



The Positive Confession Movement and its influence and legacy on the Neo-Charismatic Movement

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Abstract

This article focuses on one of the branches of Charismatic Movement known as Positive Confession or Word of Faith Movement. The movement is called with some other names due to its emphasis on faith confession or claiming by faith whatever one needs, especially in areas of wealth and health. The fundamental message of the movement is that a believer has the power or authority to unshackle himself from sickness, poverty, or any negative circumstances that may steal away happiness and peace. The intention is to trace its influence on the modern Neo-Charismatic Movement. To understand the movement fully, research has been done on its history, identity, message, dogma, and why its dogma is attractive to Neo-Charismatic Movement. The basic reason for this African proclivity to Positive Confession Movement is that Africans look for the faith that can enhance their privileges and power. The tenets of faith for this movement are identified as its main distinctive, therefore making some impression that the movement is a credible alternative for people in poverty, seeking some way out this dire situation of lacking material goods. The conclusion captures some positives and weaknesses in the movement. An appeal is made for the movement to draw the balance between its prosperity gospel and the evangelical values of commitment, character, sacrifice, holiness, and contentment.

Keywords: confession, faith movement, wealth, prosperity, health.

Introduction and Identification

This Positive Confession Movement is referred to by various names such as “Name-It-And Claim-It” (Bowman, 1988:35), Health and Wealth, happiness movement, faith-formula theology, Prosperity Gospel, Full Gospel, Word of Faith Movement (WFM), Gospel of success (Niemandt, 2017:203–219), seed faith gospel and capitalist dogma (Thomas 2012:163–172), or Positive Confession or the faith message Movement (Anderson, 2004:157). This is the worldwide movement with no structured organisation, official polity, elected leadership, headquarters, official publication or membership records¹(Rozet, 2020). The world acclaimed proponents of the movement are in multitudes, but the prominent ones include Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Joyce Meyer, John Avanzini, Paul David Yongi Cho, Marilyn Hickey, Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Robert Tilton, Fred Price, Dag Heward-Mills and many others from around the globe. It was popularised by Paul Crouch’s Trinity Broadcasting Network, abbreviated as TBN (Capps, 1980, Martin,

¹ <https://sats.ac.za/blog/2020/10/23/the-word-of-faith-movement-and-positive-confession/>



1988:3, Bowman, 1991). The television networks were and still are the extensive tool used by the Pentecostal groups, as Johns (1998:78) also attests that “Pentecostal leaders such as Oral Roberts introduced the movement to many American families via the television.” These networks reached the African continent and today there are even television channels operated from Africa, carrying the Neo-Charismatic message around the clock. “In Africa, Word of Faith is sweeping the continent. *Christianity Today* estimates that more than 147 million of Africa's 890 million people are "renewalists", Pentecostals or charismatics who believe the health and wealth gospel. Sociologists say the message of money, cars, houses and the good life is almost irresistible to poor and oppressed audience” (Zavada, 2018).

This movement was introduced in South Africa by Ray McCauley's Rhema ministries based in Randburg, north of Johannesburg in the early eighties (Frahm-Arp, 2018, Mashau & Kgatle, 2019:1). From Rhema, the movement through its positive confession doctrine started to mushroom in numerous Charismatic church formations such as Hatfield Christian Church, the Vineyard Group, Durban Christian Center etc. (Thompson, 2004:130-131, Anderson, 1987:74). It is recently displayed in the New Prophetic Churches, some brought by leaders from the other parts of the African continent, especially West (Nigeria, Ghana etc.) and Central and South - East African (Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Zambia etc.) regions.

History and Dogma

The movement traces its origin to the controversial Baptist evangelist known as E.W Kenyon of the early 1880s. The home base of this theology was Emerson College of Oratory in Boston. Kenyon was neither Pentecostal nor Charismatic, but promoted divine healing based on the strength of one's confession (Hamon, 1990). The movement disappeared from theological and Christianity evolutionary landscape, though dogmatically it sporadically popped up through historical Pentecostal effloresces, especially through the Latter Rain Movement. It surfaced and exerted itself in the 1970s. This is where I take it from, as it wined and slithered itself through Charismatic renewal to the current Neo-charismatic era. The teaching of victorious, prosperous, healthy living, in the natural and spiritual emerged from three camps (B Hamon, 1990:132):

1. Oral Roberts's ministry of teaching the seed faith principle of sowing and reaping, of sowing finances to reap finances.
2. Robert Schuller's ministry of positive living and success principles.
3. The group of ministers who became known as “prosperity preachers,” the “Faith message teachers,” or the “Word People.”

