

# Prophet and politician dining around the same table: God's message in conflict?

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The research problem in this article is the modern prophets who rub shoulders with politicians. The focus is on the prophets found in New Prophetic Churches (NPCs). These prophets seek favours as much as politicians seek favours that are divinely sanctioned by prophets. The objectives here include ensuring that God's message is not conflicted because of this prophet-politician symbiosis. It warns Christians not to commodify faith in order to achieve some political ambitions. The foundation is laid on biblical teachings on prophets and prophecy. There are two identified categories of the Old Testament prophets. Those who feasted with the kings at dinner tables and those who suffered under the status quo. These were banished, exiled, always on a run, and sometimes beheaded. Real-world examples of modern politicians who visit prophets on a regular basis are offered using social media and literature evaluations as resources. These politicians do so for a variety of reasons, including seeking spiritual affirmation and expressions of appreciation, praying for divine intervention during times of crisis that may affect their political careers or performances, and eventually soliciting favours. These favours are sought in some ungodly exchanges with expectations of some kickbacks. The solution to this compromise is the calling for the revisit of application of doctrinal and ethical dealings in and by the church and the government. Theology's task is to clarify to citizens the relationship between church and government. The debate between these two powers (prophet and politician) should continue towards amicable understanding. The church must redefine its political involvement to avoid being swallowed up, and to remain the salt of the earth and a light in the world.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The article's intradisciplinary implication is realised through the literature and social media platforms reviews to enhance social and some theological disciplines such as biblical studies, church history, ecclesiology and pneumatology. Social disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology combined with theological disciplines argue that prophets and politicians should not become bedfellows unless for enacting social justice and this to be done ethically without any compromise to morality.

**Keywords:** prophet; politician; prophetic; church; relationship; faith; biblical.

## Introduction

A modern common fad within ecclesiastical circles is prophecy: a divine revelation about people's deep life and circumstances popularised by figures calling themselves prophets. These prophets are the superstars commonly found in the charismatic churches of our day. The recent appellation of these churches is New Prophetic Churches (NPCs) or New Prophetic Movement (NPM). These prophets are men and women who claim to have divine capacity to mysteriously predict the future and go deep into people's personal lives. They are the authority by themselves as they always utter 'The Lord told me' or 'The Lord showed me'. There are very few similarities between the biblical prophets and these modern ones. The differences are aplenty, comparatively speaking. In this article the word 'prophet' is used in general terms to refer to the preacher of the gospel, the pastor of today's church. However, the illustrations used are from the modern-day prophets as the hypothesis that God's message is conflicted when a prophet and a politician become the bedfellows.

## Biblical prophets and prophecy

There were two types of prophets, especially in the Old Testament. Firstly, those who feasted with the kings at dinner tables. One can think of the prophets of Baal (1 Ki 18:19), those who supported

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Ahab the king of Israel (1 Ki 22), Amaziah, the opponent of Amos the prophet and others. These were politically connected and co-opted to speak positively about the evil leaders or national crises. Their prophetic utterances were always affirmative promises of favour, influence and prosperity to the king. The king held them in high esteem. They found it inconsiderate or unthankful to bite the hand that gives them bread. Shearman (2003:25) says they were short-sighted and blinded by their vanity to the reality of God's judgement by saying, 'God is with us, everything will work out alright'.

Secondly, those who suffered under the status quo. They were banished, exiled, always on the run, and sometimes beheaded. One can think of Jeremiah the weeping prophet, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist, among others. They suffered because of their bold voices about injustice and exploitation of the marginalised members of the society. This is something that continues even today, as De Gruchy (2016:165) says that 'Prophets of God's justice are invariably rejected by the authorities and end up in prison or worse'. They suffer because like their Old Testament predecessors, they rebuke the injustices and acts of immorality of their leaders (1 Ki 18:4). They play advocacy for the poor and the oppressed. They unashamedly condemn any political or social menace directed to the poor, widows, orphans, foreigners, among others. Kings abhorred these prophets but resorted to them only when national crises were unbearable, especially when the national security was threatened by the foreign military powers. Eugene H Merrill (1971), the noted evangelical Bible scholar gives the essence and the meaning of the Old Testament prophet:

