Commercialisation and commodification of the gospel in South African Neo-Prophetic churches: A missiological self-regulation framework

by

PAUL THEMBA THEMBINKOSI MNGADI

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SUPERVISOR: PROF. MS KGATLE

CO-SUPERVISOR: DR. MM MATSHOBANE

May 2026

DECLARATION

Name: Paul Themba Thembinkosi Mngadi

Student number: 33392226

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (Missiology)

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This entire study is a creedal profession of my Christian faith in Jesus Christ, my Redeemer and True Shepherd, as an ordained priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. It is also in honour of my parents (Patrick and Janet Mngadi) for growing and guiding me in this Christian faith experience. I value the understanding and patience of my wife, Makhosazane (MaQwabe) Mngadi, as I shared family life, study, work, and ministry. I remain grateful for her support, love, and motivation. I value the joy of my two sons (Phiwamandla and Ndumiso) and two daughters (Thandolwethu and Thobeka).

I conducted this study to contribute new knowledge to ecumenical missiology, having transitioned from Roman Catholic Theology to Neo-Prophetism, a new brand of Christianity. I am grateful for the guidance I received from Professor S.M. Kgatle, who is “unashamedly Pentecostal,” and Dr M.M. Matshobane. They have guided me academically in producing this work, drawing on their strong Pentecostal background as practising pastors.

ABSTRACT

The exponential rise of neo-prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa necessitates this investigative study. The recent preponderance of such churches reveals that Christianity lacks a regulatory framework to guide the establishment of churches in South Africa. The commercialisation and the commodification of Christianity in neo-prophetic churches and ministries have led to many abuses and vulnerabilities, and revealed a certain gullibility amongst congregants. The primary research gap this study addresses is the development of a neo-prophetic regulatory framework, with a missiological focus that aligns with the Constitution of South Africa, to curb the malpractices of Neo-Prophets where these occur. Missional imagination serves as a theoretical framework by means of which the phenomenon under study has been conceptualised. The key operational concepts of the study include *Missio Dei*, *Missio Hominum,* and *Motus Dei,* where the missional church is understood as a polycentric entity. The research adopts a qualitative research method, utilising focus groups, in-depth interviews, and observations to generate data. The primary purpose and contribution of this study is to advocate for the establishment of a Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches. This body ought to have the same voice and status as other existing Council of Churches in South Africa. Its primary purpose is to develop a neo-prophetic missional regulatory framework to standardise and regulate practices among neo-prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa. New themes for future study may investigate such a critical intervention as contributing to the reinstatement of Christianity as a credible and humanising religion in South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and the significance of the study

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) issued a report entitled *The Report of the Hearings on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems* (2017:1-65) as one of the Chapter 9 institutions established in terms of section 181 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The commission's report emerged from a nationwide investigation that covered the five main religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Traditional African, and Judaism) in South Africa. The Report found that religious sectors in South Africa, most notably Christianity, tend to be poorly regulated and called for a regulatory mechanism to be set in place to oversee religion in South Africa. It highlights, from a governmental perspective, the growing preponderance of Neo-Prophetic churches in South Africa and the challenges arising from the non-regulation of practices and the abuse of gullible congregants. This report provides a solid foundation for the current research. In the foreword, Ms. Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva writes: "Recent controversial news reports and articles in the media about pastors have left a large number of society questioning whether religion has become a commercial institution or commodity to enrich a few" (ibid.:4). Based on this observation, she extended an invitation to Christians (Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries) "to create an environment where they and not the State, can effectively regulate themselves, and hold people who bring religion into disrepute accountable, as per their various religious systems" (ibid.)

Indeed, although several ecumenical bodies exist, such as the South African Council of Churches and many other fraternities of pastors, there is no Neo-Prophetic regulatory framework that gives shape to the core principles of what constitutes a neo-prophetic church or ministry. As a result, we have church leaders who have deified themselves and victimised the gullible and vulnerable members of their churches or ministries without any framework for recourse. Neo-Prophetic churches within Christianity, as one of the most trusted religious institutions to promote good moral values based on the Bible, have led some congregants into despair. The ethical integrity and respect for human life that have been known of churches have been

turned by some Neo-Prophets into places of dehumanising abuse to the extent that the government was obliged to intervene to protect its citizens from harm.

It is against this background that this study aims to contribute a missiological framework through which Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries can review and renew their mission to be light and salt in a dark world (Mt. 5:12-16). However, it is worth noting that the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) issued a press release on the CRL Commission Report, which strongly supports a regulatory framework as a basis for compliance. (Govender, 2020). The government's stance on regulating and licensing religion in South Africa has long been contested by the Freedom of Religion in South Africa (FOR SA) and its partners as “unnecessary, unworkable and unconstitutional” (2017:2).

It is also the experience of the researcher that mass media and social media alike demonstrate many abuses in the name of God made by self-appointed Neo-Prophetic leaders (Singh K. , 2021). As an ecumenical missiologist, I have observed that this has led to ever-escalating divisions in the Christian religion. Masenya and Masenya (2018) confirm in their research that Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries are non-denominational and mainly established by individual pastors (of both genders) to practice a unique approach or ministry. The authors claim that:

> Breakaway groups demonstrate that resignation from traditional Pentecostal churches typically leads to the formation of independent churches by the breakaway pastor. The Commission for the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities explains further that it is relatively easy for any pastor to start their own church*: In the charismatic sector, you start up and report to no one; you report to heaven. If I have a calling tonight, by tomorrow I can buy a tent and a sound system, and I can call myself a bishop, a prophet, whatever – and I am good to go. It cannot be like that when you have access to vulnerable people* (2018:639).

According to Kgatle (2020b: ix), in the South African context, these churches and ministries are instituted ‘by Africans for Africans’, where each is self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (Kgatle 2017:1). This lack of accountability by

independent Neo-Prophetic churches necessitates both preventative and corrective measures to be put in place to resolve this problem systematically.

1.2 Definition of terms

Africanising: A deliberate and inclusive process of adapting and integrating the African identity of ubuntu philosophy and culture as dynamic and evolving within the rapid changes of the global village.

Christology: Christian systematic theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ.

Commercialisation: The process by which a new product or service is introduced into a general market for material and financial gain. This business ecclesiology leads to the church being seen as a marketplace (Gbote and Kgatla 2014:4).

Commodification: Transformation of goods, services, ideas, and people into commodities or objects of trade for economic value and/or profits.

Ecumenical Missiology: The propagation of the Christian gospel to people within their socio-economic and historical context (Mt. 28:19). It protects this biblical and missional mandate of the Christian Church as one Body of Christ. Greater emphasis is not placed on uniformity, but on the celebrated continental diversity of the Church of Christ.

Ecumenical self-regulation: The autonomy and authority to standardise systems, policies, and standard operating procedures to regulate practices and norms that bring about unity among Christian churches.

Gospel of Prosperity: This teaching promotes the idea that personal health and wealth prosperity are determined by the amount of financial seed or donation given to the church/ministry.

Gullibility: A tendency to be easily persuaded that something is genuine or authentic when it violates your rights, human dignity, and respect.

Missional Imagination: The shift of thinking from church-based (as an end in itself) to the kingdom-based nature of the broader Mission of God to His people and the

world (Niemandt 2012:1). This includes a Spirit-led sense of being commissioned by God as a church to the world (Baron 2019:1-19).

Neo-Prophetic Churches: A global phenomenon that offers novel gospel messages emphasising prosperity and individualistic sanctification, led by highly flamboyant church leaders.

Non-Denominational: A movement regularly established by individual pastors or communities that have broken away from an established denomination church. It can customise beliefs and practices to any doctrine.

Pneumatology: A discipline within Christian systematic theology that focuses on the study of the Holy Spirit as God's creative, redemptive, and sanctifying activity in salvation history.

Syncretism: The blending of two or more religious belief systems into a single new system.

Vulnerability: A state of being exposed to the possibility of emotional, physical, and spiritual harm.

1.3 Rationale and Purpose

This investigative study aims to develop a missiological framework that will contribute to the self-regulation of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa, addressing the well-documented exponential growth and unethical practices. Scholars such as Chitando and Biri (2016) and government departments, including Justice, Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), Social Development, and the CRL, have, to varying degrees, described the growth of Neo-Prophetic churches in South Africa. The rationale of this study is to address the unregulated dynamics and unethical malpractices of this phenomenal growth of Neo-Prophetic churches, as led by prominent Neo-Prophets in South Africa, such as Prophet Paseka Frans Motsoeneng, popularly known as Pastor Mboro (Naik, 2011) and foreign-born nationals, such as Malawian-born Prophet Shepherd Bushiri (Kgatle, 2022b). These two serve as prototypes of Neo-Prophets found in many South African towns and villages, such as those on the South and North Coasts of KwaZulu-Natal. They attract many people by their problem-solving gospel that includes personal empowerment,

healing, prosperity, and community outreach programmes (Matshobane 2023:2). One main feature that demonstrates this is their commercialised prophetic powers as nodal point of divine power (Magezi and Banda 2017;4 and Banda 2022:3). The commercialisation and commodification of the Christian core principles, moral values, and the *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) are therefore discredited in favour of what Baron and Maponya refer to as “business ecclesiology” (2020:7).

Neo-Prophets are present throughout South Africa, with this study focusing on communities along the South and North Coasts of KwaZulu-Natal. The Neo-Prophets examined are contextual and non-denominational. They are unregulated and neither registered nor accredited by any recognised professional body or council. Most of these Neo-Prophets either have a long history as members of mainline churches or felt the need to establish independent churches or ministries on their own terms (Resane 2020:1-8). This supports the argument that those in this branch of Christianity did not contribute to the exponential growth of unregulated Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, even including those who were excommunicated by mainline churches. In most cases, they lack formal theological qualifications, a solid theological background, or pastoral training. They commercialise the Christian faith as they see fit within this unregulated South African context (Kgatle 2020a). Both Shepherd Bushiri, known as Major 1 Prophet, and Prophet PFP Motsoeneng, known as Prophet Mboro, believe in direct illumination from the Holy Spirit and in using common sense to interpret scripture. For this reason, they both regard theological training with disdain, prioritising divine revelation over scholarly exegesis, and are staunchly opposed to institutionalisation, favouring the competitive display of miracles as true Men of God (Kgatle 2020a). They believe they possess prophetic power that does not require refinement through academic study.

In line with the special focus of this research on commercialisation, this research also considers the subtle commodification of the Christian faith experience. Most pastoral leaders of these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries sell religious or ‘anointed’ products, such as water and holy oil, in exchange for a prophetic promise of good health, financial prosperity, and protection from malevolent spirits (Kgatle 2020b; Matshobane 2023). In this manner, the ecumenical mission of the Christian kerygma, or the Mission of God, is tarnished by the malpractices linked to commercialisation and commodification in this brand of Christianity.

Some of these pastors have an attendant history of immorality and scandal, including the commercialisation of the Christian faith experience (Anderson 2019 b:172-188), occult practices, and the deification of their persona. A claim by a pastor to possess prophetic power to create ‘miracle money’ has led many poor and gullible congregants to take out bank loans to ‘plant the seed,’ thereby only deepening the spiritual and material poverty of some families. The establishment of money-making schemes has led some Christian believers to abandon the Mission of God to save humanity (Kgatle 2020b:133; Banda 2018:57-59). The packages touted by these pastors for ‘one-on-one’ consultation sessions at expensive hotels have likewise led to the commercialisation of the Mission of God, where an equivalence is attempted to be drawn between salvation and deliverance and currying God’s favour. This transactional prophetic claim has even gone to the extreme of exposing young girls to rape in exchange for the promise of good financial status, good health, and divine protection against malevolent spirits, where divine blessings are touted through a pastoral leader. This is evident across popular media, including local DSTV channels, newspapers, magazines, and the internet (Ngqakamba, 2018).

These media platforms are utilised to promote their bandwagon appeal or increase popularity (Rubin and Earl, 2010:14). Amidst the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith, various types of Neo-Prophetic spiritual declarations and teachings have transformed the Bible into a site of epistemological and cosmological struggle from their fundamentalist hermeneutical perspective (Nel, 2017), where a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible is leveraged for self-gain (Ramantswana, 2019:1-8). The so-called divinely inspired or revealed prophetic messages willfully distort scripture, exploiting the vulnerability of congregants to peddle fake prophecies (Frahm-Arp, 2021:1-48). Consequently, faith has become highly compartmentalised according to the teachings of each independent deified leader of a Neo-Prophetic church or ministry, where it can be observed that topics such as Christ as the Saviour and True Shepherd, Christ the Sanctifier and Healer, have lost their emphasis, due to their direct competition with and replacement of Christ through their ministries (Mugambi and Magesa, 1998:x). Christ is thereby reframed to be inadequate in addressing humanity's socio-economic challenges (Banda, 2005). The competition for dominance is perpetuated among Neo-Prophets, using national media platforms to present themselves as ‘super-divine’ prophets, superior to all

others (Anderson, 2019 b:172-188). This includes “sowing the seed” in exchange for impartation of financial prosperity, good health, and protection from malevolent spirits (Akabike, Ngwoke and Chukwuma, 2021:1-8). As a result, division is arising in the Church from competition for dominance, at the expense of the unity of the Christian faith for which Christ petitioned the Father (Jn. 17:20-22).

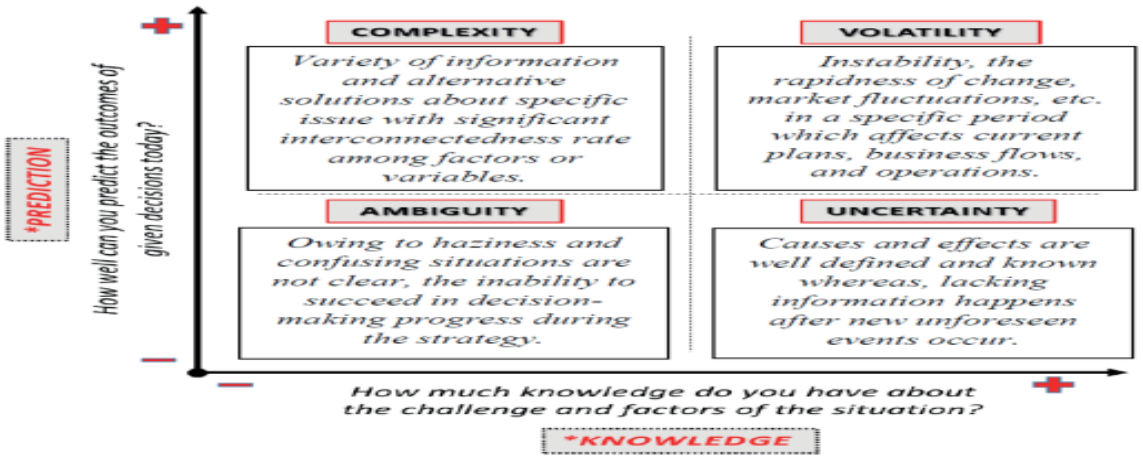
Based on this, this research critically investigates the commercialisation, commodification, and prosperity gospel within this ‘brand’ of Christianity, seeking to expose the social problems it brings about in the everyday life of its most vulnerable followers (CRL Rights Commission, 2017:6). This is done as a basis to develop solutions to the need for a missional framework for self-regulation among neo-prophetic churches and ministries. The proponents of this approach use novel strategies to compete against one another as pastoral leaders, including the selling of anointed objects and transactional or commodified concept of deliverance of congregants who are driven by a demand for supernatural powers “to remedy their religio-psycho-social pickles” (Anderson, 2019a:1). This has led to an outsized dependence of congregants on their church/ministry leader, who takes advantage of their complete trust, exploiting their vulnerability and gullibility in the pursuit of power (CRL Rights Commission, 2017:6). The researcher proposes a systematic national regulatory framework within which realistic interventions ought to be developed and implemented by the proposed National Neo-Prophetic Christian Council, argued for here as an effective regulatory body. This will serve both as a preventive and corrective strategic intervention to provide direction and establish self-regulation for this brand of Christianity, under the auspices of the State. This study argues for such an intervention as efficacious in unsettling the recent preponderance of these churches and ministries that undermine moral regeneration initiatives in the country (Matsane, 2004). The current reality of a self-appointed church leader's misuse of authority, which has pacified the human inquiry ability of congregants, justifies the need for a missional regulatory framework. The heightened individualistic ego of these church leaders causes each one of them to cast blame elsewhere for any wrongdoing labelled against them or Neo-Prophetism, acting in a self-righteous manner that places them beyond reproach, such that they even feel free to commit serious crimes such as rape (Rubin and Babbie, 2010:14).

This study aims to provide a practical and strategic regulatory framework with a missiological focus, addressing a multitude of problems that arise from the commercialisation and commodification of the Church's core mission to the world, emanating from this current situation of Neo-Prophetic leaders taking advantage of the loyalty of congregants (Matsane 2004). Examples of this abuse are tabulated in the CRL Rights Commission Report, which mentions money laundering, amongst other offences (2017:16). From a missiological perspective, part of the exploration in this study will be the alleviation of great human suffering through advocacy on behalf of congregants exposed to such practices. There is a lack of existing research and knowledge on this subject that addresses the lack of a regulatory framework advocated for here.

1.4 Statement of the problem

This study examines how the dynamics of the new sect of Christianity referred to as Neo-Prophetic promotes the commercialisation and commodification of Christianity through what it refers to as the prosperity gospel. This study aims to propose a missional self-regulation framework for neo-prophetic ministries to ward against the manner of malpractice that has become prevalent in their faith tradition.

This malpractice can be observed in the extant literature to have led to the rise of so many complex “wicked problems” (Peters, 2017:385-396). Bennett and Lemoine define such wicked problems as those that cannot be solved using conventional and linear models of analysis because of their level of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), which rapidly undermine the mission of God (2014:313-317).



Source Figure 1.1 The VUCA concept framework (Bennet & Lemoine 2014)

Each of the aforementioned examples has challenged Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to continually reorganise themselves against the ongoing disruptions caused by unregulated practices that commercialise and commodify the Christian faith experience to benefit Neo-Prophetic leaders. This research also emphasises the importance of organisational learning, absorptive capacity, and designed thinking in shaping the external new knowledge gained by Neo-Prophetic congregants. This knowledge is often used to exploit them through commercialised items such as blessed oil, water, bumper stickers, media teachings, and one-on-one consultation sessions, as they encounter each new volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous situation. This has become a core issue among Neo-Prophetic pastors, who aim to help congregants survive unknown VUCA environments (Bartscht, 2015:253-270).

This investigative study progresses from what is known to that which is unknown, in pursuit of social change and transformation. The unusual practices linked to Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have led to unpredictable extremes of abuse towards congregants, which are largely unknown unknowns and are prone to destabilising the known, similar to a Black Swan (Taleb, 2007). Church pastoral leaders have the kind of power over congregants to instruct them to do almost anything in the name of their faith, even eat grass like herbivores, eat snakes, or drink petrol, as will be considered in some detail in the literature review. Such unusual practices remain the historically unknown practices within Christianity (Kgatle 2017:1-8).

1.5 Research aim and questions

The primary aim of this investigative study is to revive the Mission of God and to develop an emancipatory framework with a missiological focus for those vulnerable congregants who suffer due to the malpractice and unethical behaviour of some Neo-Prophets.

The central question of this study is: if advocacy and the protection of vulnerable congregants are to be assured through a missiological regulatory framework as a basis for preventive and corrective measures, what key themes need to be addressed regarding the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries?

The following questions have been developed to create an interest in this subject matter, to establish a platform for robust debates, new insights, and an ethically sound and responsive investigative study:

1.5.1 Why do some Neo-Prophets and pastoral leaders commercialise and commodify the South African Christian faith experience?
1.5.2 What are the thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that need to shape this investigative study?
1.5.3 Why are congregants vulnerable to the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel?
1.5.4 Which corrective and preventive measures, from a missional regulatory perspective, need to be taken as strategic interventions to ensure a Spirit-led pastor?

1.6 Research objectives

The following are the objectives set to describe and summarise the research objectives. To achieve the aim of this investigative study, the following objectives pertain:

1.6.1 to understand the rationale behind the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel among Neo-Prophets and pastoral leaders;
1.6.2 to identify the thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that contribute towards the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel;
1.6.3 to understand the vulnerability of congregants to the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel; and
1.6.4 to develop a missional regulatory framework against the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The researcher is conducting this investigative study based on his experience as a Quality Assurance Manager, with a collective experience of 15 years at Esayidi TVET College and the University of Fort Hare. He has a strong academic interest in quality planning, quality controls, quality assurance, and the continuous improvement or enhancement of systems. He maintains his ecumenical missiological perspective

throughout this study. He argues from this perspective that the core issues surrounding the commercialisation of anointed objects, unfulfilled prophetic impartation of the gospel of prosperity, and the commodification of the Christian faith experience in South Africa require the development of a national quality management system to address them, aiming to bring about transformative change, accountability, self-regulation, and quality enhancement within Christian systems. He is an outsider to the Neo-Prophetist tradition. He is conducting this research to be better equipped to contribute to ecumenical missiology debates from an informed position, without imposing the Reformed theological standards typical of Anglicanism or the doctrines of Catholicism. He is also an ordained priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (Diocese of KwaZulu-Natal) and has received formal training and qualifications from the Catholic Church (Urbanian University, Rome). This study is not an autoethnography, but rather a phenomenological investigation of neo-prophetic churches and ministries as a form of Christian faith experience unfamiliar to the researcher. It is designed to provide valuable insights and exposure necessary for gaining a deeper understanding of ecumenical dialogue, integrated ecclesiology, and collaboration on social justice issues within the Christian community. Additionally, the researcher is supervised by an academic scholar who is a practising pastor of a Pentecostal church. This scholar is a leading expert in the field of African Pentecostalism and has authored books that have been published internationally.

This research study shall therefore be limited to the South Coast and East Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The suspicion that the CRL Rights Commission has garnered on some neo-prophetic churches and ministries that have been investigated has made these Neo-Prophets negative against researchers on the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience. The competitive drive for survival among pastoral leaders and those in management positions in these churches and ministries may lead to particular difficulties in collecting data. To mitigate this challenge, the researcher has selected the churches and ministries for research purposes and is currently a frequent visitor whose presence is always acknowledged. The dynamic changes and constant multiplication of these non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries may not be replicable. The use of focus groups may risk leading to superficial consensus and shallow analysis from informants when discussing complex topics.

1.7.1 Delimitations of the research study

The following discussion focuses on the boundaries set for this investigative study. The researcher establishes these to achieve the research aims of examining neo-prophetic churches and ministries, which represent a new brand of Christianity in contrast to the practices of classical Pentecostals, charismatic churches, and mainline churches. Accordingly, no participant shall be deliberately excluded based on demographics, such as race, age, economic status, or political affiliation. There shall be no detailed study of liturgical rituals and ceremonies that do not directly contribute to this investigative study.

For reasons of practicality and interest, this study primarily highlights the key role of the missional regulatory imagination strategic framework in interventions and corrective or preventative measures by means of which to control the rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. There will be less emphasis placed on hermeneutics, Bible interpretation, sociology, anthropology, and educational perspectives as part of this research.

1.8 Chapter Outline

This investigative study comprises six chapters.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction that defines the study's structure and organisation. It provides an overview of the study's background and significance, including the research problem, research questions, objectives, key definitions, and acronyms used throughout the study. It covers the limitations and delimitations of this study. This chapter identifies the location of the research and the gap in the existing studies on the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience, as well as a regulatory framework from a missiological perspective.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

It concentrates on the rapid rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a modern brand of Christianity. Key epistemological and cosmological features and concepts

form the basis of academic discussions and debates. Particular attention has also been paid to the historical identities and developments associated with different waves of Pentecostalism. One notable achievement of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa is that they help balance the process of Christianising Africa with Africanising Christianity. Each key feature examined aims to highlight the vulnerability and gullibility of some Neo-Pentecostal congregants under their pastoral leaders, because religion in South Africa lacks a regulatory system or framework.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter explores research design and methodology in greater detail. It outlines the research design procedures, research paradigm, research methods, and primary and supporting theories that have contributed to answering the main research question. It explains the procedures followed by the researcher to conduct research using both primary and secondary data sources, generating primary data to answer the research questions. The ethical use of the four data collection methods is explained and justified. Graphic tabulation, data analysis, coding, and validation processes are described to establish the levels of consistency, credibility, suitability, and certainty. The final section of this chapter discusses the evaluation, synthesis, and interpretation of data through narrative analysis and discourse analysis.

Chapter Four: Data analysis

This chapter analyses data from primary and secondary sources, with a special focus on the commercialisation and the commodification of the gospel. The application of the validation process to establish the credibility, suitability, and consistency of collected data shall be discussed, comparing and contrasting data before it is coded into key themes. An analysis of the thematic features will be discussed as a basis for the study's findings and recommendations.

Chapter Five: Thematic findings

This chapter presents the thematic findings in relation to the research objectives. These key themes have been generated from validated data and coded themes that emerged during the research process. Finally, a Neo-Prophetic regulatory framework is proposed based on the concept of missional Imagination. This marks a shift in thinking from a church-based perspective (as an end in itself) to a Kingdom-based

Church, and the nature of the broader *Missio Dei* to His people and the world. It will focus on a proposal to replace the current theatrical and business ecclesiology with a missionally reimagined sense of commission that begins with a missional consciousness and moves towards a kingdom-based Church that aims to contribute to humanising Christianity.

Chapter 6: Summary of findings and recommendations, conclusion, and recommended themes for future research.

This chapter will be the final one, summarising the findings, recommendations, conclusions, and identifying potential future study themes that have emerged from this work.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter considers the explosive rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a part of the Neo-Prophetic Christian sect, where key epistemological and cosmological features and concepts that form the basis of academic arguments receive discussion. The historical background of reformational waves that preceded Neo-Prophetism aims to highlight its distinct elements and common heritage shared with Pentecostal elements within Christianity. This chapter also locates the CRL Rights Commission as having contributed, together with other bodies, to the constitutional debates on the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience in South Africa. One strong argument and achievement of Neo-Prophetism in South Africa is that it creates a reciprocity between Christianising Africa and Africanising Christianity. Each key feature explored and discussed here aims to reveal the positive and negative aspects of Neo-Prophetism.

This chapter reviews the literature related to the 2017 CRL Rights Commission Report. Emphasis is placed on the findings and recommendations of the commission concerning the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience on the part of some Neo-Prophets in South Africa. It also examines the constitutionality of the rights to freedom of religion, the human right to respect and dignity, and how the misconduct of certain non-affiliated Neo-Prophets has infringed upon these rights. The chapter discusses the academic work of legal advisors, missiologists, and systematic theologians who have argued about the regulation of religion, religious freedom, and the abuses committed by some Neo-Prophets in the name of God. The study's theoretical framework supports an argument for self-regulation within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, viewing them as a unique brand of Christianity. Since Neo-Prophets share a common origin with Classic Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostals/Charismatics (Kgatle 2019), lessons on self-regulation from these traditions will be explored to help Neo-Prophetic churches to self-regulate themselves. The chapter also discusses missional and ecumenical concepts that could foster unity in diversity among Neo-Prophetic churches. Without these core elements, Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries may struggle to become economically independent, pastorally sustainable, and accountable.

2.2. Constitutional arguments against the malpractices of some Neo-Prophets

The South African government noticed much controversy surrounding some teachings of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries communicated through the media, including local TV, and (public and private) radio stations. The main issue that permeated through all these reports is that Neo-Prophetic pastors can be found to be commercialising and commodifying the Christian faith experience for their own financial gain. These media reports exposed numerous forms of malpractice that pointed to the vulnerability of congregants, who, through their loyalty, place complete trust in their pastoral leaders. As a preventive and corrective measure and intervention in abuse of these congregants, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities was established in 2004 as one of the Chapter 9 institutions, in terms of Section 181 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. This commission is commonly known as the CRL Rights Commission. The mandate of this commission is clearly defined in sections 15(1), 31(1), 81, and 185 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, as well as in the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities Act, No. 19 of 2002. In terms of section 4 of this act, the key mandate of the Commission is "to promote respect for and further the protection of the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities" (CRL Act, 2002: Section 4).

This established commission conducted an investigative study into the malpractices reported by the media concerning the commercialisation and abuses of the Christian belief system, in particular Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Due to the widespread nature of these practices across South Africa, the CRL Rights Commission employed a random sampling method involving 85 pastoral leaders from religious or traditional institutions nationwide. Of the 68 Christian pastors, 47 (equivalent to 69%) were Neo-Prophets, known for such malpractices. These individuals were selected and summoned to the hearings by the commission (CRL Rights Commission, 2017:6). The primary focus of this investigation was to "investigate and understand further issues surrounding the commercialisation of religion and traditional healing" (CRL Report, 2017:6). The fact that most of those targeted and subpoenaed were Neo-Prophets within Christianity clearly indicates where the problem lies. Ramantswana (2019:7) states that these are "prophets who are preying on people's faith".

Out of these hearings, the *Report of the Hearings on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems* was generated in 2017. This report served as a basis for the CRL Rights Commission to recommend an increase in its mandated powers to act as an "arbiter" or judge over non-compliances and malpractices of some of the Neo-Prophetic religious practitioners in South Africa (CRL Report 2017:34). Most of these malpractices and abuses that were taking place had strong links with the commercialisation that tarnished the Christian faith experience (Freedom of Religion South Africa, 2017:3). This study considers the concepts of regulation of religion by the State and self-regulation of each religion through a Peer Review Council through the establishment of professional "umbrella bodies", taken as preventive and corrective interventions against these malpractices (CRL Report 2017:38).

This CRL Rights Commission report sparked vigorous academic debates among various scholars (see, for example, Banda, 2019: 1-11; Mapitsa, 2022: 58-72; Freedom of Religion South Africa, 2017; Richmond, 2017: 3-13; Henrico, 2019: 1-27). Most of their arguments strongly oppose State regulation of religious freedom, rooted in the view that religious freedom is a constitutional right within South Africa. This democratic state promotes a cooperative model with religions to foster religious freedom. Some scholars remain open-minded about the need for churches to self-regulate without state interference. The report advocates for a form of state regulation that grants authorities the power to accredit, register, and license churches before they can operate (CRL Report 2017:31-39). This aims to professionalise pastoral leadership. Freedom of Religion South Africa and the South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Freedoms (SACRRF) compiled "Comments on the CRL Rights Commission's Report on the 'commercialisation of Religion'" in 2017. This Council mainly comprises practising religious ministers, Christian legal advisors, and theologians, predominantly representing denominational churches with canon laws, constitutions, codes of ethics, and structures governing both the laity and ordained ministers (Koopman, 2000: 237-247; Coertzen, 2014:126-141). Their report seeks to collaborate with the CRL Rights Commission "to offer alternative solutions that [they] believe to be both constitutionally permissible and practicable" (FOR SA, 2017: 11).
This sub-topic frames the need for critical discussion beyond the recommendations of the CRL Rights Commission, where it is argued that these recommendations could serve as starting points for meaningful dialogue among the CRL Rights Commission,

scholars (including theologians, departmental administrators, and legal advisors), ecumenical organisations, and Neo-Prophets, rather than reaching definitive solutions within the framework of the current research. However, this study firmly advocates for the necessity of a missional regulatory framework specifically designed for and by Neo-Prophets. Such a framework ought to aim to empower Neo-Prophetic churches to develop towards self-regulation as a distinct brand of Christianity. This would facilitate their ability to "get their house in order" (CRL Report, 2017:34). This aligns with the core mission of the CRL Rights Commission: "to foster the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities to be able to observe and practise their culture, religion and language freely" (CRL Rights Commission Act, 2002:6). It clearly defines its role as focusing on the religious practices of both individuals and communities in South Africa.

The CRL Rights Commission summarised its clear stance in the 2016 report and released a revised version in 2017. The commercialisation of religion, particularly within Christianity, was among the findings that highlighted numerous non-compliances of some Neo-Prophetic churches with South African laws. The promotion of a transactional idea of salvation, such as planting a seed with the expectation of a good return on investment, was noted as prevalent. Healing from illness and deliverance from malevolent spirits are preached as being contingent on generous financial offerings to the Church. This has transformed religion into a commodity and churches into commercial entities benefiting the pastor. A select few around him or her (CRL Rights Report, 2017:3). The sale of sacred objects—regalia, car bumper stickers, blessed oils and water—has been marketed as guaranteeing divine protection, luck in gambling, and financial prosperity. These false miracles claimed by pastors have been exchanged for large sums of money, where the report describes these individuals in no uncertain terms as charlatans. This suggests that some Neo-Prophets conduct business on church premises without complying with the Advertising Standards Authority legislation and other legal requirements. The commodification of the Christian faith was also evidenced by the payment of substantial amounts through bank card points for one-on-one consultations, which only a few could afford (CRL Rights Report, 2017:25). The unregulated proliferation of non-denominational churches and ministries led by Neo-Prophets without qualifications or formal training was identified as a serious concern by the CRL Rights Commission. These churches lack governance structures

to uphold an ethical code of conduct (CRL Rights Report, 2017:31). Consequently, there is little accountability or transparent governance, allowing some Neo-Prophets to act as they wish. The absence of good governance, self-regulation, and peer review, which are customary in denominational (mainline and Pentecostal) churches, appears to be widespread among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The findings also revealed significant non-compliance with existing laws, legal requirements, and registration procedures as either non-profit Organisations with the Department of Social Development or Public Benefit Organisations with the South African Revenue Service (CRL Rights Report, 2017:19). Most of these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries remain unregistered with local, provincial, and national government departments. One of the most extreme findings was that Men and Women of God with a divine mandate and extraordinary power claimed that any regulatory framework requiring the formal registration of each church or ministry was an enforcement that was “unconstitutional, unworkable and unnecessary” (CRL Rights Commission, 2017:29). Consequently, most Neo-Prophets summoned by the CRL Rights Commission demonstrated their defiance of such oversight and refused to provide necessary answers and supporting documentation for their claims (Dube, Nkoane and Hlalele 2017:343). This issue remains a significant point of contention for the CRL Rights Commission.

Some Neo-Prophets from other African countries and international communities were found to be misusing the visa application systems. They obtained work permits as church workers while running private companies that were not paying taxes to South Africa. Part of this finding also revealed that some Neo-Prophets registered their churches in South Africa, while becoming involved in money laundering by taking large amounts to their headquarters outside South Africa (CRL Rights Report, 2017:6). To achieve this, most of the money was never deposited into any bank account. As a result, there were no financial statements to account for money collected through tithes and offerings. This led to their income never being declared. No tax paid to the South African Revenue Services (CRL Rights Report, 2017:25). The commercialisation of the Christian faith experience in the CRL Rights Commission report highlighted the loss of the missional nature of Christianity, as churches and ministries were found to be run as businesses that exist to support the luxury lifestyle of the founding pastor, demonstrating the fraudulent non-disclosure of financial statements.

The evidence among the findings of the CRL Rights Commission pointed to Neo-Prophets preying on their congregants by advertising their spiritual powers to solve a myriad of personal problems including but not limited to the winning of court cases, the helping of women with infertility, the making of false promises of wealth or employment, and winning at gambling or competitions (Kgatle 2022b:1-10; Banda 2018:1-11). This has led congregants who had complete trust in these Neo-Prophets to lose large amounts of money.

The CRL Rights Commission became increasingly aware of the fear that the State was perceived as infringing on the constitutional rights of congregants to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion (Constitution, Section 15(1)), as well as the right to freedom of association (Section 18), by asserting the authority to regulate practices that have left many congregants vulnerable and gullible. Given these realities, this study highlights the need to establish a self-regulation framework to manage, control, and oversee malpractices that damage the reputation of Christianity. The key argument of this study is that Christianity is a large, diverse, and complex religion, making it impossible for a single Council to serve all Christians effectively. The CRL Rights Commission's proposal to establish a peer-review professional body or a multi-faith quality assurance council for self-regulation ought to focus particularly on neo-prophetic churches (CRL Rights Report, 2017:35-37). This body and framework should not be imposed hastily; instead, careful preparation through extensive advocacy, guidance, support, and empowerment initiatives proves essential. Respecting the constitutional rights of religious communities, self-regulation should be specifically tailored to Neo-Prophetic churches. Such an internal structure could better regulate and address the proliferation of churches led by unaccountable Neo-Prophets, whom the Freedom of Religion South Africa report labels "charlatans" and "con artists" (2017:4).

The report also recommended that sections 15(1) and 18, which safeguard individual freedoms, ought to be understood within the context of section 16(2), which protects all members of society from any form of abuse. This is suggested as a corrective measure against "practices that are potentially harmful, dangerous, or unethical" (FOR SA, 2017:4). The abuse includes false promises of good health, financial prosperity, and divine protection from evil spirits when individuals tithe and give offerings beyond

others (Kgatle 2022b:1-10; Banda 2022a:1-16). The primary aim of this recommendation was to ensure that congregants are shielded from dehumanising abuse and false promises in the name of God. This recommendation calls on Christians to revive the missional mandate of churches, reinforcing them as trusted institutions that promote strong moral values such as integrity, respect, and human dignity.

The report also recommended that any established church comply with the existing legal requirements, legislation, and procedures that regulate issues of Occupational Health and Safety, property ownership, and the avoidance of fraudulent activities and money laundering in South Africa (CRL Rights Report, 2017:16,35). The abuses that emerged from the hearings pointed to the proliferation of these churches as operating as businesses not registered with any government departments, either as Public Benefit Organisations, Non-Profit Organisations, or private companies, and generating profits beyond the set threshold. Based on the evidence gathered, the CRL Rights Commission has recommended a clear separation between church ministry and business activities; a distinction that promises to enable Neo-Prophets to register the two as distinct entities with relevant authorities. Such a move may lead to better compliance and a higher degree of accountability.

The commission made a recommendation regarding the lack of training and administrative oversight in most Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, particularly in terms of financial accounting. Due to this gap in South African laws regulating churches, money laundering was identified as a serious consequence. The CRL concluded that some Neo-Prophets were exploiting people for financial gain and suggested new legislation to address the misuse and abuse of religion. Particular focus was placed on establishing financial committees to manage church funds and to oversee the acquisition of church properties and businesses. The false miracles (some of which are previously described here), unfulfilled prophetic declarations, and the commercialisation of anointed objects prompted the Commission to recommend legislation to regulate fiduciary responsibilities and prevent such malpractices by some Neo-Prophets. These malpractices have eroded trust and caused faith betrayal between congregants and their pastoral leaders. The CRL report strongly advocates for self-regulation among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a preventive

measure against schisms forming in the Church, and the unchecked proliferation of new churches led by pastors who do not provide accountability.

An anomaly exists where religious leaders purchase property with community funds and later come to own that property; proper investigations must be conducted first to establish this allegation (CRL Rights Report, 2017:36). Once the fact is established, a report should be presented to the congregation, and the religious leader should take corrective measures. Additionally, a recommendation was made that Neo-Prophets be required to obtain formal training and educational qualifications and be licensed by an official body that regulates practices among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. To eliminate self-appointed Neo-Prophets who deify their own personas, the CRL Rights Commission recommended that each church draft its own constitution. A key issue in such a collectively drafted set of guidelines should be the democratic election of pastoral leadership from among church members. This may also reduce disputes over leadership succession between the family of a deceased pastor and other church members competing for the vacant position. This shared church administration may also decrease conflicts over the ownership of church property and funds that a deceased pastor may have accumulated without proper accounting and financial statements of the current balance.

The recommendation from the CRL Commission to expand its power and authority to regulate religious practices as a state organ does not violate the constitutionally protected freedom of religion enjoyed by individuals and churches (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996: Section 15(1) and 31). This constitution describes South Africa as a “religiously neutral state” (Henrico 2019:4) that neither infringes nor dictates the nature of this right, regardless of how “bizarre, illogical or irrational” it may appear (Prince v President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope 2002 2 SA 794(CC) per Sachs J para 97 and Dlamini v Green Four Security 2006 11 BLLR 1074 (LC) para 16). Consequently, religious freedom cannot be regulated since it is regarded as a profoundly personal belief and moral conviction, or conscience, which directly affects an individual's freedom of choice within a democratic society (Van der Vyver and Green, 2008:344). A relevant Constitutional Court ruling in the year 2000 articulated the sanctity of freedom of religion as follows:

> Religious belief has the capacity to awaken concepts of self-worth and human dignity, which form the cornerstone of human rights. (Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education 2000 4 SA 757 (CC) para 36).

This provides a solid basis for the recommendation by the CRL Rights Commission that religious freedom ought to be protected, rather than regulated, by the State. However, support should be given to “religious communities (churches) to regulate themselves more carefully to align with the Constitution and the law” (CRL Commission, 2017:34).

The second set of recommendations emphasises the need to regulate malpractices within religious communities, particularly by pastoral leaders who exploit religion to violate the human dignity and respect of individual congregants. Such acts are a violation of Article 16(1) of the Constitution of South Africa. The argument is that these malpractices or unusual practices ought not to be used as a blanket critique of Christianity as a whole. Therefore, the solution and any preventive or corrective measures ought instead to focus on Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a specific subset within Christianity. The fact that the report confirms these cases also indicates that only some Neo-Prophets are involved, not all. The doctrinal claim of extreme malpractice by the Seven Angels from Engcobo (Eastern Cape), who declared that “Lucifer came to this world and breathed on the South African Constitution and schools,” and who use this hate speech (Constitution of South Africa, 1996 Section 16(2)) to dismiss the Constitution and children's right to education, truly requires corrective action. There ought to be targeted regulation of the Seven Angels' extreme mission to assert their divine intervention to “return the world to Jehovah, God” (CRL Rights Commission, 2017: 21). This blatant opposition to the Constitution in religious practice is potentially harmful and unethical, particularly when considering children’s rights to basic education. The practice of home schooling, which is unaccredited and lacks quality assurance, I argue, is therefore “inferior to standards at comparable public institutions” (Constitution of South Africa, 1996 Section 29).

The third cluster of recommendations addresses the malpractices of some Neo-Prophets who deliberately disregard existing legislation in South Africa. This non-compliance was observed in relation to the registration of churches as Non-Profit

Organisations or section 21 Non-Profit Companies with the Department of Social Development, as stipulated in the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing Act No. 22 of 2022 – Sections 13-16. Some foreign Neo-Prophetic pastors are alleged to exploit a legal loophole in the Immigration Act 13 of 2002 and misuse the visa system to reside and conduct ministry activities in South Africa. Certain Neo-Prophets under investigation are reported to be commercialising anointed objects and making substantial profits without declaring any to the South African Revenue Service, in violation of Chapter 2 of the Non-Profit Organisations Act 71 of 1997, the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004, and the Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998. One Neo-Prophet in Polokwane (Limpopo) was reported to have contravened the Agricultural Stock Remedies Act 36 of 1947 by spraying insecticide on congregants in order to deliver them from evil spirits. As previously mentioned, other individual Neo-Prophets are reported to have instructed congregants to eat snakes, grass, drink detergents, and even drove a car over congregants lying on the ground (Banda, 2019: 4; Kgatle, 2017: 1; Resane, 2017: 1). Such malpractices do not justify increasing the authoritative power of the CRL Rights Commission to act as an arbiter and regulator of the state (CRL Rights Commission, 2017: 7), but rather, to refer such cases to the relevant government department/s for further guidance, support, and prosecution. The Commission's primary role is to support constitutional democracy by promoting and protecting the cultural, religious, and linguistic rights of society (Constitution of South Africa, 1996, Sections 185 and 239). Any enforcement of existing laws by the CRL Rights Commission would be unconstitutional, as these lie beyond its constitutional mandate. However, its contribution to ensuring that no pastoral leader can presume to lie beyond the scope of the Constitution and other laws of the country is commendable (Gunda and Machingura, 2013: 21).

The scope of the CLR Rights Commission does not, I argue, extend to a cluster of recommendations regarding the curbing of the exponential rise of non-denominational churches and ministries; the disputes leading to schisms; conflict on succession plan in terms of church leadership; the buying of properties; and adherence to the educational qualifications of Neo-Prophets. Instead, robust discussions and amicable common ground are to be established through its wide consultation sessions seeking out broader guidance and support (Banda 2019:1-11).

The religious plurality and expression of faith among Neo-Prophets is a broad and evolving area. These are elements of the right to religious freedom as enshrined in the Constitution. Consequently, they cannot be regulated externally. Therefore, a proposal for a statutory or overarching regulatory body, including registration and licensing of religious practitioners (CRL Rights Commission, 2017:39), may require thorough discussion between academics, government departments, and Neo-Prophets themselves. One manner in which this can be approached is to include as part of this regulatory body's role the establishment of a Peer Review Committee to issue certificates and liaise with Neo-Prophets and the CRL Rights Commission. In such a case, it ought to ensure that the constitutional rights to belief systems (Section 15(1)), to freedom of expression (Section 16), and to trade, occupation and profession (Section 22) remain upheld (Constitution of South Africa, 1996). Consequently, this regulatory body cannot be imposed without extensive consultation and consensus (du Plessis 2019:140). Such a regulatory body could also provide advocacy training on various administrative and developmental issues, including financial management and internal affairs, as identified by the commission's recommendations (CRL Rights Commission Report 2017: 35). This may serve as the most effective ecumenical intervention by the CRL Rights Commission, where it would foster peace, friendship, humanity, tolerance, and national unity among and within cultural, religious, and linguistic communities, based on principles of equality, non-discrimination, and free association (CRL Rights Commission, 2017: 40).

It is therefore crucial for this study to highlight the impact of mass and social media in exposing numerous abuses committed in the name of God by self-appointed Christian leaders. This study responds to the call of the CRL Chairperson, who has invited Christian theologians and leaders to “assist all religious institutions to create an environment where they, not the state, can effectively regulate themselves, and hold people who bring religion into disrepute accountable, as per their various religious systems” (CRL Rights Commission, 2017:4). The rationale for this is that a lack of such accountability fosters increasing divisions within Christianity. Both preventive and corrective measures are necessary to resolve this issue systematically. This study provides full support and new insights for South Africa on how other countries are tackling the rise of these churches and ministries (Richmond, 2017: 3-13). Since this is a global phenomenon, successful strategies from other nations can serve as

valuable lessons in this regard. The recommendations of the CRL Rights Commission should be seen as a call to protect South African citizens from abuses reported in the media, which constitute malpractices that heighten the gullibility and vulnerability of congregants who rely on their pastoral leaders for guidance and direction.

2.3. Pentecostal movement: An overview

This sub-section places special focus on particular Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries as a complete deviation and sharp contrast from Classical Pentecostalism in their promotion of commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith. I argue that Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries can be categorised as a fourth wave of Pentecostalism. This historical background acknowledges that the Christianisation of Africa was indeed initiated by Western missionaries, who made significant contributions to educating Africans, improving their lives, and translating the Bible into local languages. Thereafter, the widespread spread of Pentecostalism as a global phenomenon, which arguably began in 1906 among African Americans led by William Joseph Seymour, also reached South Africa in 1908 (Phiri, 2009:142). Nel asserts from a historical survey that Classical Pentecostal missionaries and adherents came from racially marginalised people of society (2019). Early Pentecostalism in South Africa came to give hope to Africans who were oppressed, marginalised, misunderstood, and epistemologically and ontologically deprived of their identity and dignity under the oppression imposed on them by colonialists (Cox, 1995:106; Anderson and Pillay, 1997:234). Classical Pentecostalism emerged as another Christian reformation following Protestantism, and aimed to provide a Pentecostal perspective on Christian faith experience to those who were socially and economically disadvantaged (Anderson, 1979:240). This experiential-subjective sense of religious spirituality challenged the prevalent deficiency in the scholastic systematic form of theology that shaped Roman Catholicism and Protestantism of the time. The propositional doctrines of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism and their pneumatologically underdeveloped faith formulae underscore the Pentecostal view of the Holy Spirit as dynamic in the lives of Christians. They stood in contradistinction to the doctrines of mainline churches that instead presented Christianity as a complete package with new and parallel Pentecostal teachings (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013: 166-171). Nel concludes that Classical Pentecostalism provided a new restorationist and revivalist Christian lived experience in multiple geographic locations. In South Africa,

it empowered the deprived, disorganised, and marginalised Africans with a contextual meaning of a distinct baptism of the spirit, the word of God, grace, and sanctification from sin.

This gave shape to a decolonial and responsive African Christian faith experience as an assertive response against colonial Western Modernism. Nel writes in this regard:

> Pentecostalism is a countercultural paramodern movement that defined its praxis-oriented identity and restorationist-primitivist spiritual ethos as a social and spiritual response to modernistic liberalism and Protestant fundamentalist cessationist orthodoxy (2020:1).

This assertive South African response led to an ecclesial exodus of thousands of congregants from mainline churches that promoted Western colonial Christianity to join the Pentecostal churches. These African Christian congregants did not feel that colonial and modernist Christianity empowered them to either cope with or address the socio-economic imbalances and historical depravity of the country (Gifford, 1998: 329). The liberal, modernist, and rationalist approaches of the colonial Western Christian churches did not provide relevant answers. However, they were seen to promote colonialism (Cox, 1995:75). Pentecostalism emerged as what Ngong refers to as a "*new Christianity"* (2006:519). This 'new Christianity' was characterised by manifestations of miraculous gifts, such as speaking in tongues, spontaneous prayers, healings and prophecies (Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12-14), led by Pentecostal-Charismatic churches located mainly in Asia, South America, and Africa (Isichei, 1995:1). Walls argues that this new brand of African Christianity has a significant impact globally (1979:180). Wacker notes that this new Pentecostal brand of African Christianity restored three key aspects of the African worldview and lifestyle, namely: philosophical primitivism, historical primitivism, and ethical primitivism, which were previously declared as backwards by the mainline churches of the West (1984:358-369). This calls for pastors with a kind of transformational leadership that can re-socialise, re-educate, re-Africanise, and psychologically restore the human identity of congregants in a manner that prevents any form of spiritual recolonisation and domination (Mwambazambi and Banza, 2014:1).

Ukah presents a novel argument in this regard, namely that Africa's uniqueness, characterised by its vast natural resources and the presence of practising Christians,

gives rise to a distinct African Christianity that diverges significantly from the practices of Christianity in Europe, North America, Latin America, and Asia. He further argues that African Christianity is lived contextually as a faith experience among various cultures and traditions, where Africa has diverse Christianities. He categorises these into three broad taxonomies, viz. Mission Christianity, African Initiated Christianity, and African Pentecostalism (Ukah, 2007:2; Ayegboyin and Ukah, 2002).

2.4. Pentecostal waves in the South African context

2.4.1. Classical Pentecostalism

The first wave of African Pentecostalism emerged from these epochal broad taxonomy types of Christianity, specifically Classical Pentecostalism (Anderson *et al*. 2010:1329). It generally falls under global Pentecostalism, which is categorised as Classical Pentecostalism, having strong links with American Pentecostalism (Gifford, 1988). Classical Pentecostalism is part of the transnational or worldwide Pentecostal movement that was rapidly adopted and adapted beyond the confines of the Azusa Street revival or the Pentecostal experience in the early 20th century. Most sources, including Bartos, attribute the origins of Pentecostals to the Methodist Holiness movement, which organised revival meetings attended by other evangelicals. Such attendance did not mean they were founders, where the founding leaders were Charles F. Parham and William J. Seymour (Kgatle 2020b: xiii). The first South African Classical Pentecostal churches with a direct link to the Azusa Street Revival were the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church in South Africa. These were so-called 'separatist churches' that were derogated as signifying the "Otherness of new churches" (Ayagboyin and Ishola, 1997:12-19) when successful at attracting congregants away from established mainline churches. These churches were offering Africans an opportunity for ecclesiological self-governance, self-financing, and self-supporting of African churches (African churches led by African pastoral leaders) as an alternative to colonial missionary churches and some indigenous churches of Africa (Rotberg and Mazrui, 1970:473-476).

Out of Classical Pentecostalism arose a brand of Christianity that gave a truly African sense of worship, communality, and ongoing experience of the Spirit, presenting a new spirituality that resonated with African indigenous worldviews. Out of this identified doctrinal gap, which Blumhofer refers to as "the narrowness of sectarian churchism"

(Blumhofer, 1989), African Pentecostalism emerged as a distinctively African brand of Christianity, shaping its liturgy, history, spirituality, and teachings. This Pentecostal brand of Christianity does not distinguish between the sacred and the secular. From this perspective, Anderson refers to African Pentecostalism as a truly 'African Reformation' that restored the lost critical dynamism of the Pentecostal experience as part of the Christian faith experience (2001:108).

This pan-African Christianity systemically views religious, political, social, and economic life as an integrated totality that values communality and the holistic development of the individual (Van Dijk, 2004). While Western missionaries focused on scientifically and rationally proven realities of life, pan-Africanist Pentecostals were indigenising their Pentecostal Christian faith experience (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013:2; Cox 1995:4-5).

This Classical and pan-African Pentecostalism stood in confrontation with colonialism of Western 'white masters' who were promoting the marginalisation, socio-economic oppression, and deprivation of human dignity of Africans on the Continent through a pietistic and supernaturalist Christian religion (Anderson and Pillay, 1997:234; Cox, 1995:106). Pan-Africanist and Pentecostal figures like Enock Sontonga, originally a Methodist (1873-1905), are well known for having written the song *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* (Online, 2021). Sontonga was leading the Pentecostalisation of Christianity to become more responsive to the socio-political, religious, and economic marginalisation of vulnerable and marginalised Africans of the time (Kalu 2005:274). The first African Presbyterian minister, Tiyo Soga, also composed a song, *The Princes shall come out of Egypt*, that conveyed a similar message about the Pentecostalisation of Christianity (Kalu, 2005:264).

2.4.2. Charismatic renewals

This brand of Pentecostalism marked a historical phase whereby "Africans took over the (Western) Christian God", and contextualised this God as transcending their understanding (Paris, 1995:36-37). This belief and Africanised Christian faith experience served as a base for the emergence of the second wave of Pentecostalism. These African-initiated/independent/indigenous churches were "founded in Africa by Africans and primarily for Africans" (White and Niemandt,

2014:476). The new epoch of the rise of African Independent Churches focused on the epistemological and ontological worldview of Africans and their everyday life challenges of dealing with witchcraft, poverty, social injustices, healing, dreams and visions, Holy Spirit baptism of fire, and divine interventions against demonic spiritual forces, as formed part of Early Apostolic Christianity (Oduro et al. 2008:19; Bediako, 1995:66). This second wave had a strong political influence on both Christians and non-Christian believers in the African National Congress, the Pan African Congress and the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (Mzondi, 2018:41-42). The Pentecostalisation of the African Church, which did not embrace the colonialist agenda of the West and that of the mainline churches, took place as two distinct processes due to irreconcilable political, social, and economic methods of undertaking theology and making sense of the dynamics of colonisation (Archer, 2007, 2009). Some of the African Initiated Churches that form part of the second wave, such as the Zionist Christian Church, formed breakaways from the Apostolic Faith Mission, which fell under Classical Pentecostalism.

These two distinctive processes of breaking away either from mainline churches or Classic Pentecostalism also led to the remarkable multiple conflicts and breakaways. Most of these breakaways into African Independent Churches or African Traditional Churches arose from intramural conflicts over doctrine, competitive ambitions to establish alternative churches, and shifts in theological emphasis. African Pentecostalism has empowered Africans to reclaim and preserve their indigenous cultural voice and identity, exemplified by the ubuntu philosophy of life (Niemandt, 2012:1). Kalu argues that African Pentecostalism constitutes a corrective historiography, redefining and valuing contextuality as a revivalist or reappropriation of the Pentecost experience of the apostolic age (2008:4).

These mark a paradigm shift in the form of new developments that gave shape to the second wave of Pentecostalism (Anderson 2000). Examples of the second-wave Pentecostal Churches are the Zion Christian Church, Saint John Apostolic Church, and Nazareth Baptist Church, also known as the Shembe. These churches had no affiliation with the mainline churches or classical Pentecostal churches. Their raison d'être was to restore African nationalism, African philosophy (ubuntu), moral beliefs, and cultural values (Masango, 2006:932). They were a second wave that destabilised

the ideological domination of Africa by the Western world. This supremacy and colonisation of Africans had to be unmasked, as not being a form of Christian salvation, modernisation, or a move from primitivity to civilisation, but instead, as a form of dispossession of land and resources, epistemological domination, and spiritual coloniality. It therefore marked the redefinition of epistemological and ontological power relations between the colonialists and the colonised (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:7-12). In terms of the critical theory, this paradigm shift formed part of the initial transformation and continuous interrogation of the imperialist agenda on the part of Africans (Adamo, 2011).

African independent churches were alleviating the manipulative, falsified agenda of the West and asserting historical realism and their Africanicity (Oden, 2007:93). This can arguably be categorised as a key driving strategy towards the achievement of a ‘de-Westernised African Christianity’ (Baur, 1994:18). This emerging ‘New World Order’ of things theologically meant that Africans were drinking from their wells of Black and African theologies (Maluleke, 1996:8-9). This gave birth to an African Christian theology and sparked an intra-continental dialogue. As a result, schisms based on polity, Africanised worship, doctrine, and decolonisation practices became both evident and unavoidable (De Gruchy 1997:38). This marked a paradigmatic shift “from Christianising Africa to Africanising Christianity” (Van der Merwe 2016). This shift was not free of syncretism and acculturation (Onyinah, 2007:305-8). The challenge of inculturation of Christianity and the Christianisation of African culture has become a new field of study within some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (De Gruchy 1997:38-9; Bosch 1991:265; Van der Merwe 2016:567-569). This second wave also includes the charismatic renewal, which was primarily undertaken by mainline churches around 1960, as a strategic intervention against the exodus of church members to Pentecostal Churches. This encompasses the charismatic renewal within certain circles of the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Methodist Church (Onyinah, 2007:309-10). These charismatic renewal initiatives were aimed at promoting an atmosphere necessary for ecumenism in teachings and practice. Vatican II presents a clear example of this remedial intervention on the part of mainline churches. This wave of Pentecostalism, however, falls outside the scope of the current study.

2.4.3. Neo-Pentecostalism

Neo-Pentecostalism is categorised as the third wave within the reformational developments that have taken place in Pentecostalism. Certain key features distinguish it from other waves, yet it shares some commonalities with them in terms of origin. It is strongly influenced by the liberative elements of neo-liberalism and the theology of the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' that fosters spiritual interdependencies and intersectionality among those born again in Christ (Pasura 2021: 76-96). This foregrounds the practices of various ministries within the church life for both pastoral ministers and congregants. The theme of deliverance permeates and destabilises the known chasms and dichotomies between the sacred and secular in Christianity as taught and practised by mainline churches. This marks a reformational development in terms of the transcendence spirituality and the secular material world and human life (Mbiti 1990:2). This Neo-Pentecostal conceptual reorientation of Christianity offers a paradigm shift in the missional practices.

Within the flatter hierarchical structures of Neo-Pentecostal churches, there is a distinct feature: a full embrace of spiritual gifts, including glossolalia, prophecy, the performance of healing ministry, and miracles. This transforms the religious landscape and factors in a new sense of being a decolonised church, especially among Africans who have been colonised, enslaved, and dispossessed of land through Christianity as presented by missionaries of mainline churches (Smith 2012: 86).

Neo-Pentecostalism calls for a complete break with the past of ancestral worship as part of being born again and delivered from the generational curses of ancestors. This is aimed at delivering those born again from ill health, demonic spirits, and the 'spirit of poverty,' and releasing them into a life of financial prosperity, good health, and a perpetual freedom from malevolent spirits (Taringa and Sipeyiye 2018, 205). In this teaching, Neo-Pentecostalism places a clear demarcation between itself and African Traditional Religion. While African indigenous religiosity sees divination as a ritual to ensure good health, financial well-being, and protection from evil spirits, Neo-Pentecostalism centres these around the power of God and prayer. This sets a clear distinction between African Indigenous Churches and Neo-Pentecostal Churches (Nyamnjoh and Carpenter 2018:289-302).

The complementarity between the divine and human, or the sacred and secular, has attracted more middle-class professionals located in urban areas to Neo-Pentecostalism. They live an emancipated life based on their understanding of the right to choose a religious faith experience of their own, and being detached from that of their families. Their awareness of the right to freedom of choice and religious belief system demonstrates their power in making the choices that shape their lives. Their newly found desacralised sense of divine protection, healing, and financial stability, obtained through prayer and the laying on of hands for divine blessing, also leads to positive thinking in their urban lifestyle. Their positive power and prayer serve to change the humanly impossible into a realised possibility. They can pray over their job application, and finally secure the job, despite facing enormous hurdles of corruption and nepotism. Prosperity and positive power, as evident in good health and wealth, have led to a total rejection of divination. Neo-Pentecostals rely on anointed oil and blessed water. In this context, “the church elders, or the leading couple, or the ‘daddy’ and ‘mummy’ of the church community, replace the advice and authority of the elders in the village” (Van den Toren 2015:113). The ministry of these Neo-Pentecostal pastoral leaders finds meaning as being God-given, bringing about spiritual deliverance, prosperity, and protection from evil spirits. They shape the lives and moral standards of their congregants through teachings that directly address and give spiritual direction to real-life issues.

This fosters a greater appreciation among congregants for the pastoral care provided by their leader and their long-term commitment to the Neo-Pentecostal faith experience, because this kind of missional church makes the presence of God felt. The worship experience is a God-directed experience of encounter and an ellipse into the presence of God as their Deliverer and Protector (Van den Toren 2015:113). It is characterised by ecstatic dance, prophecy, the esoteric phenomena of prayer in tongues and holy laughter as marking the presence of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is not a soul experience but a communitarian and individual theocentric experience that touches all dimensions of human life. Prayer in tongues, miracles, exorcism, and healing mark this wave of Pentecostalism as a distinct reformational Christian faith experience within Pentecostalism. The prosperity gospel is not used for commercial gains, but to proclaim the power of the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God. Within the context of Neo-Pentecostalism, the Prosperity Gospel cannot be seen as a

pseudo-theology or a dangerous Health and Wealth Gospel, as Pope Francis and the Vatican argue (Spadaro and Figueroa 2018: 105-108).

Neo-Pentecostal pastors have published as best-sellers books because their topics address real-life spiritual issues. Neo-Pentecostal megachurches also use multimedia to expand the missional church experience. The Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) is an example of Neo-Pentecostals evangelising as part of their missional mandate of the Great Commission. Church revival meetings and conferences under a special theme constitute a part of the responsiveness and aligned teachings to promote pastoral care and ministry among Neo-Pentecostals. Neo-Pentecostals assert that Christianity, despite being a commodified religion by Neo-Prophets , offers those with low income and those who have lost hope and reached the point of despair, a new chance to be materially restored. Certain individual members of these churches and ministries have experienced remarkable changes, having moved from abject poverty to lavish lifestyles (Benyah,2018:135). The promises of the gospel of prosperity and prophetic special prayers have brought about miraculous breakthroughs, as evidenced health, financial success, and material wealth. Some church leaders have collaborated with governments to raise funds and donated towards social responsibility/welfare projects to improve the lives of the poor members of society. This has brought about self-confidence and the ability to persist against all odds to achieve success and “the Lord’s miracle” (Martin, 1995:111). They do this even for members of society without any (gender, religion or race) discrimination (Miller and Yamamori,2007:32). Certain Neo-Pentecostal churches and ministries leaders in Ghana are reported by Benyah to have built private universities and health care centres to help governments of financially struggling countries in the same manner that the mainline churches did during colonisation (Benyah,2018:135).

Most congregants of these churches and ministries have developed a spiritual connection with the Bible, as evident in their prayers and worship. Great innovation and shared ministry in the development of music, like the training of choristers and music instrument players to enhance Afrocentric worship services, is evident. The integration of cultural ambience and expressive dance has drawn the youth to feel at home in prayer and worship services. A sense of the presence of God moves congregants to give. This manner o generosity and cheerful giving allow the church or ministry to expand (Isabelle,2007:421). Most people who attend weekday prayer group

sessions and Sunday services have learnt to pray and connect to God (Benyah, 2018:136). Those who can afford to transport others do so as part of planting the seed and securing blessings. IN this manner, the reach of the Church can be seen to spread.

The proclamation and teaching of the word for evangelistic renewal of the Christian faith have been noted. This is even giving shape to the changes necessary in the training of future church leaders in Post-School Education and Training (Martin, 1995:111). These aspects of church life are achieved through the church's funds, collected through the commodification of religion. Shared ministry promotes the participation of the laity in various ways, according to the talents and professional skills of each of those participating. This makes many talents and skills be identified and nurtured. The laity is more willing to offer their time and talents to receive God's blessings. The use of various mass media like print, radio, and television for evangelisation has offered some Christians who have walked away from the Church based on past experience, to return to Christianity. Various income-generating initiatives, including tithing, have led to congregants taking full responsibility for their church leaders and all operational costs of the church or ministry. Tithing and giving an offering for evangelisation (*Missio Dei*) and in order to give thanks have become part of a positive religious practice.

The marketing and selling of anointed or blessed products have brought a shared ecclesial identity (Stolz,2008:59-60). The same can be said of the revival conferences and professional gatherings, as well as one-on-one consultation sessions with the church leader. The great aesthetic of religious ambience and state-of-the-art settings of the sanctuary in these churches/ministries create an authentic worshipping atmosphere. This is made possible by both the talent of congregants and their free offerings (Onyinah,2004: 337). It can also be reasonably argued that Neo-Pentecostals churches and ministries are spiritual homes to those excommunicated by mainline churches and those looking for a glimpse of hope in dealing with life-debilitating issues like alcoholism, drug addiction, poverty and depression (Köhrsen, 2015: 49). Bonsu and Belk assert in this regard that the "Pentecostal message appeals to a large number of people who have no alternative pathway to economic and social mobility. (It) blends the poor's reality into the realm of the spiritual, cleverly using consumption as a salvation-oriented religious tool for conversion" (2010:312).

2.4.4. Neo-Prophetic Churches

The fourth Pentecostal wave marks the emergence and explosive rise of the born-again pastors, who featured in the African Christian reformation era, which strongly features constitutional freedom of religion. Moringa and Maposa call this wave Pentecostal Christianity (2015:1). This strongly features Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries and is driven by a new generation of pastoral leaders who are 'schismatic', separatist, and anti-institutional. They are divinely chosen and possess various spiritual gifts to deliver fresh prophetic messages, miraculous healing, and a prosperous life to congregants who suffer from fear of witchcraft, unemployment, poverty, and death (Kgatle 2022a:1). They promote an American Pentecostalism (Maxwell, 2005: 4-6; Werbner, 2011: 21-22). Prophetic healing, which involves the instant unlocking of doors to prosperity, is their key message. Through these pastors, you can ask God for a new expensive car, bigger house, or to become a millionaire (Werbner, 2011:2) These non-conformist and non-denominational pastors focus on the warm and healthy fatherly relationship with God as one who provides for protection against malevolent spirits, good health, material or financial well-being, and bestows various gifts upon the faithful, including the gifts of prophecy and healing (Omotoye, 2010:1-10). Nyoni, however, raises concern over some pastors of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries perpetuating a manner of 'colonial spirituality' through their reliance upon the vulnerability of unsuspecting congregants (2018:1).