The promoters and the renowned proponents of the movement are Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland. Hagin was born with a deformed heart on the 20th August 1917². He got “born again” on the 22nd April 1933, with some supernatural encounter with God in 1st January 1934 upon meditating on the Markan text: “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (11:23-24). He recited and repeated the text confessionally asking the Lord for healing. It was from this point that Hagin started to build his theology of ‘Believe in your heart, say it with your mouth, and receive it’ (Resane, 2008:57). This became a universal theology of the positive confession movement theology. Hagin became very popular in the

² ‘The Hagins’ Ministry, *World Religion*. <https://tulsaworld.com/> (Viewed 18 May 2022)



seventies as his ministry was plummeting almost through the world. One of the milestones for his ministry was the establishment of Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1974 (Anderson 1987:74). Out of this institution, the graduates engaged missionally “throughout the world propagating Hagin theology of health, wealth, and happiness through confession” (Resane, 2008:58).

Hagin is internationally titled “the Father of the Faith Movement” (Anderson, 1987:74; Brown, 2011:152). His dogma is widely derived from Kenyon’s convictions, which accentuates faith as a key to physical healing, material prosperity, and happiness (Hagin, 1991:19-20). Of course, this teaching receives criticism from scholars as its biblical hermeneutics is based on selective texts, that are always quoted out of context. The same level of critique can be highlighted that “many provisions of the Scripture are interpreted unconventionally, mainly in accordance with the “theology of prosperity”” (Grabovska, Talko, Kahamlyk, Honcharenko & Sierova, 2021:101). In agreement with Kenyon’s biblicist leniency, Hagin is of a strong opinion that the Bible is to be believed and confessed, and if done, success is expected or even guaranteed (Hagin, 2008:13).

The second proponent is Kenneth Max Copeland. Biographically, one can glean from websites that he was born on the 6th December 1936 in Lubbock, Texas. His parents were Aubrey Wayne and Vinita Pearl (nee Owens) Copeland.³ He married three times. In 1955-1958, he was married to Ivy Bedford, married Cynthia Davis in 1958, divorced her in 1961, and married his present wife, Gloria (nee Neece) Copeland in 1963.⁴ He enrolled with Oral Roberts University in 1967 and came very close to Oral to an extent that he became his chauffeur. His ministry operates from Fort Worth, Texas with infrastructure on a 33-acre (13 hectares) property worth hundreds of millions. It is where his famous church, Eagle Mountain International Church is based, together with television and radio production facilities, warehouse and distribution facilities, family residence, and the airport. These facilities employ about five hundred people. Copeland became a great admirer of Hagin’s theology and embraced it in totality (Atkinson, 2007).

Hagin prophesied over him, mentored and ordained him for the ministry (Balmer, 2004:189). Some of the fruits of his ministry labour includes the likes of Jerry Savelle, Fred Price, Charles Capp, and Robert Tilton. These have their outstanding ministries of their own character. Copeland is one of the wealthiest pastors in the world, and researchers wonder if this faith confession is really working for him.

Message and Dogma

The fundamental message of the movement is that a believer has the power or authority to unshackle himself from sickness, poverty, or any negative circumstances that may steal away happiness and peace. Believers can “bring into existence what they state with their tongue, since faith is a confession and a tongue is a force” (Moriarty, 1992:78). In one of the published tracts, Kenyon expressed his confession conviction in biblicism:

Confession always goes ahead of healing. Don’t watch symptoms, watch the Word, and be sure that your confession is bold and vigorous. Don’t listen to people. Act on the Word. Be a doer of the Word. It is God speaking. You are healed. The Word says you are. Don’t listen to the senses. Give the Word its place. God cannot lie (1943:26).

³ ["Texas Birth Index, 1903–1997". www.ancestrylibrary.com. Archived](http://www.ancestrylibrary.com) from the original on December 28, 2020. (Viewed 18 May 2022).



Confession is inseparable from the preaching activities (kerygma) of Positive Confession Movement. It is through confession that a believer unlocks the resources of heaven.

