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Contemporary Pentecostal churches practice prophecy primarily as inspirational preaching and teaching rather than predictive divination

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Background: Neo-Pentecostal interpretations of prophecy often emphasise prediction, overlooking its pastoral and political functions. In global Pentecostal networks, prophecy surpasses simple divination, impacting spiritual growth, communal improvement and social critique. Scholarly analyses, however, remain constrained by paradigms that either glorify the sensational and predictive elements of prophecy or limit critique to the recording of misconduct.

Aim: This study aimed to reframe the understanding of contemporary Pentecostal prophecy by demonstrating that it functions primarily as Spirit-inspired preaching and teaching with socio-political significance, rather than as predictive divination, by integrating Brueggemann's prophetic imagination with the South African prophetic theological tradition.

Setting: The study focused on Pentecostal churches and ministries in South Africa, drawing on publicly accessible sermons and prophetic utterances from three branches of South African Pentecostalism – classical Pentecostal denominations, charismatic ministries and neo-Pentecostal prophetic ministries – covering the period 2018 to 2025, with comparative reference to broader sub-Saharan African Pentecostal contexts.

Methods: A literary and theological analysis was conducted, encompassing pastoral theological discussions, ethnographic accounts and sermon assessments from Pentecostal communities, situated within the framework of Pentecostal hermeneutics and elements of the South African prophetic tradition of Boesak, Mosala and Maluleke.

Results: Prophecy functions within rhetorical, ethical and political realms. The performative and interpretive elements enable Christians to engage with God via exhortation, scriptural application and critique of economic injustice, political corruption and societal decline.

Conclusion: Modern Pentecostal prophecy primarily cultivates and rejuvenates communities rather than predicts future occurrences. Authentic prophetic engagement must surpass personal affirmation to advocate for the marginalised and promote justice.

Contribution: The study reconceptualises Pentecostal prophecy as Spirit-inspired discourse that energises communities for social justice, reclaiming the tradition from predictive teleology. This work enhances Pentecostal studies by integrating Brueggemann's prophetic imagination with South African prophetic theology to redefine Pentecostal prophecy as Spirit-inspired preaching and teaching.

Keywords: Pentecostal prophecy; inspirational preaching; prophetic imagination; social justice; South African theology; political theology; spiritual formation.

Introduction

The role of prophecy in contemporary Pentecostal churches is a topic of significant theological debate and scholarly investigation (Iwe 2016:85). Commonly, prophecy is perceived as foretelling by direct revelation or prediction; yet, this viewpoint considerably constricts the scope of a biblical theology of prophecy and its modern expressions (Payne 2020:8). In Pentecostal societies, the prophetic beyond simple divination; it manifests as a concrete manifestation of spirituality that impacts congregational life, ethical growth and social engagement.

In South Africa, where Pentecostalism has undergone significant expansion in recent decades, prophecy is essential to worship, pastoral care and the formation of communal identity (Pondani 2019:23). Bafford (2019:8) characterises the post-apartheid period as one of swift growth for

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, marked by significant prophetic activity. However, scholarly analyses of these practices are overly constrained by paradigms that either glorify the sensational and predictive elements of prophecy or restrict critique to the recording of misconduct, thereby overlooking the pastoral, rhetorical and socio-political roles that prophecy serves in everyday congregational life.

The article identifies a specific research gap. Current studies on contemporary Pentecostal prophecy are categorised into two principal streams. The initial analysis examines sensational prognostic assertions and impassioned performances (Salifu Yendork et al. 2020; Youvan 2025); the subsequent analysis uncovers the commercialisation, manipulation and exploitation of prophetic authority (Kgatle 2017; Ramantswana 2018; Resane 2017). Both streams are primarily diagnostic. A comprehensive theological re-evaluation of Pentecostal prophecy is essential to reinstate its function as Spirit-inspired preaching and teaching with public and socio-political ramifications. Despite the valuable insights offered by Brueggemann's (2001) prophetic imagination and the South African prophetic theological tradition associated with Boesak, Mosala and Maluleke, there has been limited sustained dialogue between these two bodies of work concerning the analysis of Pentecostal prophetic practice. This article examines the deficiency.

