

Evaluating 'prophecy' as a South African neo-pentecostal pastoral response to the challenges of xenophobia

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Abstract

Displacement is a challenge that many countries in Africa face and in times of crisis citizens of these countries tend to cool their anger and frustration *inter alia* through violent acts of xenophobia. Another feature of the African scene (as a part of the Global South) is the growth of the pentecostal movement in its diverse forms, with classical pentecostals, charismatic pentecostals in mainline churches and neo-pentecostal groups outnumbering members of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa. It is argued that prophecy forms an integral element in the contribution of the neo-pentecostal movement to the solution of displacement and the resultant xenophobia as a problem in Africa. Prophecy stands in the service of neo-pentecostals' emphasis on salvation and healing, within the wider context of African cosmology's view of a spirit world populated by good and evil spirits and animating the seen world. Evil spirits are causative for the occurrence of some cases of death, barrenness, illnesses and other misfortunes; the prophet can decipher and uncover the human and spiritual causes of events and prescribe a possible way to overcome it. Neo-prophecy provides guidance for the displaced as well as for those who are challenged to accept and welcome the displaced strangers in their world. The paper describes the phenomenon of neo-prophecy and evaluates its benefits and shortcomings as a pastoral response to xenophobia.

Key words

Xenophobia, neo-prophetism, prophecy, neo-pentecostal churches, prophets

Methodology

In this study a phenomenological approach is utilised by way of qualitative content analysis of the phenomena of prophecy and xenophobia, to understand meanings associated with messages involving the analysis of the contents on newspaper reports, blogs and editorials, and academic articles containing such research. The purpose is to view xenophobia and a neo-pentecostal response to it in the available material. The use of language, symbols and visual images is investigated to understand the particular discourse.

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Xenophobia in South Africa

Africa has been experiencing the challenges of displacement and migration for many centuries. Legal entries of foreigners into South Africa increased dramatically after 1994 and most of the foreigners who entered the country came from Africa, mainly from countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (Crush 2008:1; Dodson & Crush 2016:279). In 2013, the number of international immigrants in South Africa was already more than 2.3 million and it increased between 2000 and 2013 at a rate of 6.7% per annum, according to figures released by the United Nations, (Gordon 2016:4; 2017:19-20).²

Estimates of the total number of irregular (or undocumented) migrants present in South Africa range from 1 million to an implausible 10 million; it is impossible to quantify it because of the clandestine nature of irregular cross-order entry or overstaying (Dodson & Crush 2016:279).

In 2010, out of 180 000 asylum seekers, close to 150 000 were Zimbabweans.³ By 2015, this had changed so that citizens from the DRC and Somalia were the main sources of asylum seekers (Dodson & Crush 2016:280), while unofficial numbers representing illegal refugees are likely in the millions. Most of them self-settle in urban areas among other poor people for lack of governmental support (Labys, Dreyer & Burns 2017:697).

Xenophobia is in the words of Ideheue & Osaghae (2015:79) a dislike or hatred towards foreigners. Its social stereotypes and prejudices are often disguised with the phenomenon of nationalism. A word in local vocabulary, *Makwerekwere*, is used for someone who is not proficient in a local South African language and who comes from a country that is seen in local prejudice as economically and culturally backward, betraying a deep resentment for foreigners (Ideheue & Osaghae 2015:80).

Xenophobia is the result of economic and material factors such as poor blacks vying for jobs with immigrants who are sometimes better qualified or more willing to work hard for less remuneration, social factors where the 'other' in post-apartheid South Africa is redefined as 'foreign Africans', and political factors such as a lack of political leadership and elite discourses on immigration (Dodson & Crush 2016:286-288).⁴ Gordon (2016:12-14) argues that anti-immigrant sentiment is the result of a

² By comparison, in the 2011 census the official number was 2 199 871 in the 2011 census, or approximately 4% of the population. Because census enumeration is unlikely to have captured all undocumented immigrants, the real figure is higher (Dodson & Crush 2016:278).

³ In 2009 the Department of Home Affairs announced a special dispensation for Zimbabweans where four-year residence and work permits were issued to 245 000 Zimbabweans who were already in South Africa without visas or other permits; it was reissued for a further four years in 2014 (Dodson & Crush 2016:280).

⁴ The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in their research finds two myths about foreigners fuel xenophobic attacks. In the first place, it is perceived that foreign nationals take jobs that should be reserved for South Africans, leading to an escalation of unemployment figures. In the second place, the idea persists that foreign nationals are involved in much of the crime in the country (Kangwa 2016:539). Even the conciliatory former President Nelson Mandela hinted that undocumented foreigners are responsible for crime in South Africa, according to Harris (2002). Mangosuthu Buthelezi as leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) stated as Home Affairs Minister that 'all Nigerian immigrants are criminals and drug traffickers' (Tella & Ogunnubi, 2014:154).

lack of intergroup contact, stereotypes about immigration and immigrants and a general weakening of race relations in the country. The effect is that immigrants and refugees experience everyday forms of discrimination from fellow-citizens and officials in accessing those state services and rights to which they are legally entitled.

Anti-immigrant hostility and violence also drives frustrations with horrid social and economic conditions (Gordon 2016:5). Although the ANC government expanded the social welfare net in the 2000s to provide welfare grants to 17 million people and the number of people living below the food poverty line decreased by 4.9 million Gordon (2016:4), poverty still remained widespread. In 2014 12.2 million South Africans were living below the food poverty line, resulting in the South African Gini Coefficient measuring inequality at 0.64 in 2014. This makes South Africa one of the most unequal countries in the world.

