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Pentecostalism, Politics, and Prosperity in South Africa

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Abstract: One of the fastest growing religious movements in South Africa is a form of Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelic (PCE) Christianity that has some version of prosperity theology as a central pillar. This paper, based on sermons and interviews with 97 PCE pastors in the area of Johannesburg, South Africa, argues that these churches form loose clusters defined by similar emphases along a continuum of prosperity theology. These clusters are "abilities prosperity," "progress prosperity," and "miracle prosperity." Some churches fall neatly into one of the clusters, while others appear as more of a hybrid between two of these types. The paper shows that a relationship exists between the type of theology preached by PCE churches and the nature and extent of the political engagement that the pastors suggested that members in these churches should have.

Keywords: prosperity; theology; South Africa; politics

1. Introduction

During the 1980s and early 1990s, churches and other religious organizations in South Africa played a central and critical role in the anti-apartheid struggle. Under the leadership of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, there was a strong, decisive drive to shape South Africa as a modern, secular country. When Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma ran for the office of president, however, he styled himself as a Christian leader, ordained by God to lead South Africa "until Jesus comes again." He claimed that everyone who voted for the African National Congress (ANC) would go to heaven. Himself a Pentecostal pastor, Zuma closely aligned himself with Ray McCauley of Rhema Bible Church and other leading Pentecostal pastors during his presidency. In the run-up to the 2014 elections, several Pentecostal churches gave political leaders platforms on which to address their congregations by inviting them to speak at Sunday morning services (Frahm-Arp 2015). In South Africa, as in other parts of Africa like Zimbabwe (Biri 2013), Ghana, and Nigeria, "religions appear to be of prime importance not only on the level of private experience and inner belief but also with regard to the sphere of politics and public affairs, thus thwarting a typically modernist vision of society as differentiated into separate compartments, one of them being religion" (Meyer 2010, p. 115).

Pentecostal churches in the larger Johannesburg region are involved to varying degrees with contemporary politics and civic engagement. Civic engagement here is understood as activities and views that "connect (people) with the life of their community" (Putnam 1995, p. 665). Bayart (1981, pp. 53–82) reminds us that politics is not only performed in traditional, Western-organized political structures but, critically, is also made by ordinary people from below (Bompani 2008; Bompani and Frahm-Arp 2010). The paper shows that there is no uniform approach towards politics and civic engagement in these churches but that the picture is quite varied. This paper argues that, instead of secularization and modernity, we are seeing globalization with the sort of religionization and re-enchantment observed by Droogers (2001) and Meyer (2010, p. 127) in South Africa.

The research is based on 97 Pentecostal churches in the Johannesburg area during late 2015 and 2016. The churches were randomly selected from a database of churches compiled using software that picked up if a church spoke about Pentecostal themes or presented itself as Pentecostal or Charismatic. The selection includes 19 mainline churches, one Seventh-Day Adventist church, and 77 Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. This study did not include any African Independent Churches as those in the Johannesburg area that we had access to did not consider themselves Pentecostal or Charismatic.[1]

In order to contextualize this discussion, I need to begin by giving an overview of contemporary issues in South Africa and a working framework for what I mean by Pentecostalism and prosperity theology or the prosperity gospel.

1.1. Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism began in different parts of the world (Creech 1996), including the United States (Roll 2004; Synan 1997), Europe (Synan 2012), Africa (Anderson 2005), and Asia (McGee 1999), during the first decade of the twentieth century.[2] There are a number of ways in which we can discuss, define, and classify Pentecostalism. One approach is historiography, which Hollenweger (1997) and Wagner (1999) suggested when they proposed that Pentecostalism falls under broad historical categories like Classical Pentecostals, the Charismatic renewal movement, Pentecostal or "Pentecostal-like" independent churches, and Fourth Wave Pentecostalism. A second approach is to classify Pentecostalism according to perceived characteristics and phenomena, as done by social scientists like Martin (1990, 2002) and Coleman (2000). A third alternative is to study it according to theological themes, doctrines, and ideas (Kärkkäinen 2010; Cartledge 2010). This paper follows a broadly constructionist viewpoint and argues that Pentecostal churches vary greatly and that there are few clear boundaries. As Bergunder (2010, p. 52) has pointed out, Pentecostalism

> exists up to the present without an appropriate theoretical justification. The most serious problem lies in the fact that a broad understanding of Pentecostalism refers neither to a common dogmatic basis nor to a common institutional framework (international umbrella organizations like the Pentecostal World Conference only cover parts of it). Pentecostalism's unity cannot be described in the way traditional church history has dealt with Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, German Lutheranism, and so on.

What we can observe are trends and this paper is particularly interested in the current trends visible among a group of churches in Johannesburg. This approach is echoed by Anderson (2010, p. 13) who talks about Pentecostalism "by using the family resemblance analogy": While members of the family group are not all the same, there are commonalities and similarities between them as they are all in a relationship with one another. Robbins (2004) talks about Pentecostalism as "a far-flung network of people held together by their publications and other media productions, conferences, revival meetings, and constant travel" (ibid., p. 125). Understanding Pentecostalism as a family or network gives us a way to deal with one of its most defining characteristics: its changing and fluid nature. For this study, I include the following as additional key characteristics: theologically, (1) they are open to and engage with experiences of the Holy Spirit, including the prophetic gifts of many of their pastors; (2) they are "born again," in other words, their members have experienced a conversion in which they claim Jesus as their savior, an experience which ensures their access to the community; (3) they see the world as dualist, divided between "good" and "evil," Satan and God, illness and health, a world in which their pastors have the ability to drive out evil (Anderson 2010, p. 21); and (4) they do not see ancestor

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1 This stands in contrast to Hollenweger (1997) and Anderson (2004) who both regard AICs as Pentecostal.