Old Testament prophetism had its emphasis on proclamation as well as prediction. And that proclamation was generally not in cryptic, esoteric terms but in language of reproof, correction, judgment, comfort, and encouragement that the least initiated could well understand. The oracles of the prophets were nearly always expositions or reminders of the Mosaic Law, centered in revelation that had already been propounded in Israel's past. This is not to deny the predictive element; virtually all the writing prophets speak of the future, both immediate and eschatological. But the emphasis was decidedly historical, contemporary, and practical for the personal and national life. (p. 8)

Prophets were raised at a particular era, especially when, like in the case of Samuel, the national social distinctiveness was compromised with the implied rejection of the Lord's theocratic rule. Elijah-Baal's prophets is a typical example when a national crisis was both religious (God versus Baal) and social (safety in the land versus monarchical injustices i.e. Naboth and Jezebel). There were conflicting messages, all claiming to be of divine origin (Wright 2004:59). The era was in some ways very syncretic, because in Israel there was no dichotomy between a secular and a religious realm. The political realm had to conform to ethico-religious requirements (Wurzbarger 1994:92).

The New Testament prophecy persuaded believers of the authenticity of their Christian faith (1 Cor 14:22) and to convince unbelievers of the credibility of the gospel of Christ

(14:24, 25). It was principally the proclamation of revelation and not the reception of revelation. The gospel was and continues to be the only message that can convict and convince, so prophesying was and still is the most certain means of the proclamation of that message. There is no dogmatic evidence of personal prophecy in the New Testament unaccompanied by gospel proclamation or faith response. For instance, Agabus' prophecies were followed by church commitment for poverty alleviation (Ac 11:27-30; 21:10-14) and the apostolic proclamation to give God's sovereignty to prevail ('The Lord's will be done'). This is attested by Soko (in ed. Kroesbergen 2016:89), that 'for any religious practice, there necessarily exists a connected social phenomenon, which becomes the enacted place for such practices to flourish and gain acceptance'. The religious practice referred to here is prophesy.

The gift of prophecy is the capacity to expound publicly truth (of a predictive nature as well as explanatory) from God in order to exhort, edify, or console believers and to convince non-believers of God's truth (Miller 1987; Ryrice 1980:85-86). That is, a prophet is one who is deeply impressed that God has, by the Spirit of God, given him a message that he proclaims with authority and conviction. This message may result in further insight in God's Word, conviction of sin, reproof or comfort or a new direction that the church may take. Many times the message may speak to a prominent issue, the speaker not been aware that he or she is speaking prophetically.

The prophet (pastor, preacher) is therefore, both a pulpit activist and a political activist. As a pulpit activist he denounces, edifies, and rebukes vocally from the pulpit. The messages proclaimed are prophetic, because they are declarative. According to Orogun and Pillay (2023:1-2), 'pulpit activism speaks against corruption, social injustice, inequality, poor governance, nepotism, tribalism, and disregard for the rule of law'. They speak truth to power whenever a need arises, hence their ministry engagement is always contextual (Kroesbergen 2016).

As a political activist, the prophet comes to people, doing incarnational ministry on the cutting edges of the society that has been politically compromised and victimised. Political activism by a prophet is when words are translated into actions, theories become practical, and verbal proposals are implemented. It calls for inevitable church and government interaction based on concrete facts of righting the wrongs in political systems and/or processes. It is not the individual's secret encounter to exchange favours, but a public dialogue to walk together in the light as a church and government. The prophets in this category are social change agents for both current and eschatological realisations (VanGemeren 1990:31).

In the real sense, a prophet is a national troublemaker. The prophet is always against the status quo. Think of the texts such as: *When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, 'So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?'* (1 Ki 18:17 NLT), *Then Amaziah said*

to Amos, 'Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom'. (Am 7:12–13 NLT), Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region (Mark 5:17 NIV), 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us (Ac 5:28, NLT). From these texts one can deduce that the biblical prophecies were accompanied by political and religious rebukes. Prophets were at loggerheads with the politicians and through some political powers, they were incarcerated, banished, flogged, and made to suffer the public shame. Political powers and secular religions abhorred the prophetic declarations and calls to justice. It was difficult for the two to dine around the same table, as confirmed by Baldwin (1992:29) that 'the prophetic viewpoint was negative with regard to the monarchy', so the two could not walk together unless they agreed. According to Swindoll (2000:144), the rationale of their lives is being targets of oppression. They were famous but not popular. Political powers (kings) regarded them as strange seers coming from nowhere to wreak havoc on the national life.