The study seeks to reframe the comprehension of modern Pentecostal prophecy by highlighting its function as inspirational preaching and instruction rather than as predictive divination. Employing Brueggemann's (2001) notion of prophetic imagination alongside the South African prophetic tradition, the article posits that prophecy represents a politically engaged revelation of truth that challenges hegemonic ideologies, scrutinises systems of domination and fosters community cohesion around alternative social frameworks based on justice, dignity and divine intent.

This essay offers four distinct contributions. Firstly, it enriches the existing literature by integrating Brueggemann's prophetic imagination with South African prophetic theology to construct an analytical framework specifically designed for Pentecostal contexts, a synthesis not before examined in contemporary study. Secondly, it challenges the dominant predictive-teleological paradigm by demonstrating that the performative, rhetorical and ethical dimensions of prophecy are theologically essential rather than supplementary. Thirdly, it surpasses the prevailing diagnostic critique of prophetic misapplication to offer a constructive, redeeming narrative of authentic Pentecostal prophetic practice. Fourthly, it shifts Pentecostal prophecy from the domain of personal spirituality to the public sphere of justice, authority and communal well-being.

The implications of this study are significant for the church, the academic community and the wider South African population. The argument provides theological resources for Pentecostal congregations and their leadership to differentiate between genuine and distorted prophetic practices while also promoting prophecy that fortifies rather than abuses the community. The study promotes a hermeneutical pedagogy in theological education that integrates Pentecostal pneumatology with prophetic-liberative scriptural readings. The study contends that authentic prophecy must explicitly denounce structural injustice, inequality and governmental corruption, as per Amos 5:24, to ensure the plentiful flow of justice.

Literature review

The biblical prophetic tradition

The foundation for analysing contemporary Pentecostal prophecy is rooted in the bible (Brueggemann 2001). The Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament functioned not as fortune tellers but as divine interpreters, urging the populace to heed their social, political and spiritual circumstances (O'Brien 2022:1). Prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Micah confronted monarchs, questioned religious establishments and urged communities to uphold covenant integrity, social justice and authentic worship (Unit 2020:1). Their writings both mirrored opposition to prevailing injustices and envisioned alternative futures grounded in divine purpose.

The New Testament prophetic viewpoint, with the apostle Paul as its principal interpreter, emphasised edification, exhortation and comfort (1 Cor 14:3). Paul's directive assumes that prophecy enhances the church, provides ethical and spiritual guidance and offers consolation and encouragement to believers (Olajide 2025:80). This perception transitions entirely from a predictive framework to pragmatic spiritual communication, fostering the growth of religion and the flourishing of community.

Walter Brueggemann's prophetic imagination

Brueggemann's (2001) seminal work on prophetic imagination is an essential resource for understanding the political and transformative nature of prophecy. Brueggemann posits that the prophetic job comprises two primary elements: (1) critiquing the prevailing awareness that sustains unjust systems and (2) invigorating communities to act in alignment with their potential, grounded in divine promises (Brueggemann 2001:3). The prophet engages in a ministry of lamentation and optimism by recognising the anguish caused by power-imbuing ideologies and empires while proposing 'alternative visions' of equitable, dignified, peaceful and human-integrated societies (Brueggemann 2024).

Brueggemann's (2021) framework eliminates the concept of prophecy as a politically neutral spiritual endeavour. He demonstrates that authentic prophecy invariably confronts power structures, reveals the intellectual frameworks that rationalise moral wrongdoing and fosters a shared vision for societal transformation. This aligns with liberation theologies and contextual theological movements that address Christianity's engagement with justice, power and human dignity (Harwanto & Edgar 2025:51).

South African prophetic theology

In reaction to the fight against apartheid and the difficulties of post-apartheid society, the South African theological tradition has created an extensive body of prophetic theology (Makofane & Botha 2019:90). Intellectuals include Boesak (1984, 2005), Mosala (1989), Maluleke (1997, 2010) and others have articulated a vision of prophetic Christianity that contests oppression, upholds human dignity and endeavours to transform society. This tradition perceives the church's prophetic calling as integral to its mission, rather than an optional or subsidiary endeavour (Boesak 1984).

Boesak's (2020) Black Theology of Liberation and prophetic witness posits that the church must align with the downtrodden and undertake a bold, direct battle against domination. His theology asserts that authentic Christianity cannot stay passive in the presence of injustice but must confront authority with truth, regardless of the consequences (Boesak 2022:258). Mosala's (1989) materialist interpretation of the Bible emphasises that religious texts emerge 'in the struggle' and contain both repressive and liberative elements that require critical examination.

