

Prosperity theology versus theology of sharing approach

**Author:**Daniel S. Lephoko¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

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Corresponding author:Daniel Lephoko,
danlephoko@gmail.com**Dates:**

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Theologians are split into two groups: those who embrace prosperity theology and those who oppose it; both sides on scriptural grounds. Those criticising it embrace cessationism in its diversity, while its supporters are mainly found among Pentecostals and Charismatics, who are continuationists. Continuationists believe and teach that all gifts of the Spirit are still available to the church today, therefore should be practised by the church just as they were operative during the apostolic era. Therefore, it is clear that prosperity preachers are continuationists. They believe and practice healing and miracle gifts today. A review of the literature, biblical texts, historical teachings, and Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal (also referred to as charismatic and neo-charismatic) form the basis of this article. It addresses the positive features of prosperity teachers' beliefs and methods as well as how they exploit the dreams, fears, and aspirations of people living in poverty. The theology of sharing, as articulated by Nicholas B.H. Bhengu, is proposed as a solution to creating parity between the rich and the poor.

Contribution: This article seeks to balance opposing theological approaches with the prosperity gospel. It does this by introducing a theology of sharing as taught by Nicholas Bhengu based on the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, a way of life among African people. The challenge for theologians on both sides of the argument is finding a way to accommodate the other side's contributions.

Keywords: prosperity; theology of sharing; poverty; faith; capitalism; *Ubuntu*.

Introduction – Evaluation of prosperity theology

This is not an in-depth study of prosperity theology but a panoramic view, using historical and biblical texts to understand prosperity theology. The definition of prosperity according to the Oxford advanced learner's dictionary (Turnbull 2010:2332) is, 'the state of being successful, especially in the accumulation of wealth'. For the purposes of this article, the definition of prosperity is the 'accumulation of wealth and good health based on one's good work or giving power to the church' (Coleman 2000 cited by Gbote & Kgatla 2014:2).

Prosperity is used to encourage people to give to the church or to the church leader in return for God's blessing in the form of financial wealth, good health, and other benefits to the donor. It is based on scriptures such as Philippians 4:19; 3 John 2; Peter 2:24 and Luke 6:38. The emphasis on giving with the promise of receiving more than the giver has given is the bedrock of the prosperity gospel.

The prosperity gospel debate is a phenomenon that is likely to occupy the minds of theologians for decades to come.

The article demonstrates that Scripture makes no distinction between the salvation of the souls and other human needs, such as healing and socio-economic benefits. Jesus preached about the kingdom of heaven and healed the sick, fed the hungry and cast out demons (Mt 8:28–32). He also had compassion towards his audience; he did not send the people away on empty stomachs, lest they faint along the way (Lephoko 2018:244). In Mark, Jesus commanded his disciples to feed the hungry followers (Mk 6:44). He also commanded his disciples to heal the sick (Lk 10.9). Healing the sick and preaching about the kingdom of God were part of Jesus' ministry and that of his disciples. It was never either or. In this way, Jesus demonstrated that he was concerned with the wellness of people.

Note: Historical Thought and Source Interpretation.

Green (1992) says, 'there can be no possible split between a social and spiritual gospel. They belong together, and without both elements, the good news of Jesus will not get across' (pp. 38–39). Green is of the view that the gospel should address the social, spiritual, economic, and mental needs of the total person. When John the Baptist sent messengers for confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah the nation had been expecting or not; Jesus sent John the clearest message. 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them' (Lk 7:22).

It is not only the poor who seek to improve the financial status, wealth, and health. James quotes Pastor Rammile of Global Reconciliation Church in Bloemfontein, addressing his congregation who among others are business people and student that their outstanding amount of cars, and marriages and relationships with God having to settle some scores with the devil, 'I declare finances, not just a six figure, but a seven figure. I force it upon your spirit, upon your life and your family' (James 2019:38).

The middle class and the rich who desire more are also vulnerable to the teaching of prosperity gospel. The promise of cars, money and settling scores with the devil it is also attractive to them. It is the case of wanting more above what they already have. Writing to Timothy, Paul warns those who seek riches instead of being content with what they have. He warns against those who want to get rich and then, 'but those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction' (1 Tm 6:9–10).

