



“And they shall make you eat grass like oxen” (Daniel 4:24): Reflections on Recent Practices in some New Charismatic Churches

Kelebogile Thomas Resane
Department of Systematic Theology
Faculty of Theology
University of the Free State
South Africa
Email: resanekt@ufs.ac.za

Abstract

The narrative of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 is metaphorically applied to impress the understanding of dangerous practices recently observed in some New Charismatic Churches in South Africa. “And they shall make you eat grass like oxen” is a premise used to show the danger of these practices, not only to theological fundamentals, but also to human health and dignity. It is pointed out that the practices of people eating grass, snakes and rats, and drinking petrol, together with some other manifestations, all evolved out of the phenomenon known as The Toronto Blessing. This was a term created by the press in Britain, and describes the Christian revival and associated phenomena that began in January 1994 at the Toronto Airport Vineyard church (TAV), which was renamed in 1995 as the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF) and then later in 2010, renamed to Catch the Fire Toronto. The impact of this phenomenon in South Africa, especially to the stabilising Classical Pentecostalism is highlighted. The article discusses celebrity cult as is compared and contrasted in characters of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. The rationale behind these practices is the centre of this discussion. This includes anti-institutionalism, anti-intellectualism, antinomianism, and anti-sacramentalism. The government intervention through its CRL Commission is justified as a way of protecting its citizens from ensuing harmful effects of these practices.

Keywords: Neo - Charismatics, Pentecostals, anti-institutionalism, anti-intellectualism, antinomianism, anti-sacramentalism.

Introduction

This topic is a burning issue in South Africa today. The recent or current unconventional practices in some Neo-Charismatic Churches need some theological scrutiny and reflections. They cause damage to Christianity and theological fundamentals. Research is highly needed for enlightening scholars of the rationale behind these practices. This brief preface is vital for one to understand the scenario to be discussed in this paper. This historical panorama in the socio-ecclesiastical domain is the premise from which the Neo-Charismatic Movement can be understood. The latest practices of people eating grass, rats, snakes, drinking petrol etc. cannot be acceptable without this brief history. The narrative of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 is metaphorically applied only to impress the understanding of dangerous approaches to gospel declaration.

The box of Pandora was opened in January 1994 at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church. It started small and innocent but turned out to have severely detrimental and far-reaching negative consequences. John and Carol Arnott were inspired by revival manifestations in Argentina and



South Africa. They invited Randy Clark who was tremendously influenced by the South African preacher, based in Louisville, Kentucky, Rodney Howard-Browne. From 20th January, 1994 for two months, Clark preached and introduced a new phenomenon in Neo-Pentecostalism known as 'holy laughter.' He learned this phenomenon from Rodney Howard-Browne. This phenomenon was internationally known as Toronto blessing.

The church membership swelled from 120 to over a thousand that year. Attendants who came from abroad after hearing of this phenomenon, caught it and took it back to their homelands, and the manifestations spread like wildfires. Literature and YouTube shows characteristic of ecstatic worship accompanied by manifestations such as 'slaying' in the Spirit, laughter, shaking, crying, roaring like lions, barking like dogs, and crawling. Leaders and participants claim that these are physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Hayford and Moore (2006:269) recount the phenomenon as follows:

Almost immediately people were dramatically touched by the Holy Spirit, weeping, falling, shaking, and shouting. What captured the attention of the media was the phenomenon of laughter. People at the renewal meetings broke into uncontrolled laughter that doubled them over, leaving them laying on the floor laughing, sometime for an hour or more.

The Vineyard Movement disassociated itself from this phenomenon and revoked the membership of Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship Church. Slowly as the decade of the nineties progressed, the movement faded but not completely. Church growth in Africa is primarily evidenced in indigenous independent churches. These churches are mostly charismatic with Pentecostal features such as casting out demons, healing the sick, with proclivity towards deliverance from any form of bondage such as poverty, unemployment, marital needs, promotion at work, childlessness, bewitchment etc. Africa in general took this revival extremely limitless. The movement of manifestations took different directions and acts of 'miracles' further by bringing some extreme manifestations that has left the African Christian Church in wonderment. The fact of the matter is

Much of the growth in the last thirty years, however, has come from African national leaders who are increasingly developing their own 'brands' of Pentecostalism and spreading them far and wide (Hayford & Moore 2006:278).

The gospel of health and wealth arrived in South Africa at the dawn of the eighties. It swept over the country with a big bang and gave the then stabilizing Pentecostal movement a new façade. It has gained many names for itself, including name-it- claim-it" doctrine, "health and wealth" gospel etc. "According to this doctrine, it is every born- again believer's "royal privilege" to be healthy and wealthy (Moriarty 1992:297). The textual base of the doctrine is John 10:10 where the "abundant life" is interpreted as Christ's desire for his followers to access and receive his limitless resources, since their Father *owns the cattle on a thousand hills* (Ps 50:10). It continued to spread with *kerygma* accompanied or validated by signs and wonders to assert its *authenticity*. As can be expected, heresy and cultic practices emerge in the midst of any religious euphoria.