Maluleke's (1997:4) contribution to African Christianity and prophetic theology examines the interaction between indigenous African religious sensibility and Christian traditions, resulting in distinctive forms of prophetic testimony. His analysis indicates that African Christianity, encompassing its Pentecostal variants, possesses tools for confronting modern issues while maintaining a focus on indigenous wisdom and communal values.

The political dimensions of prophecy

Brueggemann's (2001) analysis is particularly beneficial for understanding the political onto-poesis of prophecy. This analysis confirms that authentic prophecy must consistently engage with matters of power, justice and social construction (Brueggemann 2001). Even when prophecies appear to pertain to personal spiritual challenges, they often possess concealed political implications, as these revelations influence believers' awareness of dignity, agency and their connection to societal structures (Boesak 2005).

However, the study also demonstrates significant contradictions between ideals and actual practices in prophetic social critique among numerous different Pentecostal communities (Kgatle 2017). The individualism that defines and personalises prophecy disrupts the equilibrium in addressing structural injustice (Gifford 2004). This necessitates a theological education that emphasises the restoration of the biblical prophetic tradition's emphasis on social justice with personal piety.

The South African context presents both opportunities and risks for prophetic engagement. The prophetic history of the church's engagement in the fight against apartheid exemplifies the effectiveness of prophetic Christianity in confronting oppressive systems (De Gruchy 1995). In the post-apartheid era, reactions to modern societal regressions have varied; some church groups remain prophetic in their endeavours, while others descend into privatised spirituality or sycophantic backing of political authority (De Gruchy 2007).

Contemporary Pentecostal prophecy: Debates and challenges

Recent investigations on Pentecostal prophecy reveal significant levels of tension and conflict (Salifu Yendork et al. 2020:249). Certain researchers have emphasised remarkable manifestations and prophetic communications, documenting examples of prophets foretelling particular future occurrences (Youvan 2025). Others examine the pastoral and communal impacts of prophetic declarations as avenues for prophecy to facilitate spiritual formation, healing and community development (Pondani 2019).

Critical perspectives have expressed scepticism over the possible exploitation of prophetic authority for monetary profit, political leverage or the reinforcement of patriarchal power dynamics (Kgatle 2021). The rise of 'prophets' who issue unfulfilled declarations and manipulate congregants has prompted demands for more accountability and theological discernment (Resane 2017). These objections underscore the necessity of examining the functioning of prophetic activities within Pentecostalism and assessing their alignment with the biblical conception of authentic prophecy.

Many scholars have recognised the advantageous impacts of prophecy on Pentecostal spirituality, including the democratisation of religious authority and the empowerment of marginalised voices, as well as the provision of direct spiritual guidance essential for navigating the complexities of daily life. The issue is to formulate theologies that honour these contributions while maintaining critical vigilance against distortions and misuse (eds. Cannon & Smith 2019).

Methods

This study utilises a literary framework that integrates theological examination with ethnographic insights and text-based analysis, adopting an interpretive methodology (Gruca-Macaulay 2016). The research design recognises that prophetic practices are intricate, multi-faceted occurrences that require diverse interpretations.

This study is literary and theological, not empirical, and hence does not utilise primary data from human participants, eliminating the need for ethical approval. The corpus consists of publicly accessible sermons and prophetic declarations obtained from official church websites, broadcast archives, published sermon compilations and authenticated YouTube channels of recognised Pentecostal organisations. The selection of sermons employed a purposive sampling technique aimed at obtaining representative prophetic discourse throughout modern South African Pentecostalism, focusing on differences in denominational streams, preaching styles and thematic emphases.

The corpus covers the period from 2018 to 2025, during which neo-Pentecostal prophetic practices achieved notable public prominence in South Africa, attracting substantial academic and media interest. The study geographically examines Pentecostal churches and ministries in South Africa, with comparative reference to broader sub-Saharan African Pentecostal contexts where relevant analytical topics arise.