## Modern prophets dining with politicians

It has become popular for politics and church to mingle and court each other. This is popular in South African Independent Churches, especially of those African Zionism and Charismatic inclinations. It is not a fairly new thing as even apartheid South Africa was noted for it.

Apartheid and Calvinism were Siamese twins, so intertwined that for close to five decades South Africa was dubbed the most Calvinistic country outside of North America and Europe. The church and the government were the symbiotic siblings or Siamese twins. The prophet, preacher or a pastor and a politician were bedfellows feeding and warming each other ideologically. Resane (2017a:125) informs us that, 'The National Party and the NGK became bedfellows, and their synergy in socio-political matters led to the entrenchment and enhancement of the apartheid ideology'. All attempts of *koinonia* beyond skin colour, but under one confession and one liturgy drew a blank. Giliomee (2003:484) refers to the multiracial conference for all three reformed traditions (Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk, Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk and Gereformeerde Kerk) convened by Professor G.B.A. Gardener of Stellenbosch University in 1950, which concluded that 'If the contribution of every racial group in this, our common fatherland, is to be guaranteed, the way of separation and not of integration is the correct one'. This was one of the good tidings for the National Party that was already in power for the second year under the NGK dominee, D.F. Malan. The prophet (Gardener) and the politician (Malan) became ideologically *di ya thoteng di bapile* [comrades in arms]. Indeed, 'As apartheid was enhanced politically, so it was theologically, especially ecclesiologically' (Resane 2017a:125).

The Bantustan leaders such as Lennox Sebe of Ciskei, Kaizer Matanzima of Transkei, and Lucas Mangope of Bophuthatswana are noted for familiarity of surrounding themselves with African Independent Churches (AICs), not exclusively the AIC but men and women in general. Some Sundays are declared as national days of prayer (for government, e.g. for rain) and colourful of cloth church leaders find themselves with government leaders, which these church leaders regarded as an honour to be closer to the 'president'. In some instances, the president will be a guest of honour to their church services or cultic centres such as Morija of Zion Christian Church in Limpopo, Silo in Zuurbekom outside Soweto, Ekuphakameni of Shembe's Church in KwaZulu-Natal, or any mega church gathering that attracted thousands of devotees on Sundays or any other religious holiday. The religious leaders felt honoured whenever visited by politicians.

The historical evolvement of South African church shows how politicians and prophets became bedfellows, even from beyond apartheid era to the new dawn of democracy. Whenever democratic South Africa is faced with some episodes of crises, the politicians run to the prophet or pastor or preacher in search of some divine affirmation.

From as far as the colonial era, the prophet and the politician were unashamedly in some form of symbiosis. For instance, in March 1899, the acting president of the Baptist Union, Rev G.W. Cross, invited the Transvaal Republic President Paul Kruger to formally open the assembly in Pretoria. In Rev. Cross' welcoming address for Kruger, he proclaimed (Batts 1920):

We have seen the marvelous rise of this State; have noted its wonderful deliverances, and have honoured in you, sir, a strong, God-fearing ruler – one entrusted by God with a sword of the State – called to be God's minister to this people for good. We have rejoiced in you as an upholder of the Protestant faith and noted with joy your service and support of your own Puritan Church.... (p. 193–194)

Resane (2017b) decries this symbiosis:

This address and Kruger's consequent address demonstrate how the earlier white Baptists were accommodating racial discrimination of the time. That era demonstrates their synchrony as bedfellows with politicians who embraced and emphasized ideology of *divide et impera* [*divide and rule*]. (p. 22)

It is clear from this event that once the prophet and the politician become yoked together, they formulate policies that are not in line with biblical social justice. In this case, racism was endorsed as the best route for the survival of one particular racial group. The prophetic role was compromised, and social injustice was embraced and promoted. This symbiosis leaves the people of faith with some uneasiness, although the prophet-politician encounters show clapping of the hands, standing ovations accompanied by sloganeering in the form of songs or rallying calls such as raised fists with the shouts of *Amandla!* with antiphonal response from the

congregation: *Awethu!* This is what Moltmann (1975) cautions:

If a preacher uses his pulpit to make political speeches instead of proclaiming the Word of God to faith or if, on the other hand, a politician uses his campaign speeches for making pious, high-flown remarks, instead of delivering a clear political program to the people, we all have an uneasy feeling. Politicizing theologians and pietizing politicians are neither fish nor fowl. Dealing with such mixtures certainly cannot be our object. (p. 101)

The former president of Zambia, Frederick Chiluba, famous for declaring Zambia a Christian country visited the Nigerian prophet, T.B. Joshua twice. During his second visit in November 2009, he encouraged leaders to depend on God for peaceful leadership and pleaded that it is critical that leaders watch Emmanuel Television Channel.<sup>1</sup> Amazingly, like the previous president of South Africa, Chiluba's post-presidential era was clouded with varying allegations of corruption. However he was consequently cleared of all these allegations. The other Head of State who visited T.B. Joshua is the former president of Ghana, John Atta Mills in January 2016. He went there to specifically testify to the accurate prophetic messages Joshua had given him before his ascension to power.