The South African government policy can be regarded as resistant if not directly hostile to immigration, contributing to a pervasive climate of xenophobia (Ideheue & Osaghae 2015:83), targeting primarily immigrants of African origin. The state represents a 'protectionist' position for the benefit of its own citizens when they introduced restrictive immigration policies, sharpened border control (Gordon 2016:2) and promoted nativism (Gordon 2017:31), which underscores the implementation of various regulatory and policing responses that undermine and negatively affect migrant entrepreneurship. It is based on high levels of negative perceptions about migrants with politicians and officials who blame the lack of sufficient state resources and criminal activities on illegal immigrants (Dodson & Crush 2016:285).⁵ In this way xenophobic sentiments are incubated that threaten black brotherhood sentiments among all Africans (Ideheue & Osaghae 2015:87).

Post-apartheid South Africa experiences many service delivery protests that is at times accompanied by violent attacks on municipal property (Saloojee 2016:263) and immigrants, including looting their businesses (Saloojee 2016:273).⁶ The tragic fact is that xenophobic attacks were mainly perpetrated

A survey in 2006 showed that 47% of South Africans supported the deportation of foreign nationals, and 74% supported a policy of deportation for any immigrant not contributing economically to the country (Ideheue & Osaghae 2015:80; Dodson & Crush 2016:285). Crush (2008) finds that 48% of South Africans saw migrants from neighbouring nations as a criminal threat, 29% believe these migrants are carriers of diseases while 15% reported losing jobs to foreigners. The Afrobarometer survey of 2011 states that as many as 45% of South Africans strongly do not want foreigners to live in the country because their jobs are threatened by foreigners while 36% admitted that they would prevent foreigners to establish businesses in their neighbourhoods and 33% would actively attempt to stop foreigners even from settling in their neighbourhoods (Ejoke & Ani 2017:171).

⁵ The International Organization for Migration (IOM) finds that these perceptions and prejudices are not based on good evidence. To the contrary, they found that foreign nationals are not responsible for the rise in crime and unemployment; in fact, migrants are twice as likely to be entrepreneurs than South African nationals, actively contributing to generate employment. They employ on average five to six people (<https://southafrica.iom.int/>; accessed 2018-02-27).

⁶ In 2004/5 (from April to April) there were 7 382 peaceful protests and 662 protests with unrest, in 2010/11 there were 11 681 peaceful and 973 violent protests, in 2012/3 there were 10 517 peaceful and 1 882 violent protests and in 2013/4 there were 11 688 peaceful and 1 907 violent protests. The acceleration in violent protests is significant (Saloojee 2016:269). Between 2009 and 2012 there were 2.95 unrest incidents a day, an increase

by poor South Africans of African heritage on poor African migrants (Chiweshe 2016:133; Gordon 2016:2). Jean Pierre Misago (in Baker 2015), a researcher at the African Centre for Migration and Society, estimates that about 350 African migrants were killed from 2008 to 2015 in xenophobic attacks.

Another fact is that some of the perpetrators of xenophobia are dedicated members of churches and many victims of xenophobia look to the local church for safety and practical assistance in the aftermath of attacks (Phakathi 2010).

'Prophecy' in the neo-pentecostal churches in South Africa⁷

As in African Christianity in general, Pentecostalism in its diverse forms⁸ is fast becoming the representative face of South African black Christianity. With the advent of neo-pentecostal groups (New Prophetic Churches [Quayesi-Amakye 2014:256] churches of the Spirit [Anderson 2016:304]) since the 1990s and the ongoing pentecostalisation of mainline churches along with the link of pentecostalism with African Indigenous/Initiated/Independent Churches (AIC), pentecostals form the fastest growing Christian movement within our times in South Africa (Anderson 2007:117).⁹ And through the millions of members these churches attract, they are influencing and impacting the social, economic and political fabric of post-apartheid South Africa (Frahm-Arp 2016:283; Keener 2016:89).

of 40% more than the average of 2.1 unrest incidents a day recorded for the period from 2004 to 2009. The top grievances by protestors were about housing, water and sanitation, political representation and electricity and it centres on unaccountable and corrupt local government and issues of community safety (Saloojee 2016:271). In 2008, in xenophobic attacks that started in Johannesburg and spread to Pretoria and Cape Town South African citizens and migrants lost their lives and property. In 2015 the Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini allegedly asked foreigners to pack their bags and go back to their countries because they were enjoying South African resources at the expense of locals (Tella 2016:142-3), stating, 'I would like to ask the South African government to help us. We must deal with our own lice in our heads. Let's take out the ants and leave them in the sun. We ask that immigrants must take their bags and go where they come from' (<https://www.herald.co.zw/zwelithini-likens-immigrants-to-lice-ants/>; *The Herald*, 17 April 2015; accessed 2018-02-23). This led to several attacks of homophobic nature

⁷ The author's presupposition is that contemporary prophecy in the pentecostal movement in its reception and contents stands in a way in continuity with the phenomenon of prophecy as found in the Bible (cf. Nel 2017) and that may represent a form of extra-biblical revelation. This is *contra* the widespread Reformed and Roman Catholic cessationist perspective that the prophet is rather an engaged observer who criticises actions and policies that differ from God's intentions. It serves as an authentically Christian mode of moral discourse (De Villiers 2016:154).

⁸ David Barrett (1970:50) perceived half a century ago that African Christianity is transforming 'Christianity permanently into a primarily non-Western religion'. Although a classification of pentecostalism is risky because of its diverse branches it is customary to speak of three waves, of classical pentecostalism that looks back for its origin to the beginning of the twentieth century with Charles Parham's Bible Schools and William Seymour's Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles and similar incidents (not all agree that Pentecostal origins in other countries go back to Los Angeles; sometimes it might have been the result of indigenous revivals; cf. Anderson 2007), of the charismatic renewal of the mainline churches since the 1950s and of an independent movement since the 1970s with its synthesis between pentecostal theology and practice and several other theological traditions. This last wave is sometimes denoted as neo-pentecostalism. The discussion is limited to these churches of which many have become macro churches centered around apostles or prophets. Cf. Anderson 2001; Gifford 2011; Kalu 2008; Quayesi-Amakye 2013 for further discussion.

