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Serving the needy from the greedy: Reviewing *Diakonia* in African neo-Pentecostalism

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When the economy turned downwards across most African nations over the past two decades hitherto today, multifarious neo-Pentecostal churches correspondingly multiplied in and beyond the Global South. While it ordinarily appeared to be a revolutionary Africanisation of Christian revival through massive indigenous evangelisation and establishment of new denominations, countless leading prophetic apostles were selfishly enriching themselves paradoxically in the world's headquarters of poverty, where the needy are multiplying and dying. Most diaconal publications engage with classical and mainline ecclesiology. Notably, minimum scholarly attention has been given to *diakonia* in African neo-Pentecostalism. Applying grounded theory, researching through the available literature, observation and the media, this article sought answers to issues that problematise *diakonia* in African neo-Pentecostalism. It unfolded and concluded that, instead of being other-centred, the generality of neo-Pentecostal leaders are self-centred, greedy opportunists exploiting the needy. Consequently, it recommended theological education, ecumenical engagement, and the establishment of an inclusive and independent regulatory body to enlighten and empower gospel ministers to revise their hermeneutics, theologies, ecclesiologies, governance and administration for the accomplishment of *diakonia*, as well as other dimensions of *missio ecclesiae*.

Contribution: This article contributes to the transformational development of African Spiritualities and Leadership in Ecclesiology and Missiology by reviewing *diakonia* in African neo-Pentecostalism.

Keywords: African; neo-Pentecostalism; Church; *missio Dei*; *missio ecclesiae*; *Diakonia*.

Introduction

From the times and impact of economic recession in most African nations, a plethora of neo-Pentecostal denominations were established (Marongwe & Maposa 2015:10; Tetteh 2022:n.p.; White 2021:266). The formation and rapid growth of new Pentecostal churches is not limited to the Global South. Adedibu (2019) observes the following:

> [T]he growth and impact of Pentecostalism is not restricted to the Global South, which incidentally is now the center of gravity of Christianity, but resonates in the Global North as Pentecostalism, particularly African and Caribbean Pentecostalism is now everywhere including Britain. (p. 19)

Correspondingly, Gonsalves et al. (2021) note:

> [N]eo-Pentecostalism today is a driving force for the global expansion of Christianity, occupying the role that once belonged to the Catholic Church throughout the colonial expansion and imperialism … (p. 49)

Interestingly, the development of neo-Pentecostalism ordinarily appeared like a monumental revival of Christianity, advancement of *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae.* Remembering the European and Western missionary history, which coincided with colonisation, the rise of indigenous African *gospellers* also implied massive decolonisation and *Africanisation* of mission. Although few of them genuinely affirmed that, by selflessly fostering the work of ministry, the majority of local neo-Pentecostals advanced their personal economic agendas. This is observable in the multi-faceted commodification of the gospel (Andrew 2021:7–10; Benyah 2018:125; Essien 2010: 650–655; Masenya & Masenya 2018:633–638). Countless neo-Pentecostals enriched themselves, provocatively in contexts where masses are languishing and dying in abject poverty. In view of the biblically and *African* necessary other-centredness, against greedy self-centredness, this article applied grounded theory and got data through the available literature and the media. Firstly, it overviews *diakonia.* Therefore, it conceptualises neo-Pentecostalism. Then it unravels

that poor hermeneutics, wrong theology, poor mentorship, nepotism, poor economics, and unprofessional administration problematise *diakonia* in African Pentecostalism. Throughout the exploration, it exposes that greediness neglects the needy, and considers possible solutions to identified problems.

Understanding *Diakonia*

Generally, most Pentecostal *ecclesiologies* divorce *diakonia* from *missio ecclesiae* (Recepcion 2014:72). In neo-Pentecostal denominations, for example Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance (PhD) ministries in Zimbabwe, Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) in Malawi and related prophetic churches across Africa, *diakonia* is often narrowed to mere social service, social work, or care for the needy, and is not given maximum attention. With limited understanding, certain ecclesial leaders only attend to *kerygma* and neglect *diakonia*. In my concurrence, Ritchie (2019:632) observes that it should not be limited to service for neighbours but fulfilling God's holistic mission.