Some of these pastors run mega-churches that placate congregants with the prosperity gospel message, positive confession, planting the seed, and fake miracles for their financial gain (Marongwe and Maposa,2015:1-22). They imprison the minds of congregants and hinder their development by claiming to preach a gospel that transcends day-to-day socio-economic and religio-political challenges in Sub-Saharan African countries (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013: 388-409). They have an agenda of promoting deliverance, prayers, healing, speaking in tongues, tithing, and miracles as an opium to escape the daily realities of poverty, social injustice, and unemployment, as based on 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. Some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries' pastors, prophets, and apostles promote this new brand of Christianity (Ukah,2007:1-18) and claim their authority and prophecies as emanating from God (Moriarty, 1992:88-97).

This study focuses on the fourth wave, marking the fact that the Reformation as an agenda for the Protestant mainline churches, like the sun, has lost its moment to shine or high numbers in terms of geographic influence on population (Paul and Wallet, 2008). This fourth wave of Pentecostalism has brought an African commercialised Pentecostal Christian faith experience (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:10-11). This marks a new shift and phase in our African Christianity, within which the Spirit of God or the baptism of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8) manifests diverse gifts for the mutual up-building of the Pentecostal Christian faith experience that surpasses human grasp (Moltmann,1992:43). The serious downfall of the Neo-Prophetic tradition is that it is centred around the deified persona of a pastoral leader.

2.5. The main features of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries

2.5.1. Sub-Saharan Africans as uncritically religious

One of the elements that has facilitated the commercialisation of Christianity among Africans is the uncritical acceptance of religious teachings that have brought physical and mental harm. It has been established as a fact by various scholars that “Africans, particularly Sub-Saharan Africans, are often considered notoriously religious or 'incurably religious” (Mbiti,1969:1). This view demonstrates the African viewpoint of an integration between ordinary facets of life and religion as two sources of culture. (Davis,1994:22; Van den Torren et al., 2020)

This African worldview or ontological reality has provided a conducive environment for many self-appointed church leaders, who call themselves prophets, pastors, men of God, or bishops, to establish non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries among urban and semi-urban communities (Kgatle, 2020b:35). This new age religious plurality has challenged the traditional religiosity and piety of well-established churches. Within this neo-liberalist religious landscape, some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have shifted from the traditional ‘gospel of the forgiveness of sins’ (sanctification), to a message centred on prosperity, supernatural healing miracles, or deliverance from Satan’s attacks or evil spirits, emphasising the key role of the anointing power of the Holy Spirit through a pastoral leader. This is achieved by an anointed servant of God who believes they possess the power to perform greater signs and miracles than even Jesus himself (Mark 16:17-18 and John 14:12). In such churches, a single infallible leader dominates the congregants,

whereas a result, there is no necessity for sacraments or doctrine (Magezi and Banda 2017:1-10).

The vulnerability of congregants in some Neo-Prophetic churches is deeply rooted in their total trust in their religious leader (Magezi and Banda, 2017:1-10). In this way, the pastoral leader is seen as a divine mediator between the congregant and God. This has a direct impact on the Mission of God to His people. As a result, the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience are justified by the teachings of the pastoral leader, which emphasise justification, righteousness, and a holy life.

2.5.2 The Neo-liberalist ideology influences Neo-Prophetism

Much of the differentiation and pluralisation, which came with secularisation and globalisation, that permeated the religious Christian faith experience of African Christian communities and the abandonment of “the Colonialist Christ,” are evident in Neo-Prophetism (Ezigbo, 2014; Bediako, 1992; Falls and Mbiti, 1972). This development has led to the Christian faith becoming an individual experience, with each person having the option to choose from an array of alternatives. This neo-liberalist ‘fourth wave’ of Pentecostalism was part of an era characterised by features like democracy, free markets, constitutional rights to freedom of religion, commercialisation, and commodification, which some Neo-Prophets used to exploit congregants (Kgatle 2020b:26). It also caused significant changes within families, as religious affiliation and practice depend on personal choice. There has been a shift in value systems and religious beliefs compared to the ethical stability and uniformity previously found in families. The parental authority traditionally held by village elders over individual church members has been superseded by certain Neo-Prophets (van den Toren 2015:113). The core moral values of community and ethical behaviour in village societies were replaced by neo-liberal consumerism and selfishness. Many South Africans perceive certain Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (with influences from African Independent Churches or African Traditional Religion) are more “anthropocentric and pragmatic” in understanding the spiritual needs of Africans (Van den Toren, 2015:103) than the Eurocentric Christian faith experience of the mainline churches from the West. This marks a significant epistemological and cosmological paradigm shift in the Christian faith experience of South Africans, moving from a Northern Hemisphere worldview to a Southern Hemisphere perspective. Based

on this neo-liberalist and consumerist perspective, South Africans have also begun to view their Christian faith from a new geopolitical and ontological perspective, that is, through an African hermeneutical lens (Ezigbo, 2010:99).

This neo-liberal framework became fertile ground for the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian experience (Hadebe, 2017). This was promoted among South Africans through intercultural and contextualised theological conversations, as well as the establishment of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries from other parts of Africa. Benno van den Toren (2015) elaborate the main characteristics of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to include: attributing great authority to the leading pastor, making congregants more vulnerable to deceit; placing a high importance on the gifts of tongues (glossolalia); prioritising healing, where the importance of tongues diminishes in comparison to the ministry of deliverance; and emphasising financial prosperity, good health, and protection against malevolent powers.

The elders, particularly the leading couple, as parental figures of the church community, assume the role of providing advice and authority in place of the village elders. Pondani defines spiritual fathering as “a situation where leaders encourage members to refer to their spiritual leaders as ‘fathers in the Lord,’ conveying warm images of intimacy drawn from a family setting but further entrenching patriarchal and gerontocratic authority patterns” (2019: 29). The wife of the leading pastor is addressed as the ‘first lady’ or ‘mommy’, to show respect and affection (Kgatle 2023b:146). Based on the neo-liberalist standpoint of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, individual choice is promoted over and above African communal/family bonds and values. In this manner, pastoral leaders present an image that is highly attractive to the new middle class and elites. Churches are modern and well-equipped, well-represented in modern (social) media, and linked to global networks. This instils a fervent desire in most congregants to succeed in an urban environment. Rather than criticising or simply neglecting the aspirations of these new middle classes in modern cities, as traditional churches often have done, these new movements see themselves as entirely legitimate and a sign of divine blessing. As part of a strong drive to increase membership, some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries promise divine help,

protection, and guidance in a world in which even the most modest success can only be achieved by overcoming enormous obstacles.

2.5.3 The African Traditionalist elements in Neo-Prophetism

The other key element that influences the emergence and rapid growth of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, along with their diverse prosperity gospels in Africa, includes aspects of decoloniality and the decolonisation of the Christian faith experience (Nel and Kgatle, 2024: 1-5). This was achieved by integrating African traditional healing and divination, which has significantly contributed to the revival of pre-colonial African culture (worldview). This culture values historicity and articulates African cosmology or metaphysics, linking our existence to the cosmic energy that surrounds us. Kgatle describes this as “syncretistic cultural hybridity”, or the “Christianization [sic] of indigenous religious practices” (2024a:2). This ontological unity has become the core of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, especially those led by traditional healers and diviners. It signifies an affirmative return of Africans to their roots, and a reconnection with the environment (Mazama 2002:219-220).

From a cosmological point of view, there is no distinction or division between the natural and supernatural worlds, and these worlds are governed by one supreme authority, God. This is the context in which many Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries consistently win favour with most Africans, and nothing exists outside this organic order of being. This forms the core missionary mandate of the identity of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as Afrocentric Christians. Based on this, Mazama argues that "a universal religion does not and cannot exist, as any religion necessarily expresses a particular experience and worldview” (2002:220). Within the Afrocentric Christian faith experience of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa, church members show faithful trust and obedience to their leaders. This has become a naturally accepted context in which some aspects of African Traditional Religion, like performing miracles, have been acculturated. Chimuka describes these churches and ministries as a genuine expression of African spirituality (2016:124).

Within this syncretism, the authenticity and full expression of core Christian principles, such as holiness, become a site of philosophical struggle, where contradictions between various expressions of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries tend to

proliferate. This stems from the fact that the acculturation or direct transplantation of aspects of African Traditional Religion—such as performing wonders and miracles (exorcism, healing, and wealth acquisition) through witchcraft practices, while claiming to cast out evil spirits and heal as agents of the Holy Spirit—has become questionable (Mofokeng 2024:1-12). This indicates that pastoral leaders of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have not fully broken away from their past (Meyer, 1998:320), instead embracing syncretism in their Christian faith experience.

The acculturation of African Traditional Religion into Neo-Prophetism shall constantly be a site of conflict as each carries its historically embedded spiritual, cultural, and doctrinal uniqueness. Out of this African worldview and religiosity have emerged other key features of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, which this study will discuss in greater detail in the following sub-sections.

2.5.4 Non-Denominationalism

The ever-increasing competition among some Neo-Prophets leads non-denominational churches and ministries to pitch themselves against one another, primarily for dominance and the free marketplace for the commercialisation of anointed objects (Ramantswana and Sebetseli, 2021: 1-10). The Neo-Prophetic churches in South Africa that tend to disappear as quickly as they arise, as in the rest of the Continent, are predominantly non-denominational, where Vondey notes that “Many Pentecostals hesitated to apply the title ‘church’ or ‘denomination’ to themselves or the movement as a whole and criticised the ‘institutionalism’, ‘formalism’, ‘ecclesiasticism’, and ‘denominationalism’ among the existing churches” (2011:320).

In articles written by scholars from various fields of specialisation (sociology of religion, ecclesiology, anthropology, missiology, and biblical hermeneutics), it is confirmed that non-denominational churches and ministries are primarily established by individual pastors (of both genders) to practice a unique approach or ministry. According to Kgatle (2020b: ix), in the South African context, these churches and ministries are instituted ‘by Africans for Africans’ and each is self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (Kgatle, 2017:1). Based on the observations of the researcher for this study, each of these non-denominational churches emphasises its unique vision and theme or mission statement, creed that is recited at every Sunday service, and other prayer services on selected weekdays aimed at retaining congregants. It continues to

drive individual church leaders to divide Christian churches and ministries into new non-denominational practices (Masenya and Masenya, 2018:639). These breakaways tend to invest in disparaging mainline and traditional Pentecostal churches (Khanyile, 2016:15).

2.5.5 Gospel of Prosperity vs. Core Christian Ethical Identity

This subsection addresses two contradictory issues in the teachings of Neo-Prophets . The gospel of prosperity (known also as the 'Gospel of Health and Wealth', 'Gospel of Success', or 'Word of Faith' Mawuko, 2016.10), contests the core of Christian ethics. One of the key teachers of the prosperity gospel was Kenneth E. Hagin. The Gospel of Prosperity has certain famous catchphrases among Neo-Pentecostals, including 'Positive Confession', 'fake it until you make it' (Kgatle 2019: 50), and 'Name it, Claim it and Grab it' (Mawuko, 2016.12). These originate from their hermeneutical understanding of Mark 11:23-24. Based on this scripture, they have developed a prosperity theology that adheres to this teaching. Neo-Prophetic congregants are taught that wealth, longevity, and fertility are contingent on their own financial generosity. Salvation is theorised as a *quid pro quo*, where, when you give generously to God, he will 'return the favour' (Amin 2010:66-73), where sowing the seed has a return on investment in terms of divine blessings. Neo-Prophets have taken this teaching and used it to commercialise the Christian faith experience. In addition to good health and financial prosperity, protection from malevolent spirits is also promised. Mashau and Kgatle argue that the prosperity gospel among Neo-Prophets has promoted a culture of greed that is opposed to "an African Christian theology of Ubuntu [sic]" (2019:1-8). This prophetic power to declare blessings by a Neo-Prophet alleviates sickness, generational curses, and brings financial prosperity. Van den Torren notes that they have strong elements of secularisation, consumerism, and individualism, where "[they] seem to be paradigmatic expressions of the religious outlook that characterises Africa" (2015:103).

This Neo-Prophetic prosperity gospel introduces us to three categories of Prosperity Theology that are prevalent among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Each is aimed at helping Neo-Prophets to enhance their quality of life, and each has a strong emphasis on individuality and breaking with the past, including family bonds. Emphasis is instead placed on the personal holistic (economic, physical, and psychological) well-being, safety from generational curses and malevolent spirits. A

positive attitude towards life, entrepreneurship, intense prayer, and tithing or 'sowing the seed' constitute pillars of the prosperity gospel among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

Each of the clusters or categories of prosperity gospel allows us to get a better understanding of the nuances of differences among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa. The first is referred to as *abilities prosperity,* which follows Christian reconstructionism and theonomy. Based on this teaching, some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries believe that redemption, the works of grace, and social reform take place through the preaching of the Word. The second one is *progress prosperity*. It is based on an appreciation for the developmental or incremental growth of a believer, even in small steps, and counting every blessing that brings about a change for the better in life, while tithing. This personal development is a worldly or materialistic (here and now) experience. The third category is *miracle prosperity,* which places strong emphasis on how prosperity is achieved through deliverance and miracles. Arduous work and morality are considered secondary when compared to the primacy of God's law of faith. The criticality of an individual believer's faith and strong prayers in receiving blessings or prophetic declarations, as declared by a prophet, pastor, or man of God, is evident in the transformation of lives. There is total confidence in the power of *positive confession* to activate God's power and confront Satan (Lioy, 2007).

These categories of prosperity theology or gospel bring to light the shifting of loyalty from Christ to a church leader. This shift from a Christocentric to a predominantly anthropocentric dependency of believers on their church leader for *health and wealth* has amplified their vulnerability. Both the gospel and theology of prosperity have a positive face. However, with a strong probability of enslaving congregants and exposing them to much abuse, they may suffer from their pastoral leader who supposedly acts in the name of God (Masvotore 2012).

This Neo-Prophetic common-sense interpretive lens serves as a basis for the Gospel of Prosperity, which was strongly challenged by the Lausanne Theology Working Group that met in a chapter held in Akropong (Ghana) in 2008 and 2009. The Lausanne Theology Working Group (2008) was led by academic scholars representing various (missiological, ethical, economic, theological, and socio-political)

perspectives. In this chapter, papers were presented and discussed. Out of the papers and those discussions, they produced a statement to summarise their stance condemning the key teachings and practices of Neo-Prophets (Lausanne Theology Working Group 2008:1-4). Based on this evident promotion of neoliberalism within the Neo-Prophetic churches, there is also what Hauerwas refers to as “the moral emptiness” (Hauerwas, 2015: 182), or a vacuum, now prevailing as a trend coterminous with liberal democracy. The fake miracles, the claim of Neo-Prophets as mediating the divine blessings of God to generous givers, and the immoral abuses they have committed against their congregants, have all raised concerns about their pastoral ministry (CRL Rights Commission, 2017). It is against this background that the need for an African Christian ethical identity promoting an Afrocentric moral value system becomes apparent. Kgatle speaks as a missiologist in categorising certain Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as promoting a materialistic gospel of greed at the expense of the core Christian principles that also shape African theology of ubuntu (2019:103). This study asserts that the gospel of prosperity and its strong link with secularisation, consumerism and individualism does not reflect Christocentric ethical values that promote “God’s creative and redemptive purposes” (Hauerwas, 1997:68). Some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries promote a manner of monolithic prosperity gospel aimed at avoiding the teachings of Christ (Hauerwas, 1997:68). It therefore keeps its key features that directly contradict the reconstructive Christian moral values and virtues in the Bible in favour of the commercialisation and commodification of Christianity.

Honesty and moral integrity have been identified as lacking in the practices of certain Neo-Prophets . The games of deception, half-truth, immoral sexual acts, and greed have been identified by the CRL Rights Commission Report of 2017 as having brought about disrepute to Christianity.

Within the context of the commercialisation of the Christian religious experience, the teachings of the gospel of prosperity of some Neo-Prophets are aimed at replacing the missional Christology of Jesus with their divine salvific authority. They bear titles like ‘the prophet’ or ‘man of God’. These Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries do not seem to have congregants who follow Christ, but proselytes who submit to the divine salvific authority of their church leader. In assuming this identity, congregants are vulnerable to the point of not having a voice on issues of faith and needing to make a

complete break with their family and cultural/historical past (Meyer, 1998). This proselytisation, erasure of the historical past, or cultural amnesia and domination by a church pastoral leader can deface a person's ethical identity. Taylor calls this state of being "non-recognition or misrecognition (that) can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being" (1994:25).

The decline of Christian ethics in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, particularly in terms of humility, diaconal pastoral service, respect for the image of God in every person, honesty, and moral integrity, is reflected in an article by Kgatle, which highlights unusual practices featured on various media platforms. Some congregants have suffered significantly in their quest to attain spiritual deliverance from evil forces of darkness, healing from various sicknesses, financial poverty, and generational curses. In a previously cited example, in 2014, Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Christian Centre was reported to have made congregants eat grass and drink petrol in exchange for a blessing and healing. Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Time Disciples Ministries ordered church members to eat live snakes and rats to prove that with God, nothing is impossible. He also called on unmarried female church members to be naked before he could pray for them to find their correct marriage partners. IN another notorious incident, Pastor Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly sprayed congregants with an insecticide, ironically called 'Doom', in exchange for healing and deliverance. Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng, as the leader of Incredible Happenings Ministry, is reported to have fondled the female private parts, claiming to be a 'divine gynaecologist' and selling 'holy viagra' product to boost libido among men. Such manner of practices by some Neo-Prophets have tarnished the ethical integrity of Christianity in our time (Kgatle, 2017).

The current status among some Neo-Prophetic churches shows the prevalence of dominating and abusive pastoral leaders over gullible church members. This calls for critical attention and ecumenical self-regulation.

2.5.6 Christology in Neo-Prophetic teachings

This sub-section is necessitated by the claims of some Neo-Prophets of Christ as insufficient because of the commercialisation and commodification of Christianity. In some Neo-Prophetic churches, there is a the almost wholesale replacement of Christ

by a pastoral leader. The five themes or motifs of the Pentecostal whole gospel that mould the pneumatological community of the born-again are Jesus as one who saves, baptises, heals, sanctifies, and who is expected to come as King to judge the world. (Kgatle, 2024a:1-10). This missing Christology is established by some individuals who broke away from either mainline churches or traditional Pentecostal churches. Fluidity in the multi-directional interpretation of each scriptural text reflects their lack of respect for the *ipsissima verba,* or the divinely inspired authority of scripture. This Latin expression denotes that the words quoted are the exact and original version taken verbatim from their originator. As an example, John the Evangelist recorded the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn. 3: 1-15) and Jesus and the woman at the well (Jn. 4:7-30), exactly as spoken and divinely inspired. The divine inspiration of these recorded words carries greater authority and is therefore considered by Christians to be without error. This claimed authenticity and authority of Scripture has a clear purpose (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In the ecclesiastical context of some of these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, the confessional belief in Christ as King and Redeemer is silenced, or words put into his mouth through prophecy, and his words in scripture are misrepresented multi-directionally through indoctrination for financial and material prosperity.

This has led to numerous and competing teachings about Christ as compared to the Christology from the Council of Nicaea, the Missionary Christology of colonial times, and Afrocentric Christologies that have been proposed and applied by theologians from the African soil. Some Neo-Prophetic teachings about Christ appear not to appreciate Afrocentric Christologies, but rather develop so many parallel teachings that undermine Christ, dare to replace Him, or compete with Him as the centre of Christianity. This parallel paradigmatic shift presents an unnecessary dichotomy between the Christology found in mainline churches and the teachings about Christ in some NPCs.

One of the special focus areas here is as to how these churches and ministries have developed either a parallel understanding of Christ to the existing core Christology paradigms, or replaced Christ as the centre of the Christian religion and faith experience (Jn.14:6). The main issue that makes Christology an important topic in Missiology is the confessional answers that Christians give to the questions that Christ asks: “Whom do people say that I am? … Whom do you say that I am?” (Mark 8: 27-

30). These questions are more primary for Christians within the context of the Christ-Event that generally covers his birth, life, ministry, suffering under the cross, death, resurrection, ascension, and his reign at the right hand of the Father. Based on this, the study argues against the doctrinal abuse of Christ in the teachings of Neo-Prophets and the abuses against the socio-historical religious trust of the vulnerable followers of these church leaders. It has become clear that some Neo-Prophetic leaders are pursuing an agenda of doing away with Christ, silencing Him, complementing Him, and competing with Him. As a result, it is not Christology, but Christodicy that is taking place among these Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries. To demonstrate the parallelism of the Neo-Prophetic Churches in their teachings about Christ, this study demonstrates the epochal paradigms of Christology from the Council of Nicaea.

There are what this study would refer to as epochal or paradigmatic answers to the questions as to who Christ is. Answers to these questions have been given by both theologians and lay Christians. The focus in this sub-section is the confessional answers given by Christians to these questions at various epochs of history. Mbiti puts it that, “Theology falls or stands on how it understands, translates and interprets Jesus Christ at a given time, place or human situation” (1971:90). The primary interest in these questions is that they were asked directly by Christ to his followers. This study has a strong focus on the Afrocentric, anthropocentric, and pragmatic confessions. This is not to say this study aims to overlook or refute the missionary Christology and Eurocentric faith confessions of Christ. Instead, based on this background, this study argues against the validity of Neo-Prophetic teachings about Christ that contradict one another and keep evaporating as each church leader develops new ones that commercialise Christianity anew for personal gain (Princewell 2019:1 and Anderson G., 2019:2).

The first paradigm of Christology emanated from the Nicene Creed that was formulated by the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD) to resolve heretical teachings of Arianism and Donatism. Emperor Constantine convoked this council to develop what would be called a Christendom and politically unify Christology, so as to ensure “ one emperor and one state religion” (Mulenga, 2017: 29). This was a mutually beneficial strategy that brought unity in the empire and peace to the church, where emphasis is placed on Christ as both divine and human (Uchenna, 2003). Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was born of Mary, is believed to have been sent forth into this world

by God the Father for our redemption and adoption as the children of the Heavenly Father (Jn. 1:1416; Gal 4.4 5 and Mk . 1:11). He is both fully human and fully divine as the Son of God (Phil.2:5-8). He is the second Person in the Holy Trinity (Mk 16:16 and Jn. 13:3). This forms the basis of the Incarnational Christology model (Potgieter and Magezi, 2016) even in African Christianity. Through evangelisation or the Great Commission (Mt.28:16-20), Christians are called to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour who ministered, died, and rose from the dead for their sake. Through his ministry and messianic death, He reconciled Christian believers to the Father (Lk 4:16-21 and Zech 4:4). He is the only Son of God (Mk 14:61-62). He was acknowledged as the Lord during his ministry (Mt.8:2 and 15:22). This scriptural doctrine became the core basis of the Christology and missiology that were part of the Christian doctrine of the Western colonialists and missionaries (Bediako,1995:6).

The second paradigm is the Missionary Christology of the 19th Century. It lacked contextuality or responsiveness, where focus was placed on the enlightenment and promotion of the epistemological (socio-economic, imperialist, and doctrinal) worldview of the West. Kalu (1979) substantiates the hermeneutical and epistemological damage that Africans suffered during this evangelisation and paternal spiritual rescue by the colonialists as follows:

> Reasons for the nineteenth-century revival of the missionary enterprise include scientific discoveries, voyages of exploration, new and aggressive mercantilist economic theories, scientific theories of racism, and competition for the plantation of colonies, as well as humanitarianism, anti-slavery movements, resettlement of formerly enslaved people, and the desire to convert souls allegedly headed for perdition (cited in Kalu, 1979:17).

This Enlightenment Christology viewed Africans as *worth being saved from their culture and traditions*. Enlightenment became the worst historic era of Western and African cultures crossing paths. According to Ezigbo (2008:15), this *Missionary Christology* of the concept of an 'enlightened and imperialist Jesus' dehumanised Africans, leading to the assertion of their inferiority on the part of Western missionaries and colonisers. While this epochal Christology led to severe damage to the existing African indigenous religions on the basis that they are satanic and anti-Christ, and therefore they cannot be transformed, the other loss brought about by Western

missionaries was the fact that they failed to present Christ as the answer to African ontological/religious questions, or concrete daily life experience. Taylor sums this up appropriately herein:

> Christ was presented as the answer to the questions a white man would ask, the solution to the needs that Western man would feel, the Saviour of the world of the European worldview, the object of adoration and prayer of historic Christendom. However, if Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like? If he came into the world of African cosmology to redeem Man as Africans understand him, would he be recognisable to the rest of the Church Universal? (1963:16).

Missionary Christology led to what this study refers to as 'the second paradigm', through African Christologies developed by various African theologians like Kalu (2005), Magezi and Banda (2017), Mbefo (1996), Mbiti (1971), Nyende (2005), Udoh (1988), and Ukpong (1992). The main aim of these theologians was to deconstruct the Europeanised Christian faith experience of Africans that had led to what Ezigbo (2008 and 2010) refers to as 'reconstructive Christologies', one of which is his own concept of 'revealer Christology'. All these theologians did not declare missionary Christology obsolete. Instead, they reconstructed a variety of more responsive indigenous Christologies "that arise from the 'new shifts' and 'new historical' conditions in the context of life of a given people" (Ezigbo, 2008:4). Igba (2013) has done an extensive study on African ancestor Christology, mainly based on Hebrews 1:1-4. The significance and relevance of how Jesus is presented in the book of Hebrews reveal its common factors with those of the African societies that share an ancestral function, a deep tradition of sacrifice, and priestly mediation. Out of this arises a shared identity between the African religious beliefs and the contextualisation of Christ as the answer to the daily realities and cultural traditions of the Hebrew community, to which this book was addressed.

Nyamiti adopted a strategy of inculturating Christology from an African perspective and worldview/cultural background as the First Christians did (Nyamiti 1984). Pobee (1979 and 1992) concurs with Nyamiti, but raises the issue that Africa has diverse oral and ritual traditions that have been passed down through the generations throughout the Continent. As a result of this diversity, he has proposed localised Ancestor

Christologies for each to determine appropriate meaning within a set of beliefs, moral practices, and rituals of each version of African Traditional Religion. For Wanamaker, this diversity is naturally part of how Christ and the Christologies emerged from oral traditions into various extant versions, as shown in the New Testament (1997). He observes in this regard that “As late as the second century CE, some groups of Christians treated the oral traditions regarding Jesus as more authoritative than the written accounts of his sayings and deeds embodied in canonical Gospels” (Wanamaker 1997: 292). For Bediako (1982, 1983, and 1998), Christ is seen as primarily the mediating ancestor between God the Father and humanity based on John 14:6 and 1 Timothy. 2:5.

Mokhoathi introduces the argument that ancestor Christology, as one of the forms of contextual Christology, has given Christ titles like ‘Ancestor Par Excellence’ and ‘Proto-Ancestor’, while at once remaining a paradigm that “does not touch base with the practical experiences of Bantu Christians. It rather appears to justify the persistent veneration of ancestors in the name of Christ” (2018:1). Potgieter and Magezi (2016) have also argued against Bediako’s ancestral incarnational Christological model as not being a theological/biblical model that best describes Christ as God incarnate, nor fully contextualises the Christ-Event within the African indigenous cultures and traditions. It therefore fails to *foreignise* Christ; instead, it promotes syncretism among African Christians.

Mbefo also presents one of the contextual Christologies of Christ as the definitive fulfiller and unifier of the religious or spiritual gap in their traditional indigenous practices. He argues: “By adopting these elements of traditional heritage through affirmation and denial, we carry forward into Christianity those authentic interpretations of God who already revealed himself to our ancestors before Christianity came as fulfilment.” (1996:10). This reconstructive Christological model reaffirms that specific fragments within every culture are divinely inspired, and compatible with Christianity. This bottom-up paradigm is favourable to the indigenisation of Christianity in Africa, and shares a common base with Mathew 5:17. This paradigm of Christology de-stigmatises African cultures where the Christ-Event can thus be inscribed into them (Ibid:2). For instance, the African monotheistic concept of God and its grassroots variation points to Africa as already having an established connection with God long before colonisation.

Another paradigm of interest to this study is one that Ezigbo (2008) refers to as Culture-Oriented Christology. In this extensive study, which contextualises the significant role of Christ as the centre of the Christian religion and primary solution to humanity's daily problems, he approaches this from a liberative angle. He speaks of culture-oriented and solution-oriented Christologies from the grassroots and theological discourses that rehabilitate certain beneficial elements of African cultures in appropriating the Christ-Event. This paradigm locates Christ as both the *questioner* who confrontationally deconstructs the Western ideological or colonial theology and catechesis, and a '*revealer'* of the divinity and humanity. Ezigbo argues that "Thus, he mediates and interprets divinity and humanity for enacting and sustaining a relationship between God and human beings" (2008: iii). This is the circumference within which he proposes that African Christians locate a truly African Christological claim among all others in conflict about the Christ-Event, including Western imperialist claims on Christ. Christ is the Revealer of God's redemptive plan and its accomplishment among us. This revealer Christology has powerful link with the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 and Luke 2:14, in which God reveals the hidden and unveils/uncovers the long obscure view of who He is in the indivisible divine; as well as the human nature of Christ (John1:14). In this way, the image of God in every human being in the universe is affirmed as godly (Ps.8:4-8). This revealer Christology is influenced by his constructive and incarnational theology, which emerges from the scholarly work of Mbefo (1996), and grassroots or lay Christologies prevalent in Nigeria. This presentation of Christ as both a *questioner* and a *solution* to the daily questions (fears of evil spirits, health, and prosperity) is highlighted in the following argument. Ezigbo argues:

> The Revealer Christology model situates Jesus within the core of African indigenous religious experience… (It) presents Jesus simultaneously as 'questioner' and 'solution' to the experiences and religious quest of Africans (Ezigbo,2008:99).

Ezigbo continues to argue that: "The Christ-Event provides a unique opportunity for human beings to experience God's remoulding, critiquing, gracious love, forgiveness, acceptance, and blessings, but it is only God that can convey God's salvation to people." (ibid.). Christ not only reveals God within the confines of Christian faith, but even beyond it (Acts 8:26-40 and Acts 17). His presence and the revelation of *God's*

self-extend far beyond what is written or contained in the Bible (John 20:30-31 and 21:25). This theophanic presence and revelation supersede all those of the angels and prophets (Heb. 1.1 4).

The other leading Systematic theologian, Udoh from Nigeria, has dedicated a book to the *Guest Christology* (1988). This reconstructive and rehabilitative Christology carries better prospects in putting an end to what Udoh (1988) calls 'religious schizophrenia' that has produced African Christians who are behaviourally loyal to African Traditional Religions on weekdays and religiously loyal to Christianity on weekends. He starts by highlighting Christ as an imposed tyrant, unfriendly and impatient foreigner, who is introduced to Africans by colonialists who marginalised them and treated their cultures as primitive and barbaric (Udoh, 1988:74-75). As a result, Christ was rejected, doubted, and excluded as not worth of any respect (Udoh, 1988: 225). This post-colonial era Christology affirms the African indigenous cultures and moral values such as ubuntu. From this grassroots perspective, one could say that this cultural and liberative Christology reveals Christ as transcending the ontological confines of European imperialism, and the epistemology of the neo-liberalist political agenda. Udoh asserts that the Christ presented by the Christian Missionaries proved t be distant from those that Nigerians read about in the Bible (Udoh,1988:212).

The only relational trajectory that could make Christ accepted and move from the status of a guest to a kin and Lord among the Nigerians was for Him to undergo a family and community ceremony of a welcomed guest, where "Once a guest and host have voluntarily initiated themselves into this new role, the distance between them begins to shorten, the number of laws governing them decreases, and the choices before them increase."(Udoh,1988:212). There exists in effect a new sense of solidarity, one ethical principle, and shared destiny. This communalism and hospitality of Africans is the only viable option to making Christ accepted according to the terms of the accepting host (De Vries, 2017). In the context of Guest Christology, Christ cannot pick and choose what the host culture dictates. According to this perspective, compliance and loyalty of Christ are key to being accepted among Africans. This is a vision of a domesticated Christ within an African culture, whose authority cannot supersede nor be seen as of equal status to traditional leaders. Instead, Christ remains an honoured guest.

Despite all the above-mentioned in-depth studies by various African scholars, particularly systematic theologians, some Neo-Prophetic church leaders have chosen to do away with Christ, compete with Him, try to replace Him, or complement/substitute Him as an *insufficient* answer and solution to the daily needs for security, prosperity, and health and well-being among Africans. This has led to a virtually non-existent level of Christology among particular Neo-Prophetic Churches in South Africa. Mugambi and Magesa place a great deal of emphasis on the centrality of Christ as a basis for any Christology and Christian Theology.

> Christology is, in the final analysis, the most basic and central issue of Christian theology and missiology… Without Jesus Christ as the cornerstone and final aim, nothing in Christology and Christian faith experience counts; nothing in theological thought is of any significance from the Christian point of view (1 John 4:1-4). To be precise, the *Mission of God* is not Christian at all when it does not offer Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the answer to the human quest (Mugambi and Magesa 1998:x).

The evident differentiation and pluralisation of Neo-Prophetic churches' teachings on Christ have become so secularised, commercialised, and commodified that they have a negative influence on Afrocentric and pragmatic value systems and religious beliefs. There is a conscientious and resolute agenda of particular Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to eliminate the ‘Christ factor’ in Christianity. They drive an ideological agenda to have African Christianity without Christ at the centre. The experience of Shorter at a conference attended by academic scholars, students, and secular humanist writers on Christianity and African Culture held in Nairobi, revealed to him a shift driven by some African Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to develop “a ‘user-friendly Gospel’ and a Jesus they can believe in with the supernatural edited out… this (is) a Christianity without any Christ at all…” (1994:1-2) The agenda of commercialising and commodifying the Christian faith experience within some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries' *kerygma* in Africa has a feature of making Christ a European foreigner in African Christianity. This foreignness or unrelatedness of Christ in terms of His identity in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries has profound and negative ontological implications in the missiological understanding of soteriology. It is as if Christ has been given no room at the proverbial inn (Lk 2:7), where not welcomed among African Christians (Magezi and Magezi, 2016).

One way in which some Neo-Prophetic pastors have demonstrated the competitive elimination of Christ is through the practice of what Kgatle (2019:4) refers to as 'forensic prophecy'. Like the practice of divination in African traditional religions, some Neo-Prophets offer people consultation sessions at which they claim to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to foretell the future of their congregants and reveal personal details of a person or a relative of the consulting person. These details may include a person's name, physical address, or health condition without the prophet having any prior information about what he/she will reveal. The discernment and ability to consult people to distinguish between true and false prophecy becomes too blurred. Biri contends that this syncretism has contributed to the transplanting of divination as a practice from African Traditional Religions into some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. He notes in this regard that: "(T)he 'voice' of African spiritualities that has been 'silenced' by Pentecostals but that continues to whisper and guide their perception and quest for the power of healing and miracles" (2012:37). In this practice, Christ as the Saviour competes with Simonism and syncretic practices. This syncretic practice of Simonism is done in the name of leading African believers to ensure good health, protection against the forces of darkness, and financial prosperity (Meyer 1995: 236-255).

In line with this, Banda expresses his despair at how some of these forensic prophecies, healing, and deliverance miracles were performed in public, humiliating the congregants in question (2018:57-59). This casts these acts as abuses of the trust and respect that people have in these African Neo-Prophets , and exposes their agenda to commercialise and commodify the Christian faith experience by taking advantage of the spiritual insecurities of congregants. They are promoting their agenda by promising a lived African Christian faith experience of "one foot in Christ and another in their African Traditional Religions" (Banda,2018:57).

Out of this emerges a kind of deification of the persona of the church leader as the greatest healer against all human misery, such as unemployment, immense suffering from evil spirits, and infertility. This teaching has promoted the distorted fear such that the believers ought to give offerings to these churches to ensure their basic survival (Jenkins 2006). Instead of promoting the Christocentric Mission of God, confident Neo-Prophetic leaders perpetuate fear as a strategy to ensure total reliance of their congregants on the religious 'products' that are 'on sale' as a sure protection of their

marriages, health, and financial prosperity (promotions at work and thriving businesses). Such teachings by some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries appear as if to make Him subservient to the dictates of the church leader. This impoverishes the Christian faith experience of believers, especially when what has been declared as a prophecy over their lives does not ultimately transpire. Anderson gives the example of a counselling session of a member of the church who was in dire need of money and was in serious debt. They were given lottery numbers, and their hands were anointed with oil. This gave them sure hope that all their problems were solved. However, in fact, nothing happened (2019:4). In a context where attainment of salvation, relief from infertility, and escape from torment by malevolent spirits can be achieved through buying anointed items with no guarantee, people begin to lose faith in Christ as well. Given this reality, such a Christian brand is bringing radical change to how Christian faith is lived. The reality is that "religion of salvation (*has become*) a human-centred programme for the attainment of health, wealth and success" (Kgatle, 2017:1), where "Poverty within this paradigm is defined as sin, laziness and lack of faith. Human suffering is also perceived as a lack of Godly favour" (Kgatle, 2019:1). In this way, the Theology of the Cross is scuppered.

A collaboration of both Missiologists and Systematic theologians (Magezi and Magezi, 2016; Igba, 2013; Ezigbo, 2008; Oborji, 2008; Bediako, 1994) has led to the conceptualisation of new African Christological models that make Christ both relevant and the answer to real-life questions of Africans. Oborji speaks of Christ as "the liberator, the ancestor, the healer, the African king and African chief" (2008:18). These Christological models were favourably followed and elaborated upon by other African theologians (Magezi and Magezi, 2017; Kabasele, 1991). These models were never favoured, nor did they have any influence on the Christian faith experience and teachings of Neo-Prophets . Instead, new titles were developed to replace the role of Christ and to deify themselves. This nullifies the centrality of Christ, Christianity as a religion, and the Mission of God as a whole. Based on this, this study argues that commercialisation and the commodification of the Christian faith experience continue to scour the tenets of Christianity as a religion.

2.5.7 Deification of the Persona of the Church leaders

The title, 'Man of God', is used by some Neo-Prophetic leaders as a manner of 'new age' term that equates them to those prophets in the Old Testament. They claim this

title and the right because they believe God has called them to proclaim His will with authority (Gunda and Machingura 2013: 15-27). This title is ascribed to separate church leaders who have proven through their leadership as religious functionaries that they have a special calling to serve as the representatives of God. These Neo-Prophets give a sense that they are biblically a cut above the rest in their church ministry. Most of them are referred to as prophets in their Neo-Prophetic churches. Their family lifestyles are evidence of extravagance, where they drive expensive cars, live in mansions, and wear designer label clothes. Some may have healing powers and work miracles. Gunda and Machingura explain the biblical references that support the exclusive use of this title by leaders of Neo-Prophetic churches or mega-churches. They observe that this title is predominantly found in the Old Testament and is only found once in the New Testament, noting that "The phrase 'man of God' occurs eighty times in the Christian Bible. Of the eighty times that this phrase is used, only once is it used in the New Testament, precisely in 1 Tim 6:9-10" (Gunda and Machingura, 2013:17).

The main characteristics of the Man of God or '*Übermensch'* depict him as above the rest of men (Glover 2006:452). Firstly, he can stand before the Lord and be unharmed. (Chuma, 2012). Secondly, the Man of God understands and mediates the divine power to impart blessings on the People of God (Glover 2006:449, 462). Examples of such Men of God in the context of Zimbabwe are Johanne Marange of the African Apostolic Church (Gunda 2012:335-336), and Emmanuel Makandiwa of the United Family International Church (Gunda 2013: 16). Gunda relates stories that were published in Zimbabwean newspapers like the Daily *News, The Sunday Mail, The Herald, The Newsday and the Standard* in 2012 and 2013, where these Men of God were reported to be responsible for miracles beyond the ordinary. Makandiwa is quoted as delivering a message on gold that will fall like rain from the sky:

> The Lord told me, "Tell Zimbabweans to change their focus. Everyone is saying diamonds, diamonds, but I see another precious mineral for Zimbabwe… gold will be picked up from the ground… The Lord told me, 'This is for my people' (The Herald, 03 January 2013).

Gunda reports that miracle babies were apparently conceived and born in three days at the command of Makandiwa. Some congregants shared testimonies of finding

miracle money in their bank accounts or pockets. He was reported to claim that he miraculously commanded fat to burn, and some congregants who lost weight immediately were reported in the local press (Gunda 2013: 16).

Thirdly, the status of the Man of God is equivalent to being a messenger of God with exclusive access to God, where Gunda and Machingura argue that “This is similarly important that the blessings given by Moses were as good as blessings given by God because the man of God stands for God, his actions are God’s actions” (2013:20). Fourth, the effects of his presence as the man of God share the same authority with God, as seen in 1 Kgs 17:14-24. Fifth, the presence and power of the Man of God mark the presence and power of God among his people. He has power as the seer and visionary who can even intercede for his people (1 Kgs 13). Besides this manner of infallibility, these Neo-Prophets claim so much divine power as to be able to offer an audience in ‘one-on-one’ sessions (Rall, 2020), where those willing to pay for the privilege will be able to ‘tell what you want and get it’. Coleman has monikered this ‘Positive Confession’ (2000:29 and 49). This includes miracle money, miracle babies, and miracle slimming. The church leader would also claim to be the sole revealer and translator of the voice of God. As such, they are feared and cannot be questioned.

This is done even against the second commandment as seen in the false claims and use of the name of the Lord: “You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain” (Ex 20:7 and Deut. 5:11). They falsely declare: “The Lord told me this morning…” He is, therefore, the mouthpiece of God. With these qualities and power (2 Kgs 7), he can declare a transformation over a person’s life from poverty to plenty in a single day. Like Elijah, these Prophets are continuing the institution of prophecy as God’s representatives among us. Coleman argues, “All things that God can do can be done by the ‘man of God’; hence the idea that where the man of God is, God cannot be far away” (2000:22). Some Neo-Prophetic pastors could even declare who shall go to heaven. Odunsi recounts that “His highly venerated father, Pastor Adeboye himself, took the defence of tithing a notch higher by threatening defaulters with loss of eternal bliss in heaven. He was quoted as saying, ‘Make it clear to them… Anyone who is not paying his tithe is not going to heaven, full stop.” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpCgpR6dETY). Anderson provides another example of the divinely motivated Prophet Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom, who, in a dream, saw a bottle of anointing oil amidst flaming fire, and was instructed by God to

make the use of anointing oil central to his ministry (2019). He added that he was instructed to give the oil to any congregant or person who gave money to support his ministry. It is for that reason that he gives the oil to people who contribute their financial resources to the growth of the church. The Prophet maintained that it is erroneous for anyone to refer to the practice as the selling and buying of the commercialisation of the Christian faith experience. For him, it remains an offertory or sacrifice, in support of God's work (Anderson 2019:182).

The deified persona of most Neo-Prophetic leaders was portrayed to affect and effect change in all spheres of life. This was also extended into the political sphere. Bishop Francis Wale Oke, Presiding Bishop of Sword of the Holy Spirit and national President of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, was quoted as claiming to be infallible by *Vanguard*, one of the Nigerian newspapers. In his address during the ordination of 200 pastors, deacons, elders, and ministers, he is quoted as saying: “God will punish those behind Nigeria’s challenges (and that) … such people will face the wrath of God in unimaginable dimensions” (Vanguard News Nigeria, 2021). In this instance, his infallibility as a mediator of God’s fresh and contextual message communicates that whatever he says is claimed to be from his private conversation with God the Father or the Holy Spirit.

In line with this, the explosive rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries began to demonstrate a resolute link with politics and politicians under the leadership of those bearing the title ‘man of God’. The religio-political changes that took place in the early 1990s were evident and promoted when some Neo-Prophetic congregants, such as President Chiluba, took political office (Phiri, 2003: 401-28; Kalu, 2006: 145). The public declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation by President Chiluba in 1991 has led to a transition of many Neo-Prophetic pastors from being “fools for Christ to fools for politicians” (Kaunda, 2017:1). This has profound implications and direct impact on missiology, practical theology, and systematic theology. As a result, many human rights abuses, including greed, corruption, and social injustice, have been overlooked (Jenkins, 2011:188). This is the main reason why this study places focus on ‘man of God’ and interrogates their emphasis on miraculous economic success rather than Christian moral principles (Van der Ven 1993:109).

The dawn of the liberal democratic state of South Africa in 1994 has also given impetus to Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. South Africa also has problems arising from the reality of most Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries led by 'Man/Woman of God' that were active in the political sphere and political parties. There is transparent collaboration between Neo-Prophets who claim to be messengers of God and the politicians of the ruling party (Micah chapters 2 to 5'; Strydom, 2000:103-118). Out of this, the theme of false prophecy and the silence of certain Neo-Prophets against the deterioration of socio-political life is evident. At the same time, the country suffers a high unemployment rate, gender-based violence, racial discrimination, and the world's measurably worst instance of unequal distribution of wealth (Stein, 1985:87). As in Zambia, some Neo-Prophets have been seduced to sacrifice their authentic prophetic voice in exchange for favours from politicians (Nthla, 1996:212). Whatever these prophets and 'Men of God' declare, they expect to be believed and undertaken according to their dictates (Masenya and Masenya 2018:636).

Biri brings a new perspective on the power of the presence of the 'man of God' among the Shona, with special reference to churches led by Ezekiel Guti (Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa) and Emmanuel Makandiwa (United Families International). In what he refers to as the 'Dominion Theology' and 'crossless Christianity' that denounces poverty, sickness, failure, and anything with a negative impact on the well-being of believers, he notes the importance of the physical presence of a portrait of these leaders in the homes of their followers in offering them continued protection against evil spirits. In keeping with this tenet, in ZAOGA, Guti's portrait is found in every church, in the manner that in many countries, a sitting President's portrait may be found in both private homes and government institutions. This serves to acknowledge the authority of the leadership. In ZAOGA, Guti alone is recognised as the founder and president of the movement, where the presence of his portrait in every ZAOGA church symbolically reinforces this claim. The use of a leader's portrait in this manner is undeniably autocratic. However, there is a belief and several claims that the portrait has healing powers. Several people claim to have used the portrait to cast away demons and to heal the sick. (2012:41).

Mashau and Kgatle express their disappointment at this lack of ubuntu on the part of such church leaders, where they argue that "The prophets of this movement put

emphasis on individual success but are silent about or have not developed a systematic theological analysis of economic injustice and social marginalisation that accompanies prosperity gospel" (2019:1). This capitalist and liberal perspective disadvantages the poor and vulnerable congregants, who are easily misled. Newell (2007) writes as an anthropologist studying Côte d'Ivoire Neo-Prophetic churches, observing that they purport to combat witchcraft practices using what she refers to as an 'alternative form' of witchcraft or otherworldly avarice in their pursuit of power, financial success, and good health. She argues that both African traditional religion using witchcraft and Neo-Prophetic churches using the Holy Spirit are strategically running in parallel to promote neo-liberal individualist ideologies of modernity. Some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries are moralising individualistic economic transformation through the gospel of prosperity as an indication of the favour of God upon the church member at the cost of breaking ties with family (Meyer, 2004, and Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). These two are driven by the same local cosmologies of moral economy and ambivalence of success, and both lead to poor moral ethics (greed, corruption, and sorcery) among Ivoirians. She even claims that certain sorcerers felt safely accommodated by and enjoyed validation within some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (Newell, 2007).

This strategic infallibility has led to the silencing of the congregants, compelling them to follow the doctrine or dictates of the church leader. This could also be another way that a deified church leader reinforces the dependency of congregants on their spiritual infrastructure and teachings. When this has become an established church culture, he/she begins to speak both *at* and *for* the congregants. Spivak sheds some light on this domination from a critical and transformative perspective. The silencing or loss of the voice of the 'sheep and lambs', as perpetrated by the 'shepherd' or church leader, is problematic, whether due to economic marginalisation or the exertion of power by a person in a position of authority. In the context of this study, the continued vulnerability of the congregants renders them unable to participate in various ministries, such as the five-fold ministry (1988). In light of Ephesians 4:11-12, the diversity of gifts of ministry within the Church as a Body of Christ needs to be fully expressed to serve the common good of all. In light of this, it may be asked whether deification of an individual persona (often manifest in a flamboyant lifestyle) indeed aligns with the missional church of Christ and the Great Commission. This lack of participation also stands in

contrast to the reality of the deified ministry of one pastoral leader dominating and suppressing other gifts within a church. The moral virtue of humility is opposed to greed for money in the practice of ordained ministry within a church, which serves to maintain a flamboyant lifestyle (1 Peter 5:2-4). In some of these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries there is a strong teaching that the church leader is 'man/woman of God' who gathers, govern, guards, guides the spiritual direction and grounds or strengthen the sheepfold under his/her charge (Is.53:1). In accordance with the fundamentalist interpretation of Isaiah 52:7, this pastoral leader of a Neo-Prophetic church or ministry is to be viewed as saintly such that he/she deserves respect as the bearer of the Word of God. This causes these leaders to express their entitlement to the luxuries of life, like private jets. In Spivak's terms, these Church leaders claim to be the voice of the voiceless, all the while muting their congregants (1988:69). This shows their perception that their position lies beyond the reproach of God or man (such as may be manifest in governmental authority). From a missiological perspective, these elements (ideological interests and prosperity) make it difficult for the Global South to define and address ethical malpractices accompanying the rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

2.5.8 The Centrality of Pneumatology and the Cross of Christ

The noticeable failure of Neo-Prophetic churches to demonstrate a reimagined missional pastoral responsibility of caring for and empowering the (spiritually and materially) poor congregants proves to be a worrying factor (Dorr, 1983). One of the greatest commandments and core Christian ethical calls is loving one's neighbour in a Christocentric manner (Jn. 13:34), where not harming constitutes the fulfilment of God's holy law. This forms a healthy atmosphere within which Christian virtues are practically expressed through the way in which one's life is lived. Cardinal virtues like temperance, prudence, justice and courage (Wis.8:7) constitute a good base for both morality and holiness (Tit.2:12). Conradie challenges particular Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to observe Spirit baptism as not culminating in individualist conversion and sanctification of speaking in tongues but instead, one that gets full expression in the love of neighbour through pastoral care and community empowerment initiatives. Spirit baptism is therefore to be seen as a nexus between one's conversion, social transformation and sanctification (Conradie, 2015:69). The theme of Christians being 'salt of the earth and light' (Mt.5:13-16) to the world is, as

declared in Mathew 28:19-20, what Christ expects of the disciples baptised in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Conradie sees this as a convincing Bible text for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The centrality of pneumatology in the Spirit baptism ought to serve as a basis for some Neo-Prophets to stop dividing the Church through these exponentially mushrooming non-denominational churches, such that they begin to see a need for ecumenical dialogue and mutual enrichment “to bring comprehensive salvation to the whole world. Through Spirit baptism, the church is commissioned to usher in the reign of God in the power to make all things new and is allowed to participate in the final sanctification of creation” (Conradie, 2015:70).

Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries dismiss the pain, suffering, and the theology of the messianic cross of Christ to the point of playing down its symbolic presence. There is no evidence of critical themes, such as the passion and death of Christ as a redemptive fulfilment of the will of God and the scriptures (1Cor.15:3 and Acts 3:18-20). This demonstrates that Neo-Prophets favour a Christ without a cross. The humility of Christ, in becoming the Lamb of God who took away the sins of humanity (universally and beyond the limitations of time and space), is also not evident (Mt.20:28) in their ecclesiology. However, it is necessary to assert that the role of Christ in terms of His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection as the Son of God serves as the only basis for any Christology. This kind of Christology makes Christ irreplaceable, neither complemented nor silenced as the Son of God, True God and True Man (Mt.27:54; Nicene Creed).

Neo-Prophets cannot accommodate the uniting power of the cross of Christ. It is a valid symbol of submitting to the will of the Father (Lk 4:16-30) and the love expressed through serving of neighbour (Mk 10:45). These two elements are completely sidelined in the prosperity gospel teachings of Neo-Prophetism. Kärkkäinen brings an interesting perspective to this topic by identifying that the weakness of these churches in placing emphasis on the individual leads to disregard for the nature of the church as categorically a fellowship of persons. The dimensional nature of ‘communion ecclesiology’ in any Christian church necessitates promoting and nurturing the mutual spiritual and holistic personal development of each member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), including the poor. At the heart of this ecclesiological fellowship of believers gathering from different strata of society, the fellowship cannot continue to be solely

between the individual and the Spirit. However, instead, the Spirit unifies them into one fellowship of Believers (2 Cor.13:14). Kärkkäinen also emphasises the central point of worship experience as one by which the gathered believers experience the presence of God or 'meet with Christ the Lord' or the Holy Spirit in the communion of saints, rather than embarking upon an individualistic experience of speaking in tongues and ritual cultic healings. Communion with God and other fellow believers is argued to be equally important. Kärkkäinen is critical of the greater emphasis of Pentecostal systematic theologians like Frank D. Macchia, Simon Chan, and Amos Yong in attempting to tackle communion ecclesiology, locate Christ as the Centre of the Christian faith, moral integrity, call to holiness or social transformation, and the will of God (Kärkkäinen, 2007).

The cross also emphasises self-denial and the sacrificial love that is so primary to the call of Christ into discipleship (Mk 8:34, Phil. 2:8-11, and Heb. 12:2). The cross of Christ offers humanity the hope of eternal life (Jn. 10:27-28). The absence of the meaning of the cross of Christ in the Neo- Prophetic churches therefore defeats the theological validity and credibility of being 'born again', arguing that it excludes the proclamation and exemplary living of the crucified Christ as symbolic of the love of God in a real-life context (1 Cor 1:18). The very core of the redemptive call to being Christians is evident of Christians participating in the sufferings of Christ (Gal.2:19-21). Their life of faith, hope, and love in the world ought to demonstrate their courage to endure suffering as a form of 'self-giving' in faithful obedience to God (Rom 8:35-39). The cross of Christ is the source of the divine power of God in them, transforming them from suffering and persecution into being conquerors in every spiritual warfare that they encounter. In their belief, the cross changes the impossible into the possible. Ecclesiastically and ecumenically, all Christians are one Body of Christ, united and made holy by one Spirit. In their diverse life contexts, they are called to "one Lord, one faith, (one hope), one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and all" (Eph 4:4-10). Consequently, the cross of Christ gives meaning to those who believe in Jesus, the Son of God. For Neo-Prophetic to promote a crossless Christian faith experience can only be indicative of theological misinformation or denial.

The absence of this symbolic power of the cross of Christ among diverse Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries has tarnished the image of the church as intrinsically an institution of *moral formation par excellence* through its various ministries and community engagement (Best and Robra,1997:24). As a result of this identified absence, systematic theologians such as Koopman (2000), Richardson (1986) and Vosloo (1994) have argued for the need for the integration of Christian ethics, each basing his/her work on the body of work by Hauerwas. The primary purpose of referencing these scholars here is to highlight individualism, consumerism, moral relativism, and autonomy as elements that shape the understanding of the church among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. In contrast, Hauerwas calls for the recovery of the church as a school for the virtues of the early Church, such as communality, compassion, and unconditional love for the neighbour. This church integrates moral and spiritual formation of the *people of the Way,* and adopts mutual accountability among Christian believers (Bafinamene, 2017).

2.5.9 Syncretic practices among Neo-Prophetic pastoral leaders

In this sub-section of the literature review, focus is placed on the evident inter-relationship between African Traditional Religion and Christian Religion. Three areas of focus shape this sub-section. It may be reasonably argued that African Traditional Religion existed before Christianity in Africa, and continues to exist as a religion. It continues to shape and give meaning to Africans to date. John Thornton refers to this as Afro-Christian open syncretism (2013:53-77). In his study of the historical growth of Christianity from an anthropological perspective, he concluded that “the basic cosmology of Kongo dominated the syncretism, thus making it some ways more Kongo and less Christian” (2013:54). Mokhoathi convincingly argues in the way he defines African traditional religion that it forms the base for various African cultural ideologies and practices in the daily lives of Africans. According to him, African Traditional Religion is “a personalised experience from which individuals build their relations with whatever they consider to be divine” (Mokhoathi, 2016:1). It is a platform or atmosphere in which broken relationships between the divine and humanity are re-established and nurtured through some form of worship. The sacred Supreme Being converges with the profane humanity to bring about harmony and order in creation/nature (Mndende, 2009:112-113). Mokhoathi, therefore, defines African traditional religion as composed of three key aspects, namely: it is a divine institution

of a belief in the Supreme Being or Creator that supersedes culture; it has a robust base on the belief and intermediary role played by ancestors; and it emphasises obedience to the laws of the Supreme Being to regulate world order and communal life.

African Traditional Religion and Christian Religion have encountered each other in Africa within the Post-colonial epoch. Thorton speaks of two syncretism approaches applied by Christian missionaries to win over African souls to Christ. Firstly, there is a *closed and rejecting approach* that insists on the total replacement of an extant religion with a new one. An apparent abandonment of a previous religion, its value system, and fundamental cosmology is non-negotiable. Secondly, there is an open and embracing approach that harmonises the changeable elements of converging religions for sustainability. This is close to inculturation (Thorton,2013:55). This same transition of harmonising changeable elements can be found to repeat itself as the version of Christianity in the transition of some African independent churches into Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

This convergence, embracing syncretism and the harmonising process of African Traditional Religion with Christianity, can be seen to be the case also within the practices of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Fromont refers to this syncretic convergence as “a space of correlation” (2011:111). As a consequence, we have a complete fusion of two religions forming an organic totality in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a brand of Christianity of the 21st Century (Heuser, 2016: 1-9).

This syncretic fusion of Christianity and African traditional religion is a point of interest in this study due to the acculturated ritualistic practices found in some Neo-Prophetic churches. Baloyi raised the fact that the “evangelical role of witchcraft in some Pentecostal movements” is used to lure the vulnerable and fearful into their churches as a pastoral concern from his perspective as an African Systematic theologian (2018:56-71). The exponential rise of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries leads to vulnerability and fear as the central points of focus for ministries like healing and miracles, and has a strong link with prophetic claims forwarded by Neo-Prophetic pastors to be able to free Africans from witchcraft, poverty, and ill-health (Merz 2008:202; Newell 2007:1). Kgatle, as a Missiologist, resents the instilling of fear of

witchcraft and its use to prey on vulnerable congregants for personal and financial gain (2020c:1-12). As a result, some of these Neo-Prophetic pastors have been openly challenged for this abuse (Mthombeni, 2018). Syncretism has become the basis for the justification of Simonism or selling of anointed objects as a protection from malevolent spirits and witchcraft in order to gain financial prosperity and good health (Baloyi 2018:63; Dube, 2020:42).

From a social anthropological perspective, this convergence has created a grey area or a hybrid kind of religious system between two independent religions (Sanou,2017:33-44; Ramantswana, 2019:8). These two religions have converged in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to address common fears and answers to deep spiritual concerns. During this process, the Christian gospel has ultimately been obscured and has lost its core identity and the reductionist understanding of this world religion into a manner of “all-is-fine Christianity” (Baloyi,2018:64). Within this context, the syncretic branding of the fear of witchcraft has distorted deliverance into a commercialised and commodified concept (Tedam, 2014: 1403-1414). This has led to some Neo-Prophetic brands of Christianity being responsible for the defamation of individual characters and destruction of unity in families, communities, and churches (Sanou, 2017:33-44). The most extreme example of this is when Nana Kwaku Bonsam, a famous traditional and fetish priest in Ghana, stormed into a church with a camera close by to expose a Neo-Prophet for soliciting the help of his deities to increase the number of congregants by keeping an idol on the church altar (Facebook, 2013). In this way, syncretism seems in an extreme manner to lead to a compromising of the Christian gospel message (Baloyi 2018:62).

It can therefore be argued that the fundamentalist hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture and the commercialisation of anointed objects within some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries has damaged and even destroyed the core message of the Christian message of Christ as being “the way, the truth and life” (John 14:6). Given this immense damage to the Christian faith experience, Kgatle and other academic scholars call for a collective pastoral response or theological/biblical teaching of the concept of prophecy as aimed at spiritual discernment, edifying, uniting and affirming the church, communities and the world (Kgatle 2020b:7-10; Banda and Masenengwe, 2018:1-10; Baloyi, 2014:1-9). From a psycho-cultural and socio-political perspective, Njoku calls for the rehabilitation of teaching and corrective measures against the

damage caused by the syncretistic practices of some Neo-Prophetic Pastors. (Njoku, 2013).

As a corrective measure, Scripture ought in principle not to be used to promote the gospel of prosperity and the deification of the persona of the church leader. Secondly, contextualisation of the Christian gospel ought in all aspects to both redeem and enhance the African culture. Thirdly, inculturation ought to be carried out by church leadership as guided by the Holy Spirit, rather than serve to promote the personal agenda of a flamboyant lifestyle. Fourth, the Gospel of Christ needs to be used to encourage and promote personal growth in grace. This needs to be demonstrated by the pastoral care and guidance of an altruistic church leader. Fifth, a profound sense of communality and hospitality, according to the adage ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ (central to ubuntu philosophy) of the people of God, is central to improving the quality of life (Matthew 25:31-46).

Besides the contextualisation and inculturation that have taken place between these two independent religions in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, certain unusual occult practices have also been noted. Kgatle notes that these unusual occult practices are linked to the commercialisation of the Christian religion in South Africa, pointing to serious abuses being practised that have made it necessary for the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) Rights Commission to intervene. He documents the most outlandish occult practices that have taken place during worship services, theorising them in theological, psychological, and socio-economic terms, extending the claim that some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries are changing Christianity and salvation into a “human-centred programme” (2017:3).

Another occult and unusual practice was reported in a newspaper (KZN) about Bheki Shandu, who is both a Bishop of a Neo-Prophetic church and a traditional healer. He was recorded dancing naked among funeral mourners beside a grave. He is reported to have been performing an unusual occult ritual. In his words, this pastor claims:

> That is how I do my job as a (traditional) healer. Every time I perform this ritual, I don’t wear anything, and there is nothing wrong with that, as this is part of my profession and calling. (Traditional healer's naked grave dancing condemned at Mandeni , 2017).

It ought not to fall outside of frame that for the performance of this occult ritual, he is paid a substantial amount.

In 2014, The Citizen newspaper reported on the arrest of a pastor after body parts of a child were found in his church for the purpose of gaining more congregants and financial prosperity (citizen.co.za news, 2014). This ritual is known to have a link with the pastor gaining more congregants and having total control over them. These unusual occult practices have emerged in South Africa through some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, and they are condemned as satanic propitiating of the spiritual powers and criminal acts (McIntosh,2019).

2.5.10 The commercialisation and commodification of the Gospel: an overview

For purposes of this study, it is important to define commercialisation as the process by which a new product or service is introduced into a general market for material and financial gain. The commercialised anointed objects, which are offered as protection from malevolent spirits, financial breakthroughs, and good health, have become a defining feature of particular Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries. The commodification of salvation as a transactional business between God and congregants has replaced salvation as a spiritual Christian faith experience that leads to a full expression of various ministries at the service of humanity. These two concepts define Neo-Prophetic churches as a distinct fourth wave from the other three waves of Pentecostalism within Christianity. The two concepts serve as biological parents of the Prosperity Gospel, providing a theoretical framework for many teachings by Neo-Prophets that promote self-gain.

2.5.11 Commercialisation and commodification of the gospel in Neo-Prophetic churches.

2.5.11.1 Commercialisation

The burgeoning non-denominational churches and ministries have begun to commercialise Christianity as a religion. Princewell confirms the allegation of the CRL Rights Commission against pastors who establish non-denominational churches and ministries to commercialise Christianity for personal gain, as both a violation of Christian core principles and the ethical code of conduct of public relations of Nigeria. The lack of a missional regulatory framework is highlighted in this argument. He shares from his own experience and research as to how this has tarnished the image of the

church. He notes two core issues that define the commercialisation of Christianity: first, the application of commercial principles in the running of the church or applying business principles to church administration or running it as a business to make economic gain; and secondly, "…the manipulation of the church/Christianity, its services (spiritual and emotional) with implied intentions to exploit members or prospects for economic or financial gain" (Princewell 2019:1). Princewell uses a few examples from the Old Testament and the New Testament on the biblical origins of the commercialisation of the Jewish Religion during the period of Ezekiel, Micah, and Amos (Princewell 2017). He demonstrates with a few biblical texts from these prophets how they vocally opposed the practice of religious corruption, selfish and excessive indulgence, which involved the direct exploitation of the poor, as shown in Amos 2:6-8 and 12, in the name of God and the temple. The pastoral leaders in the temple viewed the prophet Amos as a competitor for recognition in Jerusalem (Amos 7:12). Instead of praying for national deliverance so that the Lord would bless the land with peace and prosperity, they were preying on the poor and the vulnerable (Ramantswana, 2019; 2021). Prophets who spoke against the perversion of justice, bribery, and dishonest business practices against the poor in the temple were silenced (Micah 2:2). In Micah 3: 5-7,11, the false prophets were prophesying for venal motives and determining the prophecy based on the money paid to them, rather than preaching the word of God in good faith. The reliance on superstitious divination and magical powers for profit became the order of the day. Micah 6:11 highlights the fraudulent manipulation of the People of God.

In the New Testament, Christ made a sharp contrast between two masters: God and money (Mt.6:24). Christ was clear on his teaching that all power given to the apostles to heal the sick, raise the dead and cleanse the lepers was never to be commercialised as it was a free divine gift (Mt.10:8). The betrayal of Christ by Judas is indicative of a choice made for money, rather than based on the life of Christ (Mt.26:15). The commercialisation of Christianity is raising concerns around the vulnerability of loyal church members, high risks of unfulfilled promises and emerging distrust between pastors and congregants.

Anderson also concurs that:

> Church commercialisation first designates the application of commercial/business principles to run a church as a business entity with the intent of making economic gains. Second, the author intimated that the term depicts the manipulation of church/Christianity, its services (spiritual and emotional), with the motive of exploiting church members or prospects for economic or financial gain (2019:2).

This commercialisation is turning the gospel into a commodity to entice new proselytes and maintain an elevated level of loyalty to registered members. As in business, the founding church leader designs a marketing strategy and techniques best suited to his/her target group in order to maximise profits and earn a living (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). This drives the implementation of a carefully researched strategy and techniques to achieve the core mandate of gaining high congregation numbers and self-sustainability on a long-term basis. To achieve this, Anderson highlights a need for a Neo-Prophetic leader or pastor as a corrective measure to existing malpractices to operationalise what he calls the Seven P (product, price, promotion, place, packaging, positioning, and people) Formula (2019). In this commercialised church business, a founding leader and family must create and sustain the demand for supernatural remedies, products, or services that meet the constituency's needs. Each non-denominational church or ministry becomes an investment out of which the originator pastor and family gain money and items donated by congregants. The congregants are said to be *sowing the seed* to their church or ministry in exchange for an offered panacea to their problem, blessing, financial prosperity, security, and good health from God. Tithing and sowing the seed are based on the scriptural texts like Genesis 14:20, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 2 Samuel 24:24, and Micah 3:8-10. These can only come to them through their church leaders. All these practices are seen as opportunistic behaviour of telling half-truths to commercialise an anointed product and unfulfilled prophetic impartations (Masenya and Masenya, 2018:636)

Out of a complete trust of the divine powers of their prophetic leaders, most of these congregants buy these anointed objects with the belief that they will bring about quick financial prosperity in their business, protection from malevolent spirits (the sick, disabled the accursed, pregnant women) and those in need of promotion at work, like

nurses, police teachers and politicians (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2018:14). These acts have led congregants to see pastors as failing to meet and satisfy their spiritual expectations, unproductive expenditure of their hard-earned money, and have led to a general sense of vulnerability, high-risk and distrust (Norton, Gudergan and Young 2004:2). Given this reality, some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries bring radical change to the way in which Christian faith is experienced, where “Religion of salvation becomes a human-centred programme for the attainment of health, wealth and success” (Kgatle, 2017:1; Obijiofor, 2013:35). Simojoki argues in agreement with Kgatle that some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries are, by their very nature, promoting the “Other Gospel” (2002:271).