Mzondi (2022) writing on Ubuntu postulates that *Ubuntu* theology consist of an array of theologies knitted together like rainbow. *Ubuntu* theology includes theology of life, theology of care, theology of solidarity, theology of economic justice, theology of hope and accompaniment (p. 2). The meaning of *Ubuntu* in this article is a way of life which encompasses economic justice solidarity with the poor, and sharing of resources with the poor or people in need. It is a practice that says I am because you are. The article proposes Bhengu's theology of *Ubuntu* to create parity between those who have and those who lack. Bhengu uses the example of *Ubuntu* among Xhosa people, those who have help those who don't so that those in need are lifted up from their lack.

The poor find prosperity teaching attractive; hence, the theology of sharing, *Ubuntu* and Christian socialism as taught by Nicholas Bhengu (Lephoko 2018:244) is proposed. This is supported by his relationship with money. Bond (2003) writes that:

The young Nicholas Bhengu decided that in his lifetime he wanted to have money. In a way, that desire too was granted. He could have become very rich had his godly principles not

prohibited him from exploiting the people and bleeding the churches. He could have used his considerable influence and popularity to make money. Once a businessman proposed that Bhengu lend his name to certain business projects for half of the overall takings. (p. 65)

Mashau and Kgatle see *Ubuntu* philosophy as an antidote to the culture of greed in the prosperity gospel (Mashau & Kgatle 2019:4). They accuse prosperity gospel teachers of exploiting the poor with promises of getting rich simply by confessing their faith in God to receive financial or better life here on earth: riches, healing from diseases, and general improvement of their living conditions. The study highlights that the prosperity gospel is attractive among Africans who are confronted with unemployment, inequality, and poverty in townships and rural settings. Furthermore, it shows how critics of prosperity theology fail to teach that God does not delight in the plight of the poor and oppressed. God commands the rich to care for the hungry, the poor, and the naked (Is 58:3–7). One of the critics of the prosperity gospel is Mbugua who calls it a 'false gospel', Mbugua asserts that prosperity preachers' motivation is about giving people health, wealth, husbands, wives, jobs and promotions. Further, Mbugua postulates that this false gospel does not persuade people to desire, pursuit, or treasure Jesus. Instead, Jesus is merely the way to get the material things our worldly hearts hunger for (Maura et al. 2015:3.4). Lederle (in Nel 2020:111) is disappointed with the fact that the caricature of prosperity gospel depicted in the media shows prosperity as for selfish financial gain, misleading, gullible and sincere but ignorant believers ... who are trying to better their situation by applying the recipes for financial success provided by prosperity teachers.

The study uses Bhengu's theology of sharing. This approach will be unpacked as a theory of anti-capitalism, Jesus' socialist approach to human needs, and the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. These aspects of the theology of sharing will be applied in the development of a balanced theology of prosperity. However, before introducing this theory, it is important to give background to the roots of prosperity theology.

Origins of the prosperity gospel

According to McConnell (1988)

Kenyon expressed the view that men and women did not want a new philosophy or new metaphysical concept of Christ, but an unveiling of the reality that was seen in Jesus in His earth walk. (p. 15)

Anim (2010:67) in Mashau and Kgatle (2019:2), further remarked that 'The Prosperity Gospel is significantly influenced by the teachings of E.W. Kenyon, Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller'. Later prosperity teachers include Kenneth Copeland; in his ministry website they saw his mission as to minister the Word of Faith, by teaching believers who they are in Christ Jesus (Kenneth Copeland Ministries 2023).

One other Word of Faith teacher is Jerry Savelle (2014).

We are not to pursue things any more than we are to pursue prosperity; we don't have to. God's blessings will chase us down and overwhelm us if we only obey Him (Dt 28:2). (p. 50)

Savelle's interpretation of Deuteronomy 28:2 that things pursue those who obey is not borne out by the scripture he is referring to. The people still had to till the land, plant the seed and reap the crops to realise the benefits of their labour in obedience to God. It does not appear that being obedient to God, prosperity automatically chases after the believer. Paul wrote '... I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need' (Phlp 4:12). Paul is a typical example.

Prosperity gospel is also prevalent in Africa. Mashau and Kgatele note that Africa has not been spared from the doctrine of prosperity gospel. It has found home in countries like South Africa, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, and others (Mashau & Kgatele 2006:2).