South Africa was not left unscathed by the Toronto Blessing movement. It invaded the neo-Charismatic movement heterogeneously known as International Fellowship of Christian Churches (IFCC) made up of Rhema Bible Church of Ray McCauley, and Hatfield Christian Church of Ed Roeberts. The IFCC ended up splitting into two camps where McCauley was seeing the phenomenon as a passing phase while Roeberts' camp saw it as an ongoing revival. Toronto blessing was not the only issue that led to disintegration and polarization of IFCC. Leadership hit the loggerhead regarding the proposal of ecumenical cooperation and membership with South African Council of Churches.



In 1992 a controversy within the IFCC erupted over the leadership's decision to become observers at the South African Council of Churches. The white conservatives in the group objected to what they perceived as an unholy alliance with "liberals" and supporters of the "interfaith" movement, and a small number left the IFCC as a result (Anderson & Pillay in Elphick & Davenport 1997:237). The evangelical Christianity, especially the Pentecostals and Charismatics, was fumbling in search of relevance and prophetic role – though this failed dismally in many ways due to their *briller par son absence* for decades when the country was on the baptism of fire by the oppressive South African political regime of apartheid.

Celebrity Cult

South Africa's fast-growing religion is celebrity worship. From gossip magazines to entertainment TV, from blogs to adverts featuring famous faces, the stars; including pastors, prophets, apostles etc., are the new gods and goddesses. The Christian community is so quick to put them on pedestals; even more enthralled when they traverse and reverse the foundations of the Christian dogma.

The existential interpretation of the Scriptures characterized by celebrity cultic practices, and egoistic approach to hermeneutical applications are a norm asserted by the current charismatic Christianity in South Africa. The movement has been invaded by leadership "idols" in the names of 'Pastor', 'Prophet', 'Apostle', 'Bishop', 'Doctor', 'Professor' etc. These leaders are mostly instantly manufactured without any theological training. Some pay exorbitant and usurious amounts of monies to some fictitious characters who claim to be representatives of certain institutions in America or Nigeria; to confer some questionable honorary doctorates. Some gather some less in-depth Bible Study material and run with it as credible credentials to title them in their new ministries. Most of the pastoral agents conferring these degrees are always on a media spotlights for these activities. Good examples include the likes of Bishop Keith Hurrington, who according to the Sunday World Newspaper (2012) claims some association with a fictitious institution by the name of International Theological Seminary of California, U.S.A (ITSC). The same newspaper reports that Hurrington has allegedly been awarding honorary doctorates under the same institution, collecting between R3000 and R6000 from prospective honorary recipients. Another example to be cited is that of Archbishop Prof. Emanuel Ketsekile of the unknown and non-accredited Emmanuel Christian University. He has been conferring honorary doctorates to many naïve pastors in and around the Free State Province, and other territories. South African artists are always the target. For instance, Skillsportals in 2014 captured this:

The Department of Higher Education and Training has learnt with dismay the reported story in Sowetan on counterfeit Doctoral degrees to Mr Bheki and Linah Ngcobo who are also the known South African Maskandi musicians, by a University operating illegally in Johannesburg and not accredited on Programmes offerings.

The department affirms that this university called Anointed University owned by Nigerian nationals (Mr George Aladeoba and his wife) is an illegal university, it is not accredited and with no registration number. Their Programmes are therefore not recognised.

Celebrityism is a formal religious veneration or worship. It is a system of religious beliefs and rituals with adherents. A celebrity commands a huge amount of influence on people across all socio-cultural divides. Robin A Brace (2008) quoted John F. Schumaker, (In *New Internationalist*, Dec, 2003):



The decline of organized religion has also played a role - as the level of religiousness decreases, the tendency to celebrity worship increases. The bottom line is celebrity pastor is not immune from humanity's most rudimentary flaw of pride. This is the elevation of a human to some high status of beauty, achievement, prestige, and power; which is something that the Christian community should not blindly promote. It is not wrong to admire someone's achievement, success, or integrity; but it must be done for the right course. It is right and important to laud celebrities who do good works and plant back in significant ways. Celebrity is a form of bully pulpit – a platform upon which to promote a vision... The responsible celebrity takes the spotlight that's shining on them and turns it or holds up a mirror that redirects the spotlight on the least of these (Detweiler 2008:212).

This paper compares the prophetic declaration that was made to Nebuchadnezzar in the ninth or tenth century: "And they shall make you eat grass like oxen" (Dan 4:24). This motif is powerful to scrutinize and compare that era with the phenomenon under discussion i.e. Excessive practices in some Neo-Charismatic Churches, especially where people are commanded to eat grass, rats and snakes. What is crucial for the current debate is that there are two celebrities in this narrative. The first being Daniel, the prophet, who represents the prophetic voice in chaotic civil affairs.

