

Is Africa Godforsaken? Neo-Pentecostal prophetism on African human agency and transcendence

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African neo-Pentecostal prophets (NPPs) use their prophetic rituals like deliverance services and anointed objects such as anointed oil, to bring God's presence to people to empower their human agency (power to act) and transcendence (power to overcome). This use of prophetic systems prompts the question: What does the NPPs' teaching that Africans need prophetic rituals and anointed objects for God to empower their agency and transcendence communicate about God's presence in Africa? A further question that emerges is: How can Christian doctrines like God's transcendence (divine beyondness) and immanence (divine nearness) address the African reliance on NPPs' prophetic systems for God's power to exercise their human agency and transcendence to confront their context of poverty? Consequently, this article uses the doctrine of God's transcendence and immanence to evaluate the implications of NPPs' prophetic systems to empower Africans to act and overcome their undesirable situations in Africa. The article challenges NPPs to realise that the transcendent God is fully immanent in poor Africa and that poverty in Africa is not caused by the lack of God's presence but evil socioeconomic and political structures that hinder the poor from exercising their human agency and transcendence. The contribution of the article is challenging African NPPs to be informed by a sound doctrine of God in their attempts to empower poor Africans to deal with their poverty.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article uses insights from the doctrine of God and African traditional religious (ATR) view of God to critique the use of NPPs' rituals and anointed objects to empower African human agency and transcendence.

Keywords: anointed objects; prophetic Pentecostalism; agency; transcendence; poverty; new religious movements; vital force; transcendent God; immanent God.

Introduction

The doctrine of God's transcendence (divine beyondness) and immanence (divine nearness) is employed to critique the African neo-Pentecostal prophetic (NPP) engagement with African human agency (the power to act) and transcendence (the power to overcome) by promoting reliance on prophetic systems. Neo-Pentecostal prophetic systems refer to prophetic rituals like exorcism of demons, prophesying and anointing by the prophets and anointed objects refer to artefacts like water, oil, armbands and waistbands that prophets pray over to fill them with God's power for use by individuals to connect with God or to receive blessings that make them successful in their personal activities like running a business. The NPP movement is different from Classical Pentecostalism although it shares many Pentecostal characteristics such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, miracles and the casting out of demons. However, African NPPs follow an entrepreneurial ecclesiology as sole absolute authoritative leaders of their churches. By entrepreneurial ecclesiology is meant a commercialised approach to ministry contemptuously described by some scholars as 'gospelprenuer[ship]' (Chitando, Gunda & Kügler 2013:9). Entrepreneurial ecclesiology treats the church as a commercial business in which the prophet functions as a chief executive officer of a private company and church offerings treated as profits of business adventure. Their ministerial activities centre around their prophetic gift, unlike conservative Classical Pentecostals who are more denominational and congregational oriented (Kgatle 2019, 2021; Ramantswana 2019; Shilubane 2017). Prominent examples of NPPs in southern Africa include Shepherd Bushiri from Malawi, Emmanuel Makandiwa from Zimbabwe, HQ Nala and Paseka Motsoeneng from South Africa. Various NPPs have attracted controversy through the questionable ministerial practices such as the selling of anointed objects like anointed oil, waistbands and armbands and demand for large sums of money to prophesy and bless people. Neo-Pentecostal prophets function as fountains of hope by challenging their followers to reject the notion of suffering and poverty as God's will and to rise up and change their destiny through

faith that includes using prophetic rituals and anointed objects to drive away evil spirits and attract riches and blessings in their lives. They preach the message of prosperity and provide anointed objects that the poor can use to escape their poverty.

This article answers the question: What is implied about God's presence in Africa, in the African reliance on rituals and objects from NPPs for God's power to act and overcome hindrances to a better life? A further question that emerges is: How can the doctrine of God's transcendence (divine beyondness) and immanence (divine nearness) address this reliance on NPPs' prophetic systems for the power to exercise human agency and transcendence to confront the context of poverty? To answer this question the following steps are followed:

- First, is the description of the immanence of the transcendent God as a theoretical framework of analysing the African quest for human agency and transcendence.
- Second, is the description of how prophetic rituals and anointed objects function as instruments of addressing God's absence in Africa.
- Third, is an analysis of how the NPP prophetic rituals and anointed objects promote a notion of Africanness as godforsakenness.
- Fourth, is an evaluation of how the NPP uses of prophetic rituals and anointed objects to access God's power endorse the African Traditional Religious (ATR) view of God as an impersonal vital force that is mastered by people's religiosity.
- Fifth, is a proposal of how God's transcendence and immanence promotes African human agency and transcendence by challenging African Christians to abandon the impersonalised NPP view of God that has some similarities to the ATR view of God in impersonalised terms of a vital force.
- Finally, the article closes by challenging NPPs to use the presence of God to confront structures that hinder the poor to exercise their human agency and transcendence. The contribution of the article is challenging African NPPs to be informed by a sound doctrine of God in their attempts to empower poor Africans to deal with their poverty.