At the height of President Zuma's turbulent presidential term, when political wheels were falling off, South Africa went up for sale for what is politically known as state capture; the Commission for Religious and Linguistic Rights (CRL) was vigorously investigating some NPCs that were under spotlight for human rights and dignity abuse and corrupt financial management. The public was sitting on the edge, expecting Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries International in Sandton, Johannesburg to be summoned to the Commission. Instead, the police top brass accompanying the Minister of Police, Nathi Nhleko, paid a visit to Lukau, and the prophet went further to give the minister an award.<sup>2</sup>

In 2016, the then Minister of Water and Sanitation, Ms Nomvula Mokonyane, one of those implicated in state capture saga and a dedicated Catholic believer, visited the controversial Prophet Mboro Motsoeneng of Incredible Happenings Ministries in Katlehong, Ekurhuleni.<sup>3</sup> It was a year of drought in Southern Africa and Mokonyane embarked on prayers for rain. The politician and the prophet rubbed shoulders trying to invoke the divine intervention during the natural hazard.

One of the controversial policemen ever to be appointed to lead the Hawks (police) by Minister Nathi Nhleko is Berning Ntlemeza. The North Gauteng High Court found him not fit to hold the office. In the midst of his struggles for judicial

1. <https://www.scoan.org/blog/2009/11/26/it-is-critical-that-leaders-watch-emmanuel-tv-chiluba/> (viewed 05 February 2023).

2. Man of cloth honours men in blue: Top cops visit controversial pastor's church to receive special prayer. *Rosebank Killarney Gazette*, 26 January 2017 <https://rosebankkillarneygazette.co.za/2017154/man-of-cloth-honours-men-in-blue/> (viewed 12 August 2022).

3. Macupe Bongekile, 'Nomvula Mokonyane joins Mboro in rain prayer' *Sowetan*, 07 November 2016 –13:10 <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2016-11-07-nomvula-mokonyane-joins-mboro-in-rain-prayer/> (viewed 12 August 2022).

survival, he visited Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng also known as Mboro in Ekurhuleni. Ntlemeza thanked the controversial prophet for blessing him and Mboro while praying for him also uttered some affirmative prophecy over him:

You are untouchable. You are undisputable ... Your life has not come to an end. It is just about to begin. Even if the court says it's over, God can resurrect you to greater heights.<sup>4</sup>

This prophecy was further enhanced by Motsoeneng that Ntlemeza should continue the good work he had already started, adding after the prayers that he need not fear anything.

One of the wealthiest prophets of our time, Shepherd Bushiri, is a Malawian who resided in South Africa until he locked horns with the law, charged with multimillion rands laundering. His church is called Enlightened Christian Gathering communing in Pretoria's showgrounds. In the recent past he received accolades from some Malawian and South African politicians, pledging their support for his calling, which they named a blessing to the rainbow nation. In 2016, Bushiri received in audience the two influential South African politicians, the then Minister of Home Affairs, Malusi Nkanyezi Gigaba and the leader of the third biggest political party, Economic Freedom Fighters' Julius Malema.<sup>5</sup> Whenever Bushiri visited his homeland of Malawi, he receives a welcome fit for the head of the state with military parade in the national stadium.