Members are taught that once they know who they are in Christ, they can then speak the same words about themselves that God has spoken about them in the Bible. This allows them to access and exercise the power vested in them through their identification with Christ's finished work on the cross. . . . In the biblical account of creation, God spoke and there was light. The Faith Message teaches believers that the same world-creating power is theirs as born-again Christians, and that it is a spiritual law that the spoken word sets creative (or destructive) forces in motion. (Harrison 2005:9-10).

It is, therefore, justifiable to make conclusions like Vreeland (2007:87) that "Word of Faith refers to charismatics with an overt emphasis on divine healing and financial prosperity." Health, wealth and happiness are regarded as God's blessings accessible by faith. The catchword is "What I confess, I possess." From its historical roots in Kenyon, their dogma is well summarised by Moriarty (1992:79) that according to Isaiah 53:4, Matthew 8:17, and 1 Peter 2:24, the perfect atoning work of Christ on the cross "has provided" (past tense) complete physical healing for "all" sickness and disease. The believer's job is to believe and to positively confess (or claim) physical healing, which was already provided for in the perfect redemption of Christ on the cross. For Kenyon, physical healing and prosperity were equated, therefore inseparable. This is confirmed by Andile Zulu in the South African Weekly newspaper, *Mail and Guardian* that these preachers are doctrinally convinced that: "The salvation of humanity is a contractual agreement with God. Belief and surrender to Christ delivers not only atonement for one's sins but also exceptional health and extraordinary wealth. Through potent prayer, positive confessions and generous church offerings, one can access God's ancient promise of prosperity."⁵

This South African weekly newspaper's article; '***The 'prosperity gospel' excuses poverty and its true causes in Africa***' at the beginning of 2022 was published out of concerns perpetrated by some Neo-Charismatic preachers' theology on poverty. For instance, the issue starts by validating their research that: Pastor Chris Oyikhalome, leader of Christ Embassy sees poverty as "an affliction of those lacking faith," while Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering reminds people constantly "that poverty is a demonic force that can only be wrestled into submission through spiritual warfare." Devotees are encouraged, sometimes in some ungodly or with commercial intent, to give financially to the ministry. The more one gives, the more they receive in return. Donations to Christian ministries will always increase one's material wealth (Gbote, 2014:54). The ministry has become a *stokvel*.

Stokvel is generally a club of people forming an investment society where members make regular agreed amount, generate profit to share with members equitably at the end of a designated period. It is an:

informal group savings scheme in which members voluntarily agree to contribute a fixed amount to a common pool regularly. This could be on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis (Lukhele, 1990:504).

It can be run weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually, depending on the agreement conditions agreed upon by members. It is an "informal savings organisations in the African community in South Africa" (Mashigo & Schoeman, 2012:50). Google definition of *stokvel* is "an informal savings pool or syndicate, usually among Black people, in which funds are contributed in rotation,

⁵ <https://mg.co.za/africa/2022-01-13-the-prosperity-gospel-excuses-poverty-and-its-true-causes-in-africa/>



allowing participants lump sums for family needs (esp funerals)⁶ It is one of the key strategies of poverty-alleviation commonly practiced by black South Africans (Matuku & Kaseke, 2014:504).

In the context of this discussion, the exchange rate here is between the preacher and the devotees. Devotees must give money through faith confession to the ministry or minister. Then it becomes *gee-vir gee* or *goedere ruils* as we say in Afrikaans. It is a principle of *give me and you receive back*, or *I put in, therefore must get something in return*. It is almost like gambling, where luck (expectation) must be bought (betting) with profit expected to go positive. If it goes negative, a bettor is blamed. Baron and Maponya (2020:7) speak of *stokvel* ecclesiology that: "The church that follows the pattern of a 'stokvel' is inward looking because a *stokvel* is a system that is used by a particular group of people for a specific purpose".

The teachers of the movement are marked with a track record of this *gee-vir-gee* theology of giving, putting God under some obligation to respond positively to the devotee's act of giving. For instance, one of their teachers Price (1984:69) pointed out "Tithing is God's primary way of materially and financially blessing His people." He further emphasised that "The moment YOU give, GOD gives" (1984:114). In agreement with Savelle (1980:5), Price (1984:51) also stated that the principles or laws of tithing and giving are universal and are there to "govern the operation of God's prosperity in a person's life." The very Savelle (1980:110) stated that "Giving is very important for prosperity." Copeland's wife, Gloria took the ideology of giving further by claiming: "You give \$1 for the Gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you ... give \$1 000 and receive \$100 000" (1978:54). Following this train of thought means sowing and reaping equals or leads to receiving materially from God in proportion to how much one sows or gives. Her husband leaves no stone unturned and convincingly teaches that by giving one "involves God in your financial affairs" (1986:12). He expounds this notion that God has a "formula for success" (Copeland 1978:70), "Keys to Prosperity", or "Laws of Prosperity", a "success principle in His Word whereby you may prosper" (Copeland, 1986:2). One of their friends, Willis (1975:47) agrees that "If you are going to receive finances, you must plant some finance seed"

