




Resurgence of African Spiritualities in the New Prophetic Churches

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Abstract

The current developments in New Prophetic Churches (NPCs) raise the necessity for theological research. There are some practices within these formations, similar to African spiritualities. Spirituality is defined and some reflections on African spiritualities highlighted. This article identifies the NPCs and African spiritualities and how the two converge towards spiritual formation for Christians in these churches. Literature review and social media are used to research and conclude the research question, which is the resurgence of African spiritualities in faith formation of this faith community. Justification for this resurgence is based on both theological and etymological analyses of features, especially occultism and deliverance. Research finding is that many believers abandon Christian faith or opt to be opponents of the Gospel when promised prophecies are not fulfilled. Hence a conclusion is arrived at as an appeal for the return to Christian apologetics and vivacious socio-cultural contextual studies in the church. Robust dialogue with NPC leaders is long overdue, as at the end the local pastors are the ones engaged with damage control after the prophet has passed. Minimum standards should be suggested to minimize emotional damage in individuals and communities of faith, and discipleship into Christian faith needs to be heightened.

Keywords: NPCs, prophet, spiritualities, occultism, practices.

Introduction

This research is a study on African spirituality and prophetism in NPCs. Prophecies within these churches reflect some forms of divination, witchcraft, occultism, magic, and spiritism. These practices are constituent to African spirituality, hence the resurgence of African spiritualities in these churches. These practices were regarded by 'missionary preaching and homiletics as a psychological delusion and a figment of the African imagination' (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2016:69). It is therefore correct to start with the definition of spirituality followed by some reflections on African spirituality. Thereafter, there is an identity of the NPCs, and their spiritualities. A special focus is on occultism. The conclusion is an appeal for apologetics, dialogue and cultural context to be situated in church life in order to address the damage due to unfulfilled prophecies.

Definition of Spirituality



There is a growing academic interest in spirituality over the past few decades in the international context (Carlisle, 2016; Olupona, 2000; Bujo, 2006; Bouyer, 2013; Hudson, 2007; Sheldrake, 2007, 2010; Nicolaidis & Grobler, 2017; Kourie & Kretzschmar, 2005). Spirituality carries weighty sections regarding its history, interpretation, and practice. Literally, 'spirituality means life in God's Spirit, and a living relationship with Him' (Zaprometova, 2018:145). It is the human experiences of their connectedness to self, community, creation and to the Divine (God). Magesa (2010:68) refers to it as 'universal human activity involving human recognition of, and relationship with, Transcendence.' It is a human journey seeking the meaning of life through the relationship with God through the community. According to Amanze (2011) collective spirituality is a connection to self and other people, to nature and to a higher being. This shows the emerging and popular research's concern, as Kourie (2005:9) highlights that 'the resurgence of interest in spirituality takes place within a postmodern society and a global and inter-religious context.' Palmer points out that 'The biblical worldview, like the African worldview, presupposes the existence of a world of spirits' (2015:41). Africans believe in the reality of the spirit world. They 'still strongly believes in the reality of the spirit world. From the African perspective, the spirit world is populated with different spiritual beings' (Afolabi, 2018:99), unlike the Western theologies that deny the reality of spirits. The German theologian, known for demythologization of theology, Bultmann states that it is impossible for modern scientific man 'to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles' (1961:5).

