him.

What is a covenant? Why not a simple agreement? According to Robertson (1980:4), a covenant "is a bond in blood sovereignly administered, When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, He sovereignly institutes a life and death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered". In other words, "a bond in blood" commits participants of a covenant to loyalty that leads to death, even for Moses. Leviticus 17:11 records God saying: "For the life of flesh is in the blood..." Robertson (1980:11) is emphatic that "in a case of a covenant, death stands at the beginning of a relationship between two parties, symbolising the potential curse factor in the covenant".

Now back to the views of prosperity gospel, as it relates to the Abrahamic covenant.

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<sup>16</sup> Abram means "the exalted father"

<sup>17</sup> Abraham means "father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5) (Bible, 2006)

Bauckham (2003:34-36) postulates as follows:

The Abrahamic blessings are more than the blessing of creation because it is designed to contend with and to overcome its opposite: God's curse...the ultimate goal of God's promise to Abraham is that blessing will prevail over curse. It does so when the seed of Abraham, the singled-out descendant of Abraham, the messiah, becomes a curse for us...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.

According to Hanegraaff (2009:226-227), Kenneth Copeland advocates the notion that Abram was the senior partner, while God was the lesser partner in the covenant. In other words, prosperity gossellers believe that God entered into a covenant with Abram because God needed him more than he needed God, hence the notion of Abram being a senior partner.

The question is: Can this be true?

Without dwelling much on this, Wright (2006:200) presents an opposing view. He is of the opinion that the covenant reveals God as a sending God. Wright interprets the opening phrase of the covenant as "get yourself up and go", proving that God is indeed a sender. Tennent (2010:111) agrees with Wright, stating that sending is in most cases associated with authority and because of that there is always reluctance on the part of a junior to disobey. This would mean that God had authority over Abraham and hence His sending him out of his land, his relatives and his father's house.

I expand on this issue in chapter 6.

Suffice it to say that prosperity gossellers use the Abrahamic covenant to draw the spotlight to material blessings to the total exclusion of spiritual redemption and salvation. Pousson (1992:158) notes that to prosperity gossellers "Christians are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith...This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked primarily in terms of material entitlements". Kroesbergen (2015:79) cites Mensa Otabil arguing that it is totally impossible for anyone functioning under the blessing of Abraham to be poor or lack anything. One is only required to have faith like Abraham to be prosperous.

In agreement with Pousson, Asamoah-Gyadu (2005b:211) asserts that the Abrahamic covenant reflects that God wants all believers to prosper, not only spiritually but in child upbringing, marital life, business and every sphere of life. Phillips (2015:63) takes the matter even further by arguing that prosperity gospel teachers believe and insist that the Abrahamic covenant represents God's absolute promise to deliver to every believer material blessings and wealth, virtually upon demand.

Avanzini (1989:119) is of the view that God wants every believer to prosper and that is the reason He has given every believer the power to obtain wealth. He is emphatic that “God has a covenant with you. If you understand God and His word, and if your life is one that abides in His will, then the Lord has a covenant of blessing for your life”. David Oyedepo (2007:63-65) seems to be in agreement. He argues in his book that as part of God’s covenant every believer ought to prosper. He adds that “this covenant is sealed by the death of Christ, that all who believe in the message of the gospel will along with the salvation of their souls obtain all good things in this world, including wealth, health and total success”.

Goroh (2009:36) takes it even further by postulating that:

if you are a believer, abundant life is your birth right. The seed of the righteous are not meant to beg bread but to enjoy plenty. You are supposed to enjoy the best. Life is not supposed to be lived in crisis when Christ is living in you. You are supposed to live an abundant life even during the season of famine.

In essence, prosperity gospel seeks to suggest that the principal objective of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham materially and since believers are Abraham’s spiritual children, they accordingly have inherited the financial blessings of the covenant. They do not take into account the time that has lapsed between the promises of the covenant and their fulfilment. This is one example that signifies how prosperity gospel or gossellers are more concerned with the here and now. Chilenje (2015:16) suggests that prosperity theologians claim that the principal objective and reason for God making a covenant with Abraham was to bless him materially. They then purport that based on that notion and the fact that Christians are spiritual sons of Abraham they are heirs of those blessings and based on that they must claim the best cars, best homes, best clothes and beautiful spouses.

In contrast, Wright (2010:67-68) is of the view that the blessings of which God spoke to Abraham are set within both vertical and horizontal relationships. It is completely depended on one’s relationship with God but also importantly to be shared with humanity and that is the reason why those who are blessed are called upon to be a blessing beyond themselves and that is one element that singles out the Abrahamic covenant as missional.

Besides pointing at the Abrahamic covenant as the fundamental basis of their faith in prosperity gospel, this theology also raises the issue of atonement.

### 2.3.1.2 THE ATONEMENT

Before dealing with atonement, it is of critical importance to unpack and understand what sin is, for which atonement is necessary. Grenz (2000:183) defines sin as an act of missing the right point and/or deviating from the norm. The Book of James says: “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

Taking it a little bit further, but still in agreement with Grenz, Alexander and Baker (2003:765) assert that “theologically the word is related to human sinfulness and carries the meaning of missing the mark, being at fault, failing to perform a duty or to meet the demand of the law, or to be lacking, fall short of expectations inherent in certain relationships”. To Kakwata (2016:2) the word that is translated as “sin” originates from the Greek word *hamartia*, from the verb *hamartano* which is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Chātā* that literally means “to miss the mark, to be in, error, to be guilty or wrong”.

Now, according to Maddix (2015:67), the doctrine of atonement is a firm belief that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, humanity was saved from sin and reconciled with God the Father. The Oxford English dictionary (2016) also defines “atonement” as “the reconciliation of God and mankind through Jesus Christ”. LePoidevin (2016:179) deems atonement as “the restoration of mankind’s relationship with God as a result of Christ’s sacrifice”.

Hanegraaff (2009:171) says atonement means that Jesus Christ, through His sacrificial death on the cross, paid for and dealt with the sins of humanity. Upon that very cross, Jesus Christ redeemed men from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13) by Himself being a curse for us. The Apostle Paul puts it more aptly in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

In other words, Jesus Christ who is the epitome of virtue, the paragon of perfection, became a sacrificial lamb upon which all the sins of the world were laid. Through His willing self-sacrifice, sinners or humanity in general were counted as righteous before God.

However, prosperity gospel teaches that physical healing, material prosperity and wealth have been provided for in the atonement. They cite 2 Corinthians 8:9 to drive their point home: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that you through His poverty might become rich.” In fact, Oyedepo (2007:74) says “redemption is a cure for poverty, as it gives you access to the cure for poverty. When you were saved, you were redeemed from the plague of poverty because your Father is very wealthy”. Now the connotation and implication of this is that wealth and health are the natural divine

privileges of all Bible-believing Christians and may be procured by faith as part of the package of salvation, because the atonement of Christ includes not just forgiveness and removal of sin, but also the removal of poverty and sickness.

The understanding or lack thereof of sin, is profoundly recorded by Jones and Woodbridge (2011:52) who say that according to prosperity gospel:

Sin basically is a spiritual thing, so it must be dealt with in the spirit realm. If Jesus paid the penalty of sin on the cross, then sin is but a physical act. If his death paid it, then every man could die for himself. Sin is in the spirit realm.

Now what Jones and Woodbridge are saying tallies exactly with Oyedepo's (2007) stance. He says redemption is a cure for poverty and no mention is made of sin. In other words, proponents of prosperity gospel seek to spread a message that portrays Jesus Christ as the solution or the answer to material wants. In fact, Jones (2014:4) cites Kenneth Copeland saying that "the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary".

An interesting and connecting line in all of the afore-mentioned (Oyedepo 2007; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011; Jones, 2014) is that in the view of prosperity gossellers there is no sin. This can be deduced from their argument that sin belongs to the spirit realm and secondly that God put sin on Jesus Christ.

In over-emphasising the fact that believers need not lack, Joyce Meyer (2008) a fervent advocate of prosperity gospel, maintains that "you cannot go to heaven unless you believe with all your heart that Jesus took your place in hell". As though this is not enough, (Osteen 2000) takes the matter further by suggesting that even after "the hell fiasco", Jesus Christ still had to present or offer His own blood before the high court of heaven as a sacrifice for past, present and future sin. According to Osteen (2000), this is why the resurrected Jesus refused Mary to touch Him for He had not yet presented the blood to the high court.

Given the above, it is clear that prosperity gospel suggests that Jesus Christ did not only atone for the sins of men, but for lack and poverty as well. Given the earlier statements of Oyedepo (2016) and Jones and Woodbridge (2011), it is crystal clear that the emphasis of prosperity gospel is more on the atonement for poverty and less for sin. This presupposes that faith in Jesus Christ will redeem men from poverty.

### 2.3.1.3 FAITH

The Bible declares in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Phillips (2015:69) asserts that “Christian faith is generally understood to be comprised of trust in the person of Jesus Christ, the truth of His teaching and the redemptive work He accomplished at Calvary”.

Prosperity gospel makes a serious and very strong connection between material prosperity and faith. “We ourselves have a tremendous dynamic power to force God to act, just as long as we are utterly positive” (Banda, 2015a:70). According to Goroh (2009:63), “faith will deliver you out of any situation, no matter how deadly and impossible it may seem in the natural. Faith makes you to have victory over every onslaught of the devil, no matter how tough the attacks may be against your life, you can stop them through faith”.

In other words, prosperity gospel teaches that faith is sufficient to bring about prosperity. It doesn't end there, the said faith needs fuelling up, it needs the backing of positive words. According to Adeleye (2014:1) prosperity gospel is also at times referred to as the health-and-wealth gospel, name-it-and-claim-it gospel or the gospel of greed. In fact, Copeland (1974:98) insists that:

you can have what you say! In fact what you are saying is exactly what you are getting now. If you are living in poverty and lack and want, change what you are saying. It will change what you have...Discipline your vocabulary. Discipline everything you do, everything you say, and everything you think to agree with what God says does, what God says and what God thinks. God will be obligated to meet your needs because of His word.

In agreement with Copeland, Goroh (2009:106) avers that “your confession will determine your possession. Everything hangs in your mouth. Mend your words and you will mend your world. You can use your mouth to turn things around you. That tough situation you are going through is subject to change. Your words can change it”.

This suggests that a believer can actually create any situation that he/she desires according to what he/she believes. Williams (2001:200) takes it a bit further: “As in reconstructionism, a strong connection is made with the idea of covenant. However, this does not mean that all in the covenant will be prosperous, as the receipt for wealth depends also on positively claiming it from God.” Joel Osteen (2004:128) agrees completely. He goes on to emphasise that our words

are of critical importance in shaping our dreams, because they possess enormous creative power. According to Osteen, it is a spiritual principle that the moment you speak of something, it is created instantaneously whether it is bad or good.

Agana (2015:165) cites Duncan Williams, one of the pioneers of the charismatic churches in Ghana, who states: "Faith is the master key into all God has for mankind. In the same way unbelief is the bolt that forever shuts man out from God's presence and provision." Jones (2014:16) notes that prosperity gossellers believe that "faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function...there are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's word. Faith causes them to function". In other words, faith is not a God-given nor a God-centred act of His will, but a man-made or -created spiritual force directed to the same God.

Faith is or is supposed to be a firm belief in God irrespective of personal circumstances. Kumar (2012:17) argues that today's faith or theology is "me-centred" and that anything opposed to this is confined to historical books. He says when suffering comes closer to today's Christians, their immediate response is usually: Why did this happen? Where is God? Mumford (2012:379) concurs that prosperity preaching is extremely individualistic for it teaches believers to pray for themselves and make confessions and supplications to God on their own behalf, rather than including others.

The views expressed by both Kumar and Mumford are completely in line with Platt's (2010:19) contention that the crux of prosperity gospel is centred on what he calls an "American dream" that in essence is dictated by materialism, individualism, self-advancement, self-esteem and self-sufficiency. For his part LeMarquand (2012:82) says "unfortunately like other heretical movements, the false gospel of prosperity is anthropocentric everything is centred in the human being and his or her attitudes and not in God and His grace".

Golo (2013:383) seems to agree with the afore-mentioned views. He states that prosperity gossellers tend to regard the acquisition and possession of material wealth and affluent lifestyles as a yardstick and benchmark by which they measure a believer's salvation. In other words, seeking emancipation from poverty and its socio-economic ills by defining salvation as a liberty to prosper materially reduces the concept of salvation to the here and now.

Copeland (1974:41) is adamant that "if you make up your mind...that you are willing to live in divine prosperity and abundance, divine prosperity will come to pass in your life. You have exercised your faith".



## **2.4 PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND MIRACLES**

As alluded to earlier, prosperity gospel goes by many names. Some refer to it as word-of-faith gospel, health-and-wealth gospel, name-it-and-claim-it gospel and faith gospel. Stinton (2007:32) says that the one good thing about this gospel is that unlike the Western-initiated churches that have ceded the healing ministry to doctors, clinic and hospitals, this gospel has revived and brought to the attention of believers the true image of Jesus Christ as creator, preserver, protector and the great physician. The image of Jesus as a healer equates with Jesus as a life-giver.

Lee (2007:228) notes that:

word-of-faith teaching asserts that Christians have the power to control their physical well-being and financial fortunes through their faith. The underlying assumption is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provided Christians with the ability to live in total victory, financial prosperity and perfect health...word-of-faith preachers argue that once believers strengthen their faith by memorizing and confessing scriptures, they are able to live in total victory and control their physical and financial state.

Views expressed earlier by Stinton (2007) correspond to Copeland's (1974:101) assertion:

The first step to spiritual maturity is to realise your position before God. You are a child of God and a joint heir with Jesus. Consequently, you are entitled to all the rights and privileges in the kingdom of God, and one of these rights is health and healing. You will never fully realise or understand healing until you know beyond any doubt that God wants you healed. Whether or not you accept that and purpose to walk in the reality of the truth is your own decision to make.

In other words, prosperity gospel or the health-and-wealth gospel as referred to by Adeleye (2014:1) is closely connected with miracles. Recently here in South Africa we had members of Rabboni Ministries in Pretoria eating grass at the insistence of their pastor, Daniel Lesego, who urged them to demonstrate their faith. Early this year (24 February 2019), Pastor Alph Lukau of Alleluia ministries made headline news by claiming to have resurrected a dead man. In summing it up, Williams (2001:175) believes that almost all prosperity doctrines echoes theological beliefs that Christians are the true custodians of the world and as such have the right to reassert and reaffirm the Lord's dominion over the nations of the world.

## **2.5 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, attention was given to the origin, the history and teachings of prosperity gospel.

We learned that prosperity gospel is primarily based on a belief that every Christian has a right to material prosperity and wealth by simply claiming it from God through prayer. It also became clear that this notion is linked to the Abrahamic covenant in which God promised to bless Abraham.

Prosperity gossellers have crafted their theology on both atonement and faith. They do this by advocating the notion that through His crucifixion, Jesus Christ did not only take away the sin of man but also took away lack and poverty. In other words, they seek to emphasise material prosperity and health more than the atonement of sin.

It became evident in this chapter that central to prosperity gospel is a belief that material prosperity and wealth and health can be accessed by making offerings to the church. These offerings are termed a seed, which after sowing will bring a harvest to the sower. In fact, earlier on Heuser (2016:2) notes that “this theological construction of sowing and reaping imagined an intimate link between divine blessing and financial contributions to God and the church, it quantifies blessings by preaching that the more you sow the more you will reap”.

The other issue that is of paramount importance to the prosperity gossellers is the issue of tithe, as recorded in the Book of Malachi. Special emphasis is placed on God’s assurance that He will rebuke the devourer for those who pay their tenth.

The following chapter deals with empirical research, focusing on the observations and/or analyses of those people who have had a direct encounter with prosperity gospel. Views of pastors and ordinary Christians are also integrated or included.

## **CHAPTER 3 EXPERIENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN-COMMUNITY OF MAHIKENG WITH REGARDS TO PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the origin, the history and the teachings of prosperity gospel. To recap, Phillips (2015:iii) says the teachings of prosperity gospel are rooted in the belief that the Bible promises health, wealth and uncommon success to all believers. These teachings seem to offer hope in times of need and desperation, but the fundamental question is: What kind of hope is it – true or false hope?

It is logical to suggest that if the teachings of this gospel are indeed true, then that must be evident in the transformation of the socio-economic situation of its adherents as well as their full participation in the *missio Dei*. I must hasten to indicate that the purpose of this chapter is not to evaluate prosperity gospel as that will be done towards the end of this study in chapter 6.

So as earlier indicated in chapter 1 of this study, in this chapter I have used empirical research to source the views of those Christians who have had a direct encounter with prosperity gospel, be it positively or negatively. The views of the custodians of the gospel (pastors) as well as those of ordinary members of the church with regards to this phenomenon are also incorporated.

It is equally important to note that the data obtained from members who have had a direct encounter with prosperity gospel as well as pastors were sourced through interviews, whilst for the 100 ordinary church members the data were sourced through a questionnaire.

### **3.2 VIEWS OF THOSE WHO ENCOUNTERED PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Earlier on, Phillips (2015) reminds us that prosperity gospel operates from the premise or assertion that good health and material prosperity is for every believer. We have also learned from the teachings of prosperity gospel that all believers are entitled to these blessings, as per the Abrahamic covenant, and that all they need to do is the claim them by faith, tithing and planting seeds (offerings).

However, at times dismay and disappointment set in among those who discover that the promise of prosperity gospel and the reality are poles apart and that what they were promised was in fact just a myth. Pain sets in when these believers realise that they were duped or led to believe that they could have anything they want or desire – anything from promotion at work,

flashy cars, exquisite mansions, beautiful or handsome spouses to beautiful and brilliant children by simply saying the word.

As indicated earlier on, I now focus on the views and experiences of those who have had a direct encounter with prosperity gospel.

### **3.2.1 THE EXPERIENCES OF LORATO AND BRIAN CHANZA<sup>18</sup>**

Lorato and Brian Chanza (2019) were the first people I spoke to concerning their encounter.

Even though prosperity gospel promises these magnificent, glorious and marvellous blessings, to some believers they unfortunately remain pipe dreams. Lorato and Brian Chanza experienced this sad reality. Mr. and Mrs. Chanza joined Christos International Ministries<sup>19</sup> in May of 2000 and by that time they were already owning and operating a successful business.

With a very few competitors in the market, their business was doing exceptionally well and they were busy opening branches and sub-offices in different parts of the country. Given the fact that the sector in which they were doing business was becoming lucrative, it did not take long before it began to attract other role players. With more and more role players joining the market, the once thriving business began to show signs of a slowdown. As devoted members of Christos International Ministries they remained faithful and regular in paying their tithes and offerings.

Interestingly, Lindhardt (2009:51) observes that:

having paid their tithes and made their offerings, members do indeed believe that God should keep His promise and make them prosperous in this life. Apart from a gift that should generate counter-gifts, tithes are also seen as repayments of the essential debt human beings owe to God because He sacrificed His only son for the sake of human salvation.

Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:79) puts it so profoundly, for he postulates that prosperity gossellers have a transactional rather than a sacrificial understanding of giving. According to him, the transactional understanding of giving views offerings and tithes as a means to entice God to bless them.

According to Amarachi, Ama and Oji (2016:151), “numerous people’s lives have been negatively affected by this unbalanced teaching on giving. The teaching has come from

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<sup>18</sup> Not their real names, their identity is withheld

<sup>19</sup> Identity withheld

ministers who are using scripture on getting the return to appeal to the Western materialistic mind-set”.

The Chanzas perhaps remained faithful because prosperity adherents are taught and/or encouraged to give 10% of their salaries and/or income to the church as some sort of protection from daily challenges. The Prophet Malachi is extensively used to advance the notion that if a believer complies, then “God will rebuke the devourer” (Mal. 3:10). In fact, Goroh (2009:56) puts it more plainly: “Many believers don’t even pay tithe, yet they expect God to keep them alive during famine. God is not moved by our tears but by our obedience.”

When their business began to show signs of slowing down or being beset by a “devourer”, they approached their pastor to share with him their challenges and frustrations. As always, the pastor was very attentive and displayed a very caring attitude. (They suspect that they were amongst the top financiers of Christos Ministries. It is only a suspicion, because the congregation is never given the financial reports of the church.) After praying and rebuking the devourer or the misfortune, the pastor promised the Chanzas that he would visit their home to pray with them again.

True to his word, the pastor in the company of his friend – Prophet Bisto<sup>20</sup> - visited them one evening. They were not necessarily surprised, because they knew this foreign-based prophet very well as he was a regular visitor at their church. After some casual conversations, Bisto told Lorato and Brian that they were under a very serious attack of the devil and as such they needed to plant a seed for the turn-around of their business. The seed he was asking for was in American Dollars and with the exchange rate at the time, it amounted to R70 000). The Chanzas did not have such cash on hand.

The following day Lorato and Brian raised the required “seed” and handed the money to the pastor and the prophet. They were assured that God has seen their faith and that their business would begin to show a dramatic turn for the best. Lorato recalls that they were told in no uncertain terms that God is going to bless them and restore their joy, because “the blessing of the Lord makes one rich and He adds no sorrow with it” (Prov. 10:22). They left with their hopes high in light of the pronouncements of the “men of God”.

After this encounter and re-assurance, instead of the dramatic growth that they were promised, the trajectory of the business continued to show a serious and incessant decline. Not only was their business not doing well, but disaster after disaster befell their farming as well.

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<sup>20</sup> Not his real name – identity withheld

The promise meant to bring about prosperity became misfortune and worsened their challenges. Worsened, because they delayed to relieve some of their staff members with the hope that the business would indeed turn for the better. Instead they had to relieve these workers when the company was already in the red and as such they were left in a massive debt that required them to sell off some of their assets.

Having realised that their seed is taking what seemed to be forever to grow and bear fruit, they ultimately left Christos International Ministries. Lorato says she was the first one to leave Christos and stayed at home for several weeks, without attending any church. After some weeks, her husband approached the pastor at Christos to inform him of their decision to leave Christos. She says that according to her husband, the pastor was not pleased and entreated him to stay but he stood his ground.

Their business continued on a down-ward spiral, forcing them to lay off a lot of their staff members and sell part of their assets to pay off creditors.

According to Lorato, their experience at Christos International Ministries nearly shattered their belief and faith not only in charismatic churches, but also in the God that these churches purport to represent. Instead of improving their lives and enriching their socio-economic situation as per its teachings, prosperity gospel defrauded them out of a great deal of money and dignity. The R70 000 given to Bisto, monthly tithes and offerings all sum up to a sizeable amount of money. Having to keep their employees with hope that things will turn around and ultimately having to let them go when things were seriously bad, also ate away at their dignity.

They have since found another spiritual home, however, where they continue to serve the Lord and fully partake in the mission of God.

### **3.2.2 THE EXPERIENCE OF TEBOGO RABOTAPI<sup>21</sup>**

Rabotapi (2019) returned home to Montshioa in 2010, after being retrenched from the big company he was working for in Johannesburg. A few weeks after arriving home, he started to visit Christos International Ministries regularly, mainly because of its proximity to where he was staying. According to Rabotapi, he was fascinated by the worship services and the intriguing sermons also touched his heart. He decided later that year to take full membership of the church, as he was convinced that it was his spiritual home.

Perhaps it is of critical importance to recall the earlier observation of Togarasei (2011:340-341) that the poor people who are in these prosperity preaching churches are there with the hope

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<sup>21</sup> Not his real name

that they are on a journey to prosperity, while those who aspire or desire to be rich are constantly encouraged by the doctrine of prosperity.

Similarly, Rabotapi recalls that seeing that he was unemployed and struggling to find new employment, sought an appointment with the pastor to pray for him for a “breakthrough”. He desperately needed a divine intervention in his unemployment challenge. This is typical of what Mbewe (2016:par. 11) has observed is the “man of God” replacing the witchdoctor, for it is him who is thought to be oozing with mysterious and peculiar power that enables him to break through the invincible and impregnable layers which lesser mortals cannot penetrate.

The pastor agreed and they met one Tuesday afternoon in April 2012.

In that meeting, before prayers, the pastor enquired after his qualifications he and his past employment history as well as what has been sustaining him since his unemployment. Rabotapi says he was blown-away by this “caring” attitude of the pastor. He then explained to the pastor that he was working for a big company in Johannesburg and was retrenched, as the company was relocating. He further disclosed that he has been supporting himself from his retrenchment package and that his concern was that the money would soon dry up. At that point the pastor enquired as to how much was still left of his retrenchment package.

Rabotapi said he told “the man of God” that only R47 000 remains. The pastor convinced him to use R40 000 to plant a seed for his breakthrough, for the Bible says: “Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6: 38).

A few days later, he handed the pastor the seed for his breakthrough. He was encouraged to “wait upon the lord” (Is. 40:31) and keep on believing and praying, because God will bless him. Now Adeleye (2012:88) believes that the one area in which prosperity gospel is failing in its teachings is its inability to teach its adherents that offering or tithing is just another form of worship, instead of encouraging them to view it as a kind of investment that is bound to yield some returns or rewards here and now in material form.

Rabotapi said he continued to do as advised, but weeks turned to months and months into years. Every time he met the pastor, the pastor would encourage him to continue praying. He says out of sheer frustration and hopelessness, he left Christos International Ministries in 2016, without a job and without his R40 000. The author of the book entitled *God, Greed and the Prosperity Gospel* and also a nephew of Benny Hinn, Costi Hinn (2019:165) can relate to this very well. He says:

The devil does not make it a habit to show up at the foot of your bed with his pitchfork and a red tail shouting “here I am to deceive you”. Likewise, his false prophets don’t make their money by standing on the stage declaring ‘give all your money to my greedy scheme and I’ll give you false hope.

Come to think of it, Costi Hinn’s view is so much in line with what the Apostle Paul told the congregation on Corinth. In his letter to them (2 Cor. 11:14) Paul says: “And no wonder! For satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”

At the end of our discussion, Rabotapi said something to me which I found very profound. He said though he is still bitter about Christos and its pastor, he will never be angry at God because he, like all other South Africans who have fallen prey to false prophets, was at fault for being so desperate and gullible to believe the promises he was fed. Promises that were supposed to change his socio-economic status for the better instead robbed him of over R40 000 and also the offerings he brought at each church service.

Rabotapi’s words resonate so well with the views of Van der Walt (2011:481), who says that if we are willing to set the kingdom of God as our first priority and obey Him completely, if we are willing to fully participate in the *missio Dei*, then God will bless us even with those things that we are not actively seeking, namely enough to live on, joy and happiness. God alone holds these things in His hands and they remain a merciful gift from Him. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says: “But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

One needs to first and foremost understand God’s providence, as set out in His Word, and still serve Him faithfully and walk before Him in total obedience. “These things” that Jesus Christ spoke of, does not necessarily mean material wealth.

### **3.2.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF MARY KOBUE<sup>22</sup> - NARRATED BY HER SISTER, DUDUETSANG**

I met Duduetsang Kobue (2019) while I was distributing questionnaires to members of the Christian Assemblies to solicit their views about prosperity gospel. She then approached me with her story, which is the experience of her elder sister - Mary. She is passionate about her story in that she strongly believes that prosperity gospel has destroyed her sister who was once gainfully employed as a civil servant, but has now been left unemployed and sickly.

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<sup>22</sup> All the names used in this account have been changed to protect the identity of those concerned.



According to Kobue, she and her sister Mary were born and bred in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Mary used to love the church so much so that she was even part of the church choir. After completing her studies at the then University of Bophuthatswana (present day Mahikeng campus of the North West University), she gained employment in the erstwhile Bophuthatswana government as a civil servant. Given her academic qualifications, she secured a senior post that enabled her to buy a house for herself in one of the suburbs.

Things were looking bright for Mary when she married Michael in 1992. She and her husband moved to the more affluent suburb of Riviera Park, where they started raising a family.

Kobue couldn't recollect the exact date, but remembered that around 2014 or 2015 Mary joined Worship Ministry, which was led by a foreign national who was only known as Pastor Theo. This was a relatively small church dominated by young women, most of whom were professionals. Mary became more and more attached and absorbed into the activities of her new church, so much so that her husband began to complain that she was neglecting him and the children.

Michael sought the family's intervention, but Mary would not listen. She felt she was serving God, her creator, and therefore nothing and no one was more important. Following this meeting with the elders of the family, Mary began to distance herself from her own family. It became worse when she began accusing her family of witchcraft and refused point blank to attend the funerals of some family members, including her own two siblings.

In 2017 Mary sold her house, which she has been leasing out since she moved to Riviera Park, and resigned from work. Kobue said Mary took all her money from the sale of the house and her package to church, for she was told that it was what God wanted from her to unlock more blessings and anointing. After several meetings with the elders of the family, Michael finally gave up and filed for the divorce at the beginning of 2018. Kobue found it surprising that Mary did not even contest the divorce. Michael won the house and though they share custody of their three children, they stay with their father. Mary has moved back to her parental home in Montshioa.

Early last year (2019), Pastor Theo just vanished without a trace. The church also disintegrated and so has the life of Mary. Kobue said today the once church-loving Mary does not want to hear anything about a church, least of all "dikereke tsa bazwalwane"<sup>23</sup>

Kobue said since the disappearance of Pastor Theo, Mary has been admitted twice to hospital for depression and an unknown heart ailment. She attributed the misfortune of her sister to both

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<sup>23</sup> Charismatic churches

Pastor Theo and prosperity gospel. Prosperity gospel's teachings promised her a land of milk and honey, a prosperous future of material wealth and improved socio-economic status, but left her penniless and broken.

This story is in line with what Hinn (2019:164) has observed that:

people are losing their pay cheques, their hope and even their souls. Innocent people are being targeted by, at worst, charlatans who couldn't care less about the devastation they are causing so long as the dollars keep coming in, or by at best, teachers who are seriously uneducated and unaware of basic Biblical theology.

### **3.2.4 THE EXPERIENCE OF MAVIS MASEKOA<sup>24</sup>**

Masekoa (2019) is originally from Lesotho. Having qualified with an accounting degree from the University of Lesotho, she came to South Africa in 2002, to be more precise Johannesburg. Whilst working for the Johannesburg City Council, she was recruited by the North West Development Cooperation (NWDC) in 2004. At the end of that year, she was joined by her daughter from Lesotho after finding space for her at the International School of South Africa.

She and her daughter live in one of the local suburbs. According to her, while she was in Johannesburg she was born-again and joined Rhema Bible Church. So naturally, when she arrived in Mahikeng she went about looking for a spiritual home and finally joined Hope of Glory Ministry<sup>25</sup> in the latter part of 2005. She reported that she was intrigued by the worship and sermons that were delivered. She said she took a bit of time before finally taking up full membership of the church, because she wanted to make sure that it was the right thing to do.

Masekoa was quick to concede that she has had an encounter with what she termed "false or misguided prosperity gospel". When I asked her to elaborate on what she meant, she said most churches where prosperity is preached, put more emphasis on miracles and material prosperity itself. She explained, in most cases, people are being told that they can only prosper or experience any breakthrough they desire by giving to the church, but strikingly almost nothing is mentioned about right living or any caution being pronounced on sin or sinful living.

She considers Hope of Glory Ministry to be a charismatic church that subscribes and practices prosperity gospel of a different nature, which is appealing to her. She said that unlike some prosperity-driven churches in Mahikeng, at Hope they are not coerced into giving money under the guise that it will bring them blessings.

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<sup>24</sup> Identity withheld

<sup>25</sup> Identity withheld

Masekoa explained that although they are being taught about tithing and giving, the emphasis is always on living a life free of sin and caring for each other, particularly caring for the less fortunate as children of God. They are taught never to be selfish, but rather to share God's blessings with the less fortunate. She continued to emphasise that they are also taught to honour God and to be in total obedience to Him and His Word. Complete reliance on the Biblical providence of God is also taught.

Masekoa's experience and the teachings she received from Hope of Glory seem to stand in contrast to the observations of Phillips (2015:78). He reports that in many prosperity-driven churches that whenever prosperity gospel has a positive effect on a believer's life, all the credit goes to the prosperity teacher and not to God, but when a believer does not experience the prosperity that he/she was promised, all blame is laid squarely at the door of the believer. If they are not accused of lack of faith, they are said to have refused to follow the guidelines and directions of the teacher.

Masekoa said that unlike in some churches, aside from tithing and the normal Sunday offering, they are seldom requested to contribute money for projects and whenever additional funds are sought from the congregation, they are always given a detailed plan of the project, its intended purpose as well as an estimate of the cost implications before being asked to pledge. Once a set target has been reached, the request for pledges cease immediately. What is also important, according to Mavis, is that the church holds an annual general meeting that is open to all members of the church. It is at these meetings where they are given full reports about the progress of the church itself, projects as well as the audited financial report. As a result of these reports, they can see where their money is going.

Masekoa said what is done at Hope of Glory Ministry is in complete contrast to the common practice and experiences in most charismatic churches that she knows, where only the pastor, his family and cronies know about the running of the church, particularly the use of its finances.

I must mention here that Masekoa's observation is reasonable and true. Earlier on in this chapter, in conversation with Lorato (2019) about their experiences in Christos International Ministry, she said that she and her husband "suspected" that they were amongst the top financiers of Christos. Theirs was just a suspicion, because the congregation was never given financial reports.