The immanence of the transcendent God and the African quest for human agency and transcendence

The doctrine of God's transcendence and immanence is used as a theoretical framework of analysing the African NPP use of religious rituals and anointed objects to promote human agency and transcendence in Africa. Agency and transcendence are different, but this article treats them as mutually inclusive because they emphasise that to be human is to have a desire for a better life that causes a person to act (agency) and overcome the hindrances to achieve a better life (transcendence). According to Muhwati (2010:152) 'agency and transcendence are expressions that underscore the need for positive participation and contribution in life in order to overcome life-threatening forces and attain victory'. Agency refers to the

ownership of action while transcendence speaks to the idea of overcoming, the two different concepts coalesce in the active rejection of 'life-abandonment, surrender, and defeatism' (Muhwati 2010:153). Writing from an 'Africana womanist' perspective, Magosvongwe (2012:385) conceives agency and transcendence as meaning that 'life is a struggle to be tamed, thereby making defeatism, negativity and surrender unthinkable'. Agency indicates one's confident ownership of action arising from self-criticism and self-awareness that leads a person to question their current situation and seek effective ways of transforming it. On the other hand, transcendence is concerned with the power to overcome through taking a decisive step to change things and make life better. Agency and transcendence are important because 'responsible participation and contribution give purpose to life and make it worth living' (Muhwati 2010:152).

This article analyses human agency and transcendence from a Christian perspective guided by the doctrine of God's transcendence (divine beyondness) and immanence (presence to humanity).¹ However, the article recognises that human agency and transcendence are basic universal human qualities in all human beings, regardless of race, religion and gender. All humans have a God-given power to exercise their agency and transcendence. Even though, a Christian perspective is that God intends for humanity to exercise these qualities in relationship with him (1 Cor 10:31).

This article approaches human agency and transcendence in the light of God's transcendence and immanence because these attributes describe how God is engaged in human affairs to empower them to attain their full humanness in their life. The term transcendence means different things when applied to God and humanity. While human transcendence denotes the aspect of overcoming one's boundaries, when applied to God, it is an attribute that describes God's supremacy and distinction from his creation. According to Grudem (1994:267), God's transcendence 'means God is far "above" the creation in the sense that he is greater than the creation and he is independent of it'. In essence, the transcendence of God means his *beyondness* by which he is distinct from his creation and is not part of it, as he made it and rules over it (Banda & Masengwe 2018:8; Grudem 1994:267). The transcendence of God is described by attributes that affirm God's greatness and uniqueness such as eternal, glorious and holy nature (1 Tm 1:17), eternity (Ps 90:2), immensity (1 Ki 8:27), omnipresence (Jr 23:24) and omnipotence (Ps 147:5). A Christian biblical view of God's transcendence also includes the inexhaustible nature of his power, knowledge and wisdom through which he rules his universe. Those that trust in him can be rest assured that God's power, knowledge and wisdom towards them will never be exhausted. Not only is God distinct in his greatness but also in his holiness and righteousness, which means he is beyond any form of sin and corruption. Therefore, in Deuteronomy 10:17, God is described as supreme above all

1. The importance of God's transcendence and immanence in everyday Christian life is demonstrated by Magezi and Magezi's (2016) use of the doctrine to engender public ethical life and Banda and Masengwe's (2018) use of the doctrine to address the African Christian fear of witchcraft.

gods and lords and mighty and awesome, showing no partiality and accepting no bribes. God's greatness includes his holy incorruptible nature.

At the same time, the Bible also teaches that the transcendent God is immanent and is fully engaged in the affairs of his creation including humanity, despite its sinfulness. Grudem (1994:267) says, 'God is also very much involved in creation, for it is continually dependent on him for its existence and its functioning'. In other words, the transcendent God does not stand aloof from his world but enters it to be personally engaged in it and its affairs. In other words, as Paul states, God 'is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Col 1:17). Paul balances God's transcendence and his immanence by proclaiming that God in his transcendence is the Lord of heaven and earth who made the world and everything, but does not live in temples built by human hands, nor is he served by human hands because as the self-existing one he does not need anything, for it is he himself who gives all people life and breath and everything else, and all humanity lives, moves and has its being in him (Ac 17:24–25, 31). In another instance, Paul speaks of the 'one God and Father of all, who is overall and through all and in all' (Eph 4:6). The essence of the verse is well expressed by Grudem (1994:267) by stating that 'the God of the Bible is no abstract deity removed from, and uninterested in his creation'. As he adds, 'The Bible is the story of God's involvement with his creation, and particularly the people in it' (Grudem 1994:267). Thus, the doctrine of transcendence and immanence 'describes how God in his infinitude relates to his finite creation' (Banda & Masengwe 2018:8).

