

Catalysts or antidotes to downward social mobility? Critique of the 'Big Three' in Zimbabwe

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The fact that Pentecostal Christianity is the fastest growing form of Christianity in Africa can no longer be a subject of debate. Christianity, one of the major religions in the world, has been growing at unprecedented rates in sub-Saharan Africa. What is being observed on the religious atmosphere is the Pentecostalisation of African Christianity in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. From 2009 onwards, Zimbabwe has experienced a mushrooming spree of contemporary Pentecostalism. Though conglomerate in nature, three ecclesiastical figures overshadow the rest, namely Emmanuel Makandiwa's United Family International Church, Uebert Angel of Good News Church and Walter Magaya of Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance Ministries. The three Pentecostal figures became highly popular through the propagation of the Gospel of Prosperity with vigour and vitality. Their presence in the Zimbabwean religious arena has attracted mixed perceptions. Some people view them as rippers of peoples' hard-earned monies, while others regard them as true prophets – the messengers of God. The million-dollar question remains: Are they catalysts or antidotes to downward social mobility? This article grapples to assess whether the 'Big Three' contemporary Pentecostal prophets serve as propellers or dispellers of downward social mobility. The Big Three are antidotes based on three arguments: (1) Propagation of the Gospel of Prosperity, (2) miracle performances and (3) societal empowerment champions. On the other hand, the prophets are catalysts based on three arguments: white-collar prophecy, negation of social justice and preferential option for the Powerful. Through the application of the *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics, the study argues that the 'Big Three' ecclesiastical clergymen serve more as catalysts to downward social mobility than antidotes to downward social mobility. The *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics is a new methodological approach invented by the author based on liberation theology that sees Christianity as seeking the justice of the oppressed.

Contribution: The article critically reflects on rise of contemporary Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe focussing on the three outstanding prophets – Emmanuel Makandiwa, Uebert Angel and Walter Magaya. While the three clergymen contributed immensely, both positively and negatively to the rise and development of African Pentecostalisation of Zimbabwe, the *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics reveals the contemporary Pentecostal figures as propellers of downward social mobility.

Keywords: African Christianity; Angel; downward social mobility; Makandiwa; Magaya; Pentecostalism; Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Contemporary Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe like elsewhere in Africa and the world has attracted serious and vigorous scholarly debates. From 2009 to date, contemporary Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has mushroomed to great heights propelled by the Gospel of Prosperity (Chitando et al. 2013:9). It has become a flourishing enterprise because of the Zimbabwe Crisis (Mlambo 2014:231; Raftopolous 2009:201). Because of its ambivalent nature, contemporary Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe like anywhere else has attracted serious mixed criticisms. Some welcome it as a blessing, but some regard it as a curse. The thought-provoking questions to pose here are: Does it serve as antidotes or catalysts to downward social mobility? Why is it that the prosperity emblem seems to favour the leader more than his adherents? Before attempting to answer the questions, it is prudent to solve the jig-saw puzzle in the categorisation of the various groupings within Christianity as a mother body.

Note: Special Collection: Zimbabwean Scholars in Dialogue, sub-edited by Conrad Chibango (Great Zimbabwe University).

Togarasei (2016a) proffered that there is an array of Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe today, and it is highly probable that any new church that is formed is to have Pentecostal traits. Verstraelen (1998) pointed out that there are about four families of Christian churches generally identified in Zimbabwe. These are the Mainline and/or historical and/or missionary churches, African Initiated/Instituted/Independent churches (AICs), Pentecostal churches and Evangelical churches. Because of heterogeneity in the various Church groupings in Zimbabwe, it is of importance to clarify the categorisation of these groupings as identified by Verstraelen. The mainline churches include the Roman Catholic, the Protestant and the Evangelical churches. The AICs include all churches formed by Africans in Africa, attracting mostly Africans and worshipping in an indigenous African way of worship. Because of the lack of homogeneity in the family of Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, Togarasei (2016a) taking a leaf from Omenyo (2006:94–98) acknowledged the lack of consensus among scholars on the subject but managed to contend that there are at least three streams of Pentecostal Christianity.