Reflections on African spirituality

From the African scholars discussed below one learns that 'Spirituality is always culturally formed and informed. The formation of spirituality is always cultural-contextual. 'African spirituality involves deeper human values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices, based on various African worldviews (Marumo & Chakale, 2018:11697). This paints the unfortunate situation that there are no formal religious texts as a point of reference for African spirituality. Beliefs and moral ethics are not articulated in a systematic way. This is also highlighted by Matolino (2014:30) that 'All ideas and beliefs do not have any other origin besides the community.' According to Krüger et al (2009), African ethics are implicit in the codes of proper social behaviour and morality is viewed horizontally as a matter of human relationships. It is transmitted orally through stories, folklore, songs etc., predicated on the 'bases of cyclical existence' (Marumo & Chakale, 2018:11698). African spirituality is centered on life, which is not viewed dually or in dichotomies, except in relation with creation and culture. Life is viewed as eternity in the past, the present and the eternity to come as one continuum. The fundamental idea here is a universal interconnectedness and interplay where all things impact each other. There is no division between the sacred and the secular but there should be some maintenance of balance. Marumo and Chakale (2018:11698) reinforce this idea that 'The order and balance of the universe are based on the opposing forces that are complementary to each other. Because order and balance is a necessity for harmony between the realms of existence' this creates the necessity for divination and ritualism to maintain this balance. This is a religious quest expressed through practices in order to acknowledge, worship, communicate with or approach the Sacred, the Divine God who is perceived as the Ultimate Truth (Koenig, 2008). African spirituality is therefore, understood 'as a collective spirituality' (Ohajunwa & Mji, 2018:2524).

It is expressed within the *botho/ubuntu* where the individual self is nestled firmly within the collective, because individual spirituality within an African context is practised in a way that ensures the wellbeing of the entire community (Mji, 2012). It, therefore, involves one's immersion into the life of the world through participation in one's community (Magesa, 2010:71). African spirituality is basically a moral obligation related to behaviour universally with accountability to the community. Community expectations from an individual are weighed and judged through



traditions. That means African spirituality is embedded within the culture. This is also captured by Chiorazzi (2015:n.p.) that 'African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane'. Tagwirei (2023b:2) says 'African spirituality is unmistakably all-encompassing, as it embraces and exerts an influence over every facet of human existence – socially, physically, politically and economically.' These areas are all at the center of the NPC's prophetic ministrations.

While the mainline Christianity churches marginalise divination and ritualism by associating them with witchcraft, African spirituality finds some inroads through them for balancing the realm in which life is experienced. This creates a gap that the New Prophetic preachers identified and vowed to fill in. By "revealing" peoples' secrets and underlying fears, performing "acts of miracles" and "invoking" some strange practices, Africans finding their lives off balance and harmony with their existence, find these prophets to be agents or channels of addressing their concerns. Since the NPC is a new phenomenon within Pentecostalism, it seems to be combating what Indi (2014:53) claims, namely, that these 'emergent Pentecostal and charismatic movements promote a Christian theology designed to stomp out the remaining vestiges of indigenous beliefs and practices.'

The identity of NPCs

African Pentecostalism, especially in countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana and beyond, is shaping into a new phenomenon known as prophetism observed in the Neo Pentecostal or Neo-Charismatic Churches. Out of these churches emerged the NPCs (NPC) enhanced by the Prophetic Movement that evolved out of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) championed by Wagner who highlights that the universal church 'began to affirm the gift and office of prophet in the decade of the 1980s... previous to the 1980s most prophets of God were restricted in their ministry by the widespread notion among many believers that the office of prophet had ceased after the first century or so' (2008:26). However, this Prophetic Movement is 'designed by the Holy Spirit to bring full recognition, restoration and activation of prophets and the prophetic ministry' (Hamon, 1990:30), and that prophets 'have not been dispensationally depleted nor cemented into a nonfunctional foundation' (1990:15). Their proponents are unwavering that 'those who are truly commissioned prophets have the right to prophesy direction, correction, guidance and new revelation to a person, church or nation' (Hamon, 1997:124).

Like all movements the NPCs transmogrify and metamorphose into some new dynamic processes and shapes. Out of the New Apostolic Reformation's (NAR) prophetic emphases, the NPCs or Movement evolved. These churches may be geographically located as small or colossal. They are medium-sized and mega in followership, small or big gatherings. These are the new churches, taking a different shape from classical Pentecostalism due to their practices. Many recent Pentecostal scholars agree that the NPCs draw their theology from Neo-Pentecostalism, with distinct emphasis on prophetic dimension of the same theology (Kgatle, 2019, 2020, Kgatle & Anderson, 2020, White & Pondani, 2020, Ramantswana, 2018, Tsekpoe, 2019 & Banda, 2021). Kgatle (2023:2) highlights that 'the movement is popular for prophetic deliverance, titles, problem diagnosis, products, and consultations.' The same notion is conveyed by Tagwirei (2023a:4) that these churches 'exalt the significance of miracle-working, prophesying, and liberating individuals from various afflictions, evil spirits, attacks, and problems.'