2 Scholars like Hollenweger (1997) have argued that the Pentecostal movement began in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, in 1906 and spread from there, not that it emerged in different parts of world that were not first influenced by the Azusa Street mission. Others, like Grant Wacker (2001) and James Goff (1988), trace Pentecostalism to developments within the radical Holiness movement at the turn of the century.

veneration as an acceptable practice and demand that members break with their African heritage. The churches in this study have all, in various ways, been influenced by Pentecostalism, the Charismatic movement and the Evangelical movement; in this study, I thus refer to them as Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical (PCE) in order to signal their eclectic and fluid nature.[3] Through these different influences, there are variants amongst the churches in this study. Some churches place a great deal of emphasis on evangelizing people, others on the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, and yet others place less emphasis on these themes.

1.2. Prosperity Theology

One of the earliest preachers of the Word of Faith Movement in Africa was David Oyedepo, the founder of Winner's Chapel in Nigeria, who was particularly influenced by Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland. Broadly speaking, prosperity theology in its different forms traces its roots back to Kenneth Hagin's teaching and the Word of Faith Movement. According to Hagin, poverty is the result of sin against God, not tithing regularly or giving adequately, and the failure of individuals to understand and apply the divine laws that would allow them to claim their wealth in God's name. Dominion theologians, such as C. Peter Wagner or Cindy Jacobs, maintain that in order to confess or claim their prosperity through words, people also need to become aware of their specific destiny and calling and, through this, claim their blessings (Maltese 2015, p. 71).

According to Köhrsen (2015, p. 49), prosperity theology offers a teaching that aims to help people improve their quality of life by teaching them various improvement strategies. In South America, these tend to focus on the importance of self-discipline as well as emotional and psychological wellbeing, while in Africa significant emphasis is placed on "breaking with the past" (Köhrsen 2015, p. 49).

The features of prosperity theology in Africa can be broadly outlined as: (1) an attitude of hope in a positive future; (2) an entrepreneurial attitude of "winning ways," which in Africa usually means making a break with the past and the wider claims of extended families and culture; (3) the use of life improvement strategies that might include an ethic of hard work or how to cope with life through "strong prayers"; (4) consistent tithing or employing various means to sow "seed" offerings, thus, giving money to the church (Gifford and Nogueira-Godsey, cited in Drønen 2015, p. 254); and (5) preacher-prophets gifted with special powers to speak against and fight the "spirit of poverty."

Prosperity theology is not static. Maltese (2015), for example, shows how in the 2000s the Word of Faith teaching in the Philippines expanded to include "kingdom theology," the notion that a nation could also claim God's blessings if its leaders and people were morally good and not corrupt. This development firstly implies that God's blessing of prosperity is not limited to individuals and adds a dynamic of sanctification to prosperity theology that was not in Hagin's original teaching. "Sin became a signifier for corruption and structural poverty, while holiness stood for righteous leadership and structures" (Maltese 2015, p. 78). All these developments were ways to explain why the promised blessings preached before the 2000s had not materialized. The new sense of the collective includes the idea of seed money, thus giving money to the church so that it can develop social outreach and development programs and support political leaders running for office (Maltese 2015, p. 73). A very

[3] Since Pentecostalism began at the turn of the twentieth century, a defining characteristic of the movement has been its changing and fluid nature. The movement was marked by the firm belief that speaking in tongues was the sign that a believer had been baptized by the Holy Spirit and was filled with the Spirit. During the twentieth century, we have seen the rise of the Neo-Evangelical movement, most notably from the 1950s onwards (Ellingsen 1988). This movement, whose most famous representative was Billy Graham, maintained that its teaching was based exclusively on the literal reading of the Bible and held that the central role of a Christian was to bring other people to faith in God. Beginning in the 1960s, the Charismatic movement, primarily in mainline churches, first in America (Walker 1997) and then in other parts of the world, began to gain popularity. This movement differed from the Pentecostal movement because it argued that, once baptized in the Holy Spirit, believers might not speak in tongues but could manifest any of the gifts of the Spirit. In the latter part of the twentieth century, these three movements have significantly influenced each other and the fluid nature of the churches and their theology means that, in South Africa at present, we have a large group of churches that have elements of all three movements. I therefore refer to them as Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical churches.

similar process has taken place among the churches in this study, which use the language of "kingdom theology" to maintain that in some way the collective sin of the nation explains the economic hardships in South Africa that have shattered the dreams of equality and prosperity that were at the heart of the "New South Africa."

1.3. South Africa

South Africa has been impacted by many of the same trends that have affected sub-Saharan Africa where, since the first countries gained independence more than fifty years ago, people:

> have been confronted with two major challenges: firstly, the age of globalization with its demands of structural adjustment of national economies to international markets led internally to more social inequality between the newly emerging social class of beneficiaries and the many poor in villages and towns. Not everywhere, but in many countries, mass poverty increased dramatically as a combined result of external factors, bad governance at home, and a fast-growing population confronted with bleak job and income opportunities for the youth. Secondly, the wide-spread failure of undemocratic African governments in building prosperous nations intensified the existing (until then "sleeping") social tensions between different ethnic-regional groups. (Tetzlaff 2015, p. 47)

In 2016, when most of the fieldwork for this study was done, the African National Congress (ANC) under President Zuma was in power. There were violent service delivery protests and the extent of the corruption in the Zuma government was beginning to emerge in the public domain. Zuma was clinging on to power as a growing voice both within the ANC and the country wanted him removed from office. He was finally maneuvered out of office and Cyril Ramaphosa was inaugurated as president in February 2018. During 2016, the country was under threat of being downgraded to "junk status" by Moody's and other ratings agencies. According to Statistics SA, the unemployment rate in November 2016 was at 27.1% and the expanded unemployment figure was 36.2% (this includes people who have stopped looking for employment and those who have occasional employment). Youth unemployment (people between 18 and 35 years of age) was 38.2% of which 60% were young people who do not have a matric certificate (South Africa's school-leaving certificate) (STATSSA http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=9123). The average South African has learnt not to look towards the ANC government to build the economy and develop the country through industrial productivity, but rather to recognize that South Africa is now a "distributive state" in which an unproductive elite takes what it can for itself and creates very little (Tetzlaff 2015, p. 45). In this space of economic uncertainty and constraint, xenophobia has taken hold since 2008, and "perceptions of national identity are replaced by a discriminatory concept of 'native Africans' that indicates a stranger-citizen dichotomy" (Tetzlaff 2015, p. 33).