The sample represents three branches of South African Pentecostalism: (1) classical Pentecostal denominations, including the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of South Africa and the Assemblies of God; (2) charismatic ministries functioning within and beyond traditional Protestant denominations and (3) neo-Pentecostal and self-proclaimed prophetic ministries that have emerged since 2000. A purposive sample of around 20 sermons and prophetic utterances was studied, a corpus size deemed adequate to achieve analytical saturation within a qualitative, interpretive research framework.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) sermons or prophetic declarations by self-identified Pentecostal or charismatic preachers; (2) publicly accessible material without authentication or subscription fees; (3) content in English or accompanied by a credible English translation and (4) discourse explicitly characterised as prophetic or significantly addressing prophetic themes. Materials were excluded if: (1) the source of the recording could not be reliably verified; (2) the content was extensively edited or excerpted in a manner that obscured the rhetorical structure of the original statement or (3) the material had been officially retracted or disavowed by the speaker.

The discourse analysis was conducted in five sequential analytical stages. Firstly, transcripts were authenticated by comparing them with the original audio or video recordings to guarantee textual precision. Secondly, a preliminary close reading was performed to discern reoccurring themes, biblical references and rhetorical tendencies in each sermon. Thirdly, parts were analysed for rhetorical techniques (e.g. the formulaic 'Thus says the Lord'), performative characteristics, scriptural intertextuality and allusions to social, economic or political contexts. The coded parts were categorised thematically in accordance with the study's analytical framework: (1) pastoral edification, (2) biblical application, (3) societal critique and (4) visionary change. The thematic findings were assessed theologically in relation to Brueggemann's (2001) concept of prophetic imagination and the South African prophetic tradition (Boesak 2005; Maluleke 1997) to determine the degree to which the discourses served as Spirit-inspired preaching and teaching with socio-political significance, rather than as predictive divination.

Theological discourse analysis

This study's theological dimension encompasses biblical intertextual conversation, the history of theology and contemporary theological perspectives on prophecy (Brueggemann 2001; Warrington 2008). This article examines the Pentecostal community's perspective on and interpretation of prophecy in relation to broader Christian traditions. Particular attention is focused on the theology that underpins prophetic discourse and its reception within the worshipping congregation.

Sermon and prophetic utterance analysis

Furthermore, a significant component of this study involved the meticulous analysis of transcripts from recorded sermons and prophetic utterances across various Pentecostal churches. Critical discourse examination of the writings, encompassing content and rhetoric, religious themes and social consequences (Ashraf 2026). The examination emphasised the degree to which prophetic communications address contemporary events, utilise biblical texts for specific circumstances and convey hope or visions pertaining to individual and societal development (Brueggemann 2001).

The electronic text analysis employed discourse-analytical methods to discern patterns in prophetic speech acts, encompassing prevalent topics, linguistic characteristics and performative elements. This viewpoint illustrated that prophecy serves as a rhetorical act that imparts meaning, aids in identity development and incites action among Pentecostals.

Analytical framework

The analysis employs Brueggemann's (2001) concept of 'prophetic imagination' as a primary theoretical framework, examining how modern Pentecostal prophecy functions to both critique and invigorate. The study primarily utilises South African prophetic theology (Boesak 2020; Maluleke 1997) to situate Pentecostal practices within the broader context of Christianity's engagement with social justice and political reform, as well as its contribution to post-apartheid nation-building.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Review findings

An in-depth examination of the sermons and prophetic declarations studied in this study indicates that prophecy can be understood as a tripartite communicative practice directed towards pastoral, rhetorical and political objectives (Jarrett 2024). Beyond mere prediction, prophecy functions as spiritual exhortation and instruction that addresses current issues while guiding collective vision towards transformed futures.

Prophecy as pastoral edification

In contemporary Pentecostal settings, the primary function of prophecy is pastoral edification (Nel 2018:1). Prophetic speech typically includes guidance, solace, direction and encouragement for individuals or believers confronting life situations (Jarrett 2024:24). The leaders often commence their messages with phrases such as 'Thus says the Lord …'; however, their content focuses on …", however, their content focuses on the application

of biblical teachings in contemporary society rather than predicting specific future occurrences.

For example, one can prophesy to an unemployed individual, affirming God's promise to meet their needs while encouraging them to remain steadfast and industrious in their job search. These prophecies function as divinely authorised pastoral support, strengthening individuals' faith in God's providence and their resilience during hardships (Magezi & Tafirei 2026:1). In prophetic discourse, the formic approach is employed to impart seriousness and immediacy to words that may otherwise be regarded as impersonal religious platitudes (Hamadamin 2025). The domestication of the prophetic may also entail resolving spiritual conditions or issues within God's people (Ullah 2024). Prophets may assert that God addresses issues of fear, unforgiveness or spiritual apathy, urging Christians to introspect and rectify their conduct. These prophetic assessments provide frameworks for understanding spiritual challenges, along with aspirations for healing and development.

