

New Prophecy Movement and Black Churches in South Africa

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Abstract

In the context of the alleged end of apartheid, this essay examines the influence and effects of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM) on Black churches in South Africa. The NPM has become very popular in African Christian circles because of its charismatic leadership, ecstatic worship, and emphasis on prophetic utterances. In South Africa, the movement has found fertile ground within Black churches without excluding the other church ethnic groupings, which have historically played a central role in the socio-political and spiritual life of marginalised communities. The study examines the theological, cultural, and social dynamics driving the popularity of the NPM, as well as its implications for traditional Black church structures. Through examining the relationship between the NPM and indigenous African spirituality, the study evaluates how the movement alters perceptions of authority, prophecy, and community. The ethical and economic aspects of the NPM are also critically examined, especially in relation to its claims of prosperity and healing for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. Drawing on both historical and contemporary sources, this paper focuses on the complications of NPM's rise and its contested position within South African Christianity. Although the New Prophecy Movement gives many people spiritual agency, the study concludes that it also poses important theological and ethical issues regarding wealth, leadership, and the church's role in resolving socioeconomic injustices in South Africa after apartheid.

Keywords: Charismatic Leadership; Black Churches; South Africa; Post-Apartheid; Indigenous Spirituality; New Prophecy Movement Economic Justice

Contribution

A potential contribution of this paper lies in its critical analysis of the intersection between the New Prophecy Movement and African indigenous spirituality, providing ideas into how NPM reinterprets traditional understandings of prophecy and authority in Black churches. Also, the study stresses the ethical tensions between prosperity theology and socio-economic justice, providing a nuanced critique that can inform ecclesial responses to inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. This dual focus advances scholarly discourse on the role of charismatic movements in reshaping African Christianities.

Introduction

The New Prophecy Movement (NPM) – which combines aspects of Pentecostalism, African indigenous spirituality, and prophetic leadership – has become a well-known manifestation of charismatic Christianity. With South Africa as one of its major hubs, the movement, which started to gain traction in the late 20th century, has become especially influential in sub-Saharan Africa (Anderson, 2004:2–3). Ecstatic worship, a focus on healing and prophecy, and the assurance of divine intervention in individual and societal crises are characteristics of the NPM (Anderson, 2003:2, see also, 2013:1–10). The Black church context in South Africa, which has historically been characterised by political activism, cultural identity, and communal resilience, is where this movement has found a home. One of the fastest-growing subsets of Christianity worldwide is charismatic Christianity, which includes the New Prophecy Movement. Since their inception with the Pentecostal revival in the early 20th century, charismatic movements have extended beyond denominational boundaries and transformed Christianity, especially in the Global South (Ajoku, 2008:200–212, see also Gifford, 2015). What sets the NPM apart is its heightened focus on prophecy, spiritual warfare, and direct communication with the divine through 'prophets' who claim the unique authority to speak on behalf of God. These prophets often serve as central figures, around whom large congregations are built, offering promises of material prosperity, spiritual protection, and miraculous interventions (Qiki and Howes 2021:1–8).

In the African context, the NPM integrates elements of African Traditional Religion (ATR), especially in terms of its understanding of spirits, ancestors, and healing. This synthesis allows the movement to resonate with deep-seated cultural and spiritual frameworks that predate colonial Christianity. Therefore, in addition to being a religious phenomenon, the NPM is also a cultural force that presents alternative spiritualities that go against the conventional wisdom of Western theology¹ (Manganyi 2013:1–13; see also Banda, 2020:45–56). In this study, the relationship between traditional Black churches and the New Prophecy Movement in South Africa after apartheid is critically examined. The NPM's ascent in Black communities has sparked both excitement and anxiety because it offers a fresh approach to spirituality and church leadership that goes against accepted ecclesiastical conventions. This paper's main goals are to examine the theological and cultural foundations of the NPM, evaluate its ability to address modern issues like social justice and economic inequality, and analyse its sociopolitical effects on Black churches. This study is important because it helps us understand how religious movements like the NPM are changing South Africa's sociopolitical discourse and spiritual landscape. A notable departure from the liberation theology that traditionally defined Black churches during apartheid is the NPM's emphasis on individual prosperity and supernatural intervention. In a society still struggling with the effects of systemic oppression, economic inequality, and the pursuit of justice, this change calls into question the place of the church. Therefore, the goal of this study is to present a comprehensive analysis of how the socio-political realities of post-apartheid South Africa are both influencing and being influenced by the NPM.