Their activities are in ways consistent with African religious practices, hence the reference in this study is African spirituality. There is religious emphasis on the reality of supernatural evil and the power of the Holy Spirit. Resane (2020) elaborates on similarities between the visits to the prophet (pastor) and the witchdoctor, that in both situations these two competitors are consulted for power,



prosperity, or protection. The two contenders are closer to each other as their methods and rationale for being consulted are divided by a very thin line.

Intensive research on NPCs reveals the rationale behind unwholesome practices that dance with sorcery, exorcism, occultism, spiritism etc. is prophecy through or for power (popularity for followership) and prosperity. Gwamma (2014:139) highlights this:

Because of the quest for power, control and search for the miraculous, terms such as “anointing,” “Holy Ghost fire,” “sowing seed,” “claiming or rejecting this or that,” “not my portion,” and “back to sender prayers” have characterised Pentecostal vocabulary. Such teaching has given rise to charlatans and provided them space to thrive

These churches prioritise prophecy, which is mostly an extra-biblical revelation or personal in orientation. The NPCs perceive the Bible as a secondary source of divine authority, as words from the prophets are given premium over the Bible. Mostly, prophecies are tied to commercialisation intentions, as observed in the ministries of Shepherd Bushiri of Enlightened Christian Gathering, Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries etc. Its content carries no appeal for repentance, holiness, or instructions on faith fundamentals. It is an individualistic prophecy centered around the prophet and the enquirer, therefore an anthropocentric preaching. The prophet starts by declaring what he sees or hears, and in conversation with God, a particular person in need is revealed either through his or her personal name, clothes even their underwear, feeling of pain in the body, National Identity Document Number, Car Registration Number, place of origin etc. Then a person so identified emerges from the crowd and a personal message is delivered to him or her.

Where commercialization is the hidden intent, the enquirer is asked to opt for forensic prophecy, which is the private consultation with the man of God. It is here where an enquirer is privately exhorted not to go to the man of God empty-handed. A certain fee may be prescribed and appointment set. The prophesied individual succumbs without asking any question. Afolabi (2018:109) opines that the succumb is due to overemphasis on ecclesiastical paternalism whereby ‘pastors attempt to control the affairs of the flock and demanding respect and loyalty at all cost...’ In many instances, a recipient of the prophecy is asked to demonstrate faith or loyalty to the prophet by giving something worthwhile in return. One of the substantive issues from the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic (CRL) Rights Commission was:

Deliberate exploitation of the poor and vulnerable people because of the commercialisation of religious practices, through assumption of divine/missionary right to directly or indirectly solicit and receive gifts/offerings/tithes in cash or in kind from their members (e.g. earnings, pension payouts, movable property, immovable property, etc.) without commitment to responsible financial management and accounting (2017:19).

This is human exploitation under the pretense of religious commitment. Some psychological examination of this human hypnosis definitely leads to conclusion of some form of occultism that may turn into some pure criminal acts. ‘These so-called men of God also craftily employ occultic means to manipulate people into ignorantly donating their cars, landed properties and money to them’ (Diara et al, 2020:4).

Spiritualities in NPCs

Prophecy is equated with divination in African spiritual enquiries. Africans appreciate any diviner who reveals some hidden issues in personal life. Africans would like to know about powers



operating behind the scenes either to harm or favour them. The diviner's revelation of consultee's secrets spurs one's spiritual inner being. A prophet comes as an authentic cultic figure speaking on behalf of God or a spokesperson of a supreme entity to reveal the mysteries operating in one's life.