Daniel is a heroic legend who lived through dangers. These dangers include the test of his fidelity in faith, accusations regarding religion, condemnation for civil disobedience, escapes from danger as a result of divine intervention; and at the end of the pendulum, promotion to the high office of the land with the consequent praise and glory to God. As a hero or celebrity, Daniel is the main character, but 'behind the scenes' it is actually God. Daniel is merely his 'understudy' or counterpart (Burden 1987:205). Unlike the Neo-Charismatic miracle worker, Daniel was a prophet used by God behind the scenes. He was "a wise man who was able to interpret divine mysteries to strange kings in an alien land" (Burden 1987:200). Although Daniel excelled in the foreign palaces, his life was not wrapped in the prosperity gospel that has become so prevalent in our day. The success in the ministry is remaining true to the canonical dictates and revelations of the divine for the *kairos* moment. Daniel possessed 'mantic wisdom' that is "related to divination, which unlocks the future" (Burden 1987:201). Mears (1998:276) highlights the fact that Daniel "drew back the curtain and unveiled, as no one had ever done before, the hidden things of the future." There is an element of concern for legacy to be deposited for the future in Daniel's ministry. This is one of the visible gaps in the current gospel of health and wealth. It has no *catechesis* or *paradosis* to carry itself into the future. All centres on 'now' or 'never'.

Daniel the celebrity did not have the audience of thousands as a measure of his success, yet he stood above his peers. Much had been written about him, though he was not on a platform performing miracles or asking his audience to become unconventional. He remained engrossed and faithful to his God in a foreign land. Like Mears (1998:278) points out:

Daniel and his friends lived in an atmosphere of loose morals and low standards even though they were in a palace. Yet we read that they kept themselves apart from the evil of that court – true to God in a day when everything was against them.

The second celebrity in this narrative is Nebuchadnezzar. He became famous as:

the genius and real builder of the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar was a warrior of valour, who positioned Babylonia as a 'new world leader (Wood 1970:373).

His success is evidenced by his forty-three years rule with capable military control, the construction of the city's infrastructure, and the economic prosperity of his regime.

His main aim was to have made the cult centre of Babylon a 'wonder'... Nebuchadnezzar worked on Marduk's chapel (Ekua), Nabu's main temple (Ezida), and the shrine of Sarpanitum



adoring them within and overlaying them without with gold and made them to shine like a bright day (Wiseman 1987:64).

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a great tree stripped of its branches and leaves, and reduced to a mere stump. The stump developed and lived like a wild beast for seven years, eating grass and was made to wander from place to place. Daniel offered the interpretation of the dream:

Daniel predicted that the king himself, represented by the tree in his dream, would become demented and, like a wild beast, would roam about unable to control himself, let alone the kingdom. After seven years his sanity would return, and he would acknowledge the supremacy of Almighty God (Merril 1994:286).

Both the intra and extra textual sources acknowledge the fulfilment of this interpretation, but fail to expatiate on the period and Nebuchadnezzar's life and career after the return of his sanity. What is important is to observe this man's syncretic religion that paid allegiance to his native religion focused on "The Great Temple of Morduch (Bel)... the most renowned sanctuary in all the Euphrates valley" (Halley 1965:336). Amazingly, and with no qualms, Daniel was an advisor to Nebuchadnezzar and "exerted a powerful influence over him; and three times he called the God of Daniel God (Daniel 2:47; 3:29; 4:34) (Halley 1965:341). Through his insanity, Nebuchadnezzar's eyes were opened and his conscience touched. "He confessed to the greatness of God and bore his testimony to the goodness of God (4:34). He learned that man is not the architect of his own fortune" (Mears 1998:282).

Nebuchadnezzar's insanity accompanied by eating grass like a wild animal is a sign that the practice is dethronement to the lowest level of becoming a wild animal. When a pastor commands people to eat grass, he or she lowers the followers to the level of wild animals. Sanity is withdrawn from them, invading or abusing the reverential *imago Dei* they carry as human beings. This God's image is marred and people falling into that state lose their intellect, and become institutionally (ecclesia) disconnected, meaning they are antisacramental. They embrace antinomianism whereby they declare that by faith and grace they are freed from laws of nature and of morality. The commander Pastor is a celebrity whose attitudes, ego, and authority revolves around him, not around God.