Major General Jabulani Zikhali was appointed by Ntlemeza as the head of Hawks in KwaZulu-Natal in 2016. The Hawks were about to arrest a Nigerian Pastor Timothy Omotoso of the Jesus Dominion International Church in Bloemfontein when they found Zikhali addressing the congregation. This pastor was accused of rape, sexual assault and human trafficking. According to Jacques Pauw (2022:105), Zikhali referred to Omotoso as 'Daddy' and said: 'I was a brigadier, but daddy prayed for me and I was upgraded to a major – general'. Judge Frans Diale Kgomo accused Zikhali for abuse of power by escorting Omotoso, a private citizen, by activating a blue intermittently flashing light reserved for escorting dignitaries or officials. This was regarded as the abuse of state resources; worst of all aided and abetted a criminal suspect to evade arrest.<sup>6</sup>

## God's message is conflicted

Some sectors of the society may not see anything wrong with the prophet and the politician dining around the same table. Others will vehemently oppose the feast, understandably so. Yet I believe convincingly that 'every table can be the Lord's table where meals become celebrations, where conversation builds community, where enemies become friends, where

4. You are untouchable, Pastor Mboro tells Ntlemeza (iol.co.za) (viewed 11 February 2023).

5. Malawi: Bushiri Gets South Africa Politicians Backing – Malema, Minister Gigaba Pay Spiritual Visit to Malawian Prophet – allAfrica.com (viewed 09 February 2023).

6. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/ex-hawks-boss-tried-to-protect-his-rape-accused-daddy-timothy-omotoso-697c99ca-e72d-4427-b2c4-bbe977c48596> (viewed 10 February 2023).

Jesus is known in the breaking of bread' (De Gruchy 2016:63). The prophet and the politician's dinner or breakfast table can be a suitable platform where truth is communicated. There is a need for collaborative sensibility, which is the fruitful conversational engagement about relatively common topics with people from different societal frameworks (Ottati 2017:133). Conversation for a common good is not a human anathema, but a necessity for human sensibility. What is crucial for believers in this narrative is to know that prophecy is not a *go tlhaba dinaane* [social discoursing through folklore], but a sensitive divinely directed communication of God to people. Prophecy and politics are always in conflict, as one is self-seeking, and another is God-seeking. God-human tangencies are inevitable. Prophecy (biblically) is the needed gospel when human nature forces us to coil into the hole when life becomes splintered and disarrayed. This is 'God's invitation to us to come out of hiding, accept that we are loved, and start loving' (De Gruchy 2016:46). This message of faith, hope and love in a time of doubt, despair and violence should be given without condemnation or selfishness. A prophet should seek after God's will, not self-will. Wallis (2006:6) poses a helpful question that; 'How does a person maintain a prophetic stance that speaks truth to power?' The answer provided to this question is straightforward that 'The prophetic task involves both *modeling* what God intends and *speaking out* for policies and institutions that support the biblical mandates for peace with justice' (p. 6). Prophetic message becomes conflicted when prophet-politician relationship becomes intimate and the prophet starts to fine-tune his or her prophecies giving affirmations to a politician and a politician thanking the prophet for utterances made. When all is done, a politician embarks on seeking divine intervention, sometimes at a cost. Sadly, monetary transactions between the prophet and the politician become a norm even for seeking special favours as 'pay-back time'. Politicians pursue the prophet in order to obtain divine affirmation. This in return lifts the profile of the prophet or his church. It is a great honour for the church to host a politician.

### Seeking affirmation and rendering thanksgiving

The close scrutiny of the two heads of state (Chiluba & Mills) visiting T.B. Joshua, and Ntlemenza visiting Mboro, demonstrate that politician-prophet encounters were twofold. Firstly, it was seeking affirmation because both went there prior to their ascension to power. Secondly, it was for thanksgiving because they saw the fulfilment of the prophet's utterances over their career. In these two encounters, one can deduce that just like the prophets of the Old Testament who feasted with kings, prophecies were never for justice to prevail. Similarly, there is no call for repentance and exhortation to live and lead righteously.

It has become a norm in South Africa that during the year of elections, the Easter Weekend is an opportunity for politicians to turn pulpits into political platforms. They do this by their presence or predication. Frahm-Arp (2019:314) highlights this fact that 'in the months leading up to the presidential

elections the leaders in the churches focused on citizen-oriented political activism'. For instance, News24 in 2019 reported that politicians took to the pews across the country on Easter Sunday 'in the last push for prayer ahead of the 08 May national and provincial election'. The Deputy President David Mabuza was spotted sharing a light moment with the leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters, Mr Julius Malema at the St Engenas Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Zion City, Moria in Limpopo Province. Mabuza was given a pulpit and as part of his predication he thundered: 'Please pray for the unity of our country. The aspiration of our people on whose back we stand should always be central to everything we do irrespective of our political affiliation'. News24 press statement continued to inform the public:

The ANC spread itself out, with Tony Yengeni worshiping in Langa, Cape Town; the ANC deputy provincial chair in the Eastern Cape; Bentley Vass and the regional chair, Abraham Vosloo, attending a service at the Roman Catholic church in Keimoes and treasurer general Paul Mashatile visiting the Mnceba Methodist Church in Mount Frere.