As proof that Hope of Glory Ministry is different, Masekoa continued to narrate that in 2019 the church increased the number of "its" students by eight. These are students who, because of their academic performance and the socio-economic background of their families, are awarded

full bursaries to study. One of these students is completing his third year at the Medical University of South Africa (Medunsa).

Another project is “hand of compassion”. Members of the congregation, especially the elderly, are from time to time assisted with groceries. She explained that the last Sunday of May 2019, after the normal church service, 13 families received groceries and warm winter blankets. Keum (2013:37) puts it quite profoundly when he says: “The mission of the church is to prepare the banquet and to invite all people to the feast of life.”

Masekoa asserted that although her church employs methods perceived and associated with prosperity gospel, like tithing and offering, theirs is a different kind of prosperity gospel in that members are shown practically how they should care for the less fortunate. In acting out what they are taught in church, Mavis believes that they impact and transform the socio-economic situation of the less fortunate.

This is in line with the word of God. In the Old Testament, Moses cautions the Israelites that “for the poor will never cease from the land, therefore I command you saying, You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land” (Deut. 15:11). Equally in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul states in Philippians 2:3-4: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests but also for the interests of others.”

### **3.3 SUMMARY OF THE VIEWS OF THOSE AFFECTED**

Of all the people I spoke to, concerning the possibility of the contribution of prosperity gospel to the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng, only Mavis came out positive with regards to prosperity gospel. Besides these two sides, positive and negative, it is important that to note that I have also come across two other sides: those who are in denial and those who flatly refused to talk to me about the subject of prosperity gospel. Those in denial indicated that they have never had an encounter with prosperity gospel and about those who flatly refused to talk to me, I am inclined to believe that out of shame they may have adopted the stance that if their stories are told, even if anonymously, it may bring them sheer embarrassment or it could be that they have heard negative stories about prosperity gospel and do not want to associate it with their churches.

It can be safely assumed that the reason adherents of prosperity gospel were either tongue-tied or ashamed to voice their support of it could be that the promise has not yet materialised. Either their socio-economic status has not yet been transformed for the better or it is on the downward spiral and as a result they still live and believe that it would turn for the better. This queue is

taken from the experiences of the Chanzas, Rabotapi and Mary. There could be many more like them.

Believers need to understand that at times suffering is part and parcel of normal human life and that microwave solutions are not always the answer. Dau (2012:115) makes a very sobering observation when he notes that “the African worldview accepts that life is sometimes unfair and bitter. Although this worldview never domesticates or fatalistically accepts suffering and evil as normal, it still recognises that these are realities of life that must be faced and resisted, unpleasant as they truly are”. This is equally so from the Christian perspective. Louw (2000:333) strongly suggests that believers across the spectrum of Christianity need to move away from prosperity theology and rather focus their faith, attention and energy on a constructive theology that seeks to avoid simplistic answers and solutions to lack, suffering, poverty and depravation. A constructive theology that looks at life within its proper natural and Christian context where good and bad, life and death, joy and suffering co-exists.

The tragedy of it all is that in most cases, when their expectations do not materialise, they become disappointed and disillusioned in God and not necessarily in their teachers. Though the Chanzas and Rabotapi have experienced the debilitating side of prosperity gospel, they managed to recover from their shock and continue to partake in the *missio Dei*. The painful exception is Mary who has completely distanced herself from church.

### **3.4 VIEWS OF ORDINARY CHRISTIANS**

The views of ordinary Christians, particularly those of charismatic churches, were sought by means of a questionnaire. The reason for this selection was in line with the views of Chilenje (2015:11) who contends that though prosperity gospel is widespread across different denominations, it has its roots firmly planted in the charismatic and Pentecostal churches. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to four different churches that were selected randomly, making it 25 questionnaires per church. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it captures the views of ordinary Christians as it relates to prosperity gospel.

The principal purpose of sourcing demographic information was primarily to ascertain who are more prone or predisposed to this phenomenon and the nature of their socio-economic status. This point is of critical importance given the fact the main purpose of this study is to evaluate the contribution that prosperity gospel is making to the socio-economic status of its adherents in Mahikeng. Of equal importance was the need to determine the age group as well as the level of education of respondents.

In analysing them, the researcher observed that very few respondents refused to respond to some questions and since this was not an interview and respondents completing the questionnaire were informed that it is within their rights to stop at any given time, no reasons were sought for this.

**3.4.1 IDENTIFYING PARTICULARS OF RESPONDENTS**

The principle here is to verify the age range of respondents, which is important for providing a crystal clear indication that a wide spectrum of respondents was covered and also to determine which age group is more inclined to prosperity gospel.

TABLE 1: AGE

<b>AGE OF RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
21-30	33	33%
31-40	38	38%
41-50	22	22%
51-60	7	7%
Above 60	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

The majority of respondents are adults between the ages of 31-40. It is interesting that the second largest group is made up of youth, while the elderly did not participate. The exclusion of older people may have been the result of young people’s the tendency to be too forward. Secondly, it may also be that this was caused by my explanation that the questionnaire relates to a research and older people may have felt it does not concern them.

TABLE 2: GENDER

<b>GENDER OF RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
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Male	42	42%
Female	58	58%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

Unsurprisingly, more women participated. From general observation, it is women who are the more regular church attendees and this can be said of all churches, whether mainline or charismatic.

TABLE 3: MARITAL STATUS

<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Married	33	33%
Single	51	51%
Divorced	8	8%
Widowed	4	4%
Separated	4	4%
Live together	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

The majority of the respondents are single followed by married people. The reason for this may well be that the majority of the single respondents are young people who are more attracted to charismatic, Pentecostal and prosperity-driven churches as compared to older people who are comfortable in the traditional mainline churches.

TABLE 4: HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
None	0	0%
Grade 1-7	18	18%
Grade 8-12	44	44%
Tertiary	38	38%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

The deduction made from the table above is that respondents are fairly educated and understood the questions very well, thus able to make informed choices (even more so after the researcher explained them).

Given the fact that the majority of respondents were young people, it can be assumed that the majority of them are still engaged in tertiary study, especially in light of the availability of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

### 3.4.2 LIVING CONDITIONS

This segment depicts and clarifies the living conditions of the community.

TABLE 5: HOUSING

TYPE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Traditional hut	0	0%
Mokhukhu	0	0%
Brick house	100	100%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%



This table indicates that all respondents live in houses built of bricks.

TABLE 6: MAIN SOURCE OF WATER

MAIN SOURCE OF WATER	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Own piped water	89	89%
Public tap	0	0%
Borehole	11	11%
Dam/River	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

The majority of respondents at 89% have access to clean tap water. This is the water supplied by the municipality.

TABLE 7: TYPE OF TOILET FACILITY

TOILET FACILITY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Flush toilet	100	100%
Pit latrine	0	0%
No facility	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

These findings are not surprising. Given 3.4.2.1 and 3.4.2.2, all residents use proper ablution facilities.

TABLE 8: NUMBER OF INHABITANTS

NUMBER OF INHABITANTS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
1	0	0%
2	7	7%
3	15	15%
4	21	21%
5	44	44%
6	18	18%
7	5	5%
8	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

The majority of respondents live in a household of five and more inhabitants. However, it is important to note that this may not necessarily indicate dense population.

TABLE 9: NUMBER OF ROOMS

NUMBER OF ROOMS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
1	0	0%
2	0	0%
3	11	11%
4	28	28%
5	40	40%
6	15	15%
7	6	6%
8	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

Over 60% of respondents live in fairly spacious houses, which may relate to the number of inhabitants per a household.

TABLE 11: TYPE OF GRANT

<b>SOCIAL GRANTS</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Child support	31	31%
Disability grant	12	12%
Foster care grant	25	25%
Old age	9	9%
Did not answer	23	23%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

Although a sizeable number of respondents receive social security grants, this does not necessarily mean that households solely depend on such grants. This may just be an indication that one member of any given household receives a particular grant. It may also be assumed that none of the 23% who failed to respond to this question receive any grants in their household. The website of South Africa Social Security Agency (2019) reveals the child support grant as R430, disability grant as R1 780, foster care grant as R1 780 and old-age pension as R1 780.

TABLE 12: HOUSEHOLD MONTHLY INCOME

<b>ESTIMATED MONTHLY INCOME</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
R1 000-R5000	36	36%
R5 000-R10 000	21	21%
R10 000-R15 000	26	26%
R15 000-R20 000	11	11%
R20 000 +	6	6%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

This table depicts financial status and reflects that more than 60% of the respondents have an income of over R5 000 per month. This table also indicates that the respondents are not necessarily the poorest of the poor. This is understandable if one is to consider that a whopping 93% of these respondents can be classified as youth and middle-aged (21-50 years), whilst 38% hold tertiary qualifications. This may also mean that they are the fortunate ones who are employed.

**3.4.3 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

TABLE 13: GOD LOVES ONLY TRUE BELIEVERS

<b>GOD LOVES ONLY TRUE BELIEVERS</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	0	0 %
Agree	5	5%
No idea	9	9%
Disagree	32	32%
Strong disagree	50	50%
Did not answer	4	4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Over 80 % of respondents do not agree that God loves only true believers. It can be safely assumed that to these respondents the opposite holds true, namely that that God’s love is universal and He loves all of His creation without exception.

TABLE 14: GOD ONLY LISTENS TO THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO GIVE MONEY.

<b>GOD ONLY LISTENS TO THE PRAYERS OF THOSE WHO GIVE MONEY</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	4	4%
Agree	25	25%
No idea	7	7%
Disagree	26	26%
Strong disagree	38	38%
Did not answer	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

A greater number of respondents disagree that God only responds to the prayers of those people who contribute money to the church. This response is in line with the previous one that God does not only love true believers. It stands to reason that if God loves all of His children, then naturally He will listens to all of them.

TABLE 15: GOD WANTS ALL BELIEVERS TO PROSPER FINANCIALLY AND BE RICH

<b>GOD WANTS ALL BELIEVERS TO PROSPER FINANCIALLY AND BE RICH?</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	2	2%
Agree	39	39%
No idea	4	4%
Disagree	11	11%
Strong disagree	43	43%
Did not answer	1	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Again many of the respondents do not agree that it is God’s wish for every believer to prosper financially and be rich. It is however worth noting that a sizeable number believes that it is true that God wants all believers to prosper financially and be rich.



TABLE 16: ANYONE CAN ATTAIN WEALTH AND HEALTH BY CLAIMING IT FROM GOD.

ANYONE CAN ATTAIN WEALTH AND HEALTH BY CLAIMING IT FROM GOD?	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Strongly agree	12	12%
Agree	34	34%
No idea	0	0%
Disagree	33	33%
Strong disagree	21	21%
Did not answer	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	100%

Responses are closely split between 46% of respondents disagreeing and 54% believing that wealth and health can indeed be claimed from God through prayers.

TABLE 17: POVERTY AND SICKNESS ARE SIGNS OF LITTLE FAITH OR NO FAITH.

<b>POVERTY AND SICKNESS ARE SIGNS OF LITTLE FAITH OR NO FAITH?</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	4	4%
Agree	31	31%
No idea	3	3%
Disagree	41	41%
Strong disagree	21	21%
Did not answer the question	0	0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

All selected members of the community responded to this question, of which 63% do not hold the view that sickness is a sign of little or no faith.

TABLE 18: POVERTY AND SICKNESS IS A SIGN OF A CURSE FROM GOD

<b>POVERTY AND SICKNESS IS A SIGN OF A CURSE FROM GOD?</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	1	1%
Agree	23	23%
No idea	4	4%
Disagree	28	28%
Strong disagree	43	43%
Did not answer	1	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Given the afore-mentioned, it is not surprising that over 71% of respondents do not believe that sickness is a curse from God.

TABLE 19: PROSPERITY GOSPEL CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMY OF MAHIKENG.

<b>PROSPERITY GOSPEL CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMY OF MAHIKENG?</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	28	28%
Agree	15	15%
No idea	0	0%
Disagree	23	23%
Strong disagree	33	33%
Did not answer the question	1	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of all the respondents, over 56% as opposed to 43% doubt whether prosperity gospel can contribute to the socio-economy of Mafikeng.

TABLE 20: PROSPERITY GOSPEL IS A SUBTLE WAY OF ROBBING THE UNSUSPECTING.

<b>PROSPERITY GOSPEL IS A SUBTLE WAY OF ROBBING THE UNSUSPECTING?</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	34	34%
Agree	19	19%
No idea	8	8%
Disagree	27	27%
Strong disagree	8	8%
Did not answer the question	4	4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Exactly 62% of respondents agree that prosperity gospel is a subtle way of robbing the unsuspecting.

TABLE 21: CHURCHES MUST PRESENT ANNUAL AUDITED FINANCIAL REPORTS TO MEMBERS.

<b>CHURCHES PRESENT AUDITED REPORTS TO MEMBERS?</b>	<b>MUST ANNUAL FINANCIAL</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree		62	62%
Agree		22	22%
No idea		3	3%
Disagree		8	8%
Strong disagree		3	3%
Did not answer the question		2	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>		100	100%

It is important to 84% that the church present annual financial reports to their members.

TABLE 22: CHURCHES ARE NOT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, BUT BELONG TO PASTORS

<b>CHURCHES ARE NOT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS, BUT BELONG TO PASTORS?</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	11	11%
Agree	15	15%
No idea	0	0%
Disagree	29	29%
Strong disagree	41	41%
Did not answer the question	2	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

The majority of respondents do not agree that the church is the sole property of the pastor.

TABLE 23: GOD WANTS PASTORS TO BE RICH.

<b>GOD WANTS PASTORS TO BE RICH?</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Strongly agree	11	11%
Agree	26	26%
No idea	1	1%
Disagree	38	38%
Strong disagree	23	23%
Did not answer the question	1	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

Again, the majority of respondents do not agree that God wants pastors to be rich.

**3.5 ANALYSIS OF THE VIEWS OF ORDINARY CHRISTIANS**

Earlier on I explained why I found it necessary to source the demographic information of the respondents. This was done primarily to learn who are more prone or predisposed to this phenomenon and their particular socio-economic. This point was of critical importance given that the main purpose of this study is to evaluate the contribution that prosperity gospel is making to the socio-economic status of its adherents.

The majority of the respondents are in the monthly income bracket of between R5000–R20 000. I must hasten to add that these respondents can best be described as youth and middle-aged (21-50) and it is also important to note that most of them are moderately and well educated, meaning that they could be employed.

Now I will briefly deal with the analysis of the results of the empirical research.

What I have found is that ordinary Christians present a negative narrative and/or disposition towards prosperity gospel. They do not believe that God loves only true believers and I assume that they would have agreed that God loves all of His creation without exception. They also do not buy the story that God listens only to the prayers of those who contribute money to the



church, although 29% believes that the opposite is true and that God indeed listens to those who contribute money to the church. No doubt, the 29% are adherents of prosperity gospel. The position adopted by those who disagree I find to be in line with their early response that God loves everyone.

Slightly over 40% of respondents hold the view that God wants all believers to prosper financially and be rich. This conforms to the teachings of prosperity gospel, as exemplified by the following statement of the Nigerian prosperity gopeller, David Oyedepo (2005:6):

God wants to see you prosper! It gives Him great pleasure! God is excited when you prosper. What an encounter this will be for you! God will usher you into strange realms of prosperity, sorrow-free and God-given kingdom prosperity. God takes pleasure in your plenty! No father is happy to see his children lack. Why then do you think that your lack excites God.

Notwithstanding, it is worth noting that the majority of respondents challenge any notion that suggests that God wants all believers to prosper financially.

Again as sign of a strong presence and adherence to prosperity teachings, 46% believes that wealth and health can be claimed from God through prayer. This position is not surprising either, because in terms of the teachings of prosperity gospel the words of any believer has a strong potential of changing that believer's life and circumstance, as alluded to by Goroh (2009)

A large percentage (54%) of respondents are equally in disagreement with the suggestion that wealth and health can be attained by simply claiming them from God. I must refer back here to Mbewe's (2016:par. 18) earlier-mentioned statement that God is a sovereign God of the whole universe with limitless power, whose actions do not depend in any shape or form upon what humanity does or does not do. In agreement with Mbewe, Hinn (2019:140) is emphatic that "God is in control. He is not some cosmic genie who exists to give me what I want and do what I command him to do".

It is also interesting to note that the majority believe that there is no contribution that the prosperity gospel can make to the socio-economy of Mafikeng, while 43% believe otherwise. Again this points to a strong prosperity teaching. Earlier on Togarasei's (2011:340-341) view was cited that the poor members of these churches joined with the hope that they are on the road to prosperity, while those who desire to be rich are constantly encouraged by the doctrine of prosperity. It is not surprising therefore that there are those who believe that this gospel can contribute to the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng for, as Togarasei (2011) indicates, they live with the hope that their socio-economic outlook will change.

From a very wide spectrum of authors it can be deduced that the core word in prosperity gospel is promise. It is this promise that holds some believers captive to the prosperity-driven churches - the promise that their socio-economic status will improve for the better. In this instance, the view of Heuser (2016:2) can be recalled that the theological construction of prosperity gospel speaks of an intimate link or connection between divine blessing and financial contribution to the church. Not only that, it also quantifies blessings with the notion that the more you sow the more you will reap.

It could well be that adherents to prosperity gospel remain trapped by the belief that they have not sown enough to warrant a harvest that will transform their socio-economic status.

Although the majority of respondents (53%) believes that prosperity gospel is a subtle way of robbing the unsuspecting, a whole 12% seem to be impartial. Impartial in the sense that 8% of that 12 say they have no idea, while 4% decided to abstain. It may well be that the 53% are those who have lost hope or worse have experience or knowledge (either heard or read) of the dire consequences of prosperity gospel, while the 12% still have hope in this phenomenon.

In the same vein, the overwhelming majority of respondents (84% and 70% respectively) agree and strongly agree that churches should or must present their members with audited annual financial reports and that the church is not the sole property of the pastor. It is important to recall that earlier on in an interview with the Chanzas and Rabotapi they indicated that they never received any financial reports in their church. Of those interviewed, only Mavis confirmed that members of Hope of Glory do receive reports. From this analysis, it can be safely assumed that this issue is not spoken of in different churches, although it has been identified as an important need.

So in a nutshell, prosperity gospel is viewed negatively by the majority of respondents. This in itself does not deny the existence of prosperity gospel in Mahikeng, nor does it mean that it is not flourishing. In my interaction with the broad spectrum of Christians, I have realised that some people who belong to prosperity-driven churches do not wish to admit their membership. I strongly believe that there could be three reasons or even more why adherents of prosperity gospel in Mahikeng do not come out plainly in support of it:

- The first reason may well be that they genuinely do not know the difference. A typical example of this is Pastor Tshepo Mauco (see 3.6.1) who is deeply into prosperity gospel and yet denies its existence.
- The second and perhaps the main reason could well be found in the observation of Jones and Woodbridge (2011:18) that “prosperity gospel appeals to the natural human

desire to be successful, healthy and financially secure. These desires are not inherently sinful” or perhaps the most appropriate explanation comes from Chilenje (2015:11) who was earlier on cited to contend that prosperity gospel mostly provides hope to the marginalised, the ostracised or the hopeless. This makes perfect sense, as I will show in the next chapter, for the once booming economic situation of Mahikeng took a serious knock at the dawn of democracy leaving thousands and thousands unemployed and disillusioned. Earlier on, it was shown that over 70% of respondents acknowledged that someone in their households receives social security grants.

- Thirdly, it may also be that members of these churches have taken the conscious decision to distance themselves and their churches from the events of the not so distant past, which they may have associated with prosperity gospel, e.g. the congregation of Rabboni Ministry in Pretoria being fed grass and snakes and the congregation of Heaven on Earth Centre Ministry<sup>26</sup> here in Mahikeng being fed dog meat as Holy communion. Given the fact that these incidences are not occurring in their churches, they may assume that theirs do not necessarily subscribe to prosperity gospel.

### **3.6 VIEWS OF CHURCH LEADERS**

The church and by extension the church leaders play a pivotal role in ensuring that the ultimate goal of the *missio Dei* is achieved. In essence church leaders or pastors are or should be the custodians of the gospel, which is defined by the Mirriam Webster dictionary (2016) as “something accepted or promoted as infallible truth or as a guiding principle or doctrine”.

Now as servants of the Lord and custodians of the “infallible truth” it is crucial that their views be sought with regards to the phenomenon of prosperity gospel. These church leaders represent a wide spectrum of Christianity and were selected randomly. Three are from charismatic churches, while one is from a mainline church.

#### **3.6.1 PASTOR TSHEPO MAUCO – ALLELUIA MINISTRIES**

The youthful Pastor Tshepo Mauco (2019) is pastoring a branch of Alleluia Ministries International here in Mafikeng. He serves under Pastor Alph Lukau who made news headlines on 24 February 2019 by claiming to have raised a man from the dead at his Sandton-based church.

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<sup>26</sup> This was doing the rounds on social media (Whatsapp) in Mahikeng recently. Pastor Peter was seen slaughtering a dog and feeding the congregation its cooked meat.

As part of soliciting the voice of church leaders on the issue of prosperity gospel, I sent Pastor Mauco a whatsapp message seeking an appointment with him. The message read “Moruti<sup>27</sup>, I’m researching prosperity gospel. Do you mind talking to me for two minutes about it?”

Pastor Mauco responded: “There is no such thing as prosperity gospel according to me and the word, is only the gospel of Jesus Christ which comes with benefits, such as prosperity, blessings and miracles.” He gave me the following texts to substantiate his argument:

2 Corinthians 8:9:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that you through His poverty might become rich.

3 John 1:2:

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

Pastor Mauco believes that “Abraham was so blessed; the Bible says in Genesis he had livestock etc. He was so rich and according to Galatians (Galatians 3:14), his blessings are ours, he is the father of nations and we must be blessed as he was”.

Though Pastor Mauco said that prosperity gospel does not exist, his own words “...we must be blessed as he was” refute his very own conviction. These words are directly in line with the teachings of prosperity gospel, which seeks to undermine the sovereignty of God. No rocket scientist is needed to decipher that Mauco’s words echo that of Copeland (1974:98) who makes the following assertions:

You can have what you say! In fact what you are saying is exactly what you are getting now. If you are living in poverty and lack and want, change what you are saying. It will change what you have...Discipline your vocabulary. Discipline everything you do, everything you say, and everything you think to agree with what God says does, what God says and what God thinks. God will be obligated to meet your needs because of His word.

Secondly, no matter how strong it may be or how strongly it may be expressed, the view held by Pastor Mauco is seriously and grossly flawed in that it seeks to align itself only with the material wealth of Abraham, which was not the essence of the covenant. It is flawed in that it is solely

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<sup>27</sup> Setswana word for Pastor/Reverend

based on the teaching of prosperity gospel that the principal objective and reason why God made a covenant with Abraham was to bless him materially and as spiritual sons of Abraham, that Christians are heirs to those blessings and must therefore claim the best cars, best homes, best clothes and beautiful spouses (Chilenje, 2015:16)

As cited earlier, Bauckham (2003:34-36) in unambiguous terms asserts the following:

The Abrahamic blessings are more than the blessing of creation because it is designed to contend with and to overcome its opposite: the ultimate goal of God's promise to Abraham is that blessing will prevail over sin. It does so when the seed of Abraham, the singled-out descendant of Abraham, the messiah, becomes a curse for us...so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.

So, it makes perfect sense that the Abrahamic covenant, which Pastor Mauco referred to, is and must be both vertical and horizontal: vertical in ensuring total obedience to God and to His Word, but also living right and being compassionate to fellow human beings.

### **3.6.2 PASTOR ONTLAMETSE SEDIKO – CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES**

Fifty-seven year old Pastor Ontlametse Phillip Sediko (2019) ministers to a congregation of just under 80 people. He grew up in a Pentecostal-charismatic church and believes that he was called to the ministry when he was in his early thirties, although he only answered this call at 42 years. He is married and a father of three children.

Although he has been a pastor for 15 years now, Sediko is not in full-time ministry and continues to work as a deputy-director at the Department of Cooperate Governance, Human Settlement and Traditional Affairs. He has no formal theological training. His reason for working while being a pastor at the same time is that he does not want to depend solely on the congregation for his family's upkeep.

This prompted me to ask him about the policy of his church with regards to tithing and offering? Sediko's quick response was that tithing and offering are Scriptural and therefore part of his church's teaching. He cited Malachi 3:10, but also continued to insist that even in the New Testament Jesus Christ did not abolish tithing and simply encouraged (Matt. 23:23) scribes and Pharisees to add mercy and justice to their character.

Sediko indicated he strongly believes that every Christian must pay tithe, as it is Biblical to do so. His views are in line with Sprague (2002:16) who suggests that Christians who do not tithe are led astray by the devil and as a results deprived of heaven's very best blessing by not continually planting back into the kingdom of God. On the other hand, LeBlanc (2011:40) insists

that tithing is not a voluntary option, achievable only by those who are financially secure. It is an ancient spiritual training method that God uses to begin setting our priorities and goals right, to heal our hearts.

In Christian Assemblies, money generated through tithing and offering is used for the general maintenance of the church, which includes the salaries of two cleaners who work twice a week. He conceded that the pastor and two worship team leaders are paid monthly stipends. The bulk of the money is used during the annual Easter conferences, adding that the church recently started a social programme that seeks to take care of the elderly and orphans in the church. This would mean that he believes in the notion that a church has to contribute to the social upliftment of its members.

On the issue of prosperity gospel, Sediko explained that there are two sides to the prosperity gospel: the bad and the good. According to him, it teaches people to pray and rely on God. It also however makes people lazy, believing they can claim whatever they want or need from God through prayer. Pastor Sediko said that even though God is the provider, He encourages people to work. He made his point by citing three Scripture verses:

Genesis 3:19:

By the sweat of your brow, you will eat...

Proverbs 6:10-11:

A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest and poverty will come to you.

Ephesians 4:28:

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good that he may have something to give him who has need.

The other negative aspect of prosperity gospel, according to Pastor Sediko, is the fact that it seems to benefit pastors more than the congregations. This is the reason he chose to continue working and not rely on the support of the congregation.

Sediko said he has heard a number of stories of people who lost money and possessions to prosperity preachers. He never singles out prosperity gospel and usually preaches against all falsehood in the gospel, which includes fake miracles and fake prophecies.

Pastor Sediko indicated that he firmly believes that everything, be it good or bad, comes from the Lord. He does not necessarily mean that God does wrong, but that the devil would not be able to anything if he was not permitted by God. He cited the suffering of Job as example of God allowing the bad. In other words, Sediko recognises and completely accepts the sovereignty of God and in doing so refutes and/or repudiates the teachings of prosperity gospel, which seems to challenge the authority of God and elevate man to the status of puppet master.

### **3.6.3 PASTOR MATTHEW MASHI – KINGDOM FAITH MINISTRIES**

The 39-year old Pastor Mashi (2019) is both a theological student and serving as a pastor under Pastor Johannes Tselapedi. He said that after observing several mistakes committed by a number of pastors, especially those of charismatic churches, he felt the need to equip himself with proper theological training. He cited Pastor Daniel Lesego of Rabboni Ministries in this regard, who fed his congregation grass and snakes that they may demonstrate their faith.

Mashi called the whole act a mistake, as it does not have any Biblical reference. His argument is that if eating grass had any religious or Biblical significance, it would have started with Jesus Christ Himself after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. Instead of turning stones to bread as advised by the devil, Jesus chose to rebuke the devil: "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

Mashi and Pastor Tselapedi's church is situated in an RDP settlement commonly known as Sekha-Lekhekhe. About what motivated him to follow his calling, Pastor Mashi said:

My motivation to the Ministry, it is from this scripture (Titus 2:15) building strong relationship (fellowship) among church members as well as the formation of Christian character, help them grow to full Christian maturity, by teaching the Word, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, binding up the broken-hearted. Then by reading the Bible and following the leading of the Spirit, they will be able to grow on their own (1 John 2:27).

On the issue of prosperity gospel, Mashi believes that wealth is not necessarily a sign of God's blessing, but contentment is. He feels humanity has and must appreciate whatever comes from the Lord. Humanity needs to appreciate the sovereignty of God and understand that God is God irrespective of the circumstances. He put it as follows:

According to my understanding all the blessings in life come from God. So, prosperity is the manifestation of God's heavenly blessings and provision here on earth. Everything you are experiencing here on earth is in direct proportion to what you are experiencing in

your soul. As your soul prosper so does your life. So if your soul isn't prospering, then the issues of your life won't.

Pastor Mashi added:

Teaching that God wants everybody to prosper financially: yes, I support the teaching as long as we as Christians understand that prosperity by its definition, is simply another word for well-being, often financial but also including health, happiness, or spiritual well-being. However, some false teachers and prophets would seek to preach a gospel that attempts to defraud people of true biblical prosperity through greed, self-centeredness, and Scripture-twisting.

Pastor Mashi indicated that their church does not present an annual financial report to its members. This has never been done, even before he became a pastor, and he has never questioned the practice.

#### **3.6.4 REVEREND PETER KONZANE – DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH**

Reverend Peter Konzane (2019) was born and bred in the Dutch Reformed Church. He has the strong view that every Christian has been called by God and He has chosen from amongst them believers to lead the preaching of the gospel. He offered this as the reason he responded to the call of being in the ministry, because he understood that God chooses some to send into the world.

Konzane said that poverty cannot be a punishment from God, but that in the main God allows certain things such as poverty to remind us of the need to seek Him and to solely depend on Him. Equally so, God in His infinite wisdom blesses some to a level of affluence and riches with the sole aim that they in turn be a blessing to others and not be selfish. He cited Genesis 12:2 where God said to Abraham: "I will bless you and make your name great and you shall be a blessing."

Concerning the issue of a tithing, Konzane explained that they have started to introduce the concept in his church, but as a voluntary exercise. He added that in years gone by people grew to understand and rely on the Biblical story of the poor widow (Mark 12:42-44) who Jesus praised for giving two coins. According to him, people failed to comprehend that Jesus commended the widow because she gave her all and not from abundance. His church has decided to introduce an official tithe, but would not force anyone to pay it.

Reverend Konzane considers the concept, practice and implementation of prosperity gospel as utterly wrong, for it seeks to take away the sovereignty of God. He deems it an undisputable fact



that health and material prosperity comes from God, according to His divine providence. The challenge and what is wrong is the manner in which people are taught that it can be literally claimed from God by planting a seed. Konzane's stance corresponds to that of Phillips (2015:92) who has observed that prayers for material prosperity and wealth, as conceptualised by prosperity teachers, are like desperate pleas and supplications from gamblers who are almost about to put their last coin in the slot machine with the hope it will pop out flashy cars, expensive mansions or even promotion at work.

Konzane said that the most irksome part is that some pastors are using prosperity gospel to lure people to their churches with unrealistic promises. People are promised that by giving money to the church and/or pastor, God will respond to their needs. He strongly condemns this, as at times gullible people are encouraged and coerced into giving beyond measure. Konzane's view on prosperity gospel is in agreement with Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:79) who suggests that prosperity gossellers have a transactional rather than a sacrificial understanding of giving, which is viewing offerings and tithes as a means to entice God into blessing them.

Another issue is that in most cases the recipients of such funds are not held accountable. Konzane indicated that it is common practice in his church to provide members with a full annual financial report.

### **3.7 SUMMARY OF THE VIEWS OF CHURCH LEADERS**

The majority of the pastors I interviewed do not subscribe to prosperity gospel, although they lead charismatic churches. Although Reverend Peter Konzane acknowledged that God can bless His children according to His own divine providence, he came strongly condemned the practices of prosperity gospel. He fell just short of pronouncing it theft in the name of the gospel.

Interesting is that of all the pastors I spoke to it is only Pastor Tshepo Mauco who seems to support prosperity gospel by denying its existence as a separate gospel from the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to him, the gospel of Jesus Christ comes with benefits, such as prosperity, blessings and miracles. He justified his position by citing 2 Corinthians 8:9, which speaks about Jesus being poor so that believers could be rich, and 3 John 1:2 in which John says he wishes all believers to prosper.

(I address these particular texts in chapter 6 of this study.)

### **3.8 SUMMARY**

A comprehensive analysis of prosperity gospel is provided in chapter 6 of this study.

However, it has become clear in this chapter that the present format of prosperity gospel has negatively affected those who embraced it, given the experiences of the Chanzas, Rabotapi and Mary Kobue. Instead of impacting their socio-economic status positively, it has affected it negatively and adversely.

It was interesting to observe how some pastors who are in prosperity driven-charismatic churches seem to distance themselves from prosperity gospel or even totally denying its existence. Pastor Mauco denied the existence of prosperity gospel. Earlier on I suggested that the reason for this denial could be that they honestly do not know the difference between prosperity gospel and their charismatic churches or that some of them want to distance themselves from the recent shocking and headline-grabbing stories that are associated with prosperity gospel.

Hinn (2019:155) observes that:

prosperity gospel appeals to the deep longing of every human heart for peace, health, wealth and happiness. There is nothing wrong with wanting a good and happy life but prosperity gospel uses Jesus Christ as pawn in its get-rich-quick scam. Prosperity gospel sells salvation and false hope...It is an evil that poses as blessing but is truly a curse. It appears to be a loving extension of God's goodness but is arguably the most hateful and abusive king of false teaching.

Now it may well be that these local pastors want to protect their public image.

Given the experiences of those who encountered prosperity gospel and the general response of ordinary Christians, including the views of pastors, the following chapter focuses in on Mahikeng and briefly looks at its socio-economic status.