In an African context of human brokenness and powerlessness described by Luke Pato in his unpublished sermon quoted by Smit (2009:473) as, 'to be African is to suffer', the doctrine of God's transcendence and immanence is useful in challenging Africans to realise God's inexhaustible divine presence and resources of empowering them to stand up and act (agency) and overcome (transcendence) their state of brokenness. The immanence of the transcendence of God means that the sovereign God is actively present in the lives of his people to empower them to take responsibility and transform their undesirable human situations. The assertion that the supreme God is actively present in the lives of his people to enable and strengthen their human agency and transcendence calls for a theological evaluation of the African neo-Pentecostal prophetic use of religious rituals and anointed objects to empower African human agency and transcendence.

The prophetic rituals and anointed objects as instruments of addressing God's absence in Africa

African NPPs use prophetic systems to bridge a felt absence of God in African contexts of human brokenness. For NPP rituals and anointed objects are 'instruments of connecting with God' (Banda 2020a:2) and enacting 'God's active presence' (Banda 2019:2) in the life of the believer. This means

that these rituals and objects transmit God's presence and power to Christians in need, which means they function as channels of bringing the active presence of God into the lives of believers (Banda 2019:2, 2020a:2). Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:236–237) says the extensive use of olive oil in African neo-Pentecostalism 'must be understood against the backdrop of the desire to effectively mediate God's presence in power, healing, deliverance and protection against the evils of life'. In other words, the religious systems of NPPs bring the presence of God in contexts where God is felt to be absent. Indeed, in the African contexts 'religion serves as a survival strategy' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:237) because life is considered from a spiritual perspective that presents an intense struggle against the various elements of the supernatural evil. Thus, the prophetic systems of the NPPs play the important role of responding to what may aptly be described as an African context of hopeless godforsakenness.

However, a critical problem with NPP in Africa is its pervasive pessimistic view of Africanness that is reflected in its presentation of African heritage as rooted in the demonic sphere and pervasively controlled by this demonic sphere (Banda 2022). In essence, the religious structure of the NPPs presents the African heritage as empty of God and therefore an enemy of progress. In this case, the NPP rituals and anointed objects are popular among Africans because they address the consuming sense of God-emptiness that is understood as responsible for the ever-worsening human sufferings in the continent (Kgatle 2022:5). Biri (2018:75) explains that Pentecostals use Deuteronomy 28 to construct the wrath theory that projects wealth and health as signs of God's favour upon his children and sickness and poverty as a curse from God because of people's disobedience to him. In the wrath perspective, as health and wealth are signs of blessings from God it means poverty, sickness and disease are signs of a life that is not right with God or that lacks faith (Biri 2018:75). This points to a state of God's absence in one's life or situation. Many Pentecostals, even among some Classical Pentecostals, subscribe to some form of a theology of territorial spirits that are believed to rule over certain parts of the world to cause certain problems that are unique to those geographical areas such as high murder rate, high prevalence rate of witchcraft or some aspect of immorality and so forth.

The idea that prophetic rituals and anointed objects are instruments of dealing with God's abandonment of Africa can be seen in the statements by the prophets concerning the effects of their rituals and objects. For example, journalist Rupapa and Shumba (2014), from Zimbabwe's daily newspaper, *The Herald* quoted Prophet Makandiwa saying that 'anointing oil unlocks all the doors of impossibilities in one's life. It will lubricate your lives and things will start moving smoothly'. In other words, the oil brings a missing presence that is needed for success. Rupapa and Shumba (2014) further reported Makandiwa (2018) saying:

After this oil touches your body, all diseases will go, even HIV and AIDS. Death will also go. The power to cure these diseases is

not coming from me but from God, for the oil contains so much power that is even too much for me. (n.p.)

While the reference to HIV and AIDS offends health officials and activists campaigning against false information about the disease, it emphasises that God's healing power in the anointed objects is so great such that it can solve even huge problems such as incurable diseases that have killed millions of people in Africa. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) explains:

At anointing services, it is believed, worshippers can expect to realize success and prosperity in life. Through the application of olive oil and prayer, evil is reversed in the lives of people, even nations and communities, so that they are empowered to deal with the difficulties of life. (p. 243)

Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:243) further reports of receiving an invitation to an anointing service that promised to 'promote personal productivity; reconstruct value systems for productive living; and propagate fundamental principles for socio-economic revolution'. Indeed, the Bible does teach that to accomplish success in life, God's favour is needed (Pr 3:6). Therefore, NPPs' 'anointing services are meant to ... "activate God's presence" in the lives of believers' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:245–246). Therefore, it can be said that through the prophetic rituals and anointed objects, people's godforsakenness is ended and a state of blessedness that brings health and prosperity ushered in.