⁹ Pentecostalism is defined in terms of groups that stress the baptism with the Holy Spirit, leading to direct divine inspiration and guidance which is presented in a celebration of the *charismata*, with emphasis on glossolalia, divine healing and parallel phenomena (cf. Soko 2016:92-3).

A feature of neo-pentecostal African churches is the category of prophets (along with apostles) serving as leading religious functionaries. Prophets and prophecy historically and traditionally played a significant role within pentecostalism with its emphasis on the experience of Spirit baptism and the resultant expectation of the revelation of God's power and guidance to the contemporary believer.¹⁰ Within the classical pentecostal movement the *charisma* of prophecy is valued highly, and room exists in any worship service that believers may participate spontaneously by bringing a prophetic word or revelation.¹¹ The believer who prophesies is not called a prophet except in exceptional cases where the person is used regularly to such an extent that the (local or regional) church regards them as faithful 'prophets'. However, in the neo-pentecostal tradition the phenomenon of prophets shows an emerging dominance with specific individuals regarded and honoured as prophets. In the classical pentecostal tradition, prophecy is concerned with a word for the assembly (mostly) or an individual, in the form of an encouragement or warning, often in biblical terms and seldom related to prediction of the future. In the neo-pentecostal tradition, prophecy is mainly concerned with a word aimed at an individual as part of a pastoral discourse, although prophets' preaching often also contain prophetic announcements.

The neo-pentecostal prophet operates in the same context as the diviner in African Traditional Religion (ATR), focusing on diagnosing individual ailments and finding spiritual cures to all manner of challenges (Ngong 2010:143).¹² Neo-prophets are perceived as having a unique relationship with God, allowing them continuing access to supernatural knowledge of the seekers' problems as well as the power to bring about solutions to those problems.¹³ The solution in many cases consists of something that the believer must do or stop doing. In this sense it also differs from the pentecostal definition of a prophet. In their manner of operating, neo-prophets link rather with the phenomenon of prophecy within the AICs (as portrayed, e.g., in the excellent article of Wepener and Barnard 2016) than with classical pentecostalism, so that neo-pentecostalism may be viewed as the 'AIC'ination' of

¹⁰ Cf. the definition of Kroesbergen-Kamps (2016:29) of prophecy that she compiled from interviews with Zambian pastors from various denominations, that prophecy is 'speaking the word of God to give direction in order to bring change'. The debate about the definition of 'prophecy' is still continuing; for purposes of this article her definition is being used.

¹¹ It seems as if 1 Corinthians 14 stresses that while prophecy is a manifestation of the Spirit it also involves speaking intelligibly with the mind so that the gathered are able to follow the message. Although prophecy is a form of instruction it also reveals things that pierce the human heart so that the secrets of listeners' hearts become manifest (1 Cor 14:25). The term 'revealing' (ἀποκαλυφθῆ) in 1 Cor 14:30 suggests that prophetic insight might contain content which could not have been gained through rational thought and study alone, as Ellington (2016:177) acknowledges. At the same time, because prophecy occurs through the agency of humans all inspired prophecies are in part subject to human limitations such as subjectivity, requiring the injunction in 1 Cor 14:29 that after two or three prophets completed their instruction the others should evaluate it (διακρινέτωσαν). The purpose of discerning is according to Fee (1994:252) not to evaluate whether a person is speaking by a foreign spirit but whether the prophecy itself truly conforms to the Spirit of God.

¹² The similarity between the diviner and neo-prophet is that both have the task of uncovering the cause or root of a problem or felt need (Omenyo 2011:34); however, the similarity ends when the neo-prophet interprets the problem in terms of a revelation of the Spirit.

¹³ Research found that the most common problems to which people seek the help of prophets include incurable diseases, marital issues and unemployment, according to Sakupapa's (2016:123) research.

African pentecostalism (cf. Cox 1995:250).¹⁴ Because of these differences it seems sensible to call this phenomenon ‘neo-prophetism’, to distinguish it from the pentecostal custom.¹⁵

The history of prophetism within the neo-pentecostal tradition (and to a certain extent in African pentecostalism as well) can be traced to the role played by prophets in AICs (Omenyo 2011).¹⁶ Within these churches the prophets are defined by Baeta (1962:6-7) as individuals characterised by a striking personality and the ability to impose to convince others that they are special agents of God. Specific powers are credited to them, such as healing, deliverance, revealing of hidden things, predicting of the future, and cursing and blessing. In its initial period (1860-1960), the AICs emerged in Southern Africa for political and religious reasons, as a successful vernacularisation of the gospel for Africans (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:288) and peaceful and silent protest against colonisation and mission Christianity representing churches established by missionary agencies from Europe and America that were intolerable of traditional African worship and practices (Kalu 2008:23). There are direct links with primal religion in the phenomenon among the AICs.

Neo-prophetism provides in what Sakupapa (2016:118) calls ‘the prophetic craze among many Christians’ irrespective of church tradition or doctrine. Again, it seems that neo-pentecostalism succeeds in what Cox (1995:247) describes as an important ingredient of its recipe for success, to assimilate a wide variety of African indigenous religious practices while it links with the direct needs of ordinary people in the idiom that they understand and by emphasising the power of the Holy Spirit to provide in any need of contemporary believers, including childlessness and infertility, bodily and mental illness, drought and natural catastrophes, accidents and bad luck, poverty, racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, injustice, political dictatorship and repression, imprisonment without trial and all that dehumanises the African personality (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:293).¹⁷ Some of these prophets enjoy wide media coverage through online social media and digital television. That these prophets attract many South African blacks is not only related to neo-

¹⁴ Similarities between the prophetic ministry in AICs and neo-prophetism include that individual worshipers are called to another room to be prophesied to, with a third person who interprets; prophecies are sometimes written down; some prophecies may contain injunctions to drink holy water or another liquid, blessing of possessions, predictions that an illness will disappear when the believer follows certain injunctions, injunctions to the assembled people to help poor people and instructions what to do to ensure that businesses are blessed (Wepener & Barnard 2016:77-84).