Firstly, those are churches that have been known as classical Pentecostals. These, according to Togarasei (2016a), are the oldest Pentecostal churches that were introduced in Zimbabwe through missionary enterprise, namely: Apostolic Faith Mission, Assemblies of God, Full Gospel Church, among others. Secondly, those are churches that are called modern Pentecostal churches (Togarasei 2005). These churches according to Gifford (1998) are referred to as 'new Pentecostalism', charismatic Pentecostalism (Van Dijk 2004:171), Charismatic Ministries (Asamaoh-Gyadu 2005) or just new Charismatic churches. In the case of Zimbabwe, these include churches that were born out of Apostolic Faith Mission and from American Pentecostal influence. Thirdly, these are the charismatic movements operating within the mainline churches. The 'Big Three' prophets – Emmanuel Makandiwa, Uebert Angel and Walter Magaya – fall under the second stream of Pentecostal Christianity. The uncontested fact is that the three ecclesiastical figures are central to the rise and development of modern Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe (Madzokere 2018). The focus of this article is to examine whether these three fast-rising young and flamboyant Pentecostal prophets propel or dispel downward social mobility in Zimbabwe.

Before the article examines the methodological approach, it is prudent to define the keywords in the study. According to the Collins English Dictionary (n.d.), downward social mobility is a sociological term referring to the movement of an individual, social group or class to a lower status. It generally refers to regression or decline in one's social status. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary (n.d.[a]), a catalyst is a scientific term referring to a substance that enables a chemical reaction to proceed at a usually faster rate or under different conditions (as at a lower temperature) than otherwise possible. It is an agent that provokes or speeds up something for better or worse. According the Merriam Webster Dictionary (n.d.[b]), an antidote is a medicine or remedy for

counteracting the effects of poison and disease. Generally, it refers to something that corrects or improves the bad effects of something.

Firstly, this study examines the church groupings within Christianity to locate the Big Three. Secondly, the article discusses the *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics as a method of study. Thirdly, the study explores how the three prophetic personalities serve as dispellers to downward social mobility. Fourthly, the article discusses how the 'Big Three' serves as propellers of downward social mobility. Last but not least, the study offers an overall critique and gives a conclusion. What follows below is a look at the methodological approach that propels the study.

The methodological approach

The methodological approach utilised here is a *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics. The *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics is a new methodological approach invented by the author based on liberation theology that sees Christianity as seeking the justice of the oppressed. It is highly influenced by the biblical message of the book of Exodus whose topos is the liberation of the Oppressed (Madzokere 2017). The influence of the book of Exodus extends further to connect itself to the central message of social justice (*mispat*) by the 8th-century prophets of ancient Israel (Madzokere 2011, Madzokere 2018). This methodological approach was invented out of the inspiration and the great quest to use contextually applicable methods to the interpretation of the Bible in Africa for the transformation of our continent (Adamo 2015:59). The *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics is typically a contextual approach as interpretation is done in a particular context (Togarasei 2016b:184–185). This method belongs to a cluster of methods regarded as contextual biblical approaches, namely: African Biblical Hermeneutics, African Biblical studies, Africentric, inculturation hermeneutics, vernacular hermeneutics and womanist method and liberation method (Adamo 2015:62). The contextual biblical methods are various approaches of biblical interpretation that analyses the Bible from the experiences and realities of the African people. It is an amalgamation of multiple interpretive methods, approaches and foci that reflect a creative engagement of the African cosmological reality and the Bible (Mbuvi 2017:149). They are both innovative and reactionary. Innovative, because they refuse to be confined by the methodologies, concerns and principles that govern biblical studies in the 'West' as propelled by Western scholars and instead chart a course that is more interested in making biblical interpretation relevant to present realities. Reactionary, because its driving force is partly a critique of the inadequacy of western biblical studies in providing meaningful responses to concerns that are pertinent to African communities (Mbuvi 2017).