In view of its all-inclusive nature, Lee (2019:23) submits that 'the *diakonia* of Christians is not just looking after the Christian community but caring for everything'.

From the missionary antiquity, Recepcion (2014) discovers:

> [O]ne can find wider ecclesiological and *missiological* perspectives that come out of the experience of *diakonia* in the life of the Church. *Diakonia* in the Church brings to mind three key words: being, community, and mandate. (p. 71)

Biblically, *diakonia* fulfils God's greatest commandment for humanity as reflected in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) Online Bible Gateway in Mark 12:31. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.

Supportively, as formulated in the RSV Online Bible Gateway, Mark 10:45 echoes that the mission of Jesus Christ was diaconal as stated: 'For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Also here, relatively, Mathew 11:4–5 also affirms his comprehensive ministry which also catered for the suffering, marginalised and needy people:

> And Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me'.

Agreeably, Ritchie (2019:632) notes that *diakonia* marks major stages of the Christian missionary history, as *diakonia* features at the beginning of the twelve disciples' mission (Lk 1:17, 25), at the peak of their mission to Jerusalem (Lk 6:4), at Paul's inclusion in the mission (Lk 20:24) and when Paul completes his role in the mission (Lk 21:19). As such, Nordstokke (2013:289) also finds *diakonia* an integral part of the being of the church, arguing that 'Christ came to serve, and that his disciples are called upon to be his servants. Each believer is a *diakonos*, and in fact, every office is basically *diakonia*.' Furthermore, *diakonia* interfaces with all other missionary dimensions, as it links with *koinonia* through fellowship, caring, and sharing with others. It also links with *leitourgia* as social transformation inspires people to worship God, and with *kerygma* by ministering the gospel by meeting identified needs. Accordingly, the evolution of the theory and praxis of *diakonia* can be discerned from the different ecclesiological and *missiological* developments. While some ecclesial perspectives reduce *diakonia* from *missio ecclesiae* to secular social work (Recepcion 2014:72), several scholars such as Jørgensen (2016:10), Nemer (2016:27–28), Lee (2019:23) and Nordstokke (2014:n.p.) agree that diaconal work is the predominant practice of faith demonstration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to '... proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for captives, recovery of sight for the blind and liberty for the oppressed' (Lk 4:18) and to give life in abundance (Jn 10:10). Drawing from the above reflections, *diakonia* is a pivotal element of the primary mission of the Church (which is illustrated by the following circular diagramme).

The integral mission of the Church; interfacing *diakonia* with other dimensions of *missio ecclesiae*

Accordingly, Nordstokke (2013:290) adds that *diakonia* is both congregational, ecumenical, local, and global because 'the misery of distant places has been brought near to us'. Recent problems of natural disasters (like cyclones) and pandemics (i.e. the COVID-19) exposed the indispensability of *diakonia* as a missionary discipline that needs internal and external attention.

That is why the Lutheran World Federation's Communion of Churches (2009:26–30) regards *diakonia* as a fundamental part of the identity of the Church. Taken from leadership designations recorded in the letters of Paul (Rm 11:13; 2 Cor 4:1; Col 4:17), it reflects on empathy and generosity for marginalised widows, orphans, and the poor, which led to the installation of seven deacons in Acts 6. This was not only a caring ministry of the Church, but a deliberate demonstration of the gospel, which Resane (2019:6) presents as the incarnational love of Christ in action. Suitably, Norpel (n.d.) says that the Church is called to serve humanity and 'unless the Church is servant, she has no justification for her existence. She is nothing without *diakonia,* her mission.'