## **CHAPTER 4 BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMY OF MAHIKENG<sup>28</sup>**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapters reviewed the origin, history and teachings of prosperity gospel. We also sought the views of those who have had direct encounters with this phenomenon and the ordinary Christians of Mahikeng.

It was also established from the previous chapters that this phenomenon is spreading and growing at a rapid rate in different parts of the world, including South Africa and Mahikeng in particular. Heuser (2016:6) is of the view that no one can come to a sensible conclusion regarding prosperity gospel from a global perspective alone, but attention must also be paid to its impact on local realities. Realities like the social improvement of local communities and its role in shaping local economic conditions.

Now the fact that prosperity gospel adherents in Mahikeng, like Pastor Mauco (2019), deny its existence does not necessarily mean that it does not exist. It may well be that they seek to disassociate themselves from the strange events that have occurred in churches that are considered prosperity driven.

So in this chapter and in line with the advice of Heuser (2016), focuses on making a missiological evaluation of the contribution of prosperity gospel to the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng.

### **4.2 GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF MAHIKENG**

Mahikeng is the capital city of the North West Province in South Africa. It is not only the seat of government and provincial legislature, but also houses a number of regional offices of the national state departments. "Mahikeng" is the Setswana word for "a place among rocks". As indicated earlier (chapter 1), it is approximately 150km south of the capital city of Botswana, Gaborone, and approximately 300km west of Pretoria.

Mahikeng is located in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. According to the municipality's website (Accessed 17 March 2018), Mafikeng Local Municipality is the largest municipality in the district compared to the other four: Ramotshere Moiloa, Tswaing, Ditsobotla

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<sup>28</sup> Mahikeng is the original Setswana name for this area. However in this chapter Mahikeng and Mafikeng will be used interchangeably, as some sources use the latter. I explain the difference later when providing a brief political history of the area.

and Ratlou. It is a category B municipality, which is established in terms of section 12 of the Municipal Structures Act (MSA).

The municipality adopted the executive mayoral system that places the executive authority of the municipality in the hands of the executive mayor, assisted by a mayoral committee, while the administrative side is headed by the municipal manager.

The first inhabitants who can be directly connected to the present people of Mahikeng were the Sotho-Tswana who moved into this area around 1200AD and 1350AD. According to Ramoroka, (2009:22) the said people were Barolong whose origin can be traced to King Morolong. They were an offshoot of Bahurutshe, the main branch of the Batswana.

Ramoroka (2009:22-24) continues to record that following the death of Morolong, this tribe split into clans mainly due to infighting. For example, a clan named after Ratlou further split into smaller clans. Today one can be found at Khunwana under the chieftainship of Moshwete, another in Madibogo under Phoi, whilst the other is in Phitshane under Motseakhumo. Over the years the infighting amongst these clans and amongst other Batswana tribes, such as Bakwena, displaced them temporarily from their areas. They would however always return after a ceasefire or after defeating what they considered enemies.

One of the major upheavals, known as *difaqane*, took place between 1820 and 1830, led by Mzilikazi of the Amandebele tribe. It was upheavals like these and the continuous encroachment of the Voortrekkers onto Batswana land that saw Kgosi Montshiwa seeking the protection of the British. (The issue of colonisation will be dealt with under the sub-heading – A brief political history of Mahikeng.)

Mahikeng came under the spotlight of news and the centre of international focus when it was besieged by the Boer forces in what was to be known as the Anglo Boer War, which lasted from 1899 to 1902. The Boers saw Mahikeng as strategically important as a railhead and gateway to the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the present day Botswana and Rhodesia, which is the present day Zimbabwe.

In the abovementioned war, Barolong-boo-Ratshidi sided with their colonial masters the British who had promised them a reward for their loyalty. According to Ramoroka (2009:73), those amongst Barolong who were perceived to be not cooperating were dealt with very shrewdly by

the colonial masters. Kgosi Wessel Montshiwa was perceived as such and was dethroned and replaced with Kgosana<sup>29</sup> Lekoko.

Ramoroka (2009:76) notes that after the war “what was rather vexed was that the main culprits in the war the Boers were not punished and it was disheartening to visualise a humiliating system of injustice perpetuated by the British government against the helpless and desperate people who were fighting to protect their land”.

It should be borne in mind that in that war another Batswana tribe, namely the Barolong-boo-Rapulana, were aiding the Boers and they too were punished after the war. The animosity between the two Batswana tribes arose from their infighting, which had already escalated to a full-blown war prior to the Anglo Boer War in 1884.

The most painful part of the war, according to Ramoroka (2009:77), is that “the Ratshidi like the Rapulana had gained nothing from the siege and the status quo remained. The Rapulana remained in Lotlhakane and Montshiwa was not compensated for the efforts of the Barolong during the siege”.

The population is currently estimated at just over 500 000 and the majority of the residents are Batswana of the Tshidi-Barolong tribe<sup>30</sup>.

Putting the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng in its rightful context requires briefly reviewing its political history. A history that shows a steady economic growth prior to 1994 and a decline that was occasioned by the dawn of democracy.

#### **4.3 A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF MAHIKENG**

According to Matthews (1945:19), following the continuous inroads of the Voortrekkers into Batswana territories and the continued conflict between the Boers, Batswana and the British, a land dispute arose from their disregard of the treaties they had entered into. On 4 April 1871, the three parties sought the arbitration of the then high commissioner of the Griqualand West colony, Sir Henry Barkly. In his endeavour to resolve the impasse, Sir Barkly appointed Anthony O'Reilly of Waterstroom and John Campbell of Klipdrift to adjudicate the matter.

Ramoroka (2009:82) notes that the delegation of Batswana in the land dispute was led by Reverend Joseph D.M. Ludorf of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, who encouraged the Batswana to stand their ground against the Boers.

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<sup>29</sup> Setswana word for Sub-Chief or a Junior Chief

<sup>30</sup> The Batswana as a nation is made up of 74 tribes

Following the failure of the afore-mentioned adjudicators or judges to resolve the stand-off, the matter was referred to Governor Keate of Natal for arbitration. On 17 October 1871 Governor Keate released what was later to be known as the Keate Award. In his judgement he declared:

From the source of Molopo River to the source of the Makwasi River and along that River into the Vaal River and down the Vaal River in a westerly and southerly direction to Platberg mountain, and then due west, touching the northern edge of the Langeberg mountains, which are around Postmasburg. All land west of that line to the Kalahari is Batswana land.

According to Ramoroka (2009:83), Sir Barkly sent this judgement to Reverend Ludorf who translated it into Setswana and subsequently sent copies to Barolong, Batlhaping and Bangwaketse.

After Governor Keate's Award, Molema (1951:136) notes that Ludorf was of the view that the Boer Republics would attempt to make it virtually impossible for Batswana chiefs to occupy their land. He believed that the only solution was for the different Batswana tribes to unite and form a formal government, free from the Boers. According to Molema (1951), Ludorf's desire was to see a protected Batswana state that was not colonised.

True to the suspicion of Ludorf, the Boer Republics indeed showed signs of disregarding Governor Keate's Award. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1986:7), another attempt to save Batswana land came from John Mackenzie of the London Missionary Society. His involvement came after the missionary's station in Kuruman was attacked during the turmoil of 1878, upon the discovery of diamonds in Hope Town in 1867. The discovery of diamonds led to six parties claiming ownership of the territory. The six parties were the Boer Republics of Orange Free State and Transvaal and four other indigenous groups, one of which was the Griqua.

Comaroff and Comaroff (1986) explain that in order to escape the control and dominance of the Boer Republics, Griqua Chief Nicholas Waterboer petitioned the British High Commissioner to place his dominion over the contested area. Following this cessation of Waterboer, Mackenzie urged Britain to annex Batswana land to protect it from what he called "freebooters". Given the continuous expansion of the Voortrekkers and the subsequent establishment of the Zuid Afrikansche Republic in Western Transvaal, Chief Montshiwa of Barolong-boo-Ratshidi joined Mackenzie in a request for British protection. Chief Montshiwa signed a treaty ceding his sovereignty to the British on 22 May 1884.

However, it is crucial at this stage to recollect the 1852 Sand River Convention. Morton (1992:101) relates that it was at this convention that Britain entered into an agreement with the Boers. Morton explains as follows:

Both contracting parties at Sand River considered themselves partners in the ultimate white conquest of South Africa...Britain obligated itself to disclaim alliances with any of the coloured nations, to prohibit arms sales to Africans and to provide the Boers with continued access to guns and powder in the Cape Colony and Natal.

So, although the liberal government of Gladstone, which came to power in Britain in 1880, had promised to protect the Batswana and their land, Smith (1988:12) records that the Boers and British disregarded Governor Keate's award. In line with the agreement they entered into at the Sand River Convention, they unilaterally decided in 1885 to divide Batswana land into two. The southern part was named British Bechuanaland, while the northern part was named British Protectorate.

Mahikeng and the rest of British Bechuanaland, against the wishes of Batswana and their *dikgosi*, were annexed to the Cape Colony (present day South Africa) in 1895. However, the British colonial administrative offices for the Protectorate remained in the Imperial Reserve in Mahikeng from 1885 until 1965. According to Parnell (1986:204), this decision meant Mahikeng was to function as an extra-territorial administrative centre of which there is only one other instance in the entire world, namely the French administration of Mauritania from the Senegalese town of St. Louis.

This is why to this day Mahikeng is still fondly referred to as Mahikeng-a-ga-Mmamosetsanyana. *Mmamosetsanyana* is a Setswana term of endearment referring to the Queen of England. The Batswana coined the term following the Queen's regular visits to the Protectorate, which hosted her in Mahikeng.

Parnell (1986:204) notes that the relocation of the status of Mahikeng as the "capital city" was discussed already some time before the Second World War, discussions that continued throughout the 1950s and culminated in June 1961 when a decision was finally reached to transfer the capital to a site within the Protectorate. This decision was coupled with granting the Protectorate autonomy leading to its full independence in 1966 as the Republic of Botswana, with Gaborone as its new capital city.

According to Richards (1987:13), following the adoption of the Bantu Authorities Act No 68 of 1951 by the then South African parliament, parts of what was British Bechuanaland was restored to the Batswana. The Tswana Territorial Authority (TTA) was formed in 1961, leading

to the area being granted independence as Bophuthatswana in 1977. However at independence Mahikeng remained part of the then South Africa, given the uncertainty of some whites of being governed by blacks. Three years later the town of Mahikeng was reincorporated into Bophuthatswana and its municipality was ultimately amalgamated with that of Mmabatho in 1984, to form Mmabatho City Council.

It is perhaps important to note that Mahikeng was the original Setswana name. Smith (1988:14) records that after the 1884 treaty, which saw Chief Montshiwa ceding the autonomy of this area to the British, Sir Hercules Robinson signed a proclamation in 1885 that divided Mahikeng into two sections, namely one for the Barolong while the other was for European settlement. Due to pronunciation, the European settlement was known as Mafeking until 1980 when the town was reincorporated into Bophuthatswana and Mafeking was changed to Mafikeng.

Following the democratic dispensation of 1994, Mafikeng reverted to being part of South Africa and it is now the capital city of the North West Province. Barolong-boo-Ratshidi, under the chieftainship of Kgosi Kgotleng Montshiwa, as the rightful owners of this area petitioned the North West provincial government in 2010 to have this area revert to its original name of Mahikeng.

#### **4.4 MAHIKENG'S ECONOMY**

##### **4.4.1 PRE-DEMOCRATIC DISPENSATION**

Mahikeng has experienced a very volatile economy, because of its political nature or experiences. During its tenure as the capital city of British Protectorate, it experienced some economic growth which took a nose-dive when the status of capital city was transferred to Gaborone in the present day Botswana. However, the independence of Bophuthatswana in 1977 brought with it an economic boom for Mafikeng (Star, 1977). The most conspicuous expression of this was the increase in construction activities. Parnell (1986:205) argues that the other major source of expansion was the creation of the Bophuthatswana state apparatus. Apart from the swelling civil service, employment was created through quasi-state organisations like Agricor, Bophuthatswana Development Corporation, Bophuthatswana Broadcasting Corporation, Bophuthatswana Provident Fund, Bophuthatswana University and others.

Parnell (1986:209) observes that:

it may be argued in the light of the widespread rejection of the "independence" of South Africa's bantustans that to pose the question of whether or not Mafikeng is experiencing a series of transformation paralleling the post-independence experience of Harare,



Lusaka or Maputo, is unjustified...nevertheless it has been demonstrated that there are certain distinct changes which occurred in the Mafikeng area as a consequence of the “independence” of the “homeland”.

This economic growth was not only limited to the public sector. The private sector, especially tourism, also recorded significant growth.

Smith (1988:1) says that following the amalgamation of Mahikeng municipality and Mmabatho municipality in 1984 to form Mmabatho City Council, the fortunes of the city changed. He cites the then mayor councillor, Sydney Gordon, reporting that the budget of the city council increased from R12 million in 1984 to over R35 million in 1988.

#### **4.4.2 POST-DEMOCRATIC DISPENSATION**

Following the dawn of democracy in 1994, the economic cloud of Mahikeng began to evaporate and dissipate. Mosiane (2000:13) notes that Mahikeng’s economic crisis has been precipitated by the rundown and dismantling of the erstwhile Bophuthatswana institutions. Bophuthatswana’s independence lasted from 1977 to March 1994 and it brought with it huge government investments and general improvement to the economy of Mafikeng. According to Mosiane (2000:15):

It is estimated that since the “independence” of Bophuthatswana in 1977 until 1994, between 20-30 percent of the total budget of the bantustan was spend on the development of Mmabatho-Mafikeng. By 1995 the public sector including parastatal agencies accounted for 43 percent of the total local employment while the private sector contributed 30 percent.

Manson (2015:57) postulates that following the fall of the Bophuthatswana administration in March 1994, the joint administrators Job Mokgoro and Tjaart van der Walt, who were installed by the then South African Transitional Executive Council to run the affairs of Bophuthatswana, decided to start a process of dissolving many structures of Bophuthatswana instead of realigning them with that of the Transvaal provincial administration.

Mosiane (2000:15) contends as follows:

The reorganisation of the new North-West Provincial administration necessitated a relocation of certain governments departments from Mafikeng to larger and centrally located centres in the Province. Some private business divisions relocated to larger business centres such as Johannesburg and Pretoria. Due to the national government’s programme of public sector restructuring, the former Bophuthatswana’s 26 government

supported institutions such as parastatals, public enterprises, development finance institutions including their subsidiaries were either privatised or closed down.

Jones (1999b:526-527) notes that “the transfer and disposal of Bophuthatswana’s national assets were beginning to illustrate the wider conflict of interest emerging between South Africa’s regions and the centre. The fate of Bop TV’s considerable assets and over 750 employees illustrate the problems of Bophuthatswana’s reincorporation”.

At its closure, Bop Broadcasting (as it was commonly known then) had employed over 900 personnel. In her announcement in Parliament in Cape Town, the then minister of communications, the late Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, said: “The Broadcasting Amendment Act provides for the launch of regional television stations, in two regions of the country. To this end it has been decided to close Bop Broadcasting operations and replace it with a service to deliver indigenous languages of the Northern region.”

Other Bophuthatswana institutions like Agricor, Bophuthatswana National Development Co-operation (BNDC) and Sefalana Employees Benefits Organisation (SEBO), which were part of the economic boom and backbone of Mahikeng, suffered the same fate as Bop Broadcasting. According to Mokgoro (2012:154), “Bophuthatswana public sector was huge and complex. There were 26 departments and 42 parastatals in which a total of 65 000 workers were employed”.

The majority of these employees were based in Mahikeng, as the administrative and political capital of Bophuthatswana. The relocation of the provincial headquarters of the South African Police Service (SAPS) and that of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) from Mahikeng to Potchefstroom also rubbed salt into the bleeding wound by increasing the rapid decline of Mahikeng’s economy and swelling the ranks of unemployment.

In fact, the annual report of the Municipality (2011:28) records some of the households in the jurisdiction of the Municipality rely only on various social grants from government, whilst those employed are mainly employed in the public service. The 2011 census of Statistics South Africa recorded that Mahikeng was the 24<sup>th</sup> densest populated municipality in South Africa with a general unemployment rate is at 35.7%, while the youth unemployment rate stood at 47.1%.

The empirical research of this study (3.4.2.6) indicated that out of a 100 respondents whose views were sought concerning prosperity gospel, 77% reported that someone in their household was receiving a social security grant.

Mafikeng Local Municipality adopted its Local Economic Development strategy in May 2007 in an endeavour to improve the socio-economic status of the city. According to the municipal report (2007:88), the strategy identified three broad goals. The first was to eradicate poverty through widening the economic base in the manufacturing, SMME, transport and tourism sectors. The second goal was to create opportunities for transferring technology and skills to the local community with the sole objective of boosting their employment opportunities. The last was to assist the local businesses and SMMEs by boosting investment confidence in the area. The Municipality intended to achieve the third goal by providing more effective infrastructure and business support.

However, it is worth noting that the purpose of this study is not to solely examine the economic status of Mahikeng, but rather to do a missiological evaluation of the contribution of prosperity gospel to the socio-economy of Mahikeng. Now Mahikeng, like the rest of South Africa, encountered Christianity more than two centuries ago.

#### **4.5 THE DAWN OF CHRISTIANITY**

Social anthropologist Z.K. Matthews (1945:9) records that the tribe of Tshidi-Barolong had its first encounter with Christianity in 1813, when they were visited by Reverend John Campbell of the London Missionary Society. Subsequent to that visit, they also hosted Reverend Robert Moffat, the L.M.S. missionary of Kuruman fame in 1824.

Matthews (1945:10) adds that Molema Tawana, the son of the great Kgosi<sup>31</sup> Tawana, was the very first convert. Following his conversion, Barolong boo-Ratshidi together with the Wesleyan missionary Ludorf, built the first chapel in 1873.

According to Ramoroka (2009:79), Christianity was presented to Ratshidi's as the good news of the coming Jesus Christ. This assisted them a great deal to weigh this new-found faith against their own religious practices. As a result the two religions coexisted among the Barolong.

Molema, who Matthews (1945) was referring to, continued to be the sole African preacher amongst the Barolong and introduced the formal education he had learned from the missionaries. Kgosi Montshiwa and the royal family did not embrace Christianity immediately, for they perceived it to be against the traditions and culture of their people. Young Christian converts had lost confidence in the old traditions and customs and had focused on the Word of God. However Ramoroka (2009:89) notes that as time went by and after the death of Molema, Kgosi Montshiwa succumbed to Christianity and Western education. "He announced a charter

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<sup>31</sup> The Setswana word for Chief/King

of religious liberty and ordered the Barolong Christian leaders to say prayers at the royal Kgotla, especially before people were due to dwell on any particular issue”.

According to Molema (1966:66), Reverend Ludorf cemented his relationship with Kgosi Montshiwa and the Barolong in general by being their emissary against the Boers. As alluded to earlier, even after Governor Keate released his award, Sir Henry Barkly who was the British High Commissioner sent a copy of the Keate Award to Ludorf and it was Ludorf who translated it into Setswana. Ramoroka (2009:89) records that the cordial relationship between Montshiwa and missionaries had a great influence on his reign. The Christian value system he adopted led to him repealing the compulsory customary laws that did not conform to Christianity. Some of the compulsory customary laws which Montshiwa repealed in 1878 included compulsory initiation.

After the death of Ludorf, missionaries continued to participate and influence the lives of the Barolong. Molema (1966:124) narrates how other churches, such as the Ethiopians and African Methodist Episcopal (AME), came into being together with other churches. It is worth noting that some of these churches became affiliated to the South Africa Council of Churches. According to Meiring (2010:314-315), what is known today as the South African Council of Churches (SACC) started as the South African General Missions Council in 1904 and transformed into The Christian Council of South Africa in 1936. In 1967, the then general secretary of the Christian Council Bill Burnett proposed a new a constitution for the council and that constitution together with the name South African Council of Churches (SACC) were adopted in 1968.

Although the missionary influence and Christianity continued to spread throughout the rest of South Africa, Mahikeng began to experience Christianity differently around 1977. It should be recalled that about two decades earlier in 1951 (Richards, 1987:13) the then South African parliament adopted the Bantu Authorities Act, which paved way for the establishment of the Tswana Territorial Authority and this led to the independence of Bophuthatswana in 1977.

According to Madise (2005:114), at independence the president of Bophuthatswana Kgosi Manyane Mangope declared Bophuthatswana a Christian country and also insisted that his political party should adhere to Christian principles. Jones (1999b:531) notes that this influenced some church leaders to form their ministers’ fraternity, which they named the Bophuthatswana Ministers Fraternal (BOMIFRA), as they believed that Bophuthatswana was governed by a Christian government.

It is essential to note that this was not a council of churches such as the SACC, but just an association of different church leaders who independently from their churches came together to

form BOMIFRA. It must be kept in mind that some of those church leaders, such as Reverend Samuel Seodi and Reverend Sidney Seane of the Methodist church, belonged to churches that did not recognise the independence of Bophuthatswana and were already affiliates of the South African Council of Churches.

Clause 4(b)9 of Chapter 2 of the Bophuthatswana Constitution Act (18 of 1977) states: "All people are equal before the law, and none may because of his sex, his descent, his language, his origin or his religious beliefs be favoured or prejudiced." Lebeloane and Madise (2011:79) record that "in spite of this clause, the homeland state favoured the Christian religion above other religions".

It can be assumed that it is mainly because of this bias of President Mangope and his government that Christianity flourished in the area. This could be ascribed to the fact that Christianity was the only religion taught in schools up to high school level and every government function was preceded by a prayer. I<sup>32</sup> know from personal experience that almost every year the government would pay for busses to ferry ordinary citizens from the length and breadth of the country to come to a prayer service at the Mmabatho Independence Stadium.

However, it is not absolutely clear as to exactly when prosperity gospel found its way into Mahikeng in particular. According to Sharpe (2013:171) it could possibly have been around the 1980s.

#### **4.5.1 MAHIKENG - PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

It is crystal clear from the afore-going that Christianity was brought to this part of the world by missionaries. Though there is no documentary proof of when exactly prosperity gospel was introduced to Mahikeng, its growth is undeniably phenomenal. This could be attributed to the fact that Mahikeng has a very high level of unemployment occasioned by the democratic dispensation. As earlier cited, Chilenje (2015:11) suggests that this faith movement provides hope to mostly the marginalised, the ostracised or the hopeless.

This phenomenon has its roots firmly planted in the majority of charismatic and Pentecostal churches.

In simple terms, it means the growth of prosperity gospel is directly linked with the growth of Pentecostalism, about which the well-known statistician of Christianity David Barrett (Anderson, 1999:19) has estimated that the worldwide figure of Pentecostals is likely to rise to over 1.1 billion by 2025. Anderson (1999) avers that as a result of this forecast, Pentecostalism is fast

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<sup>32</sup> Served as personal assistant to Minister T.M. Molatlhwa between 1986-1992

becoming the dominant expression of Christianity and the most peculiar religious phenomenon in the world.

From this researcher's own personal observation (Thebe, 2019), the number of Pentecostal or charismatic churches in Mahikeng is approximately six times more than that of the mainline churches. The proliferation of prosperity gospel and gossellers in South Africa and more particularly in Mahikeng can be attributed to two main factors. As cited earlier, Chilenje (2015) indicates that the first is Pentecostalism, which taps into African religio-cultural conditions, while the equally important second one is the promise of material abundance, which in itself is the promise of an escape from socio-economic hardships.

The teachings and promises of this gospel were reviewed in chapter 2.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

Besides painting a picture of the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng, attention was also drawn to Mahikeng's geographic and social demographic as well as its long and complicated political history.

In examining the socio-economic situation, it was established that Mahikeng experienced a serious economic boom occasioned by the independence of Bophuthatswana in 1977 given the fact that at that time Mmabatho-Mahikeng was the capital city. Ironically, this economic growth that was on an upward trajectory was crushed and/or dissipated with the demise of Bophuthatswana in 1994, even though Mahikeng remained the capital city of the new administration of the North West Province.

As already indicated, Mokgoro (2012:154) mentions that Bophuthatswana's civil service and parastatals had employed over 65 000 people, some of whom lost their jobs following the restructuring and closure of those parastatals. Jones (1999b:526) also relates that approximately 700 people lost their jobs with the closure of the Bophuthatswana Broadcasting Cooperation.

Interestingly, Serumaga-Zake and Arnab (2012:68) note that between 1996 and 2001 the unemployment rate in the whole of the North West Province rose by 10%. It can be assumed that the greater portion of that percentage is for Mahikeng, because Mahikeng was the economic hub of Bophuthatswana. In fact the 2019 statistics released by the Research and Development Unit of the North West Development Corporation (2019:11) indicate that between January and March of 2019 the official unemployment rate in the North West stood at 26.4%.

The empirical research indicates that 77% of respondents receive social security grants on a monthly basis, of which a whopping 56% receive child support grants and foster care grants that were non-existent in the days of Bophuthatswana. Apart from these grants, there are two new RDP settlements that have been created to benefit the unemployed and low-income households.

This downward spiral of socio-economic conditions in of Mahikeng is even acknowledged in the 2011 annual report of the Municipality. The 2014-15 report only refers to “local economic development aims to address and reduce poverty through introducing sustainable projects and job creation”.

If the doctrine and teachings of prosperity gospel were bearing any significant and positive results, its impact would be visible in the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng and if that was actually the case, there would not be any talk of the Municipality aiming to reduce poverty through sustainable projects and neither would so many people (77%) be drawing monthly social security grants. Secondly, there would not be any need of creating two RDP settlements to accommodate the poor.

Given the above, it can be safely concluded that the opposite is true. Prosperity gospel may be promising its adherents transformation of their socio-economic situation, it is not occurring and particularly not in Mahikeng. Otherwise we would not have the experiences of the Chanzas, Rabotapi and Kobue (chapter 3). Keep in mind that basically all the doctrines of prosperity gospel are centred around and entrenched in promoting the self above the rest and now having dismally failed to satisfy the self, the question is how can they contribute to the *missio Dei*, which in essence is centred on promoting selflessness?

In the next chapter, I unpack the mission of God – the *missio Dei*.

## CHAPTER 5 THE *MISSIO DEI*

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to evaluate missiologically the contribution of prosperity gospel to the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng and whether it encourages its adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei*. Participation in the *missio Dei* is of critical importance in that it leads its participants to caring about other people and also has the serious potential of improving the socio-economic status of its participants.

From the beginning of this study up to this very moment, repeated reference has been made to the word, the phrase and or the term gospel. Though explained or defined earlier on (under subsection 2.3), it is perhaps fundamental that we review the meaning of this term. The Oxford English dictionary (2016) defines the term “gospel” as “a thing that is absolutely true”. To Christians across the globe, the infallible truth and the guiding principle is that God is reconciling Himself with humanity. Having said that, there is a need to examine the way in which God continues to reveal Himself to humanity and/or seeks to reconcile Himself with humanity. The process of revealing Himself, of seeking to redeem mankind and reconciling with Him is called the *missio Dei*.

This chapter seeks to unpack the *missio Dei*. In so doing, the researcher focuses in on what followers of Christ, as participants in the *missio Dei*, need to be doing to ensure that they fulfil its purpose and intended goal - how these participants of the *missio Dei* are called upon to be stewards in every respect, including issues of poverty alleviation. This is the case, because Bookman (1994:158) suggests that the children of God are under the Scriptural indebtedness to see themselves as agents and instruments of God’s glory.

### 5.2 WHAT IS THE *MISSIO DEI*?

*Missio Dei* is the Latin phrase meaning “the mission of God”. Bosch (2011:10) insists that *missio Dei* refers to God’s self-revelation as one who loves the world. This includes His involvement in and with the world, the nature and all activities of God’s embracement of both the church and the world in which the church is mandated to operate.

Bosch (2011:399) adds that after the First World War, missiologists began to recognise developments both in Biblical and systematic theology. He goes further to note that Karl Barth was in fact the first theologian in 1932 at the Brandenburg conference to plainly articulate that mission resides with God and not the church. However, this articulation of Barth was only intellectualised in the following years.



These republished sentiments of Bosch (2011) are in line with Richebächer (2003:589) who says it was only at the International Missionary Council, held in Willingen in Germany, in July 1952 that the term *missio Dei* was considered as a concept that describes the wider insinuations of the salvific work of God for the kingdom.

Given the afore-mentioned, Bosch (2011:399-400) defines *missio Dei* as follows:

The classical doctrine of God the Father sending the Son and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another “movement”: God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world to reconcile the world with Him...Mission is not primarily an activity of the church but an attribute of God...Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world...to participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love towards people since God is a fountain of the sending love.

Stott (2008:34-35) postulates that the phrase *missio Dei* explains the narrative of Father sending the Son and then the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. The Father sends the Son to undertake redemption and then sends the Holy Spirit to harness that redemption to the hearts of men and women. On the other hand, Flett (2009:15) considers *missio Dei* a Trinitarian theology of mission that begins first with God’s being as Father, Son and Spirit. This position preserves all important qualifications, as He gives man a share in His act and in His life.

### **5.3 GOD THE FATHER**

From the definition of *missio Dei* given by Bosch (2011:10) it is crystal clear that mission rests and resides with God. Now that raises the all-important question: Who is God? The teachings of prosperity gospel would have us believe that God is a servant of humanity from whom every blessing can be claimed simply through prayer or even just by a word. However, the source of our knowledge of who God is, is His works and His Word. Now Christians world-wide, especially those coming from the reformed tradition, believe that the Bible in its entirety is the inspired Word of God. Geisler and Packer (1983:3) state: “We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written Word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

Van der Walt (2008:502) asserts that the fact that the Bible is considered the inspired Word of God, it is a primary source of our knowledge of who God is and His will for our lives. In agreement, Tennent (2010:61) proposes that proper Bible reading goes a long way in revealing to us the story of God’s mission through God’s people in their engagement with God’s work for the sake of the whole creation.

According to Hays and Duvall (2011:23-24), the term Bible is derived from the Greek word *biblia* which literally means books or scrolls. Now these 66 books are divided into the Old Testament (39) and the New Testament (27). The word testament originates from the Latin word *testamentum*, which is a translation of the Hebrew and Greek word *covenant*. Copley (1990:14) contends that the word “testament” can safely be equated to a commonly used phrase “last will and testament” of a dead person. This is so in that in the Biblical context the word “testament” means “solemn agreement”. Equally, according to Biblical terms, a covenant refers to what God has done and continues to do to establish a relationship with humanity.

Given the views of these various authors on what the Bible is, the question is what does the Bible say about itself? 2 Timothy 3:16 says: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

The Bible, which is the Word of God, teaches us that God is a super-natural being who created everything both visible and invisible. In other words, God is above all other spiritual entities and as such is a supreme sovereign being. In addition, Van der Walt (2008:425) postulates that “God is an impersonal, illimitable universal spirit, consciousness or power which permeates and pervades all things and is present in everything”.

God has many names, which are orchestrated by His own way of revealing Himself to different people in the course of time. An example of this can be taken from the life experience of Abraham (Gen. 22:14), who referred to God as Jehovah-Jireh after being provided with a ram to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac. Another one is the experience of Gideon in Judges, (Judges 6:24) who referred to God as Jehovah-shalom.

However, God has His own way of defining Himself. An example of this is recorded in Exodus 3:14: Moses was in conversation with God at the burning bush, where God sent him to Egypt to free His chosen people - the Israelites. He enquired as to what he should say when the Israelites asked for His name. God told Moses to say He is “I am who I am”. Waltke (2007:11) suggests that “His personal name paradoxically invites the hearer to enter into intimacy in his protective nearness and to stand in awe of him in his eternal being in contrast to human mortality. He is both I am here and I am eternal.”

Centuries later John records a conversation between the Jews and Jesus Christ in which Jesus Christ was telling them that their forefather Abraham was pleased to see His day. “Then the Jews said to Him, you are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:57-58)

Interestingly, at the Island of Patmos, God told the Apostle John: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev. 22:13). The fact that God bestows a Name on Himself reveals Him to Israel as a person. It indicates that He chooses to be described as the definable and distinctive. Both the intellectualist and the mystical understanding of God are rejected.

Now, what does the Bible say about who God is? Exodus 34:6: “And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.’”

A strong exception here is that unlike the God of African traditional religion, this God is not aloof and hence Thompson (2006:53) rightly points out that it was God’s own wish from the beginning to be known by His creation and to have a relationship and/or fellowship with His creation. Thompson’s view supports that of Erickson (2001:42) who argues that because humankind is fallible and finite and because God is infinite, we cannot know or comprehend who God is unless He reveals Himself to us, unless He manifests Himself to humans in such a manner that we can know and fellowship with Him. In other words, there is no way that God can be aloof or distant from His creation for it is His wish to be known and reconciled to humanity.

Perhaps this is best depicted by Jesus Christ Himself in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Indeed, God the Father is both the primary source and the initiator of the *missio Dei*. Tennent (2010:75) calls this knowledge highly empowering and liberating, especially seen through the eyes of those who thought that the *missio Dei* originated from Western missionaries. He adds that “it is so comforting to hear the African theologian John Mbiti poignantly reminds us all that the missionaries did not bring God to Africa, it was God who brought the missionaries to Africa”.