The devotees are constantly indoctrinated to release their faith in order to receive their wealth or health. In this positive confession spirituality, tithes and offerings "...serve similar purposes as gifts offered to God with the purpose to earn God's blessings of well-being and prosperity" (Nel, 2019:4). Members are required to contribute financially. "Of all the particulars of doctrine taught... tithing would have to be numbered among the most frequently and strongly emphasized" (Harrison, 2005:97). The teaching emphasizes that failure to tithe affect not a defaulter alone, but other members from prospering (2005:98). Failure to tithe is regarded as sin to be repented from. Strong worded criticism emerged out of scholarship about commercialisation of the gospel. The fact of the matter in the public domain is that "Charlatans are perverting the gospel because of the love of money" (Ewool & Diboro, 2021:159). Scholars have identified that the effects of prosperity Gospel in modern African Christianity is a major cause of the proliferation of new charismatic movements (Anim, 2010).

At the end of the day, the poor is blamed for lack of faith, or harbouring some form of unconfessed sin. The problem is that people are burdened with guilt, because their lack of prosperity is equated to unbelief. Failures in areas of giving place people in the position of financial hardship. They are bullied into going extra mile by giving more in order to get better returns. In the situation, the message that comes through to the poor is that they should "...think positively and ignite the Godly power within them to instruct their cheque books or bank accounts to yield more

⁶ <https://www.google.com/search?q=stokvel+definition>



(abundance) or to embrace the spirit of ‘name it and claim it’ when coming to material possessions” (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019:1).

Kenyon took his conviction further to claim that Jesus Christ was imputed with Satan’s nature on the cross. He died spiritually and descended into hell to suffer as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of humanity (1968:15). The only thing believers need to do is to exercise their divine rights offered by Jesus Christ, and thereafter claim these rights by believing the promises of the Word, and so activate their faith

Both Hagin and Copeland enhanced the popularity of Pentecostalism by their symbiotic teachings on health and prosperity. To bring this point home, a long quotation from Anderson is important as a matter of clarity: “Kenneth Copeland developed Hagin’s teaching with a greater emphasis on financial prosperity and formulated ‘laws of prosperity’ to be observed by those seeking health and wealth. Poverty is seen as a curse to be overcome through faith. Through ‘faith-fierce’, believers regain their rightful divine authority over their circumstances” (2004:221).

For any systematic theologian or church historian to understand the doctrinal confession of this movement, the research by Daniel R McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (1988) is a reliable source. In this manuscript McConnell highlights the fact that Kenyon derived his doctrine from the metaphysical cults, while Hagin plagiarized Kenyon and fathered the Faith Movement.

McConnell (1988:185) points out the following doctrinal errors in this theology:

1. Its *deistic view of God*, who must dance to men’s attempts to manipulate the spiritual laws of the universe.
2. Its *demonic view of Christ*, who was filled with ‘the Satanic nature’ and must be ‘born again in hell.’
3. Its *gnostic view of revelation*, which demands denial of the physical senses and classifies Christians by their willingness to do so; and
4. Its *metaphysical view of salvation*, which deifies man and spiritualises the atonement, locating it in hell rather than on the cross, thereby subverting the crucial biblical belief that it is Christ’s physical death and shed blood, which alone atone for sin

For a sensible systematic theologian, the following theological observations can be added to add into Faith Movement’s body of theology. These observations and conclusions are reached as one listens to Faith Preachers’ sermons, reading their literature, and seeing them in operation, especially through some television channels:

1. They believe that faith is a ‘force’ as demonstrated by God who spoke creation into existence. Humans were prior to the fall, possessed the same authority and ability to command things into existence. Soteriology deals with hamartiology to restore sensible anthropocene. In other words, salvation deals away with sin to reconcile humanity back to God or original intentions of creation. Consequently, restoring humans to original state of the ability to command things into being.
2. Humans as *imago Dei* careers, when they go through soteriological revolution, they become ‘little deities’ or little gods with capacity to make positive confessions that must be followed by faith that what one has confessed has already happened. Therefore, the God who is bound by the laws of the ‘faith-force’ is left with no option but to respond positively to human words or confessions made. The movement believes that when *rhema* word is positively confessed, physical healing and material prosperity is enacted.