The *missio ecclesiae* in Figure 1; commonly involves *kerygma* [proclamation of the gospel], *leitourgia* [worship and sacraments] and *koinonia* [congregational, denominational, and ecumenical fellowship]. It is complemented by *diakonia* [demonstration of the gospel through acts of service in communities], such as addressing social, economic, and political issues bedevilling the needy. Without *diakonia*, the Church is only salvific, and she loses her rootedness in and connectivity with real life. Therefore, she ought to be contextually relevant and inclusive by showcasing the gospel through serving the needy. In my concurrence, the Lutheran World Federation's Communion of Churches (2009) observes that:
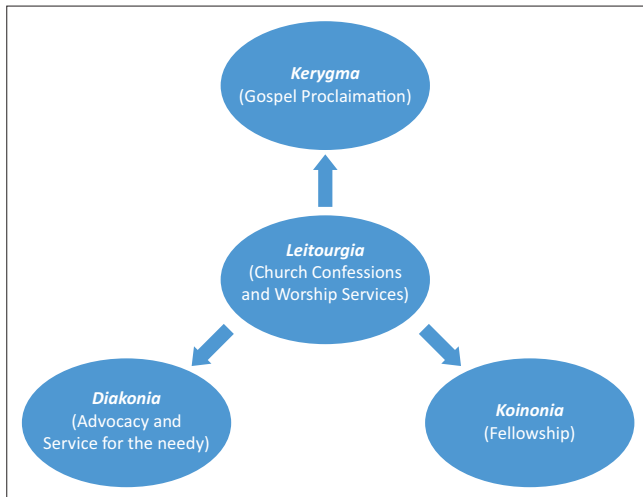
FIGURE 1: Integral mission of the Church: interfacing Diakonia with other dimensions of *missio ecclesiae*.

[D]iakonia has been spiritualized and too limited by its theological and ecclesial framework. Therefore, *diakonia* must be dialectical in a way that communicates both vertical and horizontal perspectives. That means that reflections on *diakonia* should be inter-disciplinary, taking into account insights from both theological and social sciences. (p. 30)

While remaining principally biblical through lovely and gracious selflessness to get mankind to Godliness, *diakonia* can be effective when supplemented by sociological ideals of *Ubuntu*, sustainable empowerment, and development towards curbing dependence syndromes. This concurs with the viewpoints of Breed and Semenya (2015:7) that humanity or humanness *(Ubuntu)* must be realised by identifying with, serving, and empowering each other. Subsequently, *diakonia* enlightens people to share the love, grace, resources, and sustenance of God respectively. It begets successive discipleship for the sustainability and continuity of *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae*. Considering that this article reviews *diakonia* in African neo-Pentecostalism, the following subsection overviews neo-Pentecostalism.

Overviewing neo-Pentecostalism

Neo-Pentecostalism is broadly conceptualised as an offshoot of classical Pentecostalism. Gulan (1978) submits that the charismatic and prophetic movement is an heir to classical Pentecostalism, which originate around 1900 and was highly influential up to around 1959. Thereafter, neo-Pentecostalism started rising in some nations. In most African nations, it rose massively from the 1990s when economies started weakening (Benyah 2018:118) and founders sought to contextualise the gospel to address the worsening economic problems. Notably, neo-Pentecostals believe in an all-encompassing practice of all pneumatic gifts, with extensive emphasis on prophecy, glossolalia, and miracles. While classical Pentecostalism rose from the inspiration, baptism, work, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Tagwirei 2022:4), neo-Pentecostalism extends its beliefs and practices to extremes of idolising the miraculous, healing, deliverance, success, and other

bizarre acts such as eating grass, drinking petrol, and inhaling doom (Kgatle 2017:1). This is well observed by Khanyile (2016):

