




A Pastoral review of Magaya and Makandiwa's Zimbabwean neo-Pentecostal "gimmicks" for prosperity theology

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Abstract

The neo-Pentecostal movements (NPM) or prophetic movements are a common phenomenon in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. In Zimbabwe, their rise coincided with the period of political and socio-economic instability, promising to provide viable options to people's suffering in Zimbabwe. To perpetuate the theology of prosperity, they employ many gimmicks. The gimmicks¹ are used to manipulate the followers into believing that the prophets have all the power to determine their destinies. This has been the general approach by the Pentecostal and charismatic movements over time but is now being perpetuated by the megachurch prophets. This article investigates the different gimmicks used by the megachurch prophets to promote and secure their foothold in Zimbabwe. It focuses on the United Family International Church (UFIC) of Emmanuel Makandiwa and the Prophetic Healing and Deliverance (PHD) ministries of Walter Magaya, which are the major players in Zimbabwe. It suggests some ways of pastoral care that the prophets can use to help the suffering people in Zimbabwe, rather than their greed-led prosperity theology. The article utilises the theory of manipulation to unpack the challenges posed by the gimmicks used by these megachurch prophets. The article contributes to the discourse of prophetic movements and discusses their gimmicks and impact on their followers in the broader context of pastoral care. The study reveals how adherents of NPM are economically exposed and trapped through manipulative strategies of prosperity theology.

Keywords: "gimmicks", manipulation, megachurch prophets, neo-Pentecostal, prosperity theology.

Introduction

According to many observers, Pentecostalism began with the first "outpouring of the Holy Spirit" in downtown Los Angeles in 1906, which is more commonly referred to as the Azusa Street Revival (Aasmundsen, 2012:87). Therefore, it is critical to recognise that the growth of Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe is a component of a broader, global movement (Aasmundsen, 2012). The rise of megachurch prophets became more pronounced around the 2000s during the period of political instability that resulted in the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe. They promised spiritual solutions to the socio-economic challenges facing the majority of Zimbabweans (Hove, 2024). The NPM has become powerful and popular, commanding many followers from the traditional Pentecostal and mainline

¹ "A gimmick is a revealing experience of fraudulence. It has a kind of charisma, but one that disarms and disappoints, even as it causes momentary delight" (Jaarsma 2022:92). Therefore, gimmicks are deceptive postures and tactics that sometimes end up failing to meet the promises or needs of the church followers.



denominations in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. Other scholars refer to them as the prophetic movement, neo-Pentecostal churches, the Third Wave, and charismatic or prosperity churches/movements (Mpfu, 2013, Marimbe, 2024). Besides the Zimbabwean movements, other popular neo-Pentecostal leaders around Africa are Victor Kusi Boateng in Ghana, the Nigerian pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the Nigerian prophets T.B. Joshua and Timothy Oluseun Omotoso, Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of Malawi, Pastor Daniel Lesego of Rabboni, Pastor Alph Lukau, and Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng of South Africa. The prophets and pastors of megachurches preach the prosperity gospel, seeking to convince their members to sow seed to change their life situations. The prosperity gospel is a compound of the gospel and wealth. This is whereby faith and salvation through giving are closely connected for amassing wealth and the perpetuation of funding of prosperity gospel (Mandimutsa, 2023: v).

This article discusses the various approaches used by Magaya and Makandiwa to promote their growth and stability in Zimbabwe. The purpose of the article is to engage with the practices of gimmicks such as prophetic consultation, deliverance miracles, prophetic objects, testimonies, publicity and technology, and social media. It concludes by suggesting some authentic ways of pastoral care that the prophets can use to meet the needs of suffering citizens. This literature-based article begins by defining prosperity theology and discusses the theory of manipulation demonstrating how manipulation is central in the gimmicks used by the NPM movements in Zimbabwe. The major focus is on the different gimmicks and how they are used for the benefit of the prophets than their followers. The study argues that the different gimmicks are employed as a way of amassing wealth by the prophetic movements while members continue to suffer from the socio-economic challenges.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study solely based on literature analysis. Secondary sources such as journal articles, books, dissertations and newspaper reports on Magaya and Makandiwa, the general NPM in Africa, Pentecostalism, and prosperity theology are utilized. These sources were purposively selected based on their relevance and credibility to the research theme and sub- themes. The articles use the theory of manipulation as its lens. It begins by defining prosperity theology. The focus is the discussion of various manipulative gimmicks of prosperity theology. It concludes by discussion and analysis of the challenges of posed by prosperity theology perpetuated by the NPM prophets in Zimbabwe.

Defining Prosperity Theology

Prosperity has become one of the major evangelistic tools among the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements (Stuart, 2008). According to Vähäkangas (2015:2)

The prosperity gospel and its siblings, or possibly just its different dimensions, go under various names and catchwords: faith gospel, the gospel of abundance, health and wealth gospel – name it and claim it. All contain slightly different connotations, but what all have in common is that God's blessings in this life are regarded as the outcomes of living faith.

Notably, most scholars demonstrates that NPMs perpetuate the prosperity theology, teaching that God's will is for His children to amass wealth and property. Notably, faith, wealth, and health have become the core elements of the prosperity theology (Mashau and Kgatle, 2019). Mashau and Kgatle (2019:2) further argue that "sickness and poverty are not ideal and



therefore not acceptable among Christians”. The NPM claims several scriptures to justify its position.