These opportunities for sowing the seed are being advertised through various mass communication media platforms, including radio, television, social media, printed materials, and contact sessions. Seed sowing has many names in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries circles, such as prophetic seed offering, seed for receiving the faith, personal seed sowing, financial breakthrough seed, redemptive upliftment seed to open new doors (Kitause and Achunike, 2013,16). Some Neo-Prophets use condemning language to make congregants believe that generational curses such as poverty and ill-health cause them to be unprotected from malevolent spirits shall always hang over the heads of those who do not sow the seed and tithe (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2018:23). This use of both verbal messages and non-verbal gestures that communicate the half-truth and a complete distortion of truth has made the commercialisation of the gospel a mere game of deception. One of these distortions is creating an impression that divine blessings can only be accessed through proselytising and tithing (Acts 8:20). All corruption, violence, and abuses committed by generous givers are overlooked (Diara and Mokwenye 2019:2-3). This has led to some spiritual poverty, moral decline, and Christianity has turned into an opium to pacify and exploit the vulnerable congregants (Ukpe, 2019:122). According to DePaulo, Kashy and others (1996), all this deception on the part of self-centred and highly motivated pastors is aimed at gaining personal advantage over the vulnerable and trusting receivers of the message, while protecting them from any feelings of guilt, remorse, hurt and disappointment (Princewell,2017:4). Direct market sales of portraits of Church leader, anointed items like water and holy oil or trinkets like handkerchiefs symbolically reinforce loyalty of church members towards the leader. In addition to this, one-on-one

marketing with the church leader, the laying on of hands on the sick, and blessings on newly purchased cars and houses also serve as a protection against malevolent spirits. The same malpractices have led to the CRL Rights intervening to protect the vulnerable congregants in some Neo-Prophetic churches in South Africa. This has even led to the prosecution of some of these Neo-Prophets .

The imminent prosperity, good health, security, and *planting of the seed* are all that count. This form of interventionist soteriology of miracles that are performed by the 'Man of God' demotes God from His sovereignty to a mere business partner who responds to transactional giving.

> God is treated as a business partner who has no choice but to acquiesce to the demands of those who have fulfilled their side of the bargain by paying their tithes … This represents a return to pagan religion (the Baal cult) where the favour of a somewhat fickle and capricious deity has to be secured through gifts (bribes), if not indulgences (Conradie 2015:77).

The spectre of otherness in the commercialised gospel of prosperity is its individualistic belief that by means of financial offering, one stands assured of material and financial success, according to the doctrinal teaching that one earns blessings from God by planting a seed, where there is a need to be generous and faithful in your giving is rewarded by God through increased prosperity (Jones and Woodbridge, 2011). Coleman (2000), Horton (2010), and Jenkins (2006) corroborate this. According to this view, the unavoidable path to prosperity leads to a Christian faith experience that is "dominated by self-advancement, self-esteem and self-sufficiency, individualism, materialism and universalism" (Platt, 2011:19). Each believer becomes conditioned to pursue triumph over failure, evil spirits, diseases, and even death through excessive giving in support of the church leader and family (Stott, 1984:212-228). The concept and belief in holiness and being faithful to God are measured by the monetary and material giving that ensures both the sustainability of the church, and the well-being of the church leader and family (Coleman, 2000: 27-33). Giving as cheerfully and generously as in 2 Cor. 8 1-4 and 6-8, Mt. 6:33, and 3 John Chapter 2 determines one's blessing from God in return. This interpretation also takes Christ as subservient to the dictates of the church leader. This is all the more evident in the weekly counselling sessions conducted by a church leader or trusted representative,

who often uses these sessions expediently to contextualise every predicament as a need for the client to purchase one of the anointed products on sale within the church.

Banda explicates the sanctification of an object for the purpose of gaining success and obtaining divine protection in the following way: “(A)nointing is the process by which prophets sanctify an object through a prayer of blessing or touching it to impart on it God’s miracle-working power. The object is then considered holy by hosting God’s miracle working power” (2018:57). This could cover a broader range of items like branded water bottles, clothes of a sick or lost person, special regalia for a particular revival conference, honey, branded stickers, portraits of the leaders, handkerchiefs, branded bottles with olive oil and even pens for writing an examination. These “anointed objects of the African Some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries prophets resonate with the use of magical objects in African traditional religions and the use of holy objects in African Independent Christianity” (Banda, 2018:59).

This commercialisation of anointed objects and the spiritual power of a Neo-Prophetic Pastor reveals a deified persona, where it “becomes difficult to distinguish the worship of God and the worship of (that Pastor)” (Soothill, 2007:155-156). These commercialised anointed objects and staged testimonies make congregants soteriologically vulnerable to their church leaders, who claim to have divine holiness, authority, and prosperity (Marshall, 1993:216-218). The pastor is elevated as powerful even through (or indeed by means of) the powerlessness of congregants (Lindhardt, 2012). These testimonies have led to endless religious competition, the commercialisation and commodification of the African Christian faith experience in South Africa (Lindhardt, 2009:41-61). These unusual practices have led to some pastors risking involvement with “occult economies” (Marshall 1993:202 204; Meyer, 1995:236-255; 1998:15-37; Pype, 2006:296-318; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999:279-303), a casino-capitalist kind of spirituality (Lindhardt,2014:153-180), a neo-liberalist and individualistic brand of Christianity (Freeman, 2012: 23-26).

2.5.11.2 Commodification

Some Neo-Prophets pastors and prophets will market various spiritual products for the purposes of profit (Iannaccone 1992:123-131). Christianity as a religion has become a commodity, economic service, and a medium to assuage socio-economic difficulties of poverty, witchcraft, and ill-health (Benyah 2018:116). This has been accompanied

by the exponential growth of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries from early 1990s onwards (Omenyo and Arthur, 2013), where prosperity gospel teachings (Kalu,2009:179) and religious competition among some Neo-Prophets for their market share of consumers (Yong, 2012:28; Heuser, 2017:18). As noted, this neo-liberal brand of Christianity has increased a consumer and individualistic culture, social inequalities and individual choice on the variety of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (Marti, 2012:145). Within the context of the commodification of Christianity, deliverance from malevolent spirits/satanic attacks, ill-health, and poverty can be assured through buying anointed objects and prophetic blessings from a pastor. Salvation in the Lord Jesus is redefined as financial prosperity, good health, and protection against satanic attacks (Folarim, 2007:76; Wariboko, 2012:45). Pastors are believed to possess divine powers to diagnose personal problems and offer redemptive upliftment from poverty, unemployment, sickness, and witchcraft (Währisch-Oblau, 2011: 65). For this purpose, some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have become marketplaces (Benyah,2018:129; Kalu,2010:381-382). All prophetic impartations by the divinely gifted servant/man of God are to be followed by a special prophetic offering from a congregant/s to bless/thank the pastor (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:80-81).

This practice is promoted via radio, television, and printed publications. The commodification of the gospel of prosperity and the need for newcomers to be 'born again' places a strong emphasis on the "pragmatic-oriented function of religion to make life possible and maintain it (food supply, human fertility, good life, and mutual relationships) and to safeguard it against all illnesses, misfortunes, enemies (devil, witchcraft) and death" (Benyah, 2018:121). Because this happens within a neo-liberal/free market context in which the variety of choices is both massive and unregulated, church leaders have become 'churchpreneurs' or "religious entrepreneur salespeople (pastors-prophets) who sort of commoditise, abuse and sell religious products as means of dealing with one's problems in life" (Benyah 2018:123-124).

Religious products may include books, videotapes/audiotapes, car stickers, wristbands, that serve to deliver or cleanse one's life from alcoholism, dependency on drugs, unemployment, ill-health, and torment by evil spirits. Apostles, Pastors, and Prophets of some of these churches and ministries also conduct special services claiming to be able to assign wealth through the Holy Spirit (Jenkins, 2006: 35-37).

This takes place at conferences or revival services for the affluent for ‘a double portion measure of their wealth’ (2 Kings 2:9-15). This bible text is commonly used as a theme for revival conferences among some Neo-Prophets . This is mainly because it carries a message of divine power from Elijah, a seasoned prophet, to Elisha, a younger prophet. Within Neo-Prophets circles, it denotes a Neo-Prophet as a mediator who imparts a manner of unreplicable divine power. Such revival conferences are mainly designed for business owners and other members of the middle class. They are held at luxury hotels with ‘one-on-one consultation sessions', which form most of the revival conference charge exorbitant fees, in such a way as to exclude the poor. African religiosity and the desire of congregants to move up the economic and social ladder have increased the demand for commodified and packaged religious products. This consumerist culture has led to individual consumers of these religious products and exceptional services focusing on invoking the blessing of God - notably without any spiritual commitment to conversion, growth, and edification in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Simonism has brought about a highly commodified atmosphere to this corner of the Church, peddling faith in an expensive marketplace (Achunike, 2004; Mbefo, 2001)

This has led to some practising immoral acts such as money laundering in the name of God and the Holy Spirit. The competition for gaining more congregants and staying afloat has led some of these church leaders to resort to occult practices (Ramantswana and Sebetseli, 2021:1-10; Kgatle and Ngubane, 2023, 1-12). Adimike monikers these Pastors ‘Priestcrafts and Pastorpreneurs’ (Adimike, Vanguard - Light and Grace, 2021). The selling of some religious products has formed part of this practice (City Press, 2011). Clerical flamboyance and materialistic success have been made to be the evidence of Christian principles, and the accommodation of the poor and the marginalised by the teaching of Christ are either ignored, or seen as outcasts. Financial, material, and health prosperity have been glorified as a yardstick for holiness (Masenya and Masenya, 2018:636).

The sentimental and sensual exploitation used to convince congregants to give more offerings or to purchase religious products with no real assurance of the promised socio-economic and health transformations being realised ultimately portend a collapse of trust; and have led to some members giving up on God and the Church (Ramantswana 2019:1-8). This transactional giving has also been used to bless the

servant/man of God in exchange for divine favour and material blessings (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:80-81). As per practice in African traditional religions, “ancestors and deities are fed periodically as a way of sustaining cultic relationships that enable the benefits of health, abundance, longevity, and various forms of prosperity to flow from the transcendent realm towards the human realm” (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:81; Conradie, 2010:105). This tendency to see materialism as an end in itself stands against Christian teachings. It also devalues Christian ethical commitment into a mere contractual market relationship (Horsfield,1984:84). This teaching leads to the danger of turning divine blessings into a commodity that can be branded, advertised, and purchased as any item on the supermarket shelf (Lindhardt, 2015:311). The close fraternity circles and discriminatory tendencies have led to the church being seen as controlled by the rich and famous, who give more in terms of offerings. The poor and the marginalised are sidelined in key administrative positions (Kgatle 2024:1-6). This promotes a consumerist and individualistic faith experience. In this way, the Church becomes a marketplace where divine blessings can also be commodified. Christian commitment gets devalued as merely a business partnership between God and the giver (Ige, 2017:18). Those with spiritual gifts like glossolalia and healing powers exercise these gifts for personal financial gain or self-aggrandisement and fame.

The long-established chasm between the sacred and profane has been erased (Wuthnow,1991:273). Pastoral leaders who emerge from enchanted cultural backgrounds can be seen to be attempting to be agents of disenchantment of African traditional religion (Meyer, 2002:751-776) without making a complete break with their past religious allegiance (Meyer, 1998). As a result of this, some occult practices have been translocated into some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The convergence, divergence, and interface of these two extremes have led to the commodification of Christianity as a religion in the Global South. The primary focus in this regard is promoting a ‘self-help gospel’, rather than dealing with the core issues of social justice, economic insecurity, and human development.

2.5.12 Power of Testimonies in support of commercialisation and commodification

This study focuses on how the role played by the power of public testimony stories that are selectively told by survivors, or those who have experienced a change for the better in their lives when using one or some of the anointed/holy objects that were

prayed for by a church leader. Kgatle balances this picture by indicating that in Pentecostal *anointed* worship services as much as in Spirit-led revival conferences, public testimonies serve to edify the faith experience of those who are still in the phase of their spiritual storms of life. They confirm that God answers the prayers of His faithful people who call on Him (2024a:6).

These stories reflect two realities. Firstly, they reinforce the loyalty of the congregants to their 'deified' church leader (Nwaomah, 2014:3-17; McAlexander et al., 2014: 858-875). Secondly, they confirm that the spiritual warfare between good and evil (a worldview firmly held by African Traditional Religion) has been acculturated by some Neo-Prophets for the mere commodification of anointed objects (Hunt, 2000:331-347)

Testimonies are uploaded regarding a variety of social media and internet platforms as marketing strategies to promote a particular Neo-Prophetic church or ministry (Tofa, 2014:70-85; Kgatle, 2024a). They are also mediatised (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:336-356) or digitised (Khanyile, 2016:2) as performed representations of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. These mediatised testimonies are seen as the work of the Holy Spirit (Anderson, 2002:168). Biblical texts like Luke 8:39, Romans 1:16, and 2 Timothy serve as a basis for these commercial testimonies, which are rehearsed under the guidance of a church elder so as to ensure the narration of each testimony demonstrates extraordinary spiritual deliverance experienced, and the way in which it transcends the medical expertise of doctors, occult powers of traditional healers, and any pastor ever visited before. Frahm-Arp refers to this "complex of pneumatic sensitive expressions of Christianity" as that which exclusively available through one singluar pastor alone (2010:48). These premeditated testimonials serve to reinforce the idea that congregants have accessed the exceptional divine power endowed through physical contact with the pastor, or the church-anointed objects they put up for sale (Soothill,2007:156-157; Kgatle, 2024b).

Biri also reports testimony stories from among the Shona people in Zimbabwe on the leading Neo-Prophetic churches like United Family International, led by Ezekiel Guti. He notes that this church leader has claimed alignment with African traditional religion of the Shona, practicing it in deliverance services for people suffering from powers of darkness (2012:1). Some of the congregants of Emmanuel Makandiwa, as a pastoral leader of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, are reported to have experienced

miraculous healing. Others are known to start to speak in tongues when touching his jacket. Some of Guti's followers claimed that a towel that was sold for $3 (US dollars) was used to wipe an electric stove that had stopped working, whereupon it was restored to working order. Some testified that they passed their hands across the surface of their dream cars, so as to soon be able to afford to buy one for her/himself. Portraits of these leaders and anointed towels on sale were used as protective charms, for miraculous healing, and instant financial prosperity (Biri,2012:6). Based on these testimonies, these pastoral leaders could be categorised as Neo-Prophets.

Frahm-Arp argues that this kind of vulnerability and gullibility results in the spiritual manipulation of the congregants (2021a). She speaks of pastoral leaders of these churches as miracle-prophets who can see "into people's past and bring about wealth and health in their future" (2021a, Chapter 6:11). A brighter future of great wealth and good health shapes the key theme of these testimonies. Kgatle warns against these practices of marketing, advertising, and selling of religion through the power of public testimonies as part of Pentecostal liturgy. Basing his argument on a transformative experience, he proposes the sharing of public testimonies to serve as a spiritual anchor for a deeper faith in the power of the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ. As an example of this, he quotes the power of testimony of a Samaritan woman and her encounter with Jesus in John 4:42 (2024a:5). According to McKaiser, as revealed in his radio show, a concern raised in this regard is that even when congregants suffer vulnerabilities arising from toxic masculinity, like females being kissed and have their sexual parts fondled by a pastor in public, they remain loyal and give total trust to their pastoral leader as evident in their testimonies (MacKaiser, 2019). This reveals the depths of the power that materialism, where positive confessions leading to financial breakthroughs, or the good health, and protection from attacks by witchcraft or malevolent spirits (Kaunda, 2016:18; Mbembe,2007:149-170). The sense of expectation cultivated for miracles ends creating a vicious cycle of vulnerability and submission (Frahm-Arp, 2021b: 152). The mafiarisation or total control of followers by one pastoral leader has become evident in testimony stories that congregants have shared (Ramabulana, 2019). Testimonies reveal a hidden fear of the cost of leaving such a church as likely to be utter poverty, death, or total regression in to a chaotic and demonised life (Frahm-Arp, 2021a: 32).

As a spiritual remedial intervention to this cycle, Dube highlights a distinct need to decolonise the deified persona of such pastors and their "superhero mentality" (2021: 143). He contends that such a religious mafia system in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries ought to be exposed, challenged, and decolonised. Hooks argues that deceitful mafia tendencies of such pastoral leaders ought to be deconstructed, demystified, and monitored. Unless the subordinated congregants transform the way in which they perceive religion, there cannot be any radical interventions possible to alter their situation fundamentally (1992). The mafia tendencies of some Neo-Prophetic pastors who seek divine recognition through practising constitutional delinquency need to be challenged (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:21). Dube concurs by arguing further that emancipation and critical thinking need to form the base of the gradual reformation of this kind of conundrum of religious mafia practices in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (2019:1-8). Such testimonies contribute to what Bradley calls "Christian-failure narrative" that divert these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries from the core ethical Christian standards and the South African Constitution (2012:1).

In conclusion, this study values the power of sharing testimonies as part of a missional church experience of God as one who answers prayer. From this perspective, it shows that miracles and deliverance remain a part of the experience of congregants in the presence of God. Such a genuine encounter during one's journey of the Christian faith experience has a role to play in edifying those who still hope for a miracle and deliverance from God. Consequently, such a deep personal encounter with the divine cannot simply be allowed to become a performance for the purposes of personal financial gain.

2.5.13 Neo-Prophetic fundamentalist hermeneutics

Biblical Hermeneutics, as a theological discipline, places strong focus on the interaction between the biblical text and the socio-cultural context of the reader. This interaction may be an academic exercise, or an informal engagement of a believer with the biblical text for spiritual purposes. Out of this, a decisive act of the appropriation of the biblical text arises. It poses the probability that two readers from different socio-historical, economic, and political contexts could appropriate the exact biblical text differently in terms of biblical hermeneutics. This defines biblical

hermeneutics as distinct from exegesis. Based on this distinction, an academic scholar and a lay reader of the self-same biblical text could reach different interpretations. Most African Pentecostal and Neo-Prophetic churches have a strong lineage with fundamentalist biblical hermeneutics. They believe in divine enlightenment or a Spirit-led interpretation of scripture. Most fundamentalist biblical hermeneutics of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have their own style of exploring and understanding the mutual relationship or trilogue that exists among the author, the text, and the contextual reader. This becomes more complicated when a preacher or church leader goes on to place his/her interests first and domesticate the Bible's meaning to serve their individualistic interests. The following are examples of how the fundamentalist interpretation of Bible texts has led to a total disregard of the divine authority of the Bible in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. These key issues make Neo-Prophetic fundamentalist hermeneutics important in this study.

Further to this, an exploration of how each Neo-Prophetic reader contextualises and responds to each Bible text has become a point of interest for this study. The biblical hermeneutic and theological question arises: Does the text speak to the reader before any response from the reader? It first appears that the life experience of being born in the Holy Spirit, within which each interpreter fundamentally encounters God, is of primary importance than reading the text for educational purposes. The personal experiences or “reader’s ‘personal backpack’ containing past experiences, preconceived ideas, understanding of how the world works, personal prejudices, fears and expectations” of those born again in the Holy Spirit as in Acts 2, serves as a hermeneutic lens through which one interprets each Bible text (Nel, 2015:1). This forms the authoritative encounter that far exceeds the *ipsissima verba* of scripture. This encounter cannot be bound by denominational doctrines or theological training, but by the Gospel of Prosperity mode of reading a Bible text. From a positive standpoint, this kind of encounter is personally transformative or, in some cases, a communally shared encounter. The transformative power of encountering God through reading and interpreting the Bible constitutes a true expression of Christian life experience. This is the spring fountain out of which Pentecostal and Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries establish an existential understanding of God that is different from theologies of Catholics, Eastern, and Reformed/Protestant hermeneutical traditions, respectively (Warrington 2008).

This study has a strong influence on the works of Marius Nel on Pentecostal Hermeneutics, who argue that Pentecostal scholars base their hermeneutic standpoint on the trilogue of God, the faith experience of the reader, and the immediate meaning of the Bible text.

> The community is defined in terms of being Spirit-driven, Spirit-led, and Spirit-empowered to accomplish God's purposes for and through the community, a community that is to be Spirit-governed, Spirit-supported, and Spirit-propagated. (Nel, 2015:4).

This means that every non-denominational Neo-Prophetic church, ministry, or individual might have a different Spirit-led interpretation and meaning of a Bible text. Bartos notes:

> Since there are so many interpretations of the work of the Spirit in the believer and in the Church, one cannot speak of a single hermeneutic method embraced by all Pentecostals. The diversity of the theological interpretations betrays the guiding principle: before having the interpretation, one has the experience (2015:28).

This emphasises the fundamentalist hermeneutical lens through which Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries also interpret and find diverse meanings of each Bible text. Neo-Prophetic hermeneutics always emerges out of the core three interrelated elements, namely: the Holy Spirit that reveals, the scriptures as the Word of God, and a divinely illumined prophet who mediates the biblical text to congregants. Within some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries, the word of God is made subservient to the commercialisation of anointed objects and the commodification of the Christian faith experience. Neo-Prophetic hermeneutics centres around the divine power of the self-appointed prophets serving as intermediaries of material prosperity, deliverance, and continued protection from evil spirits and good health. It also projects God as impersonal and a servant of magical rituals that are known to Neo-Prophets (Banda 2022: 1-6). Their teachings seem to have a close relation with Pelagianism, a heresy that teaches that humans ought to to save themselves, without need or recourse to God's grace. Combining this with the heresy of Arianism as a belief and teaching that Jesus Christ is not fully divine, but a human creature like us, this study notes a Neo-

Prophetic hermeneutics that downplays the role of Christ in the Trinity and the salvific power of His death and resurrection.

Neo-Prophetic hermeneutics declares that the state of being baptised in the Spirit as a Pentecostal Christian faith experience (Acts 2:1-4) does not guarantee a state of holiness or righteousness. Satan is not yet defeated, as attested to in Colossians 2:15. Neo-Prophetic congregants are taught that, beyond being born again, they still need to be delivered from demons that hinder them from the joy of pregnancy, good jobs, total protection from the generational curses, and gaining more customers in their businesses (Banda 2022: 3-4). This hermeneutic key opens an argument that there is no sufficient protection, even for those born again and Spirit-filled congregants against demons and evil forces. This emulates the role and ministry of Neo-Prophets in a manner that is not comparable with that of Classical Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism, creating an opportunity to commercialise their anointed objects, and produce teachings that commodify the Christian faith experience. Consequently, biblical texts that support planting the seed, prayer for healing, and exorcism or deliverance form part of the core of a Neo-Prophetic hermeneutics. These are offered as ‘extra-salvific processes’ in support of the limited presence of God in our struggles with the evil forces (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:236)

Neo-Prophets also maintain their firm belief in the authority of Scripture as divinely inspired, without any human error, placing them beyond reproach. This is both “fundamentalist-literalistic and anti-intellectual” (Nel 2016:193). As a ‘common-sense interpretive lens’ for the fluid and highly diverse interpretations of biblical texts, the teachings of Neo-Prophets have captured and domesticated the Bible within their agenda to commercialise and commodify the Christian faith experience (Lee Roy 2018:3). Some biblical texts have become the most quoted as favourites among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries from the Old and New Testaments. The main themes running through these Bible texts are loyalty or disloyalty to God, tithing, generous giving as a social responsibility or initiative, thanksgiving, and prosperity as a demonstration of the grace of God. These themes are developed on the basis that each Biblical text can stand alone as a prescriptive/normative and binding teaching, without any need to refer to context or the original intention of the divinely inspired writer.

The perception of Neo-Prophets that lacks the scientific exegesis and academic skills continues to promote the belief that any academic training and critical thinking endangers "the individual's faith and corrupts the church" (Nel, 2016:2). This argument highlights the unresolved theological and epistemological dichotomy between *faith and reason*. The historical exegetical methods that shape biblical hermeneutics of the mainline church are viewed as mere ivory tower scholastic engagement with strong 'dogmatic intransigence', creeds and theological theories that disempower and paralyse the work of the Spirit during the evangelisation before the end of time, while the pneumatic hermeneutics of the Pentecostals and Neo-Prophets is existentially viewed as not determinative work of the Spirit that drives believers to glossolalia, witness, worship, and miracles (Nel 2016:4) The distinctive hermeneutical angle has stood against the cessationist view that glossolalia, and diverse revelations or miracles, ended in the apostolic era (Nel 2017:1). This pneumatic *standard operating procedure* is based on the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 2: 4-5 by some Neo-Prophets and Pentecostals as a restorationist movement whose primary mandate is to demonstrate that the Pentecostal experience, visions, healing and deliverance of the early church or New Testament Christianity as still happening in this period of time. Based on this assertion, they claim to be the best representation or, existentially, an authentic direct continuation and a normative paradigm of the New Testament Christianity in this period (Acts 2) (Archer, 2009:133). As Nel asserts, "This implies that the Pentecostal method of interpretation stands on three pillars, as pneumatic, experiential, and historical narrative" (2017:92). Kgatle also notes Pentecostal anti-intellectualism as a gap that Pentecostals and Neo-Prophets need to close to avoid the risk of subjectivism[1]; and for them to participate positively in key discussions on themes like pneumatology, missiology, ecumenism and ecclesiology with the mainline churches who currently have a strong influence on Post-School theological education and training. He contrasts this against the prevalence of 'fake qualifications' that some Pentecostal and Neo-Prophetic pastors obtain from unaccredited Theological Colleges. This has led to unqualified pastors producing other unqualified pastors (Kgatle,2020b:110-111). Nel argues in favour of complementarity between Spirit-led biblical interpretation and sound exegesis, where he writes:

[1] The claim of individual-based pneumatic illumination by the Word of God and convenient interpretation that serves the interest of the reader

> A sound grammatico-historical and critical-contextual exegesis should be pursued to save one from the risk of subjectivism; there can be no hermeneutical integrity apart from a critical and contextual exegesis … But more is needed than good exegesis by the reader; human rationality must be joined in ontological union with the 'mind of Christ' (2017:91).

Nel sums up the way forward in an ecumenically strategic and diplomatic manner against any anti-scientific hermeneutical angle that interprets the bible at face value as a fixed and infallible point of reference for Pentecostals and Neo-Prophets (2017:92-93). He continues to argue that this above distinctive hermeneutical lens is more inspiring, illuminating, evangelical, and redemptive (2017:95). Thomas and Alexander (2003), Kärkäinnen (1998), and Archer (1996) all agree with Nel that this is critical for the Pentecostal hermeneutic that is still in the making.

2.6 An advocacy for a missional regulatory framework

This section of the literature review places special focus on the unregulated hostilities and competition among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to gain more numbers, rather than on the recovery of the prophetic voice as part of the reimagined nature of the mission of God. This serves as a basis for the missiological discourse in this investigative study to validate the argument that a missional regulatory framework is needed. This investigative study argues that, without the recovery of this prophetic voice of the 'missional consciousness of the church', the church shall remain overpowered and nullified by the commercialisation and the commodification in Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries (Baron, 2019:1-19). Consequently, the absence of a reimagined missional regulatory framework will exacerbate the promotion of neo-liberalist commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience, as well as the negative socio-economic impact of the gospel of prosperity, against the broader mission of God (Baron 2019:1-19; Guder 2015:17).

This section also aims to pay special attention to the absence of an ecumenical outreach by Neo-Prophets to other Christian fellowships. Nel highlights the fact that Classical Pentecostalism has come to terms with the reality "that Spirit baptism did not bring the expected unity of the Christian church and entered into formal ecumenical relations with several international ecumenical bodies and para-church organisations" (Nel, 2018:1). The Azusa Street self-perception of Pentecostals as an interracial,

ecumenical and revival movement that shapes Christianity beyond denominational borders subsided when it failed to bring about Christian unity, racial reconciliation, and multi-cultural experience of Spirit baptism across the world (Dodson,2011:52). Instead of this universal ecumenical restoration of the church back to prophetic or supernatural impartations (Numbers 11: 29) and primitive apostolic unity (Acts 2), some Neo-Prophets have shown an outright rejection of the doctrinal, institutionalised and ritualised mainline churches as a devilish and heretical sect (Jacobsen, 2010:4, Kärkkäinen, 2000 and Robeck,2004:308-309). Bergunder concurs with this observed non-institutionalism of Neo-Prophetic churches as part of their version of Pentecostalism (2010:52).

This has led to what Vondey refers to as “an ecclesiology of competition” (2010:156), where Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries are organising themselves as a “global movement of (diverse and diffused) churches that share a transformative and unifying experience of the Spirit” (Nel, 2018:3). Even this unity is only characterised by fluid commonalities and similarities. Robbins defines this unity as “a far-flung network of people held together by their publications and other media productions, conferences, revival meetings, and constant travel” (2004:125). Clifton asserts that Pentecostalism is innately an ecumenical movement and its grassroots ecclesiology is pneumatological. Therefore, it is not, and has never been, one thing or one church; but is instead a loose-knit movement of people and churches. It is a multicentred, fluid, and diverse community, identifiable not by creed or liturgy or institutional structure but by shared experience of the Spirit (Clifton, 2012:557). Lim also characterises this blending of pneumatology and ecclesiology as metaphorically the *“two lungs of the Church”,* out of which ecumenism shall emerge (2015:221).

The complementarity of pneumatology and ecclesiology ought to shape the missional lifestyle of every Christian believer (1 Corinthians 10:31). In the words of the Apostle Paul: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). The presence, unique ministry and kerygma of each Christian and a church as a collective, ought to shape the world for better (Matthew 5: 13-16) and to mark a paradgimic shift from colonial missionary strategy to win souls and conquer new territories. In this way, the missional nature of each church community needs to go beyond addressing issues of social justice or being an attractional church as a mere imperialist ark of salvation. The

missional transformation of each church or ministry that this study is promoting is one driven by the five biblical and foundational distinctives: first, the Church as being commissioned by Christ (Matthew 28: 19-20; John 20:21 and Acts 1:8); second, the significance of the redeeming victory of the cross of Christ shapes the mandate of the church to establish peace and forgiveness under one True Shepherd in the world (Ephesians 2:16); third, each church or ministry is sent as a People of God to serve humanity and offer a redemptive and alternative lifestyle based on love that humanises (Acts 2:42-47; John 13: 34 -35); and fourth, this study promotes a missional sense of each church or ministry as sent to establish dialogue with every culture as a basis for evangelisation and liberation from the known to the yet unknown Christian faith experience (Acts 17:22-34). The newly redefined embrace of the Great Commission by Neo-Prophets ought to help them realise their role as missional facilitators of cultural change, utilising imaginative creativity and innovation to empower congregants. Thereafter, the missional church is sent to establish the Kingdom of God that brings deliverance, healing, and prosperity *at no cost* (Matthew 10:7-8). This nature of being church takes its origin from the missional theology of new wineskins (Matthew 9:17). Based on these, each church needs to value ecumenical fellowship, dialogue, and complementarity with other churches.

In essence, this missional imagination calls for Neo-Prophets to play a key role in affirming this reimagined mission and evangelism as transformative (Niemandt, 2014:1-15). This study argues that such missional authority marks a paradigm shift in the expected practices of Neo-Prophets , which ought to be guided by and aligned with the New Statement presented by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism to the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2013. Their prophetic ministry and pastoral leadership ought to be rediscovered as a vocational mission that flows from God's calling and missional sending (Kim and Anderson, 2011:180). Each Neo-Prophetic church or ministry has to empower congregants to be community of hope that is commissioned to "celebrate life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces in the power of the Holy Spirit" (WCC, 2013:4). Part of this missional commission is the re-instatement of the Prophethood of all believers (Kgatle 2023a: 44-56) and commonly shared ecumenical vision and mission that values or affirms human life and its supporting cosmic biodiversity (WCC 2013:1-40).

This missional imagination that this study is advocating for is transitioning the concept and practice from 'individualised mission to the margins (privileged to the marginalised)', to mission from the distinctive contributions of congregants at the margins; therein marking a shift of the centre of gravity within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Those who are currently exposed to unusual practices and having their vulnerabilities exploited shall be empowered to move from being poor, foolish, and powerless (1 Corinthians 1:18-31) to take the centre stage in articulating God's mission of justice, joy, healing, peace, and reconciliation in the world (WCC 2013:52, 53). This missional imagination challenges Neo-Prophets to expand the scope of the Mission of God through the church beyond just a commercial business for profit, to maintain the luxurious lifestyles to a missional leadership that radically transforms the ecclesial landscape of their non-denominational churches and ministries (Roxburgh 1998:183; Van Kooten and Barrett 2004: 139-142; Guder 1998: 190-198). Out of this may emerge a new formation of missional congregational culture within which diverse ministries, the prophetic proclamation of the unceasing redeeming power of the word of God, and responsive participation of congregants in recreating the world for a better life and peace (Niemandt 2014:4).

The study also highlights the significance of the establishment of democratic and transformative leadership and missional authority based on collective participation of both pastoral leaders and congregants among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The missional formation of a strong and capable coalition of leaders that are willing to be accountable for the core functions, compliance of the church or ministry with the legal requirements and policies of South Africa, and institutional growth in terms of spirituality, upholding Christian values and practices, needs to be part of a missional conversion point among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

Nel has noted as one of the present ecumenical challenges that some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa are neither prioritising nor participating ecumenical fellowship, dialogue or communion ecclesiology (Nel,2018:5). Instead, they choose to promote an exclusivist and sectarian ecclesiology (Albrecht, 2017:4). This unregulated existence of diverse Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries has led to the failure of the Body of Christ to become a united prophetic voice in South Africa. To attain this, Plüss is calling for reconciliation among all Christian churches and ministries (2003:12). This calls for what Van Kooten and Barrett refer to as "the

discernment of missional vocation" (2004: 139) to redirect pastoral ministry from commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience to missional theology and spirituality that transform the church and congregants as pilgrims constantly on their journey with a loving God (Matthey 2010: 247-264). Out of this experience with Triadic God, they begin to see this community God as present and involved in their lives (Niemandt 2013: 78; van Gelder and Zscheile 2011:151). This personal and communal experience shall reveal the missional hermeneutic that ignites a new sense of divine disclosure, shaping their response and active participation in the Mission of God. Out of this experience of God, they participate in the preferential option to serve humanity to alleviate poverty, offer protection from malevolent spirits, restore Neo-Prophetic congregants from Afro-pessimism that has given birth to all forms of brokenness, and bring about healing and reconciliation (Banda 2022: 1-10). This marks the missional imagination as navigating the way for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to experience the Emmaus experience of rediscovering the power of the cross, joy in the resurrection of Christ, and a personal encounter with Christ as His disciples (Luke 24:13-32). It is only when this reimagined missional nature of the church and ecumenical reconciliation have taken place that Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries might begin to move as equal partners into establishing a missional regulatory framework that is needed for the church to regain its role in moral formation, peace, spiritual integrity, and mutual understanding.

Critical to this study is the need for Neo-Prophetic churches to embrace mission, as no church can exist without its missionary responsibility within its socio-political context. This ecclesio-political nature ought to contribute to the fulfilment of the Great Commission. This reimagined missional understanding of the church is still to be developed for each Neo-Prophetic church and ministry to embrace the Great Commission (sending) truly and to encourage introspection to align with the contextual socio-political dynamics (receiving). This redefined missionary ecclesiology among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries needs to form the basis of ecumenical reciprocity, mutuality, and interdependence (Bosch, 1978: 283-296). Out of this, an authentic and commonly shared missional regulatory framework shall emerge as a resolution to address new missionary challenges:

> A truly missionary church lives in mutuality and interdependence with other missionary churches throughout the world. It is therefore a community

> continually sending out and receiving missionary impulses to and from "Jerusalem:' as well as "the ends of the earth," simultaneously evangelising and being evangelised, healing and being healed, liberating and being liberated (Saayman, 2000:22).

This missional regulatory framework ought to promote a metanoic change of mind and practice. As Saayman says, “Churches should see each other with new eyes and accept each other with new hearts” (Saayman, 2000:13). This missional regulatory framework ought to put an end to the current vicious circle arising out of a competition for dominance among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. This reimagined sense of being a missional church must give birth to an authentic African missionary ecclesiology that is both evangelistic and liberatory. Salvation and discipleship need to be centred on Christ and be moved away from the person and luxurious family lifestyle of some Neo-Prophets . This will eliminate malpractice and abuse and bring about a humanising, joyously evangelistic and socially involved Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (Saayman, 2000: 14). Out of this shall arise Christian communities who share the evangelistic mission, a variety of ministries and prophethood as a People of God. All these need to be seen as an ever-ascending and never-ending spiral within each church and ministry.

2.7 Self-regulation for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries

This study aims to achieve a healthy balance between the promotion of the constitutional right of freedom of religion and religious beliefs and the limitations of each individual’s human rights. While the study values the CRL Rights Commission Report of 2017, it notes the lost opportunity of this investigation as a result of a legalistic approach of subpoenaing pastoral leaders to the hearings rather than conducting hearings through an open consultative process. This has led to many pastors taking a defensive stance and suffering humiliation and reputational damage caused by this legalistic approach. It therefore becomes the stance of this study that “the abuse of people’s belief systems” is an area that remains contested, where a conflict arises in defining the distinction between a constitutional right and its constitutionally enshrined limitations.

Article 15(1) of the South African Constitution states that: “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion” but on condition that it

does not infringe against those of others. So, if a Neo-Prophet claims to have received a divine revelation that forces congregants to pray and give large amounts of offerings based on Luke 6:38 yet continue to suffer conditions of joblessness, poverty, drug addiction, terminal illnesses and at the end it of all, no promised gains on guaranteed miracle or blessing (CRL Rights Commission Report,2017:6) in terms good health, protection from demonic forces, sound and sustainable finances. This may lead to depression, suicide, and loss of confidence in God, who is the core of their belief system. This borders very close to spiritual enslavement and powerlessness, or loss of human dignity (Article 10) on the part of congregants. At the same time, the Neo-Prophet remains powerful in the eyes of the very congregants vulnerable to his/her prophetic declarations/opinions. The power dynamics based on what has been uttered in the name of religion and to promote a commercialised belief system has come to play (Kgatle 2022b: 1-10). The shift of blame for the unfulfilled prophetic declarations come to threaten the right to life (Article 11) of some congregants as a result of the right of the Neo-Prophet to freedom of expression (Article 16) that is based on mere propaganda, and incite hate for those who are said to be bewitching a congregant (Kgatle 2022a:1). This is an agenda of certain Neo-Prophets to ensure the dependency of congregants on the anointed objects that are commercialised within that church or ministry. The commodification of the prophetic ministry, the commercialisation of the deliverance and miracles, and the promotion of the gospel of prosperity serve as a clear justification for a missional regulatory framework. According to Ramantswana, these have contributed a great deal to a religious faith experience shift from *praying for* to *preying over* congregants who are longing for prophetic deliverance from generational curses, poverty and ill-health (2019:4). Instead of these Neo-Prophets alleviating their oppression, suffering and abject poverty, and offering a pastoral ministry that builds these congregants up, theyse Neo-Prophets drive a kind of spirituality that leads congregants towards powerlessness. This powerlessness has a direct impact on the missional church as a People of God who participate in the three offices of Christ as priest, prophet, and king through baptism. Their malpractice and abuse of authority has led to the resurgence of the prophetic ministry (1 Corinthians 14:1) among congregants that makes the missional church “the conscience of society” (Ramantswana, 2019:4). They have suppressed the “prophethood of all believers” (Kgatle 2023a:44-56) as one of the core commission mandates of the missional church by allowing themselves to be absorbed and co-opted by politicians (Kgatle 2018:1-8;

Snyman 2016:88-105; Strydom 1997:495-510). This study argues for a prophetic ministry that goes beyond shouting the identity numbers and street addresses of congregants (Kgatle 2019: 42), the celebrity cult (Resane 2017:3), and holy laughter or Toronto blessing (Hayford and Moore 2006:278).

What is being raised is not the regulation of the Christian religion by the state. Instead, constitutionally, the state has to guarantee freedom of religion and the right of individual persons to choose their religious belief system. In a pluralist country like South Africa, with 79, 8% of the population being Christians (Coertzen 2014: 126) with diverse doctrinal teachings and interpretations of scripture, the self-regulation of various churches becomes a more practical solution. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church has a teaching that those to be ordained to the priesthood ought to be males and take a vow of celibacy. At the same time, African Independent Churches allow polygamy even for those in ordained ministry. Each of these belief systems is respected, protected, and promoted by the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa (Sections 7, 9, 30, 31, 185, and 234). In addition to this, the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms, which was established in terms of section 234 of the Constitution of South Africa, gives precise details of the guaranteed religious rights and freedoms that the state cannot regulate.

The self-regulation that needs to be established within the circles of Neo-Prophetic Churches and ministries ought to focus on alleviating any religious freedom of some Neo-Prophets that engenders unethical and harmful practices that limit the human rights of congregants, as stated in section 36 of the Constitution. The self-regulation proposed by this study aims to strengthen the unique identity of Neo-Prophetic Churches without any state control, such as, for instance, through the manipulation of congregants through fear (Thlabye, 2015). Self-regulation within Neo-Prophetic Churches has to address the abuses perpetrated in the name of divine healing by a pastor who, for example, kisses and fondles women's breasts without their consent (Yen, 2017). Malpractice such as that practised by Pastor Lethebo Rabalago, known as "Prophet of Doom," who claimed to perform miracles and healing using an insecticide (Doom), poses a harm to the health of congregants, and also needs to be addressed. (Babatunde, 2016). This malpractice demonstrates inhuman manipulation and psychological as well as physical harm (Frahm-Arp, 2021: 1-19), where it ought to be noted that the vulnerability of congregants to these leaders cannot be addressed

by a multi-faith Peer-Review Council for all religions in South Africa, as recommended by the CRL Rights Commission (CRL Report, 2017:6). Instead, a Neo-Prophetic Charter needs to form the basis of a missional regulatory framework in terms of section 234 of the Constitution of South Africa against those who bring Christianity into disrepute in such a manner.

This study argues for the establishment of a missional regulatory framework that advocates for the promotion and protection of religious freedom and human rights in a manner that is aligned with the Constitution. This shall become a basis for putting an end to all violations of human rights by a pastor who commands congregants to undertake outlandish tasks such as drink petrol and eat snakes against their will (Mokhoathi and Remb 2017:2; Resane, 2017:4). These acts cause the Christian faith experience to be seen as “bizarre, illogical or irrational” belief system (Constitutional Court of South Africa [CCT36/00, 2002], 25 January 2002 at para 42). The dynamics of the religious freedom and abusive authority on the part of some Neo-Prophets in exchange for a promised miracle need corrective intervention (Kgatle 2022b:1-10; Banda 2018:1-11). This finally has a direct impact on the missional church within a democratic society. The intervention of the State to protect some congregants against full-blown physical and mental harm as perpetuated by some Neo-Prophets is justifiable as a short-term remedial measure (Vorster 2021:1-6; Du Plessis 2016: 349-370). A Neo-Prophetic missional regulatory framework ought to be put in place so as to establish complementarity between religious freedom and human rights. Section 7.2 and Section 36 of the South African Constitution need to serve as a base for the establishment of this missional regulatory framework. No pastoral leader needs to practice ministry without respecting, protecting, and promoting the Bill of Rights.

This study also acknowledges the supplementary role of the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (SACRRF) to the South African Constitution on religious freedoms, human rights, and human dignity that was drawn up by religious academics, statutory commissioners, international legal experts, and church ministers. This charter was developed in 2010 to offer a more detailed understanding of religious freedom, religious beliefs, human rights, and responsibilities. Section 234 says: “To deepen the culture of democracy established by the Constitution, Parliament may adopt Charters of Rights consistent with the provisions of the Constitution" (Constitution, 1996). What is to be appreciated in this charter is the level of expertise

that ought to have been acknowledged by the CRL Rights Commission before subpoenaing pastors to its hearings. This charter establishes complementarity among constitutionally aligned religious freedoms, rights, and obligations in its 12 articles (Mokhoathi and Rembe 2017: 6-7; The South African Council for the Protection and Prevention of Religious Rights and Freedoms 2016).

Given its special focus on constitutional religious freedoms, this charter could serve as a constitutional Christian sub-framework for establishing a Neo-Prophetic Missional Regulatory Framework. This framework would enable Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to self-regulate their moral standards, monitor practices, and ensure accountability. The main objective of this missional self-regulation is to eliminate the Neo-Prophetic version of God, who is a servant of magical rituals, transactional salvation of humanity, and to reinstate the Mission of a Triadic God whose divine power cannot be arrested by Neo-Prophets , but one that liberates and sanctifies humanity (Banda, 2022:1-16). This needs to be part of 'getting the house in order' among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

This study also begins to identify the benefits of Neo-Prophets regaining a memory of their spiritual connection of origin with the denominational Pentecostal movement in South Africa. The ecumenical bodies, such as the Alliance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in South Africa and the International Fellowship of Charismatic Churches, can play a critical role in establishing a missional regulatory framework for Neo-Prophets to self-regulate, exercise ministry within the Christian traditional core teachings and standard operating procedures, and establish accountability in the administration of church resources. These developments ought to form the core of the missional regulatory framework that shall make it unnecessary for the CRL Rights Commission and other state organs intervene to protect those congregants who have been abused through the commercialisation and the commodification of the Christian faith experience by some of those in the Neo-Prophetic tradition. This self-regulation has to offer the CRL Rights Commission a new sense of appreciation and a corrective that the nature of the missional church ministry provided by a church or ministry is uniquely different from that of a mere non-profit organisation (Garnett 2013:49). This missional regulatory framework for self-regulation has also to propel Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to reconceptualise and redefine themselves collectively as commissioned to serve humanity, regaining its prophetic voice and closing the chapter

of abuses of gullible and vulnerable congregants (Kalscheur 2008:58). From this perspective, the missional regulatory framework for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries ought to uphold their constitutional religious freedom and develop remedial interventions to put an end to abuses of religion and the beliefs of their congregants. This means that no Neo-Prophet will take advantage of perpetuating any abuse against the laws of the land in the name of religion and hope to be protected by this proposed Neo-Prophetic Council and its missional regulatory framework. The mature level of accountability and consolidated doctrinal teachings of the above-mentioned ecumenical bodies can serve as a springboard for the Neo-Prophetic Council to address the lack of leadership mentorship, ensuring that Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries affiliate, register, and are trained to account for their practices. This self-regulation ought to establish an ethical code of conduct and procedures to be followed when applying consequence management as part of enhancing accountability among religious practitioners in Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries.

The ever-growing number of Neo-Prophetic Churches is justified by the fact that Africans have an appetite for ‘forensic prophecy’, the highly priced one-on-one consultation session for prophetic impartations for financial breakthroughs, ‘spiritual fathers’ with titles that demonstrate extraordinary divine powers (e.g. Major One for Shepherd Huxley Bushiri) and their claimed prophetic power to perform miracles that release congregants from witchcraft imposing previously unbreakable generational curses (Kgatle 2022b:2; Banda 2020: 1-11; Asamoah-Gyadu 2004:389-406). This clearly indicates that the future of Neo-Prophetic churches is brighter and assured by growing numbers. This has led to Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries competing against Classical Pentecostal churches, Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, as well as among themselves, to become ‘mega churches’ (Anderson 2022:1-11; Ramantswana and Sebetseli 2021:1-10). Against this background, the missional regulatory framework proposed by this study recommends an Afrocentric approach that promotes ubuntu philosophy and practices. In line with this, White and Dzor propose the conceptualisation of a “strategic cost-effective mission and church planting that promotes communality, reciprocity, and complementary trust as a cooperative missional approach for Neo-Prophetic churches to participate in the mission of God to save and sanctify humanity” (2019:228, 238). This proposal is contextually developed around the concept of ‘Nnoboa’ that originates from the

Ghanaian Akan language, meaning cooperative. In relation to the missional church in society, this may grant a renewed sense to the Great Commission (White and Dzor 2019:229).

This renewed sense of being a missional church ought to be supported by a missional regulatory framework that promotes communality and ecumenical collaboration among Neo-Prophetic Churches and ministries. This may help each to gain a sense of interconnection for better reciprocal partnerships and mutual accountability with others (Acts 2:44-45). This study argues that such a missional regulatory framework can benefit each church or ministry. For this to be achieved, Neo-Prophets need to undertake a complete break with the consumerist and individualist practice of mission. In support of this, the missional regulatory framework of Neo-Prophets ought to celebrate and enrich unity in diversity and help them to abandon any selfish tendencies that promote ever-escalating divisions.

The Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries could also explore the possibility of adapting an innovative missional model that White and Pondani call “Church-Franchise” in the formulation of their missional regulatory framework (2022: 1-9). The concept is borrowed from business management. It has the benefit of bringing about ecclesiological order, strong mechanisms of accountability, and lifelong learning in terms of educational leadership. There are strong relations between this concept and the concept of Nnoboa (White and Dzor, 2019). Such an innovative regulatory framework is likely to bring about better structured leadership, well-consolidated constitutions that regulate church polity, core religious beliefs, stewardship in financial management, and pastorally sound theology teachings. This aspect of the missional regulatory framework ought to anchor and promote the prophethood of all believers so as to alleviate the ‘spiritual father’ concept and rogue leaders (with exclusive authority and infallible voice) that disempower the emerging ministries within a church (White and Pondani 2022:4). When these have been addressed in the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries, the prevailing haphazard and unconventional ways of ministry (in the form of fake miracles and shifting of blame for unfulfilled prophetic impartation), disconnectedness, uncoordinated church administration and non-affiliation to ecumenical bodies will also improve the movement of congregants from one Neo-Prophetic church to the other.

This will earn them respect and a place of equal honour when they enter into ecumenical and missional discussions with other Christian Councils like the South African Council of Churches, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. This proposed Neo-Prophetic Council of churches and Ministries is to be established as a regulatory body. It will develop and implement practical, workable, and necessary preventive and corrective measures that are constitutional and biblical, addressing all malpractices and abuses previously reported through the media. This study views the constitution of the South African Council of Churches as a possible benchmark against which one to be developed by the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries could be aligned to include the ecumenical dimension (South African Council of Churches, 2017: 3). The main objective would be to establish a complete break from Neo-Prophets with the state and political influence. This alignment may serve as a stepping stone into better engagement with other religions like Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism to protect and promote constitutional freedom of religion in collaboration with other religious groups and atheists.

2.8. CONCLUSION

The non-denominational and trans-denominational features of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have necessitated strong strategies for each to be self-supportive and survive competition with others. Commercialisation, commodification, and the deification of each pastor's persona through various titles to demonstrate uniqueness and exceptional divine power, along with the power of shared testimony stories highlighting the par excellence power of the leading pastor, have been integral to the branding of these churches and ministries. In terms of teachings like Christology, Christian ethical identity, and Spirit-led interpretation of scripture, some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries exhibit such diversity that it ultimately undermines the centrality of Christ's mission. The standard on which all these converge is Spirit Baptism, the prosperity gospel, worship, and praise. These diverse teachings and practices have revealed the need for a reimagined missional regulatory framework. Based on this, standardisation and self-regulation ought to be established in order restore the credibility of Christianity as one of the main Religions in South Africa. This reimagined missional regulatory framework requires a comprehensive consultation

process to regulate and establish some level of control over the explosive rise and unusual practices that foster and exacerbate the gullibility and vulnerabilities of congregants. It has therefore become evident that without the regulation of practices, some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries might not value any participation in ecumenical dialogues on key themes like ecumenical missiology, mission of serving humanity, or *missio hominum* (Thinane, 2022:1-7) as an open invitation to all that bear the image of God (Simango, 2016:172-190). This is also indicative of a need for advocacy for some Neo-Prophetic pastors to pursue formal qualifications offered in accredited higher education institutions rather than fake qualifications from unaccredited institutions. Without these key issues being attended to, the non-regulation of Neo-Prophetic Churches and ministries will lead to their failure “to fulfil the missional calling, vocation and function” within the Body of Christ (Van Aarde, 2016:1).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology. It defines the research design, research paradigm, the missional imagination as a theoretical framework, and the research methodology that contribute towards answering the main research question. These collectively serve as a premise for decisions made on the most relevant research processes used to discover and make an innovative contribution to the existing body of knowledge on Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries from a missiological perspective (Thomas et al., 2011).

This polycentric view of missiology forms the basis for interrogating the deification of persona in the pastoral leadership style of Neo-Prophets and their abuse of divine authority to their financial benefit (Beyerhaus, 1964:403). Within the scope of this study, it serves as a theoretical basis for criticality and transformational change against the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith. It contributes towards dialogical, ethical, and reconstructive pastoral ministry. This study continues to define the rebirth of the *Kairos* against all biblically indefensible abuses undertaken within the circles of some of these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The *Kairos* consciousness that promotes a humane ethic of responsible citizenship and improved quality of life for all is to be achieved (Le Bruyns, 2015). All this is aimed at empowering naive congregants under some Neo-Prophetic pastoral leaders (Room, 2015). Through this, the study is contributing to achieving a social justice transformation (Ngwenyama,1991; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013), a humanising Christian faith experience, and an egalitarian way of life (Traitler, 2015; Thinane, 2021a:1-7).

The key question for this study is: if advocacy and the protection of vulnerable congregants are to be assured through a missiological regulatory framework as a basis for preventive and corrective measures, what key themes ought to be addressed regarding the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries? In this chapter, three research questions serve as a guide in exploring the research problem being addressed:

- Firstly, why do some Neo-Prophet pastoral leaders commercialise and commodify the South African Christian faith experience;
- secondly, what are the thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that need to shape this investigative study for advocacy and the protection of the vulnerable and gullible congregants against abuses in the name of God;
- and thirdly, which corrective and preventive measures, from an ecumenical missiology perspective, need to be taken as strategic interventions to have a Spirit-led pastor?

In line with these key research questions, greater focus is placed on the criticality of problem identification, problem-solving, and critical thinking to shape new knowledge and point to possible themes for future study in missiology.

3.2. Research Design

3.2.1. Qualitative research design

Qualitative research design is built on inductive reasoning, as appropriate to this study. It resonates with the assumption of this study that reality is a social construct that emerges from the real-life context of participants (Leedy and Ormord,2001:155-57). As Neuman has noted: “Qualitative researchers examine patterns of similarities and differences across cases and try to come to terms with their diversity” (1997:419). In line with Stake (1995:37), qualitative research calls for understanding complex interrelationships among all that exists, through a thorough description of experiences from a holistic point of view. This method of research was selected in this study because of its potential to guide the processes of collecting evidence, organising, analysing, and evaluating cross-contextual data that help in consolidating credible findings (Mason, 2002:1).

Qualitative research is relevant for dealing with the complexities of social meanings, practices, and patterns in real-life contexts. This had a positive contribution for the researcher to be innovative, systematic, and rigorous in conducting this research. It offered guidance in gathering, selecting, and analyse data to produce new knowledge from first-hand information on the lived experiences through collaboration between the researcher and active participants (Worthen and Sanders 1987:50). Through the

labour intensive and time-consuming processes of data collection, coding and verification, this study has used various inductive methods to “generate rich, detailed data that leave the participants’ perspective intact” (1996:54). This has contributed to producing new knowledge that helps participants and readers to base their judgement of the phenomenon from a fresh and valid standpoint (Newman and Benz,1998). Emphasis has also been placed on the primacy of the research problem and the accountability of this study during the research process, ensuring a careful and systematic understanding of why some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have become platforms for the abuses of their own congregants. Qualitative research provides a contextual, flexible, and strategic research design that is relevant to the dynamics of the researched topic (Williams, 2007:65). It guides and challenges the researcher to be self-critical against fallibility in conducting research. It demands of the researcher to demonstrate logic through methodological and theoretical steps that support the standpoint taken in support of original claims and/or against other scholarly claims (Seale, 1999:6).

Out of this, the researcher was guided to produce quality, credible, and valid explanations, arguments, and findings, from which new topics for further studies can be generated. These explanations, arguments, and findings have not been limited to the scope of a study but can be generalised. In this way, they are applicable and valid across different contexts to ensure that generalisations are fully supported by substantiating evidence (Seale and Silverman, 1997). Qualitative research has offered a demonstrable sense of accountability, accuracy, or reliability and moral stand when using (Mason, 2002:8).

This research design was chosen to offer the researcher a clearer plan of action. Holloway defines research design as “a plan of action … in which researchers describe how they proceed and which strategies and methods they will adopt” (1997:137). Creswell and Clark define research design as the “procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies” (2007:58). The application of these procedures in this study made a connection between the research problem and the data (primary and secondary) sources to answer the key research question on the gullibility and vulnerabilities of congregants as a result of the rise of Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries (Crotty,1998:115). It has served as a “blueprint” (Akthar, 2016:68) for all stages of this research study, starting from the formulation of the topic,

selection of literature review, research methodology, the collection and interpretation of data, the thematic findings, and the conclusion of this study (Kothari, 2010:39-42; Zikmund,1988:41; Durrheim 2004:29) It helped the researcher to have a clear framework that shaped appropriate and saturated levels of acquiring information in answer to the main research question (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:210).

Qualitative research design is used to explore the complexities and vulnerabilities of everyday life (Palys,1997:77-79). This innovative adventure and discovery spatial exploration path has shed light on diagnosing and systematic enquiry on how some Neo-Prophetic pastors have spiritualised the domination of congregants in their real-world worship Christian experience (Vogt 1999:105). Studying Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries constitutes an exploration of an unfamiliar worship experience for the researcher, necessitating flexibility and open-mindedness in dealing with this phenomenon. The value of this study lies in conceptualising the research problem and providing routes for future study, rather than attempting to be conclusive (Stebbins, 2011:9). For this reason, the current study selected in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observation methods to collect data. Qualitative research design proves critical against power dynamics like dominance of the deified persona of the pastor, social inequalities, and injustices that domesticate the vulnerable and gullible members of society (Stebbins, 2011:3. This research design allows the researcher to move beyond the scope of exploratory (what) and the descriptive (how) types of research design. It mainly focused on the higher-order questions, the ‘why’ factor of things (Trivedi and Shukla,1998:54). It guides the researcher to challenge conventional strategies of domination and assisted in redefining innovative solutions and developmental empowerment and serves the purpose of equipping this study with reliable tools and techniques for generating valid, new knowledge and answers on some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries from a missiological perspective on the relationship between two variables. Qualitative research design has helped this study to examine the dynamics of cause-and-effect between Pastorpreneurs and the gullible congregants. It was a proper context-bound research design type in exploring the current preliminary stage of some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries (Babbie, 2007:87-89). It facilitated the closing of the gap in the research process of explaining the phenomenon, to help people understand it better, identify changes that need to take place, and point out new research topics for future study. Publications like magazines,

newspapers, books, and articles were used as secondary research methods to substantiate the data collected.

3.2.2 The Critical Paradigm as part of the research design of this study

This study has explored various paradigms or theoretical approaches as multifocal lenses to view, understand, critique, and make sense of the research phenomenon in question. Each of the four main paradigms classifies and categorises research uniquely. According to Tracy (2013), these four main categories of paradigms are, namely, post-positivist, interpretive, critical, and postmodern/post-structural. Out of these, the researcher selected the critical paradigm to guide this study (Creswell 1994:1). The main reasons for its selection are how it defends and argues in favour of a unique way of understanding reality, building knowledge, and gathering information about the world. It has defined the worldview and philosophical perspective that informs the meaning, shared core beliefs and interpretation of the data, findings and conclusions of this study (Willis, 2007:8). It continually shaped the critical lens that frames the thinking of the researcher about the topic, the research problem and the conduct of field research (Hughes, 2010:35).

A qualitative paradigm guided the review of literature (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017) in terms of the ontological nature of reality, the social essence of this investigative study in terms of the school of philosophy and worldview chosen, which have defined the parameters within which this study was conducted (Krauss, 2005:758). The dynamics of domination and exposure of congregants to various vulnerabilities have given meaning to the perceptions and belief systems at play (Scott and Morrison, 2005:170). Secondly, the epistemological relationship between the comprehension, the broadening and deepening of the insight of this study, and the philosophy of knowledge has influenced the specificity of this study (Trochim 2000). Out of this, the research questions of this study were addressed from the data collected through selected primary and secondary sources. The epistemological assumptions of the critical paradigm have defined the scope of the findings and recommendations of this study and have led to new knowledge on some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). Thirdly, the systematic methodological inquiry, in terms of the research methods and approaches chosen for data collection and the selection of participants, have all been shaped by this paradigm. All this served the purposes of generating new knowledge in answer to the core research questions (Guba and

Lincoln, 1994:108). Fourth, ethical behaviour, accountability, and self-criticality were adhered to by the researcher during the conduct of research so as to minimise and/or avoid any physical, psychological, legal, social, and economic harm to all participants of this study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2010). The main objective of following the appropriate ethical mandate was to ensure the validity of the data collected and the findings of this study, while doing no harm.

The key elements serve of Critical Paradigm as valuable tools to solve problems and critically evaluate other paradigms. It has a specific intellectual lineage with the Frankfurt School in Germany in the 1930s, primarily influenced by the critical methods of Marx and Freud, and dominated by theoreticians Marcuse, Horkheimer, Gramsci, Habermas, Freire, and Weber (Giroux, 1988). The following are the main reasons given by the researcher for following a Critical paradigm. It is broadly based on establishing the ontological reality as evident in the ideological and hierarchical power relations and differences that take place within a political, cultural, historical, and economic context (Mertens 2008:74-75). Those in power as leaders have used doctrines, myths, and developed belief systems to socialise and subjugate their subjects, thereby maintaining their gullibility and viewing their social context as usual and naturally predetermined by the Triune God. This paradigmatic view has in the context of this research assisted the researcher to destabilise the dominant modes of subjugation identified in the research problem, and openly challenge the hidden transcript of the dominant to follow the research rationale (Nurnberger, 1996). In the context of this study, the congregants were noted to have sacralised and synthesised their lifestyles and moral norms to the dictates of their church leader. This has necessitated that the researcher to pay attention to building and consolidating trust and established a common understanding with participants to represent the expressed views fairly and more accurately (Mertens 2008:99). Out of this, the researcher and participants began to engage, discover, and proactively interrogate their accepted social injustices and other vulnerabilities (Edge and Richards, 1998:341). Equipping participants with basic technical action research, practical action research, and emancipatory action research was essential to ensuring that they become transformative researchers who collaborate with this study in generating theoretical and practical knowledge that shapes their lifelong development and emancipatory growth (Car and Kemmis, 1986:149). A critical paradigm has therefore contributed a

great deal in the formulation and implementation of an agenda for change and emancipation of participants to reap tangible results of this study (Creswell, 2009:9).

The Critical paradigm enabled this study to expose the degree to which congregants have suffered social power abuse, ideological dominance by some of their pastoral leaders, and spiritual inequality within some Neo-Prophetic churches (Car and Kemmis, 1986:138). This has led to a process of communal critical reflection on how they have reproduced the legitimacy, domination, and oppression under the deified persona of their pastoral leader (Cohen *et al.* 2003:153). Greater effort and time were spent on transformational empowerment of those exposed to domination and vulnerabilities to become real-time problem solvers (2015; Fenton *et al*. 2015). This redefined the epistemological power relations between the knower and enquirer, or would-be knower, were based on a communally shared set of core values and belief system (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:105-117). It can therefore be argued that a Critical paradigm provides better possibilities to re-orientate, change focus from domestication and energise participants to transform themselves into agents of change from all injustices and vulnerabilities that their pastoral leaders perpetuated for personal gain (Lather 1986:67; Cohen *et al*. 2000). The justification for choosing this paradigm (Dornyei, 2007:63) is that it offered an emancipatory language of hope and possibility to those currently exposed to the vulnerabilities identified in the research problem (Giroux,1983; Freire,1994)

Within the philosophical framework of this paradigm, knowledge is taken as a powerful and God-given skill that is key to interrogate and serve as a basis for conscious awareness that is necessary for socio-economic stability, political transformation, and continuous enhancement/improvement of the quality of life for all (Alversson and Willmott, 1992:435). Based on this epistemic definition, the researcher argues that doctrines, myths, and belief systems are sites of ideological or hierarchical struggle between the subjugated and those in power (Callaghan, 2016). This paradigm understands human knowledge constructions as not being sacrosanct, but fallible and subject to human error (Steffy and Grimes, 1986:334). The Critical paradigm is therefore shaped by historical realism (socio-political, economic, ethnic, and cultural dynamics) that destabilises naive realism as much as it debunks deliberately false assertions (Latour, 2000:117-118). It is disruptive in its innate democratisation of systems strongly supports the prioritisation and maximisation of transparency.

The advantage of this paradigm is that it transcends the limitations of both positivist and modernist paradigms in the way it brings stability, transformation, and alleviates socially constructed ills (Foucault, 1982:791-792). In this way, it challenged the stand of those who perpetuate immoral/unethical acts and socio-economic injustices to see value in collaborating with others to work for radical emancipation and social transformation through dialogue (Said, 2000:375). The main advantage of choosing this paradigm was the way it enhanced social equity, equal access to resources, and translated challenges into opportunities for "true human fulfilment" (Burrell and Morgan 1979:32), growth, and development of all. It has provided the researcher with a positive thinking and a worldview that defines our socio-economic and political context as full of opportunities to engage positively with the reality of life (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:105-117). In addition to this, the critical paradigm differentiates approaches, belief systems, and philosophies as either critical or non-critical (Asghar, 2013:3121).