3. One universal problem encountered in this movement is making God a commodity to be purchased by humans at will. The teaching is that for God to be able to bless one materially, especially financially, one must first demonstrate faith by financial contributions, especially to those who preach this message to them.
4. Another doctrine that has become an evangelical menace within Positive Confession Movement is that of associating sickness with sin or lack of faith on the part of the one who is sick.
5. In Word of Faith, preachers regard themselves as depositories of God's revelation. They believe it is their mandate to deliver revealed messages to others. For the movement, the pastor's preaching is a directed revelation from God, therefore cannot be questioned or critiqued, lest one is labeled a heretic or false prophet. This becomes an extra-biblical revelation that runs into conflict with evangelical exposition of the Word directly from the revealed word, the Bible. "Rather than a sermon, as in more traditional churches, in the Word of Faith Movement, the pastor or other speaker sees himself or herself as coming to instruct, to deliver information and insight—'new revelation,' as it were—from God to the people" (Harrison 2005:88).
6. The leniency to this kind of revelatory authority is that it may easily lead to 'pastor worship cult' that elevates the pastor to be above anyone else, consequently compromising the evangelical stance on priesthood of all believers. So, the underlining principle here is that the rejection of the pastor's preaching is the rejection of God's Word.

Anti-intellectualism is one of the salient features of Pentecostalism, the Positive Confession is not an exception. They denigrate orthodox methods of biblical hermeneutics and theological education. There is a direct communication between God and people, so there is no need for education. Despite the leaders' vehement rejection of theological education, they insist and claim to have a better grasp on the contents and the meaning of the Bible, because of the revelatory power in their kerygma. Harrison (2005:7) continues to highlight this notion:

This direct revelation of God's will and mind through his Word and prayer is seen as a purer form of knowledge and source of scriptural meaning than that which can be attained or accomplished through the intellect in formal training and study in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. The knowledge of God's will that can be attained by common folk...who may not be college or seminary educated, is more highly valued.

There is no doubt that anti-intellectual stance opens the door for theological error. Church history proves that for ages orthodoxy and purity of faith had been preserved through the necessary skills for Bible interpretation.

These doctrinal stances make the movement a distinctive branch within classical Pentecostalism. Vreeland (2007:76) attests to this distinction that:

What separates Word of Faith churches from classical Pentecostal is an overt emphasis on divine healing, financial prosperity and positive confessions. Classical Pentecostals, such as the Assemblies of God, embrace an emphasis on divine healing but are cautious and often critical of an emphasis on financial prosperity, and the practice of speaking positive confessions.

Further doctrinal conviction within the movement is what one of their current preachers, Robert Schuller, calls possibility thinking. He defines this possibility thinking as a "maximum utilization of the God-given powers of imagination exercised in dreaming up possible ways by which a desired objective can be attained" (1986:76). Schuller equates possibility thinking with faith, using the hermeneutical analysis of Matthew 17:20. Possibility thinking assumes that there must be a way



to achieve a desired objective; and it makes great pronouncements (confessions). “Possibility thinking is simply opening your mind for God to unfold the ways in which His will can be accomplished” (1986:77). Possibility thinking as faith encourages positive confession that God is unlimited, therefore nothing is impossible for those who believe.

The painful experiences to the contrary are when people are agonizing in pain or any negative circumstances of life are dubbed to have made “a negative confession, unbelief, or a failure to observe the divine laws” (Anderson, 2004:221). Mashau and Kgatle (2019:1) expound this notion that the movement views “Poverty within this paradigm as... sin, laziness and lack of faith.” Some people suffered some faith setbacks because of this labeling as faithless or people of unbelief.