The prosperity gospel is closely tied to the first Genesis story of having dominion and being fruitful (Genesis 1:28). For these prophetic movements, having dominion and being productive is understood as a matter of faith, health, wealth, and physical well-being (Young, 1996). One must claim, possess, and control God’s blessings. These are obtained through faith and claiming (positive confession) (Young, 1996:5). Adherents of the NPM are encouraged to pray accordingly and claim scriptures such as “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your souls prosper” (3 John: 2); “the Lord takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servant” (Psalms 35:27) and “The LORD will make you the head, not the tail” (Deuteronomy 28:13). Positive confession of being healthy and wealth is the only way one becomes rich and negative confession invites curses and chases away blessings. “By declaring out loud both the binding of the power of evil and the loosing of the power of God, one engages in positive confession. The spoken word is crucial to this act because it initiates God’s protection and blessing” (Stuart, 2008:37). For them, health and wealth are central to God’s blessings; hence, “they maintain that poverty-stricken people are not good ambassadors of the gospel” (Ajibade, 2020:152). “The underlying principle of their teachings and practices regarding prosperity is that God will reward faithful Christians with good health, financial success, and material wealth” (Ajibade, 2020:152).

Prosperity teachings revolve around the idea that God wants believers to prosper physically, materially, and spiritually. The absence of material belongings and excellent health can be interpreted as an indication of either a lack of faith or spiritual curses (Mashau & Kgate, 2019). One’s spiritual faith is measured against his/her financial, material, and economic success, growth, and prosperity. The prosperity theology cuts across the Pentecostal and megachurch prophetic movement referred to here as the NPM. In Zimbabwe, the prosperity theology is pushed by the most popular prophetic movements such as Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa and Prophet Walter Magaya (Tagwirei, 2023). Their preaching and teaching always connect faith to wealth and prosperity. This appeals to people under economic pressure and compromised health conditions exacerbated by poor health systems.

Theory of Manipulation

Manipulation is a deliberate action of misinformation or romanticising it in a way that convinces the listener to buy into the needs of the speaker. It involves dishonesty, lies, and deception that trap the listener or follower. Coons and Weber (2014:10) define manipulation as “a kind of deceptive non-coercive influence”. Todd (2014) also notes that manipulation is trying to influence someone’s behaviour in deceitful ways. This is done by overtly altering information quantity, quality, and relevance to deceive and exploit the listener (McCornack, 1992). Manipulation of people involves deception through compromising the quality of information by complete distortion, quantity by withholding important details, manner by a lack of clarity, and by completely changing the content or subject (Mittal, 2014). Any alteration is made to deceive the listener and fulfil the motives of the speaker. The purpose of manipulation is to deceive and control the other person (McCornack, 1992, Mittal, 2014). Mittal (2014:25) puts it succinctly

Manipulation can be done to deceive people regarding a product, person, data, or information. The deceitful management of given information by the sender to provide a receiver with a perception of that same information believed to be false by the sender is referred to as information manipulation.



This is usually done for indoctrination and retention of listeners or followers. Cult leaders are best known for manipulating their followers through deceitful means. Such cult leaders tend to control their followers' whole lives through manipulating their bodies and minds. They indoctrinate their disciples in such a way that they fully control every aspect of their lives. The ultimate goal of manipulation is to change behaviour in ways that, in a way, completely circumvent the target's ability to think logically (Todd, 2014). Through manipulation, the listener or follower will blindly follow the leader.

For the neo-Pentecostal prophets, obedience to the leader is the only way to flourish spiritually and in all other aspects of life. Such indoctrination makes it easier for the leader to control, dominate, and manipulate his/her followers. Therefore, acting manipulatively results in the followers losing their autonomy. The manipulation theory is a plausible lens to explore the gimmicks used by the neo-Pentecostal prophets in Zimbabwe. It exposes matters of manipulation when it comes to their unquestionable leadership styles and the obedience of their adherents.

Prophetic gimmicks

One-on-one consultation sessions

The most popular gimmick introduced by Magaya and Makandiwa is the one-on-one sessions with the man of God, the prophet. This is a privilege afforded to the sick or those who have serious social challenges they felt needed the prophet's attention. This is not free for all, like the normal pastoral counselling and support offered in other churches. South African prophets are allegedly charging between R5000 and R7000 in consultation fees, while in Zimbabwe, they charge between US\$100 and US\$150 per session (Nehanda Radio, 2023).

However, Sande (2017), Chitemba and Ncube (2016) say that Makandiwa and Magaya charge up to US\$1500 for spiritual consultation with the man of God. Consequently, one-on-one is one of the most expensive services provided by the neo-Pentecostal prophet. With this service, the prophets earn most of their money apart from seeding.

Mandimutsa (2023: vi) argues that appointments and consultations form part of patronisation and manipulation of the congregants since they are required to pay exorbitant fees to secure such private services. According to Kgatle (2022), prayers, healing, and deliverance sessions with the prophet are done for a fee. Kgatle (2022:6) argues that the prophets have gone against the biblical and ethical principles by both commodifying pastoral ministry and commercialising the gospel through their exorbitantly priced one-on-one sessions. Paying money before consulting a prophet is equivalent to compensating prophets for their abilities and services (Gifford, 2004).

Mangena and Mhizha (2013:133) describe contemporary prophets as "white collar prophets" who are driven by the urge to monetise and professionalise the word of God. The adherents are manipulated to have one-on-one encounters with the prophet, or their problems could not be solved.