The narrative shows the conflict between the two celebrities. Daniel is a picture of the representative of God living out integrity behind the scenes. He is a prophet who does not display his ability on any subject, except to usher in the mind of the God he serves. On the other hand, Nebuchadnezzar is a celebrity who displays himself as an achiever who desires the fame of the world. This paper intends to show the failure of the pastors of the Neo-Charismatic movement, who unlike Daniel, have adopted the Nebuchadnezzar option of 'walking by sight, not by faith'. The real prophet or pastor speaks the truth of God, without dramatics, even if it endangers his life. False teachers make people eat grass like wild animals. They invoke insanity instead of abundant life found by faith (not by what is seen) in Christ through his Word. Invoking faith by visible practices such as what has been happening currently, is surely not to last. For *we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal* (2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV).

Practices and Reactions

In the recent past, incidents such as people made to eat grass, rats, snakes, and drinking petrol had mistakenly become a *theatrum gloriae Dei* by which the glory of God should be discerned and recognized. Preachers are watched standing on prostate bodies of people, licking naked women, etc. to demonstrate the *dunamis* of the gospel by the celebrity preachers had shocked many of the household of faith. This is pictured by Van Eck (2013:244) using the planting of the mustard seed in the garden; that



The garden is unclean, a symbol of chaos. As a metaphor for the kingdom, the kingdom of God is thus polluted and unclean. An ordered kingdom has been replaced by a chaotic and polluted kingdom. But not only replaced, it has been taken over by an unclean “mixed kind” that grows wild, is invasive and difficult, if at all possible, to control.

This metaphor is also applied to the church of Jesus Christ, invaded by these unnatural practices that are not in line with the established confessional Christian faith. The genuineness of these practices is what matters the most in theological thinking. Are these practices qualified to be miracles? Naturally, “miracles are events that involve a suspension of the established laws of nature” (Hillman, Chamberlain & Harding 2002:34). So, these practices’ theological authenticity hangs in a balance. It is a theological understanding that miracles have the capacity to transform the hearer, creates the element of marvel; and empowerment of the recipients (Speckman 2007:118-135). The other question that arises is how much of the human dignity is taken into consideration when these ‘miracles’ are performed? Most of the practices mentioned and witnessed recently undermine human dignity in such a way that observation is made that human life is put at risk. Researchers and scholars observe the lack of responsibility, purity, holiness, and contentment in the hermeneutics and exegesis of these miracle workers. Like Benson (2011:15) has observed:

Courses on civics and citizenship including an ethical component (teaching, for example, the golden rule of “do to others what you would like them to do to you”) are important.

This is not the case with these leaders under scrutiny. The blind allegiance of the devotees also invokes a big rhetorical question. However, it can be understood that the Charismatic believers attach a “high” or “divine” regard for their leaders. They unreservedly embrace the fact that:

As spiritual and social authority is vested in his person, the religious leader becomes representative of a divine being whose will is that of God and whose actions are above reproach (Shupe, Stacey, & Darnell 2000:114).

The practices had been in various experiments such as eating grass, drinking petrol, eating rats, snakes, spraying with doom, drinking engine cleaner, putting the pastor’s shoe on a woman’s privates, walking and standing on the devotees’ bodies etc. Media did a wider coverage of these practices. For instance, it was reported in Times Live on the 11 July 2015:

Members of Prophet Penuel’s End Times Disciples Ministries in Soshanguve, Pretoria ate parts of a snake, believing it would become chocolate. Images posted onto the church’s social media sites show Penuel dangling a live snake and dropping it into the mouths of his congregants.

Closer examination to these practices, one can conclude that it is a high-risk religion. The problem is highlighted by Battin (199:74) who states:

the religious faith of believers involves a willingness to take substantial physical risks – risks to health, physical functioning, and even the risk of death.

Lizeka Tandwa of News24 through Timeslive (2015) called attention that:



The South African government through its CRL Rights Commission showed some concern and asked that all those summoned to the hearings were required to produce their ordination certificate, the church registration certificate, bank statements and annual financial statements dating from 2012.

The main concern of the government through its CRL Rights Commission is the safety of the life of the devotees. The Commission released a joint statement on the 2nd October, 2014:

We cannot allow religious institutions practising unsavoury harmful religious practices to continue to make pronouncements that are dangerous to the health and well-being of people, especially pregnant women, in the name of religion.

The concern was earlier highlighted by the MEC (Member of Executive Council) of Gauteng, Nandi Mayathula-Khoza (2014):

petrol should not be ingested and posed a danger for the breathing system and could result in breathing difficulty and aspiration pneumonia. Ingestion of fuel is corrosive and not only does it affect the intestinal territory, but also the nervous system. It causes excitement [a high], as though someone who took on drugs. That would explain the strange behaviour reactions after ingestion in the people who drink petrol.

About a century ago, the similar groups flourished in America with practices of faith healing, handling snakes; and in some cases, refusing blood transfusion, and refusing the intake of scientific medical treatment. Battin (1990:74) brings this out that:

We may think of these practices as extraordinary tests of religious commitment. We may take willingness to risk death as a demonstration of the extraordinary value for religious goals can have for believers. In fact, willingness to risk death for religious reasons is often extolled as the highest test of faith. But this willingness also raises a set of disturbing moral issues concerning the ways in which religious groups bring it about that their adherents are willing to take such risks.