Against this socio-economic and political background, this study looks at the relationship between religion, politics, and economics by examining the prosperity theology taught by PCE churches in the Johannesburg region. Data were collected from attending one service, transcribing at least one sermon, and interviewing the pastors of 97 PCE churches. All churches were in the larger Johannesburg area, which included Soweto, Johannesburg South, the East Rand, the West Rand, and Midrand. The social media communication on Twitter and Facebook of the large churches like Rivers, His People (recently renamed Every Nation) Church, and Grace Bible Church were tracked for three months during 2015–2016. Many of the smaller churches did not have active social media platforms. It was found that while all the churches regarded themselves as Christ-centered, attentive to the workings of the Holy Spirit, Bible-based, and focused on converting people to Christianity and then teaching them how to be disciples, the prosperity theology they preached varied.

Three types of prosperity theology emerged from this study: "abilities prosperity," "progress prosperity," and "miracle prosperity." Abilities prosperity focuses on getting believers to exercize and develop their own abilities. The belief is that anyone can achieve anything when they align

themselves with God's principles, claim God's blessings, give generously to the church, and work hard. Progress prosperity centers on shifting people's attitudes and emphasizes the idea that prosperity means progress. Members are encouraged to see any small success, such as getting a new client for their business or passing an exam, as progress and, therefore, a sign of prosperity. Prosperity is achieved through faith and righteous living and includes social outreach programs to develop and uplift others in the community. Miracle prosperity, in turn, embraces the belief that spiritual growth determines material wealth and that people achieve material wealth through victory in spiritual battles of prayer, driving out demons, and making personal sacrifices. This form of prosperity theology often, but not always, includes "positive confession" or "naming and claiming" practices.

When asked whether politics was discussed or engaged with in their churches, most pastors answered in the negative. Yet when asked whether they had encouraged their congregation to vote in the 2014 presidential and 2015 municipal elections, 96% of pastors answered in the affirmative. In this study, 27% of churches gave political parties a platform to address their congregations in the run-up to both elections, but fewer than 10% made suggestions to their congregations of which party people should vote for. It was in the area of prayer and civic engagement that churches showed the most consistent engagement with a wider political agenda, and this was not always directly linked to voting at elections. It is through their prayers that the political rhetoric of the different churches is shaped and expressed. Most of the churches placed a great deal of emphasis on offering prayers for the country that addressed corruption in government, the lack of service delivery, and high unemployment. In many churches, some form of weekly prayers, whether in services or at prayer meetings, were said for the political situation in the country.

The major themes in these prayers were that the current government (in this case that of 2016) was corrupt, but that people should pray for their leaders to change their ways rather than take up arms and revolt. In only a few cases did churches encourage their members to protest against the government, a stance taken mostly by churches from the mainline tradition. A dominant theme in many churches was that Christians should be in positions of leadership in the country in order to promote the moral regeneration of the country and its leadership. These churches maintained that a good Christian is also an active and engaged citizen who works to improve his or her country through engagement with civil society or groups involved in social care. Most churches preached that the real emotional and material regeneration of South Africa would only begin when the family structure was repaired in society. All the churches preached some version of the message that the crisis in government experienced in 2016 was due to the sins of the past and/or the work of the devil.

The move by PCE churches towards greater civic engagement and political involvement is not unique to twenty-first century South Africa. M'fundisi (2016, p. 195) points out changes in the PCE focus in Zambia, for example. Where converting people and helping them to live holy lives in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ used to be their focus, they now focus increasingly on social and civic engagement, with most churches involved in one or more social care projects. For example, Bishop Eddie Mulenga, a prominent PCE leader, argues:

> We the Pentecostals are trying to rise up to be relevant and, yes, there is a shift, and this is why people are rising up to build schools, orphanages, and hospitals and engaging in politics. (M'fundisi 2016, p. 197)

Similar trends have been noted in Zimbabwe, in particular by the Prophetic Healing and Deliverance (PHD), Ministries, Zimbabwean Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), and United International Family church (UIF), (Chitando et al. 2016). However, in South Africa, very few PCE churches have begun to build schools or orphanages, and none have yet built hospitals or universities as is the case in Zimbabwe (Shoko and Chiwara 2013) and Nigeria (Magbadelo 2004).