They must pay a fee to meet the man of God to present their problems, which need spiritual solutions. This is not only manipulation and deception but daylight robbery. One-on-one consultations indicate that pastoral care and counselling with the prophet are only for the rich who can afford it. The poor and unemployed are marginalised. This is the privatisation of God's gift to the prophet and the blessing of healing to the people.



Healing and spectacular miracles

Some of the spectacular miracles done by the megachurch prophets have remained doubtful and problematic. Some findings have labelled them as “fake miracles and stage managed” leaving them to be misleading and manipulative to the adherents (Sande, 2017: 54). The prophets are well-known for performing such miracles to generate testimonies like healing of the sick, raising the lame, restoration of broken marriages and breaking the case of unemployment (Madzokere, 2024). However, Sande (2022:408) argues that NPM prophets perform “stage managed miracles to attract both the poor and the rich and increase their membership. On the one hand, “Prophet Magaya is believed to heal the sick by laying hands on the sick or using the holy water and anointing oil” (Mahohoma, 2017:6). Chibango (2016:67) also argues that

Televised ceremonies of the PHD Ministries reveal several testimonies of people who claimed to have been healed from various diseases and disability after Magaya had prayed for them. One woman related that she was healed of continuous bleeding after using the anointing oil of the PHD Ministries. Another woman testified that she was healed of HIV and AIDS after using the same oil. She displayed prior healing medical documents which showed that she was HIV positive and a post-healing medical report which indicated that she had become HIV negative.

On the other hand, “Makandiwa is known for his controversial miracles ranging from manhood enlargement to changing people’s HIV statuses as well as causing the birth of the baby of a three-day-old pregnancy” (Rupapa & Shumba, 2014:1). It is also believed that Makandiwa used his jacket to heal a mentally challenged person (Biri, 2012). “In the light of the above testimonies, Makandiwa’s jacket becomes a deified religious icon, and many members of his church have defended the use of the jacket” (Biri, 2012:6). These miracles are used as an attraction for many people who struggle under Zimbabwe’s dysfunctional economic situation and collapsed health system.

At one crossover night, “Makandiwa prayed and prophesied for people to have more money in their pockets and filling members’ cars with fuel, gold and diamonds raining from heaven” (Mpfungu, 2013:144). Such gimmicks are not only misleading and manipulative but are also unethical. They are deceptive because they go against the biblical truth that human beings ought to work and sweat for resources (Genesis 3:19), and God blesses the works of human hands (Deuteronomy 28:12). The prophet claims special power and knowledge as a person closer to God, hence acts as a diviner who can handle every challenge like healing and solving social problems among the African people (Nel, 2023). Spectacular miracles are used to manipulate most of the adherents to easily embrace the prophets and the message of seeding, healing, deliverance, and prosperity. Chipere (2022:160) argues that the NPM prophets are “religious charlatans” who realised that sermons do not generate money and tend to specialise in the manifestation of supernatural powers and miracles. “It is not surprising that such ‘men of God’ attract big crowds, as in the case of Makandiwa whose followers stampede to have access to the front seats in the auditorium where they will be closer to the ‘man of God’” (Gunda and Machingura, 2013:22).

During his field research Chipere (2022:184) notes that six of the participants said that miracles are demonstrations of power to address life challenges which are beyond their control. The gimmicks serve to attract many, and they blindly follow the prophet; and they give him money without applying their mind to what is said to be happening, and just believing in the promises made. Several of the prosperity message's components could encourage abusive behaviour (Nel, 2023). The current findings demonstrate manipulation through



misinformation and stage-managed miracles that end up attracting those who are outside the movements. This is against the Christian calling to fulfil the mission of the church, to make disciples of Christ.

Deliverances

The gimmick of deliverance has a psychological impact on the NPM congregants, especially those who testify to have been delivered (Gukurume, 2020). In the NPMs, deliverance takes centre stage both in their services and one-on-one consulting sessions. Consequently, Magaya named his church and ministry Prophetic, Healing, and Deliverance (PHD) to emphasise the component of deliverance. According to Mangena and Mhizha (2013:145)

The prophets urge the church members to make a complete break with the past by denouncing that past verbally and attending deliverance sessions because the evil spirits that dominate families will continue to haunt the believer and prevent him or her from prospering in life.

Prophets are believed to deliver and protect their followers from *ngozi* (avenging spirit), *zvikwambo* (goblins), infertility, job losses and troubled marriages (Maxwell, 1995). Members are also delivered from evil spirits and demons, and some parents also bring their children to prophets for deliverance from *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits) and *mashavi* (alien spirits) (Mangena and Mhizha, 2013). Besides prophets, the prophet's wife and pastors engage in deliverance sessions exorcising spirits of different kinds (Maxwell, 2006). The church is regarded as a centre of exorcism. The prophets emphasise deliverance from the curse of poverty, the curse of sickness, and from the curse of death (Vähäkangas, 2015).

Sometimes the NPM prophets imitate the use of handkerchiefs and aprons for healing and deliverance like Paul did in the New Testament (Acts 19:12) (Biri, 2012). Most of Makandiwa's UFI members bought the prophet's cloth for US\$3 each, and it is believed to have healing and protective powers (Biri, 2012). These cloths are a source of income for the prophet as most members would need protection from life's myriad challenges. Tagwirei (2023:4) argues that

The Zimbabwean population has suffered greatly, grappling with poverty, diseases, and a host of related issues, leaving them vulnerable and desperate. In response to this context, neo-Pentecostal churches have emerged as prominent entities that have attracted thousands of followers with their health, wealth, and total deliverance gospel.