Now if we are to fully grasp and understand the definition of *missio Dei* from the perspective of Bosch (2011:399) wherein he suggests that the initiator of the *missio Dei* is God the Father who is creator of all things both visible and invisible, we then need to start right from the creation account and especially the creation of man, whose purpose was intended to be a steward of God’s creation.

### **5.3.1 THE CREATION OF MANKIND**

The creation story narrated in the Book of Genesis ends with the triune God creating man in His likeness (Gen. 1:26-27), also referred to as the *imago Dei*. The phrase *imago Dei* is a Latin phrase that denotes the symbolical relation between God and humanity. Wilson (2017:263)

says that “in the imago Dei, several of the most influential voices in theology have located foundational claims about the nature of humanity and God. Augustine, for instance, understood the divine image as residing in the human soul, while Thomas Aquinas found it in the human ability to reason”.

Erickson (2001:520-527) interprets the imago Dei in three basic ways: the substantive, the functional and the relational. In line with the substantive interpretation, there are certain qualities in mankind that exhibits who God is and they are morality and affection. Wright (2006:421) agrees with Erickson with regards to moral consciousness and aptitude for relationship. He even takes it a bit further by stating that the image of God is not necessarily what we have, but exactly who we are. In a nutshell, to Wright to be human is to be the image and likeness of God.

From Wright’s viewpoint, it stands to reason that the intended purpose and intention of man’s creation was for him to take authority or dominion of and live in complete and unqualified harmony with all creation, by living in closeness with God and having a personal relationship with God. Having authority and dominion over creation is, according to Wright (2006:427), an application of kingship that mirrors God’s own kingship. For his part, Van der Walt (2008:261-262) believes that man was made to rule over creation in the same way God Himself would have ruled and as a result that places a double responsibility on man, being responsible towards God for whom he has to fulfil this mandate and towards creation over which he has to govern.

Erickson (2013:472) takes it a bit further. He asserts that being made in God image does not only mean that we possess some of His attributes, but more importantly it also means that we belong to Him. In agreement with Erickson, Averbek (2015:234) puts it more profoundly as follows:

It is not like we look like God physically, but that we are physical beings who stand within the material creation as God’s stewards. We stand before God to serve as His authoritative representatives on this earth in His image and His likeness. We have been put in charge and made responsible for how things go here.

The ultimate desire and the ultimate wish of God was and still is that His creation should live harmoniously in reverence to Him, aptly described by Wright’s (2006:207) assertion that God’s aim to bless the nations was and is still tied with humanity’s total commitment to obedience because there is no blessing for ourselves or for others without faith and obedience. He cites 1 Samuel 15:22: “...behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...”

God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8), where he lived peacefully and had regular fellowship with God without any mediator.

### 5.3.2 THE TEMPTATION AND THE FALL OF MAN

After placing him in the Garden, Genesis 2 and 3 relate God's instruction to man that he may eat of every tree in the garden except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2:17 gives us the reason why. God said "for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die". This could be said to have been the first direct order from God, which sought the obedience of man. However Satan, who had masked and disguised himself as a cunning serpent, created doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve and guaranteed them that they would neither die nor perish by disobeying and defying God. Van der Walt (2008:352) says Adam and Eve believed Satan's claim that they could progress from merely being *imago Dei* to being *sicut Deus*<sup>33</sup>

Under the persuasion and influence of the serpent, man did indeed defy God and as a result a life, which was seamless of a perfect human being, was brought to a sudden end. Eating the fruit of the forbidden tree made the first man subject to corruption, condemned to lose his life shamefully to decay and death. Wright (2010:40) ascribes this to man being alienated from God by rebuffing and snubbing His goodness and authority.

The results of sin had a far-reaching and bad impact on our relationship with God, the whole of creation and the self. Being disobedient to God did not only introduce death, but lack and poverty and as a consequence his fervent desire to seek health and material prosperity. In other words, sin created a wedge and/or gulf between God and man, between the Maker and His creation and between humans, as well as humans and creation. The eagle-eyed Prophet Isaiah notes in Isaiah 59:2: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you." Indeed, by his intractable disobedience man deprived or denied himself and all his posterity of divine gifts. Hill and Walton (2009:23) note that every part of human nature was adversely affected by sin and was passed down to every generation. David explains it more profoundly in Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."

Coetzee (1995:30) observes that with and through the fall, Satan placed himself as an illegitimate and unwanted force between God as the Almighty King and God's creation, as it has been deformed through sin. Creation and especially man as fallen image of God did not recognise God as God anymore and consequently no longer acknowledged Him as King.

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<sup>33</sup> The Latin phrase meaning *to be like God*.

In other words, sin robbed man of the presence and regular fellowship with God. Because God is a loving and caring God, however, He couldn't permit His creation to be ruined or destroyed. God did not give up on Adam and Eve, even though they had disobeyed Him and violated His heart and unsettled His plan for them. Notwithstanding their blatant disobedience and sin, Genesis 3:1-21 describes how God through His love still managed to reach out to them and concealed their nakedness.

It is imperative to note that in terms of Scripture (Gen. 3:8) man hid from God, because of disobedience and sin, and it was God who initiated contact with man again. Though sin had created a wedge or an indestructible wall between man and God, according to Wright (2010:40), this did not deter nor dissuade God from pursuing him with incredible love and compassion. This was because, as Waltke (2007:254) puts it, God had created man in His image that he may rule as vice-regent over all things on earth and for man to worship Him and to be accountable to Him and have a close relationship.

The overwhelming love of God for man is demonstrated in the Book of Genesis and in the entire history of God's revelation. His action to seek man (who had hid from Him) did not end with Adam and Eve, but continued to their descendants and even to this day. In pursuit of His plan, chapter 12 of Genesis records that God called Abram and changed his name to Abraham as symbol of the covenant He made with him. In the covenant God ordered Abraham to leave his country and people and go to the land the Lord would show him, where the Lord would make him the father of nations. The Bible further relates that Abraham would, through his descendants, be the father of the chosen people of Israel and a blessing to other nations (Gen. 12:3), not necessarily materially, but in living right with God.

Now Taber's (1983:233) is of the view that the main reason God called Abraham and entered into a covenant with him was for Abraham and his descendants to serve as testimony of God's restorative purpose for all humanity. In other words, God would reveal Himself to other nations through Abraham's descendants. As rightly pointed out by Kritzing (2007:29), during the era of the Old Testament God's plan was intimately linked to the life and behaviour of His chosen people. When the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt, God revealed Himself to the Egyptians by means of Moses and his brother Aaron to free them.

Another example of God's self-revelation worth noting and mentioning is where He used three young Israeli men, namely Hananiah<sup>34</sup>, Mishael<sup>35</sup> and Azariah<sup>36</sup>, to reveal Himself to King

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<sup>34</sup> Shadrach

<sup>35</sup> Meshach

<sup>36</sup> Abed-Nego

Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. He revealed Himself through the willingness of these three men to sacrifice their lives out of love and obedience for Him. They said to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:18) that even if God did not save them, they would not obey and worship a false God. With this position, they revealed their total trust in God and that they acknowledged His sovereignty to save or not to save them. They did not simply direct Him to save them, as prosperity gospel will have us believe. They accepted God's sovereignty to either save them or let them perish in the fire of Nebuchadnezzar.

Notwithstanding the afore-mentioned incidents, the Israelites continued to sin and deviate from the purpose of God. He, on the other hand, never abandoned or discarded His plan to reconcile humanity to Himself. Time and time again He revealed Himself to humanity in an effort to re-establish and rebuild the relationship He had with humanity before the fall. Perhaps it is because of this consistency on the part of God, that the Apostle Paul reminds us in Hebrews 1:1 that in the past God spoke to our forefathers through prophets regularly and in various ways.

Unlike in the Old Testament times when God spoke to His people only through prophets, today He speaks to us through His Word, the Bible, and through those He has chosen and called as His servants. Wright (2006:51) reckons that the whole Bible delivers to us the account of God's mission through God's people, in the engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation. Wright (2006:52) adds that the Bible, as the inspired Word of God, is our authority for it supplies or delivers God's commands and teaches us what is right from what is wrong.

### **5.3.3 THE SAVIOUR AND REDEEMER – JESUS CHRIST**

God, after His countless attempts to rebuild His relationship with man, took the decision to send His only-begotten Son. Newbigin (1995:40) puts it so profoundly when he says that "the mission of Jesus was not only to proclaim the Kingdom of God but also to embody the presence of the Kingdom of God in His own person". Now the gospel, according to John 3:16, annals that the sole purpose of Jesus' birth was to restore the kingdom of God and that "whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have an everlasting life". Jesus Christ said, as recorded in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

In other words, the link between God and all of creation has been restored and whoever believes in Jesus Christ may have eternal life – a life in full communion with God. Through His gospel or the good news, Jesus Christ was meant to be the Saviour and Redeemer of humanity from sin. He was to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God. Erickson

(2013:552) puts it more plainly when he says God is not an enemy to sinners nor does He hate them.

In His three-year ministry, Jesus Christ was teaching humanity to go back to the basics and seek to restore a close relationship with God. The Apostle Paul puts it in its rightful perspective (Acts 17:28) by saying that it is in God that we live and move and have our being, i.e. God is in His creation and close to everyone. He is not trapped in His creation, being transcendent and in absolute control, but close and personal.

Hurd (2016:74) observes that “If Adam had finished his course of perfect obedience, he would have been justified...so Christ our second surety was not justified till He had done the work the Father had appointed for Him, and the Father’s commandments through all His trials and then in His resurrection He was justified”.

This justification that Hurd (2016) is referring to, is the manner in which or through which man’s relationship with God was restored. It is this very justification which, according to Broocks (2002:64), made Jesus the *Kurios* – the absolute authority. In other words, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ brought an end to the antagonism and estrangement that existed between God and humanity. Our hostility and disobedience towards God were removed (Erickson, 2013:744). In other words, through His death Jesus Christ paid for the sins of man to reconcile us with God and not as prosperity gossellers would want us to believe. Earlier on Oyedepo (2007:74) was cited as suggesting that the atonement meant a cure from poverty. Being saved meant being redeemed from the plague of poverty, because God is a very rich Father.

Jesus Christ’s death was symbolic in that in the Old Testament time a lamb without blemish was sacrificed to atone for the sins of the Israelites and restore to good standing before the Lord. Similarly, Jesus Christ preached the gospel of salvation for three years, healed the sick from various sicknesses and raised the dead and then like a true sacrificial lamb that was without blemish – for He was without sin - was crucified to atone for the sins of all humanity and restore them to good standing with the Lord. No wonder the Apostle Paul sums it up this way in 2 Corinthians 5: 21: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Erickson (2013:750) puts it more profoundly as follows:

Christ’s death is a beautiful demonstration of God’s love and thus a powerful incentive to us to abandon our hostility towards God and respond in repentance and faith to the offer



of grace. But it is effective as a demonstration of love precisely because we were lost and God cared enough about our condition to offer us His Son as a sacrifice.

Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross and His blood shed to atone for our sins. At the cross, He triumphed over Satan and went down to the grave from where He rose after three days. It, therefore, makes sense to recognise and accept that the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the goal of the *missio Dei* that God may reconcile with man and that man should be a steward in a loving relationship with Him. The Apostle Paul captures this very well in his letter to the Philippians 2:6-8:

Who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

After atoning the sins of men, He commissioned His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”. (Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8)

This is the essence of what the *missio Dei* is: Jesus Christ, who is part of the Trinity, sees Himself as part of the plan of God. It is of critical importance to note that in His commissioning or the sending of the disciples as participants in the *missio Dei*, Jesus Christ also gave them the assurance that He would be with them in fulfilling this calling.

Jesus Christ was not distant, in other words, He actually went with His disciples to ensure that the *missio Dei* came to pass. It is furthermore recorded in Luke that Jesus Christ did not only send His disciples, but also promised to empower them: “But you shall receive the power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In other words, the historical presence of the church in the whole world which bears and embodies the gospel, finds its roots and locus in Jesus Christ. This is why Tennent (2010:92) is adamant that:

Jesus is seen as the archetypal missionary who embodies the *missio Dei*. Thus a fresh examination of Jesus’ ministry has a way of resolving many of the traditional tensions that have caused unnecessary discord. Jesus represents the in-breaking of the reign of

God, the first-fruits of the New Creation. The Lordship of Jesus Christ lays hold of the whole creation, body and soul, humanity and the environment.

#### **5.3.4 THE COMFORTER - HOLY SPIRIT**

Earlier on Bosch (2011:399) was quoted as defining the classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as: God the Father sending the Son and God the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. Scripture attests to this in John 3:16, where it is written that God the Father so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son and in John 12:44-45, where Jesus Christ confirmed to His disciples that He was indeed sent by the Father.

According to Geitz (2004:71), the deity of the Holy Spirit though it was in doubt, was confirmed in 381AD in the Nicene Creed which confirms: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets.”

Now in Luke 24:49 Jesus Christ is quoted as saying “behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”. It is the Holy Spirit that was to equip and endow the believers with all the necessary and important gifts to fearlessly and courageously proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, as per His commission in Matthew 28:19. Greenway (1999:16) elucidates that the special function of the Holy Spirit is to witness of Christ through the lives, deeds and lips of His faithful believers. Van der Walt (2008:502) believes that “the important work of the Spirit is not to cause all kinds of mystical experiences or supernatural gifts in the human being, but to assist us to live a life of sanctification characterised by obedience to God’s law and to be good stewards”. Bosch (2011:116) takes it even further for he explains that it was the Holy Spirit who emboldened the previously fearful and timid disciples.

Acts 2:1-4 indeed recounts that on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon His disciples as they were meeting in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit overtook everyone and they began speaking in other tongues, so that each one heard them speak in his own language. Scripture records how Peter was the first to boldly and courageously stand and speak to the crowd that had gathered there. Tennent (2010:96) notes the following:

The Holy Spirit is the divinely appointed catechist for the church. The word catechesis comes from a Greek word meaning to instruct. It also can mean to resound or to echo...The Holy Spirit teaches the church the meaning and the significance of the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

Bear in mind that earlier on Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18) had told this very Peter who was now addressing the multitudes that the revelation he received (that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God) would be the rock upon which He will build His Church. So in essence, the ascension of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit facilitated the beginning and/or establishment of the church.

In simpler terms and in line with Bosch's (2011:399) definition of the *missio Dei*: God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit (Trinity) were now, together with the church, continuing the work that Jesus Christ had come to do - to spread the message of salvation and redemption. As already mentioned, the Holy Spirit that dwells in us empowers us to take part in the *missio Dei*.

### **5.3.5 THE CHURCH**

Louw and Nida (2006) note that the word "church" is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia* and means an "assembly or company of people" or "the called out". On the other hand, Roberts (1972:28) is of the view that the word "church" comes from the Greek adjective *kuriakos*, which means "that which is the Lord's".

Now emanating from the aforementioned, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to then suggest and propose that the church is a special community or gathering of people who are brought together for a precise and detailed purpose of participating in the *missio Dei*. In fact, Goheen (2011:191) says the church is called to be a witness of redemption in the midst of the world and for the sake of the world, called that it may invite and summon others to share in the covenant blessings gained from participating in the *missio Dei*.

The church, by participating in the *missio Dei*, carry out the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21) to the ends of the earth, to all nations until the end of the age. Put differently, Tennent (2010:61) believes "God the Father is unfolding a grand narrative of which His Son, Jesus Christ, is central figure and we, as the church are being called and empowered through God the Holy Spirit to participate in the unfolding of this grand narrative".

Given the above, it is not surprising that Muller (2008:56) asserts that church and mission are not two independent concepts (as expressed by the possibility of a "missionless" church and/or a "churchless" mission), they are inseparable and undividable parts of the one gospel of the triune God calling the church as the body of Christ to "one hope, one faith in obedience to the one Lord" (Eph. 4:4-5). This calling is the invitation to participate in the *missio Dei*.

In other words, God has created the church to play a pivotal role in His work in the world. Tennent (2010:58-59) agrees with Muller and adds that "God does in fact work in and through

His church and that it is central, not ancillary to His mission. Indeed, the church is the only community Jesus Christ has specifically instituted to reflect the Trinity and to participate in His mission in the world". Therefore, the church has to participate in the transformation of the society in which it finds itself. This issue comes out so profoundly from Jesus Christ in Matthew 23:23: "For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

From the afore-going, it is crystal clear that the church cannot be out of order if it is concerned with societal issues.

It is generally believed that an indication of what was later to become or develop into a church started after Peter received a revelation of who Jesus truly was. The Book of Matthew narrates that this transpired in Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus enquired from His disciples about who the people say He is and Peter responded and said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus prophesies in Matthew 16:18: "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

Jesus Christ acknowledged Peter's confession of faith, which would later be the basis for or through which all believers would be joined together in Christ (Eph. 2:20-21). This confession of faith is the catalyst of the great commission, as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, wherein Jesus Christ instructed His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations.

It is safe to assume that the commission was a directive to make disciples. According to Muller (2008:55), the church is derived from mission and would seem to be the making of disciples. Therefore, mission cannot be incidental or secondary to the life of the church and neither can mission be reduced to mere conversion aimed at enlarging church membership only. Wright (2010:24) puts it this way: "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church, the church was made for mission – God's mission."

It is of critical importance to take note that the primary purpose of God's mission was and still is to reconcile with man to allow Himself to continue to rule and govern the world through man, hence man was made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) to take dominion over the world. There is no point of convergence between the mission of God and the teachings of prosperity gospel, which seems to encourage man to sit around idly and claim health and material prosperity from God.

The disciples of Jesus Christ observed His commission and/r directive to make disciples. It is common knowledge that the actual preaching of the Word of God and/or witnessing of Jesus Christ began after the Holy Spirit had been bestowed on them (Acts 2:1-4) or to be more accurate, on the day of Pentecost. Tennent (2010:72) concedes that “the church is sent out by Jesus Christ to proclaim and embody the redemption that has been wrought through Christ, but it must intersect with the actual histories and narratives of those to whom we are sent”.

What needs to be remembered is that as the church sends out missionaries, evangelists and pastors into the world, we are not only obeying the great commission of Jesus Christ but we are also manifesting the glory of the God the Father, who is the ultimate Source, Initiator and Sender.

In our walk of faith and in taking forth the gospel as commissioned, pastors and leaders need to be an embodiment of the compassion of Jesus Christ to be true stewards.

#### **5.4 BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP**

Before commissioning His Disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 to go into the world and make disciples, Jesus Christ cautioned those who wanted to follow Him, to deny themselves and take up their cross (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). It means that to serve Christ and His purpose one has to deny oneself and be selfless.

Apostle Paul puts it more profoundly in 1 Corinthians 4:1: “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Now Jacobson (2006:251) explains that the word *steward* is from the Hebrew that describes a slave who is placed in a position of authority over the property, possessions and/or the household of the person to whom the household actually belongs. Jacobson (2006:252) goes on to say that “according to St. Paul, a congregation – its buildings and grounds, its finances and assets, its people and programs, its mission and ministry – does not belong to us. Rather, each Christian congregation belongs to God”.

Hanegraaff (2009:229) puts it so ever plainly when he cites Charles Haddon Spurgeon who argues that in essence the “cross” that Jesus Christ referred to for His followers is actually a new covenant of adversity, whereby believers are weaned from the present world in preparation to the new world which is still to come. Nürnberger (2007a:9) puts it so profoundly when he says every Christians should see and live their private lives in the context of God’s mission in the world. This means being in total obedience to God and being His steward.

What Nürnberger is saying is that servants of the Lord should not seek material prosperity at the expense of the Word of God. The Apostle Paul almost covertly makes reference to this covenant in his letter to the Philippians 4:12: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." His stance comes out more clearly in Romans 14:17: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

In the afore-mentioned texts, Paul laid bare the challenges and the reality of the gospel. He was suggesting that the objective or goal of all those spreading the gospel, should never be about personal material gain, but more about being a steward and glorifying God. In other words, that there can be an unavoidable cost for those who identify themselves with the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is in direct contrast with the teachings of prosperity gospel, which seem to take suffering out of the gospel. In doing so, they inevitably present a "cross-less" gospel.

According to King Solomon, in Proverbs 30:8-9: "Remove falsehood and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food allotted to me. Lest I be full and deny You and say Who is the Lord, or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."

Even though Solomon and Paul lived centuries apart, there is a serious convergence in what they are saying. In simpler terms, Solomon took himself out of the equation, out of any level of importance and sought to rather elevate God to His rightful place of being God. For Solomon, his material status did not matter much as long as he could ensure that the name and honour of God is protected. It was not about him, but about God. Another person who understood and completely yielded to the sovereignty of God is Job. Even when he was going through the most traumatic, tormenting and unspeakable painful experience, he noted that all authority belongs to God, and to Him alone. Job said: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him..." (Job 13:15)

The above texts do not in any way, form or fashion condemn material well-being. They only indicate that material well-being should never be more important than the relationship that one has with God and neither should material well-being be sought at the expense of the gospel. Matthew quoted Jesus Christ as saying: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

Prosperity gossellers need to understand this seeking in its proper context. This seeking speaks of understanding the issues of the kingdom of God through which an understanding of God's Biblical providence will be established. No matter how much twisting is done to this text, it will

never mean that by seeking the kingdom that God is a ticket to demand whatever pleases us. God remains sovereign and does as He pleases. This text (Matt. 6:33) is better understood when read in conjunction with 1 John 5:14: "...if we ask anything according to His will..." The simple and very logical explanation is that God grants according to His will, not according to our dictates. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the Apostle Paul cautions: "For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

The Apostle Paul's counsel to the young Timothy is also worth noting. 1 Timothy 6:9: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."

Stott (2006:97) postulates as follows:

Throughout history bad men have tried to make money out of the ministry. In the ancient world there were quacks who made a good living by posing as itinerant teachers...In the New Testament Peter urged the pastors to be not greedy for money, but eager to serve (1 Pet. 5:2), while Paul renounced his right to support and earned his own living in order to demonstrate the sincerity of his motives (1 Cor. 9:4). In our day there are still some disreputable evangelists who make themselves wealthy by financial appeals, whereas wise Christian leaders publish audited accounts of their enterprise.

Goodrich (2013:90) maintains that:

the difference between ambition [φιλότιμος] and greed [φιλοκερδούς] consists in this, that for the sake of praise and honour the ambitious are willing to work properly, to take risks and refrain from dishonest gain [αισχροών κερδών]...Thus, while honesty and ambition proved advantageous and appropriate for stewards, the desire for dishonest gain was strictly prohibited, even if covetousness was occasionally tolerated.

It is very clear that right from the onset, right from the time of creation as recorded in the creation account<sup>37</sup>, God's wish was to be in contact and fellowship with man. It is also crystal clear that the primary purpose of God creating man in His image was, as Waltke (2007:254) puts it, to be God's proxies over all things on earth.

It also becomes clear that right from the fall of man, God adopted a plan of reconciling man to Himself and this He did and continues to do by revealing Himself to man. His compassionate love for His creation is evident throughout the Old Testament, how He time and time again showed mercy to His chosen nation of Israel for the benefit of all nations.

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<sup>37</sup> Book of Genesis

Through His Son Jesus Christ, God used and is still using the church to have all nations participating in the *missio Dei*. By participating in the *missio Dei*; by proclaiming the redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ; by being in fellowship with Him and one another; by being of service to others, as exemplified by His Son; and by worshipping Him, He may be revealed and known to others. Bosch (2011:430) puts it plainly that “there is no single way to witness of Christ however the word may therefore never be divorced from the deed. It is the word made flesh that is the gospel. The deed without word is dumb the word without the deed is empty. Words interpret deeds and deeds validate words”.

In agreement with Bosch, Goheen (2011:212) makes the very profound statement that inasmuch as it is important to preach the gospel to unbelievers, it is equally important that the same gospel is authenticated by deeds of mercy and justice that are in essence powerful witnessing of the truth of the gospel. This is striking, for even the Bible in James 2:26 states: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

In other words, the great commission of Jesus Christ is a challenge to all those who are called by His name, to cross over the social, cultural, ethnic, tribal, racial, political and geographical boundaries of this world, to mirror His love and compassion to humankind. The simple reason for this is that by getting involved in the affairs of the community it has the potential to change the standpoint of the community in relation to the church itself, but more importantly in relation to the gospel. Goheen (2011:212) notes that through this involvement, society or the community will cease to see the church as alien and/or a group of people meeting for their own selfish purposes, but rather as a welcome presence in their midst to bring blessings to them.

These aforementioned views indicate the importance of approaching the gospel holistically to ensure that it makes sense and speaks to the conditions in which human beings live. Wright (2006:322) adds his voice to the debate by stating that caring for the needs of the poor is another essential priority of the community and its evangelistic appeal. By extension and implication, this is also one of the pillars that stewards needs to guard jealously and make it one of the priorities.

#### **5.4.1 STEWARDSHIP AND POVERTY**

Earlier on Wright (2006) spoke of the need of caring for the poor. Now Narayan, Chambers and Shah (2000:32) define poverty as a state of lack, material deprivation, isolation, dependence, lack of assets, vulnerability and insecurity. The World Bank (2001:15) takes it a bit further by stating that poverty is lack of basic needs, hunger, lack of proper and descent shelter, illiteracy, unemployment and being subjected to illnesses that emanates from poor sanitation. For his



part, Christian (1999:17) sees the poor as those people who lack the basic necessities of life at times as a result of injustices meted out to them, the weak and frail or those who are dependant and have been oppressed or afflicted in one way or the other. Perhaps in line with Christian, Pieterse (2001:30) defines poverty as “the inability of individuals, households, or entire communities, to command sufficient resources to satisfy acceptable minimum standard of living”.

The question that may arise is how then does poverty relate to the *missio Dei*? Pieterse (2001:69) believes that once Christians are existentially in touch with the affairs of the poor, we will be able to preach meaningfully in that situation because then and only then will we be able to interpret the Biblical message in a way that makes sense to the poor. Equally so, the author of Transforming Missions, David Bosch (2011:100) argues that the version of Matthew of the first beatitude should not only be understood in the spiritual sense because the Greek word *Ptochos*, which is translated to English as “poor”, is in fact a collective term of all disadvantages. He adds that according to Luke, the poor are also the devout, the humble who live their lives utterly dependent on God.

The Bible which is the Word of God is very explicit about how God regards the poor. Matthew 25:33-40:

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me...Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me.

Taking this point further, Nürnberger (1999:169) is of the view that “when feeding the hungry, we affirm their dignity that is their right to exist. The assertion of their right to exist, in spite of their limitations and failures, is the essence of the gospel”.

Pieterse (2001:114) takes it much further:

The church’s proclamation and its confession as well as the spirituality of its liturgy, have to pass this test of veracity. The test is love which manifests in deeds. That is why the great criterion of the final judgement is whether Christians have fed the hungry, given the thirsty water to drink, welcomed strangers, clad the naked, nursed the sick and visited prisoners.

So by participating in the *missio Dei*, Christians ought to emulate God. God enjoys giving freely (John 3:16). In fact, it is through this generosity that the Trinity sets an example for God’s

followers to also give generously, because God has given them life. Perhaps that is why Chung (2014:84) is adamant that “generosity is the ultimate method for enhancing and extending the kingdom of God”. Rodin’s (2015:11) view is that “Christ-centred generosity is the disposition of a heart that is rich toward God and is a defining characteristic of the life of an obedient and joyful steward”.

Nürnberg (2007a:25-26) holds almost a similar view. He is of the following opinion:

Poor people need acceptance, belonging and respect more than anything else. Our civilisation must regain the capacity to distinguish between people and their attributes. People do not have dignity because of their characteristics, gifts or achievements but simply because they are human beings. People must be accepted unconditionally. This does not mean that the community should condone what is unacceptable or counterproductive in their behaviour or their situations. But critique and encouragement can only be constructive under the canopy of acceptance.

In other words, poor people do not necessarily need money to be recognised and loved as people. If the yardstick of measuring and determining any person’s worth is money and worldly possessions, then our mission would be to promote the consumerism cult and not loving our neighbour as Jesus Christ directed.

LeMarquand (2012:82) concur and suggests that the church should address the issue of poverty in line with the key components of the Christian mission, namely *koinonia*<sup>38</sup> and *diakonia*<sup>39</sup>. He says:

We are also called to participate in the alleviation of poverty and the causes of poverty and to care for the sick by working for the eradication of disease. Churches should become communities that the world can look at and not say look how wealthy the pastor is, but look how much they love one another.

Kumar (2012:17) is in total agreement with LeMarquand and takes this matter even further by stating:

In a society dominated by consumerism, the church has been infiltrated by the theology of its all about me and what do I get out of following Christ – robed in nice and warm scriptures focused on the bless me. We have somewhat conditioned ourselves and members of our churches to measure God’s goodness with how good things are for us.

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<sup>38</sup> *Koinonia* is variously translated as partnership, communion and fellowship.

<sup>39</sup> *Diakonia* articulates the mandate of service and love of one’s neighbour.

Just take a look at most of our Bibles, the scriptures colored and underlined in our Bibles are often the ones dealing with His promises to us, relating to blessings.

In other words, stewardship dictates that we should at all times and by all means endorse the attributes of the church of Christ, which are unity, sanctity and compassion. A true church of Christ has no choice but to imitate Christ by being a church of the poor and for the poor. Luke 4:18-19 records that it was Christ who read the following passage from the book of Isaiah 61 in the Synagogue at Nazareth and applied the text to Himself: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

Jesus Christ had a heart for the poor. Mark 12:43 records His encounter with a poor widow. Mark says Jesus was sitting opposite the treasury when He witnessed the poor widow putting her offering in the treasury. The gesture appealed to Jesus Christ so much so that He told His disciples that the widow's offering was the best for she gave out of her poverty.

From all of the afore-mentioned, it is clear that proclaiming the gospel to the poor requires serious witnessing both in deed and in word and the two should at all costs remain inseparable. Pieterse (2001:112) puts it so profoundly: "A congregation is a community which refers to its Lord in word (witness) and deed (ministry). Word and deed should not be divorced but should be conveyed in an interrelated way by a community."

The view held by Keum (2013:20) ties in with Pieterse's expression. He says that "when all the parts of our individual and corporate lives that have been left out are included, and wherever the neglected and the marginalised are brought together in love, such that wholeness is experienced, we may discern signs of God's reign on earth". For his part, Van der Walt (2011:495) advises:

We should never take away the responsibility and joy from the poor to give to those who are even poorer. We should also not underestimate the knowledge and resourcefulness of the poor to solve their own problems. Our own solutions should not be forced on them. Such an approach is bound to fail, because the poor will experience it as something strange to them even as offensive paternalism.

Equally so, any notion that seeks to suggest that poverty is a curse from God has to be refuted with all the contempt it deserves, for it seeks to deprive the poor of their human dignity. More importantly, it also seeks to portray the poor as sub-human.

So, in a nutshell, *missio Dei* is the mission of God that originated from God Himself through which He seeks to reconcile with humanity. This mission has been evident since time immemorial. It is shown clearly in the Bible how, through His chosen nation, He sought to reveal Himself to humanity. The apex of this mission was when He sent His only-begotten Son (John 3:16) to atone for the sins of man.

Nürnberg (1998:240) says:

The mission of God, as Christians understand it, encompasses secular responsibility. God wants us to carry His redemptive concern into all corners of the world in which we live and on which we depend. Our God has no favourites. He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. When confronted with people who hold another conviction, Christians have to witness to their faith in a dialogue between equals. When confronted with economic problems, they have to enter the economic discourse on the basis of observation and reason and act redemptively in this context. But they should do so in responsibility to God, and in solidarity with all affected members of the human family.

Pieterse (2001:86) takes it a bit further:

Preachers need to show solidarity with the congregation and the community in the context of poverty. This implies acquiring existential knowledge of that situation. They need to live in the community...By being with them in their distress, by taking their side, by supporting them pastorally and showing them God's love, one starts gaining their trust. The preacher has to see life, religion, God, the government and other people through the eyes of the people. That is what it means to acquire existential knowledge of their context and of them as human being.

In line with the afore-said, Haney (2003:181) explains that the *missio Dei* is primarily centred around seven key components of the Christian mission: *martyria* (witness), *didache* (teaching), *kerugma* (proclamation), *koinonia* (fellowship), *diakonia* (service), *dikaionoma* (justice) and *leiturgia* (worship). It is of critical importance that the followers of Christ adapt and fully embrace these characteristics and/or components of the *missio Dei* and actually be its stewards.

Although all of the above characteristics and components lead to full participation in the *missio Dei*, for the purposes of study, I will briefly deal with the latter five.

## 5.4.2 KERYGMA – PROCLAMATION

According to Dluhy (2013:70), *kerygma* is the shortened form of the verb *to kerygma* meaning “to transmit a message by word of mouth”. The main reason Jesus Christ founded a church was to ensure that the gospel is stretched to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19-20), because it is only through the gospel that man can be reconciled with God. Literally what is meant here is that the believers of Jesus Christ should go into the world and proclaim the message of salvation, hope and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.

In agreement with the aforementioned, the Apostle Paul mentions in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 10:13-18) this need to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ that those who accept it may be saved. Being saved means to be reconciled with the Lord and to live in a close relationship with Him. In verses 14 and 15 he says: “How then shall they call on Him (the Lord) in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”

The Apostle Paul continues in this vein in 2 Corinthians 5:20: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” To Greenway (1999:15) the word “ambassador” indicates that believers of Jesus Christ ought to behave as representatives of His government – The kingdom of God. It is common knowledge that even politically, an ambassador represents his native country in a foreign country.