The aim of this paper is not to determine the material impact that the political rhetoric of PCE churches is having on South Africa. Rather, it is to show that politics is widely and varyingly engaged with by the 97 churches in this study and to unpack the relationship between their political rhetoric

and their theology, in particular their prosperity theology, which is a key message of the churches in this study. To do this, the paper works with the framework suggested by Droogers (1995, p. 665; 2003), who argued that there are three dimensions informing how faith and the social/civic engage and interact with one another: the sacred/transcendental dimension, the internal dimension, and the external dimension. This study uses this anthropological model to examine the intersectionality of these dimensions and how they influence, and are influenced by, each other. The different forms of prosperity theology (the sacred/transcendental dimension) influence the internal dimensions (leadership and organization) of the church to engage with external dimensions (political engagement, social care projects, and civic involvement) which in turn may affect the theology, and so the circle continues as practitioners engage with their faith and society. The work of Maltese (2015) and Bergunder (2010) shows that the relationship between culture, society, politics, and religion is not as neat as Droogers at first claimed. In this paper, then, I am not suggesting that there is a neat linear relationship between the three dimensions that Droogers identified, but I continue to use this framework because it allows us, for the sake of analysis, to separate out these three dimensions and unpack them, while acknowledging that in reality they are not clearly differentiated from each other but are rather intertwined in multiple ways.

2. Methodology

The 97 PCE churches in the wider Johannesburg area that form the basis of this study spoke of themselves as being either Pentecostal or Charismatic, and had a strong evangelical focus on growing their churches. The churches ranged from a small congregation of about 50 people meeting in a rented space with a pastor who held other jobs to support himself financially, to huge megachurches, like Rivers and Grace Bible Church, with congregations of over 40,000 people, elaborate church campuses, and a well-paid clerical staff. Some of the churches were in informal settlements (shantytowns) while others were in the most financially exclusive suburbs of Johannesburg. At each church, one of the senior pastors was interviewed by one of the seven researchers working on the project. Each pastor was asked the same set of structured, open-ended questions. The questions focused on the composition of the parish, the main theology of the church, the relationship that pastors thought there might be between material wealth and spirituality, the social outreach of the church, and what role they thought politics should or did play in the lives of their congregants. The focus of this study was on pastors because we wanted to hear their views. Many studies focus on the lived experience of the members, but this study focused on the teaching of the pastors. We verified their teaching by triangulating or comparing what they said in interviews with the message they gave in sermons and in the whole way in which they conducted services, including the messages in the prayers and songs.

In the data set of the 97 churches, 28% pursued a mainly miracle type of prosperity gospel, 39% progress prosperity, and 33% abilities prosperity. Progress prosperity and abilities prosperity churches attracted members from a range of economic backgrounds, spanning from people who were living on the street to people in the top one percent of South Africa's earners. The miracle churches were predominantly located in poorer areas and attracted members from their surrounding community, and, thus, did not include any high earners. All the mainline churches fell into the progress prosperity category.

The project began in November 2015 and continued until October 2016. Researchers observed one service in each church, and one or more sermons from each church were either recorded by a researcher during a church service or downloaded from the church website. Using ATLAS.ti, all the transcribed interviews, notes from the services attended, and the transcribed sermons were subjected to content analysis. Five of the researchers in the project were honors students who were paid to conduct the interviews and attend services, and the two lead researchers were faculty members, one at the University of Johannesburg and the other at Harvard University.

At the beginning of the project, the honors students were given extensive training on qualitative interviewing skills. Every two weeks, the students met with the lead researchers in the offices of

the Johannesburg research team leader while the USA-based researcher joined the conversation via Skype. All the student researchers were South African. One of the research leaders was American while the other was South African. Four of the student researchers were young black women while one was a white male. The two research leaders were white women. A key obstacle in conducting this research was getting access to the pastors. Many of the churches were initially unwilling to meet with researchers. This was, at least in part, because, during the period in question, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) was in the process of investigating independent churches due to the high levels of abuse reported in some PCE churches in South Africa, and many pastors believed that our researchers were part of this commission. In this paper, the identities of the pastors are protected by not giving any of the pastors' names and only referring by name to the churches. This was the only way in which pastors were willing to be interviewed and, therefore, some of the standard practices of referencing interview material have been excluded. Researcher bias was mitigated to some extent by the fact that seven different researchers worked on the project and interviewed pastors using the same structured, open-ended research questions. All data analysis for this paper was done by one of the lead researchers.

3. Three Clusters of Prosperity Theology

This paper shows that, in the mid-2010s, different forms of prosperity theology were preached at the 97 churches in this study. In analyzing the data from the churches, three clusters—churches with similar ideas, practices, and characteristics—began to emerge, while several churches emerged as hybrids between clusters. The clusters themselves are not thought of as static and discreet but rather as located on a fluid continuum. Although other criteria could certainly be used to identify patterns and establish clusters, prosperity theology stood out because of its salience as a highly publicized marker of identity in South Africa during the early and mid-2010s. Most churches in all three clusters employ the positive confession—sometimes dubbed "name it and claim it"—mindset and rhetoric of the Word of Faith Movement. Identifying these clusters is important, however, because they allow us to see the nuances of difference among churches. The clusters bring to the fore the fact that neither the PCE churches nor the prosperity theologies they preach are uniform.

According to the anthropological framework suggested by Droogers (1995, p. 665), as noted above, religions play themselves out on three different levels that interact with and influence each other, namely the sacred/transcendental dimension, the internal dimension, and the external dimension. This paper understands the transcendental dimension not in terms of the experiences people might have of the transcendental but in terms of how they speak about or understand the sacred. In the case of the churches studied here, this refers to the theology these churches have established and work with. Droogers' (1995, 2003) internal dimension refers to the way people's understanding of the divine shapes how they think about themselves and structure their churches. Finally, the external dimension focuses on what they actually do in the world outside the church. The internal and external dimensions, in turn, shape theology and the experience of the divine. Based on this framework, I argue that the theology of a congregation shapes how its members live out their lives, and this means that it shapes their civic engagement. The next section outlines the three different forms of prosperity theology and the internal dimensions of each different type, such as the structures or programs created by these churches. The final section of the paper then shows how the theology of these churches shapes their political and civic engagement.