> Neo-Pentecostals by definition are modern, founder-led independent churches that share phenomenological similarities and affinities with North America's new paradigm churches otherwise known as *Charismatic Christianity Churches.* They are the new wine in the old wine skin (*classical Pentecostalism*). Noteworthy is the fact that neo-Pentecostals have been classified in a multiplicity of ways. They have been labelled as: *a) Prosperity Christianity*; *b) Health and Wealth Gospel*; *c) the Faith Movement*; *d) Name-it- and Claim-it Movement*. Neo-Pentecostals lament that the active *'spiritual gifts'* have been marginally silenced in Classical Pentecostal Church spaces. Neo-Pentecostalism proposes a radical *renaissance* of the gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, hyper-evangelism, inspired preaching, and spirit-filled worship … (pp. 15–16)

Neo-Pentecostalism thus covers emerging, charismatic, and prophetic churches. According to Gulan (1978:1–4), the term *charismatic*, comes from the Greek word for the 'gifts' of the Holy Spirit (*Gk. 'charismata'* in Rm 12:6; 1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28, 30; and *'charisma'* in 1 Pt 4:10). Accordingly, charismatics claim to be rooted in grace-bred gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit. As such, the umbrella *neo-Pentecostalism* is said to be the revival and recovery of the Christian faith – with regards to liveliness, freshness in fellowship and a sense of belonging. Unlike the classical, neo-Pentecostals idolise the miraculous, healing, deliverance, success and the enactment of bizarre ecclesial performances, usually performed by charismatic and highly influential spiritual leaders. Neo-Pentecostals are 'new' Pentecostal in orientation because, unlike classical, they are generally trans-denominational unorthodox, non-dogmatic and cosmopolitan. For Khanyile (2016:16), neo-Pentecostalism reflects a popularised rendition of Christianity that provides for disgruntled third-world people through the provision of psychological and practical aid. The movement helps people survive both socially and psychologically. Neo-Pentecostalism provides participation, support, emotional relief, and a sense of belonging.

The new Pentecostals provide the poor with intense spiritual and mental motivation to counter the reality of depression, seclusion, disenchantment, marginalisation, and social instability. They run with enticing and internationalised names such as Heaven's Gate Ministries (of Ghana), Angels of God Ministries (Tanzania), Freedom Ministries (South Africa); Heartfelt International Ministries (HIM) in Zimbabwe, Cry out Africa Ministries (Kenya), Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (Nigeria). As Chiluwa (2010) contends, naming is a medium of self-expression, cognitive consciousness, and an ideological tool to sustain a spiritual tradition, prophecy or vision and mission. Thus, the 'ministries' part of neo-Pentecostal denominational names portray their focus on advancing the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teaching five-fold ministries. The 'international' addition to some of their names depicts transnationalism. Multiple neo-Pentecostal ministries, which call themselves 'international', suggest that

they carry international visions and missions. So, they endeavour to permeate and penetrate beyond their immediate constitutions. Furthermore, neo-Pentecostalism believes in the supernatural power to deliver economic and spiritual miracles. For Bitrus (2016:334), that is why they profess health and wealth messages through the prosperity gospel. While its leading exponents also foster the gospel of salvation, they maximise their efforts towards the emancipation of believers from poverty, evil spirits, and ailments.

Consequently, Defoe (1978) perceives that neo-Pentecostals preach a 'gospel of God's blessings', which others call prosperity gospel. Charismatics are taught to expect that salvation brings with it blessings of all kinds – material blessings and spiritual blessings as well.

Accordingly, neo-Pentecostals are taught that physical healing is part of the atonement, and that proper faith will bring the desired results. The theology of neo-Pentecostals is that faith, giving and honoring the men of God can buy healing, deliverance, and all desired ends. Thus, for them, believers should experiment their faith by giving financial and material gifts as well as claiming whatever they desire by faith, and God will grant them accordingly.

According to White (2021:266), the majority of neo-Pentecostal churches operate in urban centres, and their main mission targets are university students, professionals, and middle-class income workers. Generally, Pentecostalism is fronted by charismatic figures who are highly gifted in public speaking and in working miracles. Commonly, neo-Pentecostalism is claimed to be inspired and sustained by God for the demonstration of his Word. White (2021:1) adds that some neo-Pentecostals have administrative structures while others do not have such. Whether with or without structures, neo-Pentecostal founders lead their denominations with supreme authority.