¹⁵ Prophetism has always formed an integral part of African Christianity *contra* Western mission-churches as a perennial phenomenon (as described by Baeta 1962:6; Omenyo 2011:31; cf. also Sundkler 1961 and Oosthuizen 1992).

¹⁶ The phenomenon of AICs is notoriously complex; various attempts have been made to classify the phenomenon along diverse lines. Anderson’s (2001:15-18) and Oosthuizen’s (1992:1-2) classification makes the most sense, with AIC’s classified as Ethiopian, Zionist, Prophet/healing and Charismatic/pentecostal or Spirit-churches. Anderson (2016:306) mentions that in some parts of Africa, Spirit-churches constitute up to 40% of the total population.

¹⁷ The quest for divine immediacy is vital to pentecostal spirituality, in opposition to many Protestant theologians’ cessationism that limits supernatural intervention and the (so-called supernatural) *charismata* to the apostolic era.

pentecostals' this-worldly perspective on salvation¹⁸ but also to the affinity of their practices to certain ATR beliefs that underlie the African worldview. Muindi (2012:211) argues that the neo-pentecostal *charism* of prophecy has a particular appeal because it echoes the traditional African prophetic spirituality which accentuates *inter alia* aspects such as 'spirit possession', 'divine seizure' and 'supernatural revelations' concerning the spiritual causes of actual events among people.¹⁹ Kalu (2008:186) agrees and states that it has produced a culture of continuity with primal worldviews, in the process regaining a pneumatic and charismatic religiosity that characterised traditional society and contemporary Africans can identify with.²⁰ In African traditional life birth, illness, death, drought and material challenges were explained as acts perpetuated by good or evil spirits. Human beings are vulnerable and open to both evil and benevolent forces and the forefathers should be appeased because of their influence on the world of spiritual forces. The power of evil is perpetuated by bad witchcraft, ancestral spirits and bad *muti* or herbal medicines and potions made by *sangomas*, which are believed to cause misfortune in the lives of people. The powers of evil cause illness, poverty and broken relationships (Frahm-Arp 2016:271; Quayesi-Amakye 2013:51-85). Because people are curious about their existential concerns, they explore sources of vital forces to change their destinies for the better; hence the popularity and constancy of prophetism in Africa's religious climate (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:302). Salvation consists of freedom from evil powers that hinder human beings from achieving well-being (Ndiokwere 1981:239-243). Neo-prophetism appropriates the holistic African worldview when it perceives the spirit world as impinging on the visible world, that determines the welfare or woe of human beings. Existential challenges are decided in the spirit world and secular analysis as viewed by Western society cannot contribute to understand it (Ngong 2006:524).²¹ At the same time, ancestor veneration is not accepted as a way to appease spiritual forces and Christians are encouraged to break with their extended families who practice ancestor veneration.

¹⁸ Pentecostals traditionally emphasised divine healing, connecting salvation, wholeness and holiness (in Afrikaans: "heil, heelheid en heiligheid", demonstrating its common root). In demonstrating this connection, Maddocks (1990:7) defines health as a foretaste of the wholeness to come, when the kingdom is established and creation healed. A Christian can never talk about healing without having Jesus in mind. The meaning of his name reflects the terms 'save/heal' and speaks of the unleashing of power that brings human beings and society to a new spaciousness that releases its members to perform their function (Maddocks 1990:9). The kingdom's *shalom* consists of salvation, good health, contentedness and peace between nations (Duncan 1988:37). Holiness is viewed as the equipment necessary to become whole (Maddocks 1990:12-14).

¹⁹ Cox (1995:219) suggests religions Africa that grow will necessarily include and transform elements of pre-existing religions because these elements retain a strong grip on the cultural subconscious. In this sense, Pentecostal churches help Africans to recover some of the vital elements in their culture threatened by modernisation (Cox 1995:222).

²⁰ Traditionally mission churches with their cerebral-analytical 'class-room religion' (Taylor 1963:21-22) rejected the African worldview and primal vision and taught new believers that they need to formulate a new worldview in accordance with the Bible without acknowledging any connection between a biblical and African worldview. Kangwa (2016:544) argues that only when African Christianity retrieves and applies vital African values will they serve Africans. For that to happen, they need a spirituality of holism and a sacramental worldview. By accepting the African worldview it also changes in important respects in correlation with biblical perspectives.

²¹ Western misunderstanding of African neo-prophetism may be linked to its neglect of the primal African vision that believes that fundamentally all things share the same nature in their interaction upon each other in cosmic oneness (Taylor 1963:72).

Christians' fight is against evil forces such as the ancestors, evil spirits, hobgoblins and Satan (Frahm-Arp 2016:271-272).

Their soteriology consists of two elements, the need to minister to the needs of believers and the expectation of the second coming of Christ, with accompanying final reward for believers, of eternal life. Prophecy is concerned with physical, spiritual, emotional, social, legal and psychological challenges as well as spiritual and bodily well-being and material prosperity.²² Clients visit prophets to seek spiritual direction (*isiqondiso esingokomoya* in Sesotho or *isiqondiso esingokomoya* in Zulu). They elicit information or acquire knowledge about their lives when the prophets 'read' and 'speak' into their lives (Quayesi-Amakye 2013:246), getting psychological support that helps to calm confused minds so they can embrace the future with confidence. These blessings are accessed by living a good Christian life, giving generously to the church in terms of money and time and faithfully attending church services and group Bible studies (Frahm-Arp 2016:269).