¹ Maimela (1991:7) asserts that the indigenous countermovement emerged as a form of resistance against Western cultural and religious domination, ultimately leading to the establishment of African Independent Churches as a response to white-controlled denominations in the 19th century.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and interdisciplinary approach, combining historical, theological, and socio-cultural analysis. Sources were selected based on three criteria: (1) relevance to the rise of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM) in Africa and South Africa in particular; (2) their contribution to understanding the theological, cultural, and economic implications of prophetic Christianity; and (3) their representation of both critical and sympathetic voices. The study engages scholarly works in African theology, church history, and sociology of religion, alongside available publications. The paper does not involve fieldwork or the collection of primary data from human participants and, therefore, does not require ethical clearance. Instead, it engages exclusively with material that is already available publicly, including recorded sermons, published interviews, news articles, social media content, and documented statements from leaders of the New Prophecy Movement. These sources are supplemented by the author's critical reflections on the issues they raise within the South African context. Such publicly available data provides insight into the theological claims, leadership models, and socio-economic discourses of the movement, without direct interaction with congregants or leaders. The method is hermeneutical in that it seeks to interpret the NPM within South Africa's post-apartheid context, paying close attention to how African religio-cultural categories intersect with Christian prophetic practices.

An Overview of the Function of the Black Church Both During and After Apartheid

Black churches in South Africa played a crucial role in the fight against racial segregation and structural oppression during the apartheid era (1948–1994). Black South Africans were placed in lower social, political, and economic spheres by the apartheid government, which was founded on a system of racial classification and disenfranchisement. In this setting, the church emerged as a key organisation for fostering hope, community cohesion, and resistance (De Gruchy, 1995). Church leaders such as Desmond Tutu, Itumeleng Mosala and Allan Boesak, just to mention a few, emerged as prophetic voices, advocating for liberation theology—a theological framework that interprets the Christian message as one of liberation for the oppressed (Botha, 2018).

In addition to offering spiritual support, these churches got politically involved, opposing the apartheid regime by utilising biblical themes of oppression versus liberation, justice versus injustice, equality versus inequality, suffering versus freedom, etc. Black churches have had to adjust to new social realities in the post-apartheid era while upholding their dedication to justice and reconciliation. The alleged end of apartheid in 1994 gave churches a chance to address fresh concerns like land reform, economic inequality, and the persistent problem of poverty. However, their role in socio-political activism has sometimes been challenged by emerging religious movements like the NPM, which often focus more on personal spiritual experiences and prosperity than on systemic change (Molobi 2014).

The Rise of Charismatic Movements in Africa and South Africa

One important aspect of Africa's religious landscape has been the emergence of charismatic and Pentecostal movements, especially since the late 20th century. Because

of their focus on individual spiritual experiences, healing, and the direct work of the Holy Spirit in day-to-day life, these movements have expanded quickly (Kalu 2013). In the second half of the 20th century, charismatic Christianity gained popularity in South Africa as a substitute for both indigenous spiritualities and conventional mainline churches (Gifford, 2015). Charismatic movements' appeal in Africa is frequently attributed to their capacity to meet the existential needs of those residing in unstable political and socioeconomic environments. Through healing, prophecy, and miracles, they provide a theology of immediate spiritual intervention that speaks to the experiences of many Africans (Kgatle 2022; Banda 2020). Moreover, the flexibility and dynamism of charismatic movements allow them to adapt to local cultures while integrating elements of African traditional beliefs, such as the concept of spirits and ancestors, into their Christian practice (Chitando 2021). Scholars examining South African Pentecostalism have increasingly focused on the rise of New Prophetic Churches (NPCs).

