



CHAPTER FIVE

Prophets and Prosperity: African Perspectives on Christian Mission

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Abstract

African Christianity and its mission have largely been shaped by Western influences and culture, often at the cost of devaluing the African way of life and dignity. This chapter reflects on the African context, paying particular attention to the rise of prophets and prosperity and the impact of their activities on the Christian mission. In this chapter, we argue that prophetic actions by some African prophetic healers are connected to marketing, profiteering, and prosperity. Our discussion establishes, based on historical facts, the continued existence of prophetic healing and miracle activities, their socio-economic and socio-political triggers, and how these impact the Christian mission in Africa today. We then proceed to critique the rise of prophets and prosperity ministries in Africa based on a biblical understanding of mission and conclude with some considerations regarding God's mission in Africa today.

Introduction

Since the coming of missionaries to Africa, Western imperial and colonial tendencies have indubitably influenced the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the development of Christianity on the African continent. Often, the context, culture, beliefs, epistemologies and sufferings of African people were not taken into consideration. Since then,

we have learnt that the incarnational model of Christ in this context is a necessary imperative for upholding, affirming and celebrating the lives, history and culture of people without robbing them of their human dignity, personhood and African identity. Mission in an African context tells us that you can be African and Christian. Thus, the Christian mission must be understood in context. We must constantly ask: How is God at work in this context? This, rather than assume that God is not, or has not already been, present there. To do this we need to engage in sober reflection and, often, a kenotic process of self-emptying and re-learning.

This chapter reflects on the current focus on prophecy and prosperity in the African context. These two elements have dominated the propagating of the gospel as two sides of the same coin, especially among certain Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa. What has emerged is a new sense of commercialism (which is different from the focus of Western missionaries) which is linked to Christian experience and engagement. To understand this trend of prophecy and prosperity, we examine the African context to understand how it triggers such beliefs and practices. We offer a critique of the African approach to prophecy and prosperity and conclude by reviewing recommendations for the Christian mission in Africa in the context of the African experience. Let us begin by stating the problem.

Prophecy and Prosperity in Africa

It is popular knowledge that the African missional space is pervaded by a proliferation of churches. While some African Christians may refer to it as a 'revival', certain consequences of this phenomenon are a cause for concern. Chief among the increasingly proliferating Pentecostal groups are the prophetic movements known for prophetic and healing activities. Ramantswana and Sebetseli (2021:5) underscore the observations that prophecy is a distinct feature of these neo-prophetic churches, that the prophetic office remains central

to their activities and that prophecy is at the core of their liturgy (cf. Daswani 2015; Kalu 2008).

Ideally, prophecy, as a missional tool, ought to be appropriated in selfless service and for the glory of God; in reality, it has become a business tool, as is evident in the practices of some prophets. Ramantswana and Sebetseli assert that neo-prophetic churches regard the prophet as “a person in whom the power of God resides – the power to heal, deliver, bless, curse and also utter prophecies” (2021:5). Thus, the purpose of the gift of prophecy is to address the personal needs of followers with much emphasis on healing, deliverance, prosperity, miracles, health, wealth, and the like. Such ideas are reflected in the titles of programmes, such as ‘Prophetic Service’, ‘Deliverance Service’, ‘Night of Fire,’ ‘Miracle and Healing Service’, among others.

Using these programmes as platforms, prophetic and healing meetings have become activities that rake in money. Carrette and King (2005) assert that such practices imply that a certain form of spirituality has emerged, a spirituality of capitalism, one which promotes atomisation, self-interest, corporatism, utilitarianism, consumerism, quietism, political myopia and thought-control or accommodation. Conversely, John Calvin held that “prophecy is that unique and outstanding gift of revealing what is the secret will of God, so that the prophet is, so to speak, God’s messenger to people” (Wilson 2015). In other words, prophecy and related activities should be centred on service to humanity for the glory of God and not on prophets’ acquisitive venality. Resane (2016:1–17) argues that these are bizarre practices that are rooted in anti-institutionalism, anti-intellectualism, anti-nomianism and anti-sacramentalism. What is worse is that such prophets operate without either institutional checks and balances or academic rigour while, at the same time, disregarding moral standards.