According to Muller (2008:58), the public proclamation is heard credibly only where there is a gospel-formed community to display it visibly. As a household of God, the community of faith does not exist for itself but for God’s mission. In other words, it is the responsibility of everyone who calls himself/herself a Christian to guarantee that the gospel of Jesus Christ is spread in obedience to the great commission of Mathews 28:19-20. Bosch (2011:10) takes the matter further by stating that the proclamation of salvation is inviting others to become living members of Christ’s earthly community.

The importance of spreading this message or proclaiming the salvation of Jesus Christ cannot be emphasised enough, because receiving and accepting that message of hope and accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and personal saviour is reconnecting with God.

Perhaps that is why Horton (2009:20) puts it as follows:

The gospel makes us stand erect, looking up to God in faith and out to the world and our neighbours in love and service. Not every piece of news can do that, but the gospel can.

Only the radical news concerning Jesus Christ can distract us from all the trivial pursuits and transform us from the inside out.

Reconciliation with God, the result of hearing and accepting the proclaimed message, is in itself the fulfilment of the *missio Dei*. It can, therefore, be safely deduced from above that the intended purpose of proclamation is to expand the body of Christ and to be in fellowship with the brethren. Equally so, proclamation of a wrong doctrine or teaching, which seeks to undermine God's sovereignty, can wreak serious havoc in the body of Christ.

### 5.4.3 KOINONIA - FELLOWSHIP

Kariatlis (2012:55) indicates that *koinonia* is variously translated as “partnership”, “communion” and “fellowship”, taking its root meaning from *koinoneo*<sup>40</sup>. The Apostle Paul defines a church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:27, meaning every part is essential to the proper functioning of the body. It is in essence fellowship.

The fellowship, as defined by the Apostle Paul in the preceding paragraph, is of utmost importance. The Apostle John, in his first letter (1 John 1:3, 7), also stresses the importance of fellowship. In verse 3 he says “that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you may also have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”. He adds in verse 7 that “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”. The walk in the light that Paul is referring to here is the walk with God.

Matthew 18:20 records Jesus Christ saying that “whenever two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them”. No doubt, this statement denotes in no uncertain terms the importance that Jesus attached to us building each other up in stewardship.

Perhaps the most relevant and profound statement that Jesus Christ ever made in relation to the importance of fellowship is found in John 13: 34-35: “I give you a new commandment love one another just like I have loved you.” The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10 says: “Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the judgement.”

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<sup>40</sup> κοινωνέω [koinoneo /koy·no·neh·o/] v. From 2844; TDNT 3:797; TDNTA 447; GK 3125; Eight occurrences; AV translates as “be partaker” five times, “communicate” twice and “distribute” once. 1 to come into communion or fellowship with, to become a sharer, be made a partner. 2 to enter into fellowship, join one's self to an associate, make one's self a sharer or partner. (Louw & Nida, 2006)

Flowing from the above, it could be said that Christ designed a church as a movement that will bring His believers together to fellowship, for in essence man was created to be in fellowship with each other and more importantly with God. To Van der Walt (2008:221) the importance of fellowship cannot be overemphasised, because:

we do not care for one another sufficiently any longer, we fail to admonish, exhort one another very often, do not visit one another regularly, do not help and encourage one another sufficiently, do not laugh and weep together any longer, are not steadfast in prayer for one another because we lack love. We are like islands apart from one another.

Fellowship with brethren which does not include all other people, especially the poor and the sick, is futile. They too must be included as equals in the body of Christ, without them feeling insulted and side-lined just because they are unable to bring in fat seeds and without them feeling that truly they are what they are because of a curse placed upon them.

#### **5.4.4 DIAKONIA – SERVICE**

The Lutheran World Federation (2003:6) states that “diakonia is central to what it means to be the church. As a core component of the gospel, diakonia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship. Diakonia reaches out to all persons, who are created in God’s image. While diakonia begins as unconditional service to the neighbour in need, it leads inevitably to social change that reforms and transforms”. In agreement, Chung (2014:302) postulates that the Biblical notion of *diakonia* enunciates the mandate of service and love of neighbour.

This is service that imitates the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is not possible to imitate the divinity of Jesus Christ, but one can imitate His approach of caring, His love, sacrificing of His own divinity and interests and His general compassion. Compassion is derived from the *co-passio*, which literally means “feel with”.

Dube (2007:37) points out that Jesus Christ was not just acting out of charity, but that His compassion had a transformational dimension. Bosch (2011:417) raises the stakes by noting that “evil is not only in the human heart but also in social structures...the mission of the church includes both the proclamation of the gospel and its demonstration. We must therefore evangelise, respond to immediate human needs, and press for social transformation”.

In other words, in as much as the church has been called out of the world to worship God, it is at the same time sent back to the same world to spread the message of salvation and to be of service (*diakonia*) to the world. In essence, this gives the church a double identity. It is crucial to

note that this double identity requires of the church to be both holy unto the Lord and also worldly, but not in the sense of embracing the world's standards and norms but to be immersed in the life of the world with the objective of changing it – being the salt of the earth. Bosch (2011:418) is emphatic that:

a Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt and is not only insipid in itself, but useless to the world. But a Christianity which would use the vertical preoccupation as a means to escape from its responsibility for and in the common life of man is a denial of the incarnation.

Perhaps that is why Nel (2005:73) calls *diakonia* a desirable part of the identity and goal of the local church: in giving our lives we find life. Within the local church it should be clear that life becomes fruitful when you share it with others. This is the true identity of the church for according to Stott (2007:53), some churches present with two false images or identity of being. They either present a (i) religious club (or introverted Christianity) and (ii) a secular mission (or religionless Christianity).

It would then be fair to say that the church must cater for all different needs of people through its programmes, including any structural imbalances in society that more often than not leads to injustice, poverty and oppression. Without this Christian service, Christianity and/or God's presence can easily be doubted and thought to be irrelevant. Interestingly, in 2012, The World Council of Churches released the document *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*. This document states the following:

Our participation in mission and our being in creation and our practice of the life of the Spirit need to be woven together, for they are mutually transformative. We ought not to seek the one without the others. If we do, we will lapse into an individualistic spirituality that leads us to believe falsely that we belong to God without belonging to our neighbour, and we will fall into a spirituality that simply makes us feel good while other parts of creation hurt and yearn. (WCC, 2012:10)

Matthew 14:15-21 tells us that when Jesus Christ realised that the multitudes were hungry, He disregarded the advice of His disciples to send them away and instead sought a way of providing for them. He used the five loaves and two fish to feed the multitudes gathered there to hear Him speak. Jesus Christ was evidently rather eclectic in choosing this evangelistic strategy. He was well aware of the pressing needs of His audience and that not all circumstances necessitated an altar call. At times messages are better understood through action rather than just words. A church or ministry that responds to the needs of others, both



materially and spiritually, raises the credibility of the church and as such of Christianity as a faith.

The issue of service to mankind cannot be overemphasised for even the Bible has a number of texts that directly address it. Some of them are:

Mark 10:45:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

John 13:14:

If I then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

Galatians 5:13:

For you, Brethren have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

1 Peter 4:10:

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Still on the issue of *diakonia*, Taber (1983:239) is of the view that if the gospel is not flexible enough to address each dimension of the human condition, then it is not big enough and relevant enough to take away the sin of the world. The church has to be genuinely concerned with the totality of a human being, for even Heldt (2004:166) asserts that proclamation of mission alone, separate from any social apprehension, may be perceived as a distortion, a trimmed version of the true gospel, a mockery and travesty of the good news, lacking significance for the real problems of real people living in the real world.

#### **5.4.5 DIKAIOMA – JUSTICE**

The Prophet Amos declared: "But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24). While dealing with the *missio Dei*, it is also important to note that justice is one of the dimensions that is deeply rooted in the character of God. Manala (2012:220) holds the strong view that "God is pleased, only when worshippers are concerned

with and practise justice". There are a number of instances in Scripture, where God is portrayed as a God of justice (Ex. 12:49, Ps. 72:1-4; Ps. 99:4).

God's justice also extends to how the poor are mistreated or ill-treated. In Deuteronomy 24:17 God plainly warns: "Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take a cloak of a widow as a pledge." Having warned against the abuse of the poor, God adds that "when you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your fields...leave them for the poor and the alien".

Kang (2005:286) says "justice was found through divine revelation and not through human searching. There was an inherent and revealed justice which God, and to a limited extent nature itself, revealed. Justice is the duty of humanity under God, and is the demand of God".

Though justice is a bit complex and very elusive to define, Mofid (2005:3) told the International Conference on Globalisation for the Common Good that "justice is the heart of all creation, It is the profound feeling of oneness with all other beings in the universe. Today, it finds its most vital expression in social and economic fairness, concern for others and the vigorous defence of human rights". The oneness referred to here is that as God's children or creation, we are supposed to be one and not separated by lack and affluence, not separated by material wealth and poverty; not perceived as blessed because of material possessions and cursed because of the lack of same.

The one thing that remains crystal clear is that in the Bible justice is about a concern for the weak against the strong and the privileged. Forrester (1989:225) believes that "justice is something about which we should be passionate about, something for which we should hunger and thirst. And those people who are passionate about justice are seldom those who live in the culture of contentment, but rather the victims, the oppressed, the forgotten and the excluded – the poor and the poor in spirit as well". What Forrester is bringing forth is the need for social cohesion that breaks down artificial walls of separation built between different people. The walls of prosperity gospel seem to suggest that the rich are blessed, whilst the poor are cursed. In agreement, Manala (2012:227) calls justice crucial in that it promotes mutual love and respect and assists church members to accept, appreciate and respect the humanity of all people, especially the weak, the poor and the voiceless.

Guroian (1997:374) points out the following:

Traditional marks of the church – oneness, catholicity, apostolicity and holiness – are all to be expressed in the moral life of its members. Oneness calls for deepening love and communion, catholicity involves being welcoming to the rich diversity within community,

apostolicity suggests reaching out to neighbours in sharing truth received from Jesus Christ, and straightforward, unself-conscious goodness is an essential dimension of holiness. These are central expressions of what it means to be the body of Christ.

In other words, the concern for justice and its practice should be a very important dimension of the church and should be a central requirement for a fulfilling Christian worship. The church needs to rise in the name of justice and defend the poor, whose dignity is being attacked and trampled upon by prosperity gossellers who label them cursed. In fact, Koch (2009:1) says the logical interpretation and/or suggestion of prosperity gospel is that the poor are poor because they lack faith. As a result, poverty is the error of the poor themselves. Tillich (1960:71) urges Christians to love each other beyond material possessions. He goes on to say that:

love does not do more than justice demands, but love is the ultimate principle of justice. Love unites, justice preserves what is to be united. It is the form in which and through which love performs its work. Justice in its ultimate meaning is creative justice, and creative justice is the form of uniting love.

The truth is that being in fellowship with others and also being of service to them in an endeavour to make the gospel relevant, as alluded to by Taber (1983), requires one to have virtue. Virtue is an internal moral compass from God, which is properly nurtured in stewardship. O'Brien (2003:550) says that:

virtues are not natural in the sense that they are innate...in the natural order can exist only in consequence of deliberate, human activity. In the basic orientation of the mind towards truth and of the will toward good, there is a certain inclination in the direction of virtue, but it is only through activity that virtue actually comes into being.

In agreement, MacIntyre (2007:191) is of the view that a virtue is an acquired human quality of which the possession and exercise tend to enable individuals to achieve good. On the other side, lack of virtue effectively precludes people from achieving any good.

What MacIntyre is asserting largely corresponds to Rawls' (1971:3) argument that "justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. Laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust".

In other words, institutions like churches have to fight to ensure that there is justice. The ever-increasing and widening gap between the rich and the poor, which is contributing to the abuse of the poor by the rich, seems to be encouraged by prosperity gospel which lays emphasis on the self. On the other hand, the *missio Dei* encourages participants to be stewards and care for

each other, as Paul so profoundly states in Galatians 6:2: “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.” The law of Christ that Paul is referring to is: “This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

This means that all people, without exception, must be treated equally and fairly. Smith (1999:362) suggests that in judging other people, there is a need for honest and objectivity to ensure that all available evidence is used properly to determine what they deserve. This is important because justice can succumb to partiality bias and in the process allow irrelevant evidence and considerations to shape our assessment and treatment of others.

#### **5.4.6 LEITURGIA – WORSHIP**

Erickson (2001:349) describes worship as a process in which all focus is given to God. There are a number of facets of worshipping God and includes but is not limited to *koinonia*, *diakonia*, *dikaionia* or even *kerugma*. Worshipping God includes being obedient to Him and His Word, elevating Him in our lives above and beyond any material possessions or wealth. Worshipping God includes recognising His sovereignty, accepting His divine providence and not seeking to use Him as our servant who stands at our beck-and-call.

Manala (2012:218) asserts as follows:

Christian worship is of primary importance in that in it is an opportunity for the appointed encounter between God and human being. A further important value of Christian worship is that it brings people together on a regular basis for a common purpose. It is thus a meeting for the loving God with God’s redeemed people. It should be understood and experienced both as an occasion of God’s coming to God’s people and of God’s people meeting their loving, caring and saving God – for praise and adoration, and to have their focus shifted from self-centredness and self-interest to God, to other-centredness and to selflessness.

Worship is a place or a service wherein the covenant-keeping God, meets with His covenant people.

In other words, it is not about “naming-and-claiming” self-centred material prosperity and wealth, as prosperity gospel would want us to believe, and neither is it about a pastor demanding money from the congregation disguised as them planting a seed. Manala (2012:227) adds that “Christian worship changes situations of dire need and brings about serious and genuine transformation in the lives of both the rich and the poor”.

Worship is a vehicle through which people or to be more specific – Christians - acknowledge the greatness, awesomeness and goodness of God in every area of their lives. In fact Piper (2010:35) suggests that “missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Worship is ultimate, not missions because God is ultimate, not man”.

One can also say that worship is a celebration and expression of gratitude to God, which is done through song and service to others. Though this can be done by an individual, it has more impact or appeal if it is done in church as a corporate body (*koinonia*). Worship is, therefore, a service that we owe God; it is not a favour to Him, but because He deserves it by virtue of who He is. Muller (2008:61) suggests that both in the Old and in the New Testament worship came across as the glue that holds God’s people together and also energises them towards God’s high calling in Christ Jesus.

What Muller is saying in reference to the glue that holds God’s people together is very profound, because worship indeed has to go hand in hand with service to man. It is of paramount importance that even as we worship God for who He is in our lives, we also allow ourselves to be a conduit of His love and mercy to fellow human beings. The Apostle James cautions us that “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

It can be safely concluded from the above that worshipping God is one of the central characteristics of a church. Vorster (2007:262) underscores this by stating that worship can operate as a generating station, where energy for social change and transformation can be created. Christians can be the exporters of this energy to the parts of society where people still live in despair, gloom and hopelessness.

## **5.5 MISSIOLOGICAL EVALUATION –PROSPERITY GOSPEL – MISSIO DEI**

Having gone through some of the core teachings of prosperity gospel in chapter 2 of this study, and having unpacked the missio Dei, the question that arises is does prosperity gospel contribute or encourage its adherents to fully participate in the missio Dei?

In evaluating prosperity gospel’s contribution to the missio Dei, it is of critical importance to recap the view of the African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group (2010) concerning this gospel. The group defined prosperity gospel as “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the sowing of seeds through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings”. Ukah (2007:12) describes prosperity gospel as a teaching of new Pentecostalism that advocates a specific doctrine that singles them out from other groups of Christians, for they believe that they constitute a special group of people who alone are saved

and blessed abundantly with material wealth by God, whilst the rest of humanity is doomed to perdition.

This view was further endorsed by Pastor Mauco (2019) who insisted that there is no such thing as prosperity gospel but only the gospel of Jesus Christ which comes with benefits such as prosperity, blessings and miracles.

The afore-said views are both important and interesting is that adherents of prosperity focus more on themselves and what they stand to gain. No mention of being stewards and certainly no mention of them being prepared to suffer for the gospel. The experiences of the Chanza's, Rabotapi and Kobue (Chapter 3) are a case in point where instead of being encouraged to fully partake in the *missio Dei*, they were literally robbed of their hard earned money. In other words, they present a cross-less gospel which is completely in contrary to the experiences of the apostles. The Apostle Paul almost covertly makes reference to this covenant in his letter to the Philippians 4:12: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." His stance comes out more clearly in Romans 14:17: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

On the other hand, the *missio Dei* demands of every believer to be selfless and be a true steward. Fact is a missional church should be a church that subscribes to all characteristics of the *missio Dei* and the primary focus should not only be limited to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but also to ensure that as an entity or as the body of Christ (as Paul describes it) it is able to espouse the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. Maluleke (1993:21) says that "the Christian church should know that whenever a person responds in love to the needs of others, providing food, clothing or shelter, safety, welcome dignity, self-respect or chance to grow, God is present in this action".

What Maluleke is referring to includes but not limited to serving other human beings (*diakonia*), in lovingly embracing other people (*koinonia*), and being honestly and seriously concerned with societal dynamics as relates to justice and fairness (*dikaioma*). In discussion with those who have encountered prosperity gospel (chapter 3) it is only Mavis Masekoa (2019) of Hope of Glory ministries, indicated that her church has a social responsibility programme (*diakonia*).

Given the fact that the core values of prosperity gospel are centred around amongst others, the misinterpretation of the Abrahamic covenant, atonement and Biblical text best described by Hanegraaff (2009:xvii) as scriptorture, it is not doing much to encourage it adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei*.

## 5.6 SUMMARY

Though not exhaustively so, this chapter has dealt with the *missio Dei* – the plan of God to reveal Himself to humanity and have a relationship with them. We have successfully established that the *missio Dei* originates from God the Father who throughout history has beckoned humanity to reconcile with Him. The plan started after the fall, went through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the chosen nation of Israel.

The plan culminated, as Bosch (2011:339) would have it, when God the Father sent the Son and God the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit and expanding that to include yet another “movement”: God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world to reconcile the world with Him.

It also became clear that the church was called to be missional in nature so as to spread the gospel, which the Oxford English dictionary (2016) defines as “a thing that is absolutely true”, whilst Stone and Duke (2006:72) postulate that in Greek the word “gospel” means “a public announcement of glad tidings”, which may mean the news of a birth in a royal family, a peace treaty or even a victory at war.

In order for the church to be both effective and missional in its approach, a number of characteristics and/or components were identified namely: *martyria* (witness), *didache* (teaching), *kerugma* (proclamation), *koinonia* (fellowship), *diakonia* (service), *dikaioma* (justice), and *leiturgia* (worship). All of these characteristics and those that are not mentioned here, are absolutely in line with the *missio Dei* and are necessary for the effective spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, a gospel that truly recognises who God is as the Creator and that as such, He cannot be subjected to the wishes of His own creation for if that was to happen, then God would cease to be God.

In contrast, prosperity gospel seeks to elevate men to a status of even commanding God by simply claiming what they want from Him. Earlier on, Coleman (2000:150) was cited as arguing that “the movement regards faith as the supernatural force which believers can use to get whatever success they desire in their lives. It is the instrument which believers can use for self-actualisation or achieving their dreams”.

Now this is both a fallacy and nonsensical. Any theology or any doctrine that does not recognise God as a sovereign God, no matter how loud it is preached or proclaimed, cannot be in line with the *missio Dei* and by extension it cannot encourage its adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei*.

To this end, this study has dealt with the history and the teachings of prosperity gospel, the views of those who have had a direct encounter with this gospel in Mahikeng have also been incorporated. The socio-economy of Mahikeng has been unpacked as well as the mission of God.

Now the following chapter evaluates prosperity gospel and its contribution to the socio-economic situation of its adherents.



## CHAPTER 6 EVALUATION OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF MAHIKENG

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, the researcher focused on and unpacked the mission of God. It is crystal clear from the preceding chapter that the mission of God, for which He even sent His only-begotten Son to ensure its fulfilment, was and still is to reveal and reconcile Himself to humanity. The primary objective of the ministry of Jesus Christ and the gospel born out of that ministry is to restore man to the status he used to have prior to the fall in the Garden of Eden. That status may not be on where everyone is healthy and have great material prosperity as the teachers of prosperity gospel will have us believe, but certainly it is a status in which man recognises God for who He is, lives in total obedience to Him and not only depends on, but appreciate His providence.

Interestingly, in the Book of Galatians 1:6-7 the Apostle Paul speaks of the existence of another gospel. Perhaps Paul is referring to a gospel of recent years that seeks to elevate men and reduce the status of God to that of mere servanthood to men. A gospel that seeks to purport any man can simply claim whatever he wants from God and God will comply. Most importantly, a gospel that glorifies greed and seems to want to vilify the Word of God (Jude 1:11 16) for saying: "Woe to them, for they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah...these are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts, and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage."

That gospel is a gospel that is contrary to the gospel that Jesus Christ left on earth, which He commissioned His disciples to spread to the ends of the world (Matt. 28:18-20). On the other hand, Scripture admonishes every believer and every Christian (1 Thess. 5:21; Acts 17:11) to examine all things according to the Word of God and to subsequently hold fast to that which is good.

As a result of the afore-mentioned, this chapter focuses on evaluating some of the teachings of prosperity gospel and whether they have any positive impact on the socio-economic situation of its adherents and the community; and whether they are consistent with the *missio Dei* and the gospel of Jesus Christ because where the *missio Dei* is fully practised, the community is transformed. Most importantly, it is evaluated whether the teachings of prosperity gospel are true or false and whether they are but merely a muddy mixture of both.

Before examining and/or evaluating some of the teachings of prosperity gospel, the question that urgently needs attention is: Who are some of the prominent advocates of this gospel?

## **6.2 PROMINENT PROSPERITY GOSPELLERS**

As indicated earlier (chapter 2), Essek William Kenyon is widely regarded as the originator of what is today known as prosperity gospel. According to Warrington (2000:119), Kenyon's beliefs inspired Kenneth Hagin (b. 1917-2003) to start his ministry called the Word of Faith Ministry. A great number of other pastors followed his teachings and prosperity gospel spread around the world, as we know it today. Some of those who followed these teachings are Benny Hinn (b. 1952-), T.D. Jakes (b. 1957-), Creflo Dollar (b. 1962-), Joel Osteen (b. 1963-) and Joyce Meyer (b. 1943-). In Africa, we have David Oyedepo (b. 1954-), Enoch Adeboye (b. 1942-) and in South Africa we have Ray McCauley (b. 1949-) of Rhema Bible Church, Shepherd Bushiri (b. 1983-) of Enlightened Christian Gathering, Alph Lukau (b. 1975-) of Alleluia Ministry and Steven Zondo of Rivers of Living Water Ministry. In Mahikeng we have Kingsley Ohene-Marfo (b. 1954) of Victory Celebration Church, Prince Osuchukwu of Camp of Fire Ministries, Pastor Tlholoe of Promised Land Ministry and others.

I will briefly discuss some of the afore-mentioned pastors.

### **6.2.1 KENNETH HAGIN – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Kenneth Hagin was born in 1917 in Texas and died in 2003. According to Phillips (2015:28), Hagin was born prematurely and was sickly. At the age of fifteen, whilst bedridden, he read Mark 11:24: "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." Hagin believed in the power of divine healing.

He is labelled as the father of modern day prosperity gospel and in his book, *The Believer Authority*, he proclaims that he had several encounters with or visions of God and in those visions he had a one-on-one conversation with God.

As mentioned earlier, Hagin was firmly rooted in the belief that he was healed from his sickness by simply applying his faith to Mark 11:24. For his part, Hunt (1998:119) believes that "the entire faith movement rests upon the occult belief that faith is a force just like electricity or gravity which obeys laws and thus even non-Christians can use it".

### **6.2.2 TOUFIK BENEDICTUS BENNY HINN – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Benny Hinn is notably one of the most successful prosperity gossellers of this age. This Israeli born and America-based pastor, was raised in the Eastern Orthodox tradition and converted to

Pentecostalism as a teenager. Hanegraaff (2009:16) notes that Hinn was influenced in his ministry by faith healers such as Aimee Semple McPherson and Kathryn Kuhlman. Apparently he still visits Aimee's grave from time to time to experience "the anointing" that emanates from Aimee's bones.

Although Benny Hinn's claims of possessing healing powers and the ability to intercede for the sick had made him world famous, according to Shaffer (2009:44-45), a large number of people died at his crusades or shortly after being pronounced healed. Shaffer cites the following incident:

On September 18, 1986, Ella Peppard fell at a Benny Hinn crusade. An usher rushed over to help but Benny Hinn said "leave her alone. God will heal her". Benny Hinn was wrong in that Peppard later died from her injuries and Benny Hinn was sued \$5 million but settled out of court.

Besides the number of people who died, there were also people who were injured at his crusades. In 2004 three more people died in Nairobi, Kenya after they had left their hospital beds to attend Benny Hinn's crusade. It is reported that an additional 10 people were injured after falling from trees they had climbed for a better view of the evangelist. Shaffer (2009:46) points out that none of them were healed.

His nephew, Costi Hinn, writes the following in his book *God, Greed, and the Prosperity Gospel* (2019:46):

My uncle taught us that if we wanted God to do something for us, we needed to do something for Him. This applied to everything – especially miracles...If people wanted a miracle for the sickness and disease, they needed to give money to God. No money? No miracle! Giving to God was the secret to unlocking your dreams.

In one television programmes,<sup>41</sup> Benny Hinn publically declared:

Ladies and gentlemen don't attack God's servants. Don't publicly attack them by name. You can make statements, general statements. Nobody cares about that...but don't mention people's names on your radio program or your TV program...I'm not exactly the normal kind of guy, you know. I'm from Israel. Sometimes I wish God would give me a Holy Ghost machine gun. I'd blow your head off.

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<sup>41</sup> Praise the Lord: Praise-a-Thon program – Trinity Broadcasting Network, 8 November 1990

Harrison (1999:74) says that threats such as the above is widespread in the faith movement as a way to caution believers against asking questions and to obey blindly. He says the common Scripture being used for the purpose is Psalm 105:15: “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.”

Harrison (1999:75) is emphatic that the “touch not My anointed” is randomly used as an ideological form of enforcing social control and any questions about the pastor’s or the church’s practices or lack thereof are often redefined as challenges to their authority.

In Africa, one is bound to wonder whether utterances like these are not geared at allowing the old African traditional religion to creep into Christianity through the back door. This concern is legitimate because in terms of the African customs it is a taboo to speak ill of an elder, a chief and worse still against a witchdoctor.

It is sensible and crucial to respect and honour pastoral authority (Heb.13:17), but it is equally senseless and foolish to follow leaders blindly (Rom. 16:17-18; Ph. 3:17-19). Pastors and/or ministers are not meant to be lords over the faith of other believers, but mere vessels that should rather help them grow in knowledge of the Lord and the joy rooted in God (2 Cor. 1:24). In the execution of their responsibilities, pastors and ministers ought to be accountable both to God and the faithful. In fact, Hinn (2019:146) puts it so profoundly when he says the faithfulness of a pastor is in giving his life to serve the church and not having the church serve him.

In one of his sermons<sup>42</sup> Benny Hinn taught his followers that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit each is a triune being – possessing His own personal Spirit, personal soul and personal spirit body. In essence there are nine of them. However, this teaching is not in line with Scripture. Throughout the Bible, God is spirit (John 4:24; Deut. 4:12) and is triune. Even 1 Timothy 2:5 says: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” No reference is made to Benny Hinn’s nine.

### **6.2.3 JOEL OSTEEN – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Joel Osteen (2009:70-71), who is also a prosperity gosseller of note, encourages believers to:

supersize your prayers, God want you to ask Him for big things. Ask Him for those hidden dreams planted in your heart. Ask Him even for the unborn promises that might otherwise never come to pass in the natural. Ask Him to restore your broken ties to family members and other loved ones. Ask Him for a life free from illness. Ask Him for a full blossoming of your talents. Ask Him to fulfil your highest hopes and dreams.

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<sup>42</sup>Trinity Broadcasting Network – 3 October 1990

However, Saracco (2007:324) holds a complete different view. He notes that:

in the Bible the emphasis is always on faith, and not on the audible expressions of what we want to achieve. The words do not have power in themselves – it is God in His sovereignty who decides to bless us or withhold material blessings for now. God does bless us, but it should also be noted that the so-called spiritual laws or principles which preach immediate and concrete blessing lack support from the scriptures. Blessings come because of the grace of God and God sovereignty.

From the above messages, it is clear that Osteen doesn't only believe in positive confessions, but also values positive thinking as opposed to negative thinking.

Osteen further illustrates his point by singling out Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. According to him, God took away Zachariah's speech because he made a negative confession upon being told that his wife Elizabeth would fall pregnant and God knew that this confession would derail His plan. However, Luke 1:18-20 records that Zachariah asked the angel Gabriel for a sign that his word would indeed come to pass. So the sign that he was given was that his speech would be taken until the birth of his son.

If indeed God took Zachariah's speech in fear that it would derail His plans, as Osteen would like us to believe, it brings God's ultimate authority and sovereignty into question. Man does not make God to be God, because God is God irrespective. God cannot be subjected to the whims of His own creation. What Osteen would have us believe is in line with the teachings of prosperity gospel that God can be used by man, even to the extent of improving his socio-economic situation on demand.

#### **6.2.4 JOYCE MEYER – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Joyce Meyer is another prosperity gossellers of this age. She boasts to have earned a Ph.D. in theology from Life Christian University<sup>43</sup>. In her book, *The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make* (1996:41-43), she *inter alia* argues “so they put Him – that is His body in a grave, and His spirit went to hell because that is where we deserve to go...God rose from His throne and said to demon powers tormenting the sinless Son of God, ‘let Him go’. Then the resurrection power of the Almighty God went through hell and filled Jesus”.

In Christianity this is very dangerous, if not outright heretical, because Foster (2004:308) notes that the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, is a complete new order of life which encompasses all of human existence both here and in the hereafter.

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<sup>43</sup> A non-accredited university

Like Osteen, if Meyer's argument is to be taken seriously, then it means Jesus Christ never uttered the words: "Father into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). It means Meyer's interpretation suggests a new text, as it also negates what the Apostle Paul said in Colossians 2:15: "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

However, Meyer's statements seek to justify that Jesus Christ was indeed tormented in hell and that the price was not paid on the cross. The fact is that the words Jesus uttered on the cross in John 19:30 (Bible, 2006) and translated as "it is finished" are actually the Greek word *tetelestai*, which literally means "the debt has been paid in full". In fact, the Greek-English lexicon by Moulton and Milligan (1995:630) has this to say: "Receipts are often introduced by the phrase *tetelestai*, usually written in an abbreviated manner."

In other words, the link between receipts and what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross would have been crystal clear to John's Greek-speaking readers. It would have undoubtedly meant that Jesus Christ had died to pay for their sins.

#### **6.2.5 DR. MYLES MUNROE – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

The late Dr. Myles Munroe (2007:169), in selling the concept of prosperity gospel, indicates that the real power in this world rests with believers and not necessarily with God, stating that:

I want you to read the Bible again. Some of you have never read it before, but try to read the Bible again and find anywhere in the Bible, listen carefully, where God ever did anything on earth without a cooperation of a human. Find it, it doesn't exist. When God wanted to free His people from Egypt, He had to get a man to help Him. When God wanted to burn and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He had to get a man to cooperate. When God wanted to do anything on earth, even to save us, He had to send a human being on earth. Therefore, whatever is done on earth, a human must give God permission to do it.

This teaching resonates with Kenneth Copeland. In one of his sermons<sup>44</sup>, he had the mettle to argue:

God's on the outside looking in. He doesn't have any legal entrée into the earth. The thing do not belong to Him. You see how sassy the devil was in the presence of God in the book of Job? God said where have you been? Wasn't any of God's business. Satan didn't even have to answer if he didn't want to. God didn't argue with him a bit. You see

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<sup>44</sup> Audiotape 01-1403 – Image of God in you: Kenneth Copeland ministries.

this is the position that God has been in...If God's running things He's doing a lousy job of it.

However, MacArthur (1992:352-353) holds a completely different view, because to him:

our God is not merely a source of cargo. We are His servants. He has called us to lives of loving service and worship, not godlike supremacy. He blesses us, but not always materially. In no way can we "write our own ticket" and expect Him to follow our script – nor should any real believer ever desire such a scenario. The life of the Christian is a life spent in pursuit of God's will – not a strategy to get Him to go along with ours. No one who rejects that fundamental truth can genuinely live unto God's glory. And no one who has known the emancipation from sin and selfishness wrought by God's grace should ever be willing to exchange that freedom for the cheapened cargo of the word faith doctrines.

The afore-mentioned sentiments of MacArthur are completely in line with Scripture. King David puts it plainly in Psalm 103:19: "The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all."

#### **6.2.6 SHEPHERD BUSHIRI – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Here in South Africa, one of the most controversial prosperity gopeller is Malawian self-styled prophet Shepherd Bushiri, popularly known as Major 1. He is the founder of Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG), which has a very large following across the country. He is not only a prosperity gopeller of note, he also boasts of being endowed with super-natural powers to perform miracles.

In a BBC interview<sup>45</sup> in December 2017, he cited those powers as the reason for the phenomenal growth of his church in South Africa as compared to the same church in his native Malawi. When he was asked to explain the explosive growth of his church in South Africa compared to the one in Malawi, Bushiri boldly declared that "in my country people believe in God and in South Africa people believe in miracles!" His choice of preaching miracles instead of the pure gospel is mind boggling to say the least.