The African neo-Pentecostal propagation of Africanness as godforsakenness

It is argued that in Africa, NPPs thrive on making Africans believe that their poverty and suffering are caused by their lack of God's presence that brings blessings of health and material prosperity on people. To a large extent, the growth of NPP in Africa thrives on propagating Africanness in terms of godforsakenness that needs to be urgently addressed. The notion of godforsakenness is used to mean a state of being abandoned, rejected or even hated by God because of being in a state of rebellion against God. Therefore, godforsakenness is used to denote a state of being without God and thus without the spiritual resources to face life triumphantly. Banda (2022) criticises NPPs for using their prophetic objects in Africa to promote the belief that Africanness is so captured and enslaved by evil spiritual powers to the extent of rendering African humanness as devoid of the power to be an agent of change and transcendence.

The idea that among NPPs Africa is a godforsaken continent is shown in Onyinah's (2004:336) explanation that NPPs view demons as disembodied spirits that originated from fallen angels that came to the earth and found themselves in rivers, seas, mountains, rocks, trees and in humans, and that these spirits have become the gods of the Africans. Onyinah (2004:336) says to NPPs '[a]ll Africans are therefore under a curse because their ancestors worshipped the gods'. The curse being referred to is not the universal Adamic curse, but an extra dimension of wretchedness that is unique to Africa

that keeps its people the poorest and most suffering lot in the world. The NPP projection of African poverty and suffering as caused by demons, witchcraft and all forms of evil spirits entrenches the impression that God forsook Africa and abandoned it to demons. Neo-Pentecostal prophets project Africanness, even after Christian conversion as empty of God's life-changing presence and power until undergoing prophetic rituals, particularly the ritual of deliverance from evil spirits. The result of this belief is the perception that for Africans to prosper they must first deal with their state of emptiness of God and redeem their Africanness from godforsakenness through prophetic deliverances and the use of anointed objects.

This state of godforsakenness is also presented in terms of generational or ancestral curses, which basically means a state of being stripped of God's blessings and therefore empty of progressive functionality. Generational curses feature prominently in NPP as the reason for people's sickness and continued poverty. A significant patronage of NPPs is related to people's search for deliverance from generational curses; deliverance from generational curses is a prominent component in NPP church services. For example, the South African pastor based in Cape Town, Pastor Hlompho Phamodi (n.d.) says God has called him to the ministry of deliverance and healing because he (Phamodi) has seen Christians attend church, Sunday after Sunday, but remains with the same problems even after hearing the word and being prayed for. He therefore believes in the post-salvation ministry of deliverance and healing. According to Phamodi (2015:29) 'Curses are supervised by demons and they will make sure the following generation is under the same curse'. He further links genetic diseases within families to generational curses, by saying like generational curses, most chronic and terminal diseases are passed to succeeding generations genetically. He says while the medical professionals may be able to explain the medical cause of diseases, the actual cause is often demonic, which means someone in the family opened the door for the sickness to enter and be part of the family heritage passed down the line (Phamodi 2015:29). The state of godforsakenness is represented by the following excerpt from Phamodi (2018):

The devil uses family curses sometimes to try and cage people, even Christians. Most of us come from backgrounds where our families or parents consulted [spirit] mediums, familiar spirits and sangomas (witch doctor) (*sic.*). You have accepted the Lord but never broke that generational curse, and in the spirit realm contracts speak. As long as that contract is still tied to your name you will have difficulties. (p. 184)

In this excerpt, Phamodi affirms the universal nature of the generational curses in Africa. This means that since all Africans have ancestors who in their past consulted traditional spiritual specialists in one form or another, it therefore means all Africans have generational curses. For NPPs, this explains Africa's high rate of poverty and diseases.

The NPPs' preaching of Africa as a cursed and demon-ruled continent can be criticised for not only upholding the Western

colonial view of Africa as suffering from the curse of Ham. They further instil a notion of godforsakenness in Africans that cripples their impetus to rise and act to overcome their poverty and suffering by further instilling deterministic and fatalistic feeling among Africans. Deterministically, Africans are made to believe that God has forsaken them and pre-determined that they should be the poorest and most suffering lot in the world. The idea that emerges from this perspective is that to be African is to suffer because God has predetermined it. Fatalistically, Africans become convinced that since God has abandoned them and destined them to suffer and to be the poorest of all races, there is nothing they can do to change their position but to simply accept it and live according to it. Determinism and fatalism are expressed in many aspects of African self-perception, particularly in African self-pessimism that promotes African self-doubt by believing that Africa can only prosper with the help of white people. While much of this self-pessimism has its origins in white Western colonialism with its policies that eroded African human confidence, filling them with 'self-disgust and self-hatred' (Tutu 1997:37), the NPP endorses this pessimistic view of Africanness by projecting Africa as a continent ruled by demons. The message being sent is that in its natural form, Africanness is empty of God and therefore empty of progress and empty of blessings and doomed to poverty and suffering.