The keywords of the methodological approach are: *justitia, pro-povo oprimido* and *liberation hermeneutics*. The first component of the method to be examined is *justitia*. The word '*justitia*' is equivalent to the English word 'justice'.

Etymologically speaking, the word comes from the Old/New French, 'justice', which was borrowed from Latin, '*iustitia* or *justitia*', meaning 'righteousness, equity'. This was derived from the verb '*iustus*', meaning 'just', which is also derived from '*ius*', meaning 'right'.¹ Generally speaking, the word 'justice' means the quality of being fair or just. According to Mays (1987:145), the term 'justice' means '*mispas, dike, justitia, justice, Recht*', which means the following in the English equivalent 'equal, just, fair, right, good'.

The second key component of the method is *pro povo oprimido*. The term '*pro povo oprimido*' means 'for the oppressed people'. The Latin word '*pro*' is equivalent to the English word 'for'. Etymologically speaking, the word is also derived from the ancient Greek, '*pro*', meaning 'before'. In simple terms, the word means 'in favor of or on behalf of'. It is a prefix, meaning 'supporting, agreeing or favoring'.² The word '*povo*' is derived from the Portuguese language to refer to 'poor populace'. The term '*povo*' refers to a poor person or despised one. The word comes from the word 'poverty'. The Shona language borrowed the word from the Portuguese equivalent, 'translated to mean', 'declassée'. It is interesting to note that the word carries the same spelling in both Shona and Portuguese. This is the common feature of most Bantu languages.³ In English, such refers to the 'general citizenry of the country'. This is just the common peasantry folk within a given society. It is the poverty-stricken member of society. The term '*povo*' simply means anyone who belongs to the margins or the periphery of society. Calling someone '*povo*' is basically a short word for calling someone impoverished. The word '*oprimido*' is Portuguese, which is equivalent to the English word 'oppressed ones'. It is a masculine noun and the feminine equivalent is '*oprimida*'. Etymologically speaking, the word is derived from '*oprimir, oprimes, oppresso*', which means 'to load, loaded, to oppress, oppressed, to smother, to vex'.⁴

The third component is *liberation hermeneutics*, a combination of two words – liberation and hermeneutics. The term 'liberation' is derived from the English word 'liberate, release, bring liberty'. Etymologically speaking, the term is derived from the Latin '*libero* from *liber*', which means 'to free something, to release from restraint or bondage, to set at liberty'. The term 'liberation' comes from the Latin '*liberatio*, which means the act of delivering from restraint, confinement, oppression or slavery (Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language 2023). The term 'hermeneutics' is derived from the Greek word *hermeneuo*, which literally means to 'interpret'. Simply defined, it is 'the theory of interpretation' (Ferguson & Wright 1988:293), the study of 'rules or principles for the interpretation of particular texts' (Corley et al. 2002:3). It is the theory or science of interpretation relating especially to the Bible.

1. Wiktionary (n.d.[a]), see <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/justice>.

2. Wiktionary (n.d.[b]), see <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/pro>.

3. Britannica (n.d.), see <https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa/Cultural-patterns>.

4. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), see <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/portuguese-english/oprimido>.

The *justitia pro oprimido* liberation hermeneutics is an applicably relevant method to carry out an interrogative study of whether the 'Big Three' prophets are catalysts or antidotes to downward social mobility in Zimbabwe. The post-colonial Zimbabwe is characterised by a flourishing contemporary Pentecostal environment in the midst of serious religious, political, social and economic injustices perpetrated by the political establishment in the country. The *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics inspires and challenges the Big Three to propagate the message of social justice for social, political, economic and religious transformation of Zimbabwe. What follows below is a reflection on how the Big Three serve as antidotes to downward social mobility.

The Big Three as antidotes to downward social mobility

Emmanuel Makandiwa, Eubert Angel and Walter Magaya serve as antidotes to downward social mobility through three key initiatives this article argues, namely preaching Prosperity Gospel, miracle performances and spearheading societal empowerment projects. Each of these three views stated above would be examined in detail below.