3.2.3. The key significance of Phenomenology for this study.

Omery (1983:51) tabulates six types of phenomenology as denoted by Spiegelberg (1975:55), namely descriptive phenomenology, phenomenology of essences, constitutive phenomenology, reductive phenomenology, phenomenology of appearances, and hermeneutical phenomenology. From among these, the researcher selected interpretive/hermeneutic phenomenology as appropriate to the current research, since it places special focus on unearthing the hidden meanings of human experiences (Spiegelberg,1975:57). It reawakens and advocates for a reflective and critical analysis of the real-world experiences of human beings and explores new and fresh conceptual and philosophical insights on the phenomenon under study (Spiegelberg,1975:25). Socio-historical and cultural context that have shaped the human reality become important than the objectivist scientific naturalism (Moustakas, 1994; Cohen, Kahn and Steeves, 2000). Hermeneutic phenomenology is both critical and objective in problematising the oppressive and domination strategies that have led many congregants to suffer various vulnerabilities under their trusted pastoral leader. This has helped the researcher to unearth the hidden core or essence of the problems that prevail in certain Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. This eidetic reductionist view of reality has involved multidimensional (behind, underneath, and beyond) exposure techniques that have broadened the scope of inspection of the core

universal problems for more emancipatory strategies to be developed (Spiegelberg, 1975:70).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a critical and interpretive approach, has helped in developing an authentic picture and interpretation of the rise of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries from primary and secondary sources of data collected. Its holistic lens of reality has brought a healthy correlation between the socio-historical and cultural environment (object) and the experiencer participants (subject) (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011:3; Spiegelberg,1975:66). From the data collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups, observation of participants, and desktop study, the researcher began to make explicit what had always been the hidden ideological and doctrinal transcript that has reinforced the vulnerability of some Neo-Prophetic congregants (Sanders 1982:354). Hermeneutic phenomenology equipped the researcher with an ability to recognise and challenge his own preconceptions and biases and be more open to different ways in which participants were making sense of their own experiences (Smith *et al.*,2009:32). In this way it created a conducive environment for the newly discovered knowledge to 'let things speak for themselves', to transform the lived experiences of congregants and effect change on the systematised strategies of domination (Van Manen,1990: 180). This was achieved through the ability of the researcher to stay close and remain connected to the participants as experiencers (Smith *et al*., 2009:4). This experiential journey of self-discovery and bonding with participants offered the researcher the best opportunities to gain deeper insight into their shared lived experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology has really promoted the credibility, verifiability, generalisability, and transferability of research findings (Smith *et al.,* 2009:4).

Finally, the research framework served as a springboard for those with a common experience of the phenomenon to explore, interpret, and reflect critically on their significant life experiences, make sense out of them, and address their vulnerabilities (Moustakas, 1994:26; Polkinghorne,1989:46-48; Smith *et al*., 2009:34-36). This asserts Husserl's proposition of the researcher to bracket or suspend his assumptions and presuppositions about the phenomenon (Husserl, 2012:3) is not appropriate in the application of hermeneutic phenomenology, as Martin Heidegger argued against Husserl. Heidegger says: "Interpretation is a never presuppositionless apprehending of something to us" (1996:41). Complete detachment or bracketing oneself as a

researcher from the lived experiences and shared stories of participants is problematic, and cannot lead to a more articulate study of the phenomenon of human consciousness and essence of things (LeVasseur, 2003: 408-420).

Among the qualitative research methods used in social sciences and humanities, phenomenology has been chosen by the researcher for this investigative study, particularly that which is influenced by the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger, which focuses on establishing the “knowledge of essences” (Husserl and Heidegger, 2012:3) and the science of the being of entities – ontology” (Heidegger, 1996:33).As summarised by Streubert and Carpenter, five key aspects of phenomenology as a qualitative research method (2011:78-80). Firstly, it is a critical, rigorous, contextual, and systematic method in directing an investigative study. Secondly, it establishes clarity on the nature of human beings as able to make sense and change the status quo. Thirdly, it helps to expand awareness and clarify the nature of the phenomenon, proposing new fields of study for the future. Fourth, it enables the researcher to maintain a high level of responsibility in preserving the originality of data, as it represents a lived experience of participants as experiencers. Fifth, it strengthens complementarity between the essence of the lived experiences of participants and the theories that have been used in this study. All these key aspects have given shape to this study.

3.2.4. Missional imagination is the theoretical framework of the study.

The theoretical framework developments that took place between 1960 and 1970 among European missiologists are here acknowledged as having contributed towards the establishment of missiology as a theological discipline. The World Mission Conference at Willingen (Northern Germany) cleared so many misunderstandings on missiology and established ecumenism within missiology (Engelsviken, 2009:481-497). Missiology as a concept was instituted by Hartenstein in his presentation to this conference where he defined mission as follows:

> The missionary movement of which we are part has its source in the triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father, in that perfect love which is the very nature of God" (Bassham, 1980:52-58).

Missional imagination has been selected as a theoretical framework for this study to serve as a lens through which to conceptualise and theorise the phenomenon under scrutiny (Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2008; King and Brooks, 2017). It has been chosen based on how it assists in highlighting various dimensions of the research problem, the selection of relevant data, its interpretation, and the findings of this study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Various dimensions of this theoretical framework have contributed towards an objective bird's eye view and systematic articulation of the meaningful whole of the research problem (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The researcher shall elaborate more on these in the following chapter. A variety of missiologists who are influenced by this reimagined missional theoretical framework argue that it marks a notable paradigm shift from a colonial and paternalist view of missiology as a form of 'saving souls from paganism' (Beard, 2015; Elkington, 2014; Niemandt, 2019; van Aarde, 2023).

The mission of the church is being moved from the control of the colonial church of the West back into God as the one who redeems and directs the salvation of both humanity and creation. This reimagined missional theoretical framework plays a critical role in our times when the Global North is gradually abandoning Christianity while the Global South is increasingly embracing and reconceptualising Christianity. This demise of the Global North Church and its relics of the colonial past offers the global South a new opportunity to reverse missions and re-evangelise the transatlantic world. This cannot be done without remapping our thinking and deconstructing the universalist doctrines that are based on the logic and mathematical epistemologies and cosmologies of the Roman Empire. It therefore becomes imperative for Pentecostal Christianity to take transregional lessons from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and decolonise doctrinal teachings that have turned Christianity into a relic of the colonial past.

This missional imagination refocuses salvation from mere numbers of those saved into a polycentric fulfilment of the mission of God based on the Great Commission (Paul 2020: 1-8). This paradigm shift marks a reorientation and alignment of the church to participate in God's postmodern mission of redeeming and restoring fallen humanity (Roxburgh and Boren 2009:20). It signifies a significant transition from merely increasing membership to serving humanity and effecting transformational change,

becoming a People of God. This challenges the church to reimagine the old Roman Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal ecclesiologies that are known to have facilitated the colonial agenda of the West; so as to regain a missionality that instead facilitates reconciliation and healing, humanise and transform the People of God (Maponya and Baron 2020:8; Niemandt 2019:73) in a world with seamless complexities, diverse and dynamic changes (Barenstein and Kok 2017: 7-10; Friedman 2016: 26-27). Based on this, the study advocates for a newly reimagined sense of being a missional church to emerge (Sharpe 2018:1). This reimagined theoretical framework offers several lessons for transforming some Neo-Prophetic churches from the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience. This post-modern trend of remapping the attractional megachurches into participating in the mission of God opens up new ways of being church in our time. This newly reimagined sense of being church might facilitate a greater transformative change in the current malpractices of some Neo-Prophetic churches, as noted by the CRL Commission into Spirit-led missional churches (Van Gelder and Zcheile, 2011; Wright, 2010). This missional imagination calls for the decolonisation of Western missionary concepts of the church, in reference to both the architectural structure as well as the activities undertaken by missionaries to civilise Africans as part of an Enlightenment agenda (White 2017:1-7; Kalu 2005:228). This theoretical framework does not merely see a church as a building and a place where liturgical rituals are performed, but as a community of believers who participate in the mission of God to transform humanity. This selected theoretical framework aligns with the Pentecostal Christian missional church of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), where technological advancements influence all spheres of life, academic fields of research, and the generation of new knowledge. The 4IR challenges the Pentecostal Christian Church, as led by missional leaders of our time, to discern and reimagine a theoretical framework that aligns accordingly with new challenges and opportunities of our rapidly changing world (Niemandt, 2019:151-168). The core beliefs and practices that set the Pentecostal Christian Church apart are the centrality of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts as narrated in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12. This framework aligns with the missional church that redresses the socio-historic, economic, and political challenges of the past and allows a Spirit-led church to transform humanity through a conscientious move from “altar to action” (Kgatle and Chigorimbo, 2024:1-10). From within this theoretical framework, a firm basis for

corrective measures on malpractices by some Neo-Prophetic leaders, as tabulated in the CRL Commission report, can be conceived.

Missional imagination also serves as a theoretical framework that equips the global South to take the baton and reconceptualise the ecclesial and colonial presence from the Global North that is in decline. Meyer speaks of the “de-churching” that marks the collapse of Christianity in Europe. In the face of this collapse, we cannot merely recycle the doctrinal teachings of the past. Instead, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, as part of the global South, need to pentecostalise Christianity that is currently being seen as backward and obsolete in the global North (Meyer 2019:65; 69). This theoretical framework is resolute in pentecostalisation of Christianity and shows the church as led by the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father and Jesus Christ to give shape to the holistic development of every person and church community. The current trajectory of the heritagisation and repurposing of the church buildings into restaurants, hotels and cafes is a pointer to the decline of Christianity as a professed and practised faith experience that connects the missional church with God (Volf and Croasnum, 2019:52). This calls for the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America and Middle East) to reconceptualise, reconfigure, reimagine and align the Mission of God to make each missional church responsive to a better life for humanity and the biodiversity. Without missional imagination, the future of Christianity shall continue to be heritagised and touristified, as a relic of the past colonial glory (Coleman and Bowman, 2019:8; Mikaelsson and Selberg, 2020: 1-19).

This calls for the Global South to awaken. In line with this theoretical framework, the key question that lies at the heart of this study is as follows: Does the missional church of the Global South allow Christianity to move into the afterlife in a coffin of European supreme culture and tradition, or explore innovative and creative strategies to let it become a Pentecostal faith experience with new opportunities as offered by transregionality and decoloniality?

Out of this, a study of sub-themes on missiology that are aligned with this paradigm shift from the Global North to the global South is to be explored for possibilities for future study. This missional imagination framework is envisioned to reconceptualise and direct a renewed Christian faith experience (Meyer, 2019:71). In view of the new challenges arising out of 4IR, where there is direct interrogation, demystification and

problematisation of past teachings, we cannot continue to defend collapsing Western Christianity (Volf and Croasnum, 2019: 57-58) and disregard key issues on social justice, poverty and global warming to continue ravaging the lives of humanity in our continents. This missional imagination theoretical framework is underpinned by a Pentecostal Missiology that is also responsive to the Vision 2030 Sustainable Development Goals of the World Health Organisation.

Missional imagination as a theoretical framework of this study additionally helps in reconceptualising the Christian teachings and rewriting church history. This framework calls for new strategies for reverse mission into the secularised Europe and North America that form the Global North (Adedibu, 2013: 405-423). Without this, Polycentric Pentecostalism has no novel contribution to make to the return of the Gospel of Christ (Wahrisch-Oblau, 2009: 35-36) against the abuses and malpractices of some Neo-Prophets . African missiologists and systematic theologians in particular need to be part of the rewriting evangelical Christian stories of the goodness of the Trinity, showing that God is still faithful to the transnational divine plan of redeeming humanity.

This selected theoretical framework also underpins the indigenisation, inculturation, and celebrating diversity within Christianity, which forms part of this missional imagined sense of the church participating in the Mission of God. This reimagined missional transformation includes a symbolic means by which the Church can break down all systems that institutionalise racial and social class divisions and malpractices that lead to the vulnerability of its congregants. This period of deconstruction has to pave the way for deeper contextualisation of the Christian faith experience (Niemandt 2017:1-6). White uses the term ‘sankofa’, an indigenous Ghanaian concept, to highlight the retrieval of the past indigenous knowledge to shape the Christian faith experience or church polity within a particular culture, tradition, and geographical location into the future (2017:2). This concept aligns with decoloniality of Western imperialism and opens new opportunities for the inculturation of African epistemology into missiology. This has critical lessons for some Neo-Prophets who commercialise and commodify the Christian faith experience in South Africa.

Part of this inculturated missional imagination is aimed at doing away with the commercialisation and the commodification of Christianity on the part of some Neo-Prophets so as to redefine the church as inclusive of both ordained ministers and

congregants as a People of God. This inclusivity focuses on a shift from doctrinal songs of the West and stands in corrective contrast to songs that deify Neo-Prophetic leaders to an ethnocentric joyous celebration of liturgy and worship (White 2017:6). African music composers have already started replacing ancient and modern Christian hymns with new ones that have an African flavour. Koffeman contends that "the way in which the church pays attention to dialogue with the culture determines the quality of the church and congregations" (2012:191). Soltau argues that indigeneity of a church is fully contextualised when it is planted and grows within its socio-historical context (1955:20). The Western concept of the missionary culture as a universal container of the Christian gospel proved to be like new wine in old wineskins in terms of being domesticated by dogmatic imprisonment strategies and systematic distortions that arrest development within the imperialistic control of the kerygmatic mission and ministry (Rao, 2012: 169-170). In the same vein, the Neo-Prophetic teachings that turn the Christian faith into a divine transactional experience are interrogated by this missional imagination theoretical framework. Against these views and practices, inculturation reorients the missional life of Christians towards Christ as the True Shepherd, rather than to promote the Christendom agenda and divine transactional practice among Neo-Prophetic churches (Beaver, 1979:95-96; Beyerhaus, 1964:393–407). In this way, indigenous theology, worship, and liturgy that resonates with the African socio-religious mission praxis are likely to emerge (Bosch,1991:462).

Based on the above, it is argued by the researcher that the missional imagination theoretical framework that guide this study understands the Church as innately missional. That is, it cannot exist outside the Great Commission that has led to its core existence (Guder 2015:170). The core argument here is that the church is a Christian community of believers that participates in the Mission of God. Therefore, mission precedes the very existence of the Church. Duraisingh refers to this as a restorative move "from church-shaped mission to mission-shaped church" (2010:7). Bosch speaks of *Missio Dei* as instituting the *missio ecclesiae* (1991:370), highlighting mission as the activity of God into which the church participates. The mission of the church originates and flows from "the fountain of sending love' of the Triune (Bosch 1991:402). "Mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purposes to restore and heal creation and to call people into a reconciled covenantal relationship with God" (Hesselgrave and Stetzer 2010:24). This reinstates the Triune God as the beginning,

ruler of all, and the end of apostolic mission (Bosch 1991:399). The study notes this as a corrective of the old perception of the Church as having existed before its missional purpose (Francis, 2013:20-21). This is not a doctrine-based option for a Church-centred mission, but constitutes the core existence of the mission-centred Church (Bosch 1991:379). This stands in direct contradiction of certain Neo-Prophetic leaders who see themselves as the originators of the mission of their churches and ministries.

It is not that the church has a mission and the Spirit helps us in fulfilling it. It is rather that the Spirit is the active missionary, and the church (where it is faithful) is the place where the Spirit is enabled to complete the Spirit's work (Newbigin, 1987:20).

In line with this emphasis on the theocentric and reconceptualised role of the Spirit in the mission of the church, Niemandt states:

> A missional church is a community of followers called by the Spirit on a journey of discernment. The active presence of the Triune God in his creation presupposes discernment as the way to understand where God is working so that God's people can join in with the Spirit and participate in God's mission. The missional church recognises the importance of leadership to envision, shape, and facilitate missional transformation. To be transformed and to nurture a transforming presence in communities and the world at large requires a new kind of leader (2019b: 155).

The missional participation of the church in the Mission of God is an extension and amplification of the boundless love, perichoresis nature, and missional presence of the Triune God in the world (Niemandt 2012:2; Conradie 2015:783-785). This mutual interrelatedness and communality of the Triune God provides the framework within which the kerygmatic proclamation of the Kingdom of God flows from the missional life and communion of the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Niemandt 2015:4; Newbigin 1995:29).

Mission constitutes an act of God out of His divine mercy. The Church is seen as a community that channels the Kingdom of God to humanity through a variety of ministries to bring about social justice, political peace, and equitable distribution of world resources (Vicedom, 1965:5-9). The complementarity between the *Missio Dei,* the Kingdom of God, and the Church is significant (Scherer,1987:55), where holiness

is understood as fully expressed through active and empowering participation in promoting the love and mercy of God in the world. This theoretical framework highlights the need for vigilance to protect missiology, as a theological discipline, from anthropocentric, ideological, commercial, and commodifying strategies. This study emphasises that the Mission of God is cosmocentric and a demonstration of God as involved in shaping the world for the better with the cooperation of Christian believers (Bosch,1991:170-171). This synergistic convergence of God and humanity in mission to the world has to be redefined and reconceptualised in every epoch in history as part of Christian redemptive expression of *Missio Dei* and *Missio hominum* (Mashua and Kgatle, 2019:1-8). This reimagined missional theoretical framework serves as a pillar for this study and carries numerous points for introspection on the part of the Neo-Prophets of our times.

Important to the theoretical framework of this study are the key biblical themes of communion and the interdependent nature of the Triadic God (Cunningham,1998:183; Kgatle, 2018:1-10). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are understood as one communal Trinity from whom the missional church finds its existence. Out of this communality of the Trinity flows the ecumenical fellowship and ecclesiological communion among all nations through the missional church (John 17:20-21 and Ephesians 2:14). This humanising nature of the reimagined missional church also holds the responsibility to transmit the reconciliation and the redeeming power of the cross (Colossians 1.20) in our epochal state of brokenness and hostilities. The missional church becomes a community that serves and humanises the world. This brings the Christocentric significance of the cross at Calvary into the mission of the Church as its full expression of obedience to God (Philippians 2). This squarely defines our mission as innately Christian among all other religions. Therefore, any deification of persona and competing prophetic claims of fresh revelation by Neo-Prophets stands against Christ and the significance of the cross work against the missional nature of the Church. Based on this and the assertion made by Smith, this study argues that the Great Commission has to shape Christianity and its mission to a point of swimming against the stream than aligning to mere conditioning of the church by political, social and economic benefits (2003:55). This theoretical framework shapes our core missional mandate and social responsibility as a church to remain faithful witnesses as the People of God that are distinctly set apart from those of the world by the very

fact of our sanctification (John 17:11, 14-17). Therefore, flamboyance and lavish lifestyle, as found among some Neo-Prophets , cannot be the defining prosperity, righteousness, and witness within the Great Commission.

This study argues from these pillars of the theoretical framework that this commission is directed by the Triadic God and fully implemented by those who see themselves as created and commissioned to preach and live uniquely as images of God in the world (Volf, 1998:206; Bosch,2011:399; Franklin, 2017:282-300; Simango, 2016:172-175). Based on this argument, and as supported by Genesis 1:26-31, it could be asserted that this decisive missional and reimagined move is “from altar to action” (Kgatle and Chigorimbo 2024: 1-10). For Neo-Prophets , this missional commissioning of the church ought to challenge and extend the scope beyond being born again and individualistic teachings on prosperity as promoted by some Neo-Prophets . The biblical theme of the Church as the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) also reveals the poor conventional evangelism of Neo-Prophetic churches that is centred around the commercialisation, the commodification of the Christian faith experience, and the deified persona of some pastoral leaders.

The unregulated missional and unethical malpractices of some Neo-Prophets of preying over congregants (Ramantswana, 2019:1-8) reveals their failure to the Great Commission and acknowledgement of missional lessons from five-fold ministries as fully expressed in the apostolic and mission of the early Pentecostal Church (Ephesians 4:11). As a result of this, the prophetic voice or prophethood of all believers is exchanged with commercial competitions for greater numbers of congregants (Kgatle, 2023a:44-56). This has negatively contributed to the vulnerabilities of congregants and the glocal missional mandate in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (Kgatle, 2022a:1-7). From a missiological perspective, salvation and spiritual growth go beyond the prosperity gospel, the commercialisation, and the commodification of the Christian faith experience. Unfulfilled prophetic declarations of instant healing, fake deliverance through exorcism, opportunities for employment, marriage, childbearing, protection against witchcraft, and instant riches have dealt a severe blow to the Great Commission among some Neo-Prophetic churches (Kgatle, 2022a:1-7). The attainment of righteousness and eternal life cannot be secured transactionally through mere planting of the seed that enriches some Neo-Prophets , but a resolve to participate in the Mission of God to reconcile the world with the

heavens or the return of humanity back to divine life (Revelation 21:1-2). It could therefore be argued within this theoretical framework that there is no room for individualistic, anthropocentric, and transactional mission parallel to the Mission of the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God within the Christian faith experience.

The missional role of each church and ministry involves the sanctification and justification of humanity in the face of all prevailing complexities and wickedness in the world as a practical non-meritorious collaboration with the divine grace to save and recreate humanity and all ecosystems that support human life on planet earth. Thinane speaks of this as a clear demonstration of synergism as opposed to monergism in the Mission of God (2023:1-7). From this angle, the thesis of our justification as only through faith and grace (*justification sola fide and sola gratia)* by Martin Luther fails to appreciate *Missio hominum* within the Mission of God as a new development within missiology. Therefore, a missional strategy or project that produces and multiplies vulnerabilities and the gullibility of congregants, as it is a practice among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, cannot be seen as collaborative to God's salvific act of grace. Mission is also not a mere response to an altar call and emotional surrender to the teachings that create fear against God. This study strongly contends that the mission of God lies beyond any human-centred agenda of some Neo-Prophets to commercialise and commodify the Christian faith experience. The prevailing culture of neo-liberalist greed and competition for being paramount and super Prophet actually works against the Mission of God and the African Christian philosophy and theology of ubuntu (Mashau and Kgatle, 2019: 1-8).

It is worth noting that this investigative study has adopted some elements of "missiology as encounterology" as part of the theoretical framework to interrogate the dynamics that have emerged in how some Neo-Prophetic leaders deal with interreligious and ecumenical dialogues (Kgatle, 2024b:1-6). Greater focus is placed on how Neo-Prophets practice religious exclusivism in their pastoral ministries to ensure control over their congregants for purposes of commercialising and commodifying the Christian faith experience. Their religious experience with the Holy Spirit exclusively elevates them above the rest. This has led to their failure to embrace interreligious and inclusivism as a basis for authentic interdenominational or ecumenical dialogue and transformative encounters (Kritzinger, 2008:770-788). As a result, their pneumatological and missiological imagination remains arrested and

narrow as they claim to be the only point of encounter or ambassadors of the established Kingdom of God. Their egocentric spirituality preconceived theological teachings on being born again and promotion of the Gospel of Prosperity are the only correct points of encounter with the divine, at a total exclusion of interfaith and interdenominational encounters (Acts 2:5-11).

3.2.5. Key missiological concepts that underpin the theoretical framework

In support of this theoretical framework, new key concepts have been developed by missiologists. These shall be briefly discussed to broaden the base that underpins this study. *Mission Dei* refers to God as the originator and sustainer of His mission to redeem and restore humanity. Thinane refers to this mission of God as top-down soteriology (2024:6). There is a close correlation between *Missio Dei* and *Imago Dei* within the missional Church. In the light of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 26-27, humanity was created in the image or likeness of God as the climax of creation and commissioned to have dominion over all creation. Humanity bears the image of God in their will power, ability to reason, memory, dignity, freedom, spirituality, and ethical behaviour (Simango, 2016:172-190). *Missio Trinitatis* emphasises the mission of God as communally shared by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit to redeem humanity (Bosch 2011:390; Engelsviken, 2003:482). The communal nature of the coexistence of the Trinity serves as a divine example for humanity to live in harmony and collaborate with God in executing salvation.

Missio Hominum, as a missiological concept, qualifies the contextual response of the missional church and humanity (individually and communally) to participate in the redemptive mission of God in the world (Thinane,2022a:1-7). It denotes mutual participation of humanity in building Christocentric relationships beyond the confines of religion to serve humanity (McGrath 1998:64). It denotes and fosters a sense of discipleship beyond the confines of Christianity (Bosch 2011:74-76). It transforms every local missional Church into an environment, where themes of testimony, peace, reconciliation, deliverance, kerygmatic evangelism, and healing are a lived reality. These key themes turn the Great Commission into a lived reality. Thinane sees *missio hominum* as a bottom-up missiological concept.

> The premise of the *missio hominum* is essential because it is human nature not only to experience one's true self in communion with the Supreme Being

> but also to develop one's true humanity in relation to the divinity of God. That is to say, an authentic *missio hominum* is only realised when every human life is lived appropriately with and in service to the *missio Dei*, following the example of Jesus Christ, who became the perfect *imago Dei* (2024: 8).

Motus Dei is among the missiological concepts to be explored and applied in this study. It places great emphasis on God as moving and ever-present in shaping the missional church across epochs, continents, and technological changes. It aligns with the polycentric nature of the Church, marking a paradigm shift from mission and ecclesiology as a centripetal uniformity to a centrifugal, diverse, and multidirectional participation in the mission of God. The omnipresence of the Triune God in the world also contributes to the concept of *Motus Dei* that forms the missional imagination theoretical framework of this study. God is seen as present and moving in our world (Stott 2006:71-74). This brings the complementarity between the divinity of God the Father, the incarnational and redemptive presence of Christ, and the flow of the Spirit to transform the world and the missional participation of humanity in the Church. In this way, God is not merely static, rigid, immovable, and confined to the heavens but is on the move beyond space, time, and the missional Church. As in the Exodus narrative, God is on the move to give the church a fresh and responsive presence in the global and local Church (George and Godfrey 2012: 1-13). This points to the value put on unity in diversity and the distinctiveness of each local church. The main argument and assertion of this theme within the theoretical framework of this study is that God moves with time during this age of migration and the world becoming a global village in terms of *homo mobilis* (human mobility) and connectivity through the internet (Paul 2020:1-17). Soteriology is seen as symbiotic with changes in the missional church and the world. Each missional church reciprocally experiences the dynamics of ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ from others. Arguably, this leads to what Balia and Kim call “the reverse mission dynamics” (2010:191). The salvation of God through the missional church is directed by the God of the universe (Georges and Harold 2010: 7-9). Out of this, the researcher also argues that individual and communal participation of Christians in the missional Church is part of their likeness with God in terms of their rationality, relationality, identity, and freedom that enable each person to embrace the movement of God kinesiologically, as created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). According to the Confession of Saint Augustine of Hippo, this is put as follows: “You

have made us toward yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (Book 1, 1-2,2.5.5). As creatures of God, we are missionally, spiritually, and intrinsically determined to be on the move and participate in the dynamic change as the world and systems evolve (Groody 2012:409-424). This concept also marks a shift in articulating missiology as dynamic and focused on making disciples in all the world (Farah 2021; 2020: 1-10). Within the era of the 4IR and the understanding of the world as a so-called global village, the Kingdom of God knows no boundaries.

Another concept in support of the theoretical framework of this study defines the missional church as polycentric from its origins. Yeh argues that Christianity has no geographic centre like Mecca for Islam (2016). Based on the historically recorded details in the book of Acts, Christianity has spread multidirectionally from Greece (Europe), Asia Minor (Asia), and Alexandria (Africa), and therefore has many centres of origin.

> (T)here would no longer be one center for mission in the world today. Rather, mission would be encompassed as a polycentric reality, streaming from everywhere to everywhere rather than having a central hub from which everything would flow (Handley, 2020: 48)

As a result, the mission of the Church has also become polycentric and poly-directional; what Yeh describes as being "from everyone to everywhere" (2016:6). This emerging concept of inclusive missiology discusses the missional Church being led by a global God (Yeh 2016:28-33). From this, a polycentric, communal, and collaborative missiology and polycentric leadership theory within the missional Church have emerged (Handley, 2020: 48). This provides a corrective to those Neo-Prophetic churches that continue to exist in silos and do not adopt a shared confessional and regulatory framework. The themes and advocacy promoted by Yeh on polycentric missiology encourage partnership in pastoral theology, mission, leadership, and governance, highlighting new areas of study for future exploration. These key elements of a polycentric missiology strongly relate to the trinitarian paradigm of leadership and governance within the missional church (Franklin et al. 2017). Handley summarises this as follows: "Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lead in a polycentric manner, and as the scriptures provide examples of plural leadership, we as mission leaders can strengthen our efforts by leading polycentrically" (2021: 8). The

paradigm shift in missional leadership need not replace existing models of hierarchical, monarchical, solitary, or authoritarian leadership but should instead foster innovative missional imagination and leadership to develop a new glocal missional paradigm. This polycentric leadership should be grounded in biblical themes of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and Servant Leader. Zscheile elaborates on this point:

> Leadership communities in the image of the Trinity embrace a level of mutuality, reciprocal acknowledgement of each other's gifts, vulnerability to one another, and genuine shared life that transcends simply getting the job done. Thus, cultivating a community in the image of the divine community— a community of reconciliation, interdependence, mutuality, difference, and openness— becomes central to leadership in a trinitarian perspective. This includes both the community *of* leaders and the community *led* by the leaders (2007:57).

Part of this newly explored concept of a missionally reimagined polycentric leadership ought to contribute a great deal towards promoting diverse, indigenous, and regional structures of leadership. These inclusive structures need to develop commonly agreed "complex, adaptive, and self-regulating systems … build roots of character and (establish) core values to serve within the *Missio Dei.*" (Handley 2021: 9).

Key themes that ought to underpin this reimagined polycentric missional leadership are important to acknowledge. Charisma, rooted in trustworthiness, visionary pastoral leadership, good character, humility in serving Christ, and nurturing emerging ministries, is essential. Collaboration or team-oriented ministry should shape a form of missional leadership that embodies the perichoresis power of the Trinity (Volf 1998). This renewed understanding of the Trinity's perichoresis within participative pastoral leadership reconnects the missional church to the communal nature of God (Zscheile 2007: 43-63). It serves as a corrective to the practices of some Neo-Prophets who minister in silos and individually, 'a law unto him/herself'. The polycentric model of missional leadership must also uphold higher standards of collective ethical behaviour aligned with the shared vision and mission of the community. Handley notes in this regard that "Leaders who work with others in community bring change to their missions and foster an environment that will go farther together" (2021:10). A relational approach based on deep bonds of diaconal friendship, trust, and openness among

pastors of the global south and north should form the foundation of a people-centred leadership and effective mentorship. It emphasises elevating both pastoral leaders and congregants to higher levels of shared vision, healthy relationships, communication, and a sense of belonging to a community grounded in character, guidance, and core values such as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, peace, equality, freedom, and justice (Burns, 1978).

Thinane (2022b) and Smith (2002) introduce the concept of Mission Politica (the mission of politics), respectively. They argue from their contexts that the mission of God also provides positive lessons about addressing issues of social justice, peace, and human dignity. This can serve as a springboard for a communally shared pedagogy of love (Darder, 2002), pedagogy of the heart (Freire, 1998), pedagogy of freedom (Freire, 1998), and pedagogy of hope among vulnerable congregants (Freire, 1994). All of these become significant for congregants who have suffered and internalised gullibility and vulnerabilities (Fraser, 1997:55). These critical pedagogies support the holistic development of conscientisation and liberation within a missional church. New challenges are transformed into opportunities for new lessons about life. As Munroe argues, “Leadership is the capacity to influence others through inspiration motivated by a passion, generated by a vision, produced by a conviction, ignited by a purpose.” (2005:54). Critical skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, creativity to stimulate intelligence and critically evaluate previous assumptions, discipline, and timing are particularly important. These skills can enable pastoral leaders to inspire and mentor congregants to think critically, find innovative ways to overcome challenges, and build resilience and self-esteem (Freire, 2000:129). Pastoral leaders, especially within the circles of Pentecostalism, can act as mentors and coaches who enable some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries to celebrate diversity and foster Christian unity (Kotter 1996; Burns 1978:4). This reimagined missional church disrupts power dynamics between those who hold control and congregants on the margins. The previously marginalised begin to inform and reform their missional church (Manchala et al. 2013:42). In line with the Arusha Call to Discipleship, transformational intersectionality begins to value and facilitate a reimagined ‘mission from the margins’ that addresses powerlessness and reproduces the marginality of those who were previously marginalised (Jukko, 2021, 31-34). This creates new space, innovative and

groundbreaking prophetic expressions, and fresh perspectives for a missional church empowered by the Holy Spirit.

> The Holy Spirit is always empowering the margins throughout history with power and agency, which builds confidence, resiliency, engagement, and praxis of the margins. We celebrate the maternal Father, liberating Son, and energising Spirit in a trinitarian community, which abides and sustains within marginal communities. (Jukko 2021: 63)

Freedom to self-regulate and promotion of legally compliant entrepreneurship practices among churches may contribute towards each becoming economically self-sufficient, pastorally self-propagating, and accountably self-producing. Within the spirit of Ephesians 4, diversity is to be celebrated within the Church as the Body of Christ (Dorn,1982). This theme needs to stand as a corrective to the current practices of some Neo-Prophets who do not value and nurture the five-fold ministry among the People of God. Polycentric missional leadership framework values contributions and ministries from multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural members of the Church who come from diverse socio-political and economic backgrounds (Mancini 2008). As Yeh asserts, “Diversity keeps us sharp as we engage with other Christian points of view, but it also keeps us humble if we truly listen to others who may correct any errors in our thinking.” (2016: 59). All these need to contribute towards a theoretical framework that reconceptualises missional leadership in the 21st century.

Polycentric missional leadership plays a vital role within missio politica as a holistic perspective. It requires missional pastoral leaders to be professionally trained, highly capable, and responsive to rethinking and re-grounding pastoral ministry amid rapid social and technological changes (Setyaningrum et al. 2020:903). Stimulating congregants by setting new benchmarks in their individual spiritual journeys and training each to see challenges as opportunities for their spiritual growth and development increases their sense of belonging to the missional Church as their spiritual home. This reimagined missional Church experience transforms a church into a “church of all and for all” (Jukko 2021:70). This transformative, Spirit-led missional Church experience defines the Kingdom of God on earth. It is “commissioned to celebrate life, and to resist and transform all life-destroying forces” (Keum 2013:4). From this arises a transformative and eclectic spirituality shaping the Christian values,

belief systems, and missional praxis of the church as the People of God (Kritzinger and Saayman 2011:189; Bosch 1979:13). The synergy between *missio politica* and polycentric missional leadership could play a key role in advocating for an ecumenical missiology and restoring life-giving values among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Key themes such as the call to discipleship as the People of God, gender equity and justice, eco-justice supporting biodiversity, and inter-religious harmony could begin to broaden the church's scope beyond commercialisation and the commodification of the Christian faith experience. Neo-Prophetic churches must also recognise their missional participation in the God-initiated Mission by responding to a call to discipleship centred on Christ. The personal deification of some Neo-Prophets should be replaced by a missional sense of Christ-connectedness, Christ, and a call to humble discipleship under the cross of Christ. This will help eliminate the spiritual vulnerabilities and financial exploitation caused by the current misappropriation of authority in some Neo-Prophets , re-grounding the role of each missional church away from maladministration.

The synergistic correlation of all these concepts reveals the dependency of the dynamic growth and achievement of the biblical mission of the missional Church on the sufficiency of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in John 20:21 and the conscientious involvement of the People of God (1 Peter 2:9). These emphasise God's sufficiency to redeem humanity through His unmerited gift of grace and the vital willingness of each individual to make a conscious choice to participate in God's missional work (Thinane 2021:1-17). All these key concepts indicate that the mission of the Church is evolving into a Spirit-led mission that shapes the nature of the church beyond the limitations of any era or continent, including but not limited to the current unfolding of the 4IR.

These interconnected missiological concepts underpin this missional imagination as a theoretical framework and function as missiological lenses and pillars of this study. In this study, they are chosen to establish a foundation for a corrective and preventive regulatory framework for Neo-Prophetic churches in South Africa.

3.3. Methodology of this study

Focus groups, interviews, and observations are qualitative methods chosen to generate primary data that enabled the researcher to answer research questions and

develop credible, convincing responses on which the findings and recommendations of this study will be based. These methods were used to collect objective, authentic, original, reliable, and accurate primary data and to generate new knowledge from participants. To achieve this, field notes and audio-visual recordings were used to capture valuable data thoroughly, accurately, and systematically. This was done after obtaining formal consent from participants.

3.3.1 Selection criteria and ethical formalities

Before these formal engagements, the researcher often attended their regular services and was invited as a VIP guest at spiritual revivals and significant events. Thanks to these friendly relationships, most Neo-Prophetic pastors and management teams have expressed strong interest in this study, expecting it to offer valuable perspectives and guidance. Gatekeepers like leading pastors, church management, and key individuals across various ministries were approached and informed about the study and their cooperation was sought. Participants were selected based on criteria designed to ensure high-quality primary data and active involvement in interviews. Proximity to the interview venue was advantageous for in-depth interviews. For focus groups, purposive selection aimed to include informants with broad and strategic insights into church management and teachings. Participants had to be regular, registered members of one of these Neo-Prophetic churches or ministries for at least three years. All were briefed on the research purpose and signed informed consent voluntarily. Ethical issues such as voluntary participation and confidentiality were openly discussed. Measures to protect participants from harm or inconvenience were addressed, with the researcher committed to safeguarding their dignity and confidentiality—strictly maintaining anonymity and trusting the disclosure of sensitive information. Participants agreed to attend all scheduled sessions.

All participants were primarily selected based on their ability to articulate their Neo-Prophetic faith experience, demonstrated through their complete expression and interpretation of their values, beliefs, and opinions as self-interpreting beings (Kruger, 1988:150). They were also chosen for their known insight and participatory roles in various church activities. This allowed the study to explore, gain deeper insights, and acquire new knowledge from these carefully selected participants (Patton, 2002). The selection was based more on the practical needs of the study to enrich data according

to its rationale and purpose than on sampling large numbers. This was especially evident in choosing participants for in-depth interviews and focus groups as primary data sources. The number of participants was justified by the value of shared thoughts, experiences, interactions, and responses within their social and worship settings. This supports an argument against any under- or over-representation of Neo-Prophetic churches in the broader population (Creswell, 2007). The size of each data collection method was not predetermined but adapted to the available participants, considering the specific nature and broader scope of the topic, aiming to reach data saturation of key themes. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora describe this as “information power” (2016: 1753).

All participants agreed to provide in-depth and comprehensive answers. Recruitment of voluntary participants was conducted through gatekeepers nominated by the pastoral leadership and via snowball sampling. Companion participants recruited new and hard-to-reach individuals for their known and valued contributions (Plüss, 2003:64). Personal details such as names, addresses, and phone numbers were kept confidential. This included removing vernacular terms, location names, and geographical clues from the public, without compromising the quality of the findings when feedback was given to participants. The data collected on personal thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and self-discovery related to participants' lived experiences within their church or ministry, gathered through qualitative methods, remain confidential and securely stored. This study aimed to produce compelling, reality-based findings through various qualitative approaches.

3.3.2 In-depth interviews

A semi-structured approach to these interviews was primarily used in view of the demographic nature of the participants. A maximum of five participants were interviewed from each of the six selected Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. All participants were interviewed individually. The primary purpose of the interviews was to compare or verify the findings gained through observations. In-depth interviews had open-ended questions that were asked to all participants, serving as a guide to establish formality and order. The opportunity for probing deeper to generate new knowledge also contributed to gaining more insight. Short theme-based audio-visual recordings and pictures were used to stimulate a participatory environment to break the ice and promote open dialogue on key themes of this research. This personal

experience or direct contact between the researcher and each interviewee offered opportunities to understand responses within the context of body language and non-verbal gestures.

In-depth interviews were conducted both before and after Sunday services. This reduced travel costs and enhanced the punctuality of participants. Light refreshments were provided as a gesture of appreciation and hospitality since this was additional time beyond their usual commitments. Attendance was good, and most selected participants were fluent in English and naturally confident to engage in meaningful discussions. Individual sessions took place in each church or ministry, and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Each church or ministry had one or two participants. The gender balance was roughly equal, and the age range was between 18 and 55. Personal introductions helped to foster a mood of trust and openness. All participants were actively involved in various roles, such as worship team members, youth pastors, sellers of anointed objects, ushers, and church administrators. Gatekeepers also contributed positively to the significance of this research. A formal request to record sessions with audiovisual equipment was agreed upon by all participants, on condition that all raw data would be used solely for this investigative study. In some cases, diplomacy and sensitivity were necessary to maintain healthy human relations between gatekeepers and participants even beyond the research process. The nine primary questions, based on inductive reasoning, were used to support the findings.

- Question 1: Tell me about yourself, and how you understand the selling of anointed objects. Do you see it as a business to gain profits or a means to deepen your religious experience in your journey as a born-again Christian?
- Question 2: What experience can you talk about regarding the power of witness testimony that shows your stand on the selling of recorded sermons and teachings?
- Question 3: Are there any positive elements that make you choose to remain in this church or ministry among so many others in terms of the financial prosperity, protection from evil spirits, prophetic impartations, and guarantees for your good health?
- Question 4: Which four key themes would you choose to describe your experience as a born-again Christian in this church?

- Question 5: How does each of these four themes contribute to your growth in the Spirit and as a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- Question 6: Do you have any deliverance experience that you can voluntarily share to show the power of God flowing through your pastor into your life?
- Question 7: What other divine favours have you gained through the prophetic impartations by your pastor?
- Question 8: How does this church/ministry sustain itself against so many others in a close location? Say something on regulations and acceptable behaviour that strengthen social cohesion, fellowship, and sense of mission among congregants of this church or ministry.
- Question 9: Is there anything unique you may add to give a bigger picture and help the researcher to gain a better understanding of the practices of human dignity, freedom of choice, and right to privacy in this church?

Each of these had a few impromptu questions for more clarity and insight.

3.3.3 Direct and overt observations

It is worth noting that four out of six of the visited churches and ministries were breakaways from a Pentecostal church or mainline church. This method helped this study to pay special attention to the worship atmosphere within which most participants worshipped and praised, spoke in tongues, received teachings, prophecies, and divine healing over their lives. The planned systematic observation was on the strategic vision and mission of each church or ministry as displayed on the centre stage and forming the ambience and beauty of the altar. The commercial centre or corner where recorded sermons and teachings by the leading pastor are sold proved of great interest. The marketing drive from the altar and display of various anointed objects for sale as prescriptions for divine healing, health and wellness, financial prosperity, and divine protection from malevolent spirits formed part of the data collected through observation. In this way, observation naturally prolonged the engagement of this study through various human senses to harvest new data as presented in these worship spaces of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

Out of these observations, methodical and tactical impromptu questions were asked from selected gatekeepers and/or informants to establish a unique and fuller understanding of the setting in each worshipping space. The standardised observational study of some Neo-Prophets in each of these churches or ministries as a phenomenon led to greater insight, additional data, and valuable details, which constituted an added advantage gained through utilising this method. This method helped this study to confirm or refine data collected by other means. The observations were casual in nature, yet added value and great insight into the spontaneous behaviour of participants in their natural worship space. Since the researcher is aligned with the Anglican Church tradition, there was a lot of mutually beneficial exchange in terms of giving and receiving new insights, as this was not an immediate experience. The level of objectivity was achieved through this reciprocity, and subjective interpretations of the researcher were corrected, and new lessons emerged. This had a positive influence on the direct, informal, and better-grounded observation stance and participation in the worship services and faith revivals that took place during this data collection phase of the study. It led to some critical retrospection and more enlightenment, or a new perspective on the already gathered data.

The distinctions drawn from the use of titles like Apostle, General, Bishop, Prophet, and Archbishop emphasised the non-denominational autonomy of each of these churches and ministries. All these titles emphasised each of these pastoral leaders as ‘Man/Woman of God’. The strong drive of competing for survival and expansion was palpable from sermons and other comments. Loyalty and total obedience to the pastoral leader as a mediator for divine favours were a strong feature in most of what was communicated. This was also demonstrated even in the seating arrangement of the leader. *‘Planting of the seed’*, participation in outreach programmes of the Neo-Prophetic church or ministry, buying anointed objects and positive confessions over one’s life, form the basis of the commercialisation of the Christian faith experience.

Two of the visited Neo-Prophetic churches practice forensic prophecies, which took up most of the time and focus of the worship services. The sense of wonder was paramount at the performance of forensic prophecy, whereby the pastor reveals private matters and demographic details like the cellular phone number, bank account number, and car registration number of an individual to the congregants. This practice is said to be the main attraction of the services and part of what lies behind the exponential growth of these churches. Participants in this research study confirmed it as a higher-order spiritual gift for the chosen few, and it gave an added advantage to the incumbent of this gift compared to those without it. This study examines how this provoked vibrancy and much excitement among congregants. Some would even offer money in appreciation of this practice during the service. When the Pastor said, “Can I prophesy?”, the declaration of prophecies over individual congregants became the climax of the worship service. This was said to be based on 2 Chronicles 20:20, which says: “Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established, believe His prophets and you shall prosper.”

In summary, through the above-mentioned data collection, flexibility was practised on key issues. A more natural flow of impromptu and newly adjusted questions to challenge and probe for insight enabled this study to discover novel information. Out of this, new relevant themes emerged in answer to the original questions of this study. Based on these, clarity-seeking questions were also used to gain greater insight into participants' views on a particular theme. This was critical in moving participants from merely expressing opinions or impressions to revealing their moral values, belief systems, and sense of accountability for choices made in their lives. This also

contributed immensely as part of formative research through which problems are diagnosed and evaluated. Out of this, the most appropriate interventions, empowerment, and emancipatory strategies were developed. Most transcription and journalling took place immediately after the observation, while the mind of the researcher held a fresh recollection of proceedings.

This method of data collection was chosen to gather additional data by observing participants in their worship space. The immersion of the researcher into the power of the natural environmental context, the setting, and ambience of the observed worship services enabled him to understand the emotional behaviour, faith practices, music, and the teachings that define Neo-Prophetism. The significance of artefacts and anointed objects as points of contact with the divine power to release health and safety, healing, and financial prosperity was explored. The exponential rise of Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries in South Africa has offered a multitude of options regarding worship experiences. In each observation session for each church or ministry, two or more informants provided closer insights to the research team to enrich their understanding of this real-life worship experience. These overt observations increased bonds of trust between congregants and the research team. The team was permitted to record audio-visual data that captured the physical ambient settings, interactions, various events within a church service, and social behaviours of worshippers as they occurred. Shorthand field notes were also taken to record items useful for interpreting data. Technicians responsible for recording visuals had broader experience in capturing live events. Special thematic events were briefly documented, as discussed in briefing sessions held prior to these observed events. These recordings were invaluable for accurately sequencing the original events. From this immersive experience, the researcher could correlate observations with key research questions. This approach also enabled inferences about the overall worship experience, the transmission of teachings, and the significance of shared ministry. Observation sessions in churches and ministries selected for this study served as compelling evidence for validating emerging themes and knowledge.

3.3.4 Focus groups

Part of the data was collected through two distinct and homogeneous focus groups of key informants. The first group consisted of eight pastors and church leaders with a strong sense of gatekeeping. The second group included seven informants with a mix

of positive and negative experiences. These two focus groups developed a solid sense of confidentiality and rapport during the study. This progress was achieved after considerable time was invested in building trust and connection. Both sessions were conducted, each lasting between 70 and 90 minutes. Critical skills such as keeping informants fully engaged, maintaining focus during discussions, connecting and analysing ideas, and encouraging deeper reflection were essential. Managing group dynamics (addressing reluctant and dominant participants), facilitation (keeping discussions on track), observation, active listening, and handling ethical considerations were key. All questions were open-ended to foster discussion and gain deeper insights from the target group. Topics discussed included sensitive issues such as abuses of biblical titles (Apostle, Prophet, and Man of God), forensic prophecy, and the commercialisation of Christianity. From these discussions, preliminary data indicated serious malpractices within specific Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries, representing a new and unregulated trend within Christianity.

Probe, follow-up, and exit questions regarding the specific context of informants were more suitable to ensure data validity and facilitate the collection of new ideas and topics. This helped in eliciting further information. The aim of this was to provide a more in-depth discussion on the key teachings and practices among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Focus was placed on ‘why’ and ‘how’ issues. Resolving disagreements among strongly opinionated members and applying sensitivity or empathy to those recounting hurtful memories was necessary to ensure that this study did not leave any emotional wounds, aggravated anger, or remorse among informants. The main contribution of this method to this investigative study was in helping to assess, synthesise, and evaluate the collective body of knowledge, norms, and shared experiences among informants. Informants also provided secondary data sources that broadened the understanding of some commonly shared teachings, values, and beliefs that shape Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries as a new branch of Christianity. This method facilitated the exploration of complex issues and the development of new and future topics regarding Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries. It presented a valuable opportunity and advantage for purposive sampling.

The primary purpose of sessions with two focus groups of those involved in the strategic leadership of the church/ministry was to gain a deeper and broader picture of all data collected through in-depth interviews and observations. This was more

aimed at strengthening and consolidating raw data. It also served as an opportunity for self-criticality on the part of the researcher and the assisting team. Out of this discussion, the validated consistency, better coding, and clarity on themes and sub-themes emerged from all the raw data collected. Triangulation could be undertaken from a more objective standpoint by the researcher. This phase of the conduct of research was also critical to reach a point of data saturation. For this reason, the same questions that were prepared for in-depth interviews were used, with only one additional question at the end of the session:

- Are there any sources of information or videos that one could purchase to gain more insight into the key questions asked? This was with special reference to:
- Facebook;
- Instagram;
- Revival conference audio-video recordings;
- Books on the key teachings of this church/ministry; and
- Newspaper articles were published on this church.

Procedures for collecting and recording data served as a reasonable basis for data validation. Conclusively, the researcher used this method to finalise data collection, and this validated the data triangulation process. When evidence of data saturation was reached, no further probing was necessary. This final method of data collection validated most of the collected data and gave pointers to themes of future study.

3.4. Population sampling

This section of the investigative study defines the scope and the segment of the population that shares a homogeneous experience of some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries to find answers to the key research questions. This study targeted a total of 45 participants and informants from the selected Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries with between 1 and 10 years of experience to ensure maximum variation sampling and the identification of common themes. These were appropriately and proportionally selected as units of interest to deepen understanding of particular Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries so as to enhance the validity and credibility of this sampling process (Welman and Kruger, 1999). The rise of some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries as a phenomenon under study significantly influenced the choice of sampling techniques for this exploratory qualitative research (Hycner,

1999:156). The two types of non-probability sampling techniques employed in this research are convenience and purposive sampling, owing to limited resources and participant availability. This was particularly helpful during the observation of live worship services. The use of purposive sampling was further justified by its focus on gathering rich, meaningful data from conveniently available participants who met the set inclusion criteria of long-standing members of Neo-Prophetic churches and experts holding key positions (Babbie, 2007; Greig and Taylor, 1999). It also assisted in sampling some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a specific branch of Christianity, illustrating how this branch influences social change. This method was especially suitable for conducting focus groups and in-depth interview sessions. In a few cases, snowball sampling was utilised to accommodate those who had given consent to participate but needed reassurance from more courageous participants. This strategy also aimed at reaching hard-to-reach' Neo-Prophetic congregants who have experienced various vulnerabilities, whose contributions proved critical for this study. Additionally, shadowed data was gathered when participants extended their narratives beyond their own stories to include those of others. Participants not only shared their lived experiences but also referenced the experiences of others to show similarities or differences (Creswell and Clark, 2017: 9-11). Beyond their knowledge and lived experience, these participants were willing and able to communicate their stories and reflectively articulate their opinions until data saturation was reached (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The occasional use of shadowed data offered insights into the broader range of experiences and the wider domain of the phenomena beyond individual narratives, providing a deeper understanding of the reasons behind these differences (Morse, 2000: 4). Accordingly, this study aligns with Julius Sim et al., who state: "In the phenomenological approach, the effect on sample size is mediated through the richness of the data obtained from an individual informant" (2018: 8). This served as a foundation for identifying and selecting information-rich individuals related to the phenomenon, supporting the justification of generalisations as theoretical, analytical, logical, and representative of the population from which the samples were drawn (Patton, 2002: 240-242). Most of these credible informants were frequently mentioned by other participants and identified as having rare insights into some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (Tongco, 2007: 151).

These non-probability sampling techniques contributed towards finding participants who reflect and represent the homogeneity required to get a better understanding and insight into the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2013:206). Out of this corroboration across the board, this study was able to examine converging and divergent descriptions of the lived experiences and core issues on the rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as the subject matter of this study (Smith *et al*.,2009:3). These thick descriptive research data have contributed significantly to the quality, rich and thick findings gathered in relation to the phenomenon in question (Kelly, 2010:317).

Each sampling method, in its own way, fostered trust and human relationships between this study and individual participants. It can thus be argued that the sampling conducted through these approaches reflects different viewpoints of each social setting. These sampling techniques were convenient, economical, and appropriate (Polit and Hungler, 1999; Polit, Beck and Hungler, 2001; Babbie, 1998; Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The sampling process helped participants and other Neo-Prophetic churches to develop a better ontological understanding and educational perspectives of others within their socio-economic context. This offers improved prospects for catalytic and tactical empowerment towards their self-emancipation from identified vulnerabilities and gullibility. This is why this population sampling yielded findings that are fair, credible, transferable, dependable, confirmable, and generalisable despite ongoing debates around data saturation (Sebele-Mpofu, 2020).

In conclusion, this study argues that population sampling and the scope of this study were dictated by the research question to ensure quality data and reach data saturation. The nature of the topic of this study has several hidden transcripts and intricacies that needed to be unearthed, analysed, and interpreted. This justifies the selection of convenience, purposive, and snowballing sampling techniques used, and more data collection methods as explained below. The assurance of the quality of data could be achieved using the various sampling techniques. The qualitative and inductive method that shapes the framework of this study design necessitated these non-probability sampling methods. The use of shadowed data gave this study the convergence and divergence of experiences beyond those who physically participated. In this way, the sample size of the population given in this study was adequate and appropriate to gain information power as a basis for findings and

recommendations of this investigative study. The sampling or subjective judgment strategies used have adhered to the general principles that regulate sampling in this qualitative study. Each of these is logically aligned with the theoretical framework and research questions being addressed by this study. This study selected purposive sampling as a non-random strategy in light of nature of this study and was set out to find well-informed and reliable informants with the phenomenon being investigated (Tongco, 2007: 147-158). This study was able to obtain rich information to the saturation point. Clear inferences and credible explanations could be drawn from the lived experiences of participants. This population sampling was conducted ethically and feasibly despite limited resources and could be generalised to other Neo-Prophetic settings. Out of this, both findings and conclusions have captured similarities and variations/diversities that exist within some Neo-Prophetic churches and Ministries as a new brand of Christianity. The particularity and area of focus of this study, therefore, were on a small percentage of Neo-Prophetic churches that form part of the population of South Africa.

3.5 Limitations and delimitations of the study

This study is not an autoethnography but a phenomenological exploration of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, a brand of Christian faith experience unfamiliar to the researcher. It aims to provide valuable insights into missiology, integrated ecclesiology, and social justice collaboration within Christianity. The researcher is supervised by two experienced scholars and pastors of Pentecostal Churches in South Africa with strong research backgrounds. The study seeks to help integrate the researcher's expertise in systematic theology with ecumenical missiology. It focuses solely on Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, excluding other Christian groups. The researcher argues that issues like the commercialisation of anointed objects, unfulfilled prophetic promises of prosperity, and the commodification of Christian faith in South Africa require a regulatory framework and a national quality management system to promote accountability, self-regulation, and systemic quality improvement.

The researcher is an outsider to the Pentecostal tradition. He is also an ordained priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (Diocese of Kwazulu-Natal) and was trained and has formal qualifications from the Catholic Church (Urbaniana University, Rome). He is doing this study to be better prepared to contribute to academic writing on Pentecostal Christianity within the Global South. This may also contribute to

ecumenical missiology debates from an informed position without imposing the Reformed theology standards of Anglicanism and the doctrines of Catholicism.

This research study is therefore appropriately limited to the South Coast, North Coast, and East Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The advantage of this selection of coastal regions is the multicultural societies, and each has urban, semi-urban, and rural communities. The demographic data generated from these communities can be used reliably to reflect on South Africa. Another noted limitation is the suspicion of pastoral leaders of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries who have been investigated. They tend to be negative against researchers on the commercialisation, commodification, prophetic impartations, and fake miracles. The competitive drive for survival among pastoral leaders and those in management positions in these churches and ministries has led to difficulty in the collection of data. To mitigate this challenge, the researcher has selected these six churches and ministries for research purposes and is currently a frequent visitor whose presence is always acknowledged.

The dynamic changes and constant multiplication of these non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have led to the infiltration by traditional leaders and diviners. This syncretic nature of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries makes it challenging to distinguish a sect from a church or ministry. This limitation may be a reason for further study of this phenomenon among Neo-Prophetic churches. The use of focus groups ran the risk of superficial consensus and shallow analysis by informants around complex topics that may incriminate their pastoral leader. Most of those who participated in focus groups were church administrators and clearly demonstrated a conflict of interest in relation to their pastoral leaders, for both political and economic reasons. This was accepted as an implicit limitation determined by the nature of the research phenomenon itself, although some of what had been hidden by administrators was ultimately revealed by some interviewees, lending greater insight into areas that may otherwise be obscured from view.

The following discussion pays special attention to delimitations and the set boundaries for this investigative study. The researcher sets these for the achievement of the research objectives of the study of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, as presenting a new brand of Christianity as opposed to the practices of the classical Pentecostals, Charismatic churches, and mainline churches. In line with this, no

deliberate exclusion of participants was made based on demographics, such as race, age group, economic status, or political affiliation. There was no detailed study done on liturgical rituals and ceremonies that have no direct benefit to this investigative study.

For reasons of practicality and interest, the focus of this study remains on highlighting the key role of the missional imagination in a regulatory strategic framework for interventions and corrective/preventive measures to regulate the rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. There was less focus placed on hermeneutics, Bible interpretation, sociology, anthropology, and educational perspectives. The philosophical and theoretical framework delimited this study in terms of its perspective and what it aims to achieve in resolving the social ills arising from the unregulated rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

3.6 High levels of self-criticality

Self-criticality on the part of the researcher was particularly important as a form of best practice in this study, as it helped balance personal immersion into the experiences of participants and informants. This served to ensure that research knowledge gathered during this phase of the investigative study is used to answer key research questions with greater insight and conviction. The refining of the philosophical assumptions of the researcher about the dynamics of what, how, and why things happen in the socio-historical world and the rise of Neo-Prophetism as an unregulated phenomenon under study became important in the processes of collecting, analysing, and reporting on data results on which research claims and conclusions were to be drawn. Both personal immersion into the ontological world of participants and self-criticality enabled the researcher to establish an epistemic theoretical framework that is mutually compatible with the socio-historical world of the participants and informants (Oliver, 2012:371-372).

This self-criticality enabled the researcher to develop a focused, systematic, and rigorous approach in this investigative study (Goldstein, 2018). Key competencies included solid theoretical foundations of the topic, analytical skills, effective communication, and open-mindedness. Based on this, the generalisations and applicability of this study can be justified and trusted for recommending improvements in practice among the currently vulnerable congregants, enabling them to emancipate

themselves from the falsified claims of prophetic spiritual deliverance and instant financial prosperity. The findings generated from this cleaned, managed, and synthesised data will serve as a basis for epistemic empowerment of currently gullible congregants, helping them develop new knowledge and become less religiously domesticated, more critical in exposing the prevailing subjugation by their deified pastors (Nkoane, 2012). Their epistemic transition from critical thinking about their powerlessness to emancipatory action will be crucial to this metanarrative (Humphries, 1997). The main objective of this research study is to go beyond this religious emancipation from being subjugated and move these congregants towards a resolute and emancipatory knowledge-for-critical action (McNeill and Nicholas,2019:352) Out of this, the researcher is aiming at producing valid and convincing arguments, new socially generated knowledge on the subject matter, and sufficient evidence for findings and conclusions of this study (Rice and Dellwo,2002; Parker, 2002).

The primary objective of utilising the aforementioned research tools was to facilitate close collaboration between the researcher and participants, enabling them to address, understand, and improve their circumstances. The See-Judge-Act participatory cycle was introduced to participants as a method for tackling and resolving problems collectively through planned change, while observing and evaluating the transformation process (Sands 2018: 1-10). Furthermore, acting on that change for a better life, their emancipation was also emphasised. This empowerment benefitted both participants and the researcher, as the researcher's theoretical knowledge and experience, combined with the practical knowledge of participants, provided insights for ecclesial or organisational transformation. Creative analytical skills, the development of notions necessary for redemptive change, and fostering contextually emancipatory awareness aimed to enable the previously gullible churchgoers to assess their current situation critically. This shared ownership and addressing similar social challenges could be repeated in future instances where this proves necessary and efficacious (Kenmis and McTaggart, 2005).

The lifelong learning lessons experienced by the researcher during this phase of direct and overt data collection, synthesis, and categorisation were a valuable and immense personal experience. The researcher was a multi-tasking project manager in managing the collection of data through various qualitative data collection methods and filtering data, managing various activities to ensure that participants and

informants contribute to new socially generated knowledge, themes, and direction of this research process, as a memorable experience. The element of trust and reciprocity demonstrated by both participants and researcher led them in moving together towards achieving this quality data, and was a mutually beneficial experience. Sensitivity to the stories of contextual vulnerability shared by participants in in-depth interviews led to the recording of rich descriptions. The impact of this study has been enhanced by the depth of details given by informants who attended focus group sessions from selected churches/ministries. The last item before the closure of in-depth interviews and focus groups was the negotiation of meanings with both participants and informants, respectively. These negotiated agreements served as consensual community validation of the data collected (Schutt,2018). The processes of data documentation therefore ensured contextually situated interpretation, categorization, generation of themes, and connecting each theme to the theoretical framework of the study, corroboration, discarding of irrelevant data and presenting validated and consolidated report on the findings can be defended as done exhaustively to a point of data saturation (Denzin 2002). Based on this research experience, the new pointers to resolving issues and concerns of the Commission for the Promotion of the rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Commission) in its report on *Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems* of 2017.

3.7 Conclusion

All the above subsections have enabled this study to develop a systematic view of the corrective and preventive measures that should be implemented to address the negative impact of the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The discourse that has taken place regarding the selected research design, research paradigm, qualitative research methods, and population sampling has provided the researcher with a better philosophical orientation for this study and a multifaceted lens to view, understand, and interrogate this new brand of Christian faith experience from a missiological standpoint. This chapter has prepared the ground for diagnosing and critically evaluating the data generated. The missional imagination theoretical framework, as supported by key missiological concepts, has helped develop a critical view of the real-life challenges faced by congregants in some churches and ministries,

and thus move them towards finding a more grounded, emancipatory solution. The tried and tested concepts, themes, principles, and predictions have been synthesised to consolidate a theoretical background on which new knowledge is generated. The theoretical framework selected for this study has also helped to develop a specialised lens through which the collected data can be analysed more effectively, new knowledge and themes generated, verifiable findings discussed, and valid conclusions reached. Within the critical paradigm, this chapter presents the theoretical framework as a subset of the inclusive and logical thinking that shapes the research design, which was explicitely devised in such a way as to increase the credibility of qualitative data collected, transferability, confirmability of its findings, thereby to optimise the reliability of the conclusions drawn (Kivunja, 2018:48).

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Data collected through various research methods is presented here to underpin the claims, findings, and recommendations. The importance of data storage and security was a primary responsibility of the researcher. According to Part 2, section 4.7 of the Policy on Research Ethics of the University of South Africa, all data collected for this research must be kept for at least five years. All data formats (audio-visual and hard copy) have been digitised and stored on Microsoft OneDrive, Dropbox, and a USB flash drive to ensure availability at any time. The researcher may reuse the same data if the topic becomes a matter of public interest and signifies a significant paradigm shift. Hard copies of any unused material will be shredded to prevent recovery. Digital data will be deleted when no longer needed or valuable, in accordance with ethical standards. An assurance has been given that data will be securely stored and inaccessible to anyone who might misuse it. A long-term sharing of information has been agreed upon, to help participants stay informed and make more informed decisions in this regard.

4.2 The two sources that shape data collection

Both primary and secondary data sources were integrated into an iterative data collection process (Stake, 1995; Marshall, 1989). Besides primary sources, secondary sources were also used to verify and support the historical context and scholarly developments leading up to this study. Much of this is covered in the literature review and document analysis of additional books, records, biographies, newspaper articles, and websites for each of the churches and ministries recommended by both interview participants and focus groups.

These two sources of data have been used to uphold research integrity, demonstrate the researcher's openness to innovative knowledge, show respect, and ensure proper attribution of previous researchers' intellectual property and copyrights. Ethical standards for conducting this research within the legal frameworks of government and university codes, rules, and policies have been strictly followed. Confidentiality of all communicated or shared information has been preserved in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013. Responsible mentorship and the well-being of both interview participants and focus groups have been prioritised. This research also bears a social responsibility to support participants' personal

development, spiritual growth, practical soft skills, and competencies. It emphasises the importance of lifelong learning for both the researcher and participants as they collaboratively generate new knowledge.

4.3. Analysis done on participants in two research methods

A total of six Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries were identified and selected for this study. All of them are geographically situated on the East Coast and South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. A total of 45 members voluntarily participated in the research. There were 30 participants in in-depth interviews, and 15 informants took part in focus groups. These included three head pastors, four prophets, 10 assistant pastors, and 28 congregants, some of whom hold positions as ushers, worship team members, shop managers for anointed objects on sale, and administrators. Regarding the demographic segmentation of the focus group, 45% were males and 55% females. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 55 years. They represented various South African races (African, white, coloured, and Indian), as well as foreign nationals. Through the qualitative methods used to collect and generate data, this study was able to answer research questions based on the experiences, meanings, and socio-religious perspectives of voluntary participants (Hammarsberg et al., 2016).

Observations of actual worship services revealed attendance ranging from 150 to 650 members of the selected congregations.

Table 4.3(a) on the geographical location and classification of six churches.

Place	Geographic Location in KZN	Geographic Classification
City Centre – Durban	East Coast	Urban
Hammarsdale	East Coast	Semi-Urban
Ummbilo – Durban	East Coast	Urban
Mandeni	North Coast	Rural
Port Shepstone	South Coast	Semi-Urban
Stanger	North Coast	Semi-Urban

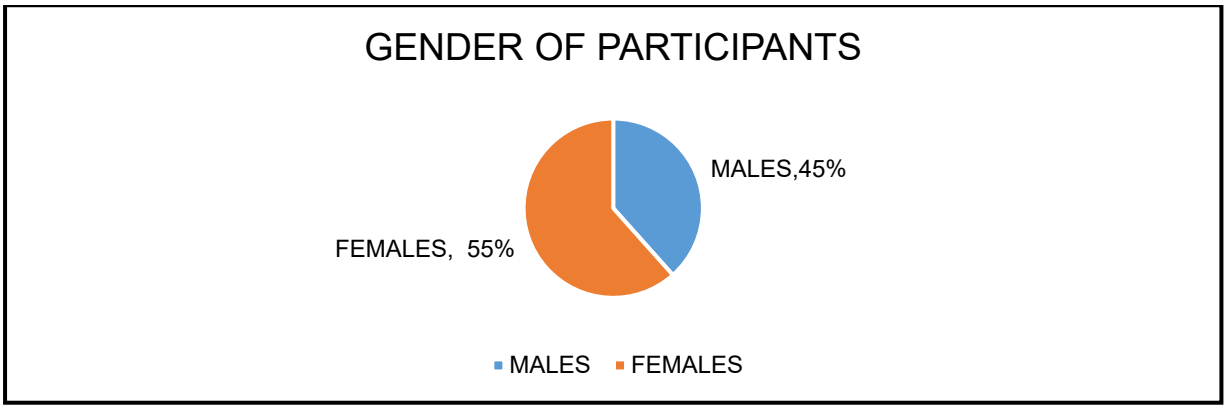
The following Table 4.3(b) tabulates the ranks or positions held by participants.