Theodeterminism or Selfish Desires?

The provisions of the South African constitution embrace the positive assessment of cultural pluralism, including acknowledgement of religious diversity. It identifies cultural differences that build towards unity and common nationalism. The practices that threaten safety, health and wellbeing of humanity are in violation of the constitutional, hence the legitimate right of the government to intervene.

Such a government must be neutral with regard to all interests, principles, and motivations, having as its only goal the equitable and just mediation of those competing interests and passions (Thiemann1991:33).



The fundamental question remains: What is the purpose of these practices? Is it to demonstrate the power of God? Is it to try God? (His genuineness, ability, etc.); or is it to give God an inlet into a believer? Battin (1990:83) succinctly points out that

The purpose, participants say, is to 'receive the Holy Ghost' or to 'confirm the word of God' in Mark 16.

In 2014, a Kenyan pastor, Rev. Njoh reportedly asked his female congregants to attend church services without panties or bras so "God can enter their bodies easily." According to the Kenyan Daily Post (quoted by Sowetan Live, March, 07 2014), the pastor's reasoning was that the undergarments are "ungodly" and people need to be "free in 'body' and 'spirit' to receive Christ."

Are these practices theodeterministic or personal preferences for selfish gains? Theodeterminism is making a decision based on what God dictates or directs. Can these practices be scripturally justified or quantified; or are they for selfish gains? Either way, there should be some reactions or responses. Reactions are inevitable within Christendom itself as was seen that

The leader of the Baptist Convention of South Africa Reverend Thembelani Jentile told eNCA that making congregants eat snakes has nothing to do with the power of God, and is instead self-serving (15 July 2015).

The other reaction with a vehement level of concern came from the South African Council of Churches.

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) says it will be meeting with Pastor Penuel Mnguni, who feeds worshippers animals, as a way of dispensing blessings. The council has expressed grave concern at Mnguni's activities, which were shown on eNCA's current affairs show Checkpoint.

The reactions are genuine and legitimate. The Neo-Charismatic dogma and hermeneutics lack divine *pathos*. Vusi Mona of the City Press Newspaper (6 December, 2015) once highlighted their hidden agenda of selfish gain that:

Stories have been reported in some parts of Africa about how religious leaders with names like General Overseer, Daddy, Papa, and Mummy train young ministers, pay them good salaries and send them to establish branches of their churches in a foreign country – not to necessarily spread the gospel, but to generate an income. These ministers are then asked by their churches to collect the offerings and tithes and send this money to church headquarters.

Their preaching lacks interest or concern to change the historical and structural circumstances of poverty, racism, marginalisation and disenfranchisement of the masses. Very little is done to address the fear that enslaves the masses around the world. They claim to be the prophetic preachers, but as far as theological *dictum* is concerned,

Prophetic preaching stirs up the courage within people to care about and then act to change the historical circumstances that work to prevent justice and righteousness (McMickle 2006:121).



This is also confirmed by Hillman, Chamberlain and Harding (2002:53) that

prophecy may be concerned with issues like unity, hunger, poverty, racism and warfare and be addressed to a wider audience.

The tendency of Neo-Charismatic preachers is towards *dichotomous gospel*, whereby social gospel is regarded as political, therefore not to meddle with; while the spiritual gospel is the accentuation of their *kerygma*. The missing puzzle piece here is the disregard of the fact that prophetic preaching is confrontational, proactive, reactive, and interventional. Hillman, Chamberlain and Harding (2002:190) continue to highlight this importance that

All Christians need to be concerned about what is happening throughout the world, in general sense – concerned about oppressed peoples, wherever they are, and about the poor in our own society.

The psychologists and those from medical expertise will equally demonstrate concerns regarding the consequences of these practices both in the psyche and the body. It'll illuminate one's mind to quote Hillman et al (2002:201) to substantiate this:

Practices that have profound effects on the emotions are often used in ministry by people who do not understand the psychological implications of what they are doing. Susceptible people can lose intellectual control. Taken out of touch with reality into a state where they see everything as 'spiritual', they can be left in a very vulnerable and potentially unbalanced condition. This is a particularly serious concern because those who employ such practices are likely also to lack proper professional training in dealing with the consequences of heightening people's emotions and altering their state of consciousness.

The fundamental fact remains: these practices are dangerous for both human mind and body. Hypnotism is likely an underlying weapon used to make people do the unconventional and abnormal. This was once captured by Thami Ka Plaatjie in a weekly newspaper of the Free State (21-27 August 2016) that

These religious tricksters have mastered the art of hypnosis and unleash it without mercy on gullible and unsuspecting poor in our communities.