While placing NPCs in the larger framework of South African Pentecostalism, these studies set them apart from the three main streams or sub-traditions that Anderson (1992:1–11) identified: African Independent Pentecostal Churches (AIPC) (Anderson 2005:175–185), classical Pentecostalism (see Anderson 2004b:22–34, 2013:1–10; Frahm-Arp 2010; Kalu 2008; Kay 2011; Nel 2019), and Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCC) (Anderson 2002:467–470). NPCs are categorised as Pentecostals despite their distinctive traits because they adhere to fundamental Pentecostal beliefs, such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit demonstrated by speaking in tongues. This phenomenon is not confined to South Africa; similar churches are found in Zimbabwe, where Chitando and Biri (2016) refer to them as the Pentecostal prophetic sector, and in West African countries like Ghana (Omenyo and Arthur 2013; Quayesi-Amakye 2015). The primary distinction of NPCs lies in their strong inclination towards the prophetic tradition. Kgatle (2019a) identifies four key features of these churches:

1. **Forensic Prophecy:** NPC leaders often engage in one-on-one prophecies, providing believers with specific personal information such as cell phone numbers and car registration details.
2. **Deliverance Ministry:** Unlike other Pentecostal streams, NPCs charge substantial fees for deliverance consultations, sometimes around R7000 or more, where members seek prophetic counseling or life direction.
3. **Miracle Money:** A notable miracle performed by NPC leaders involves the appearance of money in congregants' accounts without any labour, a phenomenon referred to as 'miracle money' (Vengeyi 2014).
4. **Prophetic Titles:** The emphasis on prophetic identity is reflected in the grandiose prophetic titles that NPC leaders commonly adopt, such as "Major 1," "Seer 1," or "Mzansi Prophet" (Kgatle 2019b:1–8; Banda 2020:45–56). Some notable examples of NPCs are the Prophet Shepherd Bushiri-led Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) in Pretoria (Ramantswana 2019:1–8), Pastor Alph Lukau's Alleluia Ministries International in Sandton, Pastor Daniel Lesego's Rabboni Ministries in Soshanguve, and Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng's Incredible Happenings Ministries in Dube (2020). The use of spiritual warfare to fight demonic forces thought to bring about individual and societal misfortune, the

importance of prophecy as a fundamental component of the Christian faith, and the role of charismatic leaders as God's chosen vessels are some of the doctrinal differences of the NPM.

Additionally, the movement is known for its adoption of the prosperity gospel, which teaches that faith, coupled with financial giving, leads to material wealth and success (Gunda and Hadebe 2020). The NPM's rise has not been without controversy. It has drawn criticism for encouraging a theology of exploitation, especially among economically disadvantaged groups, because of its emphasis on miracles and prosperity. Additionally, its leaders frequently amass substantial wealth and power due to its centralized leadership structure, which raises moral questions regarding transparency and accountability (Van Wyk 2014).

Theological Foundations of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM)

Prophecy theology, which emphasises the importance of prophecy, spiritual authority, and charismatic gifts, is the theological underpinning of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM). In addition to being fundamental to the NPM, these ideas are also impacted by indigenous African spirituality. The interaction between these elements has created a unique religious framework that differentiates the NPM from traditional Black church theology in South Africa. To navigate the unique theological foundations of the NPM, it is helpful to examine prophetic theology, the impact of African spiritualities, and a comparative analysis with traditional Black church theology (Omenyo 2013:50–70).

Concepts of Spiritual Authority, Prophecy, and Charismatic Gifts in Prophetic Theology

The New Prophecy Movement is based on prophetic theology, which holds that prophecy is a direct message from God to humanity via human messengers. The leaders of the NPM, who are frequently called prophets, are thought to have unique spiritual abilities that allow them to foretell the future, communicate God's will, and give their followers intimate revelations (Ramantswana 2019:1–8, Asamoah-Gyadu 2015). According to this theology, the prophet is a powerful person who acts as a mediator between God and the congregation, giving these leaders a great deal of social and spiritual influence (Ukah 2020).

In the NPM, charismatic gifts like healing, tongues, and discernment are frequently associated with prophetic function. These gifts are seen as proof of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The prophet can use these gifts to exercise spiritual authority over people and communities, providing divine solutions to their relational, economic, and health issues. The prophets in the NPM also engage in spiritual warfare, where they are believed to combat demonic forces and curses affecting the lives of their congregants (Kgatle 2021). Theologically, this emphasis on prophecy and charismatic gifts draws heavily on the New Testament, particularly the Pauline writings, which speak of prophecy as a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10). However, the NPM's understanding of prophecy tends to go beyond mere foretelling or edification, embedding itself in personal transformation and immediate tangible outcomes like prosperity and healing (Dube 2019).