The result is that neo-pentecostalism has grown because of its cultural fit into indigenous worldviews (Kalu 2008:170). African indigenous worldviews still dominate contemporary African experience, including the new middle class. Neo-pentecostals succeed in innovatively appropriating its very experiential and versatile spirituality to serve the contextual needs of Africans in post-colonial times in an idiom that accommodates the indigenous worldview, in the words of Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:18).

'Prophecy' as a pastoral response to xenophobia

It is argued that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of neo-pentecostal churches is its prophetism, that serves as its primary pastoral response to social challenges such as xenophobia. Anderson (1996:180) writes, 'Prophecy in Africa also often becomes an extremely effective form of pastoral therapy and counsel, mostly practised in private, a moral corrective and an indispensable facet of Christian ministry. It can become an expression of care and concern for the needy; and in countless cases, it actually brings relief'. The beneficial effects of prophecy in terms of xenophobia can be seen in at least four aspects.

²² While it is not denied that some versions of prosperity theology are theologically suspicious, many evaluations of the prosperity gospel of neo-pentecostal churches are made from a Western theological perspective. For instance, Grady (2013) criticises neo-prophets for their emphasis on prosperity and argues that it fuels greed, feeds pride, works against formation of Christian character, keeps people in poverty as it gets the little they have in the name of getting rich and abuses the Bible. What is needed is that the phenomenon of the health and wealth gospel in African churches should be analysed and evaluated from the perspective of African people and the values deduced from their worldview. The impact of a prosperity message on the emerging youthful population of Africa with a taste for exotic lifestyles is enormous (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:301). Wepener's (2013:91) remark is important, that healing is most probably the main motivation why people go to worship in Africa. Healing is interpreted in Africa in the holistic sense that it includes the total well-being of the individual, including financial success. Anderson's (1996) observations of neo-pentecostals led to his remark that the neo-prophets' primary function is to be healers.

In the first place, prophecy serves as social critique of society's norms and values and the government's policies. Kangwa (2016:543) argues that as the church took a leading role in dismantling apartheid in South Africa it should now help shape democracy and dismantle the uglier aspects of liberal democracy in post-apartheid South Africa. He (2016:543) concludes, 'African Christianity must add its voice to the call for a continent in which there is less pain and suffering. The church can help to transform Africa into a fountain of life'. Prophecy challenges ruling governments, in some instances characterised by corruption and state plundering, pressing them to deliver meaningful development that is of benefit to citizens. During the years that Zuma was president of South Africa (2009-2018), various prophets and other leaders of neo-pentecostal churches criticised aspects of government policy and ethical governance and nurtured civic responsibility, working for the alleviation of poverty, promoting education and advocating for peace and justice (Kgatle 2017:2).

Ejoke & Ani (2017:180) is of the opinion that the South African government needs strong support from outside authorities like the church, to assist in curbing the menace of xenophobia by staging powerful anti-xenophobic campaigns that accentuate important African values such as *ubuntu*. The social norm of *ubuntu* entrenched in the Xhosa saying, '*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*' (every individual becomes because of others), denotes peace and coexistence and needs to be reinforced and mainstreamed. Prophecy can and does contribute to the national discourse about xenophobia by engaging with the government and non-governmental organisations about their policies concerning migrants.

Neo-prophetism is not only word-based; it includes acts of healing, exorcism and deliverance based on the belief in God as the great power that can overcome any power of destruction, with a pneumatological soteriology expressed in interventionist terms (Sakupapa 2016:120).²³ A second beneficial effect of prophecy is that it serves the needs of migrants by accepting them in the faith community and counselling them about the future in a new country. On the one hand, it formulates a dream of the coming kingdom of heaven with healing, wholeness and holiness in its wake. On the other hand, it shows a prerogative for displaced and disenfranchised people when the local church provides a place of spiritual security and personal community for migrants (Anderson 2016:312), because Christians define themselves as strangers in an alien land like Israel in Egypt and they seek the prosperity of a strange country like Israel in Babylonian exile (Yong 2010:254).

²³ Cf. Anderson's (2016:305) remark that an African religion that does not promise deliverance from evil or promote health and prosperity is a dysfunctional religion without any future; hence that prosperity gospel has flooded the economically poorest continent. It is directly related to the religious world of Africa that is holistic. Everything is invested with religious meaning and there is no clear-cut division between spiritual and secular. Its spirituality is pragmatic, practical and this-worldly (Anderson 2016:315). The African holistic world view does not allow for separation between secular and religious, requiring of neo-pentecostalism to include also the political on its agenda.

African prophets assumed a new role in terms of challenges such as HIV and Aids, and xenophobia. These challenges become a hermeneutical key with which neo-pentecostals interpret the Bible (Anderson 2001:223), operating on the assumption that God wants to meet his people's needs in a direct manner. In this sense, neo-pentecostal prophets have become an innovative alternative to traditional healers (Anderson 2001:224). They support migrants who consult them by providing hope and practical help by their involvement in schools, clinics and hospitals, labor unions, self-help groups and development and relief organisations (Yong 2010:248).