Prosperity gospel has given birth to the culture of greed and consumption. Prophecies are given to business persons about their prosperity, but the rationale behind this is that when they succeed, the prophets will also prosper. (Ayegboyin in Mashau and Kgatele 2006:81)

Mashau and Kgatele note the severity of the matter as stated by Ayegboyin, and identified prosperity as a culture of greed (2019:4). They postulate that the new Pentecostal churches emphasise the seed-faith principle of sowing and reaping. Giving leads to means of happiness resulting to the prosperity gospel being commercialised. The principle of sowing and reaping as taught by Paul is biblical, and the ministry of sowing and reaping supplies the needs of the saints and thanksgiving to God (2 Cor 9: 6–14).

Evaluation of prosperity theology

Excesses

One of the many criticisms against prosperity teachers is their lifestyle of opulence while living amid the poorest of the poor in their communities: fancy suits, driving posh cars, living a luxurious life and amassing wealth. They teach that their followers can reach their status if they adhere to their teachings. In a YouTube interview (YouTube 2019), Kenneth Copeland defended that he owns a private jet, gets hundreds of thousands of millions of dollars, and has over 600 000 subscribers to his ministry, the KC Ministry.

The CRL Commission in its report: *The Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems (CRL Rights Commission briefing 27 June 2017)* regarding the abuses among prosperity teachers, reports as follows:

[... S]ome, but not all, churches were run like businesses, and not even good businesses. Some were not even registered and others were commercialised in terms of making money from poor people, and their beliefs were totally abused.... The controversial

reports and articles in the media – which had included grass eating, snake feeding and petrol drinking.

The situation described above makes poor people open to unscrupulous, immoral, unethical and unbridled greedy prosperity gospel preachers. They lure the poor with promises of instant riches, provided they have faith to name it and confess it with their mouth, that by faith they already possess it.

Maura sees prosperity as a spiritual blessing only, to the exclusion of other benefits: material, physical, psychological and emotional blessings. He equates prosperity with godless Cain (2015:38–39). Mbugua calls upon his readers to embrace suffering, in this way, imitate Jesus, Paul and the Church Fathers (2015:55–60). Maura names four blessings that Christians should seek: peace with God, access to God, joy from the hope of God's glory and joy in suffering (2015:94–105). Maura avoids dealing with other necessities of life which are clearly treated in the scriptures. The fact that Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, cleansed the lepers and fed multitudes of his hungry audiences and healed all manner of diseases, escapes him (Mt 8:8–17). Unlike prosperity preachers, there is no record to indicate that Jesus ever asked for remuneration from the people he had compassion on.

Jesus commissioned the 72 disciples to preach the gospel (Lk 10:9); they were to heal the sick and proclaim that the Kingdom of God had come among them. They returned with great excitement; they reported that even demons were subject to their authority.

Jesus did not rebuke them for healing the sick and casting out demons. He redirected them to the real joy, that their names were recorded in heaven.

Kearley, Myers and Hadley (eds. 1986) write:

However, the overriding principle will always be that it is the text in its historical context that provides the parameters or horizons of meaning. No meaning may be imported into the text that is extraneous to the text. The interpreter may not, in the words of Caird, 'penetrate to a meaning more ultimate than the one the writers intended ... In other words, "meaning" is that understanding found in a text in its historical context through a grammatical-historical investigation of the text'. (p. 34)

Nürnberg affirms the historical critical method to arrive to the original meaning intended by the author. Nürnberg finds problematic the assertion that claims that the Word of God is dynamic, and that since self-disclosure of God in history, such disclosure should occur outside canonical history (2002:42–43).

According to Nürnberg, God continues to reveal himself beyond the canonisation of the scriptures. The statement by Nürnberg creates an opportunity for extra-biblical sources that result in a variety of interpretations, including those of prosperity gospel teachers.

Fee and Stuart ([1981] 1993) identify the real problem in Biblical hermeneutics:

And those who affirm that women, as well as men, should pray and prophesy on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 often deny that they should necessarily do so with their heads covered. For some, the Bible “plainly teaches” believers’ baptism by immersion; others believe they can make a biblical case for infant baptism. Both “eternal security” and the possibility of “losing one’s salvation” are preached in the church, but never by the same person! Yet both are affirmed as the plain meaning of biblical texts. Even authors of this book have some disagreements as to what certain texts “plainly” mean. Yet all of us are reading the same Bible and we are all trying to be obedient to what the text “plainly” means.