Deliverance

One familiar practice in NPCs that accedes with African spirituality is exorcism or deliverance (Kgatle, 2022a). The rationale behind strange practices within the NPCs is the perceived deliverance. Deliverance is a broader term theologically, but within the NPCs it denotes wholistic life transformation from any negative situation of life or experience from bad to good such as sickness to health, poverty to wealth, unemployment to employment, barrenness to childbearing, sexual dysfunction to virility, singleness to marriage, disfavor by the boss to favour that may include promotion at the place of work etc. Reuther (1998) points out that it is deliverance from sin, disease and demonic possession. This includes the references to witchcraft. Witchcraft is a common theme during the prophetic ministrations of NPCs. Asamoah-Gyadu (2016) points out that these churches close the gap of negative disposition and disregard of supernatural causality and the power of witchcraft in particular that was created by mission Christianity. Indigenous beliefs and practices always and often identified as witchcraft, due to this western influence (Olupona, 2014:53), are now back to the center of mainline Christianity through Pentecostal spirituality. This is perpetrated by African traditional worldview which 'is the embodiment of culture, religion, customs, values and traditions' (Turaki, 1997:40).

Great Pentecostal teachers, Duffield and Van Cleave (1983:491) are of strong opinion that there is no actual record of deliverance from demons by the laying on of hands, or any mention or instruction about coughing up or spitting out demons. These teachers contend that 'nobody was ever given a special gift for "exorcism," only for discernment, as part of the protection of the Church chiefly against false teachers with lying and deceitful doctrines of demons.' Basically, just like miracles, exorcism cannot be orchestrated or pre-planned. Scripturally there is no prescriptive instruction on how to do the deliverance. Any method applied should be consonant with divine intentions and approaches such as glorifying the name of Christ and respecting human dignity. The method 'must not underestimate the power of the Word of God' (1983:491).

Occultism

Some anthropologists argue that one cannot make a clear-cut distinction between magic, which is a core component of occultism, and religion. This may well be the case in the religious systems of some non-literate societies. However, assertions that there is occultism in NPCs, is confirmed by understanding the broader meaning of occultism. Occultism includes beliefs and practices that are magical or divinatory and these have existed in all human societies throughout history. Occultism basically refers to "hidden things" that deal with witchcraft, spiritism and fortune telling. Occult 'means hidden, secret, dark, mysterious, concealed... phenomena which transcend or seem to transcend man's senses or realm of natural experience' (Dickason, 1978:196). Secrecy and mysterious revelations claimed to be received from the deep spiritual connection can easily be associated with occultism. Occultism can be associated with superstition, fortune-telling, magic, and spiritism and esoteric supernatural beliefs and practices which usually fall well outside the scope of organized religious practices. It is unfortunate that occultism appears mostly in and through some form of religious guise. Within the religious guise, as per Koch (1978), it appears as a *causa recipiens*, which is the ability to use extrasensory powers to uncover the secrets of the past, present and future. In some circles this ability is called *psi-gamma* effect derived from



the Greek word, *ginoskein*, which means “to know”. Koch highlights that occultism involves the form of energy known as *causa movens*, which is the ability to influence people and objects through extrasensory forces. This is sometimes referred to as *psi-kappa* effect, derived from Greek *kinein*, meaning “to move”. Both forces come into effect as a prophetic guise since they both claim some supernatural access to the invisible powers that can reveal the hidden issues in one’s life such as sickness and its cause, rationale behind one’s failure (business, academia, marriage, singleness, job etc.), the cause is always labelled to Satan, witches, enemies etc.

Many prophecies qualify either as *causa recipiens* or *causa movens*, therefore can be legitimately ascribed as occult practices. Remember, ‘the Bible itself often suffers the abuse of being used and quoted in magic spells and formulae’ (Koch, 1978:95-6). The NPCs operate under the shadow of spirituality, reckoning the reality of the cosmic powers in a chaotic world. The important realisation is that ‘there is the shadow of those who use sacred power for nefarious and selfish aims. These are the witches and sorcerers of the African world’ (Olupona 2014:49).