Preachers of prosperity Gospel

This study argues that the 'Big Three' dispel downward social mobility in Zimbabwe through the propagation of the Gospel of Prosperity. The 'trio' prophets preached the Gospel of Prosperity or interchangeably Prosperity Gospel. This is also identified with various nomenclatures like dominion theology, faith gospel or health and wealth gospel (Chitando & Biri 2016). Its emphasis is on prosperity as the fruit of faith. The Gospel of prosperity entails that getting rich is seen as God's will and an outward manifestation of his blessing. Poverty, according to the Gospel of prosperity, is attributed to the work of the devil that, in the words of Rekopantswe Mate (2002:552), '... is inimical to productivity'. Material poverty is also treated as a disease from which Christians should endeavour to be healed completely (Dada 2004:95–105). In this regard, therefore, the adherents of such churches are taught to use their hands to get rich and shun poverty. It is argued that for one to thwart poverty, there is a need for deliverance from the spirit of poverty, which impoverishes people. To counter the threat of poverty, Maxwell (1998) suggested what he termed – penny capitalism, which through the hawking of anything by the members of the church serves as a remedy to poverty. The 'Big Three' clergymen propagate such a gospel zealously, which is a paradigm shift from the missionary type of gospel that pronounced blessings on the poor. The teaching on prosperity has made the rich to feel at home and the poor to feel challenged to transform their downtrodden status for the better. The adherents of such churches are encouraged to be entrepreneurs (Zimunya & Gwara 2019:115). Prosperity is also explained in terms of health. Being ill just like being poor is associated with demonic possession. The doctrine of

'sowing' and 'seeding' is propagated zealously by these contemporary prophets to harvest huge monies from congregants who expect financial and health breakthroughs in their lives. The members of the churches compete to 'sow' and 'seed' because the measure of retain depended on the measure given away. Through the Gospel of prosperity, the prophets became filthy rich owning various properties in the cities. This in a way promoted infrastructural development to the nation of Zimbabwe, hence dispelling downward social mobility in the country.

Miracle performances

There is great emphasis in miracle performances, healing and deliverance in the Gospel of Prosperity as championed by the 'Big Three' prophets. Such a great emphasis on miracles, healing and deliverance serves as a key emblem of the modern Pentecostal churches and ministries (Togarasei 2016b). Miracle performances, healing and deliverances act as pull factors to attract huge attendances at their various gatherings across the country. This new wave of the modern Pentecostal movement owes a lot in terms of inspiration to its predecessors – the AICs whose greatest characteristic trait is miracle performances (*mabasa ezvominana*). The churches boast of having many followers numbering in thousands. Massive bill boards, banners and posters announcing miracles to mark the end of suffering, disease, poverty and bareness dominate the cosmopolitan landscape in Zimbabwe (Madzokere 2018). The miracle performances, healing and deliverances drive within these contemporary Pentecostal prophetic churches and ministries aided by the preached gospel of Prosperity address crucial aspects in human life – wealth and health (Togarasei 2016b). Many also visit the Magaya of Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance (PHD), Makandiwa of United Family International Church (UFIC) and Angel of Good News Church (GNC) in search of spiritual healing, miracles and deliverances hoping to find solutions to various diseases they suffer from (Biri & Togarasei 2013:82). Testimonies point towards healing from a range of physical ailments such as disabilities, human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), cancer, barrenness and all types of diseases. As in the case of the cause of poverty, the PHD Ministries also portray the understanding that diseases are caused by demons or evil spirits. Among people who turned up for spiritual healing at PHD Ministries were people who could afford neither hospital consultation fees nor medical drugs in general and those with incurable diseases (Madzokere 2018). Human life revolves around the quest for good health and abundant wealth; hence, the modern Pentecostal prophets capitalised on healing and deliverance. These enabled the ballooning and the overwhelming expansion of the churches in Zimbabwe and beyond. It is the claimed ecclesiastical mandate of the contemporary Pentecostal prophets/esses to put an end to suffering, disease, poverty and any other ailments that seem to jeopardise people from experiencing health and wealth in a holistic manner. Through the performance of miracles and deliverance extravaganzas, the

'trio' ecclesiastical personalities dispels downward social mobility and in a positive way promote upward social mobility.