The resultant projection of God as an impersonal vital force in African neo-Pentecostal prophetism

The NPP prophetic rituals and anointed objects promote a godforsakenness that disables African human agency and transcendence by ultimately projecting God in notions of an impersonal vital force similar to ATR. This disabling is through projecting African Christians as lacking the presence and blessing of God in their human efforts to deal with their many socioeconomic problems. There is intense debate regarding whether God in ATR is a personal being that directly gets involved in the affairs of his people, or whether he is an impersonal being that involves himself through a hierarchy of lower spiritual beings. This article leans towards an impersonalised view of God in ATR, because the 'Supreme Being seems to be far remote or less functional in the traditional African everyday life' (Turaki 2019:35).

However, although NPPs adopt and buttress the ATR view of an impersonal deity, it must be acknowledged that NPPs do preach a biblically derived view of God that presents God in personal terms, that is God as loving people with an everlasting love, as knowing people personally, as having plans to prosper people, as being concerned about the marginalised, among many other important points that indicate a personal view of God. A fair assessment of the NPP view of God must acknowledge that at the summit of the NPP cosmology is the all-conquering God who can cure all human problems and even raise dead people to life. Furthermore, as Meyer (2004:456–457) points out, NPPs

preach God in glorious terms and 'offer a version of African Christianity that does not make it necessary to (secretly) seek for help outside the confines of the church'. In essence, NPPs proclaim a new worldview that is not limited by the dreaded evil spirits, but a powerful loving God who unlocks all doors and destroys all strongholds standing on people's way to success.

However, NPPs nonetheless retain and bolster the ATR view of God as a distant God whose presence must be mediated by the prophetic rituals and anointed objects. As an example, Prophet Makandiwa (2018) proclaims:

There is something God can do to reverse a curse through a *man of God*. [...] You don't deal with curses anyhow, when your blood is cursed and it's a curse affecting the whole generation, it means that even the blood will choose the church where the curse is not under any threat and that is what generational curses do. I don't know about you, but I would want a *man of God* who addresses the curse. (n.p.) (italics added)

According to Makandiwa's statement, even born-again Christians remain with generational curses until they undergo deliverance under a 'man of God'. It is interesting to note the immense power Makandiwa gives to curses, for they are conscious to even choose churches that can be attended by those they possess so that they (the demons) are not exorcised, which suggest that for Makandiwa, deliverance from demons is not so much a matter of faith or salvation in Christ, but a matter of the prophet and church attended by a possessed individual. Furthermore, Makandiwa's insistence on the need of the 'man of God' to reverse the curses resembles the reliance on traditional healers and diviners in ATR. Ultimately, NPPs affirm the ATR notion of God as an impersonal deity who does not deliver people by having a personal relationship with them through faith, but delivers people through the prophets and their prophetic systems. Thus, while the NPPs do preach a personal God, they also present God as a remote deity that engages people through unique prophets. This projects God as an impersonal vital force which Magesa (1997:51–52) says in ATR 'is as a rule concentrated in certain beings or certain parts of the body'. In this case, the vital force is concentrated in the prophets, their rituals and anointed objects. Furthermore, this NPP presentation of God as an impersonal being promotes the ATR view of an impersonal vital force that is capricious and must be mastered through religious ceremonies and the intervention of traditional spiritual practitioners and magical charms. Consequently, the prophetic rituals and prophetic anointed objects function in similar ways as ATR religious rituals and magic to master God's power and tap from him the power needed for life and deliverance from poverty.

The projection of God as an impersonal force cripples human agency and transcendence because it makes poverty and failure consequences of people's failure to master the presence and power of God and make it work for them. While NPPs do indeed emphasise hard work and use of strategic planning in people's entrepreneurships, their reliance on prophetic rituals and anointed objects shows

that the attainment for economic prosperity is not really dependent on hard work and entrepreneurial strategy but on gaining control of God's power and mastering it to work in a person's life.