Prophecy as scriptural application

There exists a creative interaction with the prophetic word as it pertains to contemporary reality, in much of what is presented as prophecy (Joseph 2020). Prophets employ scriptural narratives, promises and principles to shape their interactions with specific individuals or communities (Ramantswana 2018:4). This indicates that a sophisticated theological interpretation is employed, though not consistently in scholarly terminology.

A prophet may illustrate this by invoking the story of Job to address suffering, the exodus narrative to depict liberation from oppression or Paul's discourse on spiritual gifts to motivate individuals engaged in the church to acknowledge and utilise their abilities in service (Fee 2023). These prophetic applications provide contextualised preaching that allows the ancient texts to articulate their relevance in modern circumstances. The discourse of prophetic scripture application is based on its asserted validity (Robinson 2025). Rather than perceiving texts through human comprehension, prophecy envisions biblical application as God's communication to the community.

Prophecy as social critique

While personal enrichment is certainly prevalent in contemporary Pentecostal prophecy, significant instances of social critique and criticism emerge, particularly impacted by the South African tradition of prophetic theology (Maluleke 2005). These prophetic oracles address systemic injustice, political corruption, economic exploitation and social disorder (Brueggemann 2001).

A prophetic denunciation of societal inequalities frequently uses biblical language and images to articulate contemporary inequities (Woody 2019:9). They get information to discuss modern manifestations of these problems in relation to biblical denunciations of corrupt judges, exploitative merchants and tyrannical kings (Am 5:11–12; Is 1:23). For example, prophets may denounce leaders who exploit their positions for personal gain while their constituents suffer in poverty or criticise church communities that remain mute in the presence of injustice (Boesak 2016:93).

The corpus comprises statements in which prophets appear to confront political injustices, hold governmental authorities accountable, denounce misconduct and invoke divine judgement (Fortein 2025:1). These forecasts possess a political dimension that is uncommon in prophetic discourse, but they are less frequent than the pastoral application of prophecy. The disparate critique prompts enquiries into the factors that facilitate or obstruct social prophetic activity (Maluleke 2010).

Prophecy as vision for transformation

In this context, Brueggemann (2001) asserts that authentic prophecy not only condemns present injustices but also galvanises communities towards alternative futures. Modern Pentecostal prophecy frequently articulates visions of a future that is substantially transformed, characterised by healing, restoration, justice and flourishing (Brueggemann 2018). These visions represent a moral imagination that expands the hopes and aspirations of societies.

Transformative visions are complex and varied. On a personal level, prophetic utterances denote breakthrough and healing from trauma, emancipation from detrimental thought and behavioural patterns and the disclosure of purpose (Rasheed 2025:2242). At the communal level, prophecy anticipates churches rejuvenated with attributes such as unity, generosity and productivity (Jarrett 2024:34). At the societal level, prophetic imagination refers to the conceptualisation of communities characterised by justice, healing and respect for all (Brueggemann 2001).

The potency of these prophetic visions lies in their capacity to inspire hope and incite action. By claiming that transformation is both desirable and divinely ordained, prophecy acts as a remedy for fatalism and despair. This invigorating effect is especially relevant in contexts of pervasive social disaster, where cynicism and resignation can incapacitate a population.

Performative and communal dimensions

Prophecy functions as more than a simple transmission of information; it is performative discourse that constructs and reconstructs social reality (Boychenko et al. 2019:26). The Lord's pronouncement fulfils four simultaneous functions: (1) it affirms divine authority, (2) urges contemporary listeners to respond (including the option to reject), (3) shapes their identity in connection to the word and (4) establishes them as the community addressed by God (Chan 2016).

The public reception of prophecy is at least as significant as its proclamation (Obeng 2023:36). Congregational responses, including 'Amen', vocal affirmations and physical gestures,

signify concurrence with prophetic utterances and pledges. These responses transform prophecy from a monologue into a dialogue between the speaker and the listener, fostering mutual comprehension and collective accountability. The communal is further individualised as the activity creates a feedback loop between persons and objects, thereby integrating them into a system.