Rank	Number of Participants	Data collection method used
Usher	07	Interviews/ Observation
Congregants	10	Interviews/ Observation
Worship Team	06	Interviews/ Observation
Sales Consultants	07	Interviews/ Observation
Leading Pastors	04	Focus Group/ Observation
Assistant Pastors	06	Focus group/ Interviews/ Observation
Church Administrators	05	Focus group/ Interviews/ Observation
TOTAL	45	

The following table Table 4.3(c) tabulates the years of membership of each participant.

Period as Neo-Prophetic	Number of Participants	Percentage
1-5	13	28.9%
6-10	24	53.3%
11-15	05	11.1%
16-20	03	06.7%
TOTAL	45	100%

The following pie graph shows the gender of participants.



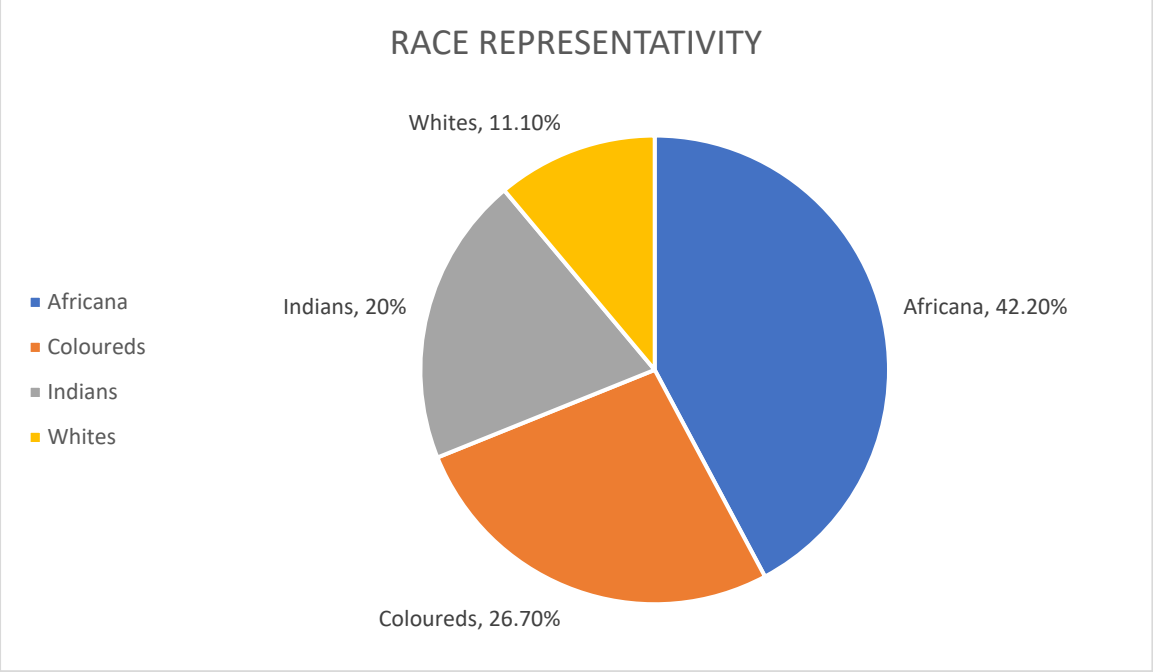
Pie graph 4.3(a).

The age range of participants was between 18 and 55, as indicated below:

Age group	Number of participants	Percentage
18 – 25	15	33.3%
26-35	10	22.2%
36-40	13	28.9%
41-55	07	15.6%
Total	45	100%

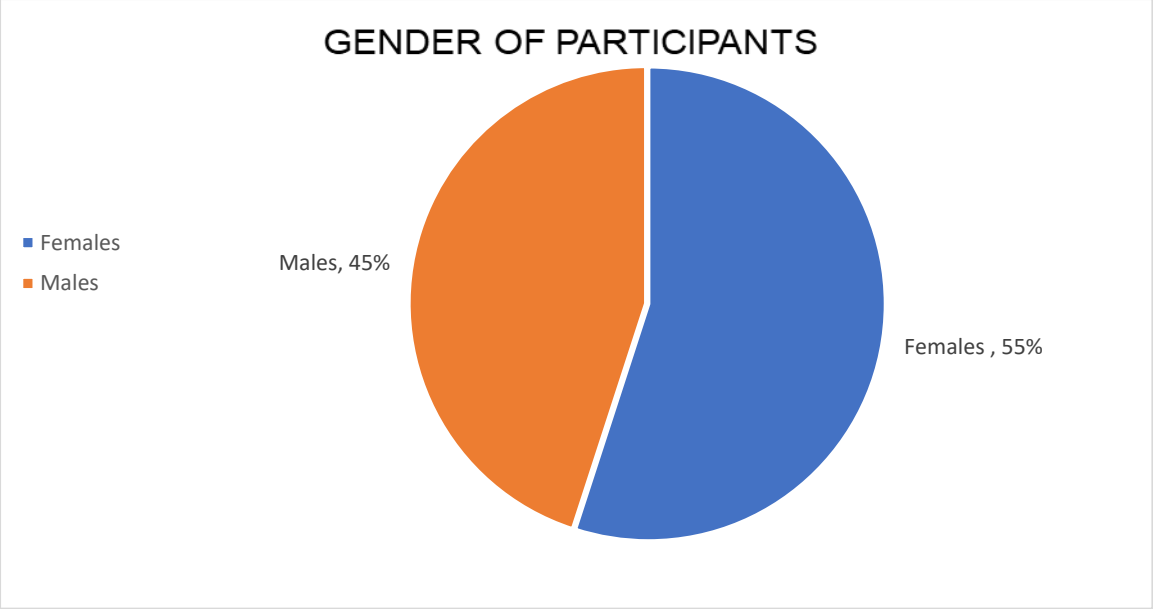
Table 4.3(d).

The following pie graph illustrates race representativity (45)



Pie graph 4.3 (b).

The following pie graph illustrates the gender percentage of both genders.



Pie graph 4.3 (c)

4.4 Data analysis and validation process

The data validation process ensured that all collected data were cleansed, verified, and appropriate for this research (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014:5). Initially, cross-referencing assessed the consistency, credibility, and reliability of data gathered through three methods (Feldman 1995). Data from in-depth interviews, observations, and focus groups were documented using audio-visual recordings, shorthand notes, social media platforms, and booklets. Next, the researcher edited the data to identify any missing information that could impact accuracy. Raw data from interviews were corrected and re-edited, while recordings were summarised. Observations were transcribed into meaningful language. All data types (text, audio, visuals) were repeatedly examined to find common themes, rich descriptions, and emerging categories. This involved sorting and sifting to identify patterns, similarities within groups, themes, and differences between groups (Miles and Huberman, 1994:93). First-order descriptive facts were derived from their natural contexts. The data were then simplified, abstracted, and coded into themes, facilitating data filtering. These themes helped answer the research questions, shape the theoretical framework, and support valid findings. For developing a new theoretical framework, inductive reasoning—central to qualitative research—was used to move from specific observed patterns to credible interpretations and conclusions (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton 2013:15). This approach enabled assessment of the dependability and trustworthiness

of the interpretations and allowed transformation of data into validated findings (Cloutier and Ravasi 2021:125).

The data sources, collection methods, and natural environment provided the researcher with detailed descriptions and essential responses to the key questions about the emergence of Neo-Prophetism as a phenomenon. Data collection was mainly inductive, exploratory, descriptive, and interpretative (Rennie, 2012). Both ontological (real-world experience) and epistemological (knowledge base) aspects, along with the necessary rigour for this research, are evident in the data (Soussa, 2014). This has ensured the data's trustworthiness and mutual benefit for participants and researchers, forming a basis for new emancipatory knowledge aimed at addressing the vulnerability of what appear to be deified pastors (Stiles, 1993). These quality-verified data are likely to produce coherent results from multiple sources and perspectives, while also supporting transferability, confirmability, and applicability of these findings in other similar contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:300). Triangulating data sources, collection methods, and research questions has resulted in reliable and responsive data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:328). Based on this strong evidence, the thoroughness and quality of the process affirm that the information-rich data serve as valid grounds for justifiable findings and conclusions (Polkinghorne, 2005). This effectively addresses potential validity threats, preventing them from compromising the study's findings and conclusions. Other threats have been recognised and used constructively within the findings and the credibility of this study's conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

4.5 Data coding process

The coding process involves comparing and contrasting data from various sources using inductive coding to systematise it. The focus was on the interconnections and complex relationships that emerged from this validated data. Part of this labelling and organising process included assigning values and themes (Grbich,2007:21). This involved reading and re-reading, coding, and recoding. As a result, it required considerable time and intense concentration to develop a broader understanding from all sources of collected and validated data. From this, the researcher linked the broader responses to the main research questions to determine how well they addressed each one.

The data coding process involved identifying emerging patterns and themes from the analysed and validated data. The following themes were identified and grouped accordingly.

Table 4.3(e) themes

No.	Cluster	Theme	Sources
1.	Salvation	Deliverance Holy Spirit Speaking in tongues Prophecy Poverty is not my portion	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations
2.	Word of God	The immanent Kingdom of God Spirit-led interpretations Subservient to teachings	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations
3.	Pastoral Titles	Apostles Prophets Pastor Bishop Doctor Professor Traditional Healer	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations
4.	Worship and Praise	Music Intercession Teachings Witness and testimonies Social media Televangelism	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations
5.	Commercialisation and Commodification	Prosperity Gospel Prophetic impartations and anointed objects	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations

		Forensic prophecies and a complete break with the past One-on-One consultations Commercialised teachings for greater wisdom Commercialisation of different attire.	
6.	Syncretism	Occult rituals to attract more congregants. Commercialised spiritual warfare. The devaluation of the redemptive role of Jesus Christ Consultation with fetish and traditional priests Back to the sender (Ps. 35:4-8 and Ps. 109)	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations
7.	Allegiance of congregants to pastors.	The authoritative power of deified pastors and the infallibility of spiritual Fathers/mothers	In-depth interviews Focus groups and Observations
8.	Vulnerabilities	Fake healings, miracles, and unfulfilled prophecies Unusual practices	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations
9.	The autopoietic features of Neo-Pentecostalism.	Start a new church Non-denominationality Individual connections and dividual disconnections	In-depth interviews Focus groups Observations
10.	The defences against the regulation of	The CRL Rights Commission Report that proposes regulation.	Secondary sources of data FOR SA Blog

	Christianity in South Africa	Neo-liberalist defences of Christian bodies against regulation.	Open letter to CRL Rights Commission Collective responses to the CRL Rights Commission Report of 2017

As shown in the table above, there were similarities and differences in data collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations conducted on the selected churches and ministries. This resulted in more systematic and logical evidence, structural validation, representativeness of data, and plausible inferences (Kahneman and Tversky, 1972). These validation measures were employed to establish dependability, trustworthiness, and consistency between the raw data collected and the findings of this study (Walther et al., 2017). This stage also involved confirming and disconfirming data themes. Some data that were disproved and rejected as irrelevant came from informants who aligned with the leading pastor as a strategy to protect the interests of the elite as a biased group (Douglas, 1976). The entire process required strategic and conceptual thinking to translate sentimentally expressed thoughts into the theoretical framework, thereby uncovering the meaning and direction of this study.

4.6 Data synthesis through narrative analysis and discourse analysis

Narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and document analysis were chosen as the most appropriate qualitative data analysis methods in this study. The narrative analysis assisted the researcher in interpreting stories that are part of the collected data to substantiate and give meaning to a formal report on findings. This considered the recorded and non-verbal cues as nuances that shape the broader storyline formulated from primary and secondary sources of data. The dual layer of interpretation of the lived religious experience by the original narrators (participants and informants) and the construction of the narrative by the researcher in answer to the key research questions marks this method of data analysis as primary to this process. Both the originator of the narrative and the researcher had a responsibility to keep each story intact as part of the broader storyline.

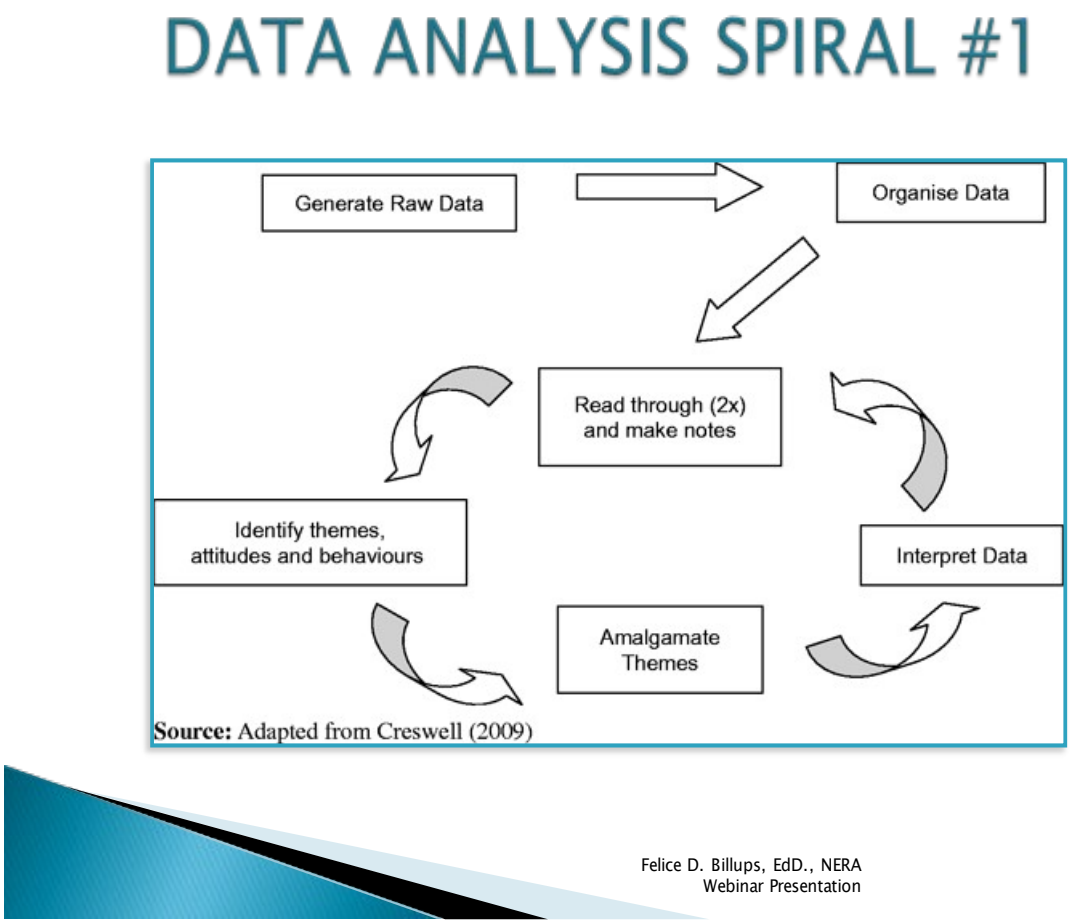


Figure 4.6. Data analysis spiral Creswell, 2009.

Discourse analysis

4.7 Data evaluation and interpretation

Refining and condensing data into thematic codes, purposive sampling, and generalisability can be achieved through these interactions between the researcher and research participants. In this way, most participants provided rich information that has contributed meaningfully to generating or co-creating new knowledge. New themes emerged, and new perspectives shaped the existing themes beyond the initial stage set by the researcher. This is one aspect that has made this research valuable by adding to existing knowledge (Creswell and Miller, 2000). It also offers better prospects for vulnerable congregants to actively participate in their emancipation from strategic domination by their abusive pastoral leaders.

When various journals—such as compilations of collected observations, shared thoughts, and insights—from each Neo-Prophetic church or ministry were examined, coded, and compared, new topics for further research emerged. During this coding process, raw data from active participants was formalised and systematised into usable information to answer the key research questions guiding this investigation. The deconstruction of interview notes, alongside coding and comparative analysis of keywords, phrases, and observed non-verbal cues, revealed general patterns, sub-themes, and new core codes related to Neo-Prophetism as a phenomenon. Consequently, the dynamism of in-depth interviews, overt observations, and focus groups contributed to the development of a new epistemology through which an emancipatory pathway is being forged. This demonstrates that participants and informants were not merely submissive but active co-creators, transitioning from an internalised sense of vulnerability to personal empowerment. The thematic analysis conducted after all data had been collected indicated data saturation, rendering further data collection unnecessary.

Out of this, new forms of institutionalised patterns of new knowledge and power of the communicated discourse were evident. Integration of communicating knowledge with power beyond words is indicative of the use of various qualitative methods to gather and generate knowledge. The selected qualitative data analysis methods have paid special focus on concepts, the socio-religious environment, original meanings, and experiences of the participants.

Through the process of coding or indexing, broader ideas, topics, and clusters of themes emerged. This data coding process was carried out by identifying clusters and themes that emerged from the analysed and validated data. This ultimately led to a coded framework of structured categories of themes and sub-themes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:347). Newly identified patterns and connections were easily recognised from the most common responses of participants and informants. This maximised the functionality, interpretation, and presentation of raw data into new themes and knowledge. As a result of the researcher’s self-criticality, some raw data became irrelevant and needed to be discarded.

This necessitated the direct involvement of the researcher at every stage to be responsive, probe flexibly, and listen actively beyond just words. Memo writing from

fresh memories of collected data also proved to be an effective analytical method to transform raw data into abstractions that explain Neo-Prophetism within the socio-religious context of the churches and ministries visited by the researcher (Birks et al., 2008). This immersion of the researcher into the socio-religious world of participants and informants shaped the process of developing new themes and knowledge in response to key research questions (Glaser, 1978:57). This process of extracting meaning from collected data through interpretation or filtering allowed the researcher to articulate, preserve snapshots of thought processes, and retain subjective perspectives of participants that were significant as a basis for justifying forthcoming findings. The variations in emerging realities, ideas, and possible directions from data interpretation and sense-making made qualitative research an evolving journey of personal growth and emancipation (Charmaz, 2004:81-82). These methods have thus added value to the collected data and empowered participants to become self-critical and to investigate their socio-religious setting and Christian faith experience with an open mind.

Random sampling and purposive sampling have primarily been employed to validate data as an objective foundation for findings (Kothari, 2004; Tracy, 2013). This was undertaken to ensure that the samples and field notes from interviews align with the research objectives established for this study. Additionally, thematic analysis and an inductive approach have been utilised to identify and categorise key themes from interview transcripts, social media profiles, and insights derived from focus groups and observations of church services. The participant responses cited below are transcribed verbatim.

4.8 Pentecostalist Thematic features of Neo-Prophetism

4.8.1 Salvation

This category of themes yielded the most comprehensive and detailed findings across all data collection methods. The main themes within this first category included Deliverance, the Role of the Holy Spirit, Speaking in tongues, and Prophecy.

4.8.2 Deliverance

Deliverance is received by congregants through prophetic impartations or spiritual ministry from an anointed Prophet to free them from demonic or generational curses that hinder the release of blessings and prosperity in terms of health and wellness,

total protection from malevolent spirits, and enjoyment of a financial breakthrough. Receiving deliverance means receiving the Holy Spirit through impartations by a Prophet as practised in the Early Church (Acts 9:17). In some churches and ministries visited for research purposes, there was no dualistic view of the person as body and soul expressed. However, deliverance is a holistic act of faith that covers the physical, psyche, emotions, and mind of the person as found in Mark 5: 1-20 and 13:10-17.

From an ontological perspective, spiritual deliverance primarily involves a complete break from past generational curses caused by malevolent spirits that have stagnated and brought suffering into one's life. One of the middle-aged male Pastors, referred to as code GOF-SUR-04, states:

> I have been a Christian since my early days, but joining […]ministry has delivered me from demonic covenants and curses that have persisted and ruled in my family for generation after generation. I have body incisions that were rubbed with some powders into, yet I have lived in extreme poverty and destitution. I have experienced deliverance that has brought victory through the prophetic impartations of the God of the Prophet over these powers that have hindered my family's progress. As far as I know, I am the first in my family to obtain a diploma and to leave before the age of 54. I am the first in my family to be happily married and to live a prosperous life in the city. I own a car and a house and can afford a middle-class lifestyle. I am indeed a child of God.

Participant SOM-INT-02, a young adult male usher, confirms:

> I am a born-again Christian, and I have experienced spiritual, physical, and financial deliverance. I believe that moving away from my original home and dedicating my life to this ministry has transformed me. I own an RDP house and live a single life that has brought me much relief, even from the burden of the black tax. My spiritual father has supported me through his teachings, helping me stay strong. Being delivered means I am more than a conqueror. I used to be a violent fighter; I smoked dagga, and I relied on traditional charms to win court cases. I always feared attracting mystical sanctions from my ancestors and never ate pork. Now, the old life of poverty has

vanished. I am saved. I am *umzalwane kubazalwane*. (a true born-again among others)

KMM- OBS- 06, a young adult woman in the church choir, shared a story of a lady who gave a testimony that she conceived after her spiritual deliverance experience. For the first time, she felt the joy of becoming a mother. She thanked God, the Pastor, and everyone who supported her through prayer and pastoral counselling.

One of the informants, HAM-FOC-04, a young adult female pastor, had direct experience of performing the deliverance of a sexually promiscuous and alcoholic man. He lacked moral control due to demon oppression (Romans 12:11-14). She described how much spiritual preparation and prayer she had to undertake before performing an exorcism. This process involved the spiritual summoning of the demons to identify themselves as a necessary step for the possessed person to achieve total deliverance. She stated that she asked the demons, “Who are you in this body?” This disempowers the demons and enhances the effectiveness of the exorcism, leading to complete deliverance. The discovery, naming, and expulsion of the demons are key steps in exorcism (Hunt, 1998). She would repeatedly say: “In the name of Jesus, I command your forces of darkness to leave this person” until the person was delivered.

4.8.3 Holy Spirit

During an in-depth interview with participant ECD-INT-01, a young woman from the worship team, she shared a profoundly moving story demonstrating the Prophetic transformative power of salvation in breaking completely free from satanic forces, specifically a historic satanic covenant she had made with the Queen of the Sea, which had caused chaos in her personal and family life. She described how she previously enjoyed sex with satanic forces in another spiritual realm in exchange for a luxurious life. She was also a successful slay-queen, sent by the Queen of the Sea and possessed by a spirit of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-21), to charm married men and sabotage their marriages. In the end, she chose to surrender her life to the Church during an altar call at the worship service, feeling “*a burning spiritual longing to turn her body into the temple of the Holy Spirit*.” She outlined four phases of this transformation. First, she entered a period of fasting and prayer, during which she dedicated her soul to Christ and the Holy Spirit. Second, she regularly attended Sunday worship services and always responded to the call for prayer and laying on of

hands by a pastor. During weekdays, she took part in two Bible study and prayer sessions. Third, she used her faith's power to overcome all cravings for sex, feelings of depression and confusion, and the temptation to destroy marriages. Lastly, she underwent a deliverance ritual led by a senior pastor, and she now serves as a youth pastor in the same church. She describes this deliverance as "*baptism in the Holy Spirit*" and quotes Acts 19:4-7. "*I believe that all this happened because the Holy Spirit illuminated, regenerated, transformed, and sustained me. I feel new from within*."

Informant KMM-FOC-03, a middle-aged male, intercessor and evangelist, provided a detailed testimony that he is a Christian who experienced a personal Pentecost. He stated:

> I am no longer just the person you see; the Holy Spirit dwells in me. I have learnt to be humble and to entrust every trouble to Christ. When I pray, the Spirit intercedes with me to God. Ooooh Jesus! Have mercy!… [He intones some unfamiliar words with such depth and continues to say] I am sorry. My salvation would be incomplete without the Holy Spirit, according to Romans, Chapter 8, verse 9 of the Romans. I am a living testimony that the Spirit of God prays and paves the way for us. I have just bought a car I never thought I would ever be able to afford, and *he keeps on doing great things!*

It was evident from this account that deliverance is more than the 'salvation of the soul' and that it is understood to extend to socio-cultural, spiritual, and financial aspects (Johns, 1996).

Informant SOM-FOC-08, a young female serving as a sound system technician, highlighted the role of the Holy Spirit as: "*The power of God that gives us power to declare prophecies over our lives, our families, other congregants, and our country*."

4.8.4 Speaking in tongues

The gift of speaking in tongues was frequently mentioned as one of the prophetic gifts or divine manifestations, alongside personal conversion experience, baptism in the Holy Spirit, prophecy, and faith healing. This divine outpouring of the gift of tongues has persisted beyond the apostolic era of the early church to the present day (Acts 2 1-4). It was a topic of great interest among participants and informants.

GOF-SUR-10, a young male who manages the Church Facebook page, understood speaking in tongues as a divine gift given to those born again, enabling them to fulfil the mandate of evangelising the world until Christ's second coming. He stated as follows:

> Mark chapter 16, verses 15 to 18, tells us that this divine gift is also for us. It shapes our testimonies of faith, our prayers, and our ministry to evangelise the world. You need to be in the realm of the Spirit to experience this gift. It may sound like ecstatic, empty, incomprehensible language—man-made utterance and meaningless babble among those who are not yet born of water and Spirit. There is no right or wrong way to speak in tongues. You cannot fake it because of peer pressure. It is either you have it or you do not. You feel as if you are out of the ordinary world.

KMM-INT-10, a middle-aged female Sunday School teacher, explained that the gift of speaking in tongues is not ‘a ticket to heaven’, but a spiritual experience in according to the will of God. It cannot be manipulated or used to claim superiority over others. It influences the entire worship service and can lead to extraordinary spiritual activities, such as loud shouts of prayer, singing, and speaking in a foreign language that a believer has not learnt. It is an angelic language that only the Spirit of God can impart and enables the saints of God to understand. When they enter into ecstatic tongues, they confound the devil and his satanic plans. It affirms their identity as children of the Most High God and serves as a confirmed ministry for the expansion of the Kingdom (Hebrews 2:4).

BSM-INT-04, a young adult woman and worship leader, highlighted that she had experienced several instances of speaking in tongues, accompanied by a profound sense of joy and comfort in the Spirit. She felt little control over her life, feeling more

under the influence of the Spirit. She explained how it strengthened her as a believer, with her mouth and body truly becoming God's instruments for proclaiming the gospel in a heavenly language. She described it as a conscious experience of tasting heavenly glory or eternal life while on earth. She has cried, lifted her hands high, laughed, and felt a very personal touch from God, which was a spiritually regenerating and evangelising experience for newcomers to witness the glory of God. It elevates the worship experience into an extraordinary praise and honour to God.

ECD-FOC-02, a lively young man representing the youth on the church administration council, spoke about the gift of tongues as a deeper personal encounter and a spiritually invigorating prayer language experience with the divine, such that it is beyond the ordinary or any human speech. His mental faculties connected with the divine, yet his will remained active. The sense of self-surrender of his ego was beyond words. He described it as a supernatural experience of God revealing and healing through His presence during prayer and worship. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as mere schizophrenia, but as a profound emotional expression that provides spiritual relief from stress. It allowed him to experience corporate worship as an authentic and holistic encounter in the presence of the divine (Acts 10:44-46).

GOF-FOC-02, a female and qualified sound engineer who was also a team leader, reported that some congregants have pretended to speak in tongues to fit in and gain acceptance. Certain prayer warriors, recognised as 'spiritual daughters and sons' of the prophet, are reported to have verbalised incantations and magical spells that caused the worship experience to become wild, leading many females into trance states and loss of consciousness.

4.8.5 The gift prophecy

Prophecy is regarded as one of the core and primary divine gift within Neo-Prophetic Churches. Acts 2:17-18, 1 Corinthians 12–14, and Acts 21:8-9 are frequently cited passages to highlight the significance of this gift as the work of God through the Holy Spirit in Neo-Prophetic ministry. This prophetic power is a divine gift reserved for Neo-Prophets that shapes their ministry. It is a Spirit-filled approach involving accessing the divine through dreams and visions.

In one of the churches visited for observation, the prophet made a serious claim:

> I am more than Jesus Christ in your lives. I am your prophet. I receive divine messages directly from God. My prophetic ministry among you is to ensure that you believe in me as a Man of God who provides spiritual impartations for your financial breakthroughs, good health, and divine protection. I am here so you can enjoy a heaven-on-earth experience. I am just too much... Hallelujah!

Informant KMM-FOC-01, a young male aspiring pastor, shared a similar story to that of their prophet, who also claims to have divine encounters with God and asserts that all teachings and sermons are directly dictated by God. He therefore believes that his prophet has greater divine power, legitimacy, and authority. He stated that the prophetic miracles and wonders serve as clear evidence of their prophet being above many. He has helped many escape extreme poverty and attain high positions and wealth. This was especially evident among those who attended one-on-one consultation sessions.

SOM-INT-02 described how his prophet takes pride in his books. He even shared a short, recorded excerpt of the message, as follows:

> I know that most of you were previously Protestants. You can read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation until Jesus comes again, but you will not receive the spiritual revelation from it or experience breakthroughs in your life! I am sent here among you as a Man of God. Trust me, I am here to release your long-overdue blessings and to feed you with the divine message that will bring you financial power to free you from generational curses and poverty. The best thing you can do is to buy and read my books and listen to my recorded sermons.

This cluster of themes clearly demonstrates that the role of a Neo-Prophetic leader is essential in ensuring that deliverance, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the gift of speaking in tongues occur among church members. The presence of a Neo-Prophet exceeds even what is written in the Bible. A prophet receives and shares new revelations from God. Complete allegiance is therefore required.

In conclusion to this cluster of themes, the central role of the prophet and the Holy Spirit was emphasised by participants. The conditional terms that a congregant must break away from the past, including family bonds, and live according to the gospel of prosperity to be better prepared to achieve financial breakthroughs, good health, and comprehensive protection from malevolent spirits, proved widespread. Intercessory prayers, speaking in tongues, dance, and a worship atmosphere have been observed as bringing spiritual relief from stress, as these practices connect each person with the Holy Spirit. It emerged that the gift of prophecy is regarded as a divine gift reserved for their prophet. The most quoted Bible verses were actually from the books that are on sale in these individual churches.

4.9 The theme of "Poverty is not my portion"

This theme was identified as one of the most shared faith declarations during prayers, and it forms part of the core teachings among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries visited for this investigative study. The primary message of this teaching, based on document and narrative analysis, is that poverty is the work of the devil and contradicts the central teachings of the prosperity gospel. It is therefore considered anomalous for a born-again Christian who is delivered, speaks in tongues, and regularly receives prophetic impartations to allow his or her mentality to be dominated by poverty. The following verbatim statements and summarised sayings demonstrate that poverty is not a Christian virtue but a sign of failure in life.

> When I was reborn, I received an impartation from my pastor who declared financial prosperity over my life. That poverty shall never be my portion ever since I was delivered from being enslaved by debt. Proverbs 22:7 tells me that I am a child of God who is predestined to be rich. I am no poor borrower, and I am no slave to any lender. Everything I have was bought in cash, including my five cars, my four houses in affluent areas, and two lucrative businesses. As written in Proverbs 13:7, I do not fake my prosperity like when I worshipped in my previous church. When I die, I will leave a legacy of prosperity for generations to come. I was born poor, but no one in this family will ever suffer the evil of poverty. For this reason, I always attend one-on-one consultations for spiritual redemptive upliftment (SOM-FOC-02, a middle-aged female, qualified accountant, and regular church collection).

KMM-INT-03, a young female choir leader in the worship team, recounted a story that being delivered and born again signifies a spiritual shift towards a life of material abundance and prosperity. She compares her attendance at a previous church with her current one and notes the significant difference. She describes this as a leap of faith into what she referred to as ‘prosperity combo’. She says:

> I am a highly successful businesswoman and a content single parent. I believe I have received a prosperity blessing of good health, complete protection from satanic forces, and financial breakthroughs in my daily life because I seek first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). I am one of the builders of this Kingdom of God on earth. I believe each day that God's divine plan is to prosper me rather than to harm me (Jeremiah 29:11). In all my prayers, I declare that poverty is not my portion.

GOF-OBS-07 is a female pastor and motivational speaker at her church. She regards poverty as an evil to be rejected because as not a spiritual virtue but a destructive virus that Satan uses to steal, kill, and destroy the lives of those born again of water and Spirit (John 10:10). Therefore, she sees her justified and righteous life as a battle to be won against Satan and demons.

> I cannot imagine being a burden to Christ Jesus by choosing poverty; 2 Corinthians 8:9 reminds me that He died on Calvary to rescue me from poverty and lead me into a life of abundant richness. I progress from glory to glory because I am anointed to triumph in every battle against the spirit of poverty (Romans 8:31-39). As you can see, I wear notable designer labels because I want to remain a visible example that I serve the Mighty God of the Prophet, who bestows wealth for generations. The word of God in Malachi 3:10 states that when I tithe, He opens the windows of heaven for an outpouring of blessings upon me. I believe that God will always provide. I constantly encourage the saints to offer their lives to God in exchange for good health, financial prosperity, and complete joy in Him (3 John 1:2).

ECD-OBS-03, a young male usher and aspiring entrepreneur, believed that he had been freed from financial hardship and emotional pain that had overwhelmed him. He was unemployed for a long period and lost many of his possessions. His wife noticed

that he was demonstrating suicidal tendencies. They sought the counsel and blessing of a prophet. He said:

> We joined this ministry… [Name withheld) after the prophet helped us regain emotional stability, and we consistently sowed seeds from our limited finances with greater faith and without complaint. Boom! We have stopped borrowing. Prosperity and wealth are now our inheritance (Ecclesiastes 3:20 and 7:14). We vowed never to leave this ministry. It is our umbilical cord of prosperity. I am proud and deeply grateful to our Prophet. We stand firm in the God of the Prophet because of his divine power and spiritual impartations. I am using anointed oil from this anointed Servant of God for my new business to ensure it remains stable and prosperous. Glory to God, Hallelujah!

HAM-OBS-03, a young male, scripture reader, and choir member, believes that when you pray for big blessings to a big God and make a significant offering for the expansion of the Kingdom of God through the Church, you harvest a substantial overflow. God can surprise you even more than your expectations (Luke 6:38). He shares a story of winning his first car from Spar Supermarket and the ongoing blessings his family receives. One of his daughters has just married, and their only son has been promoted to a senior position at work. It is as if the directors of the company have discovered his hidden talent. Many other small yet exciting breakthroughs, achievements, and instances of divine protection were also shared. For him, failure is not a trait of the anointed born-again Christians. This life is a progression from glory to glory. He described the God of the Prophet as a double-portion Giver and a generous Paymaster who is always faithful to His promises and delivers promptly. The blessings of the God of the Prophet have made them wealthy, and there is no sorrow (Proverbs 10:22).

The stories shared by participants and informants above demonstrate a strong belief in a life of abundance. During this research, it was notable that there is a suspicious vigilance against the jealousy of others who envy congregants for their financial breakthroughs and prosperity. Therefore, divine protection is sought through prophetic impartations and anointed objects at all costs. The spirituality centred around a transactional God and the prophet as a mediator of blessings and complete protection

features strongly. The belief that any evil spell returned to the sender made these congregants view themselves as untouchable under the protection of their prophet.

4.10 The themes of the Word of God among Neo-Prophets

This is the third cluster of themes that had the most reliable data and ranked highly among its themes. These include the Spirit-led and literal interpretation of the Word of God, the immanent Kingdom of God, and Bible subservience to the guidance of pastoral leaders, which can lead to the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel.

4.10.1 The immanent Kingdom of God

The new, revealed knowledge gained through prophetic teachings is regarded as divine truth and a gift to the redeemed from their prophet.

GOF-FOC-02 and BSM-INT-03, a middle-aged male worship team member, agree on the teaching that the Kingdom of God is already established among Christian believers. They base their assertions on the fact that God continues to speak and act through His Spirit in our time. Kerygmatic evangelism, prophecies, miracles, visions and dreams, healing, and deliverance serve as evidence that the Kingdom of God is fully established among believers. The subjectivity of the testimonies shared by the born-again is celebrated as evidence of the immanent God in our daily, historical realities. These testimonies confirm biblical stories of God still providing, healing, and protecting His people. There is vibrancy and new meaning to what the Kingdom of God is, compared to the catechetical doctrines of mainline churches. God is not static nor a deistic force that remains distant from humanity but hears and responds to prayers today.

HAM-SUR-15, an elderly male evangelist, views the Kingdom of God as primarily as a heaven on earth experience or the dwelling within, where those born again partake in the communion of charisms, worship, witness, and contribute in various ways for their benefit. He states: “The Kingdom of God is where we are taught divine knowledge, saved, healed, baptised in the Spirit, give testimonies, and worship God.”

4.10.2 The Spirit-led interpretation of the Word of God

Their shared experiences of hearing the voice of God (primarily the Father or the Holy Spirit) can be categorised into three types.

The first method involves a direct audible voice of God delivering a fresh prophetic message to His servant. The pastor would tell the congregation that God audibly spoke to him or her. For example, BSM-OBS-01, a vibrant young male and marketer of items on sale, experiences a change in his mind and mood when he hears the preacher say, "*May I bring you the message from the Lord this morning?"* Informant KMM-FOC-04, a middle-aged female usher (gatekeeper), explained how the Pastor receives new messages from God. The Pastor said, "*The Holy Spirit told me this morning that I should warn you not to look down upon the power of your prophet to heal you*." This affirms the belief that a missional church receives fresh revelations and impartations through the prophet.

The second way of hearing the word of God is through one's inner voice within the context of their spiritual connection with the divine. This may include dreams, visions, trances, or illumination from reading the word of God. It is well summarised in the words of GOF-SUR-11, a young female congregant. She said: "*God revealed this to me in my inner spirit, and I believe in His word. 'It shall be fulfilled. Your child shall recover from drug addiction and come back home*.'"

The third approach involves prophecy delivered by someone else. It could be a pastor or a member of the congregation, often the spouse of the prophet or a prayer warrior. Participant coded as ECD-SUR-16, a single mother and worship leader, recounted how she received a prophetic word from God over her life. She recounted as follows:

> During a weekday worship and prayer session, the Man of God was in the heavenly realm and told me that my daughter would be married, and all my prayers had been answered. I need to be strong in prayer and faithful in my tithing. He told me I am the next in line. I declared in my loudest voice: 'Hallelujah! I receive!'

BSM-SUR-10, a new female convert and choir member, said: "*We are simple Bible readers who are interested in the natural and undiluted stories through which God speaks to our reality*." KMM-SUR-10, the middle-aged male and church elder, believes that there is more illumination to reading the Bible by an ordinary Neo-Prophetic reader. He argues that there is a triadic complementarity between the Spirit, the Bible, and the Neo-Prophetic community of believers. He observed:

> There is an interdependent relationship among the Spirit, the Bible, and the community of the born-again during the process of deriving meaning from a Bible text. This triangular relationship affirms that Neo-Prophetic Christian communities have a Spirit-led way of reading the Bible.

The informant, identified as HAM-FOC-3, a young male pastor, presented a compelling argument that Neo-Prophets possess a distinctive biblical hermeneutic that differs notably from those of other Christian traditions. He describes it as pneumatic exegesis. This is an interpretation of scripture that emerges from a Neo-Prophetic freedom to listen to the Spirit within the context of a shared, real-life community. He asserts:

> When God created human beings like you and me, He breathed His Spirit into us. When we confess with our lips, truly believe with our whole heart that Jesus is Lord, and become born-again Christians, the Spirit of God in us enlightens our understanding and ability to hear His Word. Because of this, we might interpret a Bible passage differently, as we are unique in His eyes. Since God speaks anew in every situation, the exact Bible verse may lead to a fresh encounter with God in my life, too. This personal encounter with God through His Word can happen even when I am worshipping or listening to a sermon in a Sunday service. Because of this divine encounter, I worship, praise, and testify to His goodness. I do not need any theological training or a standard operating procedure for this; it is a matter of spirituality rather than academic qualification. It shapes my prophetic faith, my love for God's Word, the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:6), and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Every Bible passage read among Neo-Prophets signals the entry (incarnation) of God into our everyday life. This is our proper understanding of the Bible. We should not overcomplicate Bible interpretation, or we may miss the bus to heavenly glory.

4.10.3 The subservient abuse of the Bible by ‘Pastorpreneurs’

There is evidence that some Bible texts have been misused by certain Neo-Prophetic pastors to pursue personal profits and luxuries instead of fulfilling the primary mandate of expanding God's Kingdom. “*We are graded according to the amount we give during*

*the offering service. Those with high amounts always begin, and each gets a special blessing. Those who give amounts below R100 do not get any special blessin*g." ECD-FOC-5 is a young entrepreneur and a relative of the pastor. In line with this, SOM-SUR-08, a young adult male and usher, felt uneasy because during the COVID-19 pandemic, when church attendance was limited to 50, those offering larger sums were prioritised to attend Sunday services over others. These incidents reveal deliberate misinterpretation and misapplication of the word of God aimed at misleading the congregation into supporting a 'pastorpreneur' who views the church as a tax-free entity and a lucrative business for himself or herself. The use of Bible quotes from the book of the Prophet Malachi is also observed:

> The Prophet teaches us to remain faithful to his God in the manner he demands—tithing, offering, and giving thanks in his honour among us (Malachi 3:11-12). In his teachings, tithing is fundamentally an act of submission to the God of the Prophet, a joy of giving, and an expression of complete trust and a close relationship with this God. It guarantees a generous giver a prosperous life. Prioritising and giving in various ways to the Prophet as an act of obedience to the commandment of his God, and as a sign of gratitude, is part of the journey towards complete protection from malevolent spirits, good health, and financial prosperity (Malachi 3:10). According to Malachi 2:2, chapter 1:13-14, and chapter 3:8, I genuinely believe that neglecting to give in various ways, as instructed by the Prophet, may bring a curse, as it is equivalent to robbing the Prophet's God. The consequence is the loss of divine favour. (KMM-INT-04, a senior citizen evangelist).

The downside of this is the imprisonment demonstrated in the understanding that tithing and giving offerings are methods to acquire and maintain transactional favours from the God of the Prophet. This necessarily diminishes generous giving as an expression of our gratitude to the grace and mercy through Christ (Rom 10:4; Gal 3:24-29). Such a way of twisting scripture to serve the Gospel of Prosperity teachings empties these texts of their true biblical message. On analysis, it also transforms the Christian faith experience into occult worship and turns churches into shrines dedicated to a power other than God.

Based on the narrative analysis of the data under this theme, it has become clear that the concept of the immanent Kingdom of God is stronger than the Kingdom of God as yet to come. The concept of the rapture as a moment when Christ will return and take the Children of God to heaven completely eliminates the gap between the immanent and the yet-to-come Kingdom of God. This Neo-Prophetic teaching on the immanent Kingdom of God is linked to 1 Thess. 5:16-17, Rev. 14:14-16, and Jn. 1:13. This serves as a hermeneutic key for deciphering the way in which Neo-Prophetic congregants interpret the Bible, where there is a complementarity between the reader, the text, and the real-life context. This Bible interpretation has also led to misinterpretations and misapplications of biblical texts by some Neo-Prophets for financial gain and to commodify the gospel.

4.11 The theme of worship and praise

Observation was a more suitable method for gathering data on Altar ambience, Music, Intercessory prayer, Teachings, Witness and testimonies, Social media, and Televangelism as themes across each of the churches and ministries visited.

4.11.1 Music and singing

Both classic and contemporary hymns and choruses suited every part of the service, where a middle-aged pastor's wife noted:

> Our music is guided by talented and dedicated worship teams to create soul-inspiring melodies that bring you before the throne of eternal glory. The Afro-Neo-Prophetic rhythm soothes the soul and makes us feel alive, restoring the joy of His Presence. It also helps us dance away all stress and worries. The devil is a liar. We sing each song in harmony with the mood of the Holy Spirit and our shared experience of His presence (GOF-OBS-01,).

It also strongly emerged as part of the shared experience that praise and worship, which precede offering service and delivering a sermon, have led to prophecies, extended prayers, spiritual joy, and laughter. It is believed to please God (Zephaniah 3:17). It lifts worshippers from stress, pain, and confusion into peaceful joy (Kgatle, 2019).

Most of the saints are so spiritually immersed that various gifts of the Holy Spirit come into play. Some offer loud, extended Spirit-led prayers, others speak in tongues, and

yet others prophesy. Worship and praise services are a chaotic and emotional time where they cast all their spiritual burdens into the presence of the Divine in exchange for inner peace and happiness, as found in Isaiah 52:12 (BSM-OBS-01, a young female usher).

HAM-OBS-01, a young male with a special gift for music, described music as an expression of prayer that fosters a sense of connection between the entire congregation and the Divine. He emphasised that music is spiritually uplifting, personally transformative, and therapeutic. The afflicted find Divine comfort when the Saviour and Redeemer are worshipped in Spirit and in truth. In some of the Neo-Prophetic churches visited, a special song is sung to glorify the prophetic power of the pastoral leader, usually performed when he or she enters the church.

ECD-OBS-01, a young adult female and one of the intercessors, valued music for the way it helped congregants to connect with the power and presence of the Spirit as they truly are. The communal participation edifies and bonds worshippers into full communion and fellowship.

4.11.2 Intercessory prayers

A prayer warrior or intercessor leads these prayers as part of a formal liturgical programme. The focus is on encouraging all worshippers to speak Divine power into their situations. Worshippers may pray for healing, deliverance, protection, and various positive breakthroughs in their lives. Based on observations and evidence from audio-visual recordings made during Sunday services, full expression—such as clapping hands, walking around, or kneeling—is part of this prayer session. The nature of shared devotional prayers among congregants can be categorised as expressions of humble confession (Psalm 32:5), life-changing commitment (1 Samuel 1:10-11), worship and praise (Psalm 148:13), thanksgiving (1 Chronicles 16:34-35), healing (Jeremiah 17:14), deliverance (Psalm 107:6), supplication (Colossians 1:9-12), transformation (Psalm 139:23-24), and blessing God in advance for His answers to their prayers (Philippians 1:9-11). Most individual prayers conclude with the words: “In the name of Jesus, Amen.”

4.11.3 The power of witness and testimonies

Everyday theology and spirituality serve as a powerful motivational force that sparks spontaneous prayers of praise among the congregation. The immediacy and

specificity of real-life testimonies cannot be diluted. The following verbatim quotes illustrate this clearly.

> Bazalwane, I am here to thank you for your prayers and support during my painful experience of a confirmed HIV infection. I give honour and praise to Jesus, my Saviour and Healer (Matthew 14:14). For this, I will praise Him in the morning and in the noontide, as Psalm 59:16 states. I lost my husband, but I still want to thank Him even in my pain. I pray that He will be Father to my children and stretch His holy hand above them every day. I seek your continued support to endure this storm and emerge victorious in the end (SOM-OBS-10, a grieving middle-aged mother and Sunday School teacher).

> Good day, saints of God. I am here with my wife (he holds her closer by hand, and the congregation laughs) to tell you that we have reconciled and we will not be proceeding with the divorce. The devil is a liar! (The wife wipes a tear and tries to remain stable.) May I thank you all for never giving up in supporting my wife while I was being possessed by the forces of darkness. We thank our Pastor for counselling and support, and all of you for what you did for us. (The wife of the pastor shouts, God is Good, all the time. Hallelujah! Moreover, a worship leader starts a song, and others give them warm gestures of continued support. GOF-OBS- 08

KMM-OBS-04 stood up during a testimony session. He introduced himself and told the congregation that he came back to make an offering after a business car, which had been stolen, was recovered with minor damage. He was unexpectedly speechless, and someone from the Church Leadership spoke on his behalf, which was great news among the other congregants. He only said: “God answered my simple prayer.”

A naturally shy and less confident young man (KMM-OBS-09) also stepped forward during the testimony and altar call session, accompanied by his sister. He shared the following testimony:

> I greet you in the name of Jesus, my Saviour (all answered with a very encouraging ‘Amen’). It is my second time coming here. My sister (pointing at her closer by) asked me two months ago to join her to attend Inkonzo (a worship service) here. The Prophet of God anointed me on the forehead

> with holy oil, extended his hand upon me, and gave a touch of the Holy Spirit. I fell to the ground, and the Prophet said: “Fire! In the name of Jesus, fire!” From that day, I have been delivered from drug addiction. I have also stopped stealing and burglary that I committed with my friends to get money for drugs. Thank you, Jesus! [He lifts his hands in surrender, and the prophet gives him a fatherly hug. His sister looked on with happy tears and hugged him, too.]

4.11.4 The use of social media for worship and praise

Multimodal tools traditionally considered worldly have now taken centre stage in pastoral vocational ministry within Neo-Prophetism. Instant flow and availability of information through graphics, text, audio, video, and interactive media have made it possible for pastors to remain connected with church members. These digital communication modes have become integral to the branding that influences worship and church life in many Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Innovative creativity has shaped the way spiritual messages and actual worship services are communicated to members, even from the comfort of their homes to date.

> We have made significant progress in using social media platforms for bulk SMS, WhatsApp groups, and personalised calls to maintain spiritual fellowship as a church. We share recorded sermons and prayer sessions to foster ongoing pastoral care among the saints of God, ECD-FOC-04.

4.11.5 Televangelism

Through media platforms, prophets have conducted live streaming of worship services, individual counselling sessions, shared announcements, recorded sermons, and prayers. According to the document analysis from each of the six churches selected for this research, and the study conducted by Afolaranmi among Neo-Prophetic ministers in Nigeria, the most effective and widely used “web ministry” tools of trade, are WhatsApp Messenger, Facebook (including live streaming), Zoom, Telegram Messenger, bulk SMS, YouTube, and Instagram (Afolaranmi, 2020:20).

This has built, expanded, and sustained the community and what this study would call “online People of God,” advancing the ability to pastorally engage, motivate, and redefine the Christian faith experience. Adebayo Afolaranmi defines this evangelical

mission of the church via the internet as “online church, cyber church, virtual church, e-Church or digital church (Afolaramni,2020:13). These innovative and creative multi-modal tools of communication have significantly contributed towards the financial sustainability and evangelical ministry of many local Neo-Prophetic ministries and churches. This forms the new normal, as attested in the following:

> Our new normal of having only a few members attending and leading the online service in our physical worship space is an economic benefit to those who participate from home. These services have allowed our ministry to extend its reach beyond the registered membership. I can confidently say that we are, evangelically, a ministry without borders. We reach out to Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims through YouTube videos and televised worship services.BSM-INT-01

One of the members of a focus group (KMM-FOC-02) was so proud of how they transformed the negativity of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic into a positive opportunity to provide pastoral care and outreach ministry initiatives to the sick and bereaved families. They offered counselling and call-in centres for personal prayers and emotional support.

Participant HAM-INT-02 also highlighted the global outreach ministry they conduct through YouTube and Facebook livestreaming of worship services and Bible teachings. The use of multimedia technologies, such as television, radio, and websites has helped this missional ministry improve public communication and promote their events and religious activities. This alignment and responsiveness have become a promising investment opportunity for evangelical growth. This is a new COVID-19 related strategy for presenting the Divine. Multimedia is regarded as a tool for an authentic religious experience and evangelisation under the Holy Spirit. He says:

> Our Church's mission is to cultivate spiritually mature, principled, and spirit-filled individuals who are best equipped to exercise dominion over their lives and environment. They become ‘the salt of the earth and light to their world’. This ministry focuses on developing and reskilling the divine gifts, talents, and abilities of each member. Through this, we aim to build not only the individual but also the nation and, ultimately, the entire world. Multimedia has become a modern tool through which God reveals Himself, performing

> miracles and spreading His word. The Word of God serves as a guide for everyone to gain personal autonomy, honour human dignity, and achieve self-actualisation. This is our spiritual home of miracles, healing, and deliverance. Under the pastoral leadership of our 'Man of God', we are turning every satanic defeat into a victory. For this reason, we will always feel at home here and generously sow seeds for the Man of God to experience the reward of His divine presence among us.

Worship and praise showcased remarkable talent among musicians, technicians, and worship singers in how they conveyed meaning and a sense of reverence throughout each part of the service. Intercessory prayers were spontaneous and conducted with complete surrender to the Divine for various needs. Shared testimonies were genuine and primarily evangelical, aimed at edifying and inspiring others. Strong fellowship and mutual support were evident in the real-life experiences shared, most of which reflected a firm belief in the god of the Prophet. Some testimonies, not captured in this research data, appeared as scripted fake miracles intended to commercialise and commodify the gospel. Those who delivered these testimonies did not seem to be members of that particular church; they appeared more as performers acting out a script. The researcher observed the importance of connecting the live service with those who are sick, elderly, or overseas, demonstrating pastoral care and reinforcing bonds within the church or ministry. Televangelism in Neo-Prophetic churches exemplifies their mission to extend beyond continental borders, spreading the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth.

4.12 The theme of the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel

This category of validated data includes coded themes such as prosperity gospel, planting the seed, the anointed objects on sale for health, safety, and wealth, one-on-one consultations, and one-person pastorpreneurship.

4.12.1 One-on-one consultations

One-on-one consultation fees were among the key themes mentioned in both interviews and focus groups. BSM-INT-01, a middle-aged female congregant, confirmed that there is a charge for a one-on-one consultation with her spiritual father.

She stated:

> These personal appointments or one-on-one consultations are suitable for congregants who need the Man of God to diagnose and clarify spiritual issues that hinder their prosperity, good health, and inner peace. He then provides readily available solutions, identifies your enemy who has caused your failures in life, and assists you as a congregant in resolving the problem. He has divine powers to locate your stolen car. He can help you deal with the misfortune of employees who have been sidelined to prevent them from receiving promotions. He can bring back your estranged wife. You may be treated to win a court case. Some have been helped to win the lottery.

These also include pastoral counselling sessions aimed at alleviating alcoholism, drug dependency, lack of direction in life, and chronic illnesses. One Neo-Prophet who leads one of the six selected churches takes pride in consulting with your ancestors on your behalf, pleading for their return to you for protection and material blessings. These consultations bring about redemptive uplift and a release of your blessings. Therefore, it becomes crucial to be a generous giver and plant the seed to maintain the flow of these blessings that come through him. GOF-FOC- 01, a young adult woman and one of the church administrators, said:

> One-on-one consultation sessions are intended for more serious issues. The fees are quite high but truly offer excellent value for money. This is when you can see and feel how talented our prophet is. He is genuinely a servant of God. He provides deliverance, grants higher powers, and shares encouraging words. I have heard testimonies from congregants who were delivered, purified, and recovered from witchcraft. Some have spoken of financial breakthroughs and complete healing from chronic illnesses. They appreciate the divine power of the anointed goods of pure belief in Papa compared to those offered by others.

These one-on-one consultations have become a strategy employed by Neo-Prophetic pastoral leaders to produce self-centred church members whose interest is self-advancement by any means necessary. Through narrative analysis, it was observed that, in some cases, they have even made a complete break with their families and

taken up residence within the church premises. The following story from an adult male and a businessman offers some insight into this discovery from the research conducted.

> I once experienced a period when my business was declining day by day. It felt as if a dark shadow had cast over it. I was short-tempered and ended up dismissing many good and trustworthy employees. I had numerous bad dreams and a long series of problems I couldn't explain. All attempts by highly competent consultants to help me plan and strategise proved unhelpful. I booked a one-on-one session with the Man of God because I believed that my family was jealous and my business competitors were using evil powers to drive away my customers. I received my deliverance there. Later, the Man of God visited my business premises and performed a deliverance ritual, including a prayer and anointing of my business with blessed oil. After two weeks, suddenly—Boom! Eish, Boom!—my loyal and new customers started coming in abundance. I am now fully surrounded by prosperity and the divine blessings being released. This is what I consider a successful business [A big laugh and applause] GOF-SUR-12.

BSM-INT-02, a young adult male and a congregant narrated a different story that indicates that not all Neo-Prophets possess the powers they claim. In exchange for prophetic deliverance prayers, prophetic declarations, and promises, these men and women of God charge exorbitant fees for their false prophecies, personal philosophies, empty promises, and neo-liberalist teachings (Ezekiel 13: 2-10 and Micah 3: 6-11). This exploitation has continued without regulation or accountability from pastoral leaders (Eni, 1988). Additionally, divination has found a place and acceptance in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a means to access magical powers and spiritual potency. In two churches that participated in the research, this practice is referred to as *ukukhendla* (consultation and use of traditional magic powers to gain what you want). This was paraphrased and summarised from ECD-INT-03, a young female usher, and KMM-INT-05. A young male argued: “Attendance of these special one-on-one consultations is an open and trans-denominational invitation to the chosen few to receive prophetic impartations rather than to increase their faith in Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

The prosperity gospel among Neo-Prophets mainly serves as a spiritual medium to alleviate real-life issues, such as economic hardship, malevolent spirits, and hopelessness. GOF-FOC- 03, a middle-aged woman with extensive experience in event management, attested to this by saying:

> I am a marketing manager at work and involved in developing innovative strategies to market the products of my company. I serve on the board of… (name of the ministry). The Gospel is also a commodity that can be packaged to suit the various niche needs of our congregation. We continually seek ways to craft new retention strategies to provide value-for-money services. We sell tickets for special revival conferences for professional women, organise training for upcoming entrepreneurs, and host thanksgiving gala dinners to celebrate the achievements of our congregants. All these efforts have brought happiness, prosperity, good business networking, improved self-esteem, and spiritual breakthroughs.

ECD-FOC-07, a somewhat disgruntled young adult female, indicated that, besides one-on-one consultations, there are special events like the women's conference where the prophet offers spiritual protection to women at an exorbitant fee.

4.12.2 Titles that demonstrate unmatched prophetic powers

The importance of prophetic impartations and anointed objects was linked to titles such as apostle, prophet, pastor, bishop, doctor, professor, king of the Plentician Nation, psalmist, traditional healer, and diviner. These were identified as used to define the level of divine appointment of each church/ ministry leader or a special power to invoke ancestral spirits. Some pastoral leaders hold multiple titles to describe their roles, noting that "Our spiritual father is an all-rounder. He is King of the Plentician Nation, Plentiologist, Professor, Doctor of Divinity, Psalmist, Apostle, and Bishop" (SOM-SUR-09 is one of the five wives of the pastor). In a discussion about this range of titles held by one leader, SOM-FOC-01, a young male event organiser, confirmed that all these titles are divinely conferred on their leader. The atmosphere at the altar and the central focus on him were also observed during a worship service. He is affectionately called Ubayede or His Majesty King Somnala, the Plentiologist. The title 'Doctor of Divinity' connects him to the role he plays during one-on-one consultations, where he reveals insight into people's lives from the spiritual realm.

KMM-INT-02, a young female and a diviner, addressed her pastoral leader as Doctor, Professor, Traditional Healer, Mkhulu (grandfather), and Bishop. She said:

> My Bishop is a very busy man. He is a radio presenter, a traditional healer, and a business owner (selling herbal products at various branches in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Gauteng). During the week, he consults as a traditional healer for a standard fee, and most of the time, the first Sunday worship service is dedicated to free public forensic prophecies. He prays for our daily needs and blesses us. He is a professor because he is a cut above the rest in terms of forensic prophecies. Based on my experience, he is amazing.

BSM-SUR-13, a young female congregant, described her pastoral leader as both a bishop and a traditional leader. He specialises in performing rituals, including the practice of ‘back to the sender’ on corpses of individuals who died through gunshot, stabbing, and witchcraft rituals. He is recognised as a bishop with extraordinary powers.

GOF-SUR-11, a young female congregant, spoke of her pastor as a spiritual father who has several pastors specialising in particular ministries such as youth, children, and social media ministries. Her pastor holds only one title, believes in shared ministry, and empowers the laity to participate in both new and existing ministries. Both the pastor and his wife collaborate with others to attract new members, organise revival evangelical services, and pray for healing and divine protection. During one Sunday service, a strong sense of shared communion and empowerment was observable. Various ministers and ordinary laity take part in leading the worship service. The pastor maintains healthy ecumenical relations with other ministers from both mainline and non-denominational churches and ministries. He is also the principal of a local school.

HAM-INT-04, a young adult and wife of the pastor, referred to her pastoral leader as an Apostle. This Neo-Prophetic church is predominantly Zionist, with immediate family members of the Apostle holding key roles. The pastoral leader advocates for the evangelical growth of the church through televised worship services, a Facebook page, and online services. HAM-INT-03, a middle-aged female and leader of the worship team, also acknowledged their Apostle as a shepherd and spiritual father. Every spiritual revival introduces a new colour code of regalia that goes on sale, along

with new anointed products sold at exorbitant prices. Some of these items are exclusively available to those attending one-on-one sessions.

4.12.3 Selling of anointed objects in exchange for divine favour

The significance of the title of the prophet and his/her power to bring prosperity into the life of a congregant also has a blend of materiality and sowing the seeds for the Kingdom of God, which has indeed been evident in the testimonies shared during worship services. GOF-FOC-08, a young female and church sales consultant, says:

> Yes, we sell items such as anointed wristbands, anointed car stickers, anointed oil, salt, water, and handkerchiefs with divine protection powers to provide congregants and others with guaranteed protection against satanic forces. We also charge fees for conducting any special services, like baptisms and marriages. In addition, we encourage congregants to 'bless the Man of God' in exchange for his teachings and prophetic impartations.

Participant KMM-INT-01, a young adult female and sales consultant at a ministry where she worships, believes that selling anointed objects is vital for the financial sustainability of the ministry. She says:

> I have worked as a sales consultant for salvation products and church attire worn during our leading conferences, revival prayer camps, and cross-over night vigils. They are anointed and blessed by our father (replaced title). These aid us in claiming and receiving what we ask for, and they protect and ensure financial prosperity (especially for those with businesses), good health, and complete relief from evil spirits. There is no one like him. Whatever he has prophetically declared will come to pass.

Participant coded as BSM- SUR-13, a young adult female and congregant, concurs by saying:

> I believe in the powers of Baba [redacted]. He once gave holy water to a congregant who was desperate to conceive a child. A year later, the same lady returned with a three-week-old baby to give her testimony. They are now registered full members of this church.

In line with several videos that are freely available on YouTube, SOM-FOC-03, a young male pastor, attested that

> many miracles have happened to those who have used faith products. Some have been called to start work after a long period without employment. Faith products such as branded sprays have healed some from alcohol addiction using pastor-branded faith water, and some have raised the dead using branded holy oil. These products have been used by traditional healers, diviners, and anyone else who may not be a member of this church.

One of the sales consultants confirmed that they sell writing pens, face water, oil, body lotion, honey, and perfume spray. All are branded with the picture of the leading pastor and are believed to carry divine power. According to News24 online, a secondary source used for data collection, a bishop of one of the churches claimed that holy pens help students pass final examinations and were sold for R25. He said:

> You will never use faith water, write with Nala pen, and anoint yourself with faith oil and still pass like them, you will excel… Those who are studying must drink faith water, and the natural and supernatural power goes to your mind…Faith water has both natural and supernatural power (News24.com, 2016).

MMK-INT- 04, a young male congregant, claims that even bowing to the feet of the pastoral leader is a blessing that may bring liberation and prosperity to one's life.

4.12.4 Commercialised spiritual warfare and need for protection

Four out of the six churches and ministries visited for this study also sell the same list of anointed items for healing and protection. The following items were on sale:

- Blood tonic wine (youthful appearance)
- Kali seeds for erotic pleasure
- Powered energy belts
- Medicine to stop miscarriages
- Swollen leg elephantiasis cure
- Medicine for an unbreakable marriage
- Medicine to bring peace, love and blessing from the ancestors
- Removing curses, evil occurrences, and bad luck

- Power to perform miracles of healing people of any affliction without medicine and divination
- Court case on criminal or civil case acquittal
- To bring success and luck
- To send spiritual attacks back to the sender and destroy his/her life
- Promotion oil (at work)
- Examination success oil
- Money drawing oil
- Good luck oil
- Protection oil
- Healing oil
- Success oil
- Stress-removing oil

The above list can be summarised as mainly aimed at ensuring your material prosperity, exorcism, and protection from witchcraft, as well as living a happy and fulfilled life. The focus is on obtaining what you desire, in your own time, and in the amount you want. Most Neo-Prophetic members have joined and stayed loyal to their pastoral leader because of these everyday needs. A young male usher noted:

> My prophet asked me to name and claim whatever I wanted. I told him I wanted to win the lottery. He told me to wait for a dream in which I would be told the numbers. I received those numbers and won R200,000, and I planted R40,000 into the account of my pastor. We receive many miracles, and we submit to him as our spiritual father. My prophet is truly exceptional! There is no one like him. BSM-SUR-03

This has fostered a spiritual dependence where one's loyalty to the prophet brings blessings from God. Several testimonies of business successes, including the awarding of business tenders, loyal support of customers, and customers paying debts before the due dates, were narrated. A lot of interviewed participants and focus group informants have come to value and sustain the prophetic ministry of their pastoral leader. Prophetic consultations therefore become transactional exchanges between congregants and their pastoral leader (1 Samuel 9:7-8).

False prophecies or illusions of prophecy have emerged from these instances (Isaiah 30:23-24). These false prophetic illusions have paved a treacherous route towards idolatry (Jeremiah 23:10-12). KMM-FOC-02, a young male evangelist, states:

> What made me leave... International Ministries was the realisation that church members are persuaded to listen to a prophetic Word of God from the Man of God, and you can see him pretending to deliver a prophecy that would satisfy the members' wishes. When that happens, individuals throw a lot of money at the altar. You hear them shouting, ‘Prophesy, Man of God, prophesy!’

This is the real nefarious battle that certain Neo-Prophets are constantly fighting. Profits are made even through anointed objects similar to those sold by the Illuminati Secret Society. Majawa summarises the ten harmful teachings associated with the Illuminati that deny Christology from the writings of Pope Benedict XVI. They are listed as follows:

- ignorance of the signs of the times
- anti-church, anti-Christ, and anti-life attitudes
- uncontrolled mushrooming of churches and religious bodies
- relativistic secularism and materialism
- corruption and moral decadence
- sexual liberalism
- destruction of family and marital values
- technological abuse syndrome
- economics or international exploitation
- resurgence of five syncretistic principalities: Satanism, occultism, illuminati, witchcraft, and radicalisation (Majawa,2020).

The established ontologically protective social networks between these prophets and the Illuminati Secret Society, as well as the consultation of African traditional spiritists, have contributed to the devaluation of the salvific death of Christ on the cross (Marshall and Prichard, 2020: 327).

4.12.5 Commercialised teachings for greater wisdom and a better life

The following data was collected and recorded during the observation of key events in each of the churches and ministries visited. Additional clarity and new information were provided by one informant selected for consultation in each location. The sale of books, videos, audiotapes, and branded souvenirs and attire for special revival conferences is a profitable and well-marketed business among some Neo-Prophetic groups observed during their live worship services. Books, videos, and audio materials, available as e-copies, compact discs, and hard copies, featuring the current teachings promoted by the pastoral leader, are sold every Sunday service.