Duffield and Van Cleave (1983:492) say ‘Satan has become very bold of recent years and the occult has been receiving a great deal of public attention.’ There is undoubtedly, like in the whole universe, beliefs that the occult is alive and well on the continent of Africa (Moreau, 1990). This is confirmed by Gehman (2005:151) that ‘Africans have shared with all members of the human race a belief in mystical powers to explain life’s fortunes and failures and to seek refuge in their power.’ There is a resurfacing of demonic activities and terminology in the NPCs. Subject associated with this resurgence include occult, spiritism, Satanism, experiments in magic, witchcraft, ancestral veneration etc. To some prophets, a church service with no demon references seems to be a failure of some sort, as climax is attached to evidential manifestations of demonic activities, therefore downgrading worship to some blissful entertainment. This is regardless of the apostolic exhortation that ‘we do not walk by sight but by faith’ (2 Corinthians 5:7)

The question that scholars and some preachers of the gospel ask is ‘Why some people, especially Christians who have been formed into Christian faith from their infancy, later subject themselves to some form of occult?’ To put it blindly, ‘Why African Christians consult the prophet and agree to respond to the prophet’s rudiments even if these rudiments make no sense or they violate their human dignity?’ There are several reasons to answer these questions as stipulated by Dickason (1978:201):

1. Man’s sense of personal inadequacy – he needs outside help in this complex and confusing world.
2. The impersonalisation of society that treats man as a number on a list to be used and discarded.
3. The inadequacy of science to contribute to the real meaning and purpose of life with personal dimensions.
4. The bankruptcy of religion that has no answer, no absolutes, no dynamic.

These are the reasons for African Christians to opt for the mystical in order to peer into the depths of their personality in self-contemplation. They prefer to be associated with meaning and power in order to counteract devastating cosmic powers in their lives. Moreau (1990:102) points out that ‘there is an almost universal acknowledgement of the reality of the spirits and the spirit realm.’ These spirits are ubiquitous and eclectic in operation. The spirit world is not divorced from the physical realm. Africans want to be one with their universe where mystics and secrets are real and had to be dealt with through spiritual connections.

Reflecting on Dickason’s theses above, one can firstly acknowledge that Africans were perceived by their western counterparts as scavengers unexposed to ‘civilisation.’ This created a sense of



low self-esteem and personal inadequacy in Africans. Their survival techniques as found in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) had been stripped and made redundant as they were considered uncivilized and backward by especially colonisers. Africans were left detached from their eco-space. Their identity, meaning of life, and spirituality is a spatial reality as these are practised and experienced in the cosmos. Africans do not have space in their life for failure or impotency in any sphere of lives. They 'believe that all people should be enabled to live a normal life – that is, they should grow up, marry, bear children and eventually depart this life for a spiritual realm, whence they will protect and direct their earthly relatives' (Thorpe, 1991:115). The new world is too complex for Africans, especially Christians, hence the need for understanding of oneself in this confusing world. This is exacerbated by African spirituality which sees spiritual and physical beings as real entities that interact with each other in time and space (Kärkkäinen, 2006).

Africans are communal people. One highly esteemed African evangelical scholar, Byang Kato of Nigeria alludes that Africans are gregarious by nature (1975). They are communal in essence and substance. It is within the community that Africans find their identity and meaning of life. Resane (2017:98) correctly highlights that 'Africans experience growth when they cluster together. Growth is impossible without others. One's being, identity, meaning and integrity are solely dependent on the contribution of others.' Isolation and impersonalisation are foreign to African worldview. 'Individualism is self-fatalism' (Resane, 2017:97). The western influence with its individualistic worldview leave Africans confused and detached from life. For Africans, humans are not items on the list to be utilized and discarded once they *become redundant*. African philosophy of life is from beyond the womb to beyond the tomb. Thorpe (1991:29) captures it well that 'Life is energy and energy is divine. Participation in life's activities both releases and renews that divine energy. Life's beginnings are thus united with life's endings in a continuing cycle which has endured throughout countless centuries.' Western Christianity overlooked this, creating a gap of self-pity as western individualism left Africans longing for some connectivity here and beyond.