The truth is miracles are indeed Biblical. Matthew 10:1 records: "And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease." Greenway (1999:97) makes a very interesting observation that though the Apostle Paul's mission was accompanied by miracles (Rom. 15:18-

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<sup>45</sup><https://www.zimeye.net>

20), his emphasis was not on the signs and miracles but on the preaching of the gospel. Greenway (1999:103) adds that “in spiritual ministry, we must avoid having others look at us as shamans, persons with special powers to influence or manipulate the unseen world. If and when God uses us to defeat satan and cast out evil spirits through prayer, make sure all the glory goes to God”.

This is in stark contrast to what Mbewe (2016:par. 7) has observed. He says that these days “men of God” are credited for deliverance and breakthrough, adding that “they do this by chanting phrases and making people drop under some trance, in witchdoctor fashion, they are holding sway over the popular mind. The people love it and are paying for it. The ‘Men of God’ are becoming stinking rich as the crowds just keep on coming”.

Bushiri, besides amassing wealth through tithes and offerings, reportedly charged his followers exorbitant fees at a gala dinner he held at the Pretoria showgrounds in December 2017. Apparently a seat at his table cost R25 000. This practice was in line with the views of his Zimbabwean-born and London-based spiritual father, Prophet Uebert Angel. According to Angel, God has selected certain “men of God” through whom He blesses his children. Angel (2013:86-87) argues as follows:

You see there is a time you have to understand that there are men of God who are good ground for every seed. When you find them they will be able to sustain every seed, sown by their anointing. These men of God with great anointing and you don't have to guess who they are. Look at their substance. What do they have? Do they have plenty or less? What achievements do they possess? What is the impact they have made on earth?

Bushiri recently made headlines when he bought a brand-new Maserati Levante for his six-year old daughter, which is reported<sup>46</sup> to have cost over R1.65 million.

It is reported<sup>47</sup> that on 6 December 2017, Botswana's registrar of societies Michael Mokgautsi, effectively banned his church in that country by de-registering it. This followed the allegation that ECG continued the practice of “miracle money”, though it was issued with a warning to stop.

This was not his first run-in with the Botswana government. In May 2017, just before his arrival in that country, the government imposed a visa requirement on him, which was an obvious act to keep him out of the country considering that Malawian nationals do not require a visa to enter Botswana.

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<sup>46</sup> Wheels 24 Motoring News First.

<sup>47</sup> The Star newspaper – 10 January 2018.



Besides his brush with the law in Botswana, Bushiri seems to be courting controversy. Recently the South African Police elite crime-fighting unit – The Hawks – spokesperson, Hangwani Mulaudzi, confirmed<sup>48</sup> that they were investigating charges of money laundering against the flamboyant prophet. This follows allegations that he was sending around R15 million a month to his native Malawi illegally. It is alleged that the money leaves South Africa in his private Jet.

### **6.2.7 PASTOR X<sup>49</sup> - PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Mahikeng's prosperity gospeller of note is Pastor X who is also a stout supporter of amongst others Benny Hinn, Nigerian David Oyedepo and Ghanaian founder of International Central Gospel Church Mensa Otabil.

Besides being a prosperity gospeller, he and his church boast that he is endowed with the power of healing and performing miracles. He regularly holds what he terms healing and miracle services.

He has a stack of Benny Hinn's books and quotes him frequently in his prosperity messages. He too, like his idols Benny Hinn, Richards Roberts, Gloria Copeland, David Oyedepo and Mensa Otabil, is firmly rooted in the seed-offering premise. He has taken this "principle" or doctrine a bit further by introducing the "Isaac" offering. The narrative is that the congregation must, just as Abraham was prepared to offer (Genesis 22:2) his "only son whom he loved", should offer something that is precious to them to the Lord (from the researcher personal observation, this has always been in monetary terms).

In one of his services (in the presence of this researcher – 16 April 2017) Pastor X scolded members of his church for having left their cheque books and purses at home when coming to worship God. He said that this practice was against Scripture and cited Exodus 10:25-26: "But Moses said 'You must give us sacrifices and burnt offerings that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. Our livestock also shall go with us, not a hoof shall be left behind...'"

In other words, he implied that it is wrong and against Scripture to decide to offer only a certain amount of money and that one should rather bring all that he/she has to the church. This was in line with one of the teachings of prosperity gospel that the more you sow, the more you reap. Though this is very illogical and plainly nonsensical, it is however not surprising because Oyedepo (2008:124) proudly states that "God's word is not scientific, neither is it logical. God's word is divine". However, the question that remains is whether this divinity bars logic. Apart from

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<sup>48</sup> Sunday World newspaper – 01 April 2018

<sup>49</sup> His identity and that of his church are withheld.

this question, Oyedepo himself is completely and totally confused because in his earlier book, *Possessing your Possession* (2007:39), he writes that Christians have surpassing intelligence.

Kasera (2012:64) calls Oyedepo's views mind-boggling, because:

you cannot be intelligent without being logical for one presupposes the presence of the other. That is, intelligence presupposes the presence of logic. While scripture is not a scientific book, it is plain contradiction to say that it is not logical, and then call on people to obey it. If it were not logical, we would not be able to understand it and claiming to do what the Bible says.

McConnell (1995:109) is very emphatic in defence of the principle of rationality. He says inasmuch as it is a given that Christianity should and must transcend reason, it cannot and should not be rejected out of hand.

### **6.3 PROSPERITY GOSPELLERS AND WEALTH**

The majority of these gospellers swim in a pool of wealth and abundance, at times oblivious of the poverty and lack surrounding them. Hanegraaff (2009:xviii) aptly describes them as "camouflaged shepherds, they present a Christ who is remarkably unlike the Jesus of the Bible. Their Jesus wears designer clothes, live in a palatial mansion and is surrounded by a band of very wealthy disciples". How conveniently they forget. They forget that Jesus, though being the Son of God, spoke about His own situation as being worse off than that of foxes and birds. Both in Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58 He says: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no-where to lay His head."

For his part, Saracco (2007:325-326) believes that these gospellers are exposing their Christ as Mammon and a god of riches whose church is of opulence and in direct contrast to all the values of humility, sacrifice and abnegation which characterise the kingdom of God.

Three of the afore-mentioned gospellers are listed in the top eight richest pastors in America. According to Schmidt (2019:1) Benny Hinn who is a high school dropout is listed number three with a net worth of \$42 million. He is followed Joel Osteen whose net worth is estimated at \$40 million. It is reported that he lives in a mansion worth \$10.5 million. Joyce Meyer is in the eight spot at \$8 million.

Costi Hinn (2017:104), Benny Hinn's nephew, says:

growing in the Hinn family empire was like belonging to some hybrid of the royal family and the mafia. Our lifestyle was lavish, our loyalty was enforced and our vision of the

gospel was big business. Though Jesus Christ was still a part of our gospel, He was more of a magic genie than the King of Kings. Rubbing Him the right way, by giving money and having enough faith would unlock your spiritual inheritance. God's goal was not His glory but our gain. His grace was not to set us free from sin but to make us rich. The abundant life He offered wasn't eternal, it is now.

What is of interest is that some of the richest pastors listed in the Forbes American magazine are from Africa. Heading that list in Africa is David Oyedepo whose fortune is estimated at \$150 million. This Nigerian-based pastor has four private jets and owns mansions both in London and America. He is closely followed by his countryman, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo, at \$39 million.

Leading the pack in South Africa is Malawian born Shepherd Bushiri who is estimated to be worth \$150 million, aside from the property he owns in several countries. Second is Pastor Tshifhiwa Irene whose fortune is estimated at \$35 million, followed by Ray McCauley of Rhema Bible Church at \$30 million.

The above-mentioned statistics of wealthy pastors, shocking as they may be, are a true reflection of what is happening in the prosperity gospel. Here in Mahikeng advocates and teachers of this gospel live in the most affluent suburbs of this town and drive the latest models of expensive cars at the expense of the adherents of this gospel, whose socio-economic situation remains stagnate if not regressing. These advocates and teachers are what Hinn (2019:152-153) prefers to call charlatans who are Christ-mongers, twisting His name for personal gain. Ecclesiastes 11:6 is used effectively to continuously milk adherents dry. It says: "In the morning sow your seed and in the evening do not withhold your hand. For you do not know which will prosper, either this or that or whether both alike will be good."

The afore-mentioned text is used in conjunction with a part of Ecclesiastes 11:3, which says "If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth..." This is to encourage the congregation to continuously plant seeds and not be discouraged when they do not see the returns because "the clouds" are not full yet and when they are, the rain (blessings) will fall upon them. Banda (2015b:61) believes "humanity volunteers everything out of desperation. Desperate people manifest desperate behaviour, and this is what proponents of the prosperity gospel have discovered and have learned to take advantage of".

Asamoah-Gyadu (2009:41) postulates that the use of Biblical texts to justify lavish and flamboyant lifestyles of servants of the Lord is not only wrong, but it is also sacralising greed and covetousness. The abuse or deliberate misinterpretation of Scripture suggests that many

believers confess and seek to live for Jesus, but are very reluctant to denounce greed. Adeleye (2012:89) believes that prosperity gospel is a serious seduction into false delusion of an unrealistic solution to the challenges of daily life. In all respects it contradicts Biblical teachings by presenting unrealistic and unfortunate shortcuts to material wealth.

On the contrary and in advancing the Gospel, the lives of pastors must exemplify integrity, humility and total compassion to and for the flock. Now this is exactly what Jude 12-13 warns about. In essence Jude says these “servants of the Lord” resemble shepherds who feed themselves full, living like celebrities and royalty on the backs of those in the gutter. Their lifestyles are tainted with deception, mockery, molestation, felony, greed and the abuse of the most vulnerable in society.

Interestingly, Adu (2015:46) cite Nsehe saying:

Paradoxically the same people who complain about the extravagant lifestyles of their spiritual leaders are the same ones who finance it. Every Sunday, swarms of worshippers rush to the church to give away their hard-earned money to the pastors’ coffers in the form of tithes, offerings and special gifts with the deluded hope of multiplied financial blessings in return. For many this is but a pipe dream. Deep down the pastors’ smile, they’ve got just the perfect suckers.

This view is completely in line with Hood’s (2004:49) observation that greed is the sickness of the soul and prosperity gospel has allowed greed to creep into the church of God. In agreement, Togarasei (2011:341-343) records that the generous giving of members swell the coffers of these churches that enable founders and their close associates to live lavish lifestyles and own several properties. He also notes that though many people are attracted to these churches by the gospel of prosperity, their socio-economic status have not changed.

Now, the greed that Hood spoke of puts prosperity gospel in its right perspective. Jude 11 and 16 have even stronger warnings: “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah...these are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts, and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage”.

Lee (2007:231) explains that “prosperity Theology emphasizes that God will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing to the faithful Christian who consistently gives money to his local church. This pervasive ideology helps word churches secure more resources while allowing pastors to enjoy large salaries and unprecedented wealth”. Earlier on, Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:79) was cited to suggest that prosperity gossellers have a transactional rather than a

sacrificial understanding of giving, which is to view offerings and tithes as a means to entice God so that He may bless them.

This is a very dangerous teaching in that it kills the Christian spirit of giving without expecting to benefit out of it. This style of giving and/or offering, which is informed by the law of compensation, seeks to suggest that graces and blessings can be bought from God and goes against His unconditional love and the gratuitous nature of His Grace. This mentality of seeking compensation is responsible for not only breeding greed and selfishness, but also sustaining economic injustice by continuously milking the poor dry and greasing the pockets of those who are already rich.

In other words, it is creating unprecedented wealth generated by greed. However, it is of critical importance that Christians should always remember and never forget that the greatest wealth that anyone can have is not necessarily financial, but a sound and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. A relationship that awakens in man the knowledge and a need to live as a true steward of Jesus Christ.

In agreement with Lee, LeMarquand (2012:80) believes that “the fact that pastors become wealthier but the parishioners do not, can only be sustained as long as people believe that the pastor is godlier or has more faith than the congregation”. According to Lindhardt (2009:56), less prosperous members of these churches sometimes wonder why God is distributing material blessings so unequally. The majority of faithfully tithing born-again Christians do not become rich and at times this creates a source of tension and wonder.

Given the aforesaid, to Adeleye (2012:89) the biggest question that needs to be asked is what becomes of many believers who become disillusioned with the real and proper gospel because they have sown and or offered their faith-seed, but have not seen any of the anticipated fruits. In simpler terms, believers who have been exposed to prosperity gospel, who had the gospel infused into their heads and ended up believing its every teaching become disillusioned when they ultimately discover that they have been cheated.

Perhaps the answer lies with the advice of Mboya (2016:28-29) who says excessive obsession with material possessions and wealth tends to radically contradict and undermine the core values of the church’s identity and the mission in general. In being more concerned with receiving as opposed to giving, prosperity gospel focuses more on the gift than the giver. It tends to assume that God’s faithfulness to us is dependent on our faithfulness to Him and vice versa. It reduces God to human control and manipulation. Church leaders should guide and steer their congregations away from an excessive fixation on material prosperity.

Farah (1980:205) argues strongly that a lot of what is claimed in the word of faith movement or prosperity gospel cannot be genuine Biblical faith, but just a great deal of presumption. In agreement with Farah, MacArthur (1992:352) postulates that:

the sad truth is that the gospel proclaimed by the faith movement is not the gospel of the New Testament. The faith movement is a mongrel system, blend of mysticism, dualism and neo-gnosticism that borrows generously from the metaphysical cults. Its perverse teachings are causing untold harm to the church in general and charismatics in particular. Word faith is in the words of Apostle Peter a “destructive heresy” (2 Peter 2:1). No wonder it is riddled with greed and materialism and as spiritually bankrupt – as the crudest cargo cult.

Agreeing with MacArthur, Hanegraaff (2009:10) comes out very strongly when he says:

in recent years, multitudes who name the name of Christ have adopted a wildly distorted perception of what it truly means to be a Christian. Perhaps even more alarming, millions more have been kept from seriously considering the claims of Christ because they perceive Christianity as a con and Christian leaders as con artists. Under the banner “Jesus is Lord” multitudes are duped by a gospel of greed and are embracing doctrines straight from the metaphysical cults. While convinced that what they hear is the real thing, they are in fact turning on to nothing more than a cheap counterfeit. Eternal truths from the word of God are being perverted into bad mythology – all the while Christianity is hurtling at breakneck speed into a crisis of unparalleled proportions.

No doubt prosperity gospel seeks to articulate a message that is more materialistic than Christocentric. The emphasis of the prosperity gossellers is redirected from what the Bible says to an agenda and or programme that seeks to validate, by means of Scripture, a message that is heavily concentrated on self and material prosperity. Mbewe (2016:par. 11) makes the very passionate appeal that:

we need to sound the warning that this is not Christianity. I know that this approach is filling our church buildings and classrooms to overflowing, until we have to multiply church services in order to accommodate the crowds. But this is not Christianity. It does not lead to heaven. It is a thin coating over the religion that has been on African soil for time immemorial, which Christianity was meant to replace.

Bevans (2014:196) is of the view that the belief and/or attitude of these prosperity gossellers need to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. In agreement with the 2013 mission affirmation of the World Council of Churches “Together Towards Life”, Bevans suggests that

focusing on the market ideology of capitalism opposes the fullness of Life. He adds: “Market ideology is spreading the propaganda that the global market will save the world through unlimited growth. This myth is a threat not only to the economic life but also to the spiritual life of people and not only to humanity but also to the whole of creation.”

In agreement with Bevans, Coorilos (2014:40) is emphatic that the consumerist culture is entirely against life in the compassionate Trinity, as Trinitarian life is in clear contradiction with a luxurious life that is being manipulated and enjoyed by the minority to the detriment of the vast majority. He furthermore argues that:

the act of triune God, are characterised by an egalitarian, interdependent, communication and inclusive way of operation. Economic globalisation has effectively supplanted God of life with its own ungod of Mammon – the god of free market capitalism that propagates a soteriology of saving the world through the creation of undue wealth and prosperity.

The 2013 mission affirmation of the World Council of Churches, Bevans (2014) and Coorilos (2014) all make reference to consumerism. What is consumerism?

### **6.3.1 CONSUMERISM – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Consumerism is not easily defined, but rather easy to detect as a phenomenon that is spreading like uncontrolled cancer cells in society or a raging fire in a dry open field. It seeks to birth a new way of perceiving and thinking that brings a new outlook on life. The outlook which consumerism nurtures or seeks to perpetuate is the belief that society or humanity is free to the extent that its capacity to buy goods and services is unconstrained. Because of this very phenomenon, a great number of people if not the whole human race, especially those who are affluent, have become victims of their own (selfish) desires and as such one can conclude that the notion of this limitless freedom is at the best an illusion luring individuals, society or humanity to the patterns of mind and action that actually enslave.

In an attempt to define this phenomenon, Conradie (2006:47) suggests that consumerism is “the possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services as a perceived route to personal happiness, social status and national success”. In the same vein, Tenai (2016:1) is of the view that consumerism is a concept or a phrase that gives rise to the belief that acquiring a lot of material goods, be they cars, houses or appliances, represents a fuller and more meaningful life. He goes on to say this concept affects both the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the same way.

Conradie (2006) rightly makes reference to culture, because adherence to this phenomenon has bred its own culture known as consumer culture and has forced or imposed societal uniformity. According to Arnould and Thompson (2005:869), “consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relations between the lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets”.

The simple interpretation of the afore-said is that whatever the consumer culture may or may not be, its impact and transformation of the life world seems a generally accepted fate. Having observed this phenomenon or culture, especially in America, Conradie (2006:49) asserts that “it is not only the affluent who are caught into the trap of consumerism. James Childis comments that the black Americans are also experiencing the side-effects of consumerism. The aggressive marketing of goods and pleasures within poor, African American communities has had a corrosive effect on their traditional nonmarket values of love, care and service to others”.

Consumerism, as it is commonly known today, is to a large extent tantamount to or synonymous with Western tendencies and cultures, especially American culture. Almost in total agreement with Conradie (2006), Setmeyer (2010:306) contends that “consumerism in one understanding is the phenomenon produced by the misdirected desire to find fulfilment in things outside of God, particularly in the consumption of material possessions”. Indeed, this desire is misdirected for even the Bible alludes to the fact that earthly prosperity is inherently dangerous and futile.

One thing that is of utmost importance, mentioned by Setmeyer (2010), is his reference to God. People are ready to pursue ungodly lives all in pursued of pleasure and fulfilment. Indeed, the culture of consumerism or the consumerist lifestyle is flourishing in societies or countries where capitalism is the main model of economy and it also spreads into faith communities. Conradie (2006:170-190) lists a variety of ways in which consumerism impacts on religion or faith communities. These are the following:

- The commercialisation of religion (one of the issues being investigated by CRL Rights commission)
- An increase in the number of variations of forms of public worship, liturgical styles, church music and rivalry among ministers and preachers
- A corporate style of church management
- The impact of the consumer-friendly church ethos

Right here, there seems to be a point of convergence between consumerism and prosperity gospel. The convergence I am alluding to is that Ogungbile and Akinade (2010:203) argue that



prosperity gospel requires Christians to place much emphasis on material acquisition that could be demonstrated or revealed in possession of houses, cars and clothing. Pillay (2011:190) says by over emphasising material wealth, inevitably prosperity theology endorses and embrace materialism and legitimises greed, which tends to lend itself to the prevailing consumerist culture.

Marcuse (1991:9) also holds strong views about the impact that consumerism has on people. According to him, the impact is to such an extent that “the people recognise themselves in their commodities, they find their soul in the automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced”.

Vorster (2011:187) takes strong exception to the notion of churches being run like businesses. His take is that:

God’s people must always be a sharing community. Therefore, Christians should be protagonists of the praxis of sharing. Society at large should be taught to share God’s gifts, to be compassionate and to create a sharing community. The ethical principles of sharing and compassion must not only influence our individual ethics, but also enter the domain of political planning and policy making...the ideology of neo-liberalism with its high estimation of consumption must be revisited from a Christian ethical perspective in order to develop a responsible socio-economic critique.

Indeed, consumerism, especially in the faith communities, should be viewed in a negative light in the sense that more often than not some consumerist lifestyles are perceived as a total and serious insult to those who can hardly put food on the table, clothes on their bodies or a roof over their heads as a result of the widening gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. The greatest concern or the most painful part of this sad story is that on the periphery of affluence lies a dehumanising poverty that generates despair and hopelessness. In other words, consumerism is to a large extent the mainstay of poverty. Tenai (2016:6) asserts that “it makes a mockery of human identity and as such there is a need for a theological vision for reforming economies”.

Secondly, what peddles this negative notion is the fact that consumerist culture promotes and encourages selfish individualistic tendencies and behaviour even amongst members of the same family, especially those who are more affluent. As Conradie (2006:31) puts it: “The affluent have become the victims of their own desires.” In other words, this virus called

consumerism blinds individuals and society to personal, environmental and social ills that we so desperately need to remedy.

Tenai (2016:5) puts it more profoundly when he says that:

consumerism moulds people's characters into self-interest and a pursuit of interests other than those for the common good. Those trapped by consumerism struggle to have an interest in people and human values. Stated differently, those trapped in a lifestyle of consumerism have diminished social involvement tend to be preoccupied with "self" and overly competitive.

The self-interest that Tenai (2016) is making reference to flies in the face of Christianity and all that which Christianity represents. It is a Christian virtue or principle to esteem others better than one-self. The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 2:3-4: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests but also for the interests of others."

The Apostle Paul cautions in his letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, against the very notions presented by consumerism. In 1 Timothy 6:6-10 Paul says the following:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

From the afore-mentioned text, it is crystal clear that Paul is laying emphasis that servants of the Lord need to learn to be content and that serving God is more about stewardship than personal material gain. The other critical point he is raising is that those who pursue riches end up falling in the pit of greed and selfishness, which in itself is totally and completely against the *missio Dei* and *koinonia* in particular, which is best defined as fellowship, mutuality and comradeship.

Now this notion that Paul is addressing in his letter to Timothy is even against the African traditional way of life. In the African way of life the individual cannot be an island, but forms part of a greater structure, characterised by a deep sense of community orientation, a sense of kinship, a profound sense of belonging, sympathy, solidarity and cooperation. To Africans, one being is intertwined with others. Nürnberger (2007b:31) observes that "one's identity is not

defined so much by one's individual personality traits as by one's location in the communal hierarchy and the impact of this status on everything else in one's life world". What Nürnberger has rightly observed is deeply profound, hence the saying: "Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe<sup>50</sup>."

In line with the afore-mentioned, Wright *et al.* (2010:100) cite the African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group, also disturbed by this growing phenomenon. The group declares: "We are also aggrieved to observe that prosperity teaching has stressed individual wealth and success without the need for community accountability and has thus actually damaged a traditional feature of African society which was commitment to care within the extended family and wider social community."

As stated earlier and ironically so, this cancer of consumerism has found its way into the church. Sadly, Conradie (2006:54) notes that:

a theology of consumption began to invade our culture and our churches. Slowly, almost imperceptively we wandered away from the foundational teachings of Jesus – sharing our wealth, identifying with the marginalized, living a life of grateful stewardship and began to identify our worth with how much money we made or how many possessions we owed.

No doubt that the church, as part of society, is immersed into this consumerism culture. However, in contrast to consumerism's overhyped and flaunted freedom of choice, true freedom is when we lead lives of mutual dependency, service and care for each other. In fact, Dickens (2018:393) is emphatic that:

our identity is constituted by our relationship with others. Being in relationship, with all the inevitable constraints they involve, is how we come to enact who we always already are. Loving relationships do not diminish our freedom, they are opportunities to open oneself to shaping and being shaped by others in our common relation to God, who is the ground of our being and our freedom.

The teachings of prosperity gospel uphold the spirit and the principles of consumerism, which promotes selfishness and greed. They also encourage self-centredness as the only way of amassing material wealth and escaping poverty.

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<sup>50</sup> Literally means: a person is a person because of other people

### 6.3.2 PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND POVERTY

Folarin (2007:81) notes that in essence prosperity teachers propose a three-fold answer to the question of poverty: Poverty is not the perfect will of God, God is willing and is capable to deliver humanity from the shackles of material poverty and Christians should work hard on their legitimate jobs. This view is in line with Cotterell (1993:7), who states emphatically that

the laws proposed by this school of prosperity theology are such that prosperity in any or all of these realms is in direct proportion to an individual's faithfulness to God. This basic principle is then assumed to operate with something like mathematical precision. The resultant prosperity is then regarded as the best and clearest testimony to the consistency of that Christian's faithfulness to God.

As a result, giving to the poor is seldom encouraged by prosperity gossellers. It occurs only under certain conditions, as alluded to by Copeland (1974:83):

You can feed a thief all day long, but all you will have is a thief full of food. The food won't change him but the word of God will transform him on the inside. If you give to the poor in the proper way, then you can witness to them to introduce them to the power of God. I never give to the poor without telling them about Jesus. If they are to get my material goods, they will first have to listen to what I have to say about Jesus.

On face value, the aforementioned statement comes across as true and correct, but the question that arises is: What is the contents of his teaching? Given his history, introducing the poor to the power of God which Copeland is referring to, it is him teaching the poor about prosperity gospel. The poor can claim material possessions and wealth by simply praying and planting a seed.

Adeboye (2003:53) agrees with Copeland that the poor should be told about Jesus Christ before any assistance is accorded to them. He states categorically that one cannot be rich in the strictest sense of the word unless he/she is holy. He is emphatic that holiness is the nature of God, who is also a fountain of wealth. Given the fact that Adeboye is also a prosperity gosseller of note (his fortune is estimated at \$39 million), there can be no doubt that he too would introduce the poor to the teachings of prosperity gospel.

However, the Word of God in Deuteronomy 15:11 admonishes us: "For the poor will never cease from the land, therefore I command you saying, You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land." Similarly, Pieterse (2001:86) believes that:

preachers need to show solidarity with the congregation and the community in the context of poverty. This implies acquiring existential knowledge of that situation. They need to live in the community...by being with them in their distress, by taking their side, by supporting them pastorally and showing them God's love, one starts gaining their trust. The preacher has to see life, religion, God, the government and other people through the eyes of the people.

This noble view expressed by Pieterse is not taking place at the magnitude and scale that it should here in Mahikeng. From the empirical research (discussed in chapter 3), only Glory Ministry seem to be contributing positively to the socio-economic upliftment of its members by assisting the poor and offering bursaries for its members.

From the afore-mentioned it is expressly clear that prosperity gospel vindicates the wealth of those who are upwardly mobile by justifying that it is spiritually derived and deserved. In agreement with the above-statements, Togarasei (2011:340) stresses that the rich feel very much at home where prosperity gospel is being taught, for they find it an interesting departure from the missionary teachings that declared blessings on the poor.

What Togarasei is asserting greatly corresponds to Van der Walt's (2008:286) belief that wealth cannot be equated to sin neither can it be assumed that it is a result of injustice. Inasmuch as the Bible speaks of wealth as a blessing from God, Scripture is clear that God is very sympathetic towards widows, orphans and the poor. However, God has never promised the poor redemption solely on the basis of their poverty, neither has He promised them wealth just on the basis that they believe in God.

Togarasei (2015:119-120) argues strongly that if prosperity gospel is to be considered in light of Jesus' attitude towards earthly possessions, then there is no trace of the claim that all Pentecostals or prosperity adherents should have cars and big houses in Jesus' teachings and practice. In fact the claim is far off the mark, because Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58 record that Jesus had nowhere to lay His head. In agreement with Togarasei, Zulu (2015:22) is emphatic that preaching a problem-free gospel, as preachers of prosperity gospel do, has serious challenges because Christians continuously experience challenges in their lives even if those challenges are not necessarily related to the issues of money.

The afore-mentioned scholars are spot on, for suffering is indeed part of life and affects everybody, including Christians. As Kalu (2008:262) points out, prosperity gospel should not encourage people to fold their arms and wait for manna to drop from the skies in the way it did during the Israelites' journey from Egypt to Canaan.

The Apostle Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10: “For even when we were with you. We commanded you this. If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” He adds in 1 Timothy 5:8: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, And especially for his immediate family, He has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Having said that, the afore-mentioned Scripture does not in any way prove that poverty is a curse from God. In fact, King Solomon explains in Proverbs 22:2: “The rich and the poor have this in common. The Lord is the maker of them all.” Of more interest, is that Solomon continues in Proverbs 29:13: “The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The Lord gives light to the eyes of both.” In these verses Solomon is conveying a message that seeks to remind us that irrespective of the different economic situations of people, God remains their maker. It also suggests that being their maker, God has a plan for both of them. The fact that He gave sight to both is also testimony to the fact that their situation is escapable.

From the teachings of prosperity gospel, it seems their most important foundation is laid on the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of Abrahamic covenant, atonement and faith. All these were reviewed in chapter 2 to show how prosperity gospel gossellers use them to advance their own cause. The following section addresses how prosperity gossellers distort and misrepresent them.

### **6.3.3 ABRAHAMIC COVENANT – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

As earlier indicated (chapter 2), prosperity gossellers point to Abraham as the embodiment of prosperity upon which they base their theology. Prosperity gossellers further justify and cement their position by citing Galatians 3:13-14:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree). That the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Their narrative is that God blessed Abraham materially and since believers are Abraham’s spiritual children, they have accordingly inherited the financial blessings of the covenant. According to Jones (2014:3), the afore-mentioned assertion is flawed on two counts:

In their appeal to Galatians 3:14, prosperity teachers ignore the second half of the verse which reads “that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”. In this verse Paul clearly was reminding the Galatians of the spiritual blessing of salvation, not the material blessing of wealth. Prosperity teachers claim that the conduit through which

believers receive Abraham's blessings is faith. This completely ignores the orthodox understanding that the Abrahamic covenant was an unconditional covenant. That is the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were not contingent upon one man's obedience. Therefore, even if the Abrahamic covenant did apply to Christians, all believers would already be experiencing the material blessings regardless of prosperity gospel.

Now according to Hanegraaff (2009:226-227), Kenneth Copeland advocates the notion that Abram was the senior partner and God was the lesser partner in that covenant. In other words, prosperity gossellers believe that God entered into a covenant with Abram because God needed him more than he needed God, hence the notion of Abram being a senior partner.

Earlier on (in chapter 2) I indicated that Wright (2006:200) has a completely different and opposing view. He is of the opinion that the covenant reveals God as a sending God. Wright interprets the opening phrase of the covenant as "get yourself up and go" proving that indeed God is a sender. Tennent (2010:111) agrees with Wright and states that sending is in most cases associated with authority and because of that there is always reluctance on the part of the sent to disobey. Meaning that God had authority over Abraham and hence His sending him out of his land, away from his relatives and his father's house.

For his part and in agreement with both Wright (2006) and Tennent (2010), Helberg (2011:42) states that "God Himself chooses the other party to the covenant. He Himself determines the conditions and responsibilities and imposes it to the other party".

Phillips' (2015:58-59) take is that God elected Abraham to be the father of His chosen nation with the intention to reveal Himself and His desire to save humanity and bring them back to His original purpose through that nation – fathered by Abraham:

Nothing is more clear in the scripture than that the covenant was intentionally redemptive and not a contract to make them rich in material things...Notwithstanding the divine beneficence comprehended by the Abrahamic covenant, some Biblical scholars argue that its use by prosperity gospel teachers has transcended these promises and warped them into a set of materialistic guarantees. In fact, even the use of the term Abrahamic is intended to connote the ancient authority of the promises in order to legitimate their use by modern prosperity gospel ministers (Phillips, 2015:58-59)

To Wright (2010:80) the truth is that through this covenant, God was launching His redemptive and restorative project to correct the misdeed of Genesis 3:11. Kroesbergen (2015:86) says it has to be clear that Abraham did not manipulate or sway God into giving his blessings and what is equally important is that he received Isaac back in gratitude.

Even if Abraham had desired to manipulate God, he would not have been able to do so. Banda (2015a:73) puts it so profoundly:

There is a need to bear in mind a balanced understanding of God. On one hand we understand God as supreme, sovereign, incomprehensible and all powerful. With this in mind, we are limited and compelled to avoid any form of manipulation of this God because we are mere fallible and finite creatures in God's hands. On the other hand, the God we believe in is also a relational, loving, merciful and caring God.

#### **6.3.4 ATONEMENT – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

In simple terms, atonement can best be defined as what Jesus Christ did when He went to the cross, bore our sins and conquered death by rising from the grave (1 John 2:2). As atonement lamb, Jesus paid the ultimate penalty for our sins. However, among prosperity gospel's many lessons, they also teach that physical healing, material prosperity and wealth have been provided for in the atonement.

According to Hinn (2019:173): "This is a damaging lie that takes something beautiful about our saviour's work on the cross and turns it into a petty transaction for fleeting pleasures."

In an attempt to drive their point home, prosperity teachers cite 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor that you through His poverty might become rich." The connotation and implication of this is that "wealth and health" are the natural divine privileges of all Bible-believing Christians and may be procreated by faith as part of the package of salvation, since the atonement of Christ includes not just forgiveness and removal of sin, but also the removal of poverty and sickness.

Cotterell (1993:12-13) holds an opposing view in this regard to that of prosperity gossellers. He does not distinguish the word "rich" in the first sequence as different from the same word in the last sequence. The word denotes the spiritual riches of Jesus Christ, which can be associated with Him being part of the Triune God. Those riches were forfeited by going to the cross so that those He redeemed may benefit from spiritual and not material riches.