Prosperity gospel through deliverance leads many to attend deliverance sessions and one-on-one sessions, in the quest for health and material wealth. In Zimbabwe, a powerful preacher is known for casting out demons of barrenness, unemployment, and poverty (Dube, 2015). In one service, prophet Magaya declared complete deliverance and protection of his adherents all around their daily lives. According to Chibango (2016:63), Magaya declared:

I command every poverty spirit to come out right now...I speak the blood of Jesus on that project...finance...area of your finances...bank account...I protect your finances...by the blood of Jesus. Let your car be protected. Let your properties be protected. Let your house be protected. Let whatever is yours be protected. Let your business be protected, money be protected, business be protected...everything that is yours be protected!

This is done because the prophet preaches that business failure, unemployment, and other economic challenges are caused by spiritual forces hindering one's prosperity. "There is also an economic undercurrent as evidenced by Makandiwa's claim that 'the more you bring to God the swifter the healing'" (Biri, 2012:8). The prophets' teachings and behaviour are the roots of the prosperity theology. Instead of putting people's pastoral care needs first, the



prophets continue to lure their adherents to pay and enrich these NPM leaders (Hove, 2024). The prophetic messages and displays mislead the adherents seeing them as an alternative solution to their health, social and economic challenges (Sande, 2017). The question of manipulation becomes more open as prophets claim all sorts of things about the gimmick of deliverance done both during their main services and private consultations for members to pay for the services of the man of God.

Prophetic declarations

The prophetic declarations have become popular feature among Pentecostals and NPM prophets. They even write on their Facebook pages and invite people to respond “I receive” so that they get the fruits of the prophet’s declaration. The prophet would utter statements such as “I prophesy into your life that you will be a success, you will prosper – I declare success in your business, more profits and more breakthroughs” (Gukurume, 2020:274). Magaya teaches his followers to believe and follow his declarations without question or doubt because he has divine authority (Mahohoma, 2017). “The prophet (Magaya) teaches that when he has declared one to be a millionaire, he or she should believe it. Hence, he says, “What I declare no one can say ‘No’ [to]” (Mahohoma, 2017:8). Prophetic declarations and decrees are usually based or connected to scriptures such as: “The LORD will make you like the head and not like the tail; you will be on top and not on the bottom” (Deuteronomy 28:13a), “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11). The words that God gave Israel in the wilderness and in bondage through Moses and prophets are applied to church members’ spiritual and socio-economic situations. There is no reference made to the context, but the prophet declares, and people are called to make declarations along these verses.

Declarations begin by calling members to indulge in positive thinking. Positive thinking, language and confession are neatly put together during NPM church services (Stuart, 2008). Hunt (1998:276) states that “[p]ositive confession, put succinctly, seems to embrace a law of metaphysical causation in that what is spoken by the believer in faith operates the spiritual law of faith itself and brings what is ‘confessed’ into material reality.” The sick are called to declare healing so that they are healed, and the poor need to declare that they are rich so that their life will experience an overflow of wealth and financial breakthroughs (Stuart, 2008). Prosperity preachers encourage believers to embrace the spirit of positive confession and always declare what they want under the slogan “name it and claim it” (Mashau and Kgatle, 2019). NPM members are inspired by prophetic declarations, and they also keep up the habit of naming and claiming health, material possessions, and prosperity. In his services, Makandiwa declares that “riches are the portions of every believer” (Mpofu, 2013: 73). When the prophet makes the declaration, members always shout, “I receive, I receive” (Gukurume, 2020). Sometimes the declarations are made in the God of the prophet or the prophet’s name as members claim the fulfilment of prophecies done in their life by the man of God (Mpofu, 2013). The prophet’s intercessory prayer is by “uttering prophetic words of prosperity on the poor” (Banda, 2016:156). Although the declarations give hope to the members, not all of them are fulfilled. Some of the members remain in poverty, sickness, and miserable conditions unless they work hard or visit the hospital for medical attention. Through this gimmick, the prophet instils in his members visions of a better life that are sometimes unrealistic. This leads to manipulation of members who will blindly and unquestionably trust and believe that their prosperity comes through the word of declaration from the prophet (Hove, 2024). The NPM prophets are highly respected and deified as people are manipulated into accepting that they are closer to God than anyone else. They command some followings on social media like



Facebook and Instagram as people are invited to write “I receive” after the prophet’s declaration for the day.

Testimonies

Testimonies are one of the key strategies used to market the prophet ministries of the NPM. Besides prophecies, declarations, and deliverances, testimonies are an important part of the NPM services. They are publicly presented in almost every service and are broadly broadcast on television channels and other media platforms. Members always come forward testifying the power of the prophets. The unemployed claim to have got special jobs, the sick claim their healing, those with marriage problems resolved while others abandoned drugs and their loose morals because of the power of prophet Magaya who cast out every evil spirit (Mangena and Mhizha, 2013). “The testimonies almost invariably focus on the material realm, on finances, marriage, children, visas, jobs, promotion, [and] travel. Only a small fraction, perhaps 10%, refers to moral reform or deliverance from laziness or drink” (Gifford, 2004:173). Chibango (2016:64) highlights the testimony of a woman from South Africa who visited prophet Magaya in 2014 and claimed to have been delivered from economic hardships. She claimed to have debit relief, R6000 financial support from a friend, successfully married and flourishing in business after joining the PHD ministries (Chibango, 2016). Some of the believers acknowledged joining Magaya’s PHD ministries when they came across the testimonies about the prophet’s miracles (Marimbe, 2024). Marimbe (2024:10) further notes that although no one was known to be healed by Magaya, walking sticks, crutches, and wheelchairs are kept at Magaya’s offices as evidence of those who testified to have been healed by the prophet.