Influence of African Indigenous Spirituality on NPM Theology and Practices

The New Prophecy Movement also reflects significant influence from African indigenous spirituality, especially in understanding spiritual authority, ancestors, and communal engagement. In many African traditional religions, prophets and seers occupy a central place, serving as mediators between the spiritual and material worlds. Similarly, the prophets in the NPM are seen as mediators with the ability to connect the divine with the everyday lives of their followers (Resane 2024:1–12). The integration of African spiritual practices into NPM theology is evident in the movement's emphasis on healing and deliverance from evil spirits. Many African cultures hold that spirits, both good and bad, influence human life, and rituals to appease or exorcise these spirits are common. The NPM incorporates these elements by framing prophetic deliverance as a form of spiritual warfare that protects individuals from curses, misfortune, and ancestral spirits (Gunda and Hadebe 2020). Another dimension of African spirituality in the NPM is the emphasis on communal worship and the collective experience of faith. African indigenous religions typically emphasise communal rites and the importance of social cohesion. The NPM mirrors this in its large gatherings, where collective participation in worship, prayer, and prophetic declarations fosters a sense of community among believers. This communal aspect is crucial in understanding the appeal of the NPM, as it provides not only spiritual solutions but also a sense of belonging and shared identity (Anderson 2013).

Comparative Analysis of Traditional Black Church Theology in South Africa

While the NPM shares certain theological features with traditional Black church theology, particularly its engagement with socio-political realities, there are significant divergences. Traditional Black church theology, as seen during the apartheid struggle, was largely shaped by liberation theology. This theological framework emphasised God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed, drawing on biblical themes of justice, the Exodus narrative, and Jesus' ministry to the marginalised (van Aarde 2016:1–9). Prophetic leaders like Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak became voices for social justice, advocating for systemic change and challenging the structures of apartheid (Villa-Vicencio 1992). By contrast, the NPM's prophetic theology is less focused on systemic socio-political change and more concerned with personal transformation through spiritual means. The NPM emphasises individual prosperity, success, and healing, offering what some scholars have called a "prosperity gospel"—the belief that faith, coupled with financial giving, leads to material wealth (Niemandt 2017:201–209, see Mashau & Kgatle 2019; Williams 2022; Lephoko 2024). While traditional Black church theology saw poverty and oppression as structural issues requiring communal action, the NPM frames them as spiritual problems that can be resolved through prophetic intervention and faith (Banda, 2020).

Moreover, while traditional Black church theology emphasises the collective liberation of communities, the NPM places greater emphasis on the individual's relationship with the prophet and their spiritual journey. The prophetic figure in the NPM thus assumes a more central and charismatic role than the leadership structures of traditional Black churches, which were often more decentralised and community oriented (Vellem 2010:1–6, see also Dube 2019). In terms of eschatology, traditional Black church theology often reflected a future-oriented hope for justice, grounded in the

belief that God's kingdom would bring about equity and reconciliation. In contrast, the NPM's eschatology is more immediate, focusing on present blessings and deliverance from worldly suffering, with less emphasis on systemic transformation or future social justice (Gunda & Hadebe, 2020).

Cultural and Social Dynamics of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM)

The rise of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM) among Black communities in South Africa must be understood within the broader framework of the country's socio-economic challenges, spiritual traditions, and the cultural resonance of charismatic leadership. NPM's appeal lies not only in its theological foundations but also in its ability to address the existential and material concerns of its adherents through dynamic leadership, ecstatic worship, healing practices, and deliverance from hardships. Additionally, the movement intersects with African traditional beliefs, creating a religious hybrid that offers spiritual relevance and cultural continuity (Lephakga 2013).

Reasons for the NPM's Popularity among Black Communities

One of the primary reasons for the popularity of the NPM among Black South African communities is its ability to address both spiritual and material concerns holistically. Many Black communities in South Africa continue to grapple with issues of poverty, unemployment, and socio-economic marginalisation in the post-apartheid era (Dube, 2019). The NPM offers a theology of prosperity, healing, and deliverance that directly addresses these hardships. Through the promise of divine intervention, adherents are led to believe that their socio-economic circumstances can change through faith, prophetic declaration, and financial sowing into the church (Gifford 2015). This theology resonates strongly in communities where material insecurity is a daily reality. But that does not mean this kind of theology is legitimate and can be endorsed. To some extent, it is very detrimental to humanity.