3.1. Abilities Prosperity

Abilities prosperity is based on the idea that if Christians live according to biblical principles and work hard, then they will succeed in whatever they choose to do. Of the three categories, it is the type of prosperity gospel most influenced by dominion theologians such as C. Peter Wagner or Cindy Jacobs, and it continuously encourages people to find God's purpose for their lives and claim their blessings. Glory Divine Ministries is typical of this type of church. It was started in 2001 with

approximately 800 members in a poor community on the East Rand of Johannesburg, and the pastor runs his own business because the community is too poor to pay him. "Jesus became poor so that people could become rich" was a recurring theme in his interview and his sermons. Yet these riches, he argued, are only realized when people go out and use their abilities. This message is echoed by Corner Stone Church, located in a lower-middle-class area with a congregation of just over 500 people that is able to fully support its pastor. Another church to preach this theology is the Rivers megachurch in the affluent Johannesburg suburb of Sandton. Here the pastor talks about "creative wisdom for wealth creation." In the sermon from November 2015 recorded for this study, he preached that real wisdom comes from God: if believers align themselves to the teaching and wisdom of God, then they will realize the creative wisdom they need to create wealth. A key slogan of his is that people should go from "being employees to employers and from servants to masters."

When believers do not enjoy the wealth they were hoping for, abilities prosperity theology explains this in terms of their unrepentant sins that hold them back from realizing God's blessings. If people would just come to God and ask for forgiveness for all that they have done wrong, then their lives would be blessed. The agent of each person's success is the person him- or herself. Individuals have to repent, they have to believe, and they have to live according to God's word. In this theology, the devil plays a less central role than in miracle prosperity theology, which, as we will see, understands misfortune as the work of the devil, witchcraft, and the ancestors. Satan is not entirely absent amongst abilities churches, but there is some variance as to the emphasis placed on Satan and the need to exorcize malevolent forces from the lives of believers. An example of an abilities prosperity church is the Nigerian Winner's Chapel, whose leader Oyedepo states that poverty is an individual's own fault: "poverty is a proof of unrighteousness! ... (it) is a curse and is self-made" (Gifford 2015, p. 87). Gifford posits that "Oyedepo's theology is not 'enchanted' or concerned with combatting the myriad evil forces threatening us—as are some of his mega-rivals in Lagos, churches like the Synagogue Church of All Nations of the Prophet T.B. Joshua, or Daniel Olukoya's Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry" (Gifford 2015, p. 97). However, a few relatively new churches in Johannesburg that have leaders who are referred to as "prophets"—because of their extraordinary spiritual abilities to heal and bless people, unlocking their potential to prosper—are beginning to place significant emphasis on the devil and the power of evil, and are something of a hybrid between abilities and miracle prosperity.

With a theology primarily focused on the individual and personal ability, abilities prosperity churches place a lot of emphasis on helping people to develop themselves. They run business training programs, skills development courses, and conferences to help people get in touch with themselves and their own desires and come up with effective plans for implementing these dreams so they can become more successful and prosperous. They believe that the primary resource of the church is its people, and that the more energy the church puts into developing its members, the more the church will flourish. These types of churches place comparatively little emphasis on developing civil support programs such as schools or soup kitchens. Their primary focus is not giving handouts but, as they see it, "equipping people" so that they can realize their abilities. These churches also place less emphasis on home cell groups, Bible study groups, or programs that foster a sense of community and belonging amongst members than churches that espouse progress theology, the second type of prosperity theology.

3.2. Progress Prosperity

While abilities prosperity is primarily focused on the individual, progress prosperity theology is concerned with the community. Progress prosperity churches in the Johannesburg region did name and claim wealth but often downplayed this practice. All the mainline churches fell into this category. This theology holds that any small blessing or step of progress is a form of prosperity. A key message in PCE churches of this type is that people need to change their attitudes so that they can see things as they truly are. In other words, people often do not *see* the prosperity in their lives because their

understanding of prosperity is wrong. In this theology, "prosperity" means any form of progress in the life of a believer.

Cosmo City Church, founded in 1999, is located in Cosmo City, a new suburb of low-income housing in the northern outskirts of Johannesburg, and has a congregation of 450 members made up largely of working class or unemployed young adults. For the pastor, the problem with people is that they want "big" material blessings but do not recognize that these only come through a relationship with God. When people are in this relationship with God, then they begin to see all the ways in which God is blessing them. As the pastor explained, "God changes their [members'] views." Part of changing one's attitude is, according to the pastor, for people to realize that blessings come through a relationship with God in which people must work hard and live with integrity, and then God will bless their efforts. This is very similar to the Karambiri practices of Pentecostalism in Burkina Faso where pastors tell people to "work and have integrity and God will reward your efforts with worldly wealth" (Langewiesche 2015, p. 189).

The pastor from First Light Revival further elaborated on this idea. His small church, located in Braamfontein in the inner city of Johannesburg, was founded in 2003 and has about 70 members from all over Africa, of whom only 15% tithe regularly. According to him:

> If I have two people in my congregation, one is running a hair salon and another is having his own law firm. They both pray to God for prosperity. And both people receive two new clients in a day. They are going to be equally blessed—they both progressed and got new clients, but they will not be equally prosperous because, um, the one [type of work] pays much better than the other. But they are equally blessed.

The role of attitude or perspective in a believer's prosperity is also stressed by the head pastor of Banner of Truth church on the East Rand, founded in 1997 with a congregation of about 350 members. According to him, "spiritual maturity has nothing to do with material wealth," and people need to shift their focus away from wealth onto their relationship with God. The pastor at Full Gospel Church in Alexandra, a township in the northern part of Johannesburg, also emphasized that people need to change their attitude. For him, the central theme of the gospel is that people can change their thinking in Jesus. Consequently, his sermons (we transcribed three for this research) frequently addressed the theme of limitations that come from incorrect thoughts, which in turn are often connected to unhealthy influences, human and otherwise. He explained that people hold themselves back by listening to the wrong voices around them, such as their friends, media, or parents: "people limit themselves by doubting themselves and, most of all, Satan hinders us and people need to pray against his powers." While the work of Satan is generally not a significant focus of this cluster of churches, the Full Gospel Church is an example of a hybrid between progress and miracle prosperity.