The fact is that prosperity gospel dominates Neo-Charismatic hermeneutical landscape. The preachers, not all of them are known for opulent lifestyle. “The success is based on properties such as auditorium, vehicles and personal adornment such as tailor-made outfits, jewelry, etc.” (Resane, 2017:4). They are indeed wealthy and look happy, though some hide some physical ailments such as chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, cancer etc. (Wallis, 1996) They normally don’t disclose these conditions as they run contrary to their *kerygma*. They find their dogma conflicts with their confession (Astin, Harkness & Ernst, 2000). They sneak to health centers and professionals secretly so that their followers may not see them. Ironically, they consult medical experts far from their geographical locations, sometimes in the foreign lands where they are not popular or may not be easily identified. They do like some African politicians and some pastors who apply Nicodemus style of nocturnal consultation, by visiting the witchdoctor at night so that their followers may not know their source of power. Ukachi (2013:337) highlights this concern of the “...increase in the incidence of so-called Charismatic witchcraft and syncretism among church leaders.”

Rationale behind positive confession in Neo-Charismatic Churches

The influence or the legacy of Positive Confession Movement is not an African issue. It is “...a global phenomenon riding on the wave of capitalism which is sweeping the global economy” (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019:2). Typical of the prosperity preachers all over the world, their message is anthropocentric, blaming the victims of poverty for the lack of faith; without speaking prophetically into the causes of poverty within or from the socio-economic ideological political echelons of society. This is the area where these preachers’ prophetic role is exposed under the radar.

Many African church leaders come from some disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Some pastors from evangelical churches struggle with poverty. They desire to take their faith to the next level. For most, if not the rest of their faith-journey they have been indoctrinated that poverty is a noble state. Most of them are “still under the impression that it was worldly and carnal to have wealth or modern conveniences, or to wear and drive the latest and the best” (Hamon, 1997:197). Church history demonstrates that faith commitment equals poverty. The Greek philosophy with dualistic worldview embraced the notion that there is a distinction between the spiritual and the material world; and that the spiritual world is superior. Wealth was associated with material world; and that “truly spiritual people were to avoid wealth as much as possible” (Wagner, 2008:185). It is historically noted that the monasteries were to be populated with monks and nuns marked with unquestionable spirituality marks of poverty, chastity and obedience. “While chastity and obedience are not as prevalent today, poverty unfortunately persists as a spiritual ideal” (Wagner, 2008:185). Africans look for the faith that can enhance their privileges and power.



The missionaries of the eighteenth century brought the same gospel to Africa. They proselitised Africans to opt for poverty, not wealth in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Poverty was equated with the highest piety and sobriety. Indeed, for centuries “the Church had taught that spirituality and poverty were synonymous” (Hamon, 1997:196). However, the perpetuation of the positive faith movement through the Neo-Charismatic churches points out that there is “a notable shift from the missionary messages which focused on heavenly prosperity to the experience of prosperity in the material present” (Chitando & Biri, 2016:75). Faith as a key to prosperity is believed to enact virtuous power in economic field. Neo-Charismatic “Christianity has proved a more credible alternative to existing mission churches whose theology has proved a bit too distant from the aspirations of the people” (Cezula, 2015:141-142).

It is not only the poor clergy or laity or the underprivileged masses that subscribe to the prosperity accessed through positive confession. According to Togarasei (2011:340), “...the teaching on prosperity has made the rich to feel at home. They found it to be a departure from the missionary teaching that pronounced blessings on the poor.” This is popular in Africa: “They attract Africa’s upwardly mobile youth and *nouveau riche* middle class with their international outlook, transnational networks and emphasis on success, wealth and prosperity as indices of God’s blessings” (Nel, 2019:4; Walls, 2002:92).

Some join and follow it in order to protect their capitalistic ideology which has enhanced their amassed wealth. They embrace this in order to feel or make their businesses secure. Since their leaders are rich, they also aspire those riches. One of the catch words from these preachers is entrepreneurship. “They claim that their wealth is the result of their hard work, since they are also entrepreneurs” (Resane in Kgatle & Anderson, 2021:103). Some Neo-Charismatic leaders strive to find proximity to the top politicians, especially the head of the state or the monarch. In some places, these preachers are used to campaign either on behalf of or for the political ascendancy to the high political echelons of the state. A pastor and a politician become comrades in arms. This is seen as a prestige by the preacher. Some politicians do not go to church until the time of elections campaigns. They attend to give the pastor some sense of prestige, or to boost his or her ego. Politicians are prophesied over and made to make positive confessions in order to guarantee their political victories. The South African media confirm this trend where cabinet ministers make journeys to these formations in order to gain some divine approvals from these preachers. One example to be cited here was in the *Mail & Guardian Newspaper* carrying headlines by one politician, ‘Politicians and pastors preach a false gospel’ (Mngxitama, 2016).