Societal empowerment champions

In so far as it encourages a spirit of innovation and resilience in the face of economic hardships, the three prophets addressed the socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe. In an environment characterised by high unemployment and inadequate salaries, the three contemporary Pentecostal prophets have encouraged people to start their businesses and promote self-reliance. They also encouraged entrepreneurship among its followers to the extent that none of its followers were expected to be cry-babies that wait for the Government to provide answers. This approach to the crisis makes people optimistic and innovative. Generally, the prophets are acting as societal empowerment champions. For Schleisser (2014:339–359), one of the greatest strengths of Pentecostal Christianity's Prosperity Gospel is its tried and tested contribution to poverty alleviation in Africa. Schleisser says, 'I will argue with Botswana Theologian Lovemore Togarasei that the gospel of prosperity is contributing, and has the potential to contribute, to poverty alleviation in Africa' (Schleisser 2014:11). Such sentiments by Schleisser are drawn from the inspiration of Togarasei (2011:336–350) that examines at length the positive contribution of modern Pentecostalism in Africa. Arguing in the same line of thought, Chitando and Biri (2016:76) observed that there is a general consensus among scholars that through Prosperity Gospel, believers are called to enjoy this earthly life. The 'trio' prophets have also led by example with their business-oriented initiatives. In fact, it is often agreed that the optimism so characteristic of Pentecostal churches works independently to energise the congregants with positive material consequences (Chibango 2016). Besides that, when it comes to accumulation, Pentecostals generally have an advantage over non-Pentecostals. As Akoko (2002) observed, one of the reasons is that by breaking away from tradition and ties with the extended family, Pentecostals also increase their chances of accumulation. This spirit of innovation among the trio selected Pentecostal prophets in the context of the Zimbabwe Crisis is greatly applauded. The trio selected contemporary Pentecostal prophets also succeeded in promoting a culture of innovation among its adherents. They consider poverty to be a spirit that possesses poor people and that needs to be cast out in the name of Jesus. Such spirits are linked to tradition. While the poor seek deliverance from poverty, the rich seek to secure their wealth. Amid hard times characterised by high unemployment levels and inadequate salaries, the 'Big Three' encourage their followers to be innovative by starting businesses to make ends meet. By being the societal empowerment champions, the Big Three ecclesiastical personalities serve as antidotes to downward social mobility and positively contributing to upward social mobility. What follows below is a reflection on the Big Three as catalysts to downward social mobility.

The Big Three as catalysts to downward social mobility

The Big Three ecclesiastical personalities in Zimbabwe serve as catalysts to downward social mobility through three key points this article argues, namely white-collar prophecy, negating social justice and the preferential option for the Powerful ones. Each of the three key points raised above would be interrogated in detail below.

White-collar prophecy

The Big Three prophets – Makandiwa, Angel and Magaya – might be referred to as ‘white-collar prophets’ (Mangena & Mhizha 2013:133–152) based on five premises, namely the packaging of the message, belief in evil spirits, use of icons and portraits, quest for spiritual power, miracles and material wealth and lastly deliverance sessions. According to Madzokere (2018:276–289), the trio ecclesiastical personalities should be understood as profiteers rather than true prophets based on five arguments, namely empire building, nepotism, blind nationalism, religious tourism and lastly anointing gimmick. For Mangena and Mhizha (2013:133), white-collar prophets are those individual prophets who are motivated by the desire to professionalise the word of God through monetising it. In other words, white-collar prophets put emphasis on money and prosperity as pillars of deliverance and salvation. They believe that poverty, misfortune and disease are caused by evil spirits, and that God wants people to be prosperous and disease free in this world. From the definition given above by the two scholars, one can argue safely that the ‘trio’ clergymen fit well such a designation because of their *modus operandi* in dealing with the socio-economic challenges that most Zimbabweans experienced during the Zimbabwe Crisis (Raftopolous 2009:201–202). During this time, Zimbabweans experienced a myriad of crises: high unemployment levels, mortality rates, a dysfunctional health system, low industry utilisation, salaries below the poverty datum levels, a number of disease outbreaks, including primitive diseases such as cholera and typhoid and general poverty. The other diseases include malaria, tuberculosis, cancer, diabetes, heart problems and hypertension (Mangena & Mhizha 2013:133). Through the propagation of white-collar prophecy, all the above crises were going to be history as claimed by the Big Three and many other mushrooming prophets. The prophets performed various miracles – the lame would walk, the sick would be healed, the unemployed would get jobs and irreparable marriages would be restored. In order to lure converts, the Big Three like many other rising Pentecostal ministries would promise to offer something different from what was offered in mainline churches. In a gathering dubbed Judgment Night addressed by Makandiwa, organised during the Easter period in 2012, people from all walks of life ranging from the rich, the famous and the poor were in attendance. Thus, about 100 000 people filled the National Sports Stadium to listen to the message of the prophet (Mangena & Mhizha 2013:135). By being champions of white-collar prophecy, the