On the other side, the Elections Co-ordinator for the ANC, Fikile Mbalula visited the Tyrannus Apostolic Church in De Deur, Midvaal. He received a standing ovation with thunderous applause, with a refreshment table in front of him. He commented that he was 'humbled' by the 'rousing welcome' from the congregation in their matching church uniforms.<sup>7</sup>

These visits demonstrate that politicians tend to use religion to receive affirmations and to promote their aspirations. The church has become a campaigning platform and a price-awarding podium. During these visits one hardly hears of the hosting prophets rebuking sins in political echelons, corruption in the government, or rebuking unethical and immoral conduct of politicians. For that moment the corrupt in the corrupt services and leadership become angelic leaders, the saints not to be touched by the truth of the gospel.

Whenever the prophet and the politician dine around the same table, justice gets aborted, and righteousness gets derailed.

### Seeking divine intervention

When the Minister of Police visited Prophet Lukau, and the Minister of Water and Sanitation visited Mboro, the two sought after divine intervention. The minister of Police saw the writing on the wall that his job is in jeopardy, especially during the time when the President was changing the cabinet willy-nilly that *selepe sa magagane* [chopping axe] was on the heads of anyone in the cabinet. Not only that, the hosting prophet was sitting *ka lerago le lengwe fela* (sitting on the edge) because summons to CRL Commission were imminent, so giving favour to the minister (award) was an invocation for divine intervention. It was more like singing Fenny J Crosby's

<sup>7</sup><https://www.news24.com/news24/praying-before-the-polls-politicians-pull-out-church-suits-20190422> (viewed 22 February 2023).

pleading hymn: *While on others Thou art calling, Do not pass me by*. The Setswana and Sesotho translation is direct to this assumption: *Ha o ntse o thusa ba bang, o nthuse le nna* [As you help others, please help me also]. The Minister of Water and Sanitation used the advantage of the climax of *el nino*, while the sub-continent was hit with drought and excessive heat waves. She probably felt that all scientific measures have hit the wall. The nation was starting to be thirsty and food security in jeopardy. Like some Old Testament kings who resorted to the prophets of God only after all other means were exhausted, she sought after divine intervention.

### Seeking monetary and other favours

The main theological menace about today's prophets is the practice of entrepreneurial ecclesiology: a commercial approach to ministry described by Banda (2023) which:

[T]reats the church as a commercial business in which the prophet functions as a chief executive officer of a private company and church offerings treated as profits of business adventure. Their ministerial activities centre around their prophetic gift. (p. 1)

The gift is a drawing power of followership, fame, favour, and finances. This is demonstrated by the fame and opulence of Prophet Shepherd Bushiri and Major General Zikhali's regard for Prophet Omotoso. Bushiri is very rich that the media informs us that he is currently building a city in his home country, Malawi. It is reported that some politicians receive some financial favours from this man of God. There is even some rumour that Bushiri assisted the presidential campaigns of current pastor and/or theologian president of Malawi, Lazarus Chikwera. It is also reported that under the Home Affairs ministry of Malusi Gigaba, the prophet was fraudulently awarded a South African citizenship. The visit of Gigaba and Malema seems to be carrying some hidden motives. The prophet-politician symbiotic relationship here is for the exchange of some favours. Justice is derailed and ethics flawed.

The relationship of Zikhali with Omotoso raises eyebrows in the courts of justice and halls of politics, not to mention the pulpits of churches. Favour is given back because of the prophetic affirmation previously uttered by Omotoso. The prophet's breaking of the law, as far as Zikhali is concerned, should be glossed over and charge withdrawn. The law breaker's charge sheet should be rescinded for 'Daddy' to be free regardless of gross criminal charges against him. The narrative is a clear demonstration of the dangers when a prophet and a politician become bedfellows that justice processes and law enforcement become flawed.

During the recent Justice Zondo's Commission of Enquiry into the state capture that was pinnacled during the so called Nine Wasted Years of Zuma's presidency, the issue of 'brown envelope' kept surfacing during the judicial deliberations. The issue of the 'brown envelope' sometimes wrapped with the newspaper comes up few times when one reads Basson's *Blessed by Bosasa* (2019) or Myburgh's *Gangster State* (2019).