Similar testimonies are given during Makandiwa’s services. Some testified to have received money and gold from Makandiwa’s prophetic session where he prayed for people to receive money from heaven into their pockets (Mahohoma, 2017). To demonstrate the power of the prophet, some of the members would give vivid testimonies of some of the members who were healed from paralysis and barrenness, disabilities, HIV and AIDS, and cancer (Chibango, 2016; Mangena and Mhizha, 2013). One such testimony is that of Josephine Chuma (Daily News, 07 August 2012), who testified and believed that Prophet Makandiwa is the most genuine anointed man of God with super knowledge, wisdom, and power to deliver all sorts of evil spirits that cause misfortunes and suffering among people. “At the end of the testimonies, many congregants encouraged other congregants to remain connected to the prophet” (Marimbe, 2024:12). People are manipulated to exaggerate their testimonies and increase membership in the church. According to Marimbe (2024), from his interviews and observation in PHD ministries, not a single person who has been healed in that church could be found. More members mean more money for the prophet. Manipulation is through misinformation and false representation by those who facilitate the spread of prosperity gospel. The stories told in the testimonies will always be attractive and lure others because no one speaks of the failures or situations that the prophet could not resolve. The gimmick is a form of manipulation and perpetuation of the prosperity gospel.

The use of physical objects for protection and healing

The gimmicks include among other things using objects such as bangles, wrist bands, small towels or handkerchiefs, water, and anointing oil as tools of healing, deliverance, and protection. These objects form part of the prescription given by the prophet for healing and deliverance. Prophet Magaya is believed to heal not only by the laying of hands on the sick, but members are encouraged to buy objects such as towels, holy water, and anointing oil to



use for healing and protection from diseases and evil spirits (Mahohoma, 2017). In Makandiwa's UFIC, members buy these objects from the man of God so that they are protected, and this enriches the prophet (Biri, 2012). One of Makandiwa's members claimed that she cancelled the appointment who was supposed to come and attend to her stove because when she used the towel/cloth from the man of God, the stove started working again (Biri, 2012). On another note, "towels have been used to wipe cars that believers intend to buy" applying the prophetic formula and declaration that whatever one claims will possess it (Biri, 2012:7). Due to the powers that are believed to be in the towels, the prophets make money because members pay as much as US\$3 to obtain one.

Anointing oil is highly valued in the NPM because it is believed to function in many ways. Besides its healing power, it is also believed to cleanse, making them also anointed and holy; it breaks bonds of poverty and sickness (Mahohoma, 2017). For Magaya, "anointing oil heals, consecrates, sanctifies, and provokes divine intervention. Hence it can be applied on all affected parts of the body and even documents like business proposals" (Mahohoma, 2017:5). Makandiwa also claimed that anointing oil opens every door in one's life and could heal them from every kind of sickness, including deadly diseases such as cancer (Rupapa and Shumba, 2014). The artifacts and objects are tools of manipulation to generate an income for the prophets. The exaggerated powers and functions of these objects are used as ways of attracting membership, as the testimonies do, as part of the prosperity message.

The latest gimmick used by Magaya is the unveiling of the so-called "Card of Harvest" distributed on 1 June 2025 at the major service dubbed the church's biggest Sunday of the year (Matare, 2025). Prophet Walter Magaya promised that the card would be the greatest blessing and gift to all who receive it because it would unlock everything one needs in life (Matare, 2025). Magaya openly said, "[t]his card is more than a gift—it is a prophetic symbol and a spiritual reminder that everything you need has already been provided by grace" (Matare, 2025). Unlike other objects introduced earlier in his ministry, this card is freely distributed regardless of the member's contribution to the ministry (Matare, 2025). However, one would wonder if this were not a bait and catch. Magaya's mantra of blessing people through objects is usually accompanied by selling such items at an exorbitant price. The introduction of anointing oil, water, towels, handkerchiefs, wristbands, and tickers was big business for Magaya and Makandiwa (Manyonganise, 2024). One may argue that the cards will in turn, be accompanied by the message of seeding if not thanksgiving. Above all, the gimmick is misleading because the card is believed to connect the member to the prophet so that he/she receives prophetic blessings. It is one of the ways the prophet manipulates and domesticates members to remain loyal, submissive, and controllable. Whatever success one would attain throughout the year would be attached to the prophet's card; hence, if they were called to seed or give thanks to the prophet, they would be milked of their hard-earned incomes.

Television broadcasting

The practices of prophecy use prophetic consultation, deliverance services, miracles, and objects; another important tool and platform for manipulation used by Magaya and Makandiwa is television. According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2019), these movements are called megachurches because of having mega-sized auditoriums and their use of modern technology and media to attract large numbers of young professionals. The prophets specialise in the use of media such as television (TV) channels to easily reach out to the economically active upper-middle-class members of the community. These neo-Pentecostal prophets do not go out of cities to the poor but remain in cities where they manipulate the



middle-class people who can afford to seed and pay for the prophetic services. Makandiwa used to have a Saturday slot on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC TV) where he had services and performed healing miracles (Shoko and Chiwara, 2013). For global televangelism, Makandiwa launched his 24-hour Christ TV channel in October 2013 (Kazengezeka, 2013). Central to the channel is a demonstration of power through deliverance and healing miracles coupled with testimonies attesting to the power of the prophet (Shoko & Chiwara, 2013).