Thirdly, prophets care for the psychological well-being of migrants. Labys, Dreyer & Burns (2017:698) states that refugees who are threatened by xenophobia are at risk of mental illness. It is supported by studies that explored migrants' psychological wellbeing; for example, in Johannesburg 77 refugees were surveyed and research reported that 66% of them were in need of mental health care; high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (69%), anxiety (91%) and depression (74%) were found in clients of a centre for torture survivors; and in Durban, a high prevalence of depression (54%), anxiety (49%) and PTSD (25%) symptoms were found in 335 refugees. Forced migration, low social support and socioeconomic hardships (including food insecurity) were the main risk factors for poor mental health outcomes in this population group. In their own research, Labys, Dreyer & Burns (2017:701) finds that migrants have difficulties with xenophobia/racism, work, physical safety, housing exploitation and healthcare. The impact of these difficulties was seen in psychological effects such as feelings of worry, stress, fear, emotional pain, anger and an inability to cope (Labys, Dreyer & Burns 2017:703-707). Most of their interviewees (78%) reported that religion formed an essential part of migrants' lives. The church meeting was key for meeting friends, praying, feeling blessed, feeling happy and regaining hope. One participant who attended church every evening and Sunday mornings stated, 'They [Pentecostal church] give you lots of hope'. Praying (39%) and faith were further sources of strength, joy, and hope, providing reassurance that was crucial for survival. Prophets' involvement with migrants allow them to minister healing and hope in a situation that might at times be desperate.

Lastly, prophets influence personal morality of believers. They encourage believers to resist participation in populist action when large crowds are driven to irresponsible and irrational action by the madness created by mass hysteria characterising some of the township protests. According to Yong (2010:239-242), prophetic politics recognises and announces that allegiances to the state are secondary to allegiances to God and encourages Spirit-filled believers to explicitly witness in the public square, even and specifically in the South African secularist 'naked public square', characterised by the absence of religion from both the political and civic arena (Yong 2010:239-242).

An evaluation of the neo-pentecostal pastoral response to xenophobia

One of the primary ways neo-pentecostals react to xenophobia is through its practice of prophetism, as stated above. In this section the phenomenon's ability to address the challenges of xenophobia is evaluated.

In analysing neo-pentecostal prophetism, Ngong (2010:147) argues that it promotes an African spiritualistic worldview that does not pay sufficient attention to the scientific imagination. With its emphasis on physical healing it does not allow for the successes of medical science while at the same time its ascription in a wholesale manner of socio-economic and political challenges to the demonic as neo-pentecostal prophets customarily do, cannot be upheld (Mana 2004:96).²⁴ However, the remark generalises and does not take into account that many neo-pentecostal prophets do allow room for the contribution of medical science and the reality of socio-political and economic woes due to hard-core capitalism and greedy politicians. And when they are faced with the challenges of xenophobia in their communities they address the problems forcibly.

Still there is some truth in the remark; while providing in this-worldly needs of individuals the causes of their challenges can be spiritualised to such an extent that blame is shifted onto evil spirits and contemporary human beings need not accept responsibility for their own lives, as taught for instance by Derek Prince and the Nigerian Emeka Nwakpa (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:301).²⁵ It is not enough to cast out the demon of xenophobia; believers need to hear the important gospel message again and again that all people are to be treated with dignity because they have been created in the image of God. Mana (2004:97) proposes that a bridge should be erected by neo-pentecostals between popular expectations of deliverance and theoretical analyses of liberation and reconstruction by the church in order to transform hearts and minds in the building of peaceful and flourishing societies that accommodate migrants as well. What is needed is prophetic politics informed by Pentecostal spirituality and piety that engages the public sphere boldly²⁶ and provides all kinds of counter-cultural and counter-conventional communities where the displaced experience companionship and solidarity in the form of 'family' and as a counter-history, counter-ethics and counter-ontology to that of the myth of secularism (Yong 2010:228). The result will be that Pentecostal communities function as

²⁴ ATR pacifies evil deities and ghosts with animal sacrifices, necromancy, spiritism and ritualism and some have asserted that the AICs inappropriately mix the Christian faith with ATR by serving the same agenda. The African worldview explains misfortune in terms of the influence of evil spirits, necessitating their pacification. If neo-pentecostalism indiscriminately intends to pacify evil spirits without an unapologetic commitment to biblical finality of authority, it would degenerate into a syncretisation with questionable beliefs and practices (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:294).

²⁵ Cf. Frahm-Arp's (2016:274) description of the emphasis Bishop Moso Sono of Grace Bible Church places on hard work, moral living, personal discipline and prayer to combat poverty and difficulties, rather than blaming evil forces. The unemployed may never give up their dreams and deflect responsibility by blaming their misfortunes on the power of Satan or witchcraft.

²⁶ According to Yong (2010:248), a prophetic politics challenges that state to do what it is supposed to do, to uphold the law.

alternative ‘cities’ that intentionally ignore the broader political realities and provides solidarity for those on the margins of the *polis* (Yong 2010:13).

Another argument is that neo-prophetism’s emphasis on prosperity may disqualify it from reaching the disenfranchised and marginalised such as most immigrants are, because of its appearance as a rich church and a rich man’s church. ‘Unfortunately, Christians, especially those from Pentecostal-Charismatic circles, are not very keen to confront social and political causes of poverty on the continent’, writes Kangwa (2016:544).²⁷ What should be kept in mind is that when neo-pentecostals concentrate on this-worldly needs of believers their prophecies most of the time provide guidance derived from the Bible although it must be admitted that Scripture might be misappropriated, as Quayesi-Amakye (2013:247) explains. As explained, this-worldly challenges then become the hermeneutical key to the interpretation of the Bible, in a historicist way where the social-historical background and horizon of the text is ignored and it is interpreted as though it was written exclusively for contemporary believers. It also characterises a large part of the sermons in neo-pentecostal churches. The manner to address this issue is by bringing the importance of a sound theological training for all neo-pentecostal pastors, prophets and apostles to the attention of the movement’s leaders, a difficult task since it is not organised into alliances or denominations, as is the case with classical pentecostalism.