Of the three categories, progress prosperity places the least amount of emphasis on material gain in the lives of believers and the most on the importance of social concern projects and helping people who are in need. These social concern projects include providing material help such as clothes and food to the destitute, but also engaging in a vast array of programs stretching from how to parent children effectively to how to run one's own business. The internal structure of these churches is geared to developing community. Most of these churches have home cell groups or Bible study groups that form a central pillar of the churches' organization and constitute settings where people develop a sense of community and come to feel part of a "family." These churches tend to set up orphanages, aftercare centers, soup kitchens, and even schools. They believe that it is the role of the Christian to offer practical help to those in society who are less fortunate and that Christians need to be aware of the needs of their community and work towards alleviating these. The money to do all these projects comes from the tithes and other offerings that members give. An important part of the teaching of these churches is that people should tithe responsibly, which means giving 10% of one's income to God but not giving beyond reason or ability. This stands in contrast to the other two clusters, where giving and "giving generously" is taken to such an extreme that it is sometimes to the detriment of a believer's own well-being (see van Wyk 2014; van de Kamp 2016).

Not only do progress prosperity churches engage with the community, but—like abilities theology—they also promote an entrepreneurial mindset or spirit. As Daniels (2015, p. 265) has noted in other parts of Africa, various versions of the prosperity gospel "offer business education as an essential element within the reframing of this revised Prosperity Gospel. When entrepreneurship emerges with the prosperity doctrine, a pragmatic form of Prosperity Gospel (emerges) which stresses personal responsibility for learning business skills requisite for 'realizing' prosperity, blending of business and biblical knowledge, and an educational apparatus to disseminate a prosperity doctrine oriented business education" (Daniels 2015, p. 265). David Martin (2002) argued that PCE churches could be a raft that will bring Africa into the modern age both economically and politically, and this form of prosperity theology is the most likely to do so.

3.3. Miracle Prosperity

While abilities prosperity and progress prosperity place a great deal of emphasis on developing the individual, they place comparatively less emphasis on deliverance or miracles. Miracle prosperity, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with explaining the way the world is and how prosperity can be achieved through miracles. Here there are three subgroups defined by their core claims: (1) miraculous wealth and health happen through applying God's laws of faith—the "classic" "Faith Gospel" (Gifford 2004); (2) miraculous wealth and health come about when the devil is vanquished so that, following this, God can perform miracles; and (3) a merging of the two ideas in which miracles only happen when people have sufficient faith and, through their faith and the power of the prophet, evil is exorcized from their lives. They claim that when these things do not materialize, it is the fault of Satan or a person's sin. Some but by no means all of these churches have a positive confession theology that works together with their deliverance theology. Wealth in these churches is achieved not through hard work and a strict moral code—as is preached to varying degrees by the other two clusters—but rather through God's desire to bless people with miraculous wealth, either through their own faith or by vanquishing the spiritual powers of evil that continually want to thwart God's miracles.

This sentiment is well captured by the young pastor of Christ the Word church in Soweto, who said, "It would give me a problem if a mature spiritual person is not able to gather wealth." This church was started in 2009 and currently has about 100 members. The pastor, a young man in his early thirties, gave up a career in graphic design to pastor full time. Yet he concedes that he has not been able to gain what he calls a "good income" from his church, where only about 20 people tithe regularly. He assured the interviewer, however, that this would be changing because as the congregation grew in spiritual maturity it would also grow in material wealth. The focus of his ministry is on "equipping the saints in the spiritual gifts," which he considers a more effective means to gaining wealth than trying to help people find jobs, improve existing skills, or learn new ones. In the current context of high unemployment among young South Africans, despite having valid school-leaving certificates and even tertiary education, the "old ways" of hard work and education seem to fail them. If they want to get a job, they believe it will require a miracle in a situation where everyone else around them has the same qualifications, lacks work experience and struggles to find a job; they are no different from the millions of their peers also hoping to find employment. In this context, a teaching that explains that their joblessness is the work of the devil, who is holding back the miracles and blessings God wants to give his people, makes a lot of sense. Praying against the devil is something that they can actively do to try to improve their life chances, and it gives them a sense of agency.

In this form of prosperity theology, wealth is won in a spiritual battle, and in order to win this battle, "strong prayers" (van Wyk 2014) are needed. The people with the most power to do this are the prophet-pastors of miracle prosperity churches like City Life Church. City Life Church started in 2000, is located in the inner city of Johannesburg and has a membership of about 800 people. According to the head pastor, people's spiritual maturity is evidenced in their material prosperity. In their services, the pastor spent a significant amount of time praying with people to drive out the evil from their lives. In a similar vein, the Apostolic Faith and Acts Church, which began in 1936 and now operates

in a poor part of Soweto, also dedicated much of its service to "deliverance," prayers that evil spirits might be banished and the hold of witchcraft released from the lives of members. One of the largest churches to teach this message is the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG). While the UCKG pastors in the Johannesburg city center were not willing to be interviewed for our project, they allowed one of our researchers to attend their services. As in the work of van Wyk (2014) and van de Kamp (2016), we found that this theology emphasizes that wealth is within the grasp of every person. All that members have to do is to believe and make significant personal sacrifices, usually in the form of contributions of money, so that the pastors can pray "strong prayers" over them to drive out the evil spirits and ancestors who are preventing them from realizing the wealth that God has promised them. This theology is focused on breaking the bonds of the devil and ancestors. Many of these churches are led by pastors who are referred to as prophets because they are seen as having great spiritual powers to heal people and make them wealthy, largely through their ability to drive out demons. Examples of such churches in South Africa more widely would include Rabboni Church and the Church of the Seven Angels. Very often the prophets who lead these churches like to use dramatic spiritual tools like telling people to eat grass or spraying them with Doom (a South African insect repellent) as a way to exorcize Satan. While much time is spent fighting the devil in these churches in order to "claim God's miracles" (City Life Church service), implicit in the teaching of this form of prosperity—as with the other two—is the requirement that people have converted to Christianity and believe in God.