Whenever the politician, the businessman and/or the pastor come to the meal table, the 'brown envelope' was in the hand for exchange of favours. This 'brown envelope' contained thousands if not millions of rands as a bribe or a token of appreciation for fraudulence or corruption deal to be undertaken or just completed. Transaction is always done under the meal table, or electronically transferred, applying fraudulent procurement processes. All because the prophet or the politicians are aborting justice for the sake of self-enrichment. No matter how intentionally this is done, it is always at the expense of the poor and the citizens struggling for survival, as they deserve some services to meet their basic livelihood needs.

### What can be done?

In the interest of social justice and ethical lifestyle, this situation calls for the revisit of application of doctrinal and ethical dealings in and by the church and the civil government. The task of theology to clarify the role and the relationship of the church and the government in the lives and affairs of civilians is crucial. Throughout history, the state-church tension or relationship evolved through different ideologies and dogmas. Liberalists, liberationists, fundamentalists and modernists hold swaying and different views concerning the church-state relationships. History is full of papal-monarchical tensions, government-church conflicts, and politician-preacher disagreements. The question of who is authoritative in matters of civility, faith, conduct, morality, social or religious obligations, among others, surfaced occasionally without any concrete conclusions. The 20th century theologian, Karl Barth (1957:719-722) was of the conviction that the church is the basis of all true sociality (Brunner 2002), while William Cavanaugh (2004) speaks of the church as the out-narration of the state – the notion that rejects the church to be a political interest group, but the church is there to 'out-public the state's claims to define the public realm.' Its role is that of reconciliation. This notion is enhanced by the fact that the church's political vocation is neither total alignment with any existing political state nor withdrawal into a sectarian enclave (Wells, Quash & Eklund 2017:248). The third approach is that of Oliver O'Donovan (2005:238) that the church is the destiny of the state, which is the perpetuation of Augustinian thought. His thesis is that none of the two institutions should sit on the judgement seat against each other, but for the church to maintain her end of political community that shapes humanity for social harmony.

The debate of these two centres of power (prophet and politician) should still continue and be theologically discoursed, not to win one, but to reach consensus and amicable understanding. There is no neutrality with prophecy. Radicalism is the insoluble characteristic of prophecy. Theological approach should be that of religious courtesan. This is done with the full understanding that (Wallis 2006):

The courts of power do not like to be challenged and remaining close to them often means giving up the ability to be prophetic and to speak truth to power. People thus co-opted are sometimes

reduced to keeping the peace between the exploiters and the exploited, instead of standing up for those victimized by the powerful. (p. 6)

The proposal made here is that the church needs to redefine its theology of political involvement, where it cannot be swallowed up and lose its saltiness and being the light of the world. Its prophetic role should remain steadfast and as an academy of justice, the church should continue to conscientise the state of injustices that cripple the society by abusing humanity that is created in the image of God. The church is to unshackle itself from the chains of political religion and strive to embrace the divine intent rather than taking orders from the political seats. Moltmann (1974) points out:

Unless Christian theology frees itself from the needs and demands of the prevalent political religions, there can be no liberating theology. An on the other hand, without Christian criticism of religion, there can be no liberation of man in society. (p. 336)

Dining around the same table with a politician should be for the unfolding of justice and revelation of the righteousness of God. It should be an important theological narrative that reveals ethically important truths that foster certain virtues, moral ambitions and ethical motivations for peace and justice (Biggar 2011:37–38).

## Conclusion

The argument in this article is that a prophet and a politician cannot sit around the same table except for matters of enacting justice. The modern prophets are not in line with the biblical prophets who were always at the helm of national appeal for justice, righteousness and calling for repentance. Theocracy and democracy were and still continue to be at loggerheads. The two types of prophets that is, those dining with the kings and those who were the bold voices against the injustices authorised from the throne serve as a warning for modern prophets, especially those in the Neo-Charismatic Movement. Examples of politicians befriending prophets cited in this article serve as practical examples of compromising the real prophetic calling of the prophets. God's message is always conflicted when the prophet and the politician become symbiotic siblings as it has been demonstrated during the apartheid era. It is mentioned that politicians visit the cultic centres for various reasons: seeking divine affirmations and rendering thanksgiving, seeking divine interventions during times of crises affecting their political careers or performances, and facilitating monetary exchange for favours. The critical assessment here leaves the bottom line intact: a prophet and a politician should not become bedfellows except for the cause of justice.

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