In most cases, neo-prophets do not have any or only loose connections with church mother bodies, implying that they are not answerable to anyone and they use market techniques to ply their ministries (Zulu 2016:103). The lack of accountability and transparency is harming the neo-pentecostal movement and the behaviour of a few prophets is discrediting the movement as a whole. For instance, a few cases have been reported about prophets who exploited the trust of their clients by abusing and assaulting them sexually or emotionally, or requiring exorbitant payment for their healing prayers (Mwale & Chita 2016:52-53).²⁸ That there are excesses and abuses within the neo-pentecostal movement that are perpetuated by some prophets cannot be denied (cf. Kgatle 2017:3-5 for some

²⁷ However, such a stereotyping is not true due to the diverse and changing participation of neo-pentecostal groups in politics. Cf. Frahm-Arp’s (2016:279-280) discussion of South African megachurches who initially did not participate in politics but in the end became involved. For instance, Jacob Zuma as president of the ANC invited Ray McCauley of Rhema Bible Church to head the National Interfaith Leadership Council (NILC), and before the 2009 elections McCauley invited Zuma to Rhema to ‘preach’ to his congregation (Frahm-Arp 2016:267). Grace Bible Church invited political officials from different affiliations to address their congregations in the buildup to the 2014 elections. They motivated it by stating that the congregation should be informed about political choices in order to elect Christians into key political positions (Frahm-Arp 2016:271).

²⁸ An example can be found in the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG). In 2000 the South African Human Rights Commission found that the church exploited the poor financially and performed rituals that amount to forms of psychological conditioning. After a legal battle the Commission had to retract its findings (cf. Van Wyk 2014 for full details). Prophetic practices should be normalised and regulated; some of the implications discussed by Yong (2010:250-251) are that the church provides a site where Spirit-filled believers are emboldened to bear prophetic witness and learn how to live prophetically in the Spirit but also to engage the world external to the church, providing a prophetic alternative to the world’s conventions of corruption, patronage and oligarchy and empowered by charitable works sensitive to larger socio-structural projects and tasks, even when it implies confrontation with the principalities and powers when necessary.

examples). Presumably turning water into wine, ordering believers to drink petrol and paraffin to prove their faith according to Mark 16:17-18, turning water into petrol, turning a snake into chocolate, walking on thin air, ‘healing’ cancer, HIV and Aids, ‘raising’ the dead and predicting soccer and election results are some of the excesses that received wide and negative coverage in the daily Southern African press (Mwale & Chita 2016:51; Zulu 2016:104), doing damage to the pentecostal movement as a whole. Its most prominent leaders should be encouraged to organise the movement to such an extent that it can protect itself from swindlers and charlatans that damages its reputation with the public and governments.²⁹

Another negative feature of neo-pentecostal prophetism is the emphasis on the charisma and person of the individual prophet, also in advertisements of the ministry, and the accompanying adoration and veneration of the prophet.³⁰ The prophets’ status might also lead to their enrichment and personal gain through gifts presented to them in order to secure their services or as gratuity for supposed services (Banda 2016:221); Quayesi-Amakye (2016:303) refers to it as ‘prophetic monetization’ (cf. the critical work of Chitando, Gunda & Kügler).

Some of the positive benefits of neo-prophetism should also be described. Neo-pentecostal churches purposefully do not take denominational issues seriously in consideration for the postmodern sentiment of respect for people with different opinions. Doctrinal differences play only a peripheral role because as part of the pentecostal movement the emphasis is on people meeting the truth in the person of Christ rather than in the Bible. Perhaps the neo-pentecostal movement may serve as a catalyst for ecumenical engagement between Christians.³¹

²⁹ A tragic example is the Ngcobo Killings of 21 February 2018 where five policemen and an off-duty soldier were shot during an attack on a police station in Ngcobo, between Mthatha and Komani (previously Queenstown) in the Eastern Cape. During the attack, ten firearms and a police van were stolen from the police station before an ATM a short distance from the police station was robbed (<https://www.enca.com/south-africa/five-police-dead-in-attack-on-station>; accessed 2018-02-26). Their motive was presumably to access funds because of the dire financial straits of the church. The South African Council of Churches says it lodged a complaint with government over the Seven Angels Church but was ignored. Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities (CRL) chairwoman Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva reacted to the events at eNgcobo and said the church was probed already in 2016 and authorities were alerted to children living at the church and not attending school. The committee suggested that the government should regulate church leadership by way of registration. The co-operative governance and traditional affairs portfolio committee of Parliament responded to the committee’s report by stating that the state could not prescribe when it came to beliefs and religious convictions because of the value of religious liberty enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic but it unanimously condemned the abuse of vulnerability by religious leaders (<http://www.enca.com/south-africa/parliament-slams-crl-chairs-comment-on-engcobo>; accessed 2018-02-26).

³⁰ One of the important distinctions between the phenomenon of prophecy in the classical and neo-pentecostal movements is the former’s emphasis on prophecy as a gift to the church by way of the participation of all believers and the latter’s emphasis on the permanent office of the prophet.

³¹ Also in the wider pentecostal movement one’s unique experience in encountering God is given more value than one’s doctrine, allowing for a difference in opinion within the movement. Orthodoxy in the Protestant sense of the word is exchanged for meeting with the Truth, and the resultant transformation of believers’ lives.

While it is true that African pentecostals in the past were mostly apathetic to social concerns, they have awakened to their civic obligations (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:296). Examples of the neo-prophets' concern for the underprivileged and disenfranchised are evident. Several neo-prophets' involvement in issues of social justice, their financial contribution to projects for the benefit of migrants and their relationship with African political leaders has received much publicity.³² It can be accepted that these leaders were influenced in a positive way by emphasising issues related to social justice.³³ However, in general it is true that neo-prophets should address more publicly structural political, economic and social issues that cause poverty, ethnic violence, xenophobia and other forms of violence that characterise Africa.³⁴ It can be accepted that their prophetic task includes guidance in terms of xenophobia as it relates to individuals rather than interpreting their prophetic task to include consideration of social ethics and structural challenges that should also enjoy their consideration.