Furthermore, the observable fact in southern African countries such as Zimbabwe where NPP has a large following, is that instead of sustainable development, NPP promotes haphazard hustling that mainly focuses on quick accumulation of wealth. This highlights how things like miracle money could easily gain popularity. Consequently, instead of contributing to systematic sustainable business models, one finds haphazard hustling, called *ukukhiyakhiya* in Ndebele and *kukiyakiya*² in Shona, which means exploiting any opportunity a person finds to quickly accumulate wealth or what the Ndebele people refer to as *ukutshaya amadili* (doing, mostly dodgy, informal deals for survival) (Jones 2010; Mpofo 2011). While *ukukhiyakhiya* is traditionally associated with criminals and lazy people looking for a quick buck, it has become a normal way of doing business in countries such as Zimbabwe where the formal economy has fallen and seems unredeemable. In the absence of the systematic formal economy, human agency and transcendence essentially centres on *ukukhiyakhiya* as people search for quick and easy ways of making money. For many Christians, this leads to viewing God as a deity that only provides momentous opportunities of gathering wealth, hence the reliance on prophetic rituals and anointed objects that bring wealth. In such a context, the presence of God in a person's life is measured by the availability of opportunities to make money. Since the opportunities to find profitable deals and opportunities to make fast money are seen as limited, it creates an intense reliance on prophetic rituals and anointed objects to make God create or open opportunities for the believer. One finds that the worship and testimonies in churches do not focus much on who God is, but on the opportunities God opened for lucrative deals.

Furthermore, the NPP projection of God as an impersonal force cripples human agency and transcendence because instead of entrepreneurial ingenuity, it promotes a mastering of God's power to make profit. Creative imagination of new entrepreneurship ideas is stunted by the pursuit of the spiritual power to gather instant wealth miraculously. This can be illustrated by the many market stalls of traders who sell the same product, such as tomatoes, at the same price. Each trader hopes that they will beat the competition by securing God's favour on them that will make their tomatoes miraculously attract more customers. In such cases, instead of investing on overcoming the market forces through creative product diversification, improvement, or some form of making their product unique, the trader invests on anointed objects (read: lucky charm) that they hope will make their products sell more than those of their fellow traders. In such situations, agency and transcendence are

2. Etymologically, *ukukhiyakhiya* is probably derived from the English word key as it carries the idea of fiddling around with many different keys to open the door because he or she does not have the right one.

hindered by the *uncritical* duplication of business ideas instead of creatively finding something unique that will give the person competitive advantage.³ It can be said that the problem that fosters this uncritical duplication of business ideas is the notion of God as a limited impersonal force, which ultimately leads to seeing opportunities for economic wellbeing as limited. In such situations, people crowd around one idea or adventure as if business ideas are exhausted. However, a worldview informed by an inexhaustible God can lead to an awareness of limitless opportunities and ideas, and will cause people to seek something different than merely duplicating the ideas followed by other people.

God's transcendence and immanence in promoting African human agency and transcendence through God's unlimited presence

An important question that emerges is how can Christian doctrines like God's transcendence and immanence address the African reliance on NPPs' prophetic systems and empower African Christians to exercise their human agency and transcendence to engage their context of poverty?

Challenge the perpetuation of the African view of God as a limited cosmic good

God's inexhaustible nature in his transcendence must challenge the NPP projection of God's presence as limited to people who rely on prophetic rituals and anointed objects. This approach to God's presence and power is characterised by Van Rooy (1999:238–240) as a form of 'limited cosmic good'. Van Rooy used the phrase to describe the ATR viewing of God's power and resources needed by people to prosper in their life as limited and only accessible through people's religiosity. In this view, people believe religiosity and magical charms give them the power to monopolise God, shutting out other people from accessing his power so that they remain poor. This is a predominant belief in ATR where people who prosper are almost automatically suspected of drawing away God's power from other people and exclusively monopolising it for themselves leaving other people without the power to prosper (Van Rooy 1999:238). In ATR, people who prosper are viewed with suspicion because they are suspected of having gained an unfair hold on the spiritual resources needed for life. As Van Rooy (1999) captures the various scenarios faced by people:

People who surpass others are viewed with suspicion: Why did he pass the examination when I failed? Why are his crops better than mine? Why did he get a better job than I? Why did he escape the disease that infected me? Why are her children more successful than mine? Why does the manager like him better than me? (p. 239)

3. This article acknowledges that the duplication of ideas is a universal phenomenon and is not limited to Africa. This is demonstrated by the existence of copyright and patent laws in many countries to safeguard people's ideas and innovations. Therefore, what is criticised in this article is the uncritical copying and following of what everyone else is doing for the sake of survival, when one could apply creative innovation and improve their market standing. It is also acknowledged that poor resources limit creativity and innovation in many poor African communities making people avoid risks by sticking to the true, tried and tested methods.