Another issue of interest to consider is that the author of this text, the Apostle Paul, had been requesting collection from different congregations on behalf of the poor congregation based in Jerusalem. This act in itself indicates that Paul did not understand or deem prosperity as part of the atonement. If he did, then that would bring into question his view in an earlier letter (1 Corinthians 4:11) where he relates how "to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless..."



Now what Cotterell (1993) is attempting to bring across here is that though Jesus Christ was God (part of the Triune), He willingly and on His own volition gave up His heavenly throne to redeem us, as the Apostle Paul so profoundly puts it in Philippians 2:7-8: "He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." The underlying motive and the ultimate goal being, as Paul says in Galatians 3:13: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us for it is written cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree."

Almost in agreement with Cotterell (1993), Rodin (2000:172) argues that in the said text (2 Cor. 8:9) the apostle was commending the Macedonian churches for being utterly committed stewards in the kingdom of God. Paul did not only commend their financial support, but also how their generous giving demonstrates their response to God's immeasurable generosity in Jesus Christ.

Jones (2014:4) introduces another perspective, whereby the Apostle Paul was teaching the Corinthians that since Jesus Christ had done so much for them through the atonement, they shouldn't be mindful of how much of their wealth they spend in service of the Saviour. Paul was encouraging them to support the indigent, hence in a subsequent passage he declares "now at this time your abundance may supply their lack". This teaching of Paul, the author of almost half of the New Testament, is in direct contravention of the teachings of prosperity gospel and consumerism. Prosperity gospel and consumerism are more about the self and less about others. It is a colossal mistake, for Christians as children of God are supposed to be conduits of His love and mercy.

James 2:20 declares that faith without works is dead. In other words, faith that is pleasing to God should be accompanied with works. Pieterse (2001:112) also hold the view that "word and deed should not be divorced but should be conveyed in an interrelated way by a community". So works entail a great many things and in the execution of such works, one may encounter problems and suffering. The Apostle Paul puts it bluntly in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for the good of those who trust in the Lord.

Hafemann (2000:131-140) postulates that:

the glue that united Paul's thought and life with the message he preached and the mission he conducted was his suffering as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul's suffering was the vehicle through which the saving power of God, climactically revealed in Christ, was being made known in the world. To reject the suffering Paul was therefore to reject

Christ, to identify with Paul in his suffering was a sure sign that one was being saved by the foolishness and stumbling-block of the cross.

In agreement with Hafemann, Stott (2006:322) believes that:

the place of suffering in service and of passion in mission is hardly ever taught today. But the greatest single secret of evangelistic or missionary effectiveness is the willingness to suffer and die. It may be a death to popularity or to pride or to racial and national prejudice or to material comfort. But the servant must suffer if he is to bring light to the nations, and the seed must die if it is to multiply.

Wright (2010:240) is in complete agreement with the afore-mentioned sentiments. His argument is that it is crucial that all those who see themselves as God's people or God's servants begin to understand that persecution and martyrdom are still very much part of mission today as it was in history. The suffering of God's servants in mission is in fact their participation in the suffering of God in mission.

Wright (2010:241) emphasises this point by adding that "the cross was the unavoidable cost of the mission of God. Given that the one who bore the cross told us to take up our own crosses to follow Him, there is an unavoidable cost for those who identify themselves with the suffering mission of the suffering God". This suggests that there could be something, in fact there is something seriously wrong with a gospel of glitz and glamour, a gospel of more self and less God.

Now this is very interesting, because prosperity gospel seem to take suffering out of the gospel. In doing so, they inevitably present Pentecostalism, on which most prosperity gopellers lean on, as a "cross-less" gospel. Calvin and Bucer-Beza (2009:58) argue that prosperity gospel seems to teach its adherents to blame God in hardship and tend to praise themselves in prosperity.

It is to murmur against God in adversity and imagine that adversity and hardship can only come from satan as if he was the second god. Prosperity gospel fails to recognise that God can turn anything, even that intended by satan for evil, to the wider purpose of salvation. Nothing and absolutely nothing can change God's gracious purposes towards us. Perhaps this is the reason why the Apostle Paul does not say all things are good, but rather that all things work together for the good for those who love God (Rom. 8:28).

It is crucial to point out here that suffering is never in vain. The author of Hebrews 12:2-3 puts it strikingly: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set

before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Kumar (2012:17) takes it even further by suggesting that “this me-centred theology impacts our missiology as well...rather than preach the gospel in the entirety we hide suffering and bait nonbelievers with the blessings”.

Kumar is in essence saying that it shouldn't be surprising that prosperity gospel has not impacted the socio-economic situation of its adherents here in Mafikeng for the simple reason that it only uses blessings as a bait to draw non-believers to itself. As a result it also impacts the *missio Dei* negatively.

### **6.3.5 FAITH – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Even on the issue of faith, prosperity gospel has it all wrong. Faith is or is supposed to be a firm belief in God irrespective of personal circumstances. Kumar (2012:17) argues that today's faith or theology is “me-centred” and that anything opposed to that is confined to historical books. According to Hinn (2019:176-177): “Faith isn't giving money to get His love, Faith isn't paying a fee for is saving grace. Faith isn't going broke to get healed. Faith isn't travelling to a special service to get His anointing. Faith is repenting of your sins and turning to Him, believing that He is the Son of God.”

For his part LeMarquand (2012:82) says that “unfortunately like other heretical movements, the false gospel of prosperity is anthropocentric everything is centred in the human being and his or her attitudes and not in God and His grace”. In other words, the painful part of prosperity gospel lies in the fact that it is concentrating on the here and now of the human life. The primary and fundamental concern is physical well-being, financial and material prosperity, while at the same time disregarding the consequences of sin that has the power and potential to effect eternal separation from God.

Hinn (2019:96) postulates that:

prosperity gospel certainly denies the sovereignty of God to the extent that it demeans God to the position of a puppet and elevates man to the position of a puppet master who makes confessional demands by faith. It does this by considering faith as a force and God as the one who must respond to our faith.

Schieman and Jung (2012:738-739) also note that “prosperity gospel is a transdenominational doctrine that emphasizes that God grants material prosperity, good health or relief from sickness to those who have enough faith...Similarly financial strains or poor health may be perceived as divine punishment for sin or inadequate devotion”.

Golo (2013:383) seems to agree with the afore-mentioned views. He states that prosperity gossellers tend to regard the acquisition of material wealth and affluent lifestyles as a yardstick by which they measure a believer's salvation. In other words, seeking emancipation from poverty and its socio-economic ills by defining salvation as a freedom to prosper materially reduces the concept of salvation to the here and now.

### **6.3.6 HEALING MIRACLES – PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

Another teaching that is worth examining is the belief that adherents of prosperity gospel or believers in general cannot or should not be sick because they have a right to claim their healing, hence the term “wealth-and-health” gospel. If we are to believe this teaching, it then means that health is guaranteed and if so, it also suggests that there is something wrong with the millions of Christians around the globe who are sick.

According to the theology of prosperity gospel, a sick person needs deliverance not only from his sickness but also from generational curses and sins of his parents or grandparents. The use of blessed or anointed objects for healing is common. These include but are by no means limited to oil, water and handkerchiefs. Detailing his experiences in the healing ministry of Benny Hinn, Costi Hinn (2019:39) says he wondered at how “Peter healed people with his shadow in the Bible, now we can do it with bottled water. God is so full of surprises”.

Quite interesting and contrary to this belief, both the Old and the New Testament record serious men-of-God being visited by sickness. Some of them are:

Prophet Elisha - 2 Kings 13:14

King Hezekiah – 2 Kings 20:1

Job – Job 2:7

Epaphroditus – Philippians 2:25-26

Timothy – 1 Timothy 5:23

Trophimus – 2 Timothy 4:20 and the list goes on

The testimony of the Apostle Paul, who also lived with some sort of physical illness, in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 is also worth mentioning here:

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above

measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”. Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The above-mentioned text clearly shows that the authority and sovereignty of God are always supreme. The will of God will always prevail, whatever the circumstances, unlike what prosperity gospel would want us to believe. The Apostle Paul was one of Jesus’ highly rated apostles and he could not claim healing from God, regardless of how strong his faith in Christ was.

Cotterell (1993:31) cites a very interesting story of John Wimber who had a heart ailment and sought prayers for his sickness from Vineyard pastors in 1985. The following year his heart was still malfunctioning. He was recorded as having said: “I wish I could write that at this time I am completely healed, that I no longer have physical problems. But if I did, I would be a liar. My experience raised a larger question about divine healing: What about those who are not healed?” Hinn (2019:131) has an answer to this question. He answers this question by citing John MacArthur, who says that “one of the cruellest lies of contemporary faith healers is that the people they fail to heal are guilty of sinful unbelief, lack faith or have negative confession”.

Now this is quite interesting because those that Jesus Christ healed did not always manifest faith before the healing took place nor did he enquire of their faith (Matt. 8:14-15, 9:32-33, 12:10-13; Mark 7:32-35, 8:22-25; Luke 14:1-4, John 9:1-7). In fact, if we were to consider the situation of the man at the pool of Bethesda, (John 5:1-17) he showed no faith at all. His was a narration of a sob story of not having anyone to help him into the pool. Yet Jesus healed him, never mind his sob story. What Banda (2015a:74) is saying is very profound. He says that “God fulfils His will and plans with or without human faith. God can still heal and make a person prosperous regardless of the amount of faith one has. Furthermore, God is not obliged to heal or prosper anyone”.

On the other hand, Hanegraaff (2009:16) also narrates a story of another prosperity gopeller of note, Oral Roberts, as coercing his team into building a 20-story research tower in the misguided belief that they would birth a cure for cancer. He made his followers believe that the erection of the building emanates from his personal conversation with Jesus Christ. Long after the completion of the tower, no cure for cancer was found and ultimately the building was sold off.

Another gospeller, Allen (1967:6-7) who was well known for miracle oil, began a “raise the dead program” that yielded nothing and was closed amid a stream of allegations of fraud and fabrications, which led to him being expelled from the Assemblies of God.

However, Banda (2015a:74) cautions all that “God fulfils His will and plans with or without human faith. God can still heal and make a person prosper regardless of the amount of faith one has. Furthermore, God is not obliged to heal or prosper anyone. In His goodness God graciously heals and makes one prosper”.

Now earlier on, the African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group was cited as expressing serious misgivings and concerns about prosperity gospel. In summing up those misgivings and concerns, according to Wright *et al.* (2010:100-101), the chapter says:

We are distressed that much use of the Bible is seriously distorted, selective and manipulative. We call for more careful exegesis of texts and a more holistic bible hermeneutic, and we denounce the way that many texts are twisted out of context and used in ways that contradict some plain Bible teachings...we deplore the fact that in many churches where the prosperity teaching is dominant, the Bible is rarely preached in any careful or explanatory way, and the way of salvation, including repentance from sin and saving faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, and hope of eternal life is misrepresented and substituted by material wellbeing.

Indeed, these false teachings do not only misrepresent the real gospel but do not contribute anything positive to the socio-economic situation of its ordinary adherents. What it does best is to line the pockets of its pastors or teachers.

What the chapter is raising brings to question the total hermeneutics of prosperity gospel.

#### **6.4 PROSPERITY GOSPEL – A DEFECTIVE HERMENEUTICS?**

Preaching of the Gospel demands of the preacher not only to interpret the message, but also to do a proper exegesis of the Scripture he is using. Now hermeneutics is the process of understanding the message. In fact, Souders (2011:65-66) explains that the term hermeneutics is derived from the Greek god Hermes, the divine messenger said to be delivering divine message. He adds that “to some extent, the mission of hermeneutics has always been to reveal the secret of interpretation – to give the reader the tools to correctly interpret a text and find its true meaning”.

Kaiser Jr. and Silva (2007:17) consider hermeneutics to simply mean the discipline that deals with the principles of interpretation. They add that some scholars prefer to call it a science of

interpretation, while others call it the art of interpretation. It is irrefutably a science, because certain clear rules apply and yet is an art for the more the rules are applied the better the interpretation gets.

In other words, the function of hermeneutics is to provide a method through which the reader can fully understand the thoughts of the author in order to decode and convey them as accurately as possible. It is a given that a total historical knowledge of the scriptures may not be attainable and that we may never fully grasp the exact intended meaning and how it fits into our time. However, that cannot be an excuse for not employing proper hermeneutical processes in a text. Caputo (1987:170) emphasises the need for proper theological training, because “we hermeneuts who know the code, who know how to read backward, are able to find another possibility – like those trick cards which display different scenes when held at different angles...everything would flip into a new beginning”.

Burgess *et al.* (1988:121) argue that the point of contention with prosperity gospel is its excessive literal use of the Scripture, which is totally against the agreed-upon methods of Biblical exegesis. They say that one of the bases on which prosperity gospel is declared or viewed as illegitimate is precisely because many of its claims do not conform to the agreed-upon ways of interpreting Scripture. In agreement with the afore-said sentiments, Pillay (2011:190) asserts that “the chief problem with prosperity teaching has to do with the interpretation and application of scripture. Their doctrine is firmly grounded in scripture, prosperity teachers usually buttress their doctrine with numerous proof texts plucked out of their literary and cultural contexts”.

What Pillay is saying is that it is not surprising that this gospel is misleading, because none of its doctrine and/or teachings are grounded in Scripture.

Hinn (2019:174-175) is in total agreement too. According to him: “Prosperity gospel takes the age-old interpretative strategies that scholars have used for generations and turns them upside-down. The rules for hermeneutics are tossed out the window...prosperity gospel take the Bible and twist it into a tool for abuse.”

The misinterpretation of texts and Scriptures or “scriptorture”, as Hanegraaff (2009:xvii) prefers to call it, is at times so great that their teaching borders on cultic tendencies. Tendencies similar to those employed, for example, by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints that choose to equate Jesus Christ to the spirit brother of Lucifer or the Jehovah’s witnesses who hang on to the belief that Jesus Christ is in fact Michael the Archangel.

Now in line with the pronouncements of the African Chapter of Lausanne that prosperity gossellers seriously distort and twist some Bible texts out of context, we will examine just a few of such instances.

### **3 John 2:**

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

This is one of the few verses used extensively by the proponents of prosperity gospel. Prosperity gosseller of note, Hagin (1989:95), contends that this text is one that totally, completely and plainly refers to prosperity, which includes money. He argues that the Greek term *euodoo*, which is translated “to prosper”, actually means “good road” or “good journey” and to him there can be no good journey without money or more specifically without sufficient money.

However, Phillips (2015:85-86) suggest that the Greek word which has been translated as “prosperity” does not mean or refer to material prosperity, neither does it refer to wealth. He says the proper meaning of the word should be understood as wishing one a prosperous expedition or expeditious journey. He goes on to argue as follows:

When this verse is considered contextually it is obvious that its original intent was not to teach doctrine. The will and intent of the author was to send a polite greeting as to inspire a positive reception to the message being sent. Therefore, it is shaky theological footing to attempt to build the doctrine of prosperity on this verse.

Phillips argues further that “the etymology of the Greek word *euodoo* is derived from two root words that mean, alternatively ‘to finish or to accomplish’ ‘to do or to make’ and ‘to further or to progress’ such as on a journey”.

To drive his point home, Phillips (2015:86) goes on to cite Museltof as saying:

Prosperity teachers claim the word is all about prosperity which reveals their lack of knowledge of the New Testament Greek. The particular claim which one sometimes hears is that “prosper” at the beginning of this verse concerns prosperity of a financial nature while “prospers” at the conclusion of the verse only concerns spiritual matters. But this is entirely incorrect and in both cases the same Greek word is being used. Indeed, if John the Apostle expresses his wish that the elder might prosper “in all things” does not this remark itself show that this is not being confined to one’s financial life.



**Romans 4:17:**

As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations. In the presence of Him whom he believed – God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

This is one of the Scripture verses commonly used to give substance to the notion of just saying (Osteen, 2004:129) things into existence. Hanegraaff (2009:xvii) cites Osteen (2004) as saying that “the scripture tells us that we are to call the things that are not as if they were”. However, this is factually incorrect for the text says (Bible, 2006):

As I have made you the father of many nations, in the presence of Him whom he believed – God who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

Clearly the Scripture says that God who gives life, and not us, calls things that are not as though they were. Hanegraaff (2009:xvi) calls this not just a misquote but a “scriptorture”.

**Mark 11:24:**

Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them.

Phillips (2015:92) denotes prayers for material prosperity and wealth, as conceptualised by prosperity teachers based on the afore-mentioned text, as desperate pleas from gamblers who are almost about to put their last coin in the vending machine hoping it will pop out flashy cars, expensive mansions or even promotion at work.

Jones (2014:17) is of the view that:

there are specific theological and Biblical arguments against the prosperity gospel, and without even considering the practical implications of this movement, there are perhaps one general summary reason why the prosperity gospel is a wayward gospel. It is its faulty view of the relationship between God and man. Simply put, if prosperity gospel is correct, grace becomes obsolete, God becomes irrelevant and man is the measure of all things.

However, Olagunju (2009:154) is quick to caution that God is not forced to do anything for men. Man is God’s creation. So whatever God does is by His grace and mercy, for He is sovereign in all things. In agreement, Hinn (2019:140) is emphatic that “God is in control. He is not some

cosmic genie who exists to give me what I want and do what I command him to do...He calls us to a purpose greater than ourselves and we owe him our lives. He can't be controlled with an offering". This is so profound, because even Psalm 115:3 reminds us: "But our God is in heaven, He does whatever He pleases."

## **6.5 SCRIPTURE DENOUNCING PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

The teaching of prosperity gospel has thus been proven to be nothing more than a figment of the imagination of its teachers and that as a result this gospel cannot and will not contribute a dime to the socio-economic situation of its adherents, neither does it encourage its adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei*.

Inasmuch as it is a given that it is God who blesses, it is completely irresponsible and it borders on foolishness to expect that wealth can or will fall from heaven like manna. Even the Bible suggests that it is crucial that wealth is attained through hard work. The same God who prosperity teachers portray as father Christmas whose ready to deliver packages of wealth at demand, is the same God who said: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" (Gen. 3:19).

This is replicated in texts such as following:

### **Deuteronomy 15:11:**

For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, "You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land."

In this text God is instilling the spirit of brotherhood, in the spirit of caring for each in the children of Israel. God is instilling the spirit of *koinonia* and *diakonia* (which is discussed in detail in chapter 5), which are part of the *missio Dei*. It is almost commanding them to be conduits of His love and compassion for each other, especially to the less fortunate. This is in line with the Abrahamic covenant that he will be blessed for him to be a blessing. The blessing of Abraham, his ultimate seed, atoned the sins of the world. If there was even a grain of truth in the teaching and doctrine of prosperity gospel that health and prosperity can be simply claimed from God, then this text would not be in a Bible for it would be a monumental lie. The God who put this afore-mentioned text in the Bible says: "God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent..." (Num. 23:19)

### **Proverbs.10:4:**

He who has a slack hand Becomes poor, But the hand of the diligent Makes rich.

A serious theologian, especially one who claims to have been called by God, would acknowledge that there is one thread connecting the Old and the New Testament and that is that both Testaments convey the Word of the same God. It is an undisputable fact that the God of the Old Testament is still God in New Testament. Now in this text, Solomon is echoing what stands so clear in the Genesis 3:17: "...in toil you shall eat..."

Solomon is encouraging his nation and all of us to be productive and not wait for hand-outs. Again this text is a serious slap in the face of prosperity teachers who encourage people to just sow a seed, fold their hands and wait for a harvest.

**Proverbs. 21:17:**

He who loves pleasure will be A poor man, He who loves wine and oil Will not be rich.

A man who loves pleasure, is the one who does not work and sits at home enjoying wine. Typical of a man who has sold out his soul to prosperity gospel, which says plant a seed and fold your hands. If the experiences of the Chanzas and Rabotapi (chapter 3) are not relevant here, none will. They were told to plant a seed to turn around their misfortune, instead the bad turned out to be worse. Poverty almost visited them with their seeds firmly planted in an extremely unfertile soil.

Work, work and work again is the solution. However in instances were one cannot work not because of one's own accord but due circumstances that are beyond one's control, then in the spirit of *koinonia* the Word of God encourages the "haves" to help the "have-nots": "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your fields ...leave them for the poor and the alien." (Deut. 24:17)

**Matthew 6:19-21:**

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

If prosperity gospel and the afore-mentioned text were two boxers in the ring, prosperity gospel would have by now thrown in the towel in surrender. Here Jesus Christ (He is God by the way) is saying to not concern yourself too much about the here and now, do not be too concerned with the self but be worried about the kingdom of God. The treasure He is referring to, the one that needs to be stored in heaven, speaks of deeds of mercy and compassion rendered to the less fortunate, relates to the selfless service to the ministry without necessarily expecting

anything in return. It relates to devoting oneself to spreading the Gospel as He has commissioned, without using His name to line one's already greased pockets and without necessarily using His name to own mansions throughout the world or to hop from one country to the next in a multi-million Rand private jet.

Most importantly, wealth is about embracing the poor without degrading them by calling them cursed.

### **1 Timothy 6:10:**

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. For which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

It may be a little bit far-fetched, but there is no better story to link with the text than that of Benny Hinn. He raised his nephew, enrolled him in the best schools and showered him with presents from his ill-gotten fortune, hoping against hope that he would remain forever blind to his shenanigans of prosperity gospel. Lo and behold, Costi Hinn's eyes were opened and he unleashed the most scathing and damning attack in recent years against prosperity gospel. In my language we say "Ka tlhagolela mookana ya re o gola wa ntlhaba<sup>51</sup>".

I must hasten to add that I do not suggest that Costi was a source of pain to his uncle, but without any fear of contradiction, I submit that Benny's love for prosperity gospel was the source of his embarrassment and pain.

Though Benny announced publically that he has repented and that he will no longer pursue and/or endorse prosperity gospel, at the completion of this study niece and uncle were still not on speaking terms.

In summing up this issue, Zulu (2015:34) presents a very profound argument. He says that although it is an undisputable fact that God blesses His people with prosperity, any theology that seeks to place prosperity under the control of humans as though humans can manipulate God into giving them that prosperity, is wrong. Equally, it is wrong to measure prosperity only by material wealth.

## **6.6 TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMY – MAHIKENG**

Given their teachings of prosperity and material wealth, some Pastors in Mahikeng effectively use prosperity gospel to lure people and believers to their churches. Earlier on Golo (2013:368)

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<sup>51</sup> Setswana idiom meaning that the one thing that I pampered, has turned out to be a source of pain to me.

insisted that the said churches teach their members that all human needs were met in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. This then means that every believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth which Jesus Christ won by being nailed on the cross.

A critical question that arises, is whether prosperity gospel has contributed to the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng? The little positive contribution is completely overshadowed by the negative contribution. The only positive contribution that is worth mentioning is that prosperity gospel has changed the socio-economic situation of some pastors who now live in the most affluent suburbs of Mahikeng. A case in point is Kingsley Ohene-Marfo of Victory Celebration Church and Prince Osuchukwu of Camp of Fire ministries.

This positive contribution to the lives of pastors, can best be understood from the position adopted and advocated by pastor Tshepo Mauco (chapter 3) of Alleluia ministries. Mauco believes that "Abraham was so blessed; the Bible says in Genesis he had livestock etc. He was so rich and according to Galatians (Galatians 3:14), his blessings are ours, he is the father of nations and we must be blessed as he was".

On the negative front, earlier on Solomon (2017:118) noted that many of these Pentecostal prosperity-preaching churches establish educational institutions that are too expensive for and beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. In Mahikeng, one of these prosperity driven churches has build a primary school at Smarties-RDP settlement. But in line with the observation of Solomon (2017) almost all learners of the afore-mentioned primary school are bussed in from more affluent suburbs because its fees are unaffordable to the community that surrounds it. One matter of concern is that at times even members of those very churches cannot afford the tuition fee of the schools they toiled to build.

Due to a lack of social conscience on the part of the leaders of these churches, their institutions can only be accessed by the rich and famous. Inevitably they contribute to the widening gap between the rich and the poor. Having only the rich accessing these institutions, it would not be far-fetched to suggest that they are used as money-spinning machines for the enrichment of the pastor and his family.

Experiences of those who have encountered prosperity gospel (chapter 3) also feed to the narrative of a negative contribution. A glaring example is the experience of Lorato and Brian Chanza as well as Tebogo Rabotapi who were literally robbed over a hundred thousand rand by the pastor of Christos, who they had trusted as a servant of the Lord. Of equal concern is also the experience of Mary Kobue who was left impoverished. Of all those interviewed and sampled

by this researcher, none has come forward to say he or she has benefitted directly from being a member of a prosperity driven church.

Given the afore-mentioned, one can conclude that prosperity gospel has not contributed to the general transformation of the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng.

## **6.7 SUMMARY**

Hanegraaff (2009:13-14) is adamant that most the tragic part of Christianity today is to see both charismatic and non-charismatic leaders endorsing leaders of the faith movement. In almost despair he asks: "If Christians were willing to give their lives in days gone by, shouldn't we be willing to sacrifice out positions, platforms and popularity in order to preserve the faith?"

Some believers and non-believers alike look at this gospel, this phenomenon, and wonder whether it is an authentic and genuine gospel or rather a superstition that crops up from total despair. Be that as it may, important questions and the concomitant need for critical analysis and spiritual discernment, there is no denying that the mention of the name Jesus Christ inevitably draws multitudes to this very gospel.

To this end, it has been established that prosperity gospel is often devoid of any meaningful theology. Equally so, it has made no meaningful contribution to the socio-economic transformation of its ordinary adherents. If truth be told, a wrong theology and wrong doctrine cannot transform society nor be of any assistance to the poor.

A sincere lesson can be learnt from the views of Van der Walt (2011:481) who insists that if we are willing to set the kingdom of God as our first priority and obey Him completely, if we are willing to fully participate in the *missio Dei*, then God will bless us even with those things that we are not actively seeking, namely enough to live by, joy, happiness and contentment. God alone holds these things in His hands and they remain a merciful gift from Him. Even Jesus Christ can attest to this. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus says: "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

## **CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

The principal objective of this research was a missiological evaluation of the contribution of prosperity gospel to the socio-economic transformation of its adherents and the community of Mahikeng. Secondly, which is of equal if not more importance, was to evaluate if prosperity gospel is contributing to partaking in the *missio Dei*. Lastly, the objective was to give and/or suggest possible missiological or Biblical guidelines to address the challenges emanating from prosperity gospel.

I will be quick to acknowledge that the prosperity gospel in Mahikeng has not benefitted the community in general or its adherents, save for some pastors. I will also acknowledge that though prosperity gospel is preached in most charismatic churches, the level of opulence amongst pastors vary from church to church. The degree of variance of that opulence and what informs it would require another or further research.

In this chapter, I present a summary of this research as well as offer possible missiological and or Biblical guidelines intended to address the challenge of prosperity gospel.

### **7.2 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS**

#### **7.2.1 CHAPTER 1**

This chapter served as the introduction to this research. The background to what necessitated this study was presented, including factors pertaining to how the whole research was to unfold.

#### **7.2.2 CHAPTER 2**

In this chapter, I focused on the history and the teachings of prosperity gospel. It was in this chapter in which it was established that although prosperity gospel is spread across the whole spectrum of Christianity, it has its roots both in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

It was established that Pentecostalism began in Los Angeles in America in 1906 and founded by William Seymour in what is famously known as the Azusa Street revival. The Pentecostal movement is a phenomenon that puts great emphasis on the visible gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially preaching and praying in tongues and miracles. To put it more plainly, Coleman (2000:20-21) says that “the term Pentecostal is derived from Pentecost, the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks that is related to the Passover of the Jews. For Christians, this event

celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts”.

In other words, Pentecostalism is a religious phenomenon or ideology that gave rise to churches in the United States and Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The charismatic movement or neo-Pentecostalism emerged in the 1960s. However, it was also established that prosperity gospel can be traced to the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century in North America. It is a gospel that is rooted in the belief that man can attain any level of prosperity by claiming it from God through faith – hence the premise of “name-it-and-claim-it”.

Tithes and offerings reign supreme in the teachings of prosperity gospel. Lindhardt (2009:52) observes that:

in order to generate a counter-gift and nourish an ongoing exchange relationship between humans and God, a gift of money must also be invested with the essence and legitimate desires of the human donor. This investment makes money an inalienable gift and by receiving it God is obliged to make a return.

### **7.2.3 CHAPTER 3**

Given the phenomenal growth of prosperity gospel in South Africa and in Mahikeng in particular, this chapter sought to deal with the views of those members of the Mahikeng community who have had a direct encounter with prosperity gospel. Of interest is that most participants were quite negative towards prosperity gospel and those that were positive had only experienced prosperity gospel to a limited degree.

The views of members of the community were also sought through a questionnaire, the results of which were analysed. The views of pastors, as custodians of the gospel, were also assimilated.

### **7.2.4 CHAPTER 4**

The purpose of this chapter was to present a brief analysis or overview of the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng. As part of the afore-mentioned, the geographical and social demographics of Mahikeng were presented. The political history of the town was sketched: its status before colonisation; how it remained the capital city of the British Protectorate, even though it was outside the protectorate; how, together with the British Bechuanaland, it was annexed to the Cape colony (present day South Africa); how it was returned to the Batswana as part of the capital city of Bophuthatswana; and how again it was annexed together with Bophuthatswana to South Africa.



On the economic front, it was noted that the fluctuating economy of Mahikeng was growing steadily whilst it was the capital city of the British Protectorate, but took a nose-dive when its capital city status was transferred to Gaborone. The independence of Bophuthatswana in 1977 brought with it an economic boom for Mahikeng but that economic cloud evaporated and dissipated following the dawn of democracy in 1994.

In relation to the topic, the chapter also dealt with the introduction of Christianity in Mahikeng and how this religion flourished during the time of the erstwhile Bophuthatswana government. We discovered that although clause 4(b)9 of chapter 2 of the Bophuthatswana Constitution (Act 18 of 1977) states: "All people are equal before the law, and none may because of his sex, his descent, his language, his origin or his religious beliefs be favoured or prejudiced." Lebeloane and Madise (2011:79) observe that "in spite of this clause, the homeland state favoured the Christian religion above other religions".

Attention was also paid to prosperity gospel. Though it was extremely difficult to establish when exactly this gospel was introduced to Mahikeng, it became clear that it has shown phenomenal growth since after 1994. One wonders whether its growth is linked to the failed political promises of 1994. From personal observation, I estimate that there are approximately six times more Pentecostal/charismatic churches than there are mainline and African Initiated Churches combined.

## **7.2.5 CHAPTER 5**

It has to be recalled that the primary objective of this study was not only to evaluate the contribution of prosperity gospel to the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng, but also to evaluate whether this gospel encourages its adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei*.

So naturally, the purpose of this chapter was to unpack the *missio Dei*. Where did it all start and what does it all entail? Stott (2008:34-35) reminds us that the phrase *missio Dei* explains the narrative of the Father sending the Son and then the Father and the Son sending the Holy Spirit. The Father sends the Son to undertake redemption and then sends the Holy Spirit to harness that redemption to the hearts of men and women.

Stewardship was also discussed as part of the *missio Dei*. God expects us to love each other and to love and embrace all of His creation. In this regard, Waltke (2007:254) reminds us that in the beginning God created man in His image (*imago Dei*) to rule as vice-regent over all things on earth and for man to worship and have close relationship with Him.

Haney (2003:181) introduces seven concepts or characteristics that are fundamental to the *missio Dei*: *dikaioma* (justice), *martyria* (witness), *didache* (teaching), *kerugma* (proclamation), *koinonia* (fellowship), *diakonia* (service) and *leiturgia* (worship). Five of the aforementioned were discussed as being of critical importance for the followers of Christ to adapt and to fully embrace and to actually be stewards thereof.

The conclusion was that with its erroneous teachings and doctrine, there was no way that prosperity gospel could be in line with the *missio Dei*, let alone encourage its adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei*.

## **7.2.6 CHAPTER 6**

This chapter was dedicated to evaluating the prosperity gospel. Having gone through all the teachings of prosperity gospel, it became clear that this gospel may be what the Apostle Paul speaks about in the Book of Galatians 1:6-7. Paul speaks of the existence of another gospel, a gospel that is contrary to the gospel that Jesus Christ left on earth and which He commissioned His disciples to spread to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28-18-20).

I took time to examine some of the most prominent prosperity gospellers, from Kenneth Hagin to a locally based preacher. During the course of this study, Benny Hinn was also included as one of a prominent prosperity gospellers. However, (Hinn 2019) says he has “repented” from prosperity gospel after his very close nephew, Costi Hinn, who has worked with him for several years released a scathing attack on prosperity gospel in his book titled *God, Greedy and the Prosperity Gospel*.

It may well be that Benny Hinn has realised that he has amassed enough wealth to last him a lifetime or at least enough to allow himself to retire, instead of continuing to open himself to public scrutiny following the scathing attack and exposé of his nephew.

The evaluation also included their main teachings based on the Abrahamic covenant, atonement and faith. Of interest were their hermeneutics, which Hanegraaf (2009:xvii) prefers to call “scriptorture” and finally I paid a bit of attention to Scripture that plainly denounces prosperity gospel.