GOF-INT-02, a young adult female and church social media manager, indicated in her interview that some pastoral leaders act as commercial agents for other international prophets, who write books to promote teachings that turn the church into a marketplace for their financial gain. Most of these publications aim to encourage complete submission among congregants and to emphasise the role of the prophet as divinely appointed to bestow blessings upon them. In many cases, these teachings lack biblical support (Isaiah 8:20). ECD-FOC-02, a middle-aged Sunday School teacher noted:

> The books and other informational materials about our leader's teachings are intended to assist with ukuphakamisa izinto zakho (meaning redemptive upliftment or complete release of your blessings that have been withheld). They are sold to impart divine wisdom to congregants and to provide intervention strategies to help them manage life's challenges. These resources support congregants in improving their lives. They serve as practical tools as we navigate life, which is often a spiritual battle filled with harmful problems.

In the discussion with one focus group, it became of serious concern that some Neo-Prophetic pastors think of themselves as new and relevant sources of wisdom, far more than the Bible. One informant anonymously quoted a pastor as saying:

> I am a true messenger of God. I bring you a new Bible revelation straight from God every time. What I preach is my first-hand revelation from God. I do not tell you what Matthew, Jeremiah, and Paul wrote a long time ago. I deliver new revelations like fresh cakes. Every time I receive a Word from God, I write a

book that you should respect more than this old book called the Bible. For every new revelation, new anointed products are also unveiled.

4.12.6 Commercialisation of special events and status regalia

The commercialisation of various status regalia for specific church events has also been observed. Branded items such as jackets, caps, hats, ties, skirts, handkerchiefs, and golf shirts are sold to establish a distinctive dress code for particular worship services or conferences. Additionally, holy anointed souvenir items like cups, pens, and tags are available for purchase. All these items are given a special blessing before being sold to foster a sense of shared identity and strong belonging among those able to afford them. SOM-INT-02 states:

> At my workplace, there are many challenges, yet my colleagues come to me and say they appreciate me being part of them. That indicates there is something in me they recognise. Additionally, we are not permitted to wear church attire [ijoyini] at work, but they have no problem when I wear a branded T-shirt displaying my prophet.

This commercialisation process reveals the vulnerabilities of congregants to the religious entrepreneurial agenda of the leading pastor. Such events are mutually exclusive for those who can afford them, while people experiencing poverty are democratically excluded, as these are held at expensive and not easily accessible venues. These events are promoted through mass media such as radio, television, and print media.

This research finds that such teachings have domesticated congregants into uncritical thinkers. In fact, they function as brainwashing propaganda in order to gain control and total loyalty of congregants. Christian ethical behaviour is devised by the pastoral leadership of the church or ministry, establishing clear boundaries within which they believe they are protected from spiritual attacks. These commercialised teachings replace the Bible and foster a closed community of uncritical individuals under the spell of their pastoral leader. Through these teachings, members are manipulated to think according to the moral standards divinely revealed by their leader. These commercialised teachings have as if a hypnotic effect on congregants, bypassing their rationality.

The commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience, evident in this cluster of themes, highlights serious issues that ought to be addressed to prevent the internalised vulnerability and gullibility of congregants under the influence of some Neo-Prophetic leaders. Most Neo-Prophets are noted to practise one-on-one consultations, sourcing some of these anointed objects from traditional healers or fetish priests with links to Benin. The syncretic blending of traditional healing divination and Christian practices has damaged the faith experience of congregants. The use of titles to claim uncontested supernatural powers has fostered competition among certain Neo-Prophets. Selling anointed objects and commercialised teachings—promising greater wisdom and regalia that exalt the prophet for every church event—have turned the Christian faith experience into a commodity. The role of the Spirit has been narrowed under the gospel of prosperity, and salvation has become a transactional process for accessing divine favour. Furthermore, this commercialisation and commodification have contributed to a socio-economic divide between the rich and the poor within these churches.

SOM-FOC-04, a middle-aged male evangelist, attested that Christian prophecy is synonymous with divination practices in African traditional religions. The connection they feel with God through their ancestors is similar to the intercessions performed by Christians in mainline churches, using saints as intermediaries. These Afrocentric links with the ancestor world were also evident during an in-depth interview with KMM-INT-03, a young male congregant. This communion and interdependence among ancestors, the natural world, and Christian believers find meaning within Afrocentric communitarian epistemology, even beyond death, as shown by the fact that both participants come from non-denominational churches led by pastors who are also traditional healers. They also emphasised a strong ontological unity or cosmic connection between humanity and shared metaphysical energy from nature—animals, plants, minerals, and cultural artefacts (Mawere, 2011:58-59).

4.13. Non-denominationality

HAM-FOC-01, a young female congregant, spoke of the organic complementarity, solidarity, and principle of harmony of human beings with the cosmic biodiversity around them. She spoke of life as an endless continuum. The passage of every person transitions the modes of existence from birth, life, and death. Even death is a mode of existence that interchanges with life. Therefore, there is no dichotomy between the

natural world and the supernatural world of the spirits. The concept of the Kingdom of God as already, but not yet, is seen as a Christian belief of the West and alien to Afrocentric Christianity in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that have a strong alignment with Afrocentric belief systems.

BSM-FOC-02, a young female youth pastor, agrees with this assertion and states:

> It is, therefore, no surprise that prophetic pastors move between the natural and spiritual worlds. This benefits us as congregants. We are guided by divinely appointed pastoral leaders who are closer to God, can petition Him on our behalf, and have the spiritual authority to release our prosperous blessings, protection from malevolent spirits, and promote good health. This is a distinctive feature of this church ministry that has allowed it to benefit from the exodus of Africans from mainline churches.

Non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries pride themselves on applying ethical partiality in their dealings with family members who are members of Classical Pentecostals, Protestants, and African independent churches. The spiritual divide between these Neo-Prophets and Pentecostal born-again, sacramental Christians, and believers of African traditional religion is evident in their practices.

4.14 The devaluation of the redemptive role of Jesus Christ

GOF-FOC-05, a young adult female and congregant, along with ECD-INT-03, a young male congregant, expressed concern about a series of deliverances within some Neo-Prophetic ministries. New products are created and conferences are held to facilitate deliverance. It is observed that deliverance and salvation tend to be limited to the transition from poverty to wealth. The central themes of the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ are not connected to deliverance and salvation.

What emerges clearly from the findings listed above is that the Illuminati has minimised the significance of Christ and created a parallel secular soteriology that opposes both Christ and the church. Christology has become a battleground between Luciferians and Christians, particularly concerning the Christian identity of Jesus within the Trinity and His role (including the incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and the Holy Spirit's arrival at Pentecost) in the salvation of humanity and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Luciferians also propagate a false teaching that Jesus of Nazareth imparted secret powers and messianic secrets to the twelve apostles, his inner circle of friends. This elite group was believed to have received these powers in exchange for money. Women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna supported Jesus' ministry financially in hopes of achieving breakthroughs, protection from malevolent spirits, and good health (Preiswerk, 1951:48). This idea is used to justify the belief that the prosperity gospel has roots in the early church (Acts 16:11-15 and Philippians 4.2). This Luciferian Christology misinterprets scripture to support the planting of seeds and offering of material and financial thanks to Neo-Prophets. The false teaching about Jesus allows profiteering from vulnerable and gullible followers throughout history (Van Schrooten, 2004:68). Based on these Luciferian teachings, Jesus is viewed as just a human whose death and resurrection have never transformed human life. Consequently,, deliverance and salvation are believed to need repeating in one's life (Fredman, 1997:25-26).

In summary, HAM-INFO-04, a middle-aged congregant, and BSM-SUR-05, a young male congregant, have argued that ritualistic practices aimed at warding off demons or performing exorcisms have infiltrated worship and deliverance. Spiritual breakthroughs through the superpowers of anointed objects are achieved with the Holy Spirit's power, yet without Christ. Biblical teachings on Christian discipleship and stewardship of the born-again are domesticated within the false doctrines of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Deliverance is repeatedly emphasised to highlight Satan's constant presence as the enemy in ongoing spiritual warfare. From a missiological perspective, this reveals the commodification of the Holy Spirit and the commercialisation of the Christian faith experience, lacking a genuine spiritual connection between the believer and the Mission of God through Christ, the Redeemer.

The Prophets who claim to have the power to bestow prosperity declarations upon congregants do not have the same authority for themselves. HAM-INT-03, a young male congregant, says:

> Our Prophet would declare financial breakthroughs and the cancellation of debts over our lives. He would deposit money into our bank accounts and cause an overflow in our finances, and we respond by saying, "I receive,

> Papa, I claim this divine favour." He kept on proving to us that this is spiritually, biblically, and scientifically accurate. When we compared this to his life, we realised that he demanded tithing and offerings from us to pay a bond for his house and instalments for his cars. What he was declaring over our lives was not true in his life. He sold anointed objects for divine protection, yet he is always surrounded by armed bodyguards and driven in bulletproof vehicles. When he is sick, he flies out of the country for medical treatment. He exhorts parents to bring their children to serve his ministry full-time when their children attend elite private education institutions. This does not add up.

Based on these points of argument, they view some prophets as exploiting epistemological fear among congregants to make a profit. Consequently, spiritual warfare in certain Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries is not regarded as redemptive or spiritually empowering. The notions of freedom, self-individuation, inner transformation, communion, and fellowship among believers are not connected to Jesus as the Christ. Soteriology, Pneumatology, and Missiology in some of these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, soteriology, pneumatology, and missiology rest on false, disrespectful, and degrading Luciferian Christology. Prophetic ministry, biblical hermeneutics, and worship liturgies have become platforms for domestication and indoctrination by some Neo-Prophetic pastors, prophets, and bishops to generate tax-free profits. Given the devaluation of the soteriological significance of Christ by some Neo-Prophets, it becomes crucial for missiology to reaffirm the theology of Christ's presence among humanity. Missiologists face the challenge of maintaining a balanced approach between the Christianisation of Africa and the Africanisation of Christianity (Van der Merwe, 2016).

These have transformed some Neo-Prophetic churches into large enterprises to sustain the luxurious lifestyles of Neo-Prophetic leaders. Worldly consumerism has turned this commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience into avenues that exploit the vulnerability and gullibility of congregants in such Neo-Prophetic churches. The Gospel of Prosperity has equated salvation with the pursuit of wealth and material possessions, as reflected in the cars and properties owned by individuals. The Holy Spirit is often made subordinate to the Prophet's commands rather than recognised as a divine Power capable of bringing about personal and

communal transformation and renewal in each missional church. This has resulted in some people leaving such Prophetic churches and beginning a process of rediscovering genuine faith in the true God. They seek out missional churches that serve as spiritual homes characterised by comfort, fellowship, dedicated giving, and redemptive worship experiences. Through this, they aim to free themselves from a transactional view of salvation and from ‘shrines for the pulling of crowds’ towards missional churches that serve humanity by fostering a better life, ethical regeneration, the practice of Christian virtues, and a humanising Christian spirituality. All of this strives to re-establish the Mission of God and humanity as partners in God's divine plan for the world.

4.15 Analysis of the vulnerability and gullibility of congregants

Being born-again for these Neo-Prophetic congregants also involves a complete rupture with past family ties in favour of a personal encounter with the God of the Prophetic leader and deliverance. This is promoted through various pastoral activities, many of which create a family disconnection.

SOM-FOC-03, a young male pastor, emphasises the puritan ambiguity of being in the world but not of the world when he said:

> I have decided to pay rent for a bachelor’s flat in town so I can spend more time away from home. I keep my connections by calling home almost daily and ensuring they have enough food and cosmetics. When I am home, I make sure they do not touch me or wear my clothes. I have a cordial relationship and do not sleep with anyone out of fear of being attacked by evil spirits. If anyone sends me teachings through social media that do not align with the teachings of my prophet, I delete their number. I ensure I am always protected against any satanic force. I value the protective power of the God of my Prophet.

KMM-FOC-04, a young male evangelist, shows that his body is a battleground between God and the devil. His prayer as a born-again believer reflects a constant spiritual struggle between his soul and body, which are vulnerable to sin and temptation. He participates in prayer meetings during the week, emphasising gratitude to God, confession, and pleas for forgiveness. He praises God for His presence, prays for purification, protection from demonic forces, and a healing presence of the Holy

Spirit. The connection of the individual and the Holy Spirit supersedes all other human connections. To deepen this bond, he prefers to be more connected to the spiritual father, who brings peace, divine knowledge, and prophetic insights, than to his biological father.

BSM-FOC-01, a middle-aged devout worship team leader, narrated a story that showed the importance of praying all the time for inner soul cleansing when you leave the house, before eating any meal, or meeting any person for a conversation or work meeting. This is to ensure a dividual (set apart) cleansing for purity as a required condition for the presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life.

Prayers that are said simultaneously during a prayer service or Sunday worship service are mainly confessional and serve as a means of reconnecting and seeking deliverance from God. Each individual prays for him/herself and those dear to him or her.

> I pray as loudly as I can so that I may not hear what others are confessing. I pray for cleansing, for financial blessings, for promotions, and peace in my personal life. I call on the Holy Spirit to protect me against the insidious strategies of malevolent spirits, never to live an animalistic life or without the godly self-governance to discern between good and bad. (BSM-SUR-10, a new convert female and choir member).

Living a life of vigilance and following key teachings based on some Bible themes was observed among interviewees. The sense of being predestined (Romans 8:29-30), justified (2 Corinthians 5:21), and sanctified (Titus 3:5-7) are strong themes among Neo-Prophetic congregants who have drawn a distinction between themselves as individuals and family members whom they believe are not yet born again.

Analysis of documents reveals unusual practices that increase the vulnerability and gullibility of congregants, which are reported in newspapers, discussed on social media platforms, and confirmed as accurate through interviews. One confidential experience shared by a prayer warrior highlighted another form of gullibility among some women identified as 'spiritual daughters'. She reported feeling sexually aroused when the Prophet joined the Sunday service.

> Every time the Prophet entered for a Sunday service, most women would become hysterical and trance-like. I felt I needed to attract his attention.

> This led me to wear tight clothes in the hope of being seduced. I always wished he would date me. I know I am a wife to my husband, but I just had an inexplicable crush on the Prophet.

There is a significant imbalance between the heinous practices such as raping girls under the age of 10, human trafficking into the headquarters of the same church located outside the country or in overseas territories, and occult rituals involving human body parts in a church, and the positive aspects like healing, deliverance, and prophetic impartations. This imbalance is causing a dramatic shift in Christianity, mainly because these issues are not properly addressed due to fear of being ostracised. As a result, some Neo-Prophetic pastors act as they please, transforming their congregants into subservient followers. Their entire lives eventually revolve around one leader, whom they claim is infallible during sermons and prophetic impartations. They become so deified that they are regarded as divinely holy, even when involved in immoral, occult, or fraudulent acts.

> I always felt that my pastor is a very prayerful and a prophetic-gifted Man of God. I trusted and believed in him as my spiritual father and for the promised financial breakthroughs in my life. One day, he invited me to join him to visit a sick church member in the hospital after work. All went well, and I just believed that he would take me home. Instead, he drove to a very luxurious apartment and asked me to spend a night with him. I refused the offer, and he forcibly raped me. I could not tell this to anyone because of what he threatened to do, but when I heard that there were other victims of the same offence, I reported him to the police and moved to this ministry. This was in a newspaper. (News24 South Africa, 2018). (ECD-OBS-06: a young adult female in the worship team.)

GOF-INT-02 is a young adult woman and a church social media manager who is the mother of a girl under ten years old that was raped by their most trusted pastor in 2017. She mentioned this as one of the reasons for her loss of faith in God. The pastor, who led Sunday worship and weekday prayer services, was a paedophile who preyed on the most vulnerable children between 10 and 18 years old. He encouraged his victims to come and play in his yard as a safety measure against drug-addicted youths. SOM-OBS-7 shared her first-hand experience of human trafficking through her pastor. She believed that the offer of a job in England via her pastor's international contacts

was a blessing in her life. She endured much suffering from rape, hunger, and drugs. Luckily, she managed to reconnect with relatives and return home. She thanks God for surviving and remaining alive.

The unusual practice of a pastor who was found with human body parts of a young boy in his church caused a great deal of disillusionment among Christians in KwaZulu-Natal. BSM-INT-02 recounted the following:

> My four-year-old nephew was reported missing, and all the neighbours were alarmed by this. A week later, the remains of his body were found by police in a plastic bag inside a local church. The skull and whole skeleton were found in a nearby house. The 51-year-old pastor was arrested immediately. As residents, we could not tolerate it. When he was released on bail, we burnt his house and church and made sure he did not have a place among us. This story was reported in the national media. (SAPA, 2014)

HAM-INT-04 narrated a story that entangled her in a church investment scam that ended sour in her previous church.

> I was an extreme and trusted member of the church leadership, and our pastor claimed to have found a way to make congregants gain quick profits. He encouraged congregants to invest a non-refundable amount of R2 000 for six months and promised an 80% interest. Most people around Umzinto, Hibberdene, and Umzumbe joined in significant numbers. When the first investors attempted to withdraw the promised dividends, the system had closed down, and they could not. When they tried to make enquiries from the offices of the Church, they discovered that they were abruptly closed and the pastor had disappeared. He got arrested and was charged. This left many with serious doubts about the pastor. I was so ashamed that I had to move to this ministry.

These unusual practices were done to the detriment of the Church, which is the most trusted institution. The everyday reality is that each of these was linked to some Neo-Prophetic pastors. These stories became a national concern and were discussed across many platforms. (citizen.co.za news, 2014). These criminal acts highlighted the

need for a regulatory framework for establishing these churches by wolves in sheep's clothing. (Singh, 2021).

Fake healings, miracles, and unfulfilled prophecies are among the themes that expose the vulnerabilities some congregants face in certain Neo-Prophetic churches. Pastors have conducted these unusual practices without any guarantee or assurance that the promises made to participants and informants will be fulfilled. These practices have caused many congregants and community members to view Christianity as a refuge for charlatans and fake pastors. This issue is directly linked to the lack of regulation—or the need for a justification for a missional regulatory framework—to oversee the accreditation process necessary before a new pastor establishes a church or ministry.

BSM-SUR- 12 believes that fake healing and unfulfilled promises are simply a money-making scheme. She admits that she is involved in prostitution and has taken part with other sex workers in providing testimonies through recorded phone calls in exchange for substantial payments from some pastors. They view this as an extra boost to their income. She also received a bonus payment for working with a pastor to fake vomiting a snake as her supposed deliverance from witchcraft. One of the sex workers appeared with a twisted mouth and face and pretended to perform a healing miracle. She remains a member of this church for the money rather than for any spiritual reasons.

SOM-OBS-04 narrated a story where she was desperate to clear debts and live a happy life. She says:

> I was watching a televised miracles service and the pastor asked that any Christian believer who has complete trust in the power of God in him, should pledge R 1000 and touch his/her television screen and declare whatever miracle she/he wants to happen. In view of my desperate position, this was a kind of miracle I needed. I paid the amount through electronic fund transfer to the bank account number given. I did all this because I could see those who were in full attendance of this service receiving their healing and miracles. Some were falling and had seizures, some were crying uncontrollably, and others were speaking in tongues. After all these efforts and promises, I did not get anything, except being pushed deeper into bankruptcy.

SOM-FOC-05 informant recounted a story demonstrating a strong connection between prophecy, prayers, and anointed objects. He said;

> Our divinely anointed leader (name hidden) is truly a man of God. He can prophesy details down to your bank account and identity document number. He can tell you even the names of those who have brought you bad luck. He tells you key events that have led to your current dire situation. He will pray for you and prescribe the type of anointed objects you need to purchase for complete deliverance and healing. He is truly our Saviour and locksmith for all our problems. Congregants are to give large amounts of money in exchange for prophetic impartations. His prophetic power is like no other. He is too much! When you have been completely healed and your life is now prosperous, you need to come for a public testimony and plant a seed to ensure your continued good life.

HAM-OBS-07 recounted a story that shattered his life. Completely trusting in the divine power of the anointed Man of God, he was desperate for healing after a car accident and serious medical surgery. He was already on unpaid leave, and his family could not afford the daily necessities of life. He said:

> I attended a miracle revival that was marketed on billboards as “Come and claim your blessings, healing, and prosperity.” I was strongly advised by some neighbours to attend this revival. I hired a car to take me there. When the miracle healing session started, I could see the power of God flowing through the Prophet. He was really full of the Holy Spirit. The glory of the Lord filled the church. When he touched a person on the forehead, he/she would fall backwards into the hands of ushers. Some were at great peace while others were barking like dogs. When my turn came, he also touched me. I felt like I was struck by lightning and lost consciousness. I was told that I would be completely healed in one week. I was obliged to plant a seed for my healing, but nothing happened. My neighbours who took me there are blaming me for a lack of faith in the Prophet and that I am not yet Spirit-filled.

GOF-OBS-02, a young male congregant, argues that no one whom Christ or the Apostles touched ever fell. He bases his claim on John 18:6 and Revelation 1:17. He believes that falling to the ground is not biblical but a fake practice. He says:

> Some of my friends have indicated that they fell on purpose, and because it was expected of them to do so. They did it as trusted members to give credit to the Prophet as able to have them 'slain in the Spirit'. So it is giving in to the power of suggestion (that they are not seen as less spiritual) or yielding to peer pressure and doing what others do. This religious ecstasy cannot be attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit and is making a show about the anointed power of the prophet rather than God. This is merely a manipulation strategy rather than a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is a foreign practice among Christians and is more prevalent and an accepted practice among African spiritists and their occult rituals.

The infallibility of spiritual fathers and mothers over congregants has emerged as a key theme, illustrating the gullibility present in some Neo-Prophetic churches. Congregants refer to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, or saints of God. From an experience of 'spiritual babies' recently born again—that is, still susceptible to relapse into their sins and old habits—the elders and pastoral leaders have a pastoral duty to care for these spiritually fragile newly initiated believers (1 Corinthians 4:15). In order to support their spiritual growth, each is assigned either a spiritual father or mother for mentorship. The same principle applies to young and newly anointed pastors under their bishop or senior pastor. There exists a hierarchical structure, where a senior pastor acts as a spiritual father to elders, who in turn serve as spiritual fathers to the newly converted. The senior pastor may thus be regarded as a spiritual father to the spiritual fathers and mothers beneath him. Every spiritual father or mother warrants complete allegiance from those anointed by God to dispense Neo-Prophetic teachings. They undertake this role based on the belief in spiritual gifts bestowed by God.

> I love and honour my spiritual daddy. He is really a good man of good morals and an incredible Man of God. He is an active listener and Spirit-filled. He can read your mind and even finish your sentences. He has been a strong shoulder that nurtured and supported me as I moved from zero to hero (socio-economic status). His whole attitude to life is positive and

> influential. I would not be who I am if it were not for him and his spiritual guidance. (GOF-OBS- 07).

KMM-OBS-06, a young congregant whose gender is not specified, described their spiritual mother as strict and commanding. This congregant said, “You take marching orders or be threatened with being reported. She imposes her authority over you, and you always feel small. She has done more damage than good in my life.”

The following reported finding demonstrates a highly positive and motivating role played by a spiritual parent. It depicts an empowering pedagogical loyalty and a flow of interpersonal impartations between them, like Paul and Timothy (1 Timothy 4:1).

> My spiritual mother is a very spiritual and influential evangelist. She feeds us spiritually. Her prayer life, commitment to fasting, fellowship, tithing, and praise are not easy to compare with just any. She speaks from the depths of her heart. She is disciplined and yet down to earth. There are times I wish I were like her. I sometimes visit her home to share house chores and quality time with her, to show my complete submission to God and pledge my obedience to her. I need a double portion of her divine power, like in the story of Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kings 2:8-12. (HAM-OBS-05, a young female congregant).

BSM-OBS-02, a young female member of the worship team, shared a harrowing account of sexual advances she endured from her spiritual father. This exposes the darker side of this role, where the mentor turned abusive and exploited a vulnerable and naive youth still trying to find her way in both life and her Christian faith. He is a respected and trusted elder, yet the entire interaction ended on a bitter note. She is a principled and well-meaning individual who simply faced an unfortunate incident.

GOF-INT-02 recounted a story of how her talent and family background helped her establish an apprentice-mentor relationship with the senior pastor. She illustrated the vital role played by her spiritual father in nurturing her ministry career within the church through exposure and support. She felt validated and affirmed as divinely gifted as a mediator between God and the saints. She shared several testimonies of her growth into an innovative, transformative pastor who built a community of believers under her spiritual father. She had just asked for a blessing from her senior pastor to establish her own ministry. She believed that receiving this blessing from her spiritual father

would make God endorse her venture and become a source of blessings for her ministry. According to her, a period to build on her existing knowledge, become autonomous, and move forward signified her level of empowerment and her desire for social mobility. She indicated that she would continue to use books and sermons to maintain the parental bond with her spiritual father, which she subconsciously mimics.

KMM-INT-04, a senior citizen evangelist, recounted how he faced the reality that his church and ministry were losing members, almost to the point of closing down. Instead, he sought advice and guidance from a local bishop, who runs a prosperous ministry. Help was offered on the condition that he accept this bishop as his spiritual father. His spiritual father directed him to perform occult rituals which were believed to help him rejuvenate and flourish. This also involved a trip to Ghana, where he was exposed to advanced occult powers to increase and sustain the congregation. Following this, he performed remarkable healing miracles, financial wonders, and prophecies. He sold a miracle wallet for R1000, promising the buyer they would receive from R30,000 to R100,000 after three months. He also sold what he called victory lights, which assured peace and destiny in the spiritual realm. Additionally, he sold the perfume of Isaac and the oil of the Lion of Judah, claiming they offered protection and success in all endeavours. These items came at a price, requiring serious covenanting with occult powers linked to the Illuminati Society. He is presently undergoing therapy and spiritual cleansing.

Most of these malpractices and unfulfilled promises have prompted the CRL Commission to address such abuses of the beliefs held by congregants. Research data from this study indicates that the commercialisation and commodification of deliverance, financial prosperity, and complete protection from malevolent spirits have resulted in a complete disregard for the human dignity of congregants in pursuit of financial gain. The vulnerability and gullibility of congregants, as shown by this research, highlight the need for a missional regulatory framework. This framework should support the self-regulation of Neo-Prophetism as a distinct form of Christianity. Long-term preventative and corrective measures are necessary to combat these malpractices. Additionally, this development may involve the professionalisation of pastoral leadership within Neo-Prophetic churches.

4.16 Consultation of fetish and traditional priests

Informant BSM-FOC-03, a young congregant, revealed a concern around the competition that exists among some Neo-Prophets for growing their church membership numbers. He asserted that various strategies are used to attract and retain congregants against other churches and ministries. These strategies include consulting fetish or traditional priests for magic powers and occult rituals. Many local traditional priests have come forward on national television, confirming that they have a clientele of pastors who consult with them to grow their churches and ministries (Zuma D. , 2021).

Our prophet was advised by his spiritual father to travel to Ghana to seek counsel from those with supernatural powers. The journey lasted about five days. Afterwards, he possessed a power unlike any other local pastor. He could exorcise anyone from demonic possession, barren women conceived and delivered healthy babies, the unemployed found jobs, and those with mental disorders were healed or delivered (KMM-INT-01).

SOM-SUR-07 proudly spoke to their pastor as also divinely gifted with supernatural powers to heal any person and the redeeming upliftment of people's lives using traditional decoctions, inhalants, and ointments. He also indicated that these were done within a ritual that included dietary restrictions, incantations, and planting a seed. He says:

> Our papa is too much! He performs healing miracles through his divine power. He really deserves respect for his supernatural powers. When he points his magic ring towards you, divine power is released, and you fall. He is envied by medical doctors for healing HIV positive people instead of being recognised for this great power. His faith products make people productive and successful; they serve as an all-around protection, and they are destructive against our envious and disruptive enemies.

ECD-INT-05 pointed at a video shown in YEN.com.gh, as a key secondary source of data that reveals that 4932 international Pastors are reported to have consulted Nana Kwaku Bonsam for spiritual powers and fortification (Aryee, 2021). In pursuit of magic power to perform miracles, it is necessary to become the most sought-after and

famous prophet, and in order to acquire instant wealth, some of the prophets have consulted “the Dark Lords of Benin” (Proof Ex, 2024).

These powers enable pastors to perform miracles. A prayer warrior advised one congregant to bring her husband for miraculous healing, as he suffered from a health condition that had caused him to lose numerous contracts as an ambassador promoting certain brands. The Prophet instructed him to sow a seed and cease medical treatment after praying over him. The same husband died within a week. A month later, the Prophet was already involved in a sexual relationship with the widow of the deceased. This was cited as an example of how such consultations damage the Christian faith. Traditional healers and spiritists utilise the liberalised and commercialised public media platforms to demonstrate that some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries survive competition with the support of juju and rituals from traditionalists. The main problem with these consultations is that many innocent congregants are initiated, without understanding the covenantal relationship with other powers. As a result, church buildings become occultic shrines for these Neo-Prophets, and a sect within Christianity has emerged.

4.17 Analysing strategies of interventions

The lack of a regulatory framework that verifies the accreditation and licensing of applications for new churches has been identified as a gap, especially given the rapid rise of neo-prophetic churches founded by individuals. HAM-OBS-06 contended that no government ought to enact laws regulating the establishment of the Kingdom of God, as churches should not be subject to tax laws. Reflecting on his interpretation of Mark 12:17, he highlighted a biblical distinction between ‘what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God’. Based on this belief, church income from tithes, lucrative businesses selling anointed objects, and donations (planting the seed) ought to be exempt from taxation. Churches are non-profit, faith-based institutions that prioritise the spiritual well-being of their members. For him, this stance aligns with the constitutional right to freedom of religion in South Africa.

It was also emphasised that there are significant diversities in terms of history, schisms, and varied beliefs and practices within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa. This has resulted in a relentless cycle of constant breakaways by young pastors who feel they have reached a stage of stagnation and

decide to establish new churches. The result has been wild and unregulated competition for financial and demographic dominance. Participant SOM-INT-02 summarises it as follows:

> We live in an atmosphere of multiple choices. Establishing a church among others in proximity naturally leads to competition and the stealing of sheep from one another. This has further been exacerbated by increased inflows of immigrants from neighbouring countries and beyond, following the ushering in of a new democratic dispensation in South Africa after 1994. As a result of this massive growth of immigrant-established Neo-Prophetic churches in major cities like Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg, different forms of Neo-Prophetic beliefs and practices, giving credence to Neo-Prophetism, have added to this turbulent competition. I was a victim of this vicious circle, such that I was forced to close down the ministry I had developed from the ground up to greater heights. I am now serving under a new church led by a Bishop.

This study also found that some theological schools and colleges are strategically located within KwaZulu-Natal, and lack accreditation with the Department of Higher Education and Training, yet they offer qualifications such as bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees through unverified links with universities in the Global North. A young pastor can obtain these qualifications within weeks through online study. Additionally, some Neo-Prophetic pastors are even honoured with titles like doctor or professor without any justification, insight, or depth in theology. Neo-Prophets establish these colleges without accreditation, adopting an anti-theological education stance, yet they profit significantly from offering these qualifications.

> My pastor started this ministry two years ago after graduating as a doctor from a theological college based in Durban. Six months later, we were invited to a big and expensive celebration where he was confirmed as a professor. He has no matric, but he is a divinely inspired Man of God. He is also a businessman, a traditional healer, and a social media celebrity. (KMM-SUR-18).

This lack of accountability and the absence of academic training as prerequisites for pastoral ministry have left congregants vulnerable to divination and abuse, leading to

total allegiance to their pastoral leader. The teachings of some Neo-Prophets aligned with the Gospel of Prosperity detach certain congregants from their families. Consequently, core family values such as communitarianism, hospitality, and ethical responsibility for others' well-being have diminished. ECD-INT-02 states:

> I cannot share my private space [bedroom], clothes, and my hard-earned assets like a car with family members who are not in Neo-Prophetic churches. I do not want to reverse the prophetic impartations from the man of God and go back to a life of demonic attacks. So, I live my life and minimise any close dealings with them. This is not done as a sign of hatred but to make sure I keep my blessings and good life that my spiritual father has imparted prophetically upon me.

The above illustrates the damage that some Neo-Prophetic teachings have inflicted on family bonds.

The occult rituals aimed at attracting more congregants raised concerns due to their association with Satanism. KKM-FOC-01 reported that their pastor sought the counsel of fetish or traditional priests from Benin (Nigeria) to draw larger crowds into this Neo-Prophetic church. He stated, “His pursuit of greater numbers that will make his church become a mega-church led to him taking a business trip to Benin. Now he is surrounded by politicians, businessmen and women, artists who aspire to gain financial wealth, fame, and protection from competitors.”

BSM-FOC-03, a young congregant, stated that he left a ministry led by a leader who is both a pastor and a traditional healer. He related a story that proves that the Illuminati has infiltrated the church.

> Most of the immediate circle and leadership of members around the pastor of this ministry were businesspeople who were getting big tenders from the government. They would donate money and other material benefits, like buying food for distribution among people experiencing poverty. They demonstrated complete control of the ministry. I just felt that there was spiritual emptiness. There was so much abuse against the Holy Spirit and Christ. They were practically anti-Church, bad-mouthed pastors and other churches, and intentionally corrupt biblical interpretation of texts. They

> bought expensive music instruments and funded all trips and key activities. Wow! They were monied. Their voice was final on all matters, and they were feared. There were serious allegations that when you are critical of their dictates, you will be discredited and mysteriously disappear.

Contrary to this, SOM-INT-02 confirmed that he is one of those Christians who believe that God has granted supernatural powers to their pastor. He expressed a strong appreciation for his pastor's prophetic gift, particularly in relating Christianity to African practices like divination. Reports indicate that one-on-one consultations with the prophet often involve him consulting African spirit mediums to help foretell an individual's future.

> Our … [Title and name withheld] really gives us a sense of being African Christians. Our faith has no Western Missionary influence. He has changed the lives of so many people from daily experiences of poverty and misery into a good life. Testimonies of full recovery from disabilities, the unemployed getting employment and promotions, and some whose monies were withheld being released have shown me that a mighty and divinely anointed leader is leading us.

Soothsaying, divination, fortune telling, foretelling, and sorcery have become everyday practices that facilitate upward mobility. KMM-INT-02, SOM-FOC-05, and ECD-SUR-08 have all provided testimonies indicating that these practices have replaced Christian deliverance and salvation. Soothsaying is described as prophetic words of comfort to ease emotional pressure (such as anxiety, depression, and disappointment). They shared testimonies of messages declared as from God, directed towards buying particular oils, charms, attire, and amulets with divine (magic) powers available in the church store. This serves to ensure they receive and fully benefit from the proclaimed blessing.

> The Holy Spirit told me that you will be employed within a week from now. You shall even get a promotion in six months, and you will own a car thereafter. You have come to your prophetic blessing. This is your moment. This is your spiritual home, and I am your Spiritual Father. I shall continue

> to release your blessings. Stay here and never leave (BSM-SUR-06, a young church musician).

Divination has been given the same status as prophecy. Onomancy, numerology, and necromancy have therefore become standard practices among Neo-Prophetic self-proclaimed Prophets. They practice these forms of divination with amulets and rings from traditional spiritists. According to the secondary sources on the internet, Nana Kwaku Bonsam, a traditional spiritist from Ghana, has claimed to have given fortification as well as supernatural powers to 4932 pastors worldwide (Aryee, 2021). One outstanding story that highlights this power is narrated by KMM-FOC-01, a young male evangelist, as follows:

> Mkhulu shouted my identity number during the prophecy part of the worship service and asked me to come forward. I was so afraid of any possible prophecy about my sins that might be shouted out in public, but I still came forward. He looked *through me* and asked if I had taken a purifying bath before the service. I indicated that I did not know about this ritual, and it was my first time to attend his prophetic service. He smiled and continued to tell me about my car that was stolen in 2009. He told me the name of the person who stole it. He asked me to buy two candles to consult him further and bring my unemployed daughter, who is into drugs. He will help me get back my car, and my daughter shall soon be living an everyday life.

The evidence of extra-sensory perception or clairvoyance displayed by the prophet, used to delve deeper into the personal lives and historical details of congregants, has generated a sense of wonder and loyalty among others. This practice indicates a shift of divination and sorcery from Traditional Religion into Neo-Prophetism. Simonism, which involves exchanging pastoral ministry among the People of God for spiritual powers, has also infiltrated Christianity through these practices (Acts 8:18-21). All these customs encourage congregants to become more gullible and vulnerable as the process of seeking the redemptive mission to guide their lives through these self-proclaimed prophets.

The devaluation of the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ among Neo-Prophetic churches is observed as marginalising the power of His salvific death and resurrection. The emphasis on Baptism in the Holy Spirit in some Neo-Prophetic teachings sidelines

the central role of Jesus Christ. Even the claim of being born again or a new creation in Jesus Christ's name is not enough; it needs to be supplemented or replaced by anointed products. ECD-INT-01 and HAM-SUR-17 highlight the seriousness of the most heinous, humiliating acts, immoral claims, and heretical practices by some Neo-Prophetic leaders that are declared in the name of Christ. The placement of charms and amulets from traditional spiritists in places of worship, intended to give pastoral leaders supernatural power to perform miracles, has misled and displaced Christ as the centre of the Christian faith (Facebook, 2013). Other gods are now taking centre stage in Neo-Prophetic places of worship. Some of these pastoral leaders have contributed to the congregation hopping from one Neo-Prophetic church to another, noting that “Whenever our Pastor speaks in tongues, you hear one name being constantly repeated as if he is calling supernatural powers from the gods. I think he has a covenant with some cult” (SOM-SUR-10, a middle-aged female congregant).

4.18. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the rationale behind key issues related to the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel within certain Neo-Prophetic churches. Sources that informed the data collection, including the geographic location and demographic profile of the studied population, along with three research methods used, contributed to data saturation. This data was validated, establishing acceptable levels of credibility, confirmability, and reliability. Coding the data into thematic clusters in response to the main research question led to new insights and potential themes for future research on this subject. The evaluation and interpretation processes confirmed findings from the literature review, while also uncovering new themes and perspectives. The themes discussed, alongside direct quotes from participants and informants, confirmed the gullibility and vulnerability of some congregants in certain Neo-Prophetic Churches. This has been driven by the translocation of divination and the commercialisation of ‘anointed objects’, which have caused some congregants to see salvation, deliverance, and prosperity as transactional dealings with God. The total allegiance of congregants to their Neo-Prophet and the Prophet’s God has led to family divisions. Consequently, a more integrated missional regulatory framework is required to support the self-regulation of Neo-Prophetism as a contemporary form of Christianity.

CHAPTER 5

THEMATIC FINDINGS ON COMMERCIALISATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF THE GOSPEL

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides details of the findings presented in Chapter Four. These findings are drawn from data collected from various sources. The primary sources include individuals selected as participants and informants. The study is based on a qualitative phenomenological approach. All the cross-sectional and thematic findings presented are interconnected and ordered from those with the highest data richness. These thematic findings are organised according to the following research objectives of this study.

- To understand the rationale behind the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel among Neo-Prophets' pastoral leaders.
- To identify the thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that contribute towards the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel.
- To understand the vulnerability of congregants on the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel.
- To develop a missional regulatory framework against the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel.

This chapter continues to develop answers to the key research questions within the following thematic categories of findings. The main focus is to describe lived experiences, provide analysis, and interpret these in the context of Neo-Prophetism as the phenomenon under study.

5.2 Findings on the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel

This category of validated data encompasses the coded themes such as prosperity gospel, planting the seed, the anointed objects on sale for health, safety, and wealth, one-on-one consultations, and one-person pastorpreneurship. The commercialisation of the faith experience has resulted in Christianity being viewed as a materialistic or commodified religion within the new wave of Neo-Prophetism. Most Neo-Prophetic

churches are built around a single principal leader and are profit-oriented for personal gain (Masenya and Masenya, 2018:636).

The branding of all anointed products depicts the Pastor as an uncontested divine servant of God. His spiritual powers and prophetic declarations both claim and are believed by congregants to end poverty (psychological, emotional, and physical), sickness, and hopelessness rooted in generational curses. Nothing appears too complicated to solve. This research study finds that commercialisation and commodification within the neo-liberalist context and Chu are key for surviving competition and ensuring sustainability, expanding through new conversions, and finding innovative ways to bridge gaps while responding to the African ontological and epistemological dynamics of life. This has led many of these churches to operate as business entities and exploit congregants for financial gain (Anderson, Jnr 2019:2). The extremes of commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience reveal a lack of accountability, trustworthiness, and commitment among prophetic leaders, as they attract new followers and retain existing ones. Asamoah-Gyadu argues that this has turned salvation into a transactional deal between God and the believer who sows the seed (2013: 80-81). Ramantswana has authored compelling, well-researched works on how some Neo-Prophetic pastors prey on the poor and vulnerable, instead of praying for them (2019; 2021).

5.2.1 Prosperity gospel

One of the key findings is the significant emphasis on the importance of financial success and vibrant health and well-being among participants and informants, who serve as the primary sources of data for this investigative study. A notable interest in ministries led by prophets, apostles, bishops, and pastors promoting a prosperity gospel was observed among born-again Neo-Prophetic congregants. There is a strong correlation between titles and the perceived superpowers of prophetic impartations by each prophetic pastor, and the use of anointed objects. This study finds that Neo-Prophets have fostered a desire for quick financial gain, career promotions, and what could be called a zero-to-hero lifestyle of luxury as proof of genuine salvation. Five of the six Neo-Prophetic churches visited for this research teach a Theology of Success (Simojoki 2002: 271). Consequently, the Christian faith experience appears to be rooted in what Kgatle describes as a “human-centred programme for the attainment of health, wealth and success” (2017:1). Some congregants testified that so-called

‘miracle money’ had appeared in their bank accounts and pockets. Makandiwa was reported to claim he miraculously commanded fat to burn away. Some congregants who lost weight rapidly were also featured in local Zimbabwean newspapers, touting their results (Gunda 2013: 16). One particularly notable example is the variety of seed offerings given such as prophetic seed, personal seed for protection, financial breakthrough seed, and redemptive upliftment seed to open new doors to prosperity (Kitause and Achunike, 2013:16). These distortions have created the impression that divine blessings can only be accessed through sowing seeds and tithing (Acts 8:20).

The downside of this prosperity gospel and theology of success is the spread of spiritual impoverishment and moral decline. This new brand of Christianity has become an opium that pacifies and exploits vulnerable congregants. Document analysis revealed that most generous donors were known to be involved in various corruption cases, abuses, and gender-based violence reported in local newspapers. During Sunday services, some prophets in Neo-Prophetic churches condemn congregants to generational curses such as poverty, poor health, and exposure to malevolent spirits, that they claim will always afflict those who do not sow seeds or tithe. Some Neo-Prophets even claimed the authority to declare who shall reach heaven. Materialism, individualism, and self-advancement underpin the gospel of prosperity teachings, leading some congregants to lose faith in God when their prayers go unanswered, and where they are exploited as ‘cash-cows’ without experiencing any breakthroughs. When divine blessings—such as prosperity, good health, and protection from malevolent spirits—are commodified through branding and sold at set prices, marginalised individuals often give up on God (Lindhardt, 2015:311). When promised miracles and prophetic impartations, purchased at fixed prices, are not realised in the lives of congregants, their faith diminishes (Horsfield, 1984:84). These practices promote a consumerist and individualistic faith experience. When substantial givers begin to dictate terms of what salvation and deliverance mean, the church risks degenerating into a contractual marketplace where divine blessings are sold like goods in a supermarket (Ige, 2017:18). This increasingly aligns the Christian faith experience with a casino-capitalist spirituality (Lindhardt, 2014:153-180), redefining Christian faith within a neo-liberalist, individualistic framework typical of Neo-Prophetism (Freeman, 2012:23-26).

5.2.2 Prophetic impartations and the anointed objects

Narrative analysis of the stories shared by participants and informants revealed a strong link between prophetic impartations, the deification of the prophet, and the anointed objects. All the prophets in Neo-Prophetic churches visited during this research study declared themselves mediators of God's favour through their prophetic impartations and the sale of blessed objects to congregants. These bring deliverance and assure the congregants of their success, good health, and protection from evil spirits. Prophetic impartations and anointed objects centre around the deified persona of the prophet. The prophetic impartations were found to diminish biblical prophecy as one of the five-fold ministries shared among the People of God for the mutual upbuilding of the missional church. The Spirit of God is made subservient to the superpowers of the prophet. Apostles, Pastors, and Prophets of some of these churches and ministries see themselves as divinely appointed to serve as channels of the Holy Spirit. Some participants and informants of this research study see their pastors as bringing new revelations, new answers to the needs of congregants, and declare prophetic impartations as revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. They have a special claim to being able to make their followers rich through the transformative power of the Holy Spirit (Jenkins, 2006: 35-37). Most participants viewed the selling of anointed objects as a strategy to sustain the church and benefit them in terms of the guarantees they receive for their loyalty to the God of their prophet. The prophetic impartations and the selling of anointed objects were found to be open and trans-denominational. They were for any person who believed in the superpowers of the prophet. These have caused congregants to remain loyal and see their pastoral leader as infallible, divinely holy, and the only true mediator of divine blessings. These practices of 'pastorpreneurs', therefore, remain unchallenged.

5.2.3 Commercialised spiritual warfare

This theme primarily relies on the literal interpretation of the warfare between Christians and the principalities and powers of the dark world (satanic powers) as depicted in Ephesians 6:12-14. Some prophets lead this fight against principalities in Neo-Prophetic churches. Anything that causes insecurity, depression, and discomfort, such as sickness, misfortune, and poverty, is viewed as the work of these principalities

from the satanic realm (Rio et al., 2017). Consequently, anointed objects are sold as protection against such attacks.

Novel products are marketed as soon as a novel problem can be identified. In four out of the six churches visited for this research, items such as examination success oil, work promotion oil, money drawing oil, good luck oil, blessing release oil, blood tonic wine for looking younger, medicine for an unbreakable marriage, and medicine to foster peace between you and your ancestors to love and bless you were on sale. The list primarily aims to enhance your material prosperity, exorcism, and protection from witchcraft, helping a person lead a happy and fulfilled life. Focus is placed on helping a person get what they want, at their own time, and to the highest quantity. Most of the Neo-Prophetic members have joined and stayed loyal to their pastoral leader due to these everyday needs.

It can be conclusively argued from this finding that spiritual warfare involves a commitment to combat poverty, ill health, witchcraft-related misfortunes, and any obstacles to prosperity. Some prophets in Neo-Prophetic churches classify all such attacks as the works of Satan (Kalu 2008). In response, the prophet acts as a commander, with congregants as soldiers, who follow the commander's orders in their ongoing fight against Satan, while the prophetic leader assumes the role of saviour (Hasu 2009). This battleground between principalities of darkness and heavenly powers is an endless metaphysical threat that requires periodic deliverance (Marshall, 2016). Neo-Prophetic congregants see themselves as initiators of a new social order (Meyer, 2011). When one receives baptism in the Spirit as a born-again Christian, they become involved in a spiritual battle (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Ultimately, this battlefield serves as a negative influence, where congregants are persuaded to remain loyal and to accept their leader's dominance for personal gain (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004). This is the true nefarious struggle that some Neo-Prophets are constantly fighting. Profits are often gained even through anointed objects.

5.2.4 Commercialised teachings for greater wisdom and a better life.

The profitable trade of selling branded souvenirs with slogans used by the prophet, motivational books to share greater wisdom, and audio-visuals that usually provide step-by-step guidance on tackling key topics as born-again Christians was a prominent aspect among the findings. From the field notes gathered in a summary of an interview

with SOM-INT-02, who recounted how his prophet takes pride in his books, he even shared a short, recorded excerpt of the message, captured as follows:

> I know that most of you were previously Protestants. You can read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation till Jesus comes again, but you will not get the spiritual revelation from it and breakthroughs in your life! I am sent here among you as a Man of God. Trust me, I am here to release your long-overdue blessings and to feed you with the divine message that shall bring you financial power to free you from generational curses and poverty. The best you can do is to buy and read my books and listen to my recorded sermons.

These also serve as points of reference during sermons on special occasions such as spiritual revivals, conferences, Easter celebrations, and Thanksgiving services for specific groups. Additionally, new items are available for sale at these events. They are organised to promote new products aimed at solving emerging problems. These could include issues like poor libido, obesity, lack of attractiveness to men, or stress. These products are marketed as having the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, like never before, capable of uplifting a person to achieve financial prosperity, good health, and protection against enemies.

A strong marketing drive to buy these items is claimed by Neo-Prophets as having power to mature congregants in that prophetic ministry or church, and to cope with a variety of life's challenges. These anointed objects are marketed as extending the prophetic power of the pastor. This was reportedly taken overboard when one Neo-Prophet, declared himself as the original writer of revelatory books that bring fresh divine revelation to congregants. In marketing his new books, he claimed their content to be far better than the Bible.

In the field notes gathered during a service at one of the churches visited for observation, the prophet made a serious claim:

> I am more than Jesus Christ in your lives. I am your prophet. I get divine messages straight from God. My prophetic ministry among you is to make sure that you believe in me as a Man of God who gives spiritual impartations for your financial breakthroughs, good health, and divine protection. I am

> here for you to enjoy a heaven-on-earth experience. I am just too much... Hallelujah!

Such prophetic claims have commercialised the Christian faith experience and are used as tools to tame the spirituality of congregants.

This commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience do not promote themes such as missiology, ecumenism, ecclesiology, pneumatology, or soteriology. Instead, they involve occult practices that are unfamiliar within Christianity. One such unusual occult practice was reported in a newspaper from Kwazulu-Natal (KZN), concerning Bheki Shandu, who is both a Bishop of a Neo-Prophetic church and a traditional healer. He was recorded dancing naked among funeral mourners beside a grave, allegedly performing an unusual occult ritual. In his words, he states:

> That is how I do my job as a (traditional) healer. Every time I perform this ritual, I don't wear anything, and there is nothing wrong with that, as this is part of my profession and calling. (Zululand Observer, 2017).

For the performance of this occult ritual, he is paid a substantial amount. In 2014, another unusual practice reported by the Citizen newspaper concerned the arrest of a pastor after body parts of a child were found in his church for the purpose of gaining more congregants and financial prosperity (citizen.co.za news, 2014). These unusual and occult practices have come into South Africa through some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, and they are condemned as satanic propitiating of the spiritual powers and criminal acts (McIntosh,2019).

Such criminal and occult practices necessitate the regulation and standardisation of procedures to ensure that no dark power replaces the freedom to choose Christ and become part of the redemptive Kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13-14). This is especially relevant to Bishop. It also requires a correction that God is the Creator and Father, Christ is the focal point of the Christian faith (Matthew 12:43-45), and the Holy Spirit guides perfect Christians to become worthy servants of the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:18). Finally, it was emphasised that Christians must reaffirm the divine authority of the Bible as God's word, which precedes every teaching (Matthew 4.4). This would prevent carnality from superseding the word of God.

5.2.5 Commercialisation of special events and different regalia

This study's findings, derived from three research methods, show that every spiritual revival, conference, or celebration is accompanied by a new colour code of regalia that goes on sale. These items are sold at exorbitant prices and are meant to create a special atmosphere of belonging and identity among the 'saints'. The downside of this practice is that it has created socio-economic divisions among congregants. While these may indicate a consumer culture, they are marketed as a way to protect against life-debilitating attacks from Satan. These items are even bought for family members, relatives, and friends in order to help them cope with their daily anxieties and vulnerabilities. Acquiring anointed regalia and following the pastor's prescribed instructions, has maintained the congregation's loyalty and continues to sustain them as devoted followers of the pastor's supposed superpowers. Concepts like deliverance, healing, salvation, personal conversion, and ethical behaviour have been so commodified that they have lost their Christian meaning.

The exorbitant prices of all regalia, as solely determined by the leader, have turned churches into unregulated and tax-free marketplaces. This makes Christian faith experience a mutually exclusive one against those whose income is below the margin. Asamoah-Gyadu highlights this as symptomatic of the commercialisation and commodification of the prosperity gospel within Neo-Prophetism as a brand of Christianity:

> The specified target groups and the location mean the worship services automatically rule out any underprivileged and materially poor participants… they would not have the requisite outfits expected and the levels of offerings required (2015:1),

Kierkegaard writes in this regard:

> The most dangerous revolutions are not those which tear everything down, and cause the streets to run with blood, but those which leave everything standing, while cunningly emptying it of any significance (1848:153).

This promotes a consumerist culture that commodifies and commercialises the Christian faith experience, turning Neo-Prophetism into a religious spectacle of narcissistic self-centredness. It erodes African ubuntu social values such as community, hospitality, and social cohesion, which underpin social justice and socio-

economic development. Divine protection, deliverance, and prosperity are now treated as commodities, much like bread in a supermarket, with no spiritual significance beyond the profit gained by the 'pastorpreneur' (Conradie, 2010:105). All these are emptying Christianity of its meaning at their hand, reducing it to a mere utopian mirage (MacDonnell, 2009). Consequently, it becomes crucial for Christianity as a religion to demonstrate the power of God to counteract the negative consequences that result from such practices, and to restore the faith of the People of God (Manala, 2005).

5.3. Findings on thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries

Purposive and selective random sampling were employed because the churches and ministries visited for data collection offered in-depth and representative information about Neo-Prophetism as a phenomenon of this investigative study. Each of the theme clusters was evaluated for data richness on a simple scale of 1-5. All findings are therefore presented according to their descending scores (from high to low). This sampling method, based on data richness, helped the researcher balance the quality of interpretative analysis with the variety of available data. Based on this scale and the scores assigned to themes, some were discarded as irrelevant or of limited significance in addressing the key research questions (Heather et al., 2019). The following scoring range was utilised:

Table 5.3 thematic findings

No.	Measuring standard	Example for justification
1.	Very few qualitative data are presented. The findings that are presented are fairly descriptive.	The findings offer limited insights gained through various data collection methods.
2.	Some key features of relevant qualitative data are fairly presented	A relatively limited number of qualitative findings from various methods.
3.	A reasonable amount of qualitative data	For example, a typical qualitative research article in a journal with a smaller word limit often uses simple thematic analysis.

4.	A large and relevant amount of in-depth Qualitative data collected through various methods is evident.	For example, a qualitative research article in a journal with a larger word count that includes more context and setting descriptions, and a more in-depth presentation of the findings
5.	A rich, broad-based, and in-depth Qualitative data is evident	This rich and more detailed data is evident across all data collection methods to substantiate research, convincing claims, findings, and conclusions.

5.3.1 Salvation

The main finding within the themes of salvation as a transactional experience is that they have a tangible, transformative, and empowering effect on the lives of those who are born again of water and Spirit (Prince, 1986:16-17). This signifies a shift from being demon-possessed or oppressed by life, or in bondage to Satan, to experiencing the abundance of life. This spiritual transition is carried out by a Pastor as a healing and deliverance practitioner after thorough preparation, including prayer and fasting (Martey 1997). The most frequently cited scriptures supporting this practice are Mark 9:29 and Luke 4:1-2 and 13-14. In some cases, salvation is commercialised and commodified through anointed objects received by a select few who can afford highly priced one-on-one consultation sessions. This conceptualisation of salvation is person-centred and lacks the missional, transformative, metanoic, and spiritual benefits for the church as the People of God within some Neo-Prophetic Churches or ministries.

This study found that the theme of salvation in Neo-Prophetic church teachings has caused many members to leave mainline churches for what Ngong calls a “new Christianity” (2006:519). This new brand of Christianity offers fertile ground for decoloniality by remapping the Christian faith experience and deconstructing universalist doctrines rooted in the logic, mathematical epistemologies, and cosmologies of colonisers from the Global North. Participants and informants argue that Neo-Prophetic churches ought not be dismissed as mere ‘separatist churches’ or ‘otherness new churches’ (Ayagboyin and Ishola 1997:12-19). Instead, they have the

potential to become self-governing, self-financing, and self-supporting missional churches (Rotberg and Mazrui 1970: 473-476). This reimagined and reconfigured concept of salvation signifies a paradigmatic shift, creating opportunities within the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution to celebrate diversity and seek answers to new questions through the efforts of contemporary missional churches. The Pentecostalisation of Christianity is characterised by the manifestation of miraculous gifts such as healing, prophetic impartations, speaking in tongues, and spontaneous prayers. This Pentecostalised view of salvation could have a significant global impact, provided Neo-Prophets avoid commodifying the Christian faith experience for profit (Walls, 1979:180).

5.3.2 Deliverance

The answers from participants in the in-depth interviews and responses from informants who participated in focus groups confirmed that deliverance is a fundamental belief that influences Neo-Prophetism or Neo-Prophetic teachings on salvation. The following Bible texts were frequently cited, where the power to heal (Acts 3:1-11) performing miracles (Acts 14:8-10) and casting out demons (Acts 19:11-12) were considered divine gifts granted to the divinely chosen Neo-Prophets.

Good health, protection from malevolent spiritual forces, and financial prosperity are attainable through the divine power of their spiritual father or mother. It was the first instance in this entire section on findings to observe a link between moral control and demonic deliverance as elements of deliverance ministry among some Neo-Prophetic churches (Dua-Agyerman, 1994:3). This highlights a gap in malpractices within particular other churches and ministries (Akron, 2001). This proves to be crucial because the presence of Lucifer is both an ontological and biblical reality (Revelation 12:4-12). There is a growing realisation of the importance of personal and communal prayer prior to spiritual encounters with the principalities of darkness, rather than merely focusing on material gain (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015:18).

On the other hand, evidence gathered from interviewees and informants pointed to cases of prearranged deliverance that the Holy Spirit allegedly carried out. Some members from outside and some from the inner circle of the leading pastor of a church or ministry were hired to participate in fake miracles and deliverance during a typical service. When they did not receive the agreed-upon payment for taking part in the fake

miracles and deliverance, they spoke out. These shared stories clearly indicate that some miracles and instances of deliverance were staged for profit.

5.3.3 Holy Spirit

The experience of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) among the first believers in Christ also forms the core teachings of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The descent of the Holy Spirit gave courage, power to preach and expand the membership of the early Christian believers (Acts 2:36-41). The power to perform miracles results from repentance, the forgiveness of sins, and the reception of the Holy Spirit. In the data generated, validated, and coded for this study, the mandate of the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20 and the role played by Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in expanding or planting the church in other provinces and beyond South Africa are seen as equivalent to the expansion of the kingdom by the leading pastor. Apostolic evangelism and the emergence of local prophetic pastoral leaders are viewed as roles given by the Holy Spirit (Heward-Mills, 2005). Based on these reported findings, the researcher gained new knowledge of the Holy Spirit as a divine power that empowers, brings positive change, and affirms God's presence among His people at all times. The omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of God are evidenced in the widespread influence of the Holy Spirit throughout the universe, as found in John 14:16.

There was also a set of findings showing a negative picture, which points to the explosive rise of unregulated Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries contributing to malpractices in the name of the Holy Spirit. Some Neo-Prophets who also work as traditional healers have claimed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit in their practice of divination. They claim to have a third eye through which the Holy Spirit has illuminated the past, present, and future of congregants. Based on this, congregants have been instructed to purchase anointed objects in order to restore balance in their lives, focusing on good health, divine protection, and financial prosperity. Another finding linked to this was the type of mixtures, herbs, and ornaments with superpowers given to ensure better protection, good health, and financial prosperity. When prophetic declarations are not fulfilled as promised and no change takes place after the use of these anointed objects, congregants have been blamed for having little faith and not praying fervently enough.

5.3.4 Speaking in tongues.

Glossolalia is a supernatural act of God that confirms the receipt of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). It is also described as a trans-denominational gift that differs from multilingualism and truly manifests the Spirit's mind through a believer's tongue. There was a discovery indicating that some pastors pretend to speak in tongues but call the names of principalities that grant them cultic powers to attract more congregants to their Sunday services.

5.3.5 Prophecy

The findings under this theme reveal a strong belief that prophecy did not cease with the final canonisation of the Bible. Prophets who serve as divinely appointed messengers of God are still emerging among Neo-Prophetic churches, even today. Their ministry of foretelling and accessing the divine, as the anointed men and women of God, is validated by the changes it brings to God's people. Their authority, infallibility, inerrancy, and legitimacy are regarded as part of their divine calling, and they do not require theological or pastoral training. This has opened the door for many malpractices in the name of God and the gift of prophecy. Most Neo-Prophetic congregants view prophecy as a standalone ministry like in the Old Testament, not as part of the five-fold ministry described in Ephesians 4:11-16, nor as one of the nine gifts of the Spirit listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

One of the negative findings was that there were conflicting claims as to the hierarchy in terms of the highest order in prophecy among Neo-Prophetic churches. These remain current controversies, as proves evident in the distinction between true and false/fake prophets. This has led to a competition for survival among those who declare themselves the prophets of God. This manner of competition is evident in the transformation of socio-religious, cultural, and political dynamics. They compete for evangelic technological responsiveness, being seen as more culturally relevant than Jesus Christ, and being homegrown prophets who can transform indigenous Africans better than mainline churches and Pentecostals.

5.4 The theme of "Poverty is not my portion"

This study finds that living on credit, being imprisoned, being homeless, lacking a good bank account balance, suffering from chronic diseases, experiencing barrenness, and not owning a car all indicate a life below standard for a congregant in the Neo-

Prophetic church. Such conditions are constantly rejected. Christian (Catholic and Protestant) theology is seen as epistemologically encouraging an apocalyptic utopia ('pie in the sky when you die'), soteriologically disempowering, and leading congregants towards financial precarity (Luning, 2009; Nelson, 2018). According to Neo-Prophetic teachings, there is no place for the poor in heaven. Most participants and informants believe poverty is a choice that no Christian should ever accept. As born-again Christians, they see themselves as eagles flying higher than any other bird, and poverty as a state for grasshoppers that have never experienced such heights. They often view poverty as a condition of having no voice, or legacy. They see themselves as predestined for material prosperity, good health, and divine protection. The theology of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:18) and the prophecy of Jesus as the suffering Servant of God (Isaiah 53:3-5) are sidelined as not revealing God's power over evil.

The themes within the salvation and poverty categories highlight that the holistic understanding of salvation—through the Holy Spirit, divine powers of the pastor, and prophecy—has contributed to the rise of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Salvation is seen as liberation from tangible social issues or ‘demonic doorways’ (through which demonic forces supposedly intrude and exit a person’s life at will). This view is rooted in a strict interpretation of Matthew 12: 43-45. Many of these issues involve misfortunes that result in failure, illness, poverty, and barrenness. These factors, among others, have spiritually tainted the lives of born-again Christians and caused many to leave mainline churches for Neo-Prophetic ones (Richards, 1974:130). Receiving prophetic revelations is often portrayed as the most significant experience in a Neo-Prophetic believer's journey away from sin, Satan, and hell. The prosperity gospel has significantly altered doctrines concerning sin, Satan, and hell. Summoning demons to identify themselves is regarded as an essential step towards complete deliverance (Rowan, 2016). However, the potential for subjective prophetic declarations—potentially false prophecies—(Deuteronomy 13: 1-5, Jeremiah 23:16, and 1 Thessalonians 5: 19-22) raises concerns, as it may increase congregational vulnerability. The plethora of prophetic claims and numerous demonic doorways can ultimately intimidate, manipulate, and distort perceptions of prophets' abilities to deliver accurate prophecies and contain Satan. Living in fear of falling prey to Satan and demonic forces leaves congregants susceptible, and fosters their reliance on

commercialised anointed objects that often benefit the prophet alone. This area warrants further investigation to help congregants detach from these practices, which resemble controlling occult activities rooted in deceit (1 Timothy 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:20-21). The insights gained open new avenues for future research within missiology concerning the commercialisation and commodification of the Holy Spirit, especially when portrayed as more active outside the mainstream church experience (Yong, 2015). Furthermore, the deliberate rejection of suffering as a personal cross to bear in Christian life could divert believers from developing a deeper connection with Christ the Redeemer.

5.5 The theme of the Word of God

This theme highlights the Word of God as fallible and open to any fundamentalist interpretation. The new divine revelations, as claimed by Neo-Prophets, are considered far superior to the entire Bible. This collection of themes encompasses the Spirit-led and literal interpretation of the Word of God, the immanent Kingdom of God, and the subservience of the Bible to the teachings of the pastoral leader.

5.5.1 The immanent Kingdom of God

One of the key findings regarding some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries is that their varied teachings on the Kingdom of God revolve around the present encounter of God with His people. The ontological presence of God in the here and now, alongside the Bible as His divinely inspired Word that infallibly remains the primary source of all teachings or rules for faith and practice in the lives of the born-again. In accordance with the prosperity gospel teachings, the Kingdom of God is experienced mainly now as a continuously evolving divine revelation.

There is an imminent elevation of the Kingdom of God that does not align with eschatology. The dialectical Christian teaching of the Kingdom of God as already established (present) but not yet fully realised (future) is not evident among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Emphasis tends to be placed on the Kingdom of God as fully established and capable of being expanded through our evangelical ministry. Some Neo-Prophets address congregants as saints, which assures them of experiencing the fullness of God’s Kingdom. This view reduces the complete revelation and future realisation of the Kingdom of God to a mere utopia. A corrective measure is therefore needed to balance the immanence and transcendence of the

Kingdom of God within Christian teachings. Hebrews 11:1 balances this perspective by highlighting Christian faith as existing between Christ's ascension and his second coming (Parousia). The unity between being redeemed and sanctified in Christ (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2) and being raised as the new creation with Christ (Ephesians 2:6-8) must be balanced against the understanding that our salvation is not yet fully realised (Hebrews 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Magezi and Magezi 2016). The concept of the immanent Kingdom of God is predominantly Neo-Prophetic, and lacks ecumenical consensus. Indeed, it exists almost parallel to those of other traditions, such as mainline churches. The ethical aspect of the immanent Kingdom is individualistic and has yet to be fully integrated into ecumenical dialogues, particularly when it comes to issues of social justice.

5.5.2 Spirit-led interpretation of the Word of God

The validated findings of this study reveal that the fundamentalist or literal interpretation of the Bible is widespread and justified among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The personal spiritual relationship that Neo-Prophetic believers maintain with God is central to their interpretation of Bible texts. Hearing from the word of God resembles normal conversations in their daily lives. Most reports of hearing God's voice are closely linked to scriptural divine providence, protection, and answers to prayers. This guides them to testify, pray for individuals with different spiritual needs, and exorcise demon-possessed congregants (Archer, 2009:160). It becomes difficult to distinguish between their normal thoughts, feelings, prayer life, and the way God speaks into their life experience. Therefore, it remains a significant finding that most participants hear or discern the voice of God in scripture as fundamentally normative within their real-time subjective view and needs.