All things considered, many neo-Pentecostal churches are motivated by economic (*saving people from poverty*), social (*addressing witchcraft, demonic and related evils*) and political (*liberating congregants from bureaucratic classical Pentecostal governance, i.e. episcopal and Presbyterian*) factors. Unfortunately, the majority of neo-Pentecostal leaders ended up serving themselves and exploiting the needy, moving followers from bureaucracy to dictatorship and autocracy. In view of this, the following section reviews the problems of *diakonia* in Africa.

The problems and panaceas of *diakonia* in African neo-Pentecostalism

There are several problems bedevilling *diakonia* in neo-Pentecostal churches. Drawing from an in-depth research and reflections on practical theological scholarship and observations, this section finds erroneous hermeneutics, faulty

hermeneutics, faulty theology, poor mentorship, nepotism, poor economics, and unprofessional administration problematising diaconal ministry in African neo-Pentecostalism. Respectively, it recommends theological training, ecumenical engagement, and the institution of a regulatory body to educate and empower gospel ministers to revise their hermeneutics, theologies, ecclesiology, governance, and administration for the execution of *diakonia* as well as other aspects of *missio ecclesiae*.

Erroneous hermeneutics and wrong theology

It is observed that most African neo-Pentecostal leaders take the Bible literally, misinterpret it and thus develop wrong theologies. Examples of Scriptures that they misconstrue, include the Old Testament book of Malachi 3:6–12 which numerous neo-Pentecostals publicly use to legalise tithing when the New Testament require cheerful giving. Likewise, issues of seeding through 'men of God' *(whereby congregants are told to sacrificially give their pastors more cash and kind gifts because blessings correspond with their giving),* imply an unbiblical theology that trades off blessings. While the concept of 'seeding' is biblical, the author agrees with Muyambo (2020:26–27) who argues that 'most church leaders have been in the firing line for encouraging seeding for their personal gain', while believers who seed continue to plummet in poverty. Relatively, such self-enriching leaders neglect *diakonia*, while impoverishing their congregations and communities. This article detects that most self-serving neo-Pentecostal heads are a mixed bag of theologically trained and untrained founders and leaders. Very few of them hold diplomas and degrees in theological education. In agreement with scholars such as Wahl (2013:267), Hadebe (2017:3), Amanze (2008:2–3), Bowers (2007:138), Brunsdon and Knoetze (2021:278), theological education and training matters to prepare and enhance African gospel ministers to be competent. Accordingly, it is believed that those who go through seminaries, Bible schools, theological colleges and universities get enlightened enough to research, interpret, teach, preach, and apply Scripture properly. Scripturally, training and education augment the work of ministry as the following references reflect:

> '11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love' (Eph 4:11–16; Online RSV Bible Gateway:n.p.).

> '2 and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also' (2 Tm 2:2; RSV Online Bible Gateway:n.p.).

'Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Tm 2:15; King James Version Online Bible Gateway:n.p.).

When leaders misinterpret the Bible, they eventually misuse and abuse it, advance wrong theologies, and manipulate their congregations for self-enrichment. This is why some of them have been selling anointing oils, wristbands, stickers, and handkerchiefs; charging one-on-one counselling, prophetic meetings, and related schemes to enrich themselves as reflected by the following media headlines:

'That will be R7 000! Bushiri charges fans for a face-to-face meeting' (IOL News, 10 December 2020). The story exposes self-the enrichment schemes of Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering church from Malawi.

Makandiwa and Magaya charge US$1500 per person for 'solutions' (Nehanda Radio, 22 May 2016b) The article talks about Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa of the United Family International Ministries and Prophet Walter Magaya of the Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance (PhD) ministries from Zimbabwe.