This reflects an element of scarcity of God that leads people to believe other people succeed by gaining an unfair advantage of God's power which leaves others with nothing, hence their lack of success. Furthermore, because of the prominence of ancestors and magical charms, God is 'sometimes believed to be the Lord of magic, and Himself subject to its influence, His true image is blurred by exaggerated anthropomorphism' (Nyamiti 1997:58). Ultimately, God's 'true image is blurred by exaggerated anthropomorphism resulting in confusion, pessimism, mistrust and feelings of insecurity' (Nyamiti 1997:58). Therefore, in ATR, as Magesa (1997:52) points out, 'The sole purpose of existence, however, is to seek life, to see to it that human life continues and grows to its full capacity'. This worldview is also alive in NPP by the idea that prosperity is not so much the result of hard work and strategic planning but a result of mastering and manipulating God's power so that it brings wealth to the believer. Thus, in NPP, just like in ATR, the believer's relationship with God is anthropocentric and functional because it is concerned with promoting the welfare of humanity and making God to release his blessings on the believer. This impoverished view of God must be challenged by God's unlimited transcendence.

The NPPs must also discard the perpetuation of God as a limited cosmic power by discounting projecting the idea that God's presence in the believer is only possible through their prophetic rituals and anointed objects. The NPP projection of access to God as only possible through their prophetic rituals and anointed objects turns God into a limited cosmic good. Therefore, the prophets should desist from monopolising access to God by realising that through faith in Christ, God is present through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in all believers empowering them to realise their human agency and transcendence. Nürnberger's (1994) essay, 'The Task of the Church concerning the Economy in a Post-Apartheid South Africa' challenged the church to realise the multidisciplinary nature of the economy. Therefore, a worldview informed by the inexhaustible God should challenge prophets to realise that they are not economists, or industrialists (unless of course they have undergone training in that specialised field), and therefore they have limited knowledge about economic issues. However, God is at work in the scientists, economists, industrialists and host of other professionals involved in socioeconomic reality. This means NPPs should not monopolise the power to economic life as if they possess all the knowledge about economic affairs.

The transcendence of God affirms God's inexhaustibility

Biblically, the transcendence of God challenges the projection of God in notions of limited cosmic good by affirming God's distinction from all creation, including people. At the centre of God's transcendence is not just his glorious holiness and sovereign rule over all creation (Is 40:22), and as God whose presence fills the highest heavens and the lowest earth (2 Chr 2:6; Is 66:1-2). God is also transcendent in the greatness of his attributes that are inexhaustible. According to Erickson (1998:243), God is infinite not just as the unlimited one but as

'illimitable'. Therefore, at the centre of God's transcendence is illimitability. God is inexhaustible, as the everlasting God, who will not grow tired and his understanding is beyond measure (Is 40:28).

In the ATR context, where the spiritual realm is sometimes viewed as capricious, the Bible presents God's morality as inexhaustible he cannot even be bribed or manipulated (Dt 10:17). He is holy and righteous, inexhaustible, no amount of religiosity or anointed objects or giving can influence God to work against other people or withhold or withdraw his blessings from other people. Importantly, God is impartial and incorruptible because he is sovereign, independent, self-existing and free and does as he wishes; therefore, nothing can manipulate and control him. In the Old Testament, God distinguishes himself from idols by emphasising that he is living, sovereign, free and self-existing while idols are human created, powerless and dependent on their human creators who fashion them, carry them, speak for them, and see for them because they are dead human created images. In the New Testament, God's transcendence is punctuated by the resurrection of Christ, which demonstrates not just the reality of his power but also the extent of his inexhaustibility, described by Paul, the apostle, as 'immeasurably more than all that we ask or imagine' (Eph 3:20).

The transcendence of God as denoted by his inexhaustible illimitability challenges the neo-Pentecostal prophetic notion of God that seems heavily informed by the ATR view of God as a limited vital force that can be mastered and manipulated by prophetic rituals of the prophets. It is hoped that the awareness of God's transcendence as affirmed by his inexhaustibility can awaken Africans to exercise their human agency and transcendence by challenging their neglect of the ethic of responsibility that eventually erodes human responsibility and promotes determinism, fatalism and passivity (Banda 2016:209). The biblical affirmation of God's transcendence is intended to provoke awareness and certainty that God is dependable and people can trust him for all their unique needs. The transcendence of God means that poor Africans can trust him to be on their side for he will never be capricious towards anyone, and neither can he be manipulated to work against anyone, nor is he difficult to please to release the blessings needed by the poor, as is the case in the ATR view of God as an impersonal vital force mastered by religious rituals and magical charms.