Moreover, despite the adverse effect of prophetic activities in Africa, the prophets are becoming stronger and subscriber demand for their services is increasing (see

Chitando & Kudzai 2016:76). If the negative impact increases as the movement continue to grow, it then makes sense to consider that important enquiries are necessary. First, how do prosperity and prophecy relate to mammon and materialism? How do they connect and impact on the Christian missional assignment in Africa? Second, why do Africans increasingly subscribe to these prophetic healers and seers? What are the possible triggers of these prophetic activities? Third, what are the socio-economic, socio-political, and public health factors that impact on mission in the African context? Finally, what are the possible ways to curb the negative implications these prophetic activities have for Christian mission? Responding to these questions in the sections below forms the bulk of this chapter. One after the other, we focus in on the triggers of prophetic activities; the socio-economic and public-health implications; critical analyses of some prophetic activities, using John Calvin's prophetic prism; and, finally, we provide recommendations for directing mission perspectives in the African context.

Triggers of Prophetic Ministries and Activities in Africa

Without claiming absolute knowledge of all existing triggers, below, with cited examples, we discuss a few socio-economic, political, and spiritual triggers.

Poverty and Economic Crisis

An important question is: How did the prophetic movement leverage the rise of poverty in Africa to build its castle of power and prosperity? Lindhardt (2015:1) asserts that, with the economic stability of the 1980s and 1990s, the activities of the Pentecostals and the prophetic movement were limited. However, the story changed in 2000. In the opinion of Omenyo, their emergence in 2000 was a response to the escalation of poverty. In his words, "their emergence in most parts of Africa occurred under conditions of economic, political and social hardship, which were accompanied by economic reforms, low

wages and quality of life, the absence of social services, and the withdrawals of the welfare frontiers of the state” (2014:142). Likewise, Chitando and Kudzai argue that “all these movements rose to prominence after 2008, the year often characterised as the lowest point in the Zimbabwean crisis ... this crisis refers to hyperinflation, massive unemployment, retrenchments, and the general collapse of the economy since 2000” (2016:74).

Clearly, the rise of the prophetic movement is not unconnected to the escalation of poverty in Africa. From a holistic perspective, it may then be accurate to infer that poverty cannot be seen to self-exist. It has a ‘triogonoceros’ nature as it exists alongside corruption and religious opportunism. Thus, corruption in the socio-political system allows public servants and political leaders without conscience to plunder the wealth of the nations, thereby denying the masses basic needs like food, habitable houses, quality healthcare, good water, electricity, job opportunities, and so forth (see Orogun & Pillay, 2021:1–9). Additionally, Beegle *et al* (2016:2) observe that, of the top ten countries with the highest rates of inequality, seven are in Africa. More precisely, Beegle *et al* (2016:4) assert that Africa will not meet the Millennium Development Goal target of halving poverty and that it is projected that the world’s poor will be increasingly concentrated in Africa. Further projections indicate that nearly 90% of the countries unable to eliminate poverty by 2030 will be in Africa. Statistics South Africa (2019) reports that, in that country, the food poverty line per person per month stands at R547. Consequently, an average South African lives on R18.70, or \$1.20, per day. Indeed, Africa is in a state of poverty.

Sadly, some religious leaders have leveraged the poverty status of the masses to commercialise prophecies and consequently exploit the people through prophetic racketeering. For example, Prophet Magaya lives well on prophetic deliverance from the spirit of poverty. He claims to have a prophetic calling to break the chains of poverty (Mahohoma, 2017: 4–5). Giving to the prophet in order to receive prosperity is part of the requirements of casting

out such demons of poverty (cf. Chibango 2016:55–82). The prophets claim that these poverty spirits attract ill luck, business failure, lack of housing and other economic misfortunes (Mahohoma 2017:8). By inference, when the governing system fails and people wallow in abject penury, subscription to a prophetic solution is inevitable.