It is therefore legitimately right for the government to initiate some interventions without encroaching or tempering on the freedom of religion, association or expression.

The Rationale behind these practices

Anti-institutionalism

The spirit of anti-institutionalism that dominated American Christianity in the sixties enhanced and expedited the growth of the charismatics worldwide. As Quebedeaux (1983:135) pointed out:

The prevalence of such anti-institutional sentiment made charismatic renewal attractive as a movement of *spiritual* unity in diversity that sought to revitalize *existing* church structures rather



than to tear them down to build new ones. In this connection, it is also important to underscore the contemporary viability of the persistence of a *movement* lacking coherent internal structure, hierarchy, or real membership – given the existence in modern society of a “looser” affiliation, carried by the mass media (such as books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, cassette tapes, and large gatherings), without the need to bring people together for formal, as distinct from expressive (fellowship and evangelistic), purposes.

These emerging churches regard themselves as non-denominational as they have no link to either mainline Christian Churches or Classical Pentecostal Churches. They are in most cases, anti-denominational, and refuse endorsement of them. Closer scrutiny reveals that they encapsulate anti-organisation and anti-structure ideals. Charles Trueheart in *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1996) wrote a provocative article with a title; “The Next Church” and in that article he termed these churches as the Next Church and on page 37 he recorded:

No spires. No crosses. No robes. No clerical collars. No hard pews. No kneelers. No biblical gobbledygook. No prayerly rote. No fire, no brimstone. No pipe organs. No dreary eighteenth-century hymns. No forced solemnity. No Sunday finery. No collection plates... The Next Church, as the independent and entrepreneurial congregations that are adopting these new forms might collectively be called, is drawing lots of people.

There is no doubt that the anti-institutional tendencies had always been a hallmark of the Pentecostal and Charismatic ecclesiology since its embryonic egression. Even within the Shepherding Movement of the seventies, the same sentiment was echoed:

Feeling that contemporary church structures were inadequate and often unbiblical, the movement’s leaders developed a house church/cell group model, which of course was also in the spirit of early Pietism and Methodism. In their ecclesiological practice the basic building block of church structure was the house church or cell group led by a pastor (Moore 2003:181).

This salient feature had been perpetuated within the Pentecostal and Charismatic circles for decades. The outcomes are the observable ungodly practices reflected in this article.

Anti-intellectualism

It strikes the mind of any observer who looks into the Charismatic College curricular of limitations with regard to the depth of theological scholarship, and questionable coding of the courses offered. When perusing some of their training syllabi, one is struck by the shallowness and lack of theological depth, including those syllabi offered on line. Some of these institutions confer degrees with questionable names and titles up to the Masters level. The question that arises is the accreditation and the recognition of these courses and qualifications. The study matter apportioned a degree is sometimes even lower than that of a Group Bible Study in the local church. It is observed that the colleges run by the Charismatic groups lack a content that can challenge their graduates to enter into the professional discourse with higher learning regarding the matters of faith. The Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Ethics, and Science of Religion are not offered at a level of producing scholars that can be *workmen who do not need to be ashamed and who correctly handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)*. The kind of Systematic Theology one encounters in these New Charismatics literature is the one that is detached from the historical *genesis* and the social context out of which it develops. Woodbridge and McComiskey (1991:302) capture this sentiment accurately:



The pneumatological penchant of Pentecostals is well-known: their constant reliance on the Holy Spirit, who would teach them all things in Jesus' absence, who would facilitate "greater works" than Jesus himself performed, who would grant a "word of knowledge" understood as divinely originated disclosures of hidden information, and whose empowerment would result in accompanying signs (Mark 16:17). The Johannine reminder (1 John 2:27) "you do not need anyone to teach you" is often cited among Pentecostals to obviate academic study.

The current unconventional practices in the New Charismatic Churches are perpetuated by isolation from real academic activities of theological field. The involvement of their theological institutions at all levels, and especially, at tertiary level, in research and productive work will establish a vital link to dialogue with the broader theological academy. The kind of education they need to engage in is the one that gains purpose and significance to the extent it is consistent with and contributes toward accomplishment of God's highest purpose for humanity. It must be the one that MacArthur (2003:245) refers to:

The highest goal of education must then be to assist individuals in developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable them to better glorify and enjoy God.

This education emphasises the knowledge, change of heart or attitudes, and equips one with skills to handle issues in life honourably. However, it is to be acknowledged that these leaders are excited and enthusiastic about their faith and evangelism in the world.

The passion for Christ and His message in all their endeavours is beyond question or doubt. This lack of theological insight and depth leads to proliferation and incoherency. It inevitably breeds the lack of clarity in ecclesiological undertakings such as structure, polity, and conduct. It also brings home the thesis that their practices are not the legitimate expressions of Christology and soteriology at large. There is a gap that needs to be filled. There must be some drive of enlightening them that

the doctrine of the well-meant gospel offer is grounded upon and in harmony with the accommodated nature of biblical revelation (Spronk 2012:5).