It cannot be denied that neo-prophetism also contributes to transformation effects on the lives of its members including migrants, as demonstrated by sociological research (cf. Massey & Higgins 2011; Portes 2008). Social and cultural capital generated in neo-pentecostal churches leads to upward social mobility of individuals, families and eventually whole communities, especially by way of entrepreneurship (Portes 2008:15).³⁵ In many cases the beneficiaries of neo-prophetism were the disadvantaged and marginalised who were offered hope. However, there should also be a concerted effort by neo-prophets to address factors that rob from people the fullness of life, such as poor governance, poverty, unemployment, corruption, crime, HIV and AIDS and the erosion of African

³² The most publicised case is the donation of Prophet T.B. Joshua's ministry of 20 million US dollars to causes of education, health care and rehabilitation programmes for the vulnerable, including legal and illegal migrants. On 13 May 2017, the church also provided food and money for over 250 Nigerian deportees who arrived from Libya. The refugees who were deported from Libya found refuge at The Synagogue, Church Of All Nations (SCOAN) (<http://dailypost.ng/2017/05/13/tb-joshua-donates-food-n7m-cash-150-nigerian-deportees-storm-church-photos>; accessed 2018-02-26). And on 7 June 2017 the church donated money to the less privileged in the north of the country, most of which were Muslims (<https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-local-byo-111753.html>; accessed 2018-02-26). Banda (2016:221) accuses the church that its ulterior motive is self-prestige and winning the heart of the populace for personal interest, a remark that is not substantiated in any way.

³³ For instance, Cyril Ramaphosa visited the Shembe Church on 2 May 2017 where he met with the leadership. In his speech before the congregation he said, 'This church has always led the way in teaching the youth the value of hard work, the importance of education and the significance of ethical conduct...' He called the church a 'nation-building institution', and an 'African asset and national treasure' that provides practical solutions to our complex socio-economic challenges' that is averse to wickedness, malicious gossip, public spats by leaders and disrespect of one by another (<https://www.enca.com/south-africa/catch-it-live-ramaphosa-joins-congregants-in-celebrating-the-life-of-prophet-isaiah>; accessed 2018-02-27).

³⁴ Cf. Yong's (2010:7) warning not to generalize the statement that pentecostals including neo-prophets hardly address political issues; he refers to several examples in diverse contexts of pentecostal engagement with the political with impacting influence on societies.

³⁵ Cf. e.g. His People Christian Ministries' vision to transform the world by having committed Christians in positions of leadership. To realise their goal, they present workshops, seminars, conferences and courses aimed at helping young people develop so they would have the skills needed to become leaders in their chosen careers. They teach them how to budget their money so that they would be able to tithe and meet their financial commitments, negotiation skills, time management skills, how to develop a personal brand and how to begin and manage a small business. Research in 2003-2004 showed that most members of the church described these social-skills-development courses as the most valuable part of their church life (Frahm-Arp 2016:272-273).

value systems (Kangwa 2016:545), factors that contribute to the maintenance of deep inequalities that fuel xenophobia.

Synthesis

Increasing numbers of legal and illegal immigrants live in South Africa, facing the possibility of xenophobic acts which portray the open hatred of African people not of South African heritage by mostly poor South Africans. At times the South African government's discourse reveals animosity toward the displaced, strengthening homophobic sentiments among the public. As victims of xenophobia and violent crime, refugees in South Africa are at risk of mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, negative feelings and an inability to cope. In many instances, religion forms an essential part of migrants' lives.

One of the primary pastoral responses among neo-pentecostals to social challenges such as xenophobia is prophecy, as an effective form of pastoral therapy and counsel, mostly practised in private. It is proposed that neo-pentecostal prophetism should be distinguished from the phenomenon among pentecostals because the category of 'prophets' (along with apostles) serves among neo-pentecostals as leading religious functionaries while pentecostals emphasise prophecy as a temporary gift to individual believers. In the neo-pentecostal tradition, prophecy is also mainly concerned with a word aimed at an individual as part of a pastoral discourse while among pentecostals it functions mostly within the context of the worship service. The neo-pentecostal prophet operates rather in the context of the diviner in ATR, focusing on diagnosing and proposing solutions to individual existential ailments and challenges. In their manner of operating, neo-prophets link with the phenomenon of prophecy within the AICs, implying that neo-pentecostalism may be viewed as the 'AIC'ination' of African pentecostalism.

In evaluating prophecy as a pastoral response to xenophobia, it was noted that while neo-prophetism provides in this-worldly needs of individuals the causes of their challenges are at times spiritualised to such an extent that their clients are absolved from accepting responsibility for their own lives. It was argued that the demon of xenophobia should not only be cast out; believers need to learn that the gospel demands that all people, including immigrants, should be treated with dignity because they have been created in the image of God. The needs of people also serve as the hermeneutical key in a historicist way to interpret the Bible, a feature that emphasises the necessity of a sound theological training for all neo-pentecostal leaders.

The lack of accountability and transparency in terms of excesses and abuses of neo-prophets that is harming the neo-pentecostal movement was noted and it was proposed that prominent leaders should be encouraged to organise the movement into alliances to protect it from charlatans. The emphasis on the charisma and person of the individual prophet might lead to personal enrichment, necessitating supervision by church mother bodies that should be established.

On the positive side, for neo-pentecostals doctrinal differences play only a peripheral role because of their emphasis on the experiential as a precondition for doing theology, making ecumenical engagements with other Christians possible. They are also concerned about the underprivileged and disenfranchised, in many instances funding projects that serve the needs of migrants. However, neo-prophets hardly address structural political, economic and social issues because their ministry is aimed at individuals. Neo-prophetism also contributes to transformation in the lives of its members and the beneficiaries are the disadvantaged and marginalised.

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