In Zimbabwe, Mahohoma states that “economic hardships endured for so long and unemployment pushes people to look for solutions from the prophet. While the poor look for jobs, houses, or prosperity, the rich generally seek for protection of their money and properties” (2017:8). Eventually, thousands of people gather and throw their resources at the feet of the prophetic miracle workers; the prophets get richer, and the people get poorer. Clearly, one cannot agree more with Kuoppamäki (2017) that these wealthy prophetic preachers enjoy a luxurious lifestyle as proof of the power of their prayers; however, heavenly intervention is not responsible for their success because all of the money comes from the pockets of faithful followers. Indeed, endemic poverty in Africa triggers the evolution and expansion of prophetic healing activities.

Injustice

Nations, institutions and human society are governed by laws so that justice may be ensured. However, where a poor justice system prevails, prophets leverage the gap to provide an alternative justice system by means of spiritual judgement. Such alternatives are presented through programmes such as ‘Judgement Night’ and slogans like ‘Fall down and die’, among others. Chitando and Kudzai (2016:76) report that Prophet Magaya runs a programme titled ‘Judgement Night’ with disgruntled politicians and masses in attendance to seek divine justice. In addition, the Mountain of Fire and Miracle ministry in Nigeria runs various prophetic programmes where adherents seeking divine judgement and justice pray using the slogan ‘Fall down and die’ (See Olajimbiti 2018:13–27).

Through such prophetic services, the oppressed find succour: God hears their cries through the ministry of the prophets, mysteriously delivers judgement and assures prosperity. Other programmes targeting spiritual and alternative justice include Nigeria's Prophet Joshua Iginla's 'Judgemental Night'; in Ghana, Prophet Nana Poku's 'Judgement Night'; The 'Prophetic Judgement Night' of Prophet Wisdom Ogbe in Nigeria; The Zimbabwean Prophet Makandiwa's 'Judgement Night'; and the 'Judgement Night' of Prophet Thuso Molefhe of Botswana, among others.

Additionally, some politicians who visit prophets like TB Joshua seek spiritual help when political and justice systems seem to run contrary to their ambitions; this is especially the case where rigging elections is a popular practice. Likewise, when electoral injustice and corruption reign, people lose faith in the government and turn to prophets for political direction. In addition, when politicians in power break their social contract after having received the people's political mandate via an election, people may become discouraged and seek alternative direction concerning who to choose as their next political leaders. In this vein, some political prophets are rising to the occasion in response to the needs of their followers. In summary, a failing judicial system is a trigger for the eruption of prophetic activities in Africa.

Competitive Market Share among the Prophets

Ramantswana and Sebetseli (2021:2) note that competition in healing and miracle marketing circles is an underlying factor influencing the rise of bizarre practices within the neo-prophetic churches. This easily snowballs into the heavy commercialisation of miracles via packaging, the promotion of faith materials, the display of stage-managed miracles, and the like. This is evident in Alpha Lukau's 'raising of the dead', Prophet Bushiri's 'walking in the air', and TB Joshua's publicly advertised 'healing and deliverance' sessions. Einstein (2008:21) notes that "increased marketing means increased competition, which in turn generates more marketing".

As each prophet stages miracles, other prophets strive to showcase greater and unique miracles in order to convince followers, thereby increasing their number. Thus, the greater the publicity generated via marketing, the more popular the prophetic healing activities and, ultimately, the greater the number of followers attracted.

Poor Health Care Services

The initial stage of the Pentecostal movement in Africa was dominated by prosperity preaching. However, over time, peoples' needs, especially challenges to their health, paved way for prophetic healing and deliverance. Our opinion as authors is that poor healthcare services are an offshoot of poverty in Africa in the context of economic collapse. Mahohoma (2017:3) is of the opinion that simple logic shows that when the economy is in shambles, nothing that depends on it improves. In the same vein, Chibango (2016:61–62) attributes the rise of prophetic healing and miracle-working to inadequate healthcare services, a shortage of medical facilities and drugs and the emigration of medical doctors and nurses who are seeking greener pastures elsewhere.