The miracle theology also impacts on the internal structure or dimension of these churches: they do not offer any programs to upskill members through education and skills development, but rather offer prayer services, often several times a day (as for example at UCKG churches) at which people can drive out evil and become blessed. These churches do not have social outreach or social care programs, such as schools, soup kitchens, or homeless shelters. Furthermore, none of these churches had home cell groups or Bible study groups and developing a caring Christian community was not a prominent emphasis in their theology. While the Bible was referred to as the Word of God, this was often only done fleetingly in the sermons. This stands in stark contrast to the progress prosperity churches where biblical teaching was often the most important component of their services and where learning "The Word" was seen to be an essential part of a Christian's development; this usually took place in a Bible study or home cell group.

Based on this outline of the theology of the PCE churches in Johannesburg and their internal dimensions, I turn, in the final section, to examine the external dimension of these churches, in other words, their political and civic engagement. For the purpose of a clear argument here, I am discussing the external dimension of these churches in a sequential manner following my review of their transcendental and internal dimensions. Herewith, I am not suggesting that there is a neat linear development from the transcendental dimension to the internal and then, finally, to the external dimension; rather, I wish to propose that these three dimensions continually influence, inform, and even (re)shape each other.

4. Political and Civic Engagement

There appear to be two key differences between the miracle prosperity and progress or abilities prosperity. Miracle prosperity places a central focus on the work of evil spirits and the need for pastors to drive these out of the lives of their members through prayers. These prayers are made more powerful when people demonstrate their faith by donating large sums of money to the church. The same theology of evil shapes their view of politics. The pastor from Glory Divine Ministries argues that Christians must fight the forces of evil that corrupt their government by praying for the government, but people should not get involved in political meetings or activities.

Churches in this study that preached a form of miracle prosperity all said that they did not get involved in politics. Scholars such as Robbins (2004) and Gifford (2004) have been critical of the political impact of PCE churches. Robbins (2004) argues that they actually undermine good governance and democracy while Gifford (2004, p. 190) suggests that they create a worldview that is "hardly the

kind of mentality that will help us [Ghana] as a society to participate fully in the modern world of democracy and capitalism." These findings resonate with the miracle form of prosperity theology. One of the pastors at Apostolic Faith and Acts Church said that "people only teach the Word of God—people don't do political things here." These churches did, however, claim that it was the role of the Christian to pray against the hold that the devil has on government and the witchcraft that makes some people wealthy while leaving so many unemployed. These churches did not encourage any political dialog amongst members nor did they have specific prayer sessions focused on politics. Any prayers for the government, peace, and an end to corruption usually took place in the contexts of their more general prayers for people's prosperity. Similar trends have been identified in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, where the poor economy is "blamed on the works of the devil, rather than on the poor performance of government officials and widespread corruption" (M'fundisi 2016, p. 198). These churches do not encourage members to become active in civic groups or political issues. For them, this would be a waste of time and could open Christians up to attacks from the devil. The lack of prosperity in South Africa is for them a sure sign of spiritual attack and the power of the devil. The most effective thing to do, therefore, is to pray that everyone in the country becomes a born-again Christian and to exorcize the demons of corruption and poverty that hold the country hostage. Quite often, this is done through a confessing theology of "naming it and claiming it."

In contrast, the theology of abilities prosperity and progress prosperity places much more emphasis on people acknowledging their own sinfulness than on praying against the work of the devil. These types of churches also focus much more on how good Christians need to be good citizens. In their view, this means that people need to inform themselves about current political events.

Pastors who maintained a progress prosperity theology believed that ordinary citizens would not be able to enjoy progress in their lives if the country continued to be a corrupt and violent place. The pastor at El Shaddai Restoration church said that "when people have peace, then you can think and study, you can ... focus on ... business and succeed." All the churches in this group said that they told their members that it was their Christian duty to vote. They all held special prayer services leading up to the elections, praying for the country and the leaders to be elected, but did not publically specify which leaders their members should vote for. Almost a third of them also invited political leaders to address their congregations during Sunday services in the lead up to the 2014 elections. During 2016, when there was no election taking place in South Africa, many of these churches continued to hold regular prayer sessions for the government, the #FeesMustFall movement,[4] and better provision of basic public services. Pastors from churches such as God First and His People/Every Nation Church spoke about it being the church's duty to "engage in politics and social issues, because you know the Gospel applies to every area of life" (God First). Progress prosperity resonates with the findings of authors such as Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001) and (Marshall 1995, p. 240), who have shown how leaders in PCE churches have become much more involved in politics in Africa, often becoming political figures themselves.

It is in the prayers of these progress prosperity churches that their political rhetoric and agenda comes to the fore. They refer to the current government as corrupt, and to violence as being endemic in the country. According to them, South Africa was being poorly managed in 2016 with a problematic delivery of municipal services such as rubbish removal and running water. At the same time, they also maintained that the president must be obeyed, the office of the president respected, and the rule of law upheld, thereby indicating that violent protests were to be shunned. In their view, South Africa is a great country, blessed by God and ordained by God for greatness, but Christians have to pray and work to bring this about.