The immanence of God affirms the residence of God's inexhaustible presence among his people

The feelings of God's absence or abandonment hinder human agency and transcendence in Africa because since the cosmic good is limited, evil spiritual powers can destroy one's work or hinder one's progress. Therefore, there is need to emphasise that the transcendent God is inexhaustively immanent in the believer. It can be argued that the transcendence of God challenges viewing human suffering as caused by the shortage of God's power, while God's immanence challenges seeing human suffering as caused by

the shortage of God's presence. The NPP view that God's power and presence can be in short supply in the believer promotes reliance on anointed objects and prophetic rituals to thrive because these prophetic activities help the believer to master God's presence and power in their lives.⁴ However, the biblical view is that the inexhaustible God is fully present and active in the life of the believer and believers are commanded to submit to it and be led by it in their daily lives (Gl 5:16). The important and unique ways of God's immanence is the incarnation of Christ (Col 2:9) and the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the Christians and the church (1 Cor 6:19–20). The incarnation of Christ expresses the immanence of God by denoting the fact:

[I]n and through Jesus Christ, God the originator of everything stepped down (from his eternal transcendent and infinite existence) into the space and time of human existence in order to save humanity. (Magezi & Magezi 2016:4)

In the New Testament, God's immanence is essentially a Trinitarian concept, that is, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer is the immanence of God (1 Cor 3:16). Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit the transcendent God is present in the believers and in the church.

Bringing the presence of God to confront structures that hinder the poor to exercise their human agency and transcendence

Although NPPs promise Africans a life of victory through their prophetic rituals and anointed objects, what emerges is a life where human agency and transcendence are limited by the fear of evil spirits and the demonic world resulting in African pessimism, fatalism and determinism. In essence, the NPPs' prophetic rituals and anointed objects promote a notion of God's absence in Africa that can only be addressed by their prophetic systems. This absence of God must be addressed by awakening Christians in Africa to the implications of the transcendence and immanence of God in their African contexts. There is need to understand that God's presence in Africa is in an illimitable measure instead of creating this presence that is already abundantly there they should instead yield to it and be controlled by it. Africans must yield to this presence and be empowered by it to a living hope in their contexts of hopelessness. Their approach to life must not be regulated by the power of the prophetic rituals they have undergone or the power of the anointed objects they possess and the fear of demons but must be regulated by the fact of the presence of the inexhaustible God in their life.

Therefore, since God is abundantly present in the African context, practical hope must be engendered not by asking the question, 'what should be done to make God bless Africa?' This question can easily lead to quick-fix methods that

⁴The position of this article is that spiritual weakness in Christians is not a result of scarcity of God's power and presence but a failure to yield to God's available presence and be filled by it (Eph 5:18).

promote reliance on prophetic rituals and anointed objects. Rather, the question should be, 'how can God's presence empower Africans to be active agents in transforming their continent into a prosperous one?' This is both an awareness and confrontational question. As an awareness question it opens the eyes of the NPPs to the structural elements hindering Africans from letting God's presence empower them to act and overcome their poverty and suffering. Kgatle (2022:5) makes an important point when he says that these prophets 'charge exorbitant fees for prophecies and prayers because they know people have no where else to go as they have lost hope in their governments and political leaders'. Kgatle is pointing out that NPPs may indeed know that much of Africa's poverty and suffering has structural causes – these include corrupt governance, colonial legacy, poor and unimaginative national governance, poor service delivery, poor education and vocational training, to name but a few. However, instead of confronting the evil structures, the NPPs make the poor people blame themselves by believing that there is something wrong with their lives and therefore the need for prophetic rituals and anointed objects (Kgatle 2022:5).

As a confrontational question, 'how can God's presence empower Africans to be active agents in transforming their continent into a prosperous one?' should lead to the confronting of structures that hinder poor Africans to exercise their human agency and transcendence. In other words, NPPs should not act in complicity with Africa's corrupt ruling elites that are oppressing the poor by blaming the poor for being cursed and lacking God's presence in their lives. Instead of making the poor believe that something is wrong with their lives and therefore they need to undergo the prophetic rituals and use anointed objects, the NPPs should confront the socioeconomic and political systems that hinder the poor from exercising their human agency and transcendence. Therefore, the urgent thing in Africa is not the prophetic rituals such as deliverance from generational curses or the use of anointed objects, but promoting just structures that allow the poor to realise their human agency and transcendence (Banda 2018, 2020b).

Conclusion

The doctrine of God's transcendence (divine beyondness) and immanence (divine nearness) was employed to evaluate the African NPPs' use of prophetic rituals and anointed objects to promote human agency (power to act) and transcendence (human power to overcome) among Africans. The article contended that these prophetic systems convey a notion of Africa as forsaken by God and without his presence. Neo-Pentecostal prophets suggest that God's absence in Africa can only be addressed by their prophetic rituals. These rituals are oriented on the ATR worldview where poverty and suffering are interpreted as caused by a disruption in one's connection with the transcendent realm that gives the power for success in life. However, the Christian doctrine of the transcendence and immanence of God emphasises that God in his absolute glory and holiness is personally engaged

in the affairs of his creation including humanity and all its affairs. African NPPs are therefore challenged to respond to African poverty by providing theological perspectives that empower the poor to engage meaningfully with their context of poverty instead of passing all the blame to demons and generational curses which promotes Africans to resign to determinism and fatalism.

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