This suggests that this emerging Neo-Prophetic pneumatic hermeneutics is distinctly legitimised, along with its unique features. Firstly, it primarily focuses on fostering a deeper spiritual connection between the reader and the divine. Secondly, it is Spirit-led or driven. The Holy Spirit illuminates and reveals the full meaning of the text. Thirdly, it places greater emphasis on socio-historical and reality-based testimonies or personal experiences as filters to interpret faith journeys. Fourth, it is inherently dynamic and evolving. There is no fixed golden age, and therefore, it cannot be confined within any ideology or exegesis. Fifth, it allows for multidirectional and spiritually empowering interpretations without limitations, where "We are naturally

skilled at exchanging empowerment through storytelling. So, our testimonies are central to defining our faith experience and identity under the divine guidance and pastoral leadership of our prophet." BSM-INT-03. Sixth, Neo-Prophetic hermeneutics inherently responds to African ontological and epistemological frameworks. It is an African religious paradigm that naturally incorporates African socio-historical perspectives and philosophies of life, empowering Africans to be liberated from the rational and doctrinal constraints of the West. In urban churches, this Spirit-led illumination has even resulted in a more lenient interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-38, which traditionally prohibits women from participating in worship services.

There is also a new Spirit-led interpretation of scripture. The new understanding that arises from this is that a Neo-Prophetic, subjectivised biblical interpretation that fosters deeper spirituality among the less educated ought not to be dismissed as merely an emotional and non-cognitive experience. This suggests that the Word of God holds authority and impacts their lives. However, this biblical interpretation is heavily influenced by the teachings, prophetic impartations, and sermons of their leading pastor.

5.5.3 The subservient abuse of the Bible by Pastorpreneurs

This item was regarded as sacred, and very few paid attention to it. No matter how careful and sensitive the researcher was, it was not even worth investigating. The limited information available consisted mainly of comments noting the prevalence of this practice. In line with a finding by the CRL Commission, these unregulated Neo-Prophetic churches are driven primarily by capitalist pastors whose mission seems more focused on exploiting churches as tax-exempt entities to sell their products. Based on the validated data on this category of themes, a compelling argument emerges from the findings that there is indeed a lack of financial accountability among pastoral leaders. Conversely, the Old Testament teachings on Tithing (Numbers 18:21), offering of the first fruits (Deuteronomy 26:10), and offerings as a spiritual gesture of thanksgiving (Malachi 3:10) have been highlighted as the information-rich themes. It is under such conditions that Scripture is compromised along with its divine power to instruct, edify, and empower God's people. In some Neo-Prophetic churches, the word of God is often used or misquoted to justify vague or false personal prophecies and teachings.

In two focus groups, serious discussions took place regarding the divine calling of a prophet as a means of elevating the pastoral leader to financial riches and luxury. This was evident in the strongly competitive desire to secure the ongoing loyalty of congregants. The common factor was that church leadership is often based on natural seniority and the power of spiritual gifts, rather than formal education as criteria (Mwaura, 2007:366). Some Neo-Prophetic pastoral leaders generally claimed all the glory or divine gifts and expected congregants to elevate them. This was seen as contradicting 1 Corinthians 12:29-30, which highlights the diversity of gifts for the mutual building up of the church. At times, prophecy appeared to reflect his or her personal philosophy, teachings and agenda. All symbols used at the altar and other significant places in the church, as well as attire worn by congregants, bear his image and name "*Some of these prophets have become gatekeepers of divine blessings from God. They demand congregants to see God as the God of* [redacted name of Prophet] *and not as our God. They seem to condition and predetermine what and how God will speak*" BSM-INT- 04.

5.6. Worship and Praise

All the themes within this worship category provided spiritual relief to the souls, emotions, thoughts, and bodies of worshipping congregants (1 Samuel 16:14-23). It was an expression of Spirit-led liturgy during which some cry, laugh, shout, and dance (1 Chronicles 13:8). This highlights the uniqueness of the worship experience that has contributed to the rise of Neo-Prophetism (Vaughan, 2015:240). It is an experience that encompasses both lamentation (Isaiah 54:1) and thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:19-20). Therefore, worship can be regarded as a comprehensive expression of spirituality that may surpass the regularity of a liturgy (Nel, 2016:1).

5.6.1 Music and singing

The prominence of loud and lively music throughout the worship service was observed as a key feature across all churches and ministries visited. The harmony of talented musicians and the dedication of various members of the worship teams immersed the congregation and pastoral team in a genuine worship experience.

Neo-Prophetic worship music is uplifting and recognises the work of the Holy Spirit. It provides a strong motivation to find oneself immersed in a chorus dance before the

Lord. Music is viewed as part of evangelisation beyond the walls of their worship space. Most of these songs are also sold in church shops.

5.6.2 Intercessory prayers

Full expressions like clapping hands, walking around or kneeling form part of this prayer session. Based on the observation by the researcher, communally shared prayers confirm their distinct ethos of faith that God listens and answers all their prayers and shall intervene in the situation of each intercessor. Many prayers that individual members spontaneously declared were to face hard times and decisions, financial prosperity, promotions at work, for healing and comfort to those affected and infected by chronic diseases, peace in families, continued divine protection against evil powers, prayer for the pastoral leadership for a Spirit-filled vision and for unity among members.

5.6.3 The power of witness and testimonies

Witnessing and testimonies shared during the services attended by the researcher formed part of the observations of the worship services. These can be categorised as confessional theology aimed at empowering and motivating others who may be facing spiritual storms in their lives. The confessions and positive stories shared represent a valid, constructive, and grassroots theology that speaks of God, their prophet, as present and faithful to His promises. Bible texts were made contextually meaningful and revealed the power of God among His people. Their faith-based knowledge of God and Spirit-led journey of faith are their lived experiences of who God is. The focus of those who shared their witness stories was not to be systematic, philosophical, nor to attempt to be notable biblical scholars, but in the simplicity of their stories, they shared the revelation of God that transforms lives beyond sermons. This was a powerful experience into which the researcher became immersed.

It becomes evident from the themes above that worship in some Neo-Prophetic churches is mainly a Spirit-led and spontaneous liturgy (Anderson, 2004:198). The power of the testimonies lies in their connection to an African experience of authentic storytelling. This has transformed liturgy into a song and narrative-driven metaculture, reflecting lived Christian experience. Through these testimonies, listeners are immersed in the voice, identity, and inner strength of the narrator. The African indigeneity and pneumatic elements resonate with the Neo-Prophetic faith of the

individual. It is part of a lifelong journey that finds true meaning and expression within a community-based Neo-Prophetic faith experience. One of the findings of this study is that this contributes to the recurring practice of “stealing of sheep from mainline churches” (Chadwick, 2001:157). It encapsulates a person’s renewed sense of conversion, charisma, holiness, and sustained hope.

Witness stories or testimonies were often observed to be the product of dictated, rehearsed, or marketing strategies primarily influenced by the leading pastor. Some testimonies were merely staged performances aimed at commercialising the divine powers of the prophetic leader. These false testimonies were not genuine accounts of redemptive uplift arising from a personal faith encounter with the divine. Such malpractices have been used to expose congregants to the vulnerability of believing everything to be true. Besides this finding, it can generally be argued that the themes of the worship experience implicitly show congregants experiencing a rupture with their past, embracing or reconciling with their real-life encounters, and finding new meaning in life within the journey of faith (Droogers,2014). The dualistic view of the sacred and secular is merged into a single holistic experience of worship.

In some Neo-Prophetic churches, worship is participatory, exuberant, and exciting (Tshabalala and Patel, 2010). Each of these themes in worship creates a fresh and invigorating experience that unites congregants into one family of God (Yong, 2015). Neo-Prophetic worship featuring African rhythms and local choreographies is central to the family of God. Marius Nel summarises it as follows:

> Neo-Prophetic singing is experiential and dynamic, with the worshipper and worshipping community responding to the Spirit’s movement into the glory of God, realised already in part but not yet in fullness (Nel, 2016:4).

The power of the Holy Spirit is a tangible experience of God's presence, characterised by a vibrant atmosphere of worship (prophecy, speaking in tongues, and dance), an open-door policy (non-judgmentalism and welcoming attitude), and compelling testimonies that attract many spiritually stranded individuals in society. The reality of the liberalisation and commercialisation of the Christian faith – including experiences of worship, testimonies, and evangelisation – may carry a risk of trivialisation and banality (Meyer, 2015). This risk stems from competition among Neo-Prophetic

churches and ministries for economic opportunities and global missionary expansion or church planting.

5.6.4 The use of social media

Neo-Prophetism, as an expression of Christianity in South Africa, is continually challenged to provide pastoral care to various congregants. Social media has proven to be a versatile tool for introducing new forms of communication, worship, pastoral guidance, and financial management to sustain churches and keep them responsive. The COVID-19 pandemic compelled Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to become e-churches. To this day, Sunday services are held in-person, and extended virtually, in order to accommodate those who prefer to remain at home for various reasons and those in hospitals. Some new members beyond Africa have joined these online services. They serve as platforms to share motivations, scriptural messages, and worship songs. Additionally, they have become channels for the commercialisation of anointed objects and the marketing of pastoral leaders internationally.

5.6.5 Televangelism

Some financially stable Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have developed core strategies to ensure their sustainable existence. Neo-Prophetic pastors have invested in exploring and optimising digital media channels to communicate effectively with their congregants. According to Adebayo Afolaranmi, “multimedia ministry” or “media evangelism” has come to be associated with smartphones, social media platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, and webinars that transmit information instantaneously (Afolaranmi, 2019). With the rapid changes brought about by 4IR, televangelism from Neo-Prophetic churches is opening new opportunities for the Global South to evangelise the Global North.

This reversal of missions and the re-evangelisation of the transatlantic world, drawing on transregional lessons from other African countries as well as the continents of Asia and South America, can best equip Neo-Prophetic churches for this new sense of mission. This realisation opens new opportunities for reimagining and reconceptualising the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) and fostering a Spirit-led Christian faith experience. Neo-Prophetic churches are therefore challenged to collaborate with Pentecostalism to address socio-historic, economic, and political

changes and to contribute to shaping the way missional churches move “from altar to action” (Kgatle and Chigorimbo, 2024:1-10). Alternatively, indigenisation, inculturation, and celebrating diversity within Pentecostal Christianity form part of this reimagined sense of being church and participating in the Mission of God. This reimagined missional transformation includes a symbolic approach for the church to dismantle all systems that institutionalise divisions and malpractices, which lead to the vulnerability of congregants. This period of deconstruction ought to pave the way for deeper contextualisation of the Christian faith experience among Neo-Prophetic churches (Niemandt 2017:1-6).

5.7 The autopoietic features of Neo-Prophetic churches

This cluster of findings on Neo-Prophetism explores themes such as the emergence of new churches, non-denominational practices, mobility of congregants, and family disconnections concerning faith matters and choices. These themes share a common characteristic, namely autopoiesis processes. The freedom of young pastors to establish new churches within Neo-Prophetism, the youth exercising their right to relocate to different churches, and conscientiously disconnecting from their immediate families in pursuit of good health, deliverance, and material prosperity are prominent features of this category. This has resulted in a continuously evolving ecology of Christianity within the limited framework of Neo-Prophetism.

5.7.1 Start a new church

This theme summarises the findings based on data collected mainly from highly successful and prominent pastors. The findings reveal that there are both positive and negative aspects to the freedom of young pastors to break away from an existing church and establish their own. It was generally accepted that breakaways and the founding of new churches are straightforward processes with no regulatory requirements, such as accreditation or licensing.

Kgatle confirms that some Neo-Prophetic pastors view spiritual anointing as more critical than the theological education and preparation for becoming a pastor (2020b:109). These unqualified young pastors establish churches after training with unqualified senior pastors, who also run unaccredited prophetic colleges without levels recognised by the National Qualifications Framework, as required by the South African Qualifications Authority (Kärkkäinen, 2010). They strongly believe that God does not

only call the ‘holy-art-thou’ and ministers who have graduated from higher education institutions. In view of their claim to be divinely appointed as prophets of fresh revelations, formal pastoral education can therefore not be used as a benchmark. They believe that God has divinely qualified them as new emerging Spirit-led pastors of our time. Resane raises a serious concern that the growth of new churches and ministries is continually driven by pastors who are vulnerable to unqualified pastors who commercialise fake theological qualifications (Resane, 2017). These shortcuts into ministry have also contributed to the proliferation of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, intensifying competition for survival. This regeneration and multiplication of the same prophetic pastors have diminished the importance of academic training and professionalisation in Neo-Prophetic ministry.

5.7.2 Non-denominationality

It is among the findings of this study that Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries of this period have completely separated from the mainline churches of the Global North, where South African Neo-Prophetism appears to be developing a new form of African Christianity. This was most evident in the atmosphere of the new vision/mission statements and the setting of new altars. This non-denominational approach strongly revives Afrocentric Christianity and African spirituality (Mazama, 2002). Neo-Prophetic churches in this category mainly focus on re-establishing Afrocentric belief systems rooted in diverse African cultures (ontology) and ubuntu philosophy, which was desacralised by Christian missionaries from the West (Moeketsi, 2013). These Neo-Prophets aim for an epistemological intervention strategy to recover the once-lost African innovative freedom and creative natural symbiotic relationship with biodiversity or metaphysical energy around them (Kete, 1998). Consequently, there is a strong synergy between Afrocentric connections of the ancestor world, the environmental world, and Neo-Prophetism.

This study finds that in some Neo-Prophetic churches, the prophetic teachings and impartations of spiritual fathers and mothers overshadow the wisdom and parental roles of biological parents. Blood is no thicker than water, and ubuntu is no longer a unifying force in society and family life. Neo-liberal individualism has run rampant, and many qualities of ubuntu philosophy—such as empathy, reciprocity, harmony, hospitality, and mutual care—diminish (Battle, 2009:6-7). This highly individualised

lifestyle is adopted to secure one's prosperity, health, well-being, and safety from attacks by evil spirits.

Among the findings of this study, it has been noted as a concern that any form of institutionalism, such as family, ethical formalism, dogmatism, and denominationalism, was heavily criticised (Vondey, 2011: 320). These churches and ministries are led 'by Africans for Africans', and each is self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (Kgatle, 2020b: ix). This has also hindered the implementation of any regulatory framework aimed at restoring accountability among pastoral leaders. Due to this lack of regulation, there has been a continued proliferation of these non-denominational churches and ministries.

5.7.3 Consultation of fetish and traditional priests

One of the key findings of this research was sourced from BSM-FOC-03, who expressed concern about the competition among some Neo-Prophets to grow their church memberships. He confirmed that different strategies are employed to attract and retain congregants in competition with other churches and ministries. These strategies include consulting fetish or traditional priests for magic powers and occult rituals. In the quest for magical powers to perform miracles, become the most sought-after and renowned prophet, and instantly become wealthy, some prophets have sought the assistance of "the Dark Lords of Benin" (Proof Ex, 2024).

> Our prophet was advised by his spiritual father to take a trip to Ghana to consult those with supernatural powers. The trip took about five days. After that, he had power like no other local pastor. He could exorcise any person from demonic possession, barren women got pregnant and delivered healthy babies, the unemployed got hired, and those with mental disorders were healed/delivered (KMM-INT-01).

Many local traditional priests have come forward on national television, confirming that they have a clientele of pastors who consult them for growing their churches and ministries (Zuma D. , 2021). This further confirms a finding of the dependency and covenanting of some prophets of Neo-Prophetic churches to magic powers.

5.7.4 The devaluation of the redemptive role of Jesus Christ

From the findings derived from the data for this study, some prophets in Neo-Prophetic churches have been observed to hold numerous new revelations and competing

teachings about and against Christ, compared to the Christology from the Council of Nicaea, Missionary Christology of colonial times, Afrocentric Christologies proposed and utilised by theologians from Africa such as Kalu (2005); Magezi and Banda (2017); Mbefo (1996); Mbiti (1971); Nyende (2005); Udoh (1988); Ukpong (1992); and Potgieter and Magezi (2016). Ezigbo summarises their Afrocentric Christologies as follows:

> As God's self-revelatory act, Jesus Christ embodies both God's presence and true humanity in the world. In Jesus, therefore, a person encounters and is invited into God's fellowship. The Revealer Christology model places Jesus at the centre of African indigenous religious experience. It presents Jesus as both 'questioner' and 'solution' to the experiences and religious quest of Africans (2008:99).

Against this backdrop, many parallel and multidirectional teachings undermine Christ, daring to replace Him or compete with Him as the centre of Christianity through some Neo-Prophets aligned with their agenda to commercialise and commodify the Christian faith experience for personal gain (Nwanganga 2019:1 and Anderson 2019:2). They have either dismissed Him, compete with Him, attempt to replace Him, or seek to supplement Him, claiming that He proves to be an insufficient answer to the daily needs for security, prosperity, health, and well-being among Africans. This has resulted in a virtually non-existent degree of Christology among some Neo-Prophetic churches in South Africa. The aim of commercialising and commodifying the Christian faith experience within Neo-Prophetic kerygma in Africa features a tendency to present Christ as a European outsider in African Christianity. The perceived foreignness or disconnection of Christ in terms of His identity in Neo-Prophetism has profound and negative ontological implications for the systematic theological understanding of soteriology. It is as if Christ has no place in the inn (Lk 2:7), or is not welcome among African Christians (Magezi and Magezi 2016). In this practice, Christ as the Saviour competes with Simonism and syncretic practices within Neo-Prophetism. This is done under the guise of leading African believers to good health, protection from dark forces, and financial prosperity. Such Christianity appears to be entirely dependent on the deified personas of prophetic leaders, who are more aligned with African Traditional healing methods than with Christ, as they minister to the spiritual insecurities of the congregants (Banda 2018:57-59). As a result, most participants and informants in this

research showed divided loyalties between Christ and their prophet. From a missiological perspective, there is an urgent need for the redemptive, rehabilitative, and spiritual empowerment of these congregants. In line with this, Kgatle calls for “a prophecy of salvation, prophecy of love, prophecy of humility and approved prophecy as a remedy for bizarre practices of Pentecostal prophecy in Southern Africa” (2019:1).

GOF-FOC-05 and ECD-INT-03 expressed concerns about a series of deliverances in some neo-prophetic ministries, where new products are created, and conferences are held for deliverance. It is one of the findings that deliverance and salvation seem limited to the transition from poverty to riches. The importance of the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ is not connected to deliverance or salvation. The claimed divine power of the Prophet undermines the divinity of Christ.

The main point from the findings above is that the Illuminati has minimised the role of Christ and created a parallel secular soteriology that is anti-Christ and anti-church (Preiswerk, 1951:48). This is used to justify the idea that the prosperity gospel has origins dating back to the apostolic church (Acts 16:11-15 and Philippians 4.2). This Luciferian Christology misinterprets scriptures to support the planting of seeds and offering of material and financial thanks to Neo-Prophets. This false teaching about Jesus has, throughout history, rationalised profiteering on the part of individuals at the expense of their vulnerable followers (Van Schrooten, 2004:68). According to these Luciferian teachings, Jesus is interpreted as merely a human being whose death and resurrection have not transformed human life. Consequently, deliverance and salvation are viewed as processes to be repeated in one’s lifetime (Fredman, 1997:25-26).

In summary, HAM-INFO-04 and BSM-SUR-05 argue that ritualistic practices aimed at driving away demons or performing exorcisms have infiltrated worship and deliverance. Spiritual breakthroughs through the superpowers of anointed objects are achieved with the power of the Holy Spirit, yet without Christ. Biblical teachings on Christian discipleship and stewardship of the born-again are domesticated within the person-centred teachings of some Neo-Prophets. Deliverance is repeatedly emphasised to highlight Satan's persistent role as the enemy in ongoing spiritual warfare. From a missiological perspective, this exposes the commodification of the Holy Spirit and the high commercialisation of the Christian faith experience, with little

spiritual connection evident between the believer and the Mission of God through Christ, the Redeemer. Based on these arguments, some prophets are seen to exploit epistemological fear among congregants for personal gain. Spiritual warfare in particular Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries is thus not viewed as redemptive or spiritually empowering. The notions of freedom, self-individuation, inner transformation, and fellowship are not directly linked to Jesus as the Christ. Soteriology, pneumatology, and missiology in some of these Neo-Prophetic contexts are rooted in false, disrespectful, and degrading Luciferian Christology. Prophetic ministry, biblical hermeneutics, and worship liturgies have become platforms for domestication and indoctrination by some Neo-Prophetic pastors, prophets, and bishops for tax-free profits. Given the devaluation of the soteriological significance of Christ by some Neo-Prophets, it becomes essential for Missiology to reaffirm the theology of Christ's presence among humanity. This challenges missiologists to maintain a balanced approach between the Christianisation of Africa and the Africanisation of Christianity (Van der Merwe, 2016).

5.8 Back to the sender prayers (Ps 35:4-8 and Ps 109)

This theme highlighted the ongoing spiritual warfare that causes certain Neo-Prophets to stay alert to fears of witchcraft, suffering, and the effects of poverty. Enemies conduct these battles. This was noted as a key aspect among three of the six Neo-Prophetic churches/ministries visited for data collection for this study. Five in-depth interview participants and all focus groups confirmed the widespread nature of this practice as a form of spiritual warfare. They believe their enemies and roaming satanic forces (Job 1:9-12) are launching spiritual attacks on their good health, material wealth, and established prophetic protections as members of these churches and ministries (Onyinah, 2008:219-220). As a defence, they respond with prayers invoking the power of the God of the prophet's God (Quayesi-Amakye, 2013:91). Sometimes, they buy anointed objects for protection. In severe, repetitive cases of satanic assault, special rituals are performed by the powerful prophet at a high cost. BSM-INT-02 also believed in prayers of sending back the attack. He confirmed he has prayed for an immediate deflation of demonic plans and the destruction of his enemies, whether alive or deceased. He asked for divine favour so that God might send military missiles from heaven against his enemies. He views God as a 'bulldozer'.

These examples clearly demonstrate that the practice of warfare prayers, predominantly conducted at night to send curses, attacks, bad news, witchcraft, dreams, and satanic arrows back to the sender, forms part of repeated deliverance among born-again Christians. It is a common finding that these back-to-the-sender prayers are directed at everyone, including close family members. Such prayers are essentially acts of vengeance and aggression, aimed at defeating their Goliaths (1 Samuel 17:44-46) who are believed to be present everywhere—marine, terrestrial, and atmospheric—and at reclaiming their blessings, prosperity, and good health. Banda and Masengwe (2018) assert that the concept of back-to-the-sender is directly borrowed from African traditional religion. Neo-Prophetic teachings often cite the drowning of the Egyptians chasing the Israelites as biblical proof of the power of prayers from the sender (Exodus 14:19-31). The literal interpretation of these stories serves to justify a lifestyle free from suffering and problems (Quayesi-Amakye, 2015:43-69). This study observes that individuals tend to adopt an individualistic approach to restoring their lives, prioritising health, safety, and material success, often without remorse or self-reflection. The primary concern is to free themselves from the spiritual bondage imposed by enemies and to restore their prosperity, good life, and ongoing protection (Ntumy, 2005). Many Neo-Prophets promoting the "back to the sender" theme fail to teach critical ethical Christian principles, such as spiritual martyrdom, forgiveness, repentance, and tolerance towards others (Quayesi-Amakye, 2011:298). What matters most is self-preservation and asserting one's will against all odds. Frequently quoted scriptures include 2 Corinthians 10:3-6; Matthew 11:12; 1 Kings 13:4; Psalm 35:1, and Esther 9:25. Further research in this area is recommended for future exploration.

The main gap identified in this category of themes is that anthropologists have made significant efforts to understand these syncretic African rituals within Christianity. However, missiologists still need to explore how these dynamics influence the Mission of God and the role of the Missional Church within the African Christian faith experience. Decolonisation as a key liberative intervention for indigenising Christianity and removing colonial baggage has been overshadowed by occult Neo-Prophets promoting teachings on individualistic financial prosperity, good health, and protection from witchcraft of the dark satanic world (Shaw, 1996). The promises of financial prosperity, a good life without worries, and guaranteed protection from the torment of

evil spirits, as offered by Neo-Prophets, have found fertile ground in the current poverty and daily hardships faced by many South Africans (Deke, 2015). This has resulted in a large exodus of Christians from mainline churches into these Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries seeking to turn their misfortune into wealth and fame. This desperate pursuit of spiritual self-fulfilment and seeking God's intervention among Neo-Prophetic congregants has increased their gullibility and made them highly vulnerable to the demands of their pastors, who engage in these syncretic practices (Feierman, 1985). Divination, sorcery, and fortune-telling are considered biblically as provoking God's anger and are therefore punishable by death (2 Kings 21:6; Ezekiel 13:23; Acts 16:16-19). The findings from each of these themes clearly demonstrate that the infiltration of such practices into some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries calls for collaboration between anthropologists, traditional priests, and missiologists to develop a 'biblically informed African theology' that can correct these malpractices (Moscickle, 2017).

5.9 Findings on vulnerability and gullibility of congregants

This theme highlights elements of Neo-Prophetic churches that indicate dangers now embedded within the Christian faith experience, yet still harmful to it. The connection of some Neo-Prophetic leaders with African Traditional Religion and the Illuminati Order was identified as a serious concern. Healing, protection from poverty, and the pursuit of financial prosperity reflect a new culture of syncretism within Neo-Prophet circles. This cultic practice directly challenges Christianity as a universal religion.

5.9.1 The infallibility of spiritual fathers and mothers

Congregants in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries call each other brothers, sisters in Christ, or saints of God. Because they are often spiritual infants who have recently been born again and remain vulnerable to relapsing into old sins and habits, elders and pastoral leaders have a duty to care for these spiritually fragile new believers, based on a core interpretation of 1 Corinthians 4: 15. They are known as spiritual fathers and mothers, providing a pastoral support system for those who have recently experienced deliverance and spiritual rebirth (Reinhardt, 2015). To encourage their spiritual growth, each new believer is assigned either a spiritual father or mother under whom to be mentored. The same principle applies to young or newly anointed pastors under their bishop or senior pastor. A hierarchical structure exists where a senior pastor acts as a spiritual father to elders, who in turn are spiritual fathers to the

newly converted. Therefore, the senior pastor can be seen as a spiritual father to spiritual fathers and mothers under his leadership. Every spiritual father or mother is granted complete allegiance from those they oversee, as God anoints them to pass on Neo-Prophetic teachings. They undertake this role believing it fulfils their pastoral duties and divine calling. One key observation is that these figures are regarded as possessing a higher level of anointing and spiritual maturity, serving as messengers who receive divine messages in accordance with their understanding of Ezekiel 47. Discipleship and full submission to their teachings are seen as ways to access their elevated level of anointing and to facilitate the transfer or impartation of their double portion of divine wisdom (Reinhardt, 2013). This framework of discipleship in Neo-Prophetism results in the routine creation of spiritual fathers and mothers, acting as conduits of shared spiritual family teachings and bonds. Ultimately, a sense of community among congregants is fostered as part of this shared practice (Reinhardt, 2015). Spiritual fathers and mothers embody the amplification of official teachings, social connectivity, and the distinctive identity of being born-again. An additional finding of this study is that they are perceived as immanent sources of transcendental power, deserving of exceptional loyalty, prestige, honour, and credibility.

5.9.2 Fake healings, miracles and unfulfilled prophecies

These themes in the findings of this study centres on contemporary vulnerabilities that some Neo-Prophetic pastors have exploited to manipulate congregants, using the name of Jesus. They reportedly employ deceptive tactics to exploit trusting congregants, offering prophetic impartations in exchange for financial gain and further breakthroughs in their lives. These pastors have performed false miracles, dubious healings, and even paid trusted congregants to give false testimonies of instant healing from cancer, AIDS, and disabilities that medical professionals could not treat. Many informants and participants have described this behaviour as charlatanism.

5.9.3 Occult rituals to attract more congregants

This theme highlights the consultation of a fetish priest to attract more Neo-Prophetic congregants, which has undermined the core teachings of Christianity. Two of the six selected churches for this research have covenants with African traditional religion. They are led by prophetic pastors who openly practice as traditional healers through divination and claim to have ‘a third eye’. To bolster their practices, they have consulted fetish priests like Nana Kwaku Bonsam for extraordinary prophetic powers, where

larger congregations and traditional healing were evident. The confessions about the occult rituals undergone by prophets in some Neo-Prophetic churches, as narrated by Prof Exx (2024: 4-84) and Ramabulana (2018: 10-144), attest to the extreme actions taken in pursuit of magical powers by means of which to perform miracles, gain fame, attract more congregants, and achieve financial prosperity. The evidence of extra-sensory perception or clairvoyance of the prophet to access deeper personal and historical details of congregants has fostered a sense of wonder and loyalty among others. This practice indicates the transfer of divination and sorcery from traditional religion into Neo-Prophetism. The concept of Simonism—exchanging pastoral ministry for spiritual powers—has also infiltrated Christianity through these practices (Acts 8:18-21). All these practices lead congregants to become more gullible and vulnerable in their quest for the redemptive message of God to guide their lives through these self-proclaimed prophets.

While observing worship services in the selected churches, symbolic Illuminati decorations were also noted, featuring captions, themes, and invitations to realise one's dreams. It became difficult to distinguish such a church from a cult, which might simply serve as a vehicle that congregants do not suspect of transforming Christianity into a cult. Captions such as, 'money is not the root of evil, money is the root to all freedom', or 'become one of the enlightened and all-knowing members who are working for the advancement of humanity', conveyed a clear message: stripping the biblical meaning of mission from the church, salvation, and calling congregants to seek quick ways to achieve financial breakthroughs.

A key finding of this study is that Illuminati occult practices have been integrated into some Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries. These practices have significantly undermined Christian ethical values and core principles of the faith, emphasising financial prosperity, immorality, and control through necromancy and witchcraft. Luciferianism has overtaken Christian teachings, replacing them with consumerism, moral relativism, indifferentism, and wizardry. It has infiltrated certain Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, transforming them into entities that denounce God, Christ, Scripture, the Church, natural law, life, morality, social order (including family and marriage), and salvation history. From this foundation, they aim to be messiahs or redeemers of disillusioned, impoverished, ill, marginalised, and spiritually tormented Christians (Gray, 2007:260).

This spiritual conspiracy is also evident in some teachings that are freely available at the back of the church. Document analysis shows that it is being popularised through the internet, film industry, social media, and human agents to instil fear, manipulate vulnerable congregants spiritually, and ensure they develop and internalise their sense of helplessness. The increasing number of unregulated Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, along with reports of sexual promiscuity in the media, are among the ten harmful signs of the times marked by Satanism, occultism, the Illuminati, and witchcraft at the altars. All these aim to strip Christianity of its meaning and reduce it to a mere utopia (MacDonnell, 2009). Therefore, it becomes essential for Christianity as a religion to proclaim the power of God and to restore the faith of the People of God (Manala, 2005).

5.9.4 Non-regulated individual connections and dividual disconnections

The significance of the Catholic doctrine on the sacraments and the Protestant emphasis on the Word of God as a means of uniting families has become a clear area of conflict driven by Neo-Prophets as the fourth wave of reformation in Christianity (Newbigin, 1953). The findings highlight the way in which individual family members are disconnecting from their immediate families in pursuit of being born again (John 3:5), as well as the neo-liberalist promises of good health, financial prosperity, and complete protection from generational curses of witchcraft—the rise of unregulated Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

This section summarises key findings obtained from primary sources (participants and informants) involved in this investigative study. Most of the information was gathered from secondary data sources available on various websites and blogs. First, attention was given to the Report of the Hearings on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems, compiled by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (2017). Second, focus was placed on the response of the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners to the CRL report. Third, particular attention was paid to the open letter to the CRL Rights Commission from Freedom of Religion South Africa. The discussion of these findings highlights that freedom of religion has become a matter of human rights and constitutional law debate. Finally, focus was also on the Alliance of Neo-Prophetic and Charismatic Churches in South Africa, which represents most Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

Neo-Prophetism is associated with the post-apartheid period or the contemporary democratic South Africa (Czegledy, 2008). During this time, global trends such as consumer culture, televangelism, and individualism became integral parts of Neo-Prophetism as a new form of African Christianity (Da Silva Moreira, 2014). The commercialisation and commodification of African Christianity also gained prominence, creating demand and a market for the sale of anointed objects (Bonsu and Belk, 2010). Unethical abuse of gullible and vulnerable congregants occurred in the name of Christianity and Spirit-led prophecies. Criminal activities like money laundering increased to alarming levels (Kgatle, 2017). This lack of regulation was seen as a problem to be addressed through wider consultations to restore normality to Christianity, which is regarded as promoting neo-liberal ideas such as the free market and the privatisation of churches and ministries by leading pastors.

In response to the CRL Rights Commission's recommendation for Christianity to self-regulate and establish a regulatory professional body, the South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedom, along with Freedom of Religion South Africa, objected to this proposal. Their objection was based on the fact that any regulation of Christianity directly violates the constitutional right to freedom of religion as outlined in Chapter 2 (Sections 9, 15, and 31) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Therefore, they argue that each church or ministry ought to be self-regulating and that there should be no regulatory framework or council imposed to enforce accountability to standards set by the government. As outlined in the Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms, they state the following:

> Every religious institution is recognised and protected as an institution that has authority over its own affairs, and towards which the state, through its governing institutions, is responsible for just, constructive and impartial government in the interest of everybody… Every person has the right, for religious purposes and in furthering their objectives, to solicit, receive, manage, allocate, and spend voluntary financial and other forms of support and contributions. The confidentiality of such support and contributions must be respected. (The South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms, 2010, Section 10).

In addition to this objection, the Freedom of Religion South Africa also wrote an open letter against the regulation of religion by the government, based on data collected through a random sampling method (ACRP, IIFP & WCEN, 2017). Submissions from the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners (ACRP), International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), and Western Cape Ecumenical Network were also presented as evidence. All these submissions from Christian bodies were objecting to the principle of regulating religion, which has evidently promoted individual disconnections within Christianity.

Both the South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedoms and Freedom of Religion South Africa have cited the case of Garreth Anver Prince versus the President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope to support their argument on the constitutionality of opposing the regulation of religion (Prince v. President of the Cape Law Society, 2000). Based on this constitutional case concerning the sacred value and role of religion, they contend that the proposed self-regulation and government oversight of religious practice conflict with the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms. It also constitutes a breach of the constitutional rights to freedom of religion, belief, and opinion (Section 15), as well as freedom of association (Section 18), of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996. They cited section 42 of the ruling of the Constitutional Court on the case between Garreth Anver Prince and the President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope to support their stance. Part of this states:

> Religion is a matter of faith and belief. The beliefs that believers hold sacred and thus central to their religious faith may strike non-believers as bizarre, illogical, or irrational. Human beings may freely believe in what they cannot prove. However, that their beliefs are bizarre, illogical, or irrational to others or are incapable of scientific proof does not detract from the fact that these are religious beliefs for the purposes of enjoying the protection guaranteed by the right to freedom of religion. The believers should not be put to the test of their beliefs or faith.

In another court judgement, state regulation is argued against as follows:

> Given that South Africa promotes democratic values in support of human dignity, freedom of religion, and association, it cannot be justified that the state should exert such control over matters of religion and the free market system. Regulation of the Christian religion cannot control the scope of limitations on relationships and communication (prophetic impartations and prosperity gospel teachings) between God-appointed pastoral leaders and congregants. Diversity in terms of religious belief and association among available Spirit-led churches and ministries is to be valued as part of a constitutionally free and open society (Dawoo and Another v Minister of Home Affairs and Others, 2000).

The submissions to the CRL Rights Commission above agreed with condemning Neo-Prophetic charlatans and con artists pastors, who have exploited vulnerable and gullible congregants. In response to these malpractices and abuses, they recommend enforcing existing laws. Additionally, they call for basic training for religious institutions and practising pastors to establish a standard understanding, rather than taking complete control over regulating religion. The only regulatory scope they can accept is using the CRL report on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems to amend current legislation and create new laws to promote better compliance (FOR SA and SACRRF,2017:5-7). Both organisations have recommended that wider consultations ought to be conducted in the development of A Code of Conduct for Religions in South Africa that is practical, constitutional, and aligns with the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. They believe this approach is most likely to ensure constitutional compliance and enable decisive strategic intervention to rectify and prevent the abuses reportedly carried out in the name of the Christian faith.

These secondary sources of data have served as a strong base for the researcher to establish the validity of the findings that the CRL Rights Commission is being convinced to abandon its decision to regulate religions (including Christianity) in South Africa. These Religious Rights and Freedoms organisations are neo-liberalist and favour a free practice of religion, without any control/regulation by the State. They are aware of and condemn the abuses that Christian pastors have committed, but they remain resolute against the regulation of the practices of religion. One other finding is

that representatives of other major religious groups, like Jews, Hindus, African Traditionalists, and Muslims, show no evident opposition or submission. This seems to be a direct engagement between Christians and the CRL Rights Commission.

Neoliberalism appears to be the policy and political economy framework within which the battle between these organisations and the CRL Rights Commission is waged. It can therefore be concluded that this inexorable rise of Neo-Prophetism represents a new brand of Christianity, aimed at globalising, establishing a new world order, and re-theorising the unmediated interaction between an individual and the divine (Comaroff, 2010). Spirit baptism and being born again are concepts that have been found to proselytise individuals into the emerging new world order (McGuigan,2014). The strong features of this new world order are self-regulation and self-actualisation through available choices to gain material prosperity against all odds, including family bonds (Anderson, 2013). In addition to these findings, the researcher as a religious practitioner has observed an emerging picture of Neo-Prophetism as also a carrier of empty promises, contradictions, and avoidance of family as the first and most important institution that regulates and guides a young person to grounded decision-making. Self-righteousness and personal prosperity are made to be seen as evidence of deliverance and salvation. These are driving some Neo-Prophetic congregants to aim at becoming a billionaire (Obadare,2016).

Gerrie Ter Haar and Stephen Ellis have raised a serious contention that the recolonisation of Africa through religion (mostly Neo-Prophetism and other religious rituals) is increasingly evident (Ter Haar and Ellis,2006). The revival of African Traditional Religions and the rise of Neo-Prophetism in Africa are all aimed at using religion to establish the new world order. The finding of this investigative study is that Africa is one of the leading centres of Christianity. Therefore, world strategists are recolonising Africa using the intertwined religions and politics (Ellis and Ter Haar,2004). This intertwined external locus of control in the hands of world strategists through religion and politics makes it very difficult to determine the clear redemptive role that Neo-Prophetism plays in the spiritual growth and commitment to the core values of the African ubuntu philosophy and Christ-centred Christian faith experience (Ter Haar, 2005).

In conclusion, this detailed discussion of the key themes and sub-themes highlights the significance of time, various skills, and collaboration between the researcher and participants. They also strongly connect with the main features of Neo-Prophetism discussed in the literature review of this study. There is a natural flow and complementarity among these themes. These findings are rooted in original stories shared out of trust and conviction by all participants and informants. Given the critical role of employing four data collection methods, coding, and data synthesis through narrative and discourse analysis, these findings add value to the study of Neo-Prophetism from a missiological perspective. The study and its findings affirm Neo-Prophetism as a neo-liberal form of Christianity that is gaining new members, while mainline churches are experiencing losses. It is also evident from these findings that Neo-Prophetism has Africanised Christianity, albeit with certain disadvantages. These findings go beyond clarifying what Neo-Prophetism is to identifying gaps that require further attention from a missiological view, incorporating sociology, psychology, biblical hermeneutics, anthropology, and systematic theology. The new knowledge gathered points to a need for Neo-Prophetism to consider self-regulation standards to better Africanise and Neo-Propheticise Christianity and to influence the creation of a Christocentric Social World Order.

5.9.5 The Unusual Practices

The findings here highlight some of the flaws in the practices of certain Neo-Prophetic pastors. Most of these unusual practices have been reported in newspapers, discussed on social media platforms, and are subject to everyday gossip. Both primary and secondary sources were consulted to gather data for this study.

The findings that have been tabulated identify four distinct categories of practices within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. These categories or labels of Neo-Prophetism are interconnected and often coexist within each church or ministry. Some emphasise prosperity, others focus on healing and deliverance, some stress individualistic apostolic teachings to empower followers, and others are mainly centred on prophetic healing. The common thread is the susceptibility and gullibility of congregants, the blatant disregard and violation of their human rights, and the pursuit of profits that undermine the Mission of God.

5.10 The development of a missional regulatory framework

Critical discourse analysis underpins findings herein that highlight the unregulated hostilities and competition among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to increase their numbers, rather than to focus on the recovery of the prophetic voice as part of the reimagined mission of God. It provides a foundation for the missiological discourse in this investigative study to support the argument that a missional regulatory framework is necessary.

5.10.1 Missional imagination in a regulatory framework for Neo-Prophetic churches

This study argues from the findings in sections 5.2 to 5.3.5 that, without the recovery of the prophetic voice of the 'missional consciousness of the church', it shall remain overpowered and nullified by commercialisation and commodification in Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries (Baron, 2019:1-19). Pillay elaborates on this as follows:

> [*M*]issional understanding of the church is not about making the church attractive or bringing people into the church. Still, it is being missional and taking the church into the world to transform the world and reflect the glory of God (2015:1).

This study finds that, as a result, the absence of a reimagined missional regulatory framework is worsening the promotion of neo-liberalist commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience, as well as the negative socio-economic effects of the gospel of prosperity on the broader mission of God (Baron 2019:1-19; Guder 2015:17).

This study found that there is an absence of an ecumenical outreach by Neo-Prophets to other Christian fellowships. Marius Nel agrees with this, emphasising that "Spirit baptism did not bring the expected unity of the Christian church and entered into formal ecumenical relations with several international ecumenical bodies and para-church organisations" (Nel, 2018:1). Neo-Prophetic churches have focused on supernatural impartations rather than this universal ecumenical restoration of the church and primitive apostolic unity (Acts 2). Some Neo-Prophets continue to outright reject the doctrinal, sacramental, institutionalised, and ritualised liturgies of mainline churches, viewing them as devilish and heretical sects (Jacobsen, 2010:4; Kärkkäinen, 2000).

Bergunder also agrees with this observed non-institutionalism of Neo-Prophetic Churches (2010:52).

Through critical discourse analysis, there is observed to be what Vondey refers to as “an ecclesiology of competition” (2010:156). Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries have organised themselves as a “global movement of (diverse and diffused) churches that share a transformative and unifying experience of the Spirit” (Nel, 2018:3). Even this unity is only characterised by fluid commonalities and similarities. Robbins defines this unity as “a far-flung network of people held together by their publications and other media productions, conferences, revival meetings, and constant travel” (2004:125). Neo-Prophetism is a multicentred, fluid, and diverse community, identifiable not by creed, liturgy, or institutional structure but by shared experience of the gospel of prosperity and the commercialisation of the Christian faith. There is no blending of pneumatology and ecclesiology, as metaphorically the “two lungs of the Church” out of which ecumenism shall emerge (Lim, 2015:221).

The findings of this research offer guidance for Neo-Prophets to play a crucial role in affirming this reimagined mission and evangelism as transformative (Niemandt, 2014:1-15). There is a need to shift away from the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith that promotes an understanding of salvation and deliverance as transactional, towards a missional church that humanises and empowers both congregants and the broader society. Based on these findings, this study contends that such a missional presence and ministry of the church must herald a paradigm shift in the expected practices of Neo-Prophetic churches, aligning with the New Statement presented by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism to the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2013. Their prophetic ministry and pastoral leadership ought to be rediscovered as a vocational mission flowing from God’s calling and missional sending (Kim and Anderson, 2011:180). Each Neo-Prophetic church or ministry must empower its congregants to become communities of hope, commissioned to “celebrate life, resist the commercialisation and the commodification of the Christian faith experience and transform all life-destroying forces in the power of the Holy Spirit” (WCC, 2013:4). Part of this missional commission involves the re-instatement of the Prophethood of all believers (Kgatle 2023a: 44-56), alongside a shared ecumenical vision and mission that values or affirms human life and its supporting cosmic biodiversity (WCC 2013:1-40).

Niemandt says:

> It also facilitates each one's full participation in the life of the community… The church is called to make present God's holy and life-affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. It means rejecting values and practices that lead to the destruction of community. Christians are called to acknowledge the sinful nature of all forms of discrimination and transform unjust structures, acting instead as a counter-cultural community (2014:4).

It is also a finding of this study that the individuation and individual existence of these non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches have become a breeding ground for many vulnerabilities suffered by congregants. In line with Nel, it has been noted as one of the current ecumenical challenges that non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa are not prioritising nor engaging in ecumenical fellowship, dialogue, and communion ecclesiology (Nel,2018:5). Instead, they choose to promote an exclusivist and sectarian ecclesiology (Albrecht, 2017:4). This research has found that the unregulated existence of diverse Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries has led to the failure of the Body of Christ to become a united prophetic voice in South Africa. To achieve this, Jean-Daniel Plüss calls for ecumenical reconciliation among all Christian churches and ministries. He states:

> If we remember our presuppositions, we can say that reconciliation from a Christian point of view is reconciliation with God, through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit. Such an experience of reconciliation, we said, holds a surplus value. However, Christian reconciliation is also with people who were created in the image of God (Plüss, 2003:12).

This calls for what Van Kooten and Barrett refer to as "the discernment of missional vocation" (2004: 139) to redirect pastoral ministry from the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience towards missional theology and spirituality that transform the church and congregants as pilgrims constantly on their journey with a loving God (Matthey 2010: 247-264). Out of this experience with the Triadic God, Neo-Prophetic churches may begin to see the community God as present and involved in their lives (Niemandt 2013: 78; van Gelder and Zscheile 2011: 151). This personal and communal experience shall reveal the missional hermeneutic that ignite a new sense of divine disclosure, shaping their response and active participation

in the Mission of God. Out of this experience of God, they shall actively participate in the preferential option to serve humanity, alleviate poverty, offer protection from malevolent spirits, restore Neo-Prophetic congregants from Afro-pessimism that has given birth to all forms of brokenness, and bring about healing and reconciliation (Banda 2022: 1-10). This marks the missional imagination as navigating the way for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to experience the Emmaus journey of rediscovering the power of the cross, the joy in the resurrection of Christ, and a personal encounter with Christ as His disciples (Luke 24: 13-32).

The study finds that critical discussion needs to extend beyond the recommendations of the CRL Rights Commission. In fact, these recommendations could serve as pointers for robust discussions among the CRL Rights Commission, academics (theologians, departmental administrators, legal advisors), ecumenical bodies, and neo-prophets. This study is resolute in arguing that there is a need for a missional regulatory framework specifically for and by Neo-Prophets. This framework should aim to empower Neo-Prophetic churches to develop towards self-regulation as a new form of Christianity. This will help them to realistically and relevantly get “their house in order” (CRL Report, 2017:34). This aligns with the core mission of the CRL Rights Commission: “to foster the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities to be able to freely observe and practise their culture, religion and language” (CRL Rights Commission Act, 2002). It clearly defines its role as focusing on ethically sound religious practices of both individuals and communities in South Africa.

5.10.2 Non-regulated individual connections and dividual disconnections

The significance of the Catholic doctrine on the sacraments and the Protestant focus on the Word of God as a means of uniting families has become a prominent battleground in the ongoing struggle led by Neo-Prophets as part of the fourth wave of reformation within Christianity (Newbigin, 1953). The findings indicate that individual family members are disconnecting from their immediate families in pursuit of being born-again (John 3:5) and are swayed by neo-liberal promises of good health, financial prosperity, and complete protection from generational curses of witchcraft—driving the growth of unregulated Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

This section provides a summary of a few findings collected from primary sources (participants and informants) who took part in this investigative study. Most of the

following information is mainly based on secondary data readily available on various websites and blogs on the internet. Firstly, attention was given to the Report of the Hearings on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems, compiled by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (2017). Secondly, some focus was placed on the response of the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners to the CRL report. Thirdly, particular emphasis was also placed on the open letter to the CRL Rights Commission from the Freedom of Religion South Africa. The discussion of these findings highlights that freedom of religion has become a human rights and constitutional law issue of debate. Lastly, attention was given to the Alliance of Neo-Prophetic and Charismatic Churches in South Africa, which represents most Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

In response to the recommendation for Christianity to be self-regulating and to establish a regulatory professional body by the CRL Rights Commission, the South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedom, along with Freedom of Religion South Africa, objected to this proposal. Their objection was based on the fact that any regulation of Christianity constitutes a direct violation of the constitutional right to freedom of religion as outlined in chapter 2 (Sections 9, 15, and 31) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Therefore, they argue that every church or ministry should be self-regulating and that no regulatory framework or council should be in place to enforce accountability to standards set by the government. As outlined in the Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms, they declare the following:

> Every religious institution is recognised and protected as an institution that has authority over its own affairs, and towards which the state, through its governing institutions, is responsible for just, constructive and impartial government in the interest of everybody… Every person has the right, for religious purposes and in furthering their objectives, to solicit, receive, manage, allocate and spend voluntary financial and other forms of support and contributions. The confidentiality of such support and contributions must be respected (The South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms, 2010, Section 10).

In addition to this objection, the Freedom of Religion South Africa also wrote an open letter against the regulation of religion by the government based on data collected through a random sampling method (ACRP, IIFP & WCEN, 2017). Submissions from the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners (ACRP), International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) and Western Cape Ecumenical Network were also submitted. All these submissions from Christian bodies stood against the principle of regulating religion, which has evidently promoted division within Christianity.

Both the South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedom and the Freedom of Religion South Africa have cited the case of *Garreth Anver Prince v the President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope* to support their argument on the constitutionality of opposing the non-regulation of religion (Prince v. President of the Cape Law Society, 2000). Based on this constitutional case concerning the sacred value and role of religion, they contend that the proposed self-regulation and control of the government over religious practice contravene the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedom. They also argue that it violates the constitutional rights to freedom of religion, belief, and opinion (Section 15) and freedom of association (Section 18) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996. To reinforce their point, they cite section 42 of the ruling of the Constitutional Court in the case between Garreth Anver Prince and the President of the Law Society of the Cape of Good Hope. Part of this states:

> Religion is a matter of faith and belief. The beliefs that believers hold sacred and thus central to their religious faith may strike non-believers as bizarre, illogical, or irrational. Human beings may freely believe in what they cannot prove. However, that their beliefs are bizarre, illogical or irrational to others or are incapable of scientific proof, does not detract from the fact that these are religious beliefs for the purposes of enjoying the protection guaranteed by the right to freedom of religion. The believers should not be put to the test of their beliefs or faith.

In another court judgement, state regulation is argued against as follows:

> The fact that South Africa promotes democratic values in support of human dignity, freedom of religion and association, it cannot therefore be justified that such control by the state is allowed in matters of religion and the free

> market system. Regulation of the Christian religion cannot control the scope of limitation of relationship and communication (prophetic impartations and prosperity gospel teachings) between God appointed pastoral leaders and congregants. Diversity in terms of religious belief and association among available Spirit-led churches and ministries is to be valued as part of a constitutionally free and open society (Dawoo and Another v Minister of Home Affairs and Others, 2000).

The submissions to the CRL Rights Commission collectively condemned Neo-Prophetic charlatans and con artists pastors who have exploited vulnerable and gullible congregants. In response to these malpractices and abuses, they suggest enforcing existing laws. Additionally, they advocate for basic training for religious institutions and practising pastors to establish a common understanding, rather than taking full control of regulating religion. The only scope for regulation they support is the use of the CRL report on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems to amend current legislation and develop new laws to improve compliance. (FOR SA and SACRRF, 2017:5-7). Both organisations have recommended broader consultations in developing a Code of Conduct for Religions in South Africa that is practical, constitutional, and aligned with the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. They believe this approach is most likely to achieve constitutional legitimacy and effective strategic intervention to address and prevent the abuses committed in the name of the Christian faith.

These secondary sources of data have provided a solid foundation for the researcher to confirm the validity of the findings that the CRL Rights Commission is being persuaded to abandon its decision to regulate religions (including Christianity) in South Africa. These Religious Rights and Freedoms organisations are neo-liberalist and support the free practice of religion without any control or regulation by the state. They are aware of and condemn the abuses committed by Christian pastors, but they remain firm in their opposition to regulating religious practices. Another finding is that there is no apparent opposition or submission from representatives of other major religious groups such as Jews, Hindus, African Traditionalists, and Muslims. This appears to be a direct engagement between Christians and the CRL Rights Commission.

Neoliberalism appears to be the guiding policy and political economy framework in the conflict between these organisations and the CRL Rights Commission. It can therefore be concluded as a finding that this inevitable rise of Neo-Prophetism represents a new brand of Christianity aimed at globalising, establishing a new world order, and redefining the direct interaction between individuals and the divine (Comaroff, 2010). Concepts such as spirit baptism and being born again are utilised to proselytise individuals into this emerging new world order (McGuigan, 2014). The defining features of this new order include self-regulation and self-actualisation through available choices to achieve material prosperity despite all obstacles, including family bonds (Anderson, 2013). Furthermore, the researcher perceives Neo-Prophetism as also conveying hollow promises, contradictions, and a tendency to avoid the family, which remains the primary institution guiding young people towards grounded decision-making. Personal prosperity and self-righteousness are presented as evidence of deliverance and salvation. These aspects motivate some Neo-Prophetic followers to aspire to become billionaires (Obadare, 2016).

Gerrie Ter Haar and Stephen Ellis have raised a serious contention that the recolonisation of Africa through religion (mostly Neo-Prophetism and other religious rituals) is more evident (Ter Haar and Ellis,2006). The revival of African Traditional Religions and the rise of Neo-Prophetism in Africa are all aimed at using religion to establish the new world order. The finding of this investigative study is that Africa is one of the leading centres of Christianity. Therefore, world strategists are recolonising Africa using the intertwined religions and politics (Ellis and Ter Haar,2004). This intertwined external locus of control in the hands of world strategists through religion and politics makes it difficult to determine the clear redemptive role that Neo-Prophetism plays in the spiritual growth and commitment to the core values of African ubuntu philosophy and Christ-centred Christian faith experience (Ter Haar, 2005).

In conclusion, this comprehensive discussion on the key themes and sub-themes highlights the significance of time, various skills, and collaboration between the researcher and participants. These elements also share a strong connection with the main features of Neo-Prophetism discussed in the literature review. There is a natural flow and mutual reinforcement amongst the themes set forth. The findings are based on original stories shared out of trust and conviction by all participants and informants. The four data collection methods, as well as in the coding process and data synthesis

through narrative and discourse analysis, were critically undertaken, as a result of which, these findings add value to the understanding of Neo-Prophetism from a missiological perspective. This study and its results demonstrate that Neo-Prophetism is a neo-liberal form of Christianity that is gaining new followers while mainline churches are losing members. The findings also support the fact that Neo-Prophetism has Africanised Christianity, with some downsides. Beyond clarifying what Neo-Prophetism is, these findings identify gaps that need further attention from a missiological standpoint, integrating insights from sociology, psychology, biblical hermeneutics, anthropology, and systematic theology. The new knowledge collected indicates a need for Neo-Prophetism to seriously consider establishing self-regulation standards to Africanise, Neo-Propheticise Christianity, and influence the development of a Christocentric Social World Order.

5.10.3 Self-regulation of Neo-Prophetic churches as per the Constitution

This study aims to strike a healthy balance between promoting the constitutional right to freedom of religion and religious beliefs and acknowledging the limitations of each individual's human rights. While it appreciates the CRL Rights Commission Report of 2017, it highlights the missed opportunity in this investigation due to a legalistic approach of subpoenaing pastoral leaders to the hearings instead of conducting consultations through an open, participative process. Based on its findings, many pastors adopted a defensive stance and endured humiliation and damage to their reputation caused by this legalistic approach. Therefore, this study considers that "the abuse of people's belief systems" remains a contentious issue between a constitutional right and its constitutionally enshrined restrictions.

Article 15(1) of the South African Constitution states that: "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion" but on condition that it does not infringe against those of others. Therefore, if a Neo-Prophet claims to have received a divine revelation to persuade congregants to give large amounts of offerings based on Luke 6:38 while they continue to suffer conditions of joblessness, poverty, drug addiction, and terminal illness; and at the end it of all, there is no fulfilment or divine awarding of the promised blessing that guarantees divine favour (CRL Rights Commission Report, 2017:6) in terms good health, protection from demonic forces, sound and sustainable finances. It is a finding of this study that this has led to depression, suicide tendencies and loss of confidence in God, who is the

core of their belief system. Findings of this study highlight this as bordering very close to spiritual enslavement and powerlessness or loss of human dignity (Article 10) on the part of congregants. At the same time, the Neo-Prophet remains powerful in the eyes of the very congregants that suffer vulnerability from his/her prophetic declarations/opinions. The power dynamics based on what has been uttered in the name of religion and the promotion of a commercialised belief system come into play (Kgatle 2022b: 1-10). The shift of blame for the unfulfilled prophetic declarations comes to threaten the right to life (Article 11) of some congregants as a result of the right of the Neo-Prophet to freedom of expression (Article 16) that is entirely based on mere propaganda and fearmongering (Kgatle 2022b:1).

This is an agenda among some Neo-Prophets to ensure that congregants depend on the anointed objects that are commercialised within certain churches or ministries. The commodification of the prophetic ministry, the commercialisation of deliverance and miracles, and the promotion of the gospel of prosperity serve as clear justifications for a missional regulatory framework. According to Ramantswana, these factors have significantly contributed to a shift in religious faith from praying to preying on congregants seeking prophetic deliverance from generational curses, poverty, and ill-health as declared by some Neo-Prophets (2019: 4). Instead, self-regulation within Neo-Prophetic churches could begin to alleviate oppression, suffering, and severe poverty, providing pastoral care that builds congregants, and fostering a spirituality that encourages critical engagement with the church's mission. The current sense of powerlessness, driven by various vulnerabilities, directly impacts the church's role as the People of God to participate in the three offices of Christ-priest (Heb. 3: 1), Prophet (lk. 13: 33), and King (rev. 17: 14) through baptism. Due to malpractices and abuse of divine authority by Neo-Prophets, there is a resurgence of the prophetic ministry (1 Corinthians 14: 1) among congregants, transforming the missional church into ‘the conscience of society” (Ramantswana, 2019: 4). This study also found that these Neo-Prophets have suppressed the “prophethood of all believers” (Kgatle 2023 a: 44- 56) as a core mandate of the missional church, by allowing themselves to be absorbed and co-opted by politicians to pursue their agendas (Kgatle 2018: 1-8; Snyman 2016: 88- 105; Strydom 1997: 495-510). This study advocates for a prophetic ministry that goes beyond forensic prophecies, such as shouting out the identity numbers and street

addresses of congregants (Kgatle 2019: 42), the celebrity cult (Resane 2017: 3), and practices like holy laughter or the Toronto blessing (Hayford and Moore 2006: 278).

5.10.4 Advocacy for a missional regulatory framework

This study contends that establishing a missional regulatory framework that advocates for the promotion and protection of religious freedom and human rights in alignment with the constitution is essential. It will serve as a foundation for ending all violations of human rights by pastors, who command congregants to drink petrol and eat snakes (Mokhoathi and Rembe 2017;2; Resane 2017: 4). Such acts cause the Christian faith experience to be viewed as a "bizarre, illogical or irrational' belief system (Constitutional Court of South Africa [CCT36/00, 2002], 25 January 2002 at para.[42]). The issues arising from religious freedom and the abusive authority of some Neo-Prophets over congregants—often in exchange for a promised miracle against social ills like drug addiction, socio-historical problems stemming from being bewitched, and socio-economic challenges such as unemployment—require corrective interventions (Kgatle 2022b:1-10; Banda 2018:1-11). The false prophetic declarations made during deliverance sessions, along with shifting blame to congregants when these do not materialise, can lead to psychological stress, feelings of powerlessness, and a loss of trust in God. Ultimately, this impacts the missional church within a democratic society. Such infringements on religious liberty, human rights, and human dignity must be halted. The intervention by the state to safeguard certain congregants from severe physical and mental harm inflicted by some Neo-Prophets is justifiable as a short-term remedial measure (Vorster 2021:1-6; Du Plessis 2016: 349-370). A Neo-Prophetic missional regulatory framework is necessary to establish a balance between religious freedom and human rights. Sections 7.2 and 36 of the South African Constitution should underpin the development of this framework. No pastoral leader should conduct ministry without respecting, protecting, and promoting the Bill of Rights.

This study also recognises the supplementary role of the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (SACRRF) to the South African Constitution on religious freedoms, human rights, and human dignity. It was drafted by religious academics, statutory commissioners, international legal experts, and church ministers. This charter was developed in 2010 to provide a more detailed understanding of religious freedom, religious beliefs, human rights, and responsibilities. Section 234 upholds: "To deepen the culture of democracy established by the Constitution,

Parliament may adopt Charters of Rights consistent with the provisions of the Constitution" (Constitution, 1996). What is to be appreciated in the Charter is the level of expertise that ought to have been acknowledged by the CRL Rights Commission before subpoenaing pastors to its hearings. This charter establishes complementarity among constitutionally aligned religious freedoms, rights and obligations in its 12 articles (Mokhoathi and Rembe 2017: 6-7; The South African Council for the Protection and Prevention of Religious Rights and Freedoms 2016).

Based on the special focus of this charter on constitutional religious freedoms, it could serve as a constitutional Christian sub-framework to establish a Neo-Prophetic Missional Regulatory Framework for self-regulation of moral standards and for overseeing practices and accountability of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The primary goal of this proposed regulatory framework is to eliminate the Neo-Prophetic depiction of God, who is often seen as a servant of magical rituals and transactional salvation, and to restore the Mission of a Triadic God, whose divine power cannot be subdued by Neo-Prophets, but instead liberates and sanctifies humanity (Banda, 2022:1-16). Incorporating this is essential for restoring order among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

This study also begins to find a pointer and the benefits of Neo-Prophets reclaiming a memory that they share a spiritual connection of origin with the denominational Pentecostal movement in South Africa. Ecumenical bodies such as the Alliance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches in South Africa and the International Fellowship of Charismatic Churches can play a vital role in establishing a missional regulatory framework for Neo-Prophets to self-regulate, practise ministry within the core teachings of Christianity, and adhere to standard operating procedures to ensure accountability in the management of church resources. These developments should form the foundation of the missional regulatory framework, making it unnecessary for the CRL Rights Commission and other state bodies to intervene to protect congregants who have been harmed by the commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience by some Neo-Prophets. This self-regulation ought to give the CRL Rights Commission a renewed appreciation and a corrective learning process, emphasising that the nature of the missional church ministry carried out by a church or ministry is distinctly different from that of a simple Non-Profit Organisation (Garnett 2013:49).

This missional regulatory framework for self-regulation must also motivate Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to reconceptualise and redefine themselves collectively as commissioned to serve humanity, restore their prophetic voice, and put an end to the abuses of gullible and vulnerable congregants (Kalscheur 2008:58). From this viewpoint, the framework ought to uphold their constitutional right to religious freedom and develop remedial measures to prevent abuse of religion and the belief systems of their congregants. This clearly means that no Neo-Prophet will exploit the situation to perpetuate abuse against the laws of the land in the name of religion and expect protection from this proposed Neo-Prophetic Council and its regulatory framework. The mature level of accountability and the consolidated doctrinal teachings of the mentioned ecumenical bodies can serve as a foundation for the Neo-Prophetic Council to address the shortcomings in leadership mentorship. This will ensure that Neo-Prophetic Churches and Ministries register, affiliate, and undergo training to be accountable for their practices. This self-regulation should establish an ethical code of conduct and procedures for applying consequences, thereby enhancing accountability among religious practitioners in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

An increasing number of Neo-Prophetic churches can be attributed to Africans' desire for ‘forensic prophecy’, the costly one-on-one sessions claiming to impart prophetic insights for financial breakthroughs. The ‘spiritual fathers’ wield titles that suggest divine powers beyond the ordinary (e.g., Major One for Shepherd Huxley Bushiri) and assert their prophetic abilities to perform miracles that supposedly free congregants from ‘unbreakable bonds’ of generational curses such as witchcraft. These claims require a corrective (Kgatle 2022a:2, Banda 2020: 1-11; Asamoah-Gyadu 2004:389-406). The idea of spiritual father/mother, rooted in the ascetic and monastic wisdom of sages within the broader Orthodox Church, could offer more suitable lessons in indigenising and decolonising strategies to align Neo-Prophetic churches with the epistemologies of our continent, such as ubuntu philosophy (Grobnicu, 2016: 168). Such lessons suggest that the future of Neo-Prophetic churches is promising and secure, extending beyond mere growth in numbers. This has led Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to compete in becoming mega-churches alongside Classical Pentecostal churches, Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, and among themselves (Anderson Jnr 2022:1-11; Ramantswana and Sebetseli 2021:1-10). Given

this context, the proposed missional regulatory framework advocates for an Afrocentric approach that embraces ubuntu philosophy and practices.

This study aligns with the recommendation as outlined by White and Dzor on the conceptualisation of a “strategic cost-effective mission and church planting that promotes communality, reciprocity, and complementary trust as a cooperative missional approach for Neo-Prophetic churches to participate in the mission of God to save and sanctify humanity” (2019:228-238). This recommendation is developed within the context of the Ghanaian concept of Nnoboa, meaning cooperative. In relation to the missional church in society, it may offer a renewed sense of an Afrocentric Great Commission.

> Mission is about the capability of the Christian faith to enter new contexts, connect different groups, inspire new generations, and impact societies. The mission of the church is much broader than evangelism. It embodies the total impact of the church on the world: its influence, its involvement with the social, political, and moral life of the community and nation where it is placed (White and Dzor 2019:229).

This suggested sense of being a missional church ought to be supported by a missional regulatory framework that encourages community and ecumenical collaboration among Neo-Prophetic Churches and ministries. This could help each to develop a sense of interconnection for better reciprocal partnerships and mutual accountability with others (Acts 2:44-45). The study argues that this type of missional regulatory framework, which underpins self-regulation among Neo-Prophetic churches, may help each church or ministry become Pentecostal and prophetic. To achieve this, Neo-Prophets need to break with the consumerist and individualist practices of mission completely. Consequently, their missional regulatory framework ought to celebrate and enhance unity in diversity, and assist them in abandoning any selfish tendencies that lead to ever-increasing divisions.

The Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries could also consider adopting an innovative missional model that White and Pondani refer to as “Church-Franchise” in their missional regulatory framework (2022: 1-9). This idea is borrowed from business management. It helps establish ecclesiological order, robust accountability mechanisms, and lifelong learning in educational leadership. There is a strong

connection between this concept and Nnoboa (White and Dzor 2019). Such an innovative regulatory framework is likely to lead to better-structured leadership, well-established constitutions governing church polity, core religious beliefs, financial stewardship, and sound theological teachings. This part of the missional regulatory framework should underpin and promote the prophethood of all believers to counteract the deified persona concept and rogue leaders (who wield exclusive authority and an infallible voice) that disempower emerging ministries within churches (White and Pondani 2022:4). Once these issues are addressed by the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries, the existing chaotic and unorthodox practices of ministry (such as fake miracles and shifting blame for unfulfilled prophetic impartation), disconnection, uncoordinated church administration, and lack of affiliation with ecumenical bodies will also be improved, encouraging the movement of congregants from one Neo-Prophetic church to another.

The following is a flow chart that could outline the key processes necessary for the advocacy of this missional regulatory framework.