Big Three embarked on the Gospel of Prosperity for their personal egos rather than for the transformation of the adherents.

Negators of social justice

The ‘Big Three’ are propelling downward social mobility through propagating the gospel of anointing to the negation of social justice. These preachers of prosperity gospel have now gone wild and berserk to speak of the ‘anointed everything’ during their crusades, judgement nights and boozy services (Chibango 2016). The anointed items range from oil, clothes, pens, toothbrushes, pencils, rulers and books. The extreme cases these days are situations where a prophet speaks of anointed condoms and anointed underwears that bring to disrepute the church (Madzokere 2018). This ‘anointing everything’ gimmick enables these trio-selected contemporary Pentecostal prophets to make abundant profits from items they just buy for cheap money only to sell them at exorbitant prices. These prophetic personalities are not accountable to anyone; therefore, they just do as they will to become millionaires in 3 days (Chibango 2016). The trio selected contemporary Pentecostal figures take advantage of the deplorable, hopeless and despair situation of the people to make a killing from the anointed items, offerings and tithes brought by congregants to receive a blessing from the men of God. Madzokere and Machingura (2015) observe that critics dismiss modern-day Zimbabwean prophets/esses like Makandiwa, Magaya, Angel and others as fake money-making prophets/esses who take advantage of the level of poverty, unemployment and disease in Zimbabwe and become prosperity ‘gospellers’ for self-aggrandisement. The trio contemporary Pentecostal prophets are emerging in a context characterised by social, political, cultural, economic and religious turmoil (Chibango 2016). Their message of prosperity goes in tandem with the broader population’s suffering, squalor and abject poverty. The contemporary Pentecostal prophets manipulate the suffering situation of the generally impoverished Zimbabwean populace to unscrupulously steal their money. The above scholar asserts that these contemporary Pentecostal prophetic figures parade and miraculously put gold nuggets in the congregants’ pockets; they still collect offerings, tithes and groceries from the poor. Paradoxically, these charismatic prophetic figures never condemn corruption, mismanagement of resources and violence that is the daily motto in Zimbabwe (Madzokere 2018). Failure to address social injustices prevalent in Zimbabwe but focus mainly on the gospel of anointing makes the Big Three propellers rather than dispellers of downward social mobility.

Preferential option for the Powerful

The Big Three just like many other modern Pentecostals groupings in Zimbabwe have shown that they are not apolitical but they support the status quo – those wielding the power in the country hence the ‘the preferential option for the Powerful’ (Madzokere forthcoming). This is one of the strongest criticisms levelled against this crop of the selected contemporary