How pastor who charges N310.000, keeps dozens of Nigerians in church in preparation for 'rapture' (ICIR News, 29 April 2022). The story chronicles the extremes of the Nigerian prophet Noah Abraham, the founder of the Christ High Commission Ministries who manipulated his congregants to dispose of their belongings and give him proceeds after prophesying to them that rapture was imminent.

Besides that, some neo-Pentecostal leaders have a narrow salvific theology of *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae*. They focus on *kerygma* and ignore other dimensions of the mission. Arguably, theological education can correct their hermeneutics and theology of mission to work beyond *kerygma* to *diakonia*. However, theological education may not tackle wrong hermeneutics and theologies alone. This is because theological education is also spoiled by the proliferation of self-serving, ill-resourced denominational and interdenominational schools. Some neo-Pentecostals established their own institutions and prophetic and charismatic curriculums, and used their loyal subordinates to teach their wrong theologies! Meanwhile, several African theological institutions are currently economically constrained and losing experts, who are leaving for greener pastures elsewhere. The remnant of competent theologians is now frustrated by meagre remuneration and is no longer giving their best attention to students. Although we still have a fraction of passionate trainers who continue to equip upcoming ministers of religion, we cannot dispute the fact that standards fall when economies plummet. Thus, even those who enrol at formerly sound institutions may no longer be getting the expected standards. Moreover, some of the neo-Pentecostal leaders do not value education. They secularise knowledge and spiritualise ignorance. 'Studying theology will not call, anoint, and empower me to deliver in ministry. God calls and equips His own!', said one of the Zimbabwean Church leaders in an ecumenical *WhatsApp* group discussion. It is agreeable, as

reflected before, that theological education does not guarantee ministerial effectiveness. Generally, this is because education is theoretical, and ministry is practical. That is why there are some uneducated and other less educated gospel ministers who appear to be doing very well in ministry, while some of the educated are failing. Nonetheless, various benefits of theological education, such as hermeneutical skills, leadership know-how, communication skills and philosophical empowerment cannot be nullified.

Zero or poor mentorship

Studies suggest that the majority of African neo-Pentecostal churches lack leadership accountability, stewardship of resources as well as accommodate autonomy and the abuse of authority. Some of the scholars who have studied this, White and Pondani (2022), find that most neo-Pentecostal denominations are under the leadership of untrained and unaccountable prophets, and say that in the light of the gaps in good stewardship and accountability, one might argue that imposters may have entered into the 'Church' because the very absence of regulation makes it easier to engage in fraud without detection.

In agreement with the scholars, mentorship can help. As Graffius (2019) notes:

[*M*]inistry in the name of Jesus is too demanding for a solo performance. It is foolhardy for anyone to attempt to be a mission leader in the name of Christ without the supervision, accountability, support, advice, humor, and receptivity that characterize good mentoring. (p. 1)

Defined by Akano (2022:26) by means of discipleship, instructing or training of an individual through the words and deeds for their enlightenment, empowerment and development, biblical examples of mentorship of Joshua by Moses, Elisha by Elijah, the 12 disciples by Jesus Christ, Paul by Barnabas, and Timothy by Paul, signify its importance. When leaders lack mentorship and accountability, they neglect servanthood and become authoritarian, because nobody advises and corrects them. Although some leaders engage with those who do the same as they do to become their 'spiritual fathers', they get more of their extremes! Popular examples are such as the Malawian prophet, Shepherd Bushiri, who calls himself 'Major One' who publicised his submission to the Zimbabwean prophet, Eubert Angel, who is based in the United Kingdom. Prophet Eubert Angel, who also calls himself Major 'Prophet', submits to the Nigerian pastor, Chris Oyakilome. Zimbabwean Emmanuel Makandiwa is mentored by the Ghanaian prophet, Victor Boateng. Such, and related mentees and mentors, are all charismatic prophets, prosperity gospel proponents and well publicised in the mainstream media as controversial, self-centred and commercialising the gospel (Banda 2021:5; Benyah 2018:125–128; Kgatle 2022a:4–5; Moyet 2021:n.p.; Nehanda Radio, 15 April 2016a; The Standard, 01 March 2015). Such a kind of mentorship is arguably ineffective. It only yields their personal interests, such as impartation for prophetic and miraculous exploits. Somehow,

having and publicising a foreign spiritual father also decorates and maximises one's popularity and followers. Genuine mentorship with sound leaders who can provide biblical counselling begets objective discipleship for holistic ministry that encompasses *diakonia*.