Moreover, the NPM's emphasis on the supernatural—miracles, healing, and deliverance from evil forces—offers immediate and tangible solutions to personal and communal struggles. In many ways, the movement is seen by others to serve as a spiritual refuge for those seeking hope amid economic and social crises (Chitando 2021). Its ability to provide a sense of empowerment, particularly through charismatic leaders who claim divine authority, makes it a compelling option for individuals seeking both spiritual and material upliftment (Kgatle, 2021). Generally, these are two major reasons that advocates of this movement bring as precedents for this faith grouping.

Role of Charismatic Leadership and Personality-Driven Movements

The NPM is significantly shaped by its leaders, many of whom possess charismatic personalities and claim to have a unique prophetic anointing. In contrast to more traditional church leadership structures, the NPM places a strong emphasis on the individual leader, often referred to as a "prophet" or "apostle," who is believed to have direct access to divine revelation (Ukah 2020). These leaders play a pivotal role in building the movement, attracting followers not only through their message but also through their charisma and perceived spiritual authority. This form of personality-driven leadership allows prophets to exert considerable control over their congregations, shaping the movement's theology, rituals, and socio-political engagement. Prophets

often portray themselves as mediators between the divine and the people, and their spiritual authority is seen as an essential component of the believer's success in life (Kgatle, 2021:1–8). The public performance of miracles, healings, and prophecies reinforces the prophet's divine status and draws in new adherents who are seeking solutions to their challenges (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015). The prophet's role as a central figure mirrors African traditional leadership models, where spiritual leaders or chiefs held significant authority within the community (Gunda and Hadebe, 2020:12-19).

Ecstatic Worship, Healing Practices, and the Promise of Deliverance from Socio-Economic Hardship

Ecstatic worship, characterised by emotional intensity, collective participation, and a sense of divine immediacy, is a hallmark of the NPM. During these worship services, congregants engage in spirited singing, dancing, and speaking in tongues, creating an atmosphere of spiritual fervour (Dube 2019). This worship style offers not only a spiritual outlet but also a form of emotional catharsis for individuals burdened by life's difficulties. It allows participants to feel a direct connection to the divine, while the collective nature of the worship strengthens social bonds within the congregation.

Healing practices in the NPM are closely linked to the theology of deliverance. Prophets claim the ability to heal both physical and spiritual ailments through prayer, laying on of hands, and other ritualistic practices. Healing services are often the focal point of NPM worship, and testimonies of miraculous recoveries serve as powerful motivators for continued faith and financial support of the movement (Kgatle 2021). Deliverance from spiritual oppression, particularly from witchcraft and ancestral curses, is another central promise of the NPM, offering followers a path to personal and financial success through spiritual purification (Gifford 2015). In a society where many still believe in the influence of spiritual forces on daily life, this promise of deliverance is particularly attractive.

The NPM's focus on socio-economic upliftment through spiritual means also ties into its prosperity gospel, where adherents are encouraged to give generously to the church in the belief that they will receive material blessings in return. This teaching is particularly appealing in contexts of poverty, where the prospect of divine intervention in one's financial situation can be a strong motivator for participation (Chitando 2021). While critics argue that the movement exploits the vulnerable by promoting false promises of wealth, its popularity persists due to its ability to address immediate concerns with practical, albeit spiritual, solutions (Banda 2020).

The Intersection of NPM with African Traditional Beliefs

The NPM's theology and practices intersect with African traditional beliefs, particularly in areas like ancestor veneration and spiritual warfare. In many African indigenous religions, ancestors are believed to play a crucial role in the lives of the living, offering guidance and protection, but also in some cases causing misfortune if they are not properly honoured (Chitando 2021). While the NPM generally discourages ancestor veneration, viewing it as incompatible with Christian belief, it nonetheless engages with the concept by reinterpreting ancestral curses as demonic forces that need to be exorcised through prophetic intervention (Gunda and Hadebe 2020). In this way, the NPM both rejects and reconfigures traditional African spirituality, positioning the prophet as a

spiritual authority who can mediate between the human and spiritual realms, much like traditional African spiritual leaders (Anderson 2013). Furthermore, African traditional spirituality's emphasis on communal worship and the power of spoken word finds resonance in the NPM's practices. Prophetic declarations, often made in public during worship services, function similarly to traditional African practices where words are believed to have spiritual power (Ukah, 2020). These declarations, aimed at altering the spiritual and material circumstances of the faithful, bridge the gap between African spirituality and Pentecostal Christianity, offering a form of spiritual continuity that is attractive to many believers (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015).