It is against this background that prophetic healers claim that they have the power to cure diseases. Some employ certain tools in the course of their services. For example, in South Africa, Prophet Lethebo Rabalago uses 'Doom' spray, an insecticide, to achieve healing and deliverance; Prophet Legeso Daniel feeds his congregants grass; and Prophet Penuel Mnguni has fed snakes to congregants. The majority of the prophets utilise anointing oil as a means of healing. Prophet Magaya refers to the anointing oil as "blank cheque anointing", claiming that it has the power to heal when applied to an affected part of the body (Mahohoma, 2017:5). In light of such evidence, it may be correct to infer that where there are poor healthcare systems, communities will run to prophets for divine healing.

Spiritual Circumstances

The spiritual experience of Africans plays a key role in the establishment of prophetic activities. According to Nkurunziza (2013:61), in Africa, spirituality extends beyond outward religious practices and behaviours associated with religious convictions to involve internal, personal, and emotional expressions of joy, peace, confidence, comfort or sorrow resulting from the existence of a faith within. Kalu (2008:180) asserts that many Africans hold spirituality in great reverence so as to keep their homes secure from opposing forces of darkness that derail destinies. Thus, African Pentecostal spirituality is linked to the manner in which Pentecostals have attempted to deal with 'African' fears and problems. Nkurunziza (2013:68) further notes the similarities between Pentecostalism and traditional African religions as regards awareness of the spiritual world, belief in divine healing and exorcism of evil spirits.

Kalu (2008:171) agrees that traditional healers and neo-Pentecostals share a common appeal – combatting evil forces. According to Hollenweger (1972:158), many South African black communities celebrate prophetic healers and deliverers, such as sangomas. Likewise, Nigerians celebrate prophets, as they celebrate traditional spiritualists and Zimbabweans adore prophets like their traditional spiritual nangas. From the church's historical perspective, Kalu (2008:171–180) concludes that spiritual and demonic powers afflicting people make them seek help from African healers and miracle workers. Hence, when prophetic healing began in Africa, it was easy for people to embrace due to their existing spiritual understanding of the role and functions of African traditional seers, healers, and priests. In essence, their own spiritual experiences and a further desire for help easily triggered the passion of followers for African prophetic healers. We discuss the implications of these prophetic activities in the next section.

Implications of Prophetic Activities in Africa

There are three consequential questions this section seeks to address. First, how do prosperity and prophecy relate to mammon and materialism? How do they impact on the church's missional assignment in Africa? What are the implications of prosperity and prophecy for public health and safety? We attempt to respond to these questions below.

Mammon and Its Implications for Missional Work

Several reports demonstrate that the actual focus of prophetic healing activities is material gain for the prophets. Ramantswana and Sebetseli (2021:3) relate that some prophets provide their followers with one-on-one session services priced between R5 000 and R15 000. These charges exclude the purchase of holy water, anointing oil, bracelets, and the like. Fihlani (2018) reports that more than 40,000 attendees of Prophet Bushiri's meetings have purchased some form of specially designed merchandise that has been on sale. Such goods include miracle oil, healing water, calendars, wrist-bands, branded towels, T-shirts, and caps. Vendors tell patrons that Bushiri had prayed and imbued the goods with healing powers. As indicated, thousands of adherents purchase such items. Likewise, Kuoppamäki (2017) reports that Chris Oyakhilome of Nigeria preaches that anyone seeking a miraculous recovery from disease must sow a 'precious' seed and asserts that, by this, Oyakhilome is referring to money. Likewise, Fröhlich (2019) demonstrates the connection between African prophetic activities and mammon as he reports that Andrew Ejimadu, a Nigerian prophet based in Zambia, popularly referred to as Prophet Seer 1, vomited money during one of his church services in South Africa. The prophet claimed he carries money worth millions inside his stomach. While some onlookers were amazed at the magic, others called for his arrest on money-laundering charges.

Relevant to such items of information on mammon is the report of South Africa's Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities

(CRL Rights Commission). Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva, the head of the commission at the time of the release of the report, asserts that some of these churches were making a considerable profit from so-called 'faith products' that were being bought by poor people desperate to have their lives changed for the better. In its probe, the CRL Rights Commission revealed the abuse of people's belief systems and links between religion and commerce in light of the wealth that some religious practitioners are amassing (2017:6).