[4] Between 2015 and 2017, there were a number of demonstration and protests at tertiary education institutions in which the students called for free tertiary education for all South Africans.

Many of these progress prosperity churches were involved in various social media debates about civic issues like the #FeesMustFall campaign. With respect to the latter, churches like His People/Every Nation Church were actively involved, calling members of the church community to assemble at the gates of several universities to pray for an end to high student fees. These churches also think that it is the duty of the Christian citizen to become politically informed, and many of them either gave political leaders a platform to speak to their congregations or encouraged social media discussion groups about contemporary politics. Overall, these churches were driving a particular political message that claimed that the country was in economic and political crisis due to its leaders and citizens having sinned both now and historically. According to them, it is the role of good Christian citizens to pray for forgiveness and commit themselves to living according to the strict moral code laid down by God and adhered to by members of these churches. This was a very different message from that of the miracle churches, who maintained that the corruption and mismanagement that were so rife in South Africa were the work of the devil and that the primary obligation of Christians was to wage spiritual war against the devil, not to become activists for secular political reform.

While all three of these clusters called for their members to be good citizens, progress and abilities prosperity churches, which otherwise appear quite similar, showed two marked differences that stemmed from their theology. While the progress prosperity churches all maintained that Christians should partner with civil society and state organizations to work towards improving South Africa and push the government to deliver what they "should" to citizens, the abilities prosperity leaders urged their members "not to be dependent on government" and to create their own success. As a result, they were critical of the social grants system that they blame for developing a culture of dependency on government. Abilities prosperity was far less involved in politics, and very few of these churches offered political leaders any form of physical or virtual platform. None were particularly engaged with civic issues like #FeesMustFall. There seemed to be a feeling that, if people are equipped to embrace their abilities, then they will prosper, regardless of the political climate.

5. Conclusions

M'fundisi (2016, p. 194), writing about Pentecostalism in Southern Africa, observes that Pentecostalism "is not only about the relationship between humankind and the transcendent, but also about how the experiences of humankind's altruistic behaviours shape their understanding of God." This relationship between how people interact with each other and the social world and their understanding of God has been the focus of this paper. Analyzing the particular message of prosperity theology preached in 97 PCE churches in the Johannesburg area has shown that they fall into three broad clusters. The best way to visualize the argument is to see the different churches as part of a scatter-graph, which is how we plotted them according to recurring themes. What emerges are three clusters around common characteristics or features. In this paper, I have labeled the clusters abilities prosperity, progress prosperity, and miracle prosperity, but these are by no means neat typologies and many churches were a hybrid with elements from different clusters. The idea of the clusters emerged from the research as we observed common trends in various churches. One of the key reasons for highlighting the clusters is that a correlation between forms of theology preached and the political engagement of these churches emerged; it therefore became meaningful to discuss these findings in terms of the different clusters. Both miracles prosperity and abilities prosperity churches are very focused on the individual, albeit in very different ways, while progress prosperity is more concerned with community; this distinction has a great impact on how they view politics and political engagement. Progress prosperity is the most focused on political engagement while the other two clusters generally showed little sustained engagement with political concerns. If political engagement had not been the key focus of this study, the clusters might well have been quite different, highlighting the tenuous and largely untested nature of these clusters. More work will have to be done to see whether these clusters remain applicable if the focus is shifted to other practices and belief structures, such as those related to healing.

As has become clear in this paper, the different prosperity theologies share many of the same elements, including an emphasis on conversion and spiritual gifts, faith in God's desire to bless his followers with wealth and health, and some form of life improvement strategies. In some of the churches in this study, these life improvement strategies were primarily focused on spiritual empowerment while others focused mainly on practical skills development. Most of the churches in the study had some form of positive confession theology. While all believed in the power of the devil, miracles prosperity preached the most overt form of deliverance theology, a message that dominated their practices and worldview in ways that did not apply in the other two clusters.

All three clusters preached the centrality of tithing and giving generously, one of the key components of Word of Faith teaching. While progress prosperity churches had a measured approach to tithing—saying that people should give generously and abundantly to God while not putting themselves into financial danger in the process—abilities and miracle prosperity churches maintained that excess giving was one of the most effective ways of proving personal faith and thereby winning God's favor and blessings.

This paper has focused on the voice of the pastors and what they think and teach, and has not engaged with ordinary members of the congregation. At the beginning, I outlined the different kinds of socio-economic groups that the different clusters primarily attract, but I have not developed this line of thinking because the focus of the study has been on what pastors, not congregants, thought. The next step in this larger project will be to interview members from the different congregations to engage with questions like do people make decisions about joining a church based on their socio-economic status or their theology? Do people join churches primarily because they offer them solutions to life's challenges or for other reasons? How does the political and prosperity teaching of the pastors in these different churches resonate with their congregants?

This paper has used Droogers' concept that religions work along various dimensions, the transcendental, the internal, and the external. These dimensions should be understood as influencing each other and as interrelated, and although they have been oversimplified and dealt with as neat categories for the purposes of this paper, I do not mean to suggest that there is a strict flow in reality from theology to internal to external political practices; I only wish to suggest that, in order to unpack these influences, it is easiest to speak of them in terms of a sequential flow. In the scope of this study, it is impossible to unpack where or how the influence begins and ends. I have chosen to begin with the theology of these churches because, in much of the social sciences literature on their politics, the theological dimension is underdeveloped. An interesting follow-on study would be to explore how the relatively new political engagement of these churches is affecting or changing their theology, particularly in the case of progress prosperity churches, which are the most overtly engaged politically.

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