## **7.3 FINDINGS**

### **7.3.1 PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND SOCIO-ECONOMY**

This study has found that in its present form prosperity gospel has not contributed anything positive to the socio-economic situation of Mahikeng. The only contribution that is worth

mentioning here is that this gospel has changed drastically the socio-economic situation of some pastors who now live in the most affluent suburbs of Mahikeng, while members of their congregations live in a sea of abject poverty. The question that may arise is whether these pastors lack a social conscience or are simply money hoodlums.

In describing these unfortunate “men of God”, Gathogo (2011:147-148) says:

They have not been fishers of men, Instead, they have been reapers of diamond and gold in an endless mine of desperate souls in search of spiritual nourishment. They live opulent, conspicuous lifestyles completely at odds with the gospel that they preach and the condition of the vast majority of their flock...there is little doubt that many of them are completely cynical conmen and women out to make a financial killing...many of them have the morals of the organisers of so-called pyramid saving schemes who rip off the gullible.

In agreement with Gathogo’s assessment, Wommack (2011:1) comments as follows on a fundraising event held by a Christian network:

I saw manipulation that makes con men look honest, and it was all done in the name of the Lord with tears and lots of hype. It really grieved me as I know it would many of you. What really upset me was that these tactics work. The body of Christ responds to this type of appeal with big bucks, and that’s why ministers do this. It works. There are organisations receiving hundreds of millions of dollars per year through gimmicks, lies and manipulation. That says volumes about the immaturity in the body of Christ.

Banda (2015b:69-70) notes that one of the basic tenet of prosperity gospel is that every believer should be rich, because living in poverty is living outside the perfect will of God. He goes to quote prosperity gospel as saying that “you can be rich, healthy and trouble free. Jesus was rich and God wants you to be rich”. However, this goes right against Scripture. Jesus Christ said (Matt.16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23): “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”. No mention of earthly riches.

In some instances, these prosperity-driven churches establish institutions of learning as a way of suggesting that they are ploughing back into the community. Here in Mahikeng, one such institution of learning has been established in a predominantly poor RDP settlement, yet charge fees unaffordable to the very community that surrounds them.

From the researcher’s personal observation, almost all learners of the primary school based in Smarties-RDP settlement are bussed in from more affluent suburbs. One matter of concern is

that at times even members of those very churches cannot afford the tuition fee of the schools they toiled to build. In other words, donor funds and funds raised from the very poor congregation are used to build these institutions while also receiving government subsidies for the services purportedly rendered to the poor.

Notwithstanding, people or believers who continue to gather under the disguise of a church are used to the benefit of the pastor and his cronies. Amarachi *et al.* (2016:151) is in total agreement with sentiments expressed by Wommack: “My intention is not to accuse anyone of deliberately misleading or manipulating those whom they impact, but I have seen first-hand the unhealthy consequences of this type of teaching, and the manipulation breaks my heart.”

Still on this matter, Hinn (2019:152-153) strongly believes that all Christians have a responsibility to speak with a very loud voice, for those who have their voices and dignity stripped from them or those who have had their deepest faith in God shaken or even destroyed. He argues further that most importantly we have a moral responsibility to stand for Jesus Christ, our Lord and redeemer, when we realise that His name is being dragged through the mud by charlatans who are Christ-mongers, distorting His name for personal gain.

Wells (1994:82) also condemns in the strongest possible terms the attitude and acts of prosperity gossellers, of using and or misusing the Word of God for financial gain. He says:

The word of God is not for sale, and therefore it has no need of salesmen. The word of God is not seeking patrons, therefore it refuses price cutting and bargaining, therefore it has no need of middlemen. The word of God does not compete with other commodities which are being offered to men on the bargain counter of life. It does not care to be sold at any price. It only desires to be its own genuine self, without being compelled to suffer alterations and modifications...It will however, not stoop to overcome resistance with bargain counter methods. Promoters' successes are sham victories, their crowded churches and the breathlessness of their audiences have nothing in common with the word of God.

Though it is crucial to respect and honour pastoral authority (Heb. 13:17), it is however equally foolish and dangerous to follow leaders blindly (Rom. 16:17-18; Phil. 3:17-19). Pastors and/or ministers are not meant to be lords over the faith of other believers, but are meant to be mere vessels that should rather help other believers to grow in the knowledge of the Lord and the joy rooted in God (2 Cor. 1:24). In the execution of their responsibilities, pastors and ministers ought to be accountable both to God and the faithful. They must learn, no matter how difficult it is, to avoid the temptation of pride, popularity and greed. In advancing the Gospel and the

business of the kingdom, they must strive to live lives that exemplify humility, simplicity and most importantly integrity.

Olajungu (2009:154) is of the view that in as much as it is good for prosperity gospel teachers to point believers to God and His exceptional promises in His Word in order to have their needs met, the very sad part is that these teachings have not eradicated poverty in society and have instead made some believers lazy by suggesting that it only takes positive pronouncements to attain prosperity.

Arguments presented thus far paint a picture that seeks to suggest that adherents of prosperity gospel see God from an economic perspective rather than as Lord, merciful Father and creator of both the visible and invisible. Equally so, the teaching that says wealth is from God and poverty is from satan miss the point entirely. Job said it so profoundly (Job 13:15): "Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him." It should be kept in mind that God had earlier testified of Job's blamelessness and how upright he was, yet He allowed him to go through suffering and unspeakable tragedy.

The just name-it-and-claim-it principle is flawed to say the least. The truth is nothing that we as people have come from us, because everything originates from God. Hence, the Apostle Paul had the boldness to ask in 1 Corinthians 4:7: "For what makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Chapter 3 of this study presented sob stories of experiences of those who were cheated out of their hard earned money, all in the name of a gospel that promises awesome returns. Not wanting to be outdone in the game of gimmicks, today's men of God are nicely camouflaged in false humility, camouflaged in sheep skins, whilst deep inside they are ego-centric wolves hell-bent on deceiving the unsuspecting by presenting sickness and poverty as a way of punishment from God for whatever secret sin.

### **7.3.2 PROSPERITY GOSPEL ADVANCE CONSUMERISM**

Another critical finding of this study is that prosperity gospel advances the interest of consumerism and in turn consumerism advances the spread of prosperity gospel. This is one of the fastest growing phenomenon in the world. Setmeyer (2010:306) notes that "this phenomenon is produced by the misdirected desire to find fulfilment in things outside of God, particularly in the consumption of material possessions".

In an endeavour to articulate a link between prosperity gospel and consumerism, Conradie (2009:170-190) believes that there are various ways in which consumerism impacts on religion or faith communities. These are as follows:

- The commercialisation of religion (one of the issues being investigated by CRL Rights commission)
- An increase in the number of variations of forms of public worship, liturgical styles, church music and rivalry among ministers and preachers
- A corporate style of church management
- The impact of the consumer-friendly church ethos

In line with the afore-mentioned, Wright *et al.* (2010:100) cite the African chapter of the Lausanne Theology working group, also disturbed by this growing phenomenon. The group says: “We are also aggrieved to observe that prosperity teaching has stressed individual wealth and success without the need for community accountability and has thus actually damaged a traditional feature of African society which was commitment to care within the extended family and wider social community.”

Not only does consumerism impact on the church and by extension the gospel of Jesus Christ, it also has a bad influence on one of the best principles of African cosmology - *Ubuntu*<sup>52</sup>. Ramose (2006:15) deems *Ubuntu* as an African philosophy that elevates communal interest above those of individuals and where human existence is intertwined and dependent upon interaction with others. For his part, Marumo (2016:105) is emphatic that “Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can’t exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can’t be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity is for the whole humanity”.

In other words, this is a clarion call that one ought to respond to and fully participate in the characteristics of the *missio Dei*, particularly *koinonia*, *diakonia* and *dikaioma*. Jesus Christ gave this commandment in Mark 12:31: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” More importantly, theologically Ubuntu can be best described as what happened in the Book of Acts. Acts 4:32-35:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in

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<sup>52</sup> Humanity

common. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what they sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Still on the issue of *Ubuntu* and particularly in relation to prosperity gospel and consumerism, the views of Mashau and Kgatle (2018:4) are so profound. They say "The philosophy of Ubuntu is one of mutual concern, care and sharing that holds out the promise of eradicating the preventable and deadly poverty that currently envelops most of Africa".

### **7.3.3 PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND MISSIO DEI**

Though adherents of prosperity gospel attend church regularly, their participation in the *missio Dei* is suspect because theirs is not a gospel of Jesus Christ or the gospel of the kingdom of God. The abuse and deliberate misinterpretation of Scripture, suggest that many believers pronounce and want to live for Jesus but are very reluctant to denounce greed. Adeleye (2012:89) believes that prosperity gospel is a serious seduction into false delusion of an unrealistic solution to the challenges of daily life. In all respect, it contradicts and violates authentic Biblical teachings by presenting unrealistic and unfortunate shortcuts to material wealth.

In other words, the colossal mistake of prosperity gospel is not necessarily that it promises its adherents too much but rather that it promises too little. The undeniable fact is that the gospel of Jesus Christ or rather the gospel of the kingdom of God promises and offers salvation from the deep muddy-clay of sin, whilst prosperity gospel promises a platform for earthly prosperity.

Given the afore-said, Louw (2000:330-334) strongly suggests that believers across the spectrum of Christianity need to move away from prosperity theology and rather focus their faith, attention and energy on a constructive theology that seeks to avoid simplistic answers and solutions to lack, suffering, poverty and depravation. Louw rightly points out that prosperity gospel is a utopian theological approach that provides an inappropriate perspective of life, whereby life is looked at or viewed as blissful and free of any suffering. The suggestion of a constructive theology makes so much sense for it looks at life within its proper natural and Christian context where good and bad, life and death, joy and suffering co-exist.

Although he is part of the charismatic movement, Bishop Mosa Sono of Grace Bible Church in Soweto is vehemently opposed to prosperity gospel. According to Anderson (2005:80):

the reasons for Sono's resistance to prosperity gospel must be found in his suspicion that this does not address his constituency's needs. In the very different situation he

ministers to, a message of wealth and power as signs of God's blessing does not connect with the stark realities of poverty and crime in Soweto.

Could it be that though Sono is leading one of the biggest charismatic churches in Soweto, he has realised that the perverse teachings of prosperity gospel have the potential of causing untold harm to the church in general, but for the charismatics in particular?

In all fairness, advocates of prosperity gospel cannot defend this gospel in terms of being partakers of the *missio Dei* for theirs is in direct contradiction to the whole purpose of the *missio Dei*. It is a gospel seriously riddled with greed, materialism and spiritual bankruptcy. When all is said and done, both believers and unbelievers alike need to come to the full realisation and acceptance that God cannot be a means to an end or rather a glorified tool in the hands of His own creation.

Earlier on Hinn (2019:140) was cited as reminding us that God is in control. "He is not some cosmic genie who exists to give me what I want and do what I command him to do...He calls us to a purpose greater than ourselves and we owe him our lives. He can't be controlled with an offering". This is so profound, because even Psalm 115:3 reminds us: "But our God is in heaven, He does whatever He pleases."

In the simplest of terms – if God is not a sovereign God, then God is not God.

Based on the afore-said, I have no choice but to fully subscribe to what Jones (2014:37) says about prosperity gospel. In summing it all up, he points to a few critical points, which are that:

- (i) prosperity gospel is built upon a faulty understanding of the Abrahamic covenant;
- (ii) prosperity gospel is built upon a faulty understanding of the atonement;
- (iii) prosperity gospel is built upon a faulty understanding of Biblical teachings on giving;
- (iv) prosperity gospel is built upon a faulty understanding of Biblical teachings on faith;  
and
- (v) prosperity gospel in general has been constructed upon a faulty Biblical interpretation.

The central point to all of the afore-mentioned is that prosperity gospel has a complete misunderstanding of the *missio Dei*, its origin, what it stands for and what is required to fully partake of it.



## 7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the unpleasant findings of this study, namely that prosperity gospel has not contributed anything positive to the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng and that it does not encourage its adherents to fully participate in the *missio Dei*, I offer the following recommendations on how the church in general can contribute to addressing this awesome challenge.

### 7.4.1 PRAYER

All of us need to come before the Lord in prayer, pleading for forgiveness for what Mbewe (2016:par. 1-4) describes as having allowed the rot that is taking place within our own ranks. We must and have to do so, for Robb (2006:151) reminds us that “prayer is the most powerful form of social action because God responds directly to prayer. Prayer is the most powerful part of mission...Even in the most hopeless of situations, He breaks through the false dominion of the enemy, bringing spiritual light and breathing life for lasting social transformation”.

Earlier on Louw (2000:330-334) was cited as strongly suggesting that believers across the spectrum of Christianity need to move away from prosperity theology and rather focus their faith, attention and energy on a constructive theology that seeks to avoid simplistic answers and solutions to lack, suffering, poverty and depravation, but rather promotes full participation in the *missio Dei*. For us to be able to do so, we need to be brutally honest with ourselves and concede that prosperity gospel is not about the kingdom of God. Having conceded this, we then have to seek the face of the Lord.

Banda (2015a:74) suggests that “when we come before God in prayer...we should bear in mind that we are placing a matter before the Creator and Ruler of the universe and we are directly involving Him in whatever problem or need we may face”. It is of critical importance to remember that God is faithful and just (Num. 23:19), and He is the same God who said: “If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

There are numerous texts in the Bible where God invites humanity to seek Him. Seek Him to be His steward, to honour Him and to glorify Him. This invitation does not permit anybody to then command God, as though God is not sovereign (Deut. 4:29; 1 Kings 22:5; Is. 55:6; Jer. 33:3; Amos 5:14; Matt. 7:7; Heb. 11:6, etc.).

## 7.4.2 PROPER THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

Having addressed the importance of repentance through prayer, I need to concede that I fully understand the narrative of the apostolic-charismatic churches that God qualifies those He calls and that the Holy Spirit has the potential of illuminating text. However, I also hold the very strong view that my understanding should not and cannot replace or substitute the importance of proper theological training. Brunsdon and Knoetze (2014:275) postulate that theological training is not aimed at only producing professional and theologically educated clergy, but also about producing spiritual leaders that are equipped and empowered to prepare God's people for works of service that the body of Christ may be edified.

However the training of pastors and/or leaders does not necessarily take away the responsibility of every Christian to also study Scripture to keep from being misled, particularly because one of the most critical findings against prosperity gospel is that its teachers misinterpret texts and Scripture or do what Hanegraaf (2009: xvii) prefers to call "scriptorture".

Ellington (2015:50) is of the view that this misrepresentation of Scripture can easily be curbed by teaching pastors exegetical skills that will open their eyes to see what is really present in the Bible verses, Biblical books and the canon of scripture as a whole. He goes on to say that:

those who train pastors and teachers of the church are challenged to require that students learn to carry out the study of Bible verses and Biblical passages in their literary and canonical context. If future pastors learn to do this, scripture will be allowed to have a voice for itself, and interpretation will not be left solely to the dictates of personal and societal pressures.

Besides exegetical and hermeneutical training to ensure proper use of scripture, I fully subscribe to the recommendations of the South African Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL, 2016:124-125). After their investigations and public hearings concerning the abuse of churches, they recommend that:

the governance from within should be strengthened. The institutions must decide on their internal operational guidelines, and determine levels of compliance and non-compliance for each member institutional operations. These guidelines should assist associations to evaluate and assess operations of new institutions on recognition of the level of compliance post admission into the sector based on the requirements of government systems and processes.

Another important aspect is that pastors need to be taught how to run the finances of churches. They should be made to understand that it is community money and must therefore benefit the mission of the church and the community. The money collected in the name of the church or worse still in the name of God, is not exclusively for the use of the pastor, his family or cohorts.

In the main, churches are non-profit making organisations (NPOs) and as such there is a lot of education that needs to be conducted to explain how it is managed and to explain that the moment an organisation engages in business as a religious institution it must register a different business entity. Pastors need to be mindful that any NPO's books should be open to the public at any time.

Still on the issue of proper theological training, pastors must be made to learn and understand that their churches ought to be missional in their approach. A missional church would be a church that subscribes to all characteristics of the *missio Dei*. The primary focus would not only be limited to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but also to ensure that as an entity or as the body of Christ (as Paul describes it) it is able to espouse the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. Maluleke (1993:21) says that "the Christian church should know that whenever a person responds in love to the needs of others, providing food, clothing or shelter, safety, welcome dignity, self-respect or chance to grow, God is present in this action".

Goheen (2011: 212) makes a very profound statement when he says inasmuch as it is important to preach the Gospel to unbelievers, it is equally important that the same Gospel is authenticated by deeds of mercy and justice that are in essence powerful witnessing of the truth of the Gospel. Pieterse (2001:112) is also of the view that "proclaiming the gospel to the poor, requires witness in deed and word – and the two are inseparable". This is striking, for even the Bible states in James 2:26: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

### **7.4.3 PEER MONITORING**

Even though I would be the first one to raise objection to government regulation, the principal question is have we not had enough of the abuse of the unsuspecting in the name of God or religion?

In an endeavour to bring a stop to the commercialisation of religion, the South African government announced on 20 August 2015 that the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities would investigate this phenomenon. At that time, the chairperson of the commission, Mkhwanazi-Xalavu (2015), said the following:

We are launching an investigative study on the commercialisation of religion and the abuse of people's belief system in terms of when these institutions are being run, how are they being run, where is their funding going into, who collects how much and what do they do with the money, where does the money eventually go to, what are the governing principles that are there.

This stance was applauded by Mbewe (2016:par. 1-4), because according to him, the church has done nothing to stop the rot that is taking place within its own ranks. He was of the view that the fountain of this rot is the charismatic movement that has failed to regulate who should become a pastor. Mbewe believes that if the state does not intervene, this growing monster of charlatans who impose themselves as men of God will continue to consume the little that is left of the reputation of the church.

I must concede that Mbewe makes perfect sense. I however would recommend that instead of politicians, the responsibility of peer monitoring be assigned to the South African Council of Churches (SACC). In fact, the SACC should be mandated to regulate churches in this country and part of the regulation should amongst others include:

- a requirement that all pastors should hold theological qualifications from reputable institutions of higher learning;
- having produced a theological qualification and on the recommendation of their denomination, they must be required to register and be certificated by the SACC in the same way health practitioners register with the South African health professional's council; and
- no foreigner should be allowed to open a church in this country unless so recommended by a sending denomination from his native country or at the invitation of a local church that is registered. In the event he is sent, the sending denomination must first register with the SACC and produce a work permit from the Department of Home Affairs.

Another important aspect to peer monitoring is that pastors be encouraged to work together. They may differ in terms of denominations and church doctrines, but need to be each other's keepers. The fact is Christians as the body of Christ need to work together for the common good of the kingdom of God. Gangel (1990:29) notes that in working together "the smog of selfishness and egoism lifts to make mutual ministry a Biblical reality".

#### **7.4.4 CONDEMN FALSE TEACHINGS**

False teachings must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

Larson (1989:6) cautions that some people assume that it is out of place to criticise another person's religious beliefs and yet Christians need to ask themselves whether it is better to smile and say nothing, as people follow self-proclaimed messiahs to a false paradise or even worse. Christians need to understand that dismantling and eradicating the myth and false religious beliefs and worshipping of idols, be they ancestors or whatever, is not only the work of Biblical apologetics but is also a labour of love. Igba (2013:111) puts it profoundly when he asserts that "the need for Christology to be undergirded by very solid biblically consistent basis cannot be overemphasised. Just as a faulty foundational basis remains a threat to the building, a faulty Christological basis remains a harbinger of heresies and errors".

So those who profess to be men of God and called into leading ministries have a responsibility to ensure that what they preach is nothing but pure unadulterated Gospel. Stewart (1972:73) defines preaching as "to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God". At the time of creation (which I touched on in chapter 5) humanity was created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), the serpent came and planted a desire in the minds of people to be like God (*sicut Dei*).

In line with what Stewart is saying, it is therefore of critical importance to expose and discard the modern-day spiritual charlatans who amass material wealth at the expense of their poor and hard-working followers. Both the Old and the New Testament contain a number of texts that justifies the condemnation of false teachings. In the Old Testament, the Lord through the mouth of prophet Jeremiah 23:16 says: "This is what the Lord Almighty says, Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you, they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord."

One of the reasons why Martin Luther left the Roman Catholic Church was his strong conviction (Paas, 2016:168) that salvation if it is to be real, must be based on faith birthed by Scripture and hence, the Greek words *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*. Many prosperity gossellers, for example Kenneth Hagin, base most of their convictions on personal experiences that are not necessarily Scripturally based. On account of the afore-mentioned, I completely agree with Kaiser Jr. (2007:39) and strongly recommend that any attempt to create new truth that goes beyond and/or outside Scripture must be perceived and correctly labelled as heretical.

All of us and not just politicians or the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities have to stand up and be vocal against the exploitation and commercialisation of the Gospel. Together we can win this war, because no

victory has ever been recorded in the annals of history as having been won solely by the silent majority who linger far behind the range of enemy gunfire.

#### **7.4.5 BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP**

Earlier on (in chapter 5) I made reference to Biblical stewardship, how pastors as custodians of the Gospel need to represent Christ and not their own selfish interests. Alaby and Quiroga (2018:76) suggest that it is of critical importance that pastors should fully embrace their calling of being stewards. They add that “the spirit of stewardship is full of life principles, it is a remedy against greed, it provides mental health to face real needs, it values the being, so that the having is viewed as that which does not belong to us”.

Wright (2010:236) warns that moral integrity is fundamental to Christian uniqueness, which in turn is very important to Christian mission in public. In essence integrity means that there is no contradiction between our private and public lives, between what we profess and what we actually practice on a daily basis. Banda (2015a:74) is of the view that it is equally important “to practice faith with personal integrity. Faith must manifest itself in both private and public moral life”.

As pastors and stewards we need to guard vehemently against embracing the wrong doctrines of prosperity gospel, just because they are appealing and attract crowds. The fact of the matter is crowds or popularity is by no means proof or rather confirmation of the truth, since people can be deceived in great numbers.

We need to recall that the Bible, which I believe to be a source of our faith (*sola Scriptura = sola fide*) says Jesus Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith endured the cross because of the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). The joy that is referred to here was the joy of bringing salvation to mankind, the joy of reconciling humanity with God the Father and the joy of knowing that through His death Satan and sin will be defeated.

Given this, common sense and simple logic would then suggest that if we as pastors are truly His servants, if we are true stewards and shepherds of His flock, if indeed ours is a calling and not a job or career, then the “joy” of bringing salvation to humanity, the “joy” of taking care of His flock should be supreme in our minds. The lust and insurmountable desire to abuse His name, to abuse His suffering and to abuse His gospel to nourish and satisfy our petty and selfish ambitions for power and material prosperity, should and must be far from our minds.

The Apostle Peter cautions in 1 Peter 5:2: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.” Hinn

(2019:177) is of the view that Christian leaders must use their God-given authority and assignment to protect people from deception and courageously steer the church into the truth by not exploiting the desperate and the vulnerable. Jones and Woodbridge (2011:19) put it so profoundly when they say: “You spoil the gospel by addition. You have only to add to Christ, the grand object of faith, some other objects as equally worthy of honor, and the mischief is done. Add anything to Christ and the gospel ceases to be a pure gospel.”

If we (I include myself) are truly called, if we are truly His, then our fervent wish and desire should and must be to emulate Him. The Apostle Paul challenges us to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). In agreement, Pieterse (2001:114) says “that is why the great criterion of the final judgement is whether Christians have fed the hungry, given the thirsty water to drink, welcomed strangers, clad the naked, nursed the sick and visited prisoners”.

It is a mockery and a disgusting indictment on us all that instead of feeding the poor, the lame and the hungry we choose to line our already excessively greased pockets.

## **7.5 RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE/FURTHER RESEARCH**

Prior to 1994, Mahikeng was the economic hub of Bophuthatswana boasting a swelling civil service that included the military and a police force, a growing number of parastatals, an international airport and a developing industrial area. The economy was growing and was continuously absorbing local residents and those of other parts of Bophuthatswana into different jobs.

The then South African liberation movements, particularly the African National Congress (ANC), attributed the success of Bophuthatswana and by extension Mahikeng, to the policy of the then South African government of separate development and apartheid.

Following the unbanning of liberation movements in the 1990s and a climate of peaceful negotiation, which were to lead to a democratic dispensation, the Bophuthatswana government collapsed in March of 1994. According to Jones (1999a:604): “Notably, it was civil servant demands and concerns over salary parity, pensions and job security rather than political opposition, which had precipitated a popular revolt.”

Early on, around 1993/94, the African National Congress developed its election manifesto and election slogan which spoke of “A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL”. This gave hope to the electorate in South Africa and in Mahikeng in particular, that life in the new dispensation would be better for all the citizens of South Africa.

However, following the collapse of the Bophuthatswana administration the once booming economy of Mahikeng came crashing down. Earlier on, Mosiane (2000:13) was cited as noting that Mahikeng's economic crisis was precipitated by the rundown and dismantling of the erstwhile Bophuthatswana institutions. Bophuthatswana institutions like Agricor, Bophuthatswana National Development Co-operation (BNDC) and Sefalana Employees Benefits Organisation (SEBO), which were part of the economic boom and backbone of Mahikeng, suffered the same fate as Bop Broadcasting. According to Mokgoro (2012:154), "Bophuthatswana public sector was huge and complex. There were 26 departments and 42 parastatals in which a total of 65 000 workers were employed".

The question that arose to a lot of Mahikeng residents who were retrenched from their jobs was whether the promise of "a better life for all" was just a well-coined slogan used to keep them and the rest of South Africans hoping against hope or was this slogan speaking of a reality or just a pipe-dream?

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (2016:6) observes that "in recent years, scores of churches, religious organisations, and traditional healing practices have mushroomed throughout the country, changing the face of the religious communities and practice irreversibly. Streets are marked with signs and advertisements with promises of miracles, ranging from healing to prosperity".

The question that deserves further investigation or research is: Is there a link between the growth of prosperity gospel in Mahikeng and the failed promise of a better life for all?

**May God have mercy on us!!!!**



**GALATIANS 1:7-8**

**“...BUT THERE ARE SOME WHO TROUBLE YOU AND WANT TO PERVERT THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. BUT EVEN IF WE, OR AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN, PREACH ANY OTHER GOSPEL TO YOU THAN WHAT WE HAVE PREACHED TO YOU, LET HIM BE ACCURSED”.**

**&**

**JUDE 1:11 &16**

**“WOE TO THEM! FOR THEY HAVE GONE IN THE WAY OF CAIN, HAVE RUN GREEDILY IN THE ERROR OF BALAAM FOR PROFIT, AND PERISHED IN THE REBELLION OF KORAH...THESE ARE GRUMBLERS, COMPLAINERS, WALKING ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN LUSTS, AND THEY MOUTH GREAT SWELLING WORDS, FLATTERING PEOPLE TO GAIN ADVANTAGE”.**

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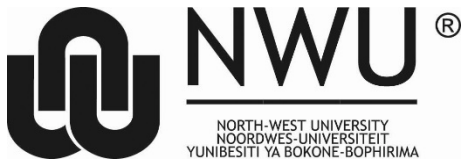
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## ANNEXURE A



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**Senate Committee for Research Ethics**

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28 October 2019

## ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the Theology Research Ethics Committee (TREC) on 28/10/2019, the Theology Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

**Study title: A missiological evaluation of the contribution of prosperity gospel in the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.**

**Ethics number:**

**N W U - 0 1 9 0 4 - 1 9 - A 6**

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A

= Authorisation

**Commencement date: 2019/10/28**

**Risk Category:**

**Minimal**

**Expiry date: 2020/10/27**

**Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and**

**Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):**

**General conditions:**

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the TREC:
  - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
  - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the TREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.



Yours sincerely

Prof Rudy Denton

Chairperson NWU Theology Research Ethics Committee

## ANNEXURE B



### ***INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT***

***FOR:***

Pastors being interviewed

***TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY:*** A missiological evaluation of the contribution of prosperity gospel on the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

***ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBERS:***

***PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:*** Prof. Sarel van der Merwe

***POST GRADUATE STUDENT:*** Obakeng George Thebe

***ADDRESS:*** 10752 Ramosadi Village, Mahikeng

***CONTACT NUMBER:*** 083 5938 558 / ogthebe@gmail.com

You are being invited to take part in a research that forms part of a PhD study. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to say no to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part now.

This study has been approved by the **Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology (REC-FT) of the North-West University (NWU.....)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of Ethics in Health Research Principles, Processes and Structures (DoH, 2015) and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or other relevant people to inspect the research records.

***What is the research study all about?***

We plan to evaluate the contribution made by prosperity gospel in the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

This study will be conducted in Mahikeng and will be done by experienced researcher in interviewing and at least three participants will be included in this study.

***Why have been invited to participate?***

You have been invited to be part of this research because you are a pastor of a church.

What will be expected of you?

You will be expected to participate in an interview of about 30 minutes that consists of 9 questions

***Will you gain anything from taking part in this research?***

There will be no direct gains for you in the study.

The other gain of the study is for the general members of the community who will know and understand the doctrine of prosperity gospel.

***Are there risks involved in you taking part in this research and what will be done to prevent them?***

There are more gains and no risks for you in joining this study than there are risks.

***How will we protect your confidentiality and who will see your findings?***

Anonymity of your findings will be protected by the researcher. Your privacy will be respected by having the interview at a private place. Your results will be kept confidential by keeping them in the researcher's laptop which can only be accessed by a private pin-code only known to him. Only the researchers and the REC-FT will be able to look at your findings.

***What will happen with findings or samples?***

The findings of this study will only be used for this study.

***How will you know about the results of this research?***

We will give you the results of this research when the study is complete and has already been submitted for examination.

You will be informed of any new relevant findings by the researcher should such need arise.

***Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs for you?***

This study is not funded.

No you will not be paid to take part in the study because the study is not funded and it is voluntary.

There will be no costs involved for you, if you do take part in this study.

***Is there anything else that you should know or do?***

You can contact Obakeng George Thebe at 083 5938 558 or Professor Sarel van der Merwe at 083 3100 372 if you have any further questions or have any problems.

You can also contact the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology (REC-FT) via Mrs. Tienie Buys at [Tienie.Buys@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Tienie.Buys@nwu.ac.za) if you have any concerns that were not answered about the research or if you have complaints about the research.

You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own purposes.

**ANNEXURE C**

***Declaration by participant***

By signing below, I..... agree to take part in the research study titled the missiological evaluation of the contribution of prosperity gospel on the socio-economic transformation of Mahikeng.

I declare that:

I have read this information/ it was explained to me by a trusted person in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.

The research was clearly explained to me.

I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person getting the consent from me, as well as the researcher and all my questions have been answered.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.

I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be handled in a negative way if I do so.

I may be asked to leave the study before it is finished, if the researcher feels it is in the best interest, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at.....On.....2019.

.....  
***Signature of participant***

**ANNEXURE D**

***Declaration by person obtaining consent***

I Obakeng George Thebe, declare that:  
I clearly and in detail explained the information in this document to

.....

I did not use an interpreter  
I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.  
I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.  
I gave him/her time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed at ..... On .....2019

.....

***Signature of person obtaining consent.***

**ANNEXURE E**

***Declaration by researcher***

I Obakeng George Thebe, declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to all the potential participants.
- I did not use an interpreter
- I encouraged participants to ask questions and took time to answer them.
- The informed consent was obtained by myself
- I am satisfied that the participant adequately understands all aspects of the research, as described above.
- I am satisfied that the participant had time to discuss it with others if he/she wished to do so.

Signed .....On .....2019

.....  
***Signature of researcher***



## ANNEXURE F

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PASTORS

1. Describe your calling to the ministry. What motivated you?
2. Generally, what has been your experience in your walk of faith?
3. What is your viewpoint about the suffering in the world, about poverty, affluence and riches?
4. What is your understanding of the following texts?
  - 4.1. 3 John 1:2 “beloved I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”
  - 4.2. Mark 11:24 “Therefore I say to you, whatever you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them”
  - 4.3. Proverbs 10:22 “The blessing of the Lord makes one rich and He adds no sorrow with it”.
  - 4.4. John 10:34 “Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said you are gods”
5. What is the policy of your church on tithe and offerings?
6. What is your understanding of God’s providence for His children? Does He always give abundantly or does the believer some-times suffer from lack?
7. Do you support the teaching that God wants everybody to prosper financially?
8. Have you ever felt pressured to follow this popular teaching or preach against it?
9. In your view, what is the Biblical attitude towards wealth and poverty?
10. Do you know of people who were hurt or benefitted from these teachings?
11. Does your church present audited financial reports to its general membership?

## **ANNEXURE G**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THOSE DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

1. How long have you been a member of your church?
2. What have been your experiences in your spiritual journey?
3. What is your attitude towards tithe and offerings?
4. Do you believe that one's riches or poverty is depended on his faith?
5. What is your understanding of the following texts?
  - a. 3 John 1:2 "beloved I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers"
  - b. Mark 11:24 "Therefore I say to you, whatever you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them"
  - c. Proverbs 10:22 "The blessing of the Lord makes one rich and He adds no sorrow with it".
  - d. John 10:34 "Jesus answered them, is it not written in your law, I said you are gods"
6. Have you ever had an encounter with prosperity gospel?
7. How?
8. What were your experiences?
9. What has it done to your spiritual life / faith?
10. Would you recommend this gospel to anyone?