Economic and Ethical Dimensions of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM)

The New Prophecy Movement (NPM) in South Africa, largely associated with charismatic Pentecostalism, has garnered significant attention for its emphasis on the prosperity gospel and the economic practices that underpin it. These practices, while offering hope to socio-economically marginalised communities, also raise ethical questions regarding financial exploitation, the commodification of spiritual experiences, and the accountability of church leadership. This section explores the economic appeal of the prosperity gospel, critiques of financial exploitation within NPM, and ethical concerns surrounding the commercialisation of prophecy, healing, and miracles (Adedibu, and Igboin 2019:1–8, see Frahm-Arp 2018; Kgatle 2022).

The Prosperity Gospel and Its Appeal in Socio-Economically Marginalised Communities

The prosperity gospel, central to the teachings of the NPM, promises material blessings and economic success as rewards for faith, positive confession, and financial contributions to the church. This theology is particularly attractive to socio-economically marginalised communities in South Africa, where economic inequality, unemployment, and poverty remain pervasive (Dube 2019). The prosperity message offers an alternative to the harsh realities of life, positing that through financial sacrifices, often referred to as "seed offerings," adherents can secure divine intervention in their material circumstances.

The theological foundation of the prosperity gospel rests on a re-interpretation of biblical texts, especially those associated with blessings and abundance (Meyer 2007). Leaders in the NPM emphasise verses like Luke 6:38—“Give, and it will be given to you”—to encourage congregants to give generously to the church, promising that their contributions will return to them manifold (Gifford 2015). In communities where access to formal financial systems is limited, and economic opportunity is scarce, the prospect of divine financial intervention provides a significant sense of hope and agency.

However, the appeal of the prosperity gospel is not solely financial. It also speaks to the psychological and emotional needs of individuals who feel marginalised by society (Chitando 2021). The NPM provides a framework in which believers can exercise control over their destiny through faith and financial giving, transforming what might seem like a passive dependence on divine favour into an active and participatory engagement with the divine economy (Kgatle, 2021). In this sense, the prosperity gospel serves both as an economic promise and as a psychological balm for those experiencing the brunt of socio-economic marginalisation.

In appraising the prosperity dimensions of the New Prophecy Movement, it is important to acknowledge the more nuanced contributions of scholars such as J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu. He notes that prosperity preaching cannot be reduced simply to materialism or exploitation; it also reflects deep yearnings for dignity, healing, and empowerment in African contexts marked by poverty and marginalisation (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:235–238; 2013:90–92). For many adherents, prosperity theology affirms God's concern for their socio-economic well-being, providing a framework of hope that challenges narratives of perpetual suffering. At the same time, Asamoah-Gyadu also recognises the dangers of abuse, particularly when prosperity claims are commodified or disconnected from ethical responsibility (2012:125–127). His balanced assessment helps situate the NPM within broader African Pentecostal and Charismatic trajectories, where prosperity is both a site of spiritual agency and of theological controversy.

Financial Exploitation and Critiques of NPM Leadership (Case Studies)

Despite its popularity, the NPM has faced significant criticism for financial exploitation, particularly of vulnerable communities. Leaders of NPM churches often live in wealth and opulence, funded by the financial contributions of their congregants, many of whom are living in poverty. Case studies of NPM leadership in South Africa reveal instances where congregants are pressured to give beyond their means, with promises of miraculous financial returns that rarely materialise (Dube 2019).

One prominent example is that of Prophet Shepherd Bushiri, whose church has been accused of encouraging congregants to make exorbitant financial contributions in exchange for prophecies and blessings. Bushiri's lavish lifestyle, which includes private jets and expensive homes, has drawn public scrutiny, especially in light of the financial hardship faced by many of his followers (Banda 2020). Similar critiques have been levelled against other charismatic leaders in the NPM, who are seen as exploiting their congregants' faith for personal financial gain.

A study by Ukah (2020) suggests that the financial practices of NPM leaders are often justified through a theology that equates the leader's material success with divine favour. Congregants are encouraged to view their leader's wealth as a sign of God's blessing, reinforcing the notion that financial giving will lead to similar blessings for them. This creates a cycle of giving that benefits the leadership financially while often leaving the congregants in economic precarity (Meyer 2007:5–28). The ethical implications of this practice have been widely debated, with critics arguing that it constitutes a form of spiritual abuse. Leaders are accused of manipulating vulnerable individuals, using their socio-economic conditions to extract financial contributions under the guise of spiritual promises (Gunda and Hadebe 2020). In response, some have called for greater regulation of NPM churches and more accountability for their financial practices, though such efforts have been met with resistance from within the movement (Chitando 2021).