In 2015, Prophet Magaya used to broadcast his services and miracles on the South African television channel eNCA (www.enca.com/africa360). In 2018, he launched his Yada TV channel (Chibango, 2016). It is through private TV channels that the message of property is propagated, miracles of healing and exorcism are performed, and the message of seeding and testimonies are broadcast. Prosperity themes broadcasted through the Yada channel include among others, “breaking the chains of the spirit of poverty, joy and prosperity, breakthrough, healing and deliverance, marriage, restoration, grace, and competition” (Marimbe, 2024:14). The TV gimmick instantly perpetuates the prosperity theology as it reaches global spaces in a matter of seconds. Some viewers are invited to touch the TV screens for healing, deliverance, and receiving material blessings (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019; Marimbe, 2024). Through TV channels, those who are far and near are said to be connected to the man of God for anointing (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019). Through their TV the Zimbabwean neo-prophets have become more popular even beyond their national borders. Instead of using the traditional crusades or evangelistic outreaches, the prophets found TV channels to easily reach out to their target population. Through the TV channels people are enticed to give testimony about their health and wealth demonstrating the positive impact of the man of God to the world (Mahohoma, 2017). Therefore, one may conclude that the TV channels become the tool for manipulation of the members and prospective followers.

Discussion

Manipulation leads to a series of deceptions. Cohen (2018:484). argues that Deception is the intentional act of convincing another of a falsehood”. Due to the prophet’s desire to manipulate the adherents, he/she deliberately employs multiple gimmicks that can convince them to believe the message of prosperity theology. The focus is on the self-enrichment of the neo-Pentecostal prophet. Unfortunately, intentional manipulation has led to the breeding of false beliefs among members of the neo-Pentecostal movements (Cohen, 2018). The neo-Pentecostal prophets mostly use psychological control to manipulate their members. According to Zhang (2023:841), psychological “control is imposed mentally; with techniques including hypnosis and guided imagery” to influence the members to adopt the prosperity ideologies and theology in their subconsciousness. However, the followers benefit from comfort and psychological healing through the prophets’ prayers, promises and declaration of changing situations and provisions of cars, houses or spouses soon (Mahohoma, 2017). But the dominant path of prosperity theology remains problematic since it seems to benefit the prophet more than the followers (Hove, 2024). In such cases signs of manipulation become visible in the context of the people’s difficult socio-economic circumstances.

Downplaying the realities of the economy and health system in Zimbabwe

Prophets and church leaders should provide pastoral care to the people. One of the ways of effective pastoral care is truth-telling and being honest with people. Taking advantage of people and devising some irrational solutions to people’s challenges is falsifying pastoral care ministry. Due to bad governance, Zimbabweans are facing difficult economic challenges that



intricately include corruption, poverty, and unemployment. The economic challenges have caused the collapse of the health system, leaving the poor more vulnerable as they can neither access nor afford health care. “Zimbabwe’s economic pressure and deterioration of medical facilities leave people struggling to survive. It is within this context that mega prophets flourish by promising people an alternative health system” (Hove, 2024:7). People visit Magaya and Makandiwa ministries because they cannot afford medical bills and drugs (Chibango, 2016). Unfortunately, the neo-Pentecostal prophets falsify the challenges and solutions for these challenges. By the desire to manipulate the people for financial gain and prosperity, Magaya and Makandiwa perpetuate the prosperity theology by failing to be truthful to the causes of the economic challenges. “Intentionally causing false beliefs by means of triggering the victims’ lapses of judgment is the sign of manipulation” (Cohen, 2018:490). This is a challenge to the prophets’ pastoral care approaches. Buffel (2007:17) asserts that

Pastoral care takes the African realities (realities of poverty in the developing world) seriously. One of the most important realities of Africa is the context of poverty, which is compounded by other associated realities such as HIV and AIDS, illiteracy, crime, economics, and power. Pastoral care must cease to only concentrate on the ambulance ministry’ with the sick and the troubled while ignoring the social, economic, and political causes of poverty and all that makes them sick and troubled.

Pattison (1988) also emphasises that we should seriously consider the social and political situations of people and always be on the side of the poor. The prophets do not take seriously the socio-economic situations in Zimbabwe, thereby failing to provide holistic pastoral care to their adherents and people in general. Instead of relating the causes of people’s economic challenges to spiritual cases that needed exorcism and deliverance, they needed to speak truth to power and help people understand their economic realities that need economic and political solutions. Under such circumstances, the church needs to be intentionally and politically committed to support the cause of the poor (Buffel, 2007).

Clericalism and privatisation of pastoral care

The neo-Prophets’ gimmicks have caused a challenge to pastoral leadership. Their pastoral care is clergy-centred or pastor-centred in such a way that the members become passive consumers of the prosperity theology that seeks to domesticate them as passengers in the church and kingdom of God. Hove (2025:4) argues that “Megachurch prophets and apostolic movements, characterised by clergy-centred churches, have become prevalent today”, especially in Zimbabwe. Their ability to manipulate people is their charismatic form of leadership (Zhang, 2023). Leaders use their charisma to control their members’ whole lives. They utilise threats and promise protection and prosperity. The prophet’s declarations are taken as God’s promises that shall always come to pass; therefore, it becomes a major gimmick of manipulation and control of membership. The declaration is guided by manipulation through imagery and hypnosis. “It stems from hypnosis and has the potential to make individuals feel relaxed and absorbed into the world that the storyteller is constructing” (Zhang, 2023:840). Magaya and Makandiwa are good at creating focus on themselves by telling people how their lives will change if they obey the prophet. Their adherents cannot challenge or be objective towards the prophet’s teachings as they are guided by the slogan “touch not the anointed” (Psalms 105:15). Objective thinking that seems to oppose the prophet’s teachings is regarded as not only fighting the prophet but also God, who appointed and sent him. Therefore, the adherents want a sense of belonging and fulfilment as they remain completely loyal to their prophet, who is regarded as the “spiritual father”.