To summarise, the commission called into question the relationship between religion and commerce. The commission reasoned that, as with politics, economy, sports and many other fields, the religious sphere is not immune to fraudulent activities. The commercialisation of religion is tied to the issue of healing and miracles – the problematic component being the advertising of miracles, healing, and prosperity (CRL Rights Commission 2017:9). Ultimately, the missional implications of these practices are that the prophetic movement has not only misrepresented the church of Christ but has also subjected the image of the church to ridicule. The prophetic movement has replaced the Bible-based sacrificial service of the missional church with a commercial venture. As society becomes more informed about the exploitative irregularities of the prophetic movement, there may be resistance to the gospel in some African communities – not only by Christians but also by other religious organisations and their adherents who may be aware of the tricks behind prophetic commercialisation.

Public Health Implications

As mentioned above, poor health systems in African communities have been instrumental in the rise of the prophetic healing movement. Chief among the claims of the healing prophets is the power to cure HIV/Aids and other diseases. Fröhlich (2019) reports that, in 2018, Walter Magaya, popularly called 'healer' and 'doctor', announced his discovery of a scientifically proven cure for HIV/Aids that uses two plants, one found in Zimbabwe and the other in Mozambique.

He further claimed that the drugs had been tested on several HIV-positive patients, and that, afterwards, they were completely free of the virus. Fihlani (2018) also records that Prophet Bushiri has claimed to have healed people of HIV/Aids. Bushiri further claimed that he got doctors in Pretoria, South Africa, to bring in tested HIV patients and that, after his prophetic prayers, they were HIV-negative.

In a live TV interview, in reaction to the claim of Bishop Hamilton Nala of KwaZulu-Natal that he cures HIV with 'faith water', Dr Catherine Orrel noted that spiritual healing claims are not medically proven and remain unsubstantiated. She was of the opinion that such prophets are preying on desperate people who are afraid to die. Since anti-retroviral drugs constitute a lifelong treatment and are not easy to take all the time, a once-and-for-all healing water supplied by the prophets may be viewed as an easy way out. Unfortunately, such effortless means have not been proven to be authentic (Orrel 2013). More critically, many people are dying because they have given up use of prescribed medication after experiencing 'prophetic healing'.

In summary then, we have established in this section that prophetic healing activities have negative implications for public health and safety, injure and harm people, and, most significantly, bring Christian mission into disrepute. In the next section, we critique the prophetic activities discussed so far.

Critiquing African Prophetic Activities

It is clear that the African context brings new ideas to an understanding of the Christian mission on the African continent. This is largely due to the dynamics of this context, which have led to economic exploitation and the abuse of Christians, as demonstrated above. The biblical understanding of prophecy is quite different from what we observe today in Africa.

The prophets of Israel are known from biblical literature and its early history as those sent by God, those who proclaim

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the word of God and who interpret Israel's history and destiny. Prophets are essentially messengers from God calling God's people back to God's plan, will and Word. Prophets have an important role to play in addressing socio-political and economic injustices and are still needed and relevant today. They are not prophets making 'profits' from the people they serve but rather seek justice for the oppressed. Unfortunately, what we observe in Africa today is the linking of prophecy to prosperity rather than to God's justice.

It should also be stated that prosperity is not wholly condemned in the scriptures. Wealth is considered a blessing from God (Prov 11:24–25, Gen 13:2, Ps 68:19, Deut 8:18). However, the scriptures are clear that those who accumulate wealth and do not share with the needy are not obedient to God. Jesus made it clear that you cannot worship God and Mammon and that it is difficult for the rich to inherit the kingdom of God (Luke 18:24). Rather than teaching us to pursue prosperity, the Bible teaches us to be content and to find our contentment in God through Jesus Christ (Phil 4:11–12). Furthermore, the Bible teaches us to share wealth with the poor (Acts 2:42 ff, Mark 10:17–25) and not to accumulate riches for self-gain. The latter is what we see happening today – 'prophets' who extort money from people on the pretext of being messengers of God.