The New Charismatic ministers are called to realise that the unconventional practices are derived from subjective experiences. Contrarily experience should come through some deep engagement of the mind as a result of wide range of interaction, debates, and self-evaluation based on the metanarratives. The objectives are not just for effectiveness in *ecclesiastical* activities or *missional* endeavours, but for systematic arguments that defend the faith and its cause (apologetics). It is to be cautioned that the critique directed to their practices, is panoramically assessed from the context. The context must not always dictate faith, but faith must align itself with revealed intentions of and by the Divine. Bate (2012:72) rightly points out that

An authentic response to a context like this requires a response to the *complexus* of truths, beliefs and values within the context.

All the anti-intellectual leniencies referred to above, disregard the matters of facts and reason. The New Charismatic leaders under scrutiny should desist from portraying theology as an epitome of unscientific irrationality that is uninspiringly godless. This sad news is captured by Leslie Sedibe of City Press Newspaper (3 April 2016):

There is no compulsory study, no official mentoring. There are no exams. All you need is a bit of eloquence, swag and a spring in your step. If you can throw in an American or Nigerian accent, that's a



bonus – hence the presence of individuals with a chequered past who are now making a living as charismatic pastors.

When institutional teaching and learning is not provided for, then mentoring supervision for ministerial formation is an option. Learning under an experienced and sonant *kalodidaskalos* – the teacher of what is good plays superlative shaping for doing right things and forming character which is above reproach. Resane (2010:99) captures the effect of this deficiency:

The lack of mentoring supervision is very much like spiritual fatherlessness. We have many handicapped leaders in positions of power who have nothing to offer except to perpetuate poisonous methods of leadership. They are fatherless because they do not have mentors in their lives. They have nothing good to impart hence corruption in higher places. Mentors provide knowledge, skills, and directions in life.

Antinomianism

This is theologically understood to mean that by faith and grace a Christian is freed from all laws, including the moral standards of the culture. Any law from the established institutions such as government or churches, is regarded as being irreligious or atheistic. The textual reference used to justify antinomianism is Matt 5:20. The abolishment of the law and the fulfilment of the law are used oxymoronically. Welzen (2013:99) expounds this to caution that for “some, it is an abolishment of the law. For Jesus himself, it is the fulfilment of the law.” In the context, Jesus was teaching that there should be some harmony between the law and ethics. It is of great interest to note the reaction of some Christians regarding the processes of Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights Communities (CRL Rights Commission) currently examining some pastors and their practices in South Africa. The state and the broader composition of the South African church had come to conclusion that some New Charismatic Churches practices are antinomian to a certain degree. These practices disrespect human dignity, and endanger people’s quality of life – not to mention the economic robbery of the citizens. For instance, making people eat grass, snakes, rats etc. is a serious health risk. Walking on people’s body or asking people to expose their genitalia is a serious human dignity degradation. The lack of morality; and the illicit sexual behaviour and practices, is a decadent moral flaw. According to the government gazette, the Commission operates within its jurisdiction as its mission statement is:

To promote and develop peace, friendship, humanity, tolerance and national unity among cultural, religious and linguistic communities. To achieve this mission, the CRL Commission shall:

- be the channel of communication between the state and communities;
- monitor compliance by the State and Civil Society with its mandate;
- mediate in inter-community conflict situations and facilitate harmonious co-existence
- facilitate the development of programmes that foster sensitivity, respect and understanding for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity;
- lobby government departments and legislative authorities in order to identify and recommend, amending, repealing or enacting laws undermining or supporting those rights respectively.

The Neo- Charismatic leaders generally believe that the laws of the land can be capriciously ungodly, therefore, if not disregarded, should be disobeyed. The CRL Commission requested accountability from the pastors under discussion. This should, as expected not settle well with many of these pastoral practitioners. The Commission felt the reactionary heat right from day one.



The chairperson, Mkhwanazi-Xaluva told News24 on the 24 November, 2015 that she had already consulted the police to seek protection after several religious leaders arrived at the commission with armed men. She stood her ground:

The issue here is that these so-called religious leaders do not want to account. They want to intimidate us, but we can't fold. All we are asking for is financial books. It can't be that the country is controlled by a few.

The emerging Charismatic churches tend to disregard the lawful procedures, since they claim or base their action on extra-biblical revelations. All their unlawful practices are connected and legitimized by 'God'. Bearing in mind that

within charismatic movements, recognition of the leader's relationship to the divine provides the basis for authoritative control over religious followers (Shupe, Stacey & Darnell 2000:114).

