

# The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration, by Marius Nel.

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In the book *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration*, Marius Nel (2020) concurs with some of the post-COVID-19 researchers who have contended that African Pentecostalism and/or Afro-Pentecostalism is not a mere duplication of Euro-American Pentecostalism. Even though all categories of global Pentecostalism (referring to the classical Pentecostal movement that grew out of the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement in the United States, Neo-Pentecostal independent groups with prophets and apostles as their leaders, and the charismatic movements that have been in existence since the 1960s) are beholden and/or comparing notes with the Euro-American Pentecostalism, the unique African flavour is still evident. In particular, Marius Nel (2020) has drawn the distinctiveness between the two brands by admitting that Afro-Pentecostalism embraces African worldview, indigenous resources and contemporary realities even as they focus on prosperity and wholeness of life.

The main strength in Marius Nel's (2020) book, *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration*, is the bold appreciation of Pentecostalism's social influence on the global community, especially in the 21st century. This huge influence is also captured in Julius Gathogo's works, "Theo-Political Dominance of Afro-Pentecostalism in the 21st Century" *US-China Law Review*, 11(11), 2014, pages 1499 – 1515; and "Afro-Pentecostalism and the Kenyan political landscape," *Swedish Missiological Themes (SMT)*, 2(2013), pp. 203 – 230. Elle Hardy, an Australian-born journalist and writer based in New Orleans, USA, has echoed the



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same position. In her book *Beyond Belief* (2022, Hurst), Hardy demonstrates how Pentecostal faith is “taking over the world.” In some places, it inspires anti-establishment politics, from the 45th American president, Donald Trump (who reigned from 2017 to 2021), to Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who served as the 38th Brazilian president from 2019 to 2022. In Europe, Australia, and Korea, Pentecostalism engages in cultural wars and social media. It offers meaning and a sense of belonging to a community to the disenfranchised of the global community. Its holistic appeal is seen in the fact that it is not just a soul-winning enterprise but strives to transform lives and societies as it controls their modes of socio-political affairs. In this schema, their ‘prophets’ have the influence and resources that enable them to wage their versions of holy wars.

In this book, *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration*, Marius Nel (2020), an Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of South Africa, speaks as an insider Pentecostal adherent. AFM is a classical Pentecostal Christian denomination in South Africa, with 1.2 million followers. It is the largest Pentecostal church in South Africa, constituting 7.6% of the country’s population. Nel, an AFM Cleric turned scholar and research professor at the Unit for Reformed Theology, Faculty of Theology, Potchefstroom Campus, North-West University, brings out the power and impact of African Pentecostalism, which is well-spiced with both indigenous resources and the American prosperity theologies. He traces today’s scenario from the early distribution of the American prosperity theology books in South Africa, like in the rest of the continent, and the resultant effects obtained today. Hence, educating the masses about prosperity theologies through published works was a major starting point, coupled with spirited campaigns.

In his preface, Nel (2020) gives a graphic account of how he recovered from an ailment after he “consented to the voice of God” (ix). He also recounts how he prayed for many sick people during his 35 years of ministry, some of whom recovered from various ailments miraculously. While affirming his belief in the faith-healing ministry of the church of Christ, he realistically questions the link that Pentecostals had traditionally made between healing and atonement. He also questions the direct link between prosperity and atonement, as prosperity teaching has been doing for the past 50 years.

As stated, the purpose of Nel’s (2020) book, *The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: An African Pentecostal Hermeneutical Consideration*, is to describe Pentecostal hermeneutics regarding its viewpoints toward the prosperity gospel. This is well executed by appealing to both the New and Old Testaments and via surveying of literary studies. It is a welcome reading, from an insider Pentecostal leader to scholars of the sociology of religion, intercultural students, and scholars of the emerging Afro-Pentecostal studies, locally and globally.