Nepotism

As well observed by Orogun (2020:218), lots of African neo-Pentecostal churches developed family dynasties and monarchical systems in which denominational ownership, trusteeship and royalty are retained within the founder's family. The generality of neo-Pentecostal leaders appoint their spouses, trusted family members, relatives, and friends into pivotal key leadership positions. Examples such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA, based in Zimbabwe), Christ Embassy (in Nigeria), Spirit Embassy (in Zimbabwe), Power Chapel Worldwide (in Ghana), Alleluia Ministries (in South Africa) and Be Free church (in Botswana)'s leaders, family members or closest and most loyal friends are the signatories to all their denominational accounts. Additionally, the founders and family members are title deeds holders of all the fixed and movable assets of their churches. Thus, they have turned their churches into family possessions. While such practices are common and acceptable in secular businesses, they are unacceptable in ecclesiology. Although issues of loyalty, calling and ministries are mentioned as the main factors behind their stance, the trend suggests conquest and retention of power, wealth, and security. Appointing family members, relatives, and friends into positions of authority, keeps benefits among themselves. Consequently, they serve themselves instead of serving the people. When they consider giving, relatives and friends will be prioritised. Yet, the diaconal ministry should not be selective. It is arguable that nepotism rises from flawed hermeneutics and wrong theologies because, if God and his Bible are well conceptualised, anybody whom God calls and gifts for ministry, will be taken on board regardless of how close they are to church founders and leaders. When that is respected, *missio ecclesiae* and *diakonia* would be inclusively and impartially attended to. Expediently, it is recommendable for ecumenical bodies to counsel neo-Pentecostal church leaders on theological, governmental, and administrative issues through seminars and conferences. Even if some big-headed leaders may not attend, as they can disregard dissenting voices, progressive ecumenical engagements can serve others.

Poor economics

Economic crises and poverty have been worsening in Africa since 2008 (Christensen 2023:n.p.; Jennings & Oldiges 2020:1–2; Maswana 2010:2; Nyika 2005:1). Such a predicament also constrained churches from affording *diakonia*. Considering that many Pentecostals depend on tithes, freewill offerings, and other congregational gifts, they correspondingly lost much income, as congregants have been losing incomes, especially when COVID-19 crumbled businesses, jobs, and revenues.

Resultantly, a number of economically challenged neo-Pentecostal denominations have been struggling to meet their operating costs (i.e. electricity, water bills and pastors' support). As such, they got incapacitated and do not afford any missionary work. Besides attending internal *leitourgia* (worship services) at local venues, affected churches lost the capacity for any external missionary programmes. The costs of fuel, electricity and related essentials rose from the effects of COVID-19, the Ukrainian war and local African political volatility; everything got expensive.

In such a situation, very few churches attended *diakonia*. Large numbers of neo-Pentecostals narrowed their focus to their congregational and family needs. However, economic difficulties cannot justify inattention to *diakonia*. Arguably, genuine other-centred disciples can always share the little they have with others. As Jesus Christ exemplified love, selflessness, other-centredness, and generosity (i.e. Phlp 2:5–8; 2 Cor 8:9; Jn 5:30), his followers should always strive to be selfless, as mirrored by Philippians 2:3–4:

> [3]Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. [4]Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5]Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. (RSV Online Bible Gateway:n.p.)