The Neo-charismatic churches thrive on the doctrine of salvation that is proved by success in life. It is this conviction that convinces the poor that in God there is healing and all earthly and heavenly riches. Resane (2022:3) captures it well that: “These churches evolved as a means of salvation economy where materialism, prosperity and prestige are the appeal to psychosocial needs of Africans whose lives are ravaged by poverty of underprivileged.”

The doctrine of salvation is intertwined with confessional liturgies, and this is especially true in Africa. Prayers and sacrifices are linked to invocation or appeal for success in life. Hence, Nel (2019:3) is correct that “African salvific goals are often evident in libation prayers, which focus on material blessings and prosperity.” African religious worldview is always centered around the divine blessing which encapsulates prosperity, privilege, and power. It is pointed out by Dubarry and Müller (2019:4) that “African religions have always been about prosperity and material wellbeing.” Religion is associated with success; hence prosperity preachers delve into this niche and capitalize on it for the growth of the churches, which leads to higher possibility of access to wealth through members. The bottom line is that African Charismatics ‘acknowledge a spiritual basis for everything such that material success becomes an evidence for spiritual success’ (Ola,



2019:8). The abject poverty in Africa opens Africans, regardless of their geographical locations, to receptivity of prosperity gospel invoked by confession, libations, or sacrifices.

Positive contribution of this movement to Christian faith is captured by Wagner (1999:253) that it called Christians to the dynamic role of Christian faith in the normal daily life: "It was needed because many of us had fallen into the rut of a watered-down and relatively powerless view of faith." The movement injects some passion into the hearts of many Christians who start to appreciate the promises of God in his word, the Bible. The emphasis on studying the Scriptures is also vital for healthy ecclesiastical lifestyle. Its focus on practical living is a healthy reminder that the Bible is to control the everyday lives of Christians. They enhance biblicism, which is one of the cornerstones of evangelicalism; and of course, add value to faith excitement as devotees start to appreciate the unity of God by believing in him unreservedly. Broadly, this Charismatic trend encourages transformative faith into a material reality of life, which is the potency of faith (Niemandt, 2017:203–219). According to Adamo (2021:8), this movement "motivates African Christians to demonstrate their faith in the God of Israel to perform his miracle again as he did amongst ancient Israelites."

The focus on practical living is a commendable feature that reminds Christians that the Bible is the rule of faith and conduct in daily life experiences. It is a public knowledge that South Africa is significantly and racially divided on Sunday more than any day of the week. One contribution by Positive Faith Movement, especially in South Africa is the effort to produce multi-cultural churches, which is the failure of many evangelical fellowships in the post-apartheid era. The movement demonstrates and displays the barrier-breaking power of the gospel. Wherever one finds their fellowship, they are always multicultural or multiracial, unlike the traditional denominations and some classical Pentecostal churches in South Africa.

Conclusion: Strengths and Weaknesses

Emphasis on prosperity undermines the evangelical understanding of the rudiments of the gospel. Divine blessings are not supervenient to one's ability to give or follow some principles. Trusting Jesus as Jehovah Jireh is the principle that unlocks God's resources that are released sovereignly on those who invoke him for them. Putting faith in Jesus is not an access to prosperity as there are millions of poor Christians in the world. In their poverty, humanity in Christ experiences this shalom of God and wait expectantly for divine interventions in their lives. Many people abandon the faith and walk away from God, after following all the principles and their expectations are untouched or addressed.

On top of these shortcomings, Ukachi (2013:337) adds the tendency to ignore the issue of holiness in the Body. This can be affirmed by number of these leaders whose marital lives had been some multiple partners.

The movement needs to, in its geographical conglomerates, aim to strike a balance in the prosperity teachings. Ukachi (2013:338) makes a somber appeal: "The church must bring a balance between prosperity and Christian commitment; between prosperity and Christian character; between prosperity and sacrifice; between prosperity and holiness; and between greed and self-contentment."

These tenets of evangelical values (commitment, character, sacrifice, holiness, and contentment) are replaced with success, self, immediate reward and empire building. Sacrificial living of championing for human salvation, social justice, evangelism, discipleship, and God's kingdom mindedness are abandoned. The current Neo-Charismatic movement is called upon to conduct a thorough introspection that may lead to the return to the fundamentals of the evangelical faith.



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