It is unfortunate that mission and ministry are used by some for capitalistic, commercial gain rather than with the serious intent of proclaiming the good news of Christ to the world. Christian mission has over the centuries emphasised various aspects of its rubric. If we attempt a more specifically theological synopsis of 'mission' as the concept has traditionally been used, we may note that it has been paraphrased as 1) propagation of the faith; 2) expansion of the reign of God; 3) conversion of the heathen; and 4) the founding of new churches (see Pillay 2017:37). Drawing from this, mission is seen as the saving of souls, service (*diakonia*); worship (*leiturgia*); the transformation of society, community and world; a process of humanisation, community development, and the construction of churches,

among other things. Pillay points out that to “emphasise one or more aspects of mission does not render it wrong; it is just incomplete in the comprehensive biblical understanding of God’s mission in the world” (2017:37). Defining a missional church, Pillay (2017:38) states that

a missional church is one that is centred on the good news of Jesus Christ and the triune God; has a broad view of mission; focuses on the kingdom of God as it works for justice, peace and righteousness on earth; and leads people to faith in Jesus Christ as it seeks to transform both the individual and the environment.”

The ‘kingdom of God’ is a broad theme for Christian mission today – it is understood as life free from the reign of all those forces which enslave humanity. The ‘kingdom’ is where human beings are no longer subject to destructive forces but rather help people to become more human. Therefore, the goal of mission, among the other aspects mentioned, must be to point to humanity in Christ (Pillay 2010:16). If humanisation is also the goal of Christian mission, then we must be wary of ‘prophets’ who dehumanise the people of God by forcing them to do biblically untenable things like eating grass, drinking petrol, and the like. Moreover, we need to hold in question and to accountability the so-called ‘prophets’ who use ministry to accumulate wealth and prosperity in the name of God. Christian mission and ministry must be life-affirming and uphold the human dignity and identity of the people of Africa and beyond.

Interestingly, John Calvin, who was recognised as a prophet in his time (see Jon 2014:6), provides some understanding as to how we may assess prophets today. In interpreting Calvin’s comment on 1 Corinthians about the prophets, Wilson (2015) provides an important summary: (1) Calvin sees prophecy as “revealing what is the secret will of God”. This includes both interpreting scripture and understanding exactly what the Church needs to hear, with a view to applying the former to the latter; and (2) Calvin happily agrees with Paul that prophecy is somehow greater than the

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gifts of men. In addition, (3) he held that the prophets' calling is to be messengers who bring news of what God wants.

McCallum (2017) argues that through intense study of the word of God, Calvin developed a prophetic prism, a three-dimensional theology that emphasises God (*gloria Deo*), Christ (*sola Christus*), and the Word (*sola scriptura*) as the core facets of a theological prism for contemporary prophets and all and sundry. Briefly, first, all that prophets do must be to the glory of God and not for human self-glorification. As we have shown, most of the 'prophets' discussed above are invested in self-glorification, power and prosperity – all of which are questionable in biblical terms. Instead, the call is to follow the example of Jesus who, in his ministry, consistently pointed back to the Father.

Second, prophetic activities within the human institution of faith must be centred on Christ alone and not on the miracles of the prophets. Invariably, manipulating people with stage-managed miracles, extortion, and the sale of miracle emblems for commercial gain, as discussed above, cannot be a service undertaken unto Christ alone. Christ deceived no one – neither did he manipulate those who approached him for help – because his mission is to glorify the Father. This is the prophetic standard African prophets must emulate. Ultimately, the African prophets are not above Christ as Christ remains above all mediators; all prophetic activities must occur within the framework of Jesus' miracle culture.

Third, as Calvin claimed, *sola scriptura* must be the guiding principle by which 'prophets' lead and guide the people of God. The African prophetic movement must be accountable to the word of God. Yes! The bible encourages believers to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy; however, the scripture makes no allowance for its abuse. Using Calvin's prophetic prism – God's word alone – all of the anti-scriptural practices and examples discussed above are biblically untenable and should be rejected. At this point, we may move on to ask how we understand Christian mission in the African context.