What Fee seeks to show is that some prosperity teachers embark on what he calls ‘plain meanings’ are not equally plain to all. This leads to a variety of interpretations of scripture, as illustrated in the above quoted paragraph. However, Fee affirms the historical context, the time and culture of the author and his readers, that is, the geographical, topographical, and political factors that are relevant to the author’s setting and the occasion of the book, letter, psalm, prophetic oracle, or other genre (1993:25). The caution given by Fee is not to be too harsh in our criticism of others, because we may be wrong in our own interpretation of the scriptures. We must accept that despite all the tools the exegete has, this results in a number of theologies: Reformed, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Liberal, Black Theology, Liberation Theology, Public Theology, among others.

According to Nel (2020), confession is key to prosperity teachers:

Confession is defined in the Faith Movement as affirming something believers believe in, testifying to something they know, and witnessing for a truth that they have embraced. The secret to confession is to know the nature and extent of the perfect redemption in Christ, to know one’s ‘identity’ and ‘rights’ and ‘privileges’ in Christ, and to confess verbally the provision of Christ in every need and problem of life. (p. 42)

The confession referred to by Nel is based on ‘so faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ’ (Rm 10:17). Confession responds to the truth in Romans 10:17.

Unemployment in South Africa

South Africa’s unemployment rate was 32.9% in the third quarter of 2022. This was the lowest jobless rate since Q1 of 2021, as the number of unemployed persons declined by 269 000 to 7.725 million and employment rose by 204 000 to 15.765m. The youth unemployment rate, measuring job-seekers between 15 and 24 years old, fell further to an over 2-year low of 59.6% in the Q3 of 2022, but remains high (STATISTA 2019–2023).

Magill (1983) quotes Gutierrez:

Poverty for ... is the death of the individual, but also, as community, it is cultural death, and the death of a culture

weighs heavily on the dispossessed and oppressed ... Beyond any possible doubt, the life of the poor is one of hunger and exploitation, inadequate health care and lack of suitable housing, difficulty in obtaining an education, inadequate wages and unemployment, struggles for their rights and repression. (p. 91)

According to the World Bank, in 2022 poverty line is defined as living on US\$2.15 per person per day (The World Bank 2022). Both World Bank and Magill depict that poverty and hunger is a reality in the world, and this situation must not be left unattended.

Finding a balanced approach to prosperity theology among extraneously opposed views in a highly charged arena, between those who support it on the one hand and on the other hand those who condemn it, is almost impossible. It is suggested here that there are some positive elements of the prosperity gospel.

Biblical examples of prosperous people

It is acknowledged that the Bible does teach the believer spiritual, physical and material blessings. Numerous men in the Bible were rich – one of them is Abraham, the father of our faith: ‘Now Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold’ (Gn 13:2). Lot had also amassed great wealth, which, together with that of Abraham, which caused them to separate in order to have enough grazing land for their stock (Gn 13:5–9). Here, the scriptures do not refer to the spiritual blessing of Abraham only but also to his wealth as part of God’s blessing of him. Job is another rich person in the Old Testament (Job 42:10, 12–13). God doubles his riches after adversity; this is clear proof that God wanted Job to prosper by giving him double blessings after he had lost everything, including his children. However, James condemns the attitude of the rich towards the poor (Jas 2:14:26). His teaching is not that there should be no rich people in the church (2 Cor 9:6–15).

However, God is also concerned about the poor. Paragraph four of the Belhar confession addresses the fact that God is the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged:

[A]nd further on, he calls his church to follow him in this; the church as the possession of God must stand where he stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged. Finally, paragraph five takes a stand that the church must be obedient to Jesus Christ even if it may be punished for doing so. Everything the church does is for the glory of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Kgatla 2019:129–130)

Bhengu preached prosperity gospel of a different kind

Bhengu is an example of non-prosperity theology teachers who practised spiritual gifts endowed on him by God. Hollenweger (1972) quotes Nicholas Bhengu:

I will prove that there is a God and that he is stronger than the Devil! Bhengu said, and did this by means of faith healings, ‘for

without them my church would be as empty as the other Protestant' (p. 129). Some of the healings and miracles performed by Bhengu during his evangelistic campaigns include a woman who was born with a hunchback, she would walk by bending forward and lifting up her knees and could not sleep on her back in East London. After Bhengu prayed for her there was a cracking sound coming from her spine as the bones loosened and straightened. From that day she walked upright, the healing of a man brought in a wheelbarrow in Nelspruit in 1956, the crippled man of Nigeria and a miraculous deliverance of a demon-possessed girl. (Lephoko 2018:118–123)