1. A national conference for prophets in Neo-Prophetic churches.
2. Advocacy for the formation of the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches
3. Establishment and accreditation of the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches
4. Establishment of a missional regulatory framework for the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches
5. Voluntary affiliation and formal registration of Neo-Prophetic churches
6. Advocacy training of prophets from Neo-Prophetic churches on the missional regulatory framework

7. Basic institutional audit of the status of Neo-Prophetic churches

8. Research on key findings of the basic institutional audits on Neo-Prophetic churches

9. Development of an improvement plan based on basic institutional findings

10. Development of an approved Implementation Plan for the improvement of registered Neo-Prophetic churches

11. Monitoring and evaluation of practices among registered Neo-Prophetic churches

In conclusion, this will garner respect for Neo-Prophetic churches and secure their place of equal honour when engaging in ecumenical and missional discussions with other Christian Councils such as the South African Council of Churches, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. The proposed Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries ought to establish itself as a regulatory authority that develops and enforces practical, workable, and necessary preventative and corrective measures that are both constitutional and biblical against all forms of malpractice and abuse previously reported through the media. This study considers the constitution of the South African Council of Churches as a potential benchmark against which the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries could align, incorporating an ecumenical dimension (South African Council of Churches, 2017; 3). The primary aim of this is to firmly separate Neo-Prophets from state and political influence. Such alignment may also serve as a stepping stone for better engagement with other religions like Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, to uphold and promote constitutional freedom of religion in collaboration with other religious groups and atheists.

5.11 Conclusion

The findings discussed in this chapter clearly indicate that Neo-Prophetism represents the fourth wave of reformation and a new form of Christianity. The commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith are part of a strategy to secure the luxurious lifestyles of pastoral leaders. The prosperity gospel and neoliberal individualism among congregants underpin a transactional view of salvation and deliverance. The African ontological and epistemological pursuit of good health, wealth, and protection from malevolent spirits has created fertile ground for prophetic impartations and the sale of anointed objects. This has resulted in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries becoming tax-exempt business entities. They have commodified and commercialised spiritual warfare, keeping congregants vulnerable and gullible to the teachings of their pastors. Evidence of this is seen even in commercialised special events, where key themes include the devaluing of Jesus Christ's redemptive role, the domestication of the Holy Spirit, and the use of the Bible as the Word of God. Worship experiences, media for televangelism, and testimonies often serve as platforms for exalting the prophet's superpowers beyond imagination. Extreme strategies are employed to attract more members, expanding the prophet's territory and financial prosperity. The autopoietic characteristics of Neo-Prophetism highlight a strong need for self-regulation within this new form of Christianity. This also calls for a missional regulatory framework to serve as a benchmark for developing and implementing preventive and corrective measures, aiming to address and resolve malpractices that have damaged the reputation of Neo-Prophetism.

CHAPTER 6
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides a zoom-out perspective and contextually locates this whole research study within Missiology. It highlights the research gap and the main objectives of the study as a basis for demonstrating how it fits in, providing some practical solutions to the existing body of knowledge on the subject matter. The researcher establishes a link between the missional imagination as the theoretical framework to guide the steps that need to be taken towards self-regulation and the practical solutions as recommended in this study. It is also important to note that qualitative research, the critical paradigm as a philosophical framework, inductive reasoning and hermeneutic phenomenology have contributed greatly to deconstructing the internalised teachings that are domesticating Neo-Prophetic congregants. The core findings of this study demonstrate that Neo-Prophetism has become a new global form of Christianity. Its defining characteristics are the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel and mission within Christianity. The overarching finding is that all non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries share key features that mark their establishment. Based on these features and the analysed data, the researcher presents recommendations based on gaps identified and future research areas within Missiology. In the discussion of these key features, the potential impact of this study on different stakeholders and beneficiaries is being highlighted. To ensure clarity and to zoom out, all summarised findings and recommendations are compiled in one subsection. Following this, subject themes proposed for further study are outlined, particularly those not sufficiently addressed within this thesis. These highlighted gaps in knowledge warrant open discussion, academic collaboration, and further research in fields such as Missiology, Ecumenism, Theological Anthropology, Systematic Theology, and Pentecostalism, extending beyond but still aligned with this thesis. The final section addresses limitations that the researcher hopes can be addressed in future academic writing, like conference papers. The conclusion of this chapter summarises the central argument of this study

and how the findings have also challenged it, namely, the need for the Neo-Prophetic self-regulation framework.

6.2 The theoretical and practical contributions of this study.

This research topic has emerged from malpractices by some Neo-Prophets that highlight a need for a missional regulatory framework. This is currently a bone of contention between the CRL Rights Commission and Neo-Prophetism in South Africa (Viljoen, 2025). The organisation called the South African Church Defenders, which represents most Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, objected to the established Section 22 Committee, set up to facilitate the formulation of a self-regulatory framework and a code of conduct for pastoral leaders, as tabled by the CRL Rights Commission. The situation is volatile, complex, full of uncertainties and ambiguities. The missional regulatory framework that this study proposes emphasises key issues that need to be considered for this to be owned and led from within Neo-Prophetism rather than by outsiders. This thesis goes beyond just problem identification, as evident in the literature review and moves on to resolving issues as supported by the verified data collected. Missional imagination as the theoretical framework of this study continues to serve as a lens through which the researcher uses to conceptualise, theorise and systematically articulate the research problem of this study. It changes focus from commercialising and commodifying the Christian faith experience into missional churches that serve humanity. In this way, this reimagined and transformative theoretical framework aligns this study with addressing new challenges and exploring new opportunities that arise from the rapidly changing world, belief systems, epistemologies and cosmologies within Christianity.

6.3 Summarised findings and proposed recommendations

This section of the chapter illustrates how the findings and recommendations of the study fulfil the research aim and objectives as achievable. Additionally, it demonstrates how the findings and recommendations address the research questions that underpin the central argument of this study. To achieve this, the summarised findings and proposed recommendations have been organised in alignment with the following research objectives:

- understand the rationale behind the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel among Neo-Prophets pastoral leaders;

- identify the thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that contribute towards the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel;
- understand the vulnerability of congregants to the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel; and
- develop a missional regulatory framework against the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel.

6.3.1 Commercialisation and commodification of the gospel

The commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience have emerged as fertile grounds for 'pastorpreneurs', with the promotion of the Gospel of Prosperity shaping Neo-Prophetism as a fourth wave of Christian reformation in contemporary times. Through transactional seed-sowing, a materialistic understanding of salvation, the harnessing of prophetic impartations via one-on-one consultations, and the use of anointed objects as faith assurances for good health, financial prosperity, and complete protection from malevolent spirits, Christian faith has been significantly commercialised and commodified. Numerous studies cited within this thesis on these phenomena within Neo-Prophetism indicate that the church's mission is increasingly being redirected towards viewing churches as business entities, through which some congregants have been exploited. This study recommends that Neo-Prophetism be regulated by Neo-Prophets themselves to cultivate greater ownership of transformational change and evidence-based solutions to the malpractices that have tarnished the reputation of Christianity as a religion, as well as Neo-Prophetism as a recent expression of Christianity. Restoring the active participation of the missional Church of Christ in the central mission of God, coupled with accountability, trustworthiness, and Christ-centred pastoral leadership among church leaders, is essential. This is particularly important as Neo-Prophetism is part of the Pentecostalization of Christianity and the polycentric fulfilment of the mission of God based on the Great Commission. This has the potential to drive a reverse mission from the Global South back to the Global North.

The findings of this study have pointed out that concepts that carry the core teachings of Christianity through various epochs and Christian reformations have changed. Within Neo-Prophetism, as the fourth wave of Christianity, salvation has become a materialistic, transactional, and individualistic practice. Deliverance is centred around

one deified prophetic leader and has been commercialised for generating personal profits. Baptism in the Spirit is now a repeated practice that is to be supported by the buying of anointed objects as part of a spiritualised warfare. Some Neo-Prophetic leaders are self-declared intermediaries between God and congregants. While prophecy has been with us since at least the Apostolic era and has remained influential within Christianity across all epochs, it has taken on an entirely novel meaning within contemporary Neo-Prophetism. It has become an office for Neo-Prophets as the only divine messengers who are infallible, and each is competing for recognition above the rest. The interpretation of Bible texts in their teachings, prophetic impartations, and staged testimonies is aimed at underpinning the divine power of one Prophetic leader. Any individualised and subjectivist interpretation of scripture is therefore not contributing positively to the corporate empowerment and hope for a transformed church of Christ. It therefore remains part of the central argument of this study that a reimagined and reconceptualised missionality of the church be regained to facilitate reconciliation, healing, and a humanising kerygma that transforms congregants into a People of God.

The findings based on data collected from in-depth interviews, focus groups and observations (direct and overt) regarding commercialised teachings that promise greater wisdom and a prosperous life, along with spiritual revival conferences aimed at fostering a sense of belonging among other saints, point to an altered understanding of what it means to be ‘born-again’ Christians within Neo-Prophetism. These have domesticated the Mission of God and the spirituality of congregants, aligning them with the agendas of pastoral leaders who seek maximum financial gains. Additionally, these findings expose a significant social status divide between the wealthy and the impoverished congregants. Fake miracles and unfulfilled prophetic impartations, which are part of teachings and revival conferences, have diminished the role of the missional church within the Mission of God.

It is recommended that the pastoral ministry ought to gain greater significance and positioning within the Christian teachings of the five-fold ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16) or the nine gifts of the Spirit as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. This serves as a preventative and corrective measures against the misuse of authority, infallibility, and the claimed inerrancy by deified pastors who see themselves as either equal to Christ

or competing with Him. Such outcomes can be achieved through foundational training in Biblical Hermeneutics, Missiology, Pastoral Theology, and Systematic Theology for those aiming to become pastoral leaders. A balance between formally acquired knowledge, such as historical-critical approaches to reading the Bible, and lived experience is recommended to shape the missional identity of each Neo-Prophetic church or ministry. Furthermore, the concepts of the common priesthood (1 Peter 2:5) and the prophethood (Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:16-20) of all believers need to be restored to foster a more Christocentric faith experience (1 John 4:13-17), rather than one where a single pastoral leader dominates congregants for his/her financial gain.

6.3.2 The thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries

This sub-section presents the summarised findings and recommendations on the thematic features of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that contribute to the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel.

The central role of the Word of God is crucial among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The defence of a literal interpretation of scripture, within the context of Spirit-led Neo-Prophetism, argues that it is hermeneutically valid, distinctive, and based on emerging, diverse interpretive strategies. However, the researcher maintains that one pastor cannot monopolise the illumination and revelation of God's word to impose his/her will on congregants. As in the early church, the prophetic experience that demonstrates the complementarity between Pentecost and prophecy should aim to edify and build up the church community (Acts 2:17). A key finding of this study is that Neo-Prophetic hermeneutical finiteness, freshness, and contextual particularity justify a variety of biblical interpretations beyond modernist exegesis (Archer, 2016). This restorationist and revivalist hermeneutical approach within some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries proves to be a valid stand and essential in recognising the greater role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the missional church, contrasting it with the pietistic Christianity of mainline churches. Nonetheless, it is recommended that this Spirit-led hermeneutic approach not be controlled or subjugated to the agenda of a Neo-Prophet seeking profits and personal glorification. Instead, this Spirit-led Neo-Prophetic hermeneutic ought to contribute towards Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries becoming self-sustainable, compliant with the South African Constitution, as well as self-governing and self-regulating. This is

recommended as part of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in taking full responsibility as they reconceptualise and reimagine their missional role within the Mission of God.

The findings have revealed specific commercial teachings against the Trinity. God the Father is portrayed as a transactional dealer of blessings and also accessible through planting the seed. Jesus Christ is portrayed as insufficient, His redemptive role is played out, His divinity replaced, and in competition with Neo-Prophets as the intermediary of salvation and deliverance between God and the congregants. The Holy Spirit is presented as only a power to execute prophetic impartations, miracles, and testimonies that gratify and deify a Neo-Prophet. Christian apostolic faith is made dependent on a 'pastorpreneur'. The canonicity and meaning of scripture is determined by a Neo-Prophet. The 4IR and its dynamics challenge the church to develop a Neo-Prophetic hermeneutics that arises from a community of prophets. Therefore, it is recommended that the prophethood of all Christian believers serve as the basis for giving a theological response to questions arising from daily life. This restorationist and Afrocentric hermeneutical lens should facilitate a paradigmatic shift away from commercialised interpretations by individual Neo-Prophetic pastors.

Five biblical and fundamental principles that drive the missional transformation of each church or ministry are recommended by this study. First, that Christ commissions the Church (Matthew 28:19-20; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Second, that the importance of Christ's victorious redemption on the cross shapes the church's mandate to promote peace and forgiveness under one True Shepherd in the world (Ephesians 2:16). Third, that every church or ministry is missionally sent as God's People to serve wider humanity and to offer a redemptive, alternative lifestyle rooted in love that humanises (Acts 2:42-47; John 13:34-35). Fourth, this study advocates a missional perspective for each church or ministry as being sent to engage in dialogue with all cultures, serving as a foundation for the evangelisation and liberation from the known to the yet undiscovered Christian faith experience (Acts 17:22-34). The renewed understanding of the Great Commission by Neo-Prophets ought to assist them in recognising their role as catalysts for cultural change, employing creative imagination and innovation to empower congregants. Fifth, the missional church is sent to establish the Kingdom of God, which offers deliverance, healing, and prosperity freely (Matthew 10:7-8). This

idea of being church needs to stem from the missional theology of new wineskins (Matthew 9:17). Based on these recommended principles, each Neo-Prophetic church and ministry ought to value ecumenical fellowship, constructive dialogue, and complementarity with other churches and religions.

Neo-Prophetic teaching on the immanence of the Kingdom of God has played a vital role in contextualising and Africanising Christianity. This has alleviated the atheistic view of Christianity as a mere utopia and challenged the heresy that God is transcendent and that He created the world but has no supernatural interest in it. It is recommended that Neo-Prophetism presents God as supernaturally providing for various human needs, including miracles, visions, and deliverance. In addition to this, the researcher recommends the establishment of a healthy balance between the immanence and transcendence of the Kingdom of God. This will strengthen the significance of the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith. It is also essential for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to genuinely honour the role of parents and families and the love of one's neighbour (Matthew 25: 34-40). Neo-Prophetic teachings need to address the ethical dimension of the immanent Kingdom of God as a basis for reciprocal and ecumenical initiatives on social justice issues.

Critical to this study is the finding that Neo-Prophetic churches ought to embrace the Mission of the Triadic God, as no missional church or ministry can exist without its missionary responsibility within its socio-political context. This might offer better prospects for a missional approach to metanoic conversion among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. This ecclesio-political nature of each missional church has to contribute to fulfilling the Great Commission. This reimagined missional understanding of the church is still to be developed for each Neo-Prophetic church and ministry to embrace the Great Commission (sending) truly and to foster introspection to align with the socio-political dynamics of the context (receiving). This study recommends that a reimagined missionary ecclesiology among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries ought to form the basis of ecumenical reciprocity, mutuality, and interdependence (Bosch, 1978: 283-296). As a result, an authentic and commonly shared missional regulatory framework shall emerge as a solution to address new missionary challenges.

> A truly missionary church lives in mutuality and interdependence with other missionary churches throughout the world. It is therefore a community continually sending out and receiving missionary impulses to and from "Jerusalem: as well as "the ends of the earth," simultaneously evangelising and being evangelised, healing and being healed, liberating and being liberated (Saayman, 2000:22).

Part of the formulation of a recommended missional regulatory framework has to promote a metanoia of mind and practice. Saayman states, “Churches should see one another with new eyes and accept one another with new hearts” (2000:13). This missional regulatory framework aims to end the current vicious cycle driven by competition for dominance among some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. The reimagined understanding of being a missional church should give rise to an authentic African missionary ecclesiology that is both evangelistic and liberating. Salvation and discipleship need to be centred on Christ and moved away from focus on the person and luxurious family lifestyles of some Neo-Prophets. This recommendation will help prevent many malpractices and abuses, fostering humanising, joyously evangelistic, and socially engaged Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries (Saayman, 2000: 14). From this, Christian communities that share the evangelistic mission, diverse ministries, and the prophethood of all believers as a People of God will emerge. All of these ought to be viewed as an ongoing, ever-ascending cycle within each church and ministry.

Worship and praise play a vital role in the complete surrender of the entire congregation to divine power through music, intercessory prayers, witness, and testimonies. This is what distinguishes Neo-Prophetism from other Christian churches as the most therapeutic and motivating. In this context, the use of social media and televangelism to minister beyond church membership is a prominent and positive feature of Neo-Prophetic churches or ministries. These elements provide important lessons for mainline churches, which have significantly lost membership, in making worship alive and engaging (McDonnell,1980:147). One of the benefits of this is that Neo-Prophetism offers profound lessons for mainline churches, especially regarding the globalisation of Christianity. Inculturation and adaptation of global Neo-Prophetism have been achieved to a greater extent compared to the practices of mainline churches. It remains true that mainline churches have Christianised Africa, but

Pentecostals and Neo-Prophetism have gone further to Africanise Christianity. Within this context, Neo-Prophetism has a better chance to drive processes of decoloniality and interculturality, contributing positively to its emergence as a new form of Christianity (Bays and Widmer, 2009). It is therefore recommended that a multidirectional and ecumenical fellowship and communion be established among Christian churches, so that sacramental worship services in mainline churches also become more Afrocentric and therapeutic. This could lead to a more Afrocentric missiology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology.

It is an established finding that positive interest in Neo-Prophetism by mainline churches and their participation in ecumenism are both at an infant stage. (Robeck, 2002). It is recommended that the ecumenical communion and the theology of the presence and centrality of Christ be restored among Neo-Prophetic churches that have played out the critical redemptive role of Christ in the Christian faith experience. This will locate Neo-Prophetism as a new brand within the broader framework of Christianity rather than a parallel and individual sect.

This Spirit-led mutual exchange among mainline, classical Pentecostals, Charismatics, African Initiated Churches, and Neo-Prophetism can foster a healthy diversity essential in all Christian worship services. This ‘ground-up’ or bottom-up approach is necessary for South African Christianity to enhance social cohesion and strengthen moral regeneration (Wendlinder, 2018). It is also critically important as part of South Africa's contribution for Neo-Prophetic churches to move from rivalry to a humanising Ecumenical Christian Spirituality (Pape 2021). This calls for a reconciliatory pneumatology. The starting point might be the formation of one’s identity as reflected in faith, ministry, and social responsibility, as part of the growth and development journey that each believer undergoes within a missional Christian community. Key elements of this growth among fellow Christians might also include cognitive learning, life-skill development, and affective growth, which shape discipleship, social responsibility, kindness, Christian love, service, peace, and hospitality to others. The commercialisation and commodification of the Christian gospel and faith experience within some Neo-Prophetic churches have negatively impacted family life, which remains the foundational institution of social life. Replacing the family, traditionally a social school for nurturing responsible and ethically accountable members with spiritual fathers, has fostered individualistic and self-

centred members of society. Integrating Christian teachings on family with the African philosophy of Ubuntu could help re-establish and strengthen Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as supportive centres of worship where social acceptance, a sense of belonging, compatibility, self-esteem, and identity are fostered. Personal growth and individual distinctiveness ought to serve as strong foundations for developing various ministries aimed at uplifting the congregation. Such a break from tradition, as advocated by some Neo-Prophets, is recommended.

It is also a finding of this study that creating and promoting the spiritual dependence of congregants through one-on-one consultation sessions, prophetic impartations, and commercialised teachings for greater wisdom requires attention. Some of these commercialised teachings were reported to be replacing the Bible and fostering a closed community of self-centred individuals under the influence of their pastoral leader. Through these teachings and prophetic impartations, they are manipulated to think within the doctrinal teachings of their pastoral leader. These commercialised teachings have disempowered the rational capacities of congregants. Critical discourse analysis might assist in developing a rehabilitative strategy to help some of the congregants think critically and escape gullibility. Based on these identified gaps in the teachings and practices of Neo-Prophets, it is recommended that a regulatory body within Neo-Prophetism be established, free from external authoritarian control.

The findings of this study also reveal that Neo-Prophetic pastors are among those Christian ministers tempted to use occult practices to acquire wealth and powers to perform miracles. Syncretic covenants with these occult forces of the New World Order have led to the performance of certain rituals that are competing with, or complementing Christ as insufficient for our salvation, prosperity, and divine protection. This permissive attitude towards occult practices, including ‘back-to-sender prayers’, and Christodicy have led to the presence of divination, oenomancy, necromancy, fortune-telling, and sorcery on the altars of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

The findings of this study further reveal the fear of being trapped in endless spiritual warfare, as pastors instil in their congregants. This has resulted in feelings of spiritual desperation, personal insecurity, depression, misfortune, and poverty. The social order of living under constant fear of the unknown, reliance on commercialised anointed

objects, and the use of back-to-the-sender prayers as protection are bordering this Christian faith experience as part of the practices by the anti-Christ. It is therefore recommended that missiological concepts like *Missio Christos* and *Missio ecclesiae* need to restore the importance of Christ as part of the Trinitarian God on mission, which is highly recommended against the prevalent Christodicy, which perpetuates vulnerabilities and unfulfilled prophecies among naive congregants. This shift will also move focus away from the gospel of prosperity and diminish the devaluation of Christ's redemptive role as the Saviour, Good Shepherd/Teacher, Healer, and Sanctifier (Land, 1993:100-106).

The recommendations made by the CRL Rights Commission should be seen as a call to protect South African citizens from reported abuses that are viewed as malpractice. These practices increase the vulnerability of congregants who rely on their pastoral leaders for guidance. Based on narrative analysis of data collected during this research, some participants indicated that the CRL Rights Commission responded reactively to issues of commercialisation and commodification of the gospel in certain Neo-Prophetic churches. Its focus appeared to be solely on addressing abuses linked to the commercialisation of religion. The fact that most targeted and subpoenaed individuals were within Christianity clearly highlights the nature of the problem. Many participants and informants acknowledge that the abuses are real and require intervention. Ramantswana states that these are "prophets who are preying on people's faith" (2019:7). The findings suggest that the CRL Commission should reconsider its powers and authority to regulate religious practices as a state organ, ensuring it does not infringe on the constitutionally protected freedom of religion enjoyed by individuals and churches (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996: Section 15(1) and 31). South Africa's constitution describes the country as a "religiously neutral state" (Henrico 2019:4), which neither restricts nor dictates the nature of this right, despite reports of practices that may seem "bizarre, illogical or irrational" (J para 97 and Dlamini v Green Four Security 2006 11 BLLR 1074 (LC) para 16). For this reason, religious freedom is considered a deeply personal belief system and moral conscience, which directly influences individual decisions within a democratic society (Van der Vyver and Green, 2008:344). The Constitutional Court's ruling in 2000 emphasised the importance of religious freedom, defining its sanctity as follows:

> There can be no doubt that the right to freedom of religion, belief, and opinion in an open and democratic society contemplated by the Constitution is important… However, freedom of religion goes beyond protecting the inviolability of the individual conscience. For many believers, their relationship with God or creation is central to all their activities… Religious belief has the capacity to awaken concepts of self-worth and human dignity, which form the cornerstone of human rights (Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education 2000 4 SA 757 (CC) para 36).

This provides a solid basis for the recommendation that religious freedom should be safeguarded and never be subjected to state regulation. Nevertheless, support ought to be given for "religious communities (churches) to regulate themselves more diligently to be in line with the Constitution and the law," CRL Commission, 2017:34.

6.3.3 The vulnerability and gullibility of congregants

The assertion of doctrinal infallibility and inerrancy of spiritual leaders over their congregants as spiritual infants has established and promoted the domestication of believers towards total allegiance. Similar to Orwell's satire, *Animal Farm*, some Neo-Prophetic churches have become kingdoms under the rule of some of these pastors. Equality and human dignity remain utopian ideals, where a Neo-Prophet does marginalisation. Insights from missional imagination, *Missio Hominum*, and critical analysis could contribute to the emancipation of disempowered congregants who have internalised their vulnerabilities. Evidence of Neo-Prophetic pastors exploiting the trust congregants placed in them has been examined. Their deification—through false or half-truth messages, unfulfilled promises, and prophetic impartations—has resulted in passive, gullible congregants who are vulnerable to various forms of abuse. Consequently, it is recommended that the prophetic voice, which challenges and critically questions the status quo of silence and domestication imposed by deified prophets for personal financial gain, be restored within Neo-Prophetism. This revival of the prophetic voice ought to free congregants from any imposed fear of change and prevent the reproduction of their domestication under these pastorpreneurs. Such a prophetic voice ought to challenge and destabilise the extremes of commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience and allow God to be recognised as God among His people through empowering teachings and practices. Without this prophetic voice in Neo-Prophetism, the essential elements of redemptive Christology,

pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology that are central to the mission of the church cannot be fully realised. Examples of united and controversial prophetic voices against apartheid, such as Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, and Beyers Naudé, may illuminate this discourse.

The researcher has observed that there is a widespread belief that the South African government has delayed interventions to regulate malpractices within religious communities, particularly by pastoral leaders who misuse religion and violate the human dignity of their congregants. This constitutes a breach of Article 16(1) of the South African Constitution. The study has found that most of these malpractices have not been reported and have continued to perpetuate the gullibility and vulnerabilities of congregants. It is recommended that solutions, along with preventive and corrective measures, be implemented within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries as a specific segment of Christianity.

The doctrinal claim of gross malpractices by the Seven Angels from Engcobo (Eastern Cape), who declared that “Lucifer came to this world and breathed on the South African Constitution and schools,” and used this hate speech (Constitution of South Africa, 1996 Section 16(2)) to ignore the Constitution and children’s right to education needs urgent correction. A regulatory approach is essential to countering such a radical mission of the Seven Angels, who see this as divine intervention to “return the world to Jehovah, God” (CRL Rights Commission, 2017: 21). This direct defiance of the constitution in religious practice is potentially dangerous and unethical, especially considering children's right to basic, further, and adult education. This form of religious homeschooling is neither recognised nor quality assured and is therefore regarded as “inferior to standards at comparable public institutions” (Constitution of South Africa, 1996 Section 29). These are gross violations that accompany the unethical practices by some Neo-Prophets. A recommendation is tabled that new Occupational Programmes and short courses be developed and rolled out by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations for those who have a vocational call to ministry. It is also recommended that Neo-Prophetic pastors possess academic and professional qualifications. The shift of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges from Legacy Programmes to Occupational Programmes could substantially support this initiative.

This study strongly recommends addressing the malpractices of certain Neo-Prophets, who knowingly disregard South Africa's existing legislation. This non-compliance has also been observed in the registration of churches as Non-Profit Organisations or section 21 Non-Profit Companies with the Department of Social Development, as mandated by the General Laws (Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing - Act No. 22 of 2022, Sections 13-16). Some foreign Neo-Prophetic pastors have exploited a legal loophole in the Immigration Act 13 of 2002 and misused the visa system to reside and conduct ministry in South Africa. Several of these Neo-Prophets are reportedly commercialising anointed objects and generating substantial profits without declaring any to the South African Revenue Services. These unethical practices are a direct violation of Chapter 2 of the Non-Profit Organisations Act 71 of 1997, the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004, and the Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998.

One Neo-Prophet in Polokwane (Limpopo) was reported to have contravened the Agricultural Stock Remedies Act 36 of 1947 by spraying an insecticide on congregants to deliver them from evil spirits. Other individual Neo-Prophets are reported to have commanded congregants to eat snakes, grass, drink detergents, and driven a car over prostrating congregants (Banda, 2019: 4; Kgatle, 2017: 1; Resane, 2017: 1). Such malpractices do not justify increasing the authoritative power of the CRL Rights Commission to act as an arbiter and regulator of the state, but rather to refer such cases to relevant government departments for further guidance, support, and prosecution. It is therefore recommended that its primary role be to support constitutional democracy by promoting and protecting the cultural, religious, and linguistic rights of this society (Constitution of South Africa, 1996, Sections 185 and 239). Enforcement of existing laws by the CRL Rights Commission would be unconstitutional if it exceeded this constitutional mandate. Its contribution towards ensuring that no pastoral leader claims or acts above the Constitution and other laws is commendable (Gunda and Machingura, 2013: 21).

The set of recommendations regarding the containment of the rapid growth of non-denominational churches and ministries, disputes leading to schisms, conflicts over succession planning in church leadership, property acquisitions, and adherence to

basic educational standards among Neo-Prophets should not be issues that the CRL Rights Commission need to regulate, as this study suggests. Instead, vigorous discussions and the establishment of amicable common ground through extensive consultation sessions should provide guidance and support.

The commercialised teachings, one-on-one consultations, and various commercialised attire have fostered this dependency syndrome and faith-based domestication of congregants. The fake healings and miracles, along with unfulfilled prophecies, have led to the total worship of the pastoral leader and the vulnerability of congregants. It is recommended that more Christocentric Christian ethical teachings take the centre stage and replace the deification of the persona of these pastors. The Christian doctrine of perichoresis (the mutually indivisible nature of the Trinity) and the Afrocentric philosophy of Ubuntu need to be reinstated as the foundations of our African Christian faith experience. These should form part of Africanising Christianity.

The autopoietic or ongoing establishment of non-denominational churches and ministries as a feature of Neo-Prophetism appears to indicate a lack of self-regulation. These non-denominational churches and ministries are part of the fastest-growing fourth reformational wave within Christianity, currently making up over a quarter of the Christian population, mainly in the Global South (Johnson and Zurlo, 2020). This necessitates the establishment of a Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and a Neo-Prophetic missional regulatory framework. This will help in facilitating Neo-Prophetism being recognised as an integral part in introducing the prophethood of all believers and the Pentecostalisation of world Christianity. These are critical as Neo-prophetism is a dynamic and complex phenomenon with various forms and nuances in the revival of world Christianity. It is also these that will enhance the state of readiness for reverse mission from the Global South to the Global North. The ever-escalating divisions, competition, freedom of choice, and individualistic prosperity reflect the ideological alignment of Neo-Prophetism with neo-liberalism (Anderson et al., 2010: 20-22). To make Christianity more responsive and adaptable to the Mission of God, this study recommends that Neo-Prophetism affirms its natural capacity to effect change by functioning as a renewal movement through prayer, healing, shared ministry, or spiritual gifts. This requires self-regulation and collaborative ecumenical links with other churches and religions. For it to establish itself as a new restorationist brand of Christianity, Neo-Prophetism needs to focus on developing its foundational theological

education and emphasise the perichoresis role of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father and the Son. It also needs to embrace and reinstate the value of family as the primary institution for the growth and development of every individual within its teachings and practices. Such steps may indicate some form of Afrocentric Ubuntu philosophy that is necessary for the re-emergence of the prophethood of all believers within Neo-Prophetism as a brand of Christianity. This ideological stance must influence the indigenisation, innovation, and self-regulation of each missional church and ministry within Neo-Prophetism.

6.3.4 The development of a missional regulatory framework.

A finding on religious plurality and the expression of religious faith among Neo-Prophets forms a broad, ever-expanding, and evolving field. These are part of the constitutional freedom of religious expression. Consequently, they cannot be regulated externally. A potential recommendation in this light is for a statutory or umbrella regulatory or professional body to manage and administer registration and licensing of religious practitioners. This may require extensive discussions at various platforms among scholars, government departments, and Neo-Prophets. Part of the key role of this regulatory body shall include establishing a Peer Review Committee to issue certificates and facilitate communication between Neo-Prophets and the CRL Rights Commission. This professional body will need to ensure that constitutional rights—such as the right to belief systems (Section 15(1)), freedom of expression (Section 16), and freedom to trade, occupation, and profession (Section 22)—are not violated, in accordance with the Constitution of South Africa of 1996. Therefore, such measures cannot be imposed without proper consultation and consensus. An example of what is being proposed is the Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church, which ensures self-regulation and is a standard for all who profess this Christian faith. Part One of Book II, titled 'People of God,' details the rights and obligations of the Christian faithful (Canons 208–223) and the terms and conditions for the formation of Sacred Ministers who shall be licensed to practise (Canons 232–293). The Anglican Church of Southern Africa also established the Anglican Consultative Council as a regulatory body and is registered as a Charity Organisation in the United Kingdom. Part IV of the Canons on Ministry, covering Principles 25–47, regulates various pastoral ministries and offices.

This study recommends that the CRL Rights Commission reconsider the imposition of such a structure and instead offer guidance to establish the Neo-Prophets Council of Churches as a recognised regulatory body within Christianity. This will increase the recognition status of this body as deserving of equal government recognition, akin to the Roman and Anglican Churches. This study also recommends that the CRL Rights Commission should not hastily introduce such a level of self-regulation among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. It needs to create open platforms where discussions can develop within this brand of Christianity. The proposed Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches could assume full responsibility for creating a missional regulatory framework and standard operating procedures for and by registered members. Such a regulatory body could offer advocacy training on various administrative issues and other developmental and empowerment gaps, such as managing finances and internal affairs. This could represent the most effective ecumenical intervention by the CRL Rights Commission "to promote and develop peace, friendship, humanity, tolerance and national unity among and within cultural, religious and linguistic communities based on equality, non-discrimination and free association" CRL Rights Commission, 2017: 40). Once this reimagined, missional view of the church and ecumenical reconciliation has been realised, that Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries may begin to act as equal partners in establishing a necessary missional regulatory framework, enabling Christianity to reclaim its role in moral formation, peace, spiritual integrity, and mutual understanding.

The findings of this study reveal that some Neo-Prophets have created a new set of pastoral titles. Pastors use these titles to elevate their status above others. Some of them possess fake qualifications from non-accredited institutions. This indicates that certain individuals in senior pastoral roles have falsified credentials and have self-declared themselves as intermediaries of new divine teachings and spiritual gifts. Some are doctors and professors, yet lack any formal post-secondary qualification or NQF Level 5 (Mwaura 2007:366). It is recommended that the Quality Council of Trades and Occupations (QCTO) receive guided support to bridge this gap. This support would help the QCTO create a new post-school programme that addresses the occupational (academic and professional) needs of future pastoral leaders, providing new pathways to HEIs.

This conscientious anti-intellectualism and avoidance of formal higher education and training have led to serious misconduct and abuses within pastoral ministry and among congregants (Omenyo 2008:44-45). Consequently, this has caused theological stagnation and a disdain for training in pastoral ministry. Vondey notes that this disdain can be attributed to a fear of improperly replacing the illumination of the Holy Spirit and “leaning on the arm of the flesh” (2013:135-137). This has prompted some Neo-Prophetic ministers to view formal training for ministry with suspicion, especially when such education is being seen as conflicting with Neo-Prophetic ethos in teachings and practices (Draper, 2002 and Omenyo, 2008). It is recommended that advocacy for a positive outlook on theological and pastoral education and training be promoted through Neo-Prophetic seminars and conferences. The establishment of non-accredited theological institutions and the issuance of counterfeit qualifications should be discouraged, as they foster unauthentic ministry practices.

The 4IR has brought about rapid changes that influence all aspects of our lives and identities. All the opportunities and challenges it presents necessitate formal education and training (Xu et al. 2018). Illiteracy and limited education levels could undermine the impact Neo-Prophetism has in developing soft skills and motivating congregants to remain positive and productive in fulfilling the Mission of God. This should be promoted by the proposed South African Neo-Prophetic Council as a quality enhancement project to encourage those in pastoral ministry leadership to acquire essential soft skills (such as preaching, providing pastoral care, church administration, creative liturgy, and spirituality) and hard skills like strategic planning, innovation, theological education, and training. These capabilities and critical skills are vital for their self-actualisation and individuation within Neo-prophetism. Based on this, Neo-Prophetic pastors will be better equipped theologically and practically to address and respond to Afrocentric, global philosophies and contemporary key issues robustly (Lewis 2007:173). The works of Pentecostal academic scholars such as Solomon Kgatle, Marius Nel, Kenneth Archer, Allan Anderson, and Amos Yong exemplify the success stories and good practice of this proposed path for Neo-Prophetism. Furthermore, Neo-Prophetic theological methods and forms of intercultural theology must influence the development of a distinctive identity for Neo-Prophetism.

A key observation from this study is that Neo-Prophetic ethos, in terms of core teachings and practices, has been domesticated by one pastoral leader for financial gain, with no opportunity to influence the current theological curriculum. In terms of theology, Neo-Prophetism remains in its infancy and borrows concepts from other classical church traditions, especially Pentecostalism, to develop its own identity. This 'patchwork' identity and mimicry (Kärkkäinen 2010:53-54) cannot serve as a foundation for Neo-Prophetic theologies such as systematic theology, pastoral theology, biblical hermeneutics, and missiology to emerge. A Neo-Prophetic ethos and its call for paradigm shifts need to mature and self-actualise. This process of individuation can only be achieved through the formal education of pastors rather than superficial qualifications. The study recommends that Neo-Prophetism gain recognition and establish itself as an equal among other Christian Councils, participating in key discussions on missiology, pastoral theology, and systematic theology—particularly concerning Christology, ecumenism, ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology. Africanised Christianity requires a unified, centralised voice of authority instead of the current fragmented and competing claims of Neo-Prophetism. This voice must clearly define the identity of Neo-Prophetism. Educated Neo-Prophetic leaders need to continue developing this new knowledge and identity, providing future generations with a distinctive theological stance and empowering spirituality (Rice, 2002:309).

The overuse of titles also shows the idolisation of some Neo-Prophetic pastors without justification. These titles reflect intense competition for dominance, with a focus on individual personalities. As a result, they have elevated their own personas to claim all divine glory and assume multiple roles within the church. For example, one leader might be a singer, prophet, traditional healer, and marketer. The proliferation of many pastoral titles for a single leader has reduced fellowship and communion among Neo-Prophets and their congregations. It is recommended that this practice be halted and replaced with developing and recognising new ministries that benefit all members. The ideas of the priesthood and prophethood of all believers should replace this obsession with a single leader. The self-regulating Council of Neo-Prophetic churches could help standardise this practice. This may help reduce deception and false practices, fostering trustworthiness and a commitment to serve one another (John 14:31).

As a result of the widespread misuse of Scripture interpretation for personal propaganda and financial gain, rather than helping congregants find meaning and purpose in life, it is recommended that the regulation of Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries be implemented as the first step towards restoring ethical standards and credibility in the Christian faith experience, which should be redemptive and Christ-centred. This recommendation is based on the fact that the Roman Catholic Church has its own regulatory body, the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference; the Anglican Church, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, as a regulatory body; and the Lutheran Church, St. Peter's Confessional Lutheran Church of South Africa. The Neo-Prophetic Council ought to establish consultation sessions to develop standard operating procedures that regulate and formalise accepted practices. This level of accountability should come from the self-critical evaluation of Neo-Prophetism and a regulatory framework that strategically guides and accredits both existing and emerging Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Such measures will help reduce issues like human trafficking, murders for occult purposes to attract more followers, and the abuses faced by congregants in churches led by 'Pastorpreneurs'. The constitutional right to freedom of religion and the right to choose can be most effectively expressed through a regulated Neo-Prophetic movement. Based on this recommendation, a more Spirit-led, systematic, credible, and redemptive theology and spirituality can develop. These are essential for establishing a high standard of practice within Neo-Prophetic circles before any ecumenical dialogue is pursued.

The recent statistical evidence published by Johnson and Zurlo (2020) indicates that the Global West and North are experiencing a decline in Christianity, while the Global South and East are seeing numbers rise. Neo-Prophetism is the new brand of Christianity and is growing as mainline churches decline. The rise of Neo-Prophetism is not about stealing sheep, but rather about congregants voting with their feet. It is also clear that the exclusive, judgmental stance still held by some mainline churches against Neo-Prophetism is not preventing the growth of this new Christian movement and is hindering ecumenism. This calls for systematic introspection among conservative and modernist mainline churches, which remain overly intellectualistic and rationalistic in their theology and spirituality, and a need to embrace the dynamics and vitality of 4IR and the Neo-Prophetisation of both theology and spirituality. A historic shift of the centre of gravity in Christianity is evident as the Global South and

East move towards re-evangelising the Global West and North, marking a new chapter in church history (Zurlo, Johnson and Crossing, 2019).

The findings of this study also indicate that African Neo-Prophetism has become transnational. This Africanised brand of Christianity has extended beyond continental borders through multinational churches and ministries through televangelism. The influence and diversity of Neo-Prophetism significantly impact how they re-evangelise the homes of Christian missionaries like Europeans and Americans (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:297) and evangelise international communities from other religions (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2001; Parsitau and Mwaura, 2010). Additionally, this has contributed to the growth of African Neo-Prophetic presence beyond Africa. This includes the adaptation of Africanised Neo-Prophetic teachings, such as prosperity gospel and belief practices, to foreign countries. This study recommends that reverse mission or re-evangelisation of Europe and America should become a distinctive African contribution, enabling Africa to be recognised as capable of producing responsible, ethical, and trained African pastors. This African Neo-Prophetism must demonstrate democratic shared ministry, allow full expression of various charismata, and promote social transformation through deliverance, healing, and an African sense of worship.

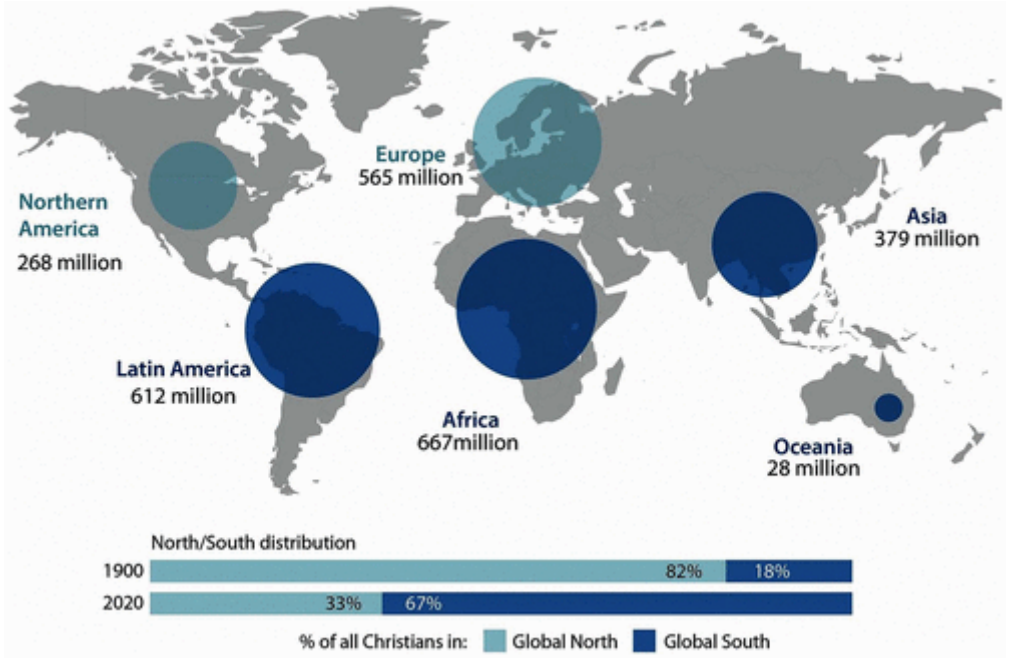


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Figure 6.2 Map 1 by continent (Todd & Zurlo 2019)

Pentecostalism and Neo-Prophetism are progressively moving from the periphery to the centre stage of Christianity. This shift includes the Pentecostalisation and Neo-Prophetisation efforts on the part of mainline churches themselves, to avoid their total decline. These movements are likely to resist ideological recolonisation of the Global South and East if they stay focused on the Neo-Prophetisation (and possibly Pentecostalisation) of Christianity and avoid the extremes of commercialisation and commodification of the African Christian faith experience. This offers the best chance for a redemptive renewal of the Christian faith experience away from the rationality or cerebral religion typical of the Global West and North. Such Neo-Prophetisation ought to be a deliberate intention to move away from imperialistic, rationalistic, non-charismatic, and non-experiential theology and spirituality that are foreign to the Afrocentric understanding of the God-self.

This study also recommends that Neo-Prophetic Christianity cease borrowing dualist-based theological concepts from the Global West and North, and instead begin to articulate an African holistic understanding of God through Neo-Prophetic real-time visions, dreams, and interactive corporate worship. This embodied experience—mind, body, heart, and soul—must influence their epistemological and ontological view of who God is and His Mission. The decolonised Neo-Prophetic Christian faith experience and the Africanised epistemology concerning God need to form the foundation for a genuinely Afrocentric Christianity. Afrocentric Christianity need to serve as fertile ground for developing and integrating Missiology and Christian Spirituality in rewriting Church History. Following the Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues, prophecy, praising God through music and prayer, altar calls, and sharing testimonies within the Neo-Prophetic ethos, encounters with God need to be an ever-evolving journey of spiritual growth and deepened faith. From this, a God-drenched missional church, vibrant Christian spirituality, and individual sanctification will emerge. The mutual importance and complementarity of formal education and Spirit-led illumination in reading and interpreting scripture need to recognise that some divine encounters will remain unspeakable, yet profoundly heartfelt.

The fourth wave of reform within Christianity, led by Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries, has a more substantial potential to contribute to the Africanisation of Christianity. The alignment between the Christian faith, social context, and the Bible ought to be guided by Neo-Prophetic scholars. This alignment should empower African

communities and their natural resources from exploitation by others from different continents. Focus should be on social justice issues and vulnerabilities that emanate from pastorpreneurship.

The rise of Neo-Prophetism, through the full expression of the prophethood of all believers and the Africanisation of Christianity, must shape the reimagination or reconceptualisation of key themes such as missiology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, ecumenism, pneumatology, and eschatology, viewing these as a forward movement into the future. New themes for the 21st Century, including African liberation theology, reconstruction, human development theology, and the theology of work, should replace congregants' dependence on syncretic occult practices for fame and wealth, and reduce reliance on the utopian promises and unfulfilled prophetic declarations. These themes require Neo-Prophetic pastors to evolve from 'pastorpreneurs' into academic theologians who integrate their theology with disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, economics, and linguistics. Neo-Prophetism must Neo-Prophetise Christianity and generate new knowledge that will decolonise and decouple theological education in South African Higher Education Institutions from the Theology and Spirituality of the Global West and North. The rise of Neo-Prophetism ought to be led by Spirit-filled and academic scholars willing and able to Neo-Prophetise. The transnational or international dimensions of Neo-Prophetism make this necessary, with the South African Neo-Prophetic Council playing a key role in ensuring these developments are coordinated and consolidated.

The researcher firmly believes in the urgent need for Neo-Prophetic pastors who can think strategically and theologise systematically. This belief underpins the importance of this investigative study. Based on this argument, the researcher also argues that the rise of Neo-Prophetism, the Neo-Prophetisation of Christianity, along with developing themes of Missiology, Systematic Theology of the 21st Century, and God-drenched theology and spirituality. It will also guide humanity and the world away from the influence of the Illuminati and strategists of the New Social World Order, whose focus is on profits. The South African Neo-Prophetic Council must promote a Christ-centred and redemptive upliftment of vulnerable congregants, protecting them from neo-liberalist commercialisation and commodification as a strategy of recolonisation by the wealthiest few. This strategy is also driven by 'pastorpreneurs', who have

adopted a competitive mindset to survive, even if it means falsifying core Christian values and replacing them with what ensures their own comfort.

While blanket statements and generalisations across all Neo-Prophets cannot do justice to those whose practical ministries are Christ-centred, it may reasonably be argued from the findings of this study that some Neo-Prophets have replaced, complemented, and competed with Christ. In the ecclesial context of these churches and ministries, the confessional belief in Christ as King and Redeemer is silenced, and words are often put in His mouth through the claimed divine enlightenment or prophecy (Magezi and Banda, 2017:5). The verbatim words of Christ in Scripture are misrepresented multi-directionally for financial and material gain. This has led to numerous and competing teachings about Christ as compared to the Christology from the Council of Nicaea, the missionary Christology of colonial times, and Afrocentric Christologies that have been proposed and applied by theologians from the African soil (Nyende 2005; Udoh 1988). The main argument that is supported by the findings of this study points to the fact that the role of Christ is downplayed to no level of significance. This raises the question as to whether to accept Christianity with Christ entirely replaced by Neo-Prophets in some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries who promote self-centred teachings and a gospel of individualistic prosperity. In answer to this question, the researcher argues that, without a Christo-centric and Afrocentric Christianity, there is no missional church, redemptive soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, biblical hermeneutics, five-fold ministries, ecumenism, and eschatology for Africa as a continent.

The question: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15) that Christ asked His inner circle disciples, becomes crucial for the proposed South African Neo-Prophetic Council, Neo-Prophetic missiologists, and systematic theologians. This study recommends redefining and rethinking Christology for the 4IR. Neo-Prophetic pastoral ministry is not among the South African Critical Skills List of the 21st Century and 4IR in the Government Gazette of 2023, but it is necessary to make itself stand out and have a Christocentric commanding voice. The replacement of the dignity of humanity as co-creators with God and the theology of work by robotics and the dehumanisation of humanity, especially among the poor, has arrived. This necessitates a new approach to reimagining and repositioning Christianity as a world religion to empower humanity and preserve the redemptive presence of God among us.

This study recommends that rehabilitative Missiology and the African Christian faith experience begin to value the positive contributions emerging from Neo-Prophetic theologians. This will open new and unexplored opportunities that serve as a metanoic alternative to the syncretic and occult practices of some Neo-Prophets. Neo-Prophets should be part of an ecumenical, decisive movement to establish a Christ-centred Kingdom of God, rather than redirecting their churches and ministries into their kingdoms on earth. The study also advocates for African Spirituality, which builds confidence, promotes the value of family life, and strengthens missional churches and ministries that serve humanity. The current era calls for an African spirituality of work as a sub-theme to empower Christians to be less dependent on the state's welfare and to support themselves while remaining future-oriented. This proposed African Spirituality ought to discourage congregants from resorting to quick and dangerous practices such as corruption and occult rituals to attain wealth and fame. The Neo-Prophetic concept of 'sowing the seed' should benefit the entire church community, not just one pastor's enrichment. Additionally, the African spirituality of work should help African Christian communities to value biodiversity—including water, minerals, vegetation, animals, and fellow human beings—and to reduce disease, poverty, unemployment, and conflict. The South African Neo-Prophetic Council proposed in this study needs to develop and nurture prosperity gospel proponents, who will redefine the prosperity gospel as a form of redemptive upliftment for humanity out of poverty.

The argument presented by this study does not concern the regulation of the Christian religion by the state. Constitutionally, the state must guarantee freedom of religion and the right of individuals to choose their own belief systems. In a pluralist country like South Africa, where 79.8% of the population are Christians (Coertzen 2014: 126), diverse doctrinal teachings and scriptural interpretations mean that self-regulation within various churches becomes a practical approach. For example, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that those to be ordained as priests should be male and take a vow of celibacy, while African Independent Churches permit polygamy, even for those in ordained ministry. Each of these beliefs is respected, protected, and promoted by the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (Sections 7, 9, 30, 31, 185, and 234). Furthermore, the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms,

established under section 234 of the Constitution, delineates the specific religious rights and freedoms that the state cannot regulate.

The self-regulation needed within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries must focus on reducing instances where some Neo-Prophets violate religious freedoms, leading to unethical and harmful practices that infringe on the human rights of congregants, as outlined in section 36 of the Constitution. The self-regulation proposed by this study aims to preserve the unique identity of Neo-Prophetic churches without government interference. For example, the manipulation of congregants through fear (Thlabye, 2015). It must also address abuses committed in the name of divine healing, including sexual abuses (Yen, 2017). Malpractices like those of Pastor Lethebo Rabalago, known as “Prophet of Doom,” who claimed to perform miracles and healings using insecticide directly on his own congregants, also necessitate intervention (Babatunde, 2016). These malpractices, which involve inhumane manipulation and psychological and physical harm (Frahm-Arp, 2021: 1-19), cannot be effectively addressed by a multi-faith Peer-Review Council covering all religions in South Africa, as recommended by the CRL Rights Commission (CRL Report, 2017:6). A Neo-Prophetic Charter should serve as the foundation for a regulatory framework in accordance with section 234 of the South African Constitution to combat those who bring Neo-Prophetism and Christianity into disrepute.

The findings of this study also reveal that Neo-Prophetic pastors are among those Christian ministers who are enticed to use occult practices to acquire wealth and powers to perform miracles. Syncretic covenanting with these occult forces of the New World Order diminishes the significance and centrality of the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the Christian faith experience. It is recommended as a revival measure to cease the practices of some Neo-Prophetic pastors who compete with, or complement, Christ as insufficient for our salvation, prosperity, and divine protection. This permissive attitude towards occult practices and Christodicy has introduced divination, oenomancy, necromancy, fortune telling, and sorcery onto the altars of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Based on these findings, the researcher suggests the revision and updating of Afrocentric Christology and Ecumenical Missiology as areas for future research, incorporating the contributions of Neo-Prophetic churches.

There is a need for the complementarity of pneumatology and ecclesiology to shape the missional lifestyle of every Christian believer (1 Corinthians 10:31). The presence, unique ministry, and kerygma of each missional church as a collective ought to set an example in shaping a better world and serving humanity (Matthew 5:13-16). This model of a missional church signifies a paradigm shift from the commercialisation and commodification of Christian faith strategies to embracing the biblical theme of the Great Commission in a way that empowers and humanises congregants. Consequently, the missional essence of each church community ought to extend beyond addressing issues related to transactional salvation and deliverance or being an attractional church and a mere business to generate profits.

The missional imagination for which this study stridently advocates is aimed at driving transformational change to mission rooted in the distinctive contributions of congregants at the margins, signifying a shift of the centre of gravity within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Those currently exposed to unusual practices, gullibility, and vulnerabilities need to be empowered to move from total dependency on the dictates of their Neo-Prophetic leaders and take the centre stage in articulating God’s mission of justice, joy, healing, peace, and reconciliation in the world (WCC 2013:52–53). Missional imagination as the theoretical framework of this study challenges Neo-Prophets to expand the scope of the Mission of God through the church beyond merely a commercial enterprise for profit intended to sustain luxurious lifestyles, towards a form of missional leadership that radically transforms the ecclesial landscape of their non-denominational churches and ministries (Roxburgh 1998:183; Van Kooten and Barrett 2004:139-142; Guder 1998:190-198). Out of this may emerge a new formation of missional congregational culture characterised by diverse ministries, the prophetic proclamation of the unceasing redeeming power of the Word of God, and responsive participation of congregants in recreating the world for a better life and peace.

This study also recommends that Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries establish transformative and rehabilitative leadership and missional authority through collective participation of both pastoral leaders and congregants. Missional formation aims to build a strong and capable coalition of leaders who are accountable for fulfilling core functions, ensuring that the church or ministry complies with South Africa's legal

requirements and policies, and promoting growth in spirituality, Christian values, and practices.

6.4. Potential areas of future research that emanate from this study

The following are key areas of research arising from this study on Neo-Prophetism. They offer an extended scholarly resolve to address the vulnerabilities of congregants that arise from the commercialisation and the commodification of the Christian faith experience beyond this study. They are essential for further exploration beyond this thesis. Addressing them may require vigorous interdisciplinary discussions among academics. While not an exhaustive list of all potential research themes, these provide a solid foundation to establish self-regulation as both a corrective and preventive tool against all malpractices that have tarnished Neo-Prophetism in South Africa.

6.4.1 Celebrating unity in diversity among registered non-denominational Neo-Prophetic churches could lead to greater recognition and strategic positioning of Neo-Prophetism as a fourth wave of reformation within Christianity.

6.4.2 The recognition and inclusion of the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches as a regulatory body and an equal partner among other ecumenical councils within Christianity in South Africa.

6.4.3 Training Neo-Prophets on key themes such as the Great Commission, the reimagined missional church to restore the reputation of the church, self-regulation in line with the South African Constitution, and the Africanisation of Christianity.

6.3.4 The development of new concepts and the reconceptualisation of existing ones to illustrate the paradigmatic shift within Christianity brought about by Neo-Prophetism.

6.4.4 The Afrocentric concept of spiritual fathers and mothers that aligns with an Ubuntu Philosophy slogan that ‘my child is your child’ to promote good citizenship, shared community values, fellowship, and communion.

6.4.5 Further research on Christ-centred teachings and Spirit-led Biblical hermeneutics within Neo-Prophetism.

6.4.6 An academic paper submitted to the Department of Higher Education and Training for consideration by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) to develop accredited Occupational Programmes for training Pastors,

ensuring they are academically and professionally prepared for pastoral leadership.

6.4.7 Further research studies on the prophethood of all believers within Neo-Prophetism.

6.4.8 Interdisciplinary study on the integration of reverse missions within the Motus Dei concept as an emerging feature of Neo-Prophetism.

6.4.9 The Africanisation of Christianity within Neo-Prophetism versus some Neo-Prophetic churches becoming occult sects.

6.4.10 The African Christian spirituality that promotes work as part of co-creating with God, rather than persuading congregants to transact through planting seeds for miracles and instant financial breakthroughs within Neo-Prophetism. Additionally, this will include eco-theological study and empowering society to be responsible stewards of biodiversity within the Mission of God, while being connected to the cosmos for their livelihood.

6.4.11 The significance of establishing democratic and transformative leadership and missional authority based on the collective participation of both pastoral leaders and congregants within Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

These pointers to new fields of future study within Neo-Prophetism also call for interdisciplinarity among academics in Missiology, Systematic Theology, and Biblical Hermeneutics. Biblical hermeneutics that recognise the pneumatic epistemological and ontological reality of Africans is likely to be more relational, personal, and experiential than mere Western scientific exegesis of the modernist era. This Afrocentric yet glocal interpretive mode will affirm the value of shared testimonies or witness stories on the signs, wonders, and various gifts within the church community (Romans 8:1-27). This will validate the authority of scripture and the sufficiency of its final canonicity against many new and apocryphal claims. Within this context, part of the self-regulation of Neo-Prophetic movements ought to address the use of apocryphal Bible books as new divine revelations, as claimed by some Neo-Prophetic pastors.

Finally, these themes for future areas of study may rehabilitate the fellowship, communion, and stewardship of all believers as a foundation for ecclesial mutual interdependence and shared accountability among Neo-Prophetic members of the Mystical Body of Christ (Ephesians 4 and Romans 12). This may be a responsibility of

the Neo-Prophetic Council (Acts 15), which will facilitate the self-regulation process. The researcher contends that this Neo-Prophetic Council possesses a divine mandate of “not quenching the Spirit of God among the Churches” (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

6.5. Final limitations of this study

The researcher in this study has a strong background in mainline churches, and Neo-Prophetism is an unfamiliar area. He is currently a licensed priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. Previously, he was a monk at the Monastery of Marrianhill (Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) and holds a postgraduate qualification from a Catholic university in Rome (Urbanian University). Based on this background and the research findings, some of the dualist-based theological concepts of the Global West and North used in this study do not adequately define and qualify Neo-Prophetism. Therefore, the researcher considers the development of new concepts and the reconceptualisation of existing theological and missiological ideas as essential, given the reality that Neo-Prophetism introduces into Christianity.

The conduct of this study on the commercialisation and commodification of Christianity by some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries within South Africa was carried out at a time when most Neo-Prophets were still suspicious of any research on the subject, as they had seen some of them being subpoenaed by the CRL Rights Commission. This made it challenging to gain trust and be accepted for such research. Consequently, some key findings could not be validated and were not included in this study. These findings could be explored in future as more confidence is gained between the researcher and Neo-Prophetic churches.

Most gatekeepers who participated in interviews and focus groups for this research were also present to ensure that the reputation of their pastoral leader was not compromised or tarnished. This was evident on matters of financial accountability, gender-based violence, and other forms of misconduct that were shared across social media platforms and in public newspapers. This study did not seek to gather incriminating evidence against Neo-Prophets; rather, it emphasised the importance of a reimagined missional regulatory framework for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries that complies with the Constitution of South Africa. The researcher is creating cordial networking with some leading pastors to present papers on the subject matter. This cordial networking is being established with the CRL Rights Commission.

Occult practices aimed at gaining fame, attracting more congregants, and achieving financial prosperity have blurred the line between Neo-Prophetism and Christianity. In extreme cases, some churches have become sects that oppose Christianity, highlighting concerns about the commercialisation and commodification of Christianity by certain Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa. Leading pastors in such churches and ministries seem to rely on New Social World Order strategies that promote a 'survival of the fittest' neo-liberal approach to their pastoral leadership. They see congregants not as local communities but as global tools to exploit, keeping them vulnerable to achieve their aims with little resistance. At revival conferences, success is measured in terms of profits gained through the selling of anointed objects rather than spiritual conversions and altar call prayers. The traditional divide and rule principle has shifted to a global manipulation of humans as subservient, loyal individuals with reduced concern for the biblical concepts of neighbours and family. Within this context, it was difficult for the researcher to tackle the defence of the pastor by those who have suffered abuses and unfulfilled prophetic miracles. This might need a lot more focus in terms of empowerment and over-reliance or blind obedience to a pastor who values profits over saving souls.

The researcher notes it as a limitation that some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries no longer fit into the category of Christianity as a religion. They are led by a person who is a diviner and performs rituals that are foreign to Christianity on weekdays and a leading pastor on Sunday. Sunday services are clearly a strategy to market and recruit customers to come for individual consultations on weekdays at exorbitant fees. These practices border on African Traditional Religion rather than Christianity. Such churches could not be categorically identified as Christian churches, but rather as sects. The practices of these sects extend beyond the boundaries of Christianity and cannot be examined further within the field of Missiology.

The study has also shown positive lessons that may help in the Pentecostalisation and prophetisation of Christianity within mainline churches. Some of these positive aspects could not be included in this study because they fall outside the scope of the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on summarising validated findings to answer the research questions of this study. It has proposed recommendations grounded in research results in each sub-section. This study had limitations defined by the scope of the title. The researcher only briefly mentioned areas he wished he could explore further. These were not fully addressed as they fall beyond the scope of the thesis title and its research aims. The research has enabled the researcher to locate himself with greater rigour within the field of missiology. This work represents his contribution to the broader literature seeking to understand and extend the work of the missional Christian church.

Greater emphasis has been placed on balancing positive strengths, corrective and preventative measures against malpractices, and new growth opportunities for Neo-Prophetism arising from its natural connection with Pentecostalism. The findings and recommendations have shown the necessity of self-regulation among Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries in South Africa. These serve as a strong base on which transformative change within the mission of the church needs to take place. The benefits of this study go beyond the confines of Neo-Prophetism to Christianity as a religion. This transformative change needs to start with setting benchmarks and frameworks that regulate the commercialisation and the commodification of the Christian faith in Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. This study is contributing to the view of polycentric missional leadership and celebrating diversity within Christianity that should form a strategic intervention towards humanising the kerygmatic role of each missional church in South Africa. The new contribution of this study gives a pointer to the need for missional pastoral leaders to be professionally trained, highly capable, and responsive to rethinking and re-grounding pastoral ministry amid rapid social and technological changes in the current era.

The diversity and individual dynamics within Neo-Prophetism necessitate interdisciplinary, multifocal, and multi-perspectival solutions to reposition Neo-Prophetism within Christianity. The most effective remedial solutions are likely to come from within Neo-Prophetism itself. The commercialisation and commodification of the Christian faith experience and the gospel have negatively impacted the missional mandate or Great Commission of some Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries. Creative and innovative strategies and remedial actions presented in this study might also benefit other Christian denominations. The concept of ‘new wineskins’ as found

in Matthew 9:17 ought to serve as a strong foundation for the Africanisation and Neo-Prophetisation of Christianity.

This study calls for a South African Christianity that is liberative, reconciliatory, and empowering. The role of each Neo-Prophetic missional church or ministry has to take a conscientious resolve to give honour to the South African Constitution and the human dignity of all persons. This is one of the serious gaps identified by this study. The proposed recommendations around this may form a more resolute way forward. This can be achieved through the establishment of the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries in South Africa. This council needs to formulate a reimagined regulatory framework that standardises practices and compliance with a clear mandate to regulate. Much of the advocacy and collaboration between the CRL Rights Commission, other existing church councils, and the Neo-Prophetic Council of Churches and Ministries will be vital.

The state of readiness for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries to move from the periphery into the centre stage also calls for the formal academic and professional qualifications for Neo-Prophets. This may sharpen their missional pastoral leadership and Spirit-led ministry. Such may equip them better for transnational reverse missions. Neo-Prophetism requires several future areas of study to be addressed within the field of Missiology as it grows within Christianity. Some of the pointers to future studies have been tabulated in this chapter. This will offer new answers and empowerment opportunities for congregants, the Africanisation of Christianity and a rehabilitative Missiology for Neo-Prophetic churches and ministries.

The recommendations and findings have identified critical gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed. Strategic interventions that have been tabled in this study indicate a need for the Neo-Prophetic Council to establish ecumenical connections with other existing Church Councils to learn and effect changes that re-establish the Christian faith experience, which is redemptive, humanising and based on the Mission of God in the world.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Researcher acknowledgement letter.

UNISA university of south africa

THE COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES

RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Hereby, I (Paul Themba Thembinkosi Mngadi), ID number (6601205373086), in my personal capacity as a researcher, acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the

- Unisa Research Policy
- Unisa Ethics Policy
- Unisa IP Policy
- SOP for Risk Assessment

And that I shall conform to and abide by these policy requirements.

I furthermore declare that I Did Not Plagiarise I Have Referenced All Material used in The Research Paper.

SIGNED: P T T Mngadi

Date: 14 -August 2024

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Appendix B

Leading questions to generate discussions in interviews

Leading questions to generate in-depth discussion interviews

Each of the following questions shall be used to facilitate discussion among participants of interviews. This session will take between 60 to 75 minutes in each of the six selected churches and ministries.

- First question: How long have you been a registered member of this church/ministry?
- Second question: What is your key role in this church or ministry?
- Third question: What positive element has led you to choose this church or ministry among so many others?
- Fourth Question: Does the leading pastor have any unique prophetic powers?
- Fifth question: Have you used any of the anointed objects? Kindly share what you were going through if you are comfortable sharing that experience and its results.
- Sixth question: Does this church have any strong relations with African Indigenous Religion like ancestor worship and healing rituals?
- Seventh question: How is the relationship of this church/ministry with other Christian Churches (Mainlines, Charismatics, and Pentecostals)?
- Eighth question: How does this church/ministry sustain itself against so many others in a close location? Say something on strategies to keep congregants loyal and committed to this church or ministry.
- Ninth question: Is there anything unique that may give a bigger picture and is not easy to see that you would like the researcher to know about?

Appendix C

Observation schedule

Observation Schedule

The following are key activities to be observed during the conduct of a worship service by the researcher:

1. The greetings and welcome of newcomers by existing members to ushers.
2. The economic status of most congregants.
3. The nature of the building and its ambiance.
4. The location of the worship team and the music team.
5. The design of the altar and the positioning of the leading pastor and honoured guests.
6. The power of worship songs before the arrival of the leading pastor.
7. The selling of anointed objects.
8. The grand entry of the leading pastor and the entourage.
9. The key role players in the sub-service for the ’planting of seeds’ and church offerings.
10. The reading of scripture and the sermon of the day.
11. The sub-service for deliverance, financial prosperity, healing, and protection from sickness and malevolent spirits.
12. The marketing and general announcements.
13. Service conclusion.