Considerations for Mission in Africa

Drawing from what we have said above, specifically in relation to prophets and prosperity in the African context, we offer the following considerations for mission in Africa today.

First, we need to understand afresh the task of God's mission (*missio Dei*) in Africa and in the world. This can be aptly summarised in the idea of extending God's reign in the world, which involves a broad definition of mission as not only 'saving souls' but transforming the world to reflect God's glory. This includes political and socio-economic transformation. The task of mission is to change both the individual and the environment. The African context warrants and validates such an understanding of God's mission.

Second, in doing mission, we need to understand the mission context so that we appropriately 'incarnate' the gospel of Christ in that context. Each context is unique and provides different understandings, interpretations and methods of missional engagement. For the African context, for example, none can deny the need for prophetic ministries; yet the context defines the way in which such ministries are exercised. As we have seen from this research, the African context of poverty, injustice, poor public health and spirituality has led to exploitation and abuse of people, linking prophetic healing to prosperity.

Third, in Africa, there is definite need for prophetic ministries in light of social, economic and political injustices; these should impact on the nature of contextual Christian mission. Interpretively, prophetic ministry is good, appreciable, and acceptable as long as it is for selfless service in the church and in society. Prophetic ministries must be devoted to the glory of God, centred on the ministry and example of Christ and based on the Word of God. Any notion of prophets seeking material profits must be seriously rejected with the contempt it deserves.

Fourth, given what we have shown in this research about prophets and prosperity and their impact on public health and

safety, there is a need for collaboration and shared ministries with other stakeholders and public sectors. For example, a multi-faceted healing process should be implemented through working collaboration between the medical health system and the prophetic healers.

The prophetic movement must embrace an integrated approach to healing and ministry. As the World Health Organization (in Myers 2011:10) infers, “a holistic approach to a phenomenon integrates the physical, spiritual, mental, and social aspects that relate to the whole being of any person” (cf. August 2010:45). In Kalu, Wariboko and Falola’s words, “a holistic expression of healing defines healing as a multi-dimensional component that has different facets to it. Here, sickness includes more than physical illness and, therefore, healing should become multi-faceted” (2010:214).

Consequently, African prophetic healers should embrace a multi-faceted approach to healing and be open to collaboration. An example of this is the collaboration of some Botswana churches with the health sector and the government to tackle the HIV pandemic (Audet, Ngobeni & Wagner 2017:1–6; cf. Obed 2001:220–231). In this regard, Beegle *et al* (2016) indicate that there has been a reduction in the spread and impact of HIV/Aids in Botswana. Similarly, some medical articles have hailed the cooperation of African traditional healers in providing honest and ethically based collaboration with the medical health sector in the interest of public health (See Iwu & Gbodossou 2000; Obayendo 2020; Pharma News 2018; Rumun 2014). Such collaborative initiatives can only strengthen and enhance the Christian mission of taking the whole gospel to the whole person in the whole of Africa.

Finally, Christian mission is best served within structures of accountability and responsible service, whether these are within denominational structures, mission boards, mission organisations or similar entities. The majority of ‘prophets’ who engage in prophetic ministries for commercial gain usually have no accountability to formidable mission structures and, left unchecked, they tend to bring disrepute

and do disservice to the Christian faith. Any mission activity must affirm the human dignity and identity of African people – and of all people.

Conclusion

The research presented here has focused on mission in the African context, specifically, on the rise of prophets and prosperity in Africa today. It has examined poverty, injustice, competitive market-share among the prophets, poor healthcare services and spiritual circumstances as these pertain to the African context and has shown how these impact on Christian mission in Africa, especially in relation to prophets and prosperity. We critiqued the latter from the perspective of the biblical understanding of mission and concluded by listing salient points that ought to guide missional engagement in Africa.

God's mission in Africa and the world at large is the responsibility of all believers. We do God's mission responsibly and best when we affirm life, human dignity and identity. Such affirmation is desperately needed in Africa today in the wake of the so-called prophets' use of the prosperity gospel for self-gain. God invites us to share in God's mission of healing, reconciling and seeking justice in a broken world.

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