McGowan (2016) states that capitalism is the new god of the free market:

If God's absence from the world becomes evident after the birth of capitalist modernity, capitalism simultaneously erects a new form of divinity, one even more tyrannical than the old form. The new god is the market, and unlike the omnipotent and omniscient God of the monotheistic traditions, the market doesn't make its tyranny clear. It never proclaims itself to be a jealous god in the way that Yahweh does. (pp. 114–115)

McGowan postulates that capitalism is a tyrant god compared to Yahweh. According to McGowan, it is clear that capitalism is the driving force behind excesses among prosperity teachers. Unlike God, capitalism and the free market, adopted by some prosperity teachers, show no mercy to its victims. Prosperity teachers who adopt the capitalist system are not concerned with the plight of the poor so long they amass wealth for themselves.

Bhengu on capitalism

Bhengu accuses capitalism of greed, uncaringness, and inhumanity. Bhengu is in favour of *Ubuntu*. Bhengu continues:

The rich have plenty to eat and what is left is given to the dogs when there are hungry people around them. Compassion is not forced on people; it is not forced on people at gun point. I went on tour to Israel. Our bus stopped at a place near the sea of Galilee, where Jesus had sat and taught thousands of people. I visualised him sitting and teaching the people for 3 days. He had compassion because the people were hungry. (Lephoko 2018:244)

The theology of sharing in scriptures

The theology of sharing is taught in the Old and in the New Testament. In Isaiah, God accuses Israel of hypocrisy with their fasting and prayers while placing heavy yoke on their workers and the poor (Is 58:1, 3–10). Paul addresses the question of meeting the needs of those who are less fortunate by those who have the means (riches). He deals with it in the chapter grossly misinterpreted by prosperity teachers.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich (2 Cor 8:9)

Paul's focus is on helping the poor so that there might be parity between the rich and the poor (2 Cor 8:11–15; 2 Cor 9:10–15), not the rich getting richer. In the same vein, James says 'faith without works is dead'. James is scathing against

the rich who oppress the poor and those who pronounce blessings to the destitute instead of providing for their needs (Jas 2:1–20).

Bhengu's theology of sharing

Nicholas Bhengu's theology of sharing as articulated in *Ubuntu*, African philosophy of life, is proposed as a solution to the challenges of the prosperity gospel. Bhengu's philosophy is proposed as a solution to the challenges of the prosperity gospel. Bhengu was one of the African Pentecostal leading evangelists in Africa. He was also a church planter. He taught his people to be self-sufficient through hard work, instead of just exercising their faith in God alone in order to prosper. He believed in *Ubuntu* to help alleviate the plight of the poor. He opposed capitalism and its unbridled exploitation of the people, especially people experiencing poverty.

Antidote of capitalism – *Ubuntu* approach

In one of his cassette-taped sermons, preached at the Peace Centre in Thaba Nchu, Bhengu is scathing against capitalism and communism in favour of Christian socialism and *Ubuntu* as a means of addressing the needs of the poor. In this article, the sermon preached by Bhengu is divided into three aspects: *Ubuntu*, capitalism and Christian socialism (Lephoko 2018:243).

Bhengu on Christian concern for others

Bhengu introduces Christianity as a caring religion based on the teachings and practices taught by Jesus:

Jesus had compassion. He did not send the people away hungry; he feared they may collapse on the way. He fed the multitudes. Capitalists would have sent the people away while they remained behind to feed themselves. They don't care about the hungry as long as they themselves are full. This attitude is the cause of wars and industrial strikes. What is good for the goose is good for the gander. It is not right that you should eat pudding but give me only pap (maize porridge) to eat. Why do you do that to me when our needs are the same, only compassion can address that. (Lephoko 2018:245)

According to Mashau and Kgatle, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is one of mutual concern, care and sharing that holds out the promise of eradicating the preventable and deadly poverty that currently envelopes most of Africa (Ramosé 2006:15). *Ubuntu* is a philosophy that places communal interests above those of the individuals, and where human existence is dependent upon others (Donald 2010:139).