No earthly or socio-political leader should govern them and their acts. They disregard the fact that the divine ordination does not necessarily imply authenticity. The divine appointment does not imply the abuse of public policy. Pastors or church leaders are not generally good just because they are ordained by God. The God-ordained man or woman of God cannot persist in practicing the dangerous behaviours on the citizens of the state; and the state does not watch and observe from the distance. This fact is expressed by Battin (1990:85);

A principal objection to the view that autonomous risk-taking conduct in religion should be respected, the only objection with legal standing, appeals to the harm principle by citing the social costs of such behaviour. Under this principle, risk-taking religious conduct may be morally condemned, as well as restricted or prohibited under law, where it imposes harm or substantial risk of harm to others

In these churches, a leader receives the revelation which in many cases, it is extra-textual; and is regarded as authentic and authoritative. The canonical revelation as embodied in the Writ receives very shallow perusal. This is evidenced by the absence or unprofessional production of responsible budgets, auditing, strategic plans, proper administration, accountability, etc. These are regarded as ungodly and unscriptural. The practices are perpetuated by the lack or shallow intellectual capacity of the so-called "Men or Women of God" (founders who might carry the titles such as Bishop, Apostle, Prophet, Pastor, Professor etc.) who receive revelations from God regarding the directions the ministry must take.

Anti-sacramentalism

This is actions against the foundational blocks of church as expressed through dogma, polity, ordinances, confessions etc. The earlier Pentecostals, though anti-sacramental, embraced the "Baptist congregationalism, anti-sacramentalism, and Biblicism, while it adopted Methodist sanctification and empiricism" (Quebedeaux 1983:26). The Neo-Pentecostals moved away from this and imbibed the new and strange practices that leave many observers with some bafflement. This might however, be due to somniferous rationality prevalent in the mainline Christianity. This somnolence is always used as the reason for the springboard of this anti-sacramental attitude.



The two major sacraments in Evangelical Christianity are water baptism by emersion and the Holy Communion. Many of the Neo-Charismatic churches hardly observe these ordinances, especially the baptism. As for the Holy Communion, it is not done as per dictates of 1 Corinthians 11:24-26. One sees or observes its observance sometimes at the wedding when it is administered to or for the groom and the bride. The Neo-Charismatic Christianity is usually understood as a miracles movement resorting to health and wealth benefits of those who commit themselves to the 'Pastor', 'Apostle', 'Prophet', 'Man of God' etc. In the latter days' sacraments are replaced with 'divine' directives to eat snakes and rats, drink petrol, nakedness displays, walking on devotees' bodies, driving cars over devotees' bodies etc. It is understood that the movement is considered as a reaction against fundamentalism and Pentecostal classicalism, resulting in another denominational category within the broader Pentecostal faith.

Conclusion

The era of Nebuchadnezzar was not different from our time. Astrology, occultism, consultation of omens, miracles workings, and visible divinations, were used to give directions regarding the divine will in times of wars, natural disasters such as famines, earthquakes, civil uprisings etc. Injustice was abounding in the land.

The strong used to plunder the weak who was not equal to a lawsuit. The rich used to take the property of the poor. Regent and prince would not take the part of the cripple and widow before the judge, and if they came before the judge he would not preside over their case (Wiseman 1987:100).

However, Nebuchadnezzar, despite his insanity, endeavored to reverse the injustice system in order to restore equity and justice. The problem was his arrogance.

The Daniel text implies that the king was put into isolation and slept rough for long enough for his nails to grow like claws. His diet was vegetation (Wiseman 1987:104).

The main concern is the celebrity pastors who, unlike Daniel, pattern themselves as celebrities after Nebuchadnezzar who end up behaving like the wild beasts even in matters of diet. Although the Toronto Blessing phenomenon does not have a direct bearing on the current practices by some New Charismatic Churches in South Africa, the historical trail can be traced from it; as some latest practices reflect similar kinds of manifestations. The Toronto Blessing paved the way for observable activities in these church traditions.

The Neo-Charismatic movement that promotes the unconventional practices such as eating grass, snakes, and rats do not have any theological construct to support their practices. The leaders are the celebrities who replace the gospel with the unconventional exercises that are dangerous to people's lives. Even Peter C Wagner (1988:213) warned

When God works with healing power, He does not require superstars as His agents. He can and does work through ordinary, obedient Christians who understand and live the life-style of the kingdom of God.

These pastors are the embodiment of Nebuchadnezzar, people who lost their sanity, and had become anti-intellectual, anti-institutional, anti-sacramental, and antinomian in their ecclesiastical practices. The bottom line is correctly captured by Vanhoozer and Strachan: "Theology is in exile and, as a result, the knowledge of God is in ecclesial eclipse" (2015:1). Doctrinal occultation has covered the Christian ontology in its epistemological morality and dignity. The government has the



civil right to protect citizens whose lives are endangered by these unconventional religious practices.

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