Manipulation is meant to indoctrinate and domesticate the adherents. “These techniques (of manipulation) are most likely driven by a sense of wanting to belong or to be fulfilled” (Zhang, 2023:840). Instead of participating in pastoral care ministry, members become the real “sheep” not only owned but also blindly following the prophet. The prophet becomes the sole messenger and servant of God who dispenses blessings. Therefore, the titles “man of God” or “Papa”. To demonstrate a sense of belonging, members give in to the gimmicks of objects sold by the prophets. These include stickers, bangles, and headscarves with the inscription “*Ndiri mwana wemuporofita*” “I am a child of a prophet,” or “*Ndiri Mwana waApostle*” “I am a child of an apostle,” and paste them on fridges, house doors, and motor vehicles for protection from curses and evil spirits (Fenga, 2018:165). Members become subjects of the prophets rather than coworkers in the vineyard, providing pastoral care to the people of God. Such privatisation and clericalism of pastoral care “is inconsistent with the African worldview that focuses on communalism, relationships, mutual care, and ubuntu and is also systemic” (Buffel, 2007:210). The promotion of clericalism and pastor-centred pastoral care undermines the priesthood of all believers that calls for members to actively serve God by serving others (Hove, 2025). Pastoral care is the business of the whole church and faith community; hence members should be participants in ministry.

Lack of ethical leadership and preservation of the gospel of Christ

Pastoral care needs ethical leadership. The neo-Pentecostal prophets in Zimbabwe have failed to demonstrate ethical leadership because of their desire to manipulate people for fame and personal gain. Magaya and Makandiwa have become accomplices of corrupt government officials and politicians (Hove, 2024). Instead of being advocates for justice and supporting the cause of the poor, they employ gimmicks to milk the poor because of their vulnerability. Instead, they manipulate the poor into making biased judgments in matters of faith leading to false beliefs (Cohen, 2018). Through their TV programmes, the prophets push their agenda of manipulation as they both display the miracles and open a window of testimonies from those who claim to have experienced them. The miracles demonstrated and broadcast act as confirmation and authentication of the power of the man of God and promises of prosperity (Chitando, 2013). The movement's claims are further validated by personal announcements and testimonials, which are frequently given during services or through TV channels (Marimbe, 2024). These provide followers with relatable and emotional stories that make sense. Numerous scholars have raised serious questions concerning the authenticity of these miracles. Scholars such as Mandimutsa (2017), Mahohoma (2017) and Banda (2019) argue that the miracles performed by the NPM prophets are doubtful performances meant to commodify the gospel by luring the adherents to pay the prophets. The findings of Madimutsa (2023:296) indicate that some of the so-called miracles are drilled and rehearsed with congregants who would be paid after successfully performing their roles such as being healed, delivered from evil spirit or raised from a wheelchair. The acts are meant to authenticate the prophet's ability to “demonstrate the power of God as indicated in the Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:4) (Mandimutsa, 2023:296). Such cases exemplify the extent of manipulation of adherents to believe that the prophet has divine supernatural abilities to perform miracles. According to Cohen (2018:490) “creating false beliefs by means of true messages is most aptly classified as manipulation.” Through their TV channels, they advertise miracles of healing and deliverance from all forms of curses and suffering and promise financial breakthroughs and wealth. Many have remained pie in the sky when they die because they give away their resources to the prophets through costly one-on-one sessions, hoping to change their fortunes.



Prophets should provide ethical Christian leadership by providing genuine pastoral care to the needy and suffering other than cheating them, leading them to further lose what they have. Through the prophets, there is exploitation and oppression and violation of rights and the dignity of the defenceless poor (Garande, 2020). They go against the primary aim of pastoral care which is to help people handle their crises in a more meaningful and progressive manner (Clinebell, 1984). They need to follow Christ's servant leadership approach. Christ genuinely cared for people, healed the sick, cast out evil spirits, and fed the hungry. He did not take away from people but provided for their needs. Christ demonstrated ethical leadership of care. "The Christian concept of leadership is based on values of love, service, selflessness, sacrifice, honesty and not less the fear of God" (Ushe, 2013:35). Prophets pursue -self-service kind of leadership rather than being servants of the people and on the side of the poor. This leaves some sections of society aggrieved due to the prophets' behaviour and acts of manipulation (Ushe, 2013). Prophets as the servants of God need to love, care, and serve God's people because they claim to be his messengers. They should be carriers of the gospel of peace, reconciliation, and genuine care for one another among the children of God, thereby preserving the sanctity of the gospel of Christ who loved and reconciled the world to God through his death on the cross.

Exclusion of the poor

The gimmicks by the neo-Pentecostal prophets not only undermine the dignity of the poor, but they also promote exclusion. Firstly, they already have a ministry targeting the middle class who have sustainable incomes to access their services and sustain their ministries. For that reason, they operate in towns and cities, leaving out the rural folk who have little or no resources. If they were genuine servants of God who intended to promote pastoral care and the gospel of Christ, they would have branches in rural areas and make visits and outreaches to provide healing and deliverance. Those who are in the rural areas would sell livestock to get money to visit the prophet in town and have one-on-one sessions for services. This is not possible for the majority of the rural people; hence they remain excluded.