Thus, economic excuses cannot rationalise limiting or neglecting diaconal ministry. As Augustine (2016:79) deducts communal economics from Acts 4.32–33, collective sharing enhances sustenance even in harsh times. Ideally, national and international ecumenical bodies should facilitate deliberations on biblical communal economics and *diakonia*. Such efforts can serve the needy from the greedy when leaders are enlightened to live the gospel *diaconal*.

Unprofessional administration

Neo-Pentecostal *ecclesiologies* and governance are pastors-centred. The majority of African neo-Pentecostal founders and leaders claim to be theocratic while using dictatorial and autocratic leadership styles as and when they choose, mostly for the advancement of their own interests. Many times, they micromanage everything.

Sharma (2022:n.p.) conceptualises micromanagement as a management style with direct and total control, supervision, involvement and frequent checking of every detail, work and performance. Consequentially, such management personalises and degrades professional administration. Thereupon, planning, budgeting, mobilisation, and distribution of resources fulfil needs and wants of the leading few at the expense of the followers.

In such scenarios, resources are often exhausted in meeting leaders' priorities and very little, if any, is left for holistic *missio*

ecclesiae. Generally, *kerygma* and *leitourgia* get attention while *koinonia* and *diaconia* remain unattended. Observations in some African churches uncovered that most neo-Pentecostal prophets and pastors rarely attend congregants' funerals, weddings, and related events. They only visit and socialise with selected wealthy congregants who give them much and seldom attend to the masses. For the rest, they sometimes send representatives and generally neglect the unknown needy. Likewise, such leaders' *diakonia* is selective. While few of them established diaconal committees to serve their caring ministries, scores of them usually care for their relatives, friends, and/or supporters. Yet, choosy *diakonia* is ungodly. As the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37) embodied Christly *diakonia*, it should be open for everyone who is in need.

So, it is advisable to shun pastor-centred ecclesiology, authoritarian leadership styles, uphold professional administration and accountancy to realise *diakonia* in neo-Pentecostalism. Considering that self-serving leaders may not reform themselves out of power and affluence, an inclusive, independent, and non-governmental regulatory body could help. This is recommendable because existing local ecumenical bodies are exclusive to either evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, or other orientations. Thus, an interfaith regulatory body can be established with representatives from different backgrounds. This is also suggested against State regulation, which is retrogressive in view of religious freedom as Henrico (2019:12) and Pollitt (2017:n.p.) note. All things considered for the sake of impartial engagements, reviews, and enforcement of progressive development of accountable church governance, administration and *diakonia*, an inclusive and independent body is highly recommendable. As long as pastor-centred ecclesiology, authoritarianism, micromanagement, and maladministration remain unquestioned, self-styled neo-Pentecostals may continue serving themselves instead of serving others.

Conclusion

This article conceptualised *diakonia*, overviewed neo-Pentecostalism and reviewed its problems and recommended some strategies to serve the needy from greedy ecclesiastic leaders. Taking *diakonia* from its biblical position as an integral part of *missio Dei* and *missio ecclesiae*, it explored its meaning beyond common care for the needy, to inclusive embodiment of the love, grace, generosity, and holistic care for not only the poor, widows, and orphans, but for everyone and everything in need of help such as human, animal and environmental victims of political intolerance and violence, natural disasters, pandemics and related predicaments. It detects that in neo-Pentecostalism is problematised by the selfish pastor-centred ecclesiology, authoritarian leadership styles, flawed hermeneutics, wrong theologies, nepotism, a lack of, or poor mentorship, economic meltdown, and maladministration. All these lead to manipulative schemes such as seeding for blessings, charging one-on-one counselling, prophecy and healing meetings as well as trading anointing oils, handkerchiefs, stickers, and various other stuff. Therefore, this article recommends

theological education, ecumenical engagement, and the establishment of an inclusive and independent regulatory body to enhance the revision of neo-Pentecostals' hermeneutics, theologies, *ecclesiologies*, governance and administration. When all is said and done, the integral mission of the church can attended to, greed may die, and *diakonia* may be realised in African neo-Pentecostalism.

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