Ethical Concerns about the Commodification of Prophecy, Healing, and Miracle Claims

Another significant ethical issue surrounding the NPM is the commodification of prophecy, healing, and miracles. In many NPM churches, these spiritual experiences are no longer viewed solely as divine gifts but are often treated as commodities that can be accessed through financial contributions. Prophets within the NPM are known to charge

fees for private prophetic consultations, healings, and miracle services, with prices varying based on the severity of the issue or the prominence of the prophet (Kgatle 2021). The commodification of these spiritual practices raises concerns about the authenticity of the prophetic and healing claims. Scholars argue that when spiritual experiences are tied to financial transactions, the line between faith and fraud becomes blurred (Gifford 2015). The commercialisation of these practices not only undermines their spiritual integrity but also exploits the desperation of those seeking miracles for personal or financial problems (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:45).

Moreover, the ethical implications extend beyond financial exploitation to issues of trust and integrity within the religious community. When miracles and prophecies are commodified, the relationship between the prophet and the congregant becomes transactional, reducing what should be a sacred experience to a financial exchange (Ukah 2020). This not only damages the spiritual credibility of the NPM but also raises questions about the moral responsibility of its leadership in safeguarding the spiritual well-being of its congregants. The commodification of prophecy and healing has led some to question whether the NPM prioritises profit over spiritual care. Critics argue that the movement's focus on financial gain contradicts the core tenets of Christian teaching, particularly regarding the role of prophecy and healing as gifts of grace rather than commodities to be bought and sold (Anderson 2013). Ethical concerns surrounding the NPM, therefore, not only pertain to its financial practices but also to the broader implications of turning sacred experiences into a means of generating wealth.

Critical Reception and Controversies of the New Prophecy Movement (NPM)

The New Prophecy Movement (NPM) has attracted significant attention and critique, both from within South African Christianity and from broader socio-religious circles. This critique revolves around the theological, ethical, and public controversies tied to the movement's practices, leadership, and relationship with traditional Black churches. The movement's rise in prominence, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa, has prompted responses that reflect deep tensions between different strands of Christian thought and practice.

Engagement with South African Theological Critiques

South African theologians such as Tinyiko Maluleke (2005) and Vuyani Vellem (2014) have raised important critiques of prophetic and prosperity-oriented movements, warning against their potential complicity in perpetuating economic inequalities under the guise of spiritual empowerment. For Vellem, the commodification of religious experience within some prophetic churches represents not liberation but an extension of neoliberal capitalism into the sacred sphere. Similarly, Allan Boesak's emphasis on prophetic theology as a voice for justice challenges the NPM to reframe its understanding of prophecy not merely as foretelling or miracle-working, but as speaking truth to power in a society still scarred by economic apartheid. These critiques sharpen the ethical evaluation of the NPM, situating it within broader debates about the role of the church in post-apartheid South Africa.

Theological and Ethical Critiques from Within South African Christianity

Within the theological landscape of South African Christianity, the NPM has been criticised for promoting a theology that is seen as self-serving and misaligned with traditional Christian ethics. The prosperity gospel, a core element of NPM teachings, is especially controversial. This theology promotes the belief that material wealth and physical health are evidence of divine favour, and that faith, particularly as expressed through financial giving, guarantees personal prosperity (Kgatle, 2021). Critics argue that this focus on prosperity detracts from the biblical teachings on suffering, social justice, and community solidarity that have historically characterised Black Christianity in South Africa, particularly during the apartheid struggle (Anderson 2013).

Furthermore, traditional Black churches, especially those influenced by liberation theology, critique the NPM for neglecting issues of social justice. Liberation theology, which emerged as a response to the socio-political injustices of apartheid, emphasises the church's responsibility to address systemic inequality, poverty, and political oppression (Modise & Mtshiselwa, 2013). By focusing on individual success rather than collective justice, the NPM is seen by some as abandoning the prophetic role of the church in favor of personal gain (Gunda and Hadebe 2020:12-19).