The embodied and emotional dimensions of prophetic performance amplify its impact (Pak 2018). The Prophet may deliver sermons theatrically, showcasing vocal variation, gestures and diverse physical movements. The intense expressiveness of this rhetorical style conveys urgency and authority; it asserts that this is not only a human perspective but a heavenly mandate, a divine message that warrants our attention.

Challenges

The interpretive study reveals several theological and ethical difficulties evident in modern Pentecostal prophetic practice. A primary issue evident in the sermons and broader studies is the personalising of prophecy, which seems to favour individual interests over systemic and structural issues (Kgatle 2017). This stance potentially trivialises prophecy as a personal spiritual sentiment detached from public theological dialogue.

A further concern is the political appropriation of prophecy, when predictions are utilised to validate specific political agendas or figures, rather than adopting a critical perspective towards all temporal authorities (Resane 2017). When prophets act as propagandists for a political group or individual, they contravene the biblical tradition of prophecy, which mandates that all human authority be subjected to divine justice (Brueggemann 2001).

When examined alongside the relevant secondary literature, the corpus suggests that failed predictions or deceptive prophetic statements can have detrimental impacts on both individuals and society (Asamoah-Gyadu 2020). These occurrences indicate, through this interpretive lens, the necessity for theological discernment, accountability frameworks and education concerning authentic and spurious predictions. The lack of these safeguards, the investigation indicates, renders the community vulnerable to spiritual exploitation (Kgatle 2017).

Additionally, several prophetic activities had characteristics of the prosperity gospel, which associated divine favour with financial wealth and a life of ease (Bowler 2018). This type of theological misinterpretation undermines the capacity of prophecy for genuine social critique and may reinforce rather than challenge unjust economic systems. This distortion must be avoided by authentic prophetic imagination to prevent the biblical emphasis on justice, compassion and solidarity with the marginalised from being undermined (Brueggemann 2001).

Discussion

Reconceptualising Pentecostal prophecy

The study advocates for a redefinition of Pentecostal prophecy as divinely inspired communication that fulfils several theological and social functions (Cartledge 2012). Rather than limiting prophecy to mere prediction, we can perceive it as Spirit-infused discourse that strengthens communities, elucidates biblical wisdom for contemporary relevance, denounces injustice and cultivates moral imagination for transformation (Brueggemann 2001).

This reconceptualisation honours the genuine spiritual experiences of Pentecostal worship while also critically examining the nature of the prophetic work being undertaken. It acknowledges that theophanies constitute genuine divine communication for believers while also recognising the human, cultural and political aspects of prophetic discourse.

Furthermore, viewing prophecy as motivational preaching and guidance rather than foretelling alleviates certain theological challenges. This explains why numerous prophecies lack specificity about historical events and why they emphasise contemporary spiritual realities rather than deterministic forecasts (Warrington 2008). This perspective establishes a foundation for evaluating prophetic discourse based not on the 'precision of prophecies' but on their theological substance, ethical implications and practical outcomes (Cartledge 2012).

Implications and recommendations

Theological implications

The ramifications of these findings are significant for theological discourse on spiritual gifts, the divine word and the church's purpose (Warrington 2008). Consequently, if, as is likely, prophecy and prophets are individuals who convey messages in a personalised manner not because of supernatural abilities, but because preaching and teaching effectively communicate God's voice to His followers, then the gift of prophecy may be more accessible than commonly perceived. It can be argued that many believers who apply scriptural wisdom to contemporary issues and articulate visions for renewal with conviction possess the prophetic gift, even if they do not claim to be prophets (Damtew 2023).

This indicates that prophetic insight is based on theological and ethical substance rather than on ostentatious displays (Warrington 2008). The criterion for genuine prophecy lies not in its theatrical presentation or the accuracy of its predictions, but in its adherence to biblical standards and its influence on life, encompassing justice, love and loyalty to God (1 Jn 4:1; Brueggemann 2001).

Furthermore, recognising the political aspect of prophecy necessitates a critical examination of efforts to separate the spiritual from the social parts of the Christian religion (Brueggemann 2001). If prophecy pertains to power, justice and social existence, authentic Christianity cannot be confined to mere personal piety (Boesak 2005). The prophetic

essence of a faith must engage in the public sphere; it should vocally oppose institutionalised injustice and advocate for social reform.

Practical implications for Pentecostal communities

This research presents possible practical ramifications for Pentecostal communities. Firstly, churches must cultivate theological literacy concerning prophecy, instructing individuals on both the scriptural prophetic tradition and the contemporary functioning of such prophecies.