The fact that *Ubuntu* is a way of life and part of African culture does not always follow people's practices even though they are expected by the community whether in the townships or rural areas, to demonstrate the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. It is possible that because of economic pressure, life both in the townships and rural areas where there is

high unemployment, poverty and hunger, communities may find it difficult to share the little that they have with the community. However, this should not take away from the need to practice *Ubuntu*. In the African community, township and rural, *Ubuntu* is foundational to human relationships.

When there is a funeral, the community comes together to help the bereaved by making contributions. Community members invite themselves to the home of the bereaved family to offer assistance by donating various kinds of assistance: money, groceries, cleaning and cooking. Members who do not offer help are ostracised by the community when it is their turn to receive help. *Ubuntu* builds cohesiveness among community members.

A member of the community who does not participate or cooperate in helping others is left out in the cold when they need help from the community. The article proposes Bhengu's theology of *Ubuntu*:

Among Xhosa-speaking people (one of the African tribes in South Africa), there are those who have livestock and those who have none. Black people are not capitalists in the Western way of life. When people have no food because there was no rain in their area, they would go to those who have, to ask for food. If I have a cattle and you have none but want to get married, I lend you cattle to go and pay lobolo (dowry) for your wife. You are allowed to pay back when you can with no interest charged. In African culture there is no capitalism as experienced in the West. When someone has no cows, he is loaned a cow so as to have milk to feed his children, so that his children may not die from hunger. In Western culture a ten times millionaire will ignore you. African people look after one another, they would not watch other people suffer when they can help. (Lephoko 2018:244)

The illustration given by Bhengu about Xhosa people helping one another does not bare the marks of tribalism. For many years, Bhengu ministered among the Xhosa people and learned to appreciate how Xhosa people applied the principle of *Ubuntu* among themselves. It is accepted that other cultures do have a philosophy of helping one another; however, the article looks at *Ubuntu* as practised within the African culture. *Ubuntu* practice acts as an alternative to the greed and exploitation of the poor by greedy and unscrupulous prosperity teachers.

Bhengu's lifestyle

Bhengu lived an ordinary lifestyle like most people in the community, even though he had churches that could have provided him with affluence. Bhengu writes:

I could not ride a high horse after all my success for they were all His. I was glad when no street, road or avenue in all the was named after me. My life was buried with Christ, and although townships I received great honours from the leaders of various countries yet I was never elated to feel that I was above my fellowmen in the street. I am going to lay myself down in death in real equality with all men of low estate. Men who never went to school, never preached to thousands in Africa and overseas. I feel I am worthless. I feel I am nothing. I feel I am nobody but

God took my life and used it for His own pleasure as useless as I was. It was all for His honour and glory... (n.p.)

The statement proves that Bhengu lived an ordinary life although he could have enriched himself like some of the prosperity gospel preachers. He saw himself as one with the people of low estate. This is supported by one of his funeral instructions that announcements on the air and in the press were as follows:

Nicholas Bheka, son of Josiah Khanda, son of Yele Bhengu. Born on September 5th 1909 at Entumeni Mission Station, expelled twice for his faith by the mission as a heretic, first as a young man, 21 years old. Came back to settle down in his father's land, built a home and was forced to leave in 1973 and settled at Mtunzini. Died at so-and-so on so-and-so at the age of so-and-so. Nothing else should be said, absolutely nothing! No watch night services anywhere and no substitutes. (Bond 2003:54)

Conclusion

A balanced approach to prosperity theology is advocated in this article. The article reveals the inadequacies of both sides of the debate – on the one hand those who condemn prosperity teaching as taught and practised by prosperity teachers regarded it as theologically unsound and exploitative on the basis of biblical interpretation of scripture, and on the one hand and on the other those who believe that on the basis of scripture their interpretation is sound and correct.

As part of the solution, the article advocates a theology of sharing as taught by Bhengu and in the biblical text, in an attempt to address the gaping divide between the rich and the poor in the church and community: the sharing of food, provision of clothes and shelter. Theology of sharing advocates for the rich to share what they have with the poor so that there may be no hunger in the community. Theology of sharing is a theology holding hands and of walking together with those in need. Jesus taught about sharing in the kingdom of God, yet it is also true that Africans practised the culture of giving and caring for one another before Christianity arrived in Africa which was practising *Ubuntu*.

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