Africans from all walks of life journey towards the prophet. It does not matter that one is poor or rich, educated or uneducated. Science fails to contribute to the real meaning and purpose of life with personal dimensions though a truly scientific worldview recognises the reality of the world. Makumba (2014:87) asserts that 'God has instituted a natural law, which is also accessible to the human person by the powers of his intelligence.' Theology as a scientific subject is expected to enlighten one to see error and truth. 'Any theology that does not interact with this perception of reality will be irrelevant to those Africans who hold such a world view' (Imasogie, 1983:77). Western medical techniques and human philosophies seem inadequate to address African spirituality issues. Moreau (1990:126) is correct that 'there is a lack of trust in Western medical techniques, which are too mechanical and do not answer the African question of "Why?" adequately.' They need something spiritual to fill the vacuum in their lives. This vacuum was fathomed by Solomon in his old age (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Many Africans who were brought up in the households of faith flock to the prophet, because, as Nkadimeng (2020:24) says, 'The natural desire to see God is embedded in man.' Unfortunately there is bankruptcy of religion with no answer, no absolutes, no dynamics. The liberal thoughts in the mainline Christianity make faith unappealing and irrelevant for African spirituality. Rationality without inspiration, oratory without illumination, liturgy without spiritual connection, and confession without application, leave many African Christians with the vacuum that calls for something that can touch their deepest sense of spirit. Religious formality that does not address African real world dominated by cosmic powers is impotent for African experiences. As per Moreau (1990), God and the Christian worldview leave believers with feelings that witchcraft and sorcery possess greater power than the Christian and his God. They turn to the prophet who is little more than a "Christianised" carry-over of the prophetic concepts of the traditional beliefs.



Any claim of communication with the invisible power – demonic or divine, is spiritism. This is exacerbated by African concepts of reality and destiny deeply rooted in the spirit world, so all social and spiritual phenomena are governed by the laws of spiritual mystery (Turaki, 1997:41). To claim the invisible power beyond human senses or natural experience is open to spiritual scrutiny (1 Corinthians 14:29-33). The prophet's spiritual exercises are authoritative and indubitable. This synchronises well with the African cantations by a *sangoma* where the listener's response to *Vumani bo!* (agree!) should always be positive *Si ya vuma* (We agree!). It has become commonly known that prophets ask the enquirers to respond to every incantational statement with "I receive". Expectation is that a person prophesied upon should just agree or accept what the prophet says. Mochechane (n.d:36) captures it correctly that 'The prophet "declares and decrees" and the faithful "Receive"; no questions asked.' This is not different from divination. 'Many of them make fake prophecies and extort their victims in the name of the Christian God (Diara et al, 2020:4).

These incantational utterances may sound theologically licit but may possess the power of insanity coming through confession. Many people fall into some trance reciting these cantations and out of that *hypnosis* build some form of *euphoria* sounding factually intangible. They fall for false visions, operating in delusions of the minds (Gwamma, 2014:132), 'a magic focused on the manipulation of supernatural forces for the benefit of individuals.' In that state, they make commitments, mostly financial, to the man or woman of God (prophet), who is the beneficiary.

Conclusion

The pseudo-Christian practices are globally gaining popularity as witchdoctors and prophets 'disguise themselves in cloaks and garments akin to those of the prophets and priests to deceive the poor and helpless masses who are desperate for one miracle or the other' (Diara, 2016:66). This spirituality is demonstrated by features that are pertinent with African spiritualities, where occultic practices appear. The prophets tap into African social, economic, religious and cultural needs, making 'many people consult occultic and diabolic personnel today in the name of "men of God" without knowing' (Diara et al, 2020:4). The NPC prophets lay an emphasis on personal revelations and extra-biblical revelations at the expense of biblical revelation. Little is said about the sufficiency of Christ to redeem humanity from depravity. The key focus is on the prophet, a "messiah" who is not just a mediator or provider, but a medium for health and wealth. People with low spiritual formation become gullible to the prophetic misnomers and many either end up in more miseries or abandon the Christian faith altogether.

Some vigorous return to Christian apologetics and vivacious socio-cultural contextual studies need to be heightened in the church. Robust dialogue with NPC leaders is long overdue, as at the end the local pastors are the one engaged with damage control after the prophet has passed. Minimum standards should be suggested to minimize emotional damage, and discipleship into Christian faith reenacted to alleviate the euphoria for Christians remaining "...infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

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