Secondly, Pentecostal communities necessitate accountability frameworks that assess prophetic messages from theological and ethical perspectives (Nel 2018). By honouring the essence of spontaneity and immediacy in prophetic declarations, churches can establish frameworks for collective discernment that assess whether a prophet's message aligns with scriptural doctrine, promotes communal welfare or justice initiatives and manifests the fruits of love (exemplified by kindness, goodness and faithfulness) and peace.

Thirdly, Pentecostal congregations must deliberately cultivate the social justice aspects of prophecy (Boesak 2005; Brueggemann 2001). Pentecostal congregations must deliberately cultivate the social justice aspects of prophecy (Boesak 2005; Brueggemann 2001). This encompasses recovering the biblical prophets' advocacy for the marginalised, developing theological frameworks that confront systemic oppression and establishing platforms where prophetic voices would provoke rather than pacify. Examining the South African prophetic tradition can facilitate contemporary Pentecostal congregations' interaction with its profound prophetic heritage.

Fourthly, leaders ought to embody prophetic engagement that integrates pastoral care with social critique, personal challenge with corporate vision and spiritual discipline with political awareness. Thus, community leaders can cultivate more resilient communities with an enriched prophetic imagination that motivates people to discover innovative solutions to pressing local and global issues.

Limitations and future research

This research recognises multiple limitations. The statistics were gathered in a South African Pentecostal context and may not be relevant to other Pentecostal communities in other cultural and political environments. Secondly, although the research is literary and refrains from making statistical assertions regarding the general functioning of prophecy within the broader Pentecostal movement, this facet offers extensive insights into a relatively underexplored phenomenon.

Future research should explore prophetic discourse across diverse cultural contexts to facilitate comparative analysis and understand how local variables influence this style of expression. Longitudinal research can elucidate the evolution of prophetic practices and their adaptation to emerging social and political situations. Furthermore, research focusing on female prophets and gendered representations of prophetic authority would yield valuable insights for comprehending contemporary Pentecostal prophecy.

Conclusion

This article contends that modern Pentecostal prophecy is more accurately interpreted as Spirit-inspired preaching and teaching, rather than as predictive divination, with tangible socio-political implications. This study conducts a literary and theological analysis of publicly accessible sermons and prophetic statements from South African Pentecostalism between 2018 and 2025, contextualised by Walter Brueggemann's concept of prophetic imagination in conjunction with the South African prophetic theological tradition represented by Boesak, Mosala and Maluleke. It aims to reclaim prophecy as a public act of truth-telling that strengthens congregations while challenging ideologies that sustain injustice.

The interpretive analysis indicates that prophetic practice in this context functions concurrently as pastoral edification, scriptural application, social critique and a vision for transformation, upheld by the performative and communal nature of prophetic discourse that addresses, constitutes and mobilises the worshipping community into responsive action. Thus interpreted, prophecy holds theological significance primarily through its rhetorical and ethical contributions, rather than its predictive capabilities, and the South African prophetic tradition developed during the apartheid struggle provides a particularly valuable framework for analysing these practices within a politically engaged context.

The analysis reveals significant distortions within the modern Pentecostal prophetic domain: The privatisation of prophecy into therapeutic self-reference, its instrumentalisation for partisan political purposes and its alignment with prosperity gospel theologies that endorse rather than challenge unjust economic systems. These misunderstandings undermine the prophetic vocation and, in certain instances, inflict tangible harm on congregations. Addressing these issues necessitates ongoing theological education, communal processes of discernment and accountability and a conscious critical detachment from secular authority, ensuring that prophetic discourse serves the marginalised rather than the prophet's benefactors.

The study's contribution is thus both reconstructive and constructive. Integrating Brueggemann's prophetic imagination with South African prophetic theology provides an analytical framework that transcends the predictive-teleological paradigm and the predominant diagnostic critique of prophetic abuse, situating it within the public sphere of justice, power and the common good. As Pentecostalism expands globally, especially in the Global South, reclaiming this wider prophetic mission can empower congregations to engage authentically with the spiritual, social and political dynamics of their communities,

embodying the exhortation of Amos 5:24 for justice to flow like waters and righteousness like an unceasing stream.

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CRediT authorship contribution

Ndidzulafhi Mudau: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing. Rendani Tshifhumulo: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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