Ethically, the NPM has been accused of exploiting vulnerable populations by emphasising financial giving as a prerequisite for divine blessings. Critics suggest that this theology disproportionately impacts socio-economically marginalised communities, who are often encouraged to give money they cannot afford in the hope of receiving a miraculous financial breakthrough (Mashau and Kgatle 2019:1-8). This has raised concerns about the ethical responsibility of church leaders, particularly regarding their stewardship of financial resources and their duty to care for their congregants.

Public Controversies Surrounding Prominent NPM Figures

Several high-profile figures within the NPM have been embroiled in public controversies, ranging from allegations of financial fraud to abuse of power and spiritual manipulation. Leaders like Shepherd Bushiri, one of the most prominent NPM figures, have faced legal battles over accusations of fraud, money laundering, and financial exploitation (Kgatle 2021). Bushiri, who leads the Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG), has amassed a significant following across Africa and internationally, but his opulent lifestyle and the financial practices of his ministry have sparked widespread debate about the ethical boundaries of prophetic leadership (Banda 2020:45-56).

Similarly, other NPM leaders have been accused of manipulating their spiritual authority for personal gain. Allegations of false prophecies, staged miracles, and the commodification of religious services (such as paying for prophecy or healing) have drawn public scrutiny. For instance, several NPM leaders have been criticised for selling "anointed" items like water, oil, and cloths, which are purported to carry divine power. These practices have led to accusations of turning the gospel into a business venture, exploiting the faith of ordinary believers for financial gain (Ukah 2020:134-153). The abuse of spiritual authority extends beyond financial exploitation. There have been cases where NPM leaders have been accused of exercising undue control over their followers' personal lives, including dictating whom they should marry or isolating them from family members who are seen as spiritually "dangerous." These forms of control have

led to accusations of spiritual abuse, where leaders use their prophetic authority to maintain power over vulnerable individuals (Mashau and Kgatle 2019:1-8).

Responses from Traditional Black Churches and Theological Scholars

Traditional Black churches and theological scholars have responded critically to the rise of the NPM, often positioning it as a distortion of the Christian faith. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) has publicly condemned some of the more controversial practices associated with NPM leaders, calling for greater accountability and ethical oversight within the church (van der Walt 2016:271–290, see also Modise and Mtshiselwa 2013:359–378). These traditional bodies argue that the NPM's focus on wealth and individual success undermines the church's historical mission of advocating for justice, equality, and the welfare of the poor. Theological scholars have also engaged in rigorous critiques of the NPM, particularly regarding its interpretation of prophecy and the church's role in society. Many Scholars (Kretzchmar 2019:1–8; Steenkamp 2020:1–8; Knoetze 2022:1–8) have called attention to how NPM leaders claim divine authority without being subject to any form of theological or ethical accountability. The lack of oversight and the consolidation of spiritual power in one individual are seen as dangerous trends that undermine the credibility and moral authority of the church (Anderson 2013).

Furthermore, some scholars argue that the NPM's theology of prosperity is incompatible with the socio-economic realities of South Africa, where poverty and inequality remain deeply entrenched. By framing poverty as a personal spiritual failure rather than a systemic issue, the NPM is seen as contributing to a form of victim-blaming that ignores the structural causes of economic injustice (Mashau and Kgatle 2019:1–8). This has prompted calls for a return to a more community-oriented theology, one that emphasises social justice, solidarity with the poor, and collective action to address inequality. However, it is important to note that not all responses to the NPM have been entirely negative. Some scholars recognise the appeal of the movement, particularly its ability to offer hope and empowerment to individuals who feel disenfranchised by both the state and traditional religious institutions (Meyer 2015). The NPM's emphasis on personal agency, spiritual warfare, and the possibility of miraculous intervention resonates with many South Africans who are searching for meaning and empowerment in the context of ongoing socio-economic challenges.

Conclusion

The New Prophecy Movement (NPM) has significantly impacted Black churches in South Africa by reshaping theological priorities and introducing a charismatic style centred on prophetic authority, prosperity, and healing. Its appeal, particularly among socio-economically marginalised communities, highlights the movement's ability to respond to spiritual and material needs in post-apartheid South Africa. However, the NPM also raises profound theological, cultural, and ethical challenges, including concerns over prosperity teachings, financial exploitation, and the commodification of spiritual practices. Moving forward, the NPM's influence on Black Christianity in South Africa will likely depend on how it navigates these controversies and whether it can balance personal empowerment with a deeper commitment to addressing systemic social injustices.

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