Secondly, the charges of consultation and prophetic objects are beyond the reach of the poor (Hove, 2024). Magaya and Makandiwa are said to charge exorbitant prices for consultation, ranging from US\$500 to US\$1500 (Chitemba & Ncube, 2016:1). The majority of civil servants in Zimbabwe do not get monthly salaries in excess of five hundred dollars. It means if they want the service of the prophet, they need to work and save for half a year or so. The implication is that those with little or inadequate income are excluded from participating in these religious movements. "For Musakwa, the result is that church leaders now worship '*mari*' (money) and not '*Mwari*' (God). The absent '*w*' represents a major loss, he avers" (Chitando, 2013:107). The prophets have become money-mongers. Additionally, media platforms such as television are not easily accessible in Zimbabwe, particularly for those in rural areas. Neo-Pentecostal prophets' use of television means they reach out to the specific social target group that can afford to have TV sets in their homes and could subscribe to certain channels. The neo-Pentecostal movement becomes an institution serving the upper middle class in urban areas.

Finally, the language used, and the prosperity ideology are not compatible with the poor. It is aimed at those who are upwardly advancing on the socio-economic ladder. Poverty, illness, and suffering are associated with a lack of faith, demon possession, and being cursed (which requires exorcism). Furthermore, Mashau & Kgate (2019:1) argue "[p]overty within this paradigm is defined as sin, laziness and lack of faith". Neo-Pentecostal movements are closely associated with statements such as "To be poor is a sin before God" or "Why are you poor?"



Check your life/relationship with God!” (Biri, 2012:9). This kind of labelling causes social marginalisation. The poor do not belong to the faith community of the neo-Pentecostal movements. The motto in neo-Pentecostal churches is: “My God is rich; therefore, I am also rich!” (Anderson, 2001:184). The economic language employed entices those who aspire to climb the economic ladder, especially those who are educated, job seekers, workers, or business owners. Their purpose of joining the neo-Pentecostal movement would be purely for economic blessings (Anderson, 2001). Therefore, the poor are excluded, causing psychological effects and an inferiority complex (Garande, 2020). This leads them to suffer from both economic and social poverty (Garande, 2020). If one declares and decrees according to the prophet’s order and fails to get the desired blessing, he/she is then blamed for lacking faith. Yet Christ invites all into his kingdom. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28). Neo-Pentecostal prophets should equally accommodate the rich and the poor because they all belong to Christ.

Undermining the sovereignty of God

The gimmick employed by the neo-Pentecostal prophets to perpetuate the prosperity theology puts the prophets at the helm of their followers’ lives. God’s sovereignty is downplayed and undermined as the prophet becomes the centre and object of power. The prophet becomes the only conduit for blessings, and all other people could depend on him instead of presenting themselves before God to meet their needs. This leads to the manipulation of the prosperity theology whereby spiritual, physical, and material blessings are perceived to be rewarded only to those who obey and honour the prophets and give financial and material resources to the prophets (Banda, 2016). “This relegates the sovereignty of God, his grace, and divine providence. This goes against the understanding that God’s blessings and provisions for humanity are not dependent on human initiatives” (Hove, 2024:7). Besides the followers claiming to be sons and daughters of the prophets, they entirely depend on the grace of the prophets. The adherents of the prophets in Zimbabwe would commonly say “*nyasha dzemuporofita dzive nemi*” (the grace of the prophet be with you) (Manyonganise, 2024:8). “Makandiwa and Magaya have become powerful beyond imagination and above all human beings” (Hove, 2024:9). Instead of aligning with the biblical principles of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the prophet becomes the source of all grace that can accompany his followers. That is why they could easily adhere to instructions like touching the TV screens for anointing and healing or following the declarations of the prophet through the TV (Marimbe, 2024). This is only meant to easily manipulate people to obey and trust a human being beyond God; hence, the prophet has ultimate authority over his followers.

Conclusion

The prosperity theology flourishes and grows in Zimbabwe due to the economic meltdown and the collapse of health and social security systems. It is further exacerbated by the neo-Pentecostal prophets like Magaya and Makandiwa. They have devised and employed different gimmicks to attract and entice the upper middle class who would afford their service, which is not freely accessible. Among the gimmicks are the prophet declarations, healing miracles, deliverance services, prophetic declarations, and the use of physical objects that are sold for use by the followers as channels for dispensing prophetic powers. The use of television has promoted the growth and popularity of Magaya and Makandiwa, both nationally and globally. All the gimmicks are meant for marketing and profiteering rather than serving the pastoral care needs of the people of God.



This article argues that the gimmicks are tools of manipulation that are used to perpetuate the prosperity theology for the benefit of the prophets. This has led to undermining the sovereignty of God and a failure to provide holistic care through ethical leadership. Above all, the gimmicks of the prosperity theology promote the marginalisation of the poor who can neither afford the prophet's service nor their physical objects that are said to provide healing, deliverance, and protection. The prophets need to revisit and align their ministry with servant leadership and the all-embracing, holistic ministry of Christ. The limitation of this study only based literature analysis with some of the sources not based on empirically generated information. It relies on theoretical interpretations on NPM and the challenges of prosperity theology causing manipulation of their adherents. Further research should be based on field study interrogating the victims of manipulation and engagement with various members of these prophetic movements.

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