Pentecostal prophets in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Most of these contemporary Pentecostal prophets have worked in cahoots with those who are in control of the political leadership of the country. We shall see if the trio did the same. This has been shown by the public participation of such ecclesiastical figures in the quasi-national events and in particular here 'the signing of anti-sanctions' by Makandiwa of UFIC and an overwhelming presence of most of the state government officials at their annual 'Judgment night vigils' (Madzokere 2018). Walter Magaya personally supported the former first family of Robert Mugabe and Grace Mugabe when he bought the book written by the Grace Mugabe for US\$50000 – a shocking exorbitant and unbelievable price for just a single book. Such a price would buy approximately one thousand plus copies of the same book. Under normal circumstances, its price is US\$8. Uebert Angel recent appointment as the 'ambassador at large' by Emmerson Mnangagawa speaks volume to these prophets' drive to side themselves to the political establishments of the country. This is a true reflection that some of these contemporary Pentecostal prophets are spongy adherents of those who wield power but paradoxically are the worst oppressors of people. One other way such contemporary Pentecostal prophets have shown that they are not apolitical is by delivering prophecies on the political affairs of the country, predicting some bloodbath in the event that people revolted against the deposed Robert Mugabe regime, which, if critically analysed, could weaken citizen participation to determine the politics of Zimbabwe. Warning citizens not to challenge those in the reins of power gave an advantage to Robert Mugabe and his cronies to rule forever, who knows, it might be such contemporary Pentecostal prophets connived with the political leadership then to silence the dissenting voices who castigated dictatorship. This way then these contemporary Pentecostal prophets and the political leadership were 'accomplices in evil' (Madzokere forthcoming). The contemporary Pentecostal prophets have always participated and influenced the political processes by prophesying a prosperous future of Zimbabwe, taking sides with politicians when they condemn homosexuality and taking part in meetings that were organised by the then Governor of Reserve Bank, Gideon Gono, to discuss the economic implications of 'miracle money' (Chitando & Biri 2016). Such contemporary prophetic personalities are also known of casting out demons of sickness, suffering and poverty, which for Dube (2012) took a giant step in addressing some of the worst problems of humankind. For him, the process of casting out demons is a dramatisation and clear expression of discontent with the prevailing socio-economic and political realities in the country. The Big Three serve as catalysts to downward social mobility by their preferential option for the Powerful; instead by doing this, the trio clergymen took sides with those who perpetrate various social injustices in the country. This way these ecclesiastical personalities act as 'accomplices in evil' (Madzokere forthcoming).

Conclusion

This interrogative study of the 'Big Three' from a *justitia pro-povo oprimido* liberation hermeneutics observed that the

Big Three prophets are playing an ambivalent role in Zimbabwe. Positively, Angel, Makandiwa and Magaya are transforming the lives of the masses through the preaching of the Gospel of Prosperity, which has a counter drive to poverty prevalent Zimbabwe. They cultivate a spirit of innovation, hardwork and entrepreneurship in their followers. They serve as empowerment societal champions. They also transform lives of their congregants by the performance of miracles, deliverances and healings. This way they would be addressing the health needs of the masses in Zimbabwe where the medical facilities are short-staffed because of brain drain and poor working conditions. Negatively, the same men of cloth are a thorn in the flesh to the political, social, economic and religious well-being of Zimbabwe because of white-collar prophecy, negating of social justice and the preferential option for the Powerful. The Big Three focus on personal wealth accumulation disregarding the communitarian ethic of life where one needs to love his or her neighbour. If analysed critically and insightfully, all the positive contributions by the 'Big Three' fail to address the most crucial problem in contemporary Pentecostalism the world over, which is failure to address the structural evil in society rather than focussing on individual sins.

The prophets of the Bible (Old Testament) – Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Hosea and Jeremiah championed social justice in the political, social, economic and religious spectrum of the ancient Israelite society (Wolff 1990:15). They preached social justice [*mispat*] and righteousness [*sedeqah*] to transform society holistically. If a prophet of God builds his own empire not God's, then how can he transform society permanently? What the Big Three prophets are doing in Zimbabwe is typically similar to a medical doctor who gives a high blood pressure patient paracetamol instead of urazide. To bring an end to social injustice in Zimbabwe, the Big Three prophets just like any other prophets should address the structural evil caused by the political leaders in the country. Overall, such behaviour by the 'Big Three' prophets propels rather than dispels downward social mobility.

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Author's contributions

N.M. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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