

The Prophetic Fallacy: A Modern-Day Fallacy

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Abstract

Prophetic fallacy, a modern-day fallacy, is born of a misconstrued understanding of biblical prophecy; faulty reasoning and self-gratification have taken over the theological landscape in Africa today. Modern-day tele-preachers seem to be suffering from an Alternative Personality. The purpose of this article prophetic fallacy: a modern-day fallacy is to bring out the malady deployment of prophecy by the Prophetic movement clergy in Africa. Prophetic fallacy, like other fallacies in theology, considers three meanings of mistaken belief, especially one based on unsound arguments, a failure in reasoning which renders an argument invalid and faulty reasoning by the Prophet (Papa). Papa-ism has taken over the pulpit in Africa. This article is a literature review and is written within the historical-contextual methodology. The findings indicate that the long-lost African Magicians have become Prophetic Preachers.

Keywords: Prophet, Papa, Prophetic Fallacy, Fallacies, Spiritual Capture.

Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ has been invaded by various preachers and prophets who use different titles. Their ordination is as questionable as their work. They come wearing titles that are out of this world, such as Generals, Oracles, and Majors and so on. Their mission appears Christian, as they refer to their worship places as shrines, Temples, and Churches of the Lord God. Commonly, many of them have no training in any form of theology yet claim to understand it. What they forget, as though deliberate, is that all can preach, but not all can accurately interpret the Holy Scriptures. Some among them hardly preach the word of God, thereby giving rise to what is known as the Prophetic Fallacy [1]. The linkage to the prophetic fallacy is that most perpetrators have replaced African magicians with seemingly Bible-based prophecies about Elijah and Elisha of the 8th century BC. Unlike modern-day prophets, Elijah and Elisha (with very few biblical-based exceptions) employ this fallacy by issuing threats to their followers. They always conclude their prophecies with the formula "The Lord has spoken." They equally acquire consent from the unsuspecting congregants by saying, "Can I prophesy?" while receiving responses of prophecy, saying, "Speak it out, Papa" Like the times of the Old Testament prophecy endorsement slogan "Thus says the Lord God" (c.f Ezekiel 20:1-49, 2 Kings 1:1-18) and has been replaced with "Can I prophesy" with responses "Speak it out Papa".

However, Edwin K. P. Chong (2003:1) was the first to describe logical fallacies through examples, in which eleven logical fallacies and their use in attacking the Bible and its claims are discussed. Equally, that prophetic fallacy which has not been discussed unless otherwise in theology, must be understood, described and interpreted by way of examples, such as the Preacher uses the name of God to speak what is on his mind without returning honour and significance of the prophecy to God [2]. How does one explain the mentioning of cell phone numbers, car license plate numbers, underwear, even streets and blankets as prophecy? It is on this basis that I seek to bring out the significance of this study in theology.

Prophetic Fallacy

An online dictionary offers that Prophetic Fallacy is when a prophecy, usually one in a visual form, is misinterpreted due to it either lacking some crucial piece of information or being mixed with blatantly false information. In this paper, however, the term "prophetic fallacy" refers to the observation that most televangelists, commonly known by their titles, lack knowledge of what constitutes prophecy. The term "by reference" denotes prophecy delivered in the name of God, conveyed through mystical pronouncement to the thirsty congregation. It thrives on people who would want their problems dealt with by God, yet run away from the creation narrative curse to Adam [3, 4]. The terms "Prophet" and "Papa" will be used interchangeably, as commonly used

in modern evangelical televangelism. Mookgo Solomon Kgatle (2002), in his article "Go deeper papa, prophesy, do something": The popularity and commercialisation of prophetic deliverance in African Pentecostalism", referred to the Prophetic Preacher as Papa. Could it be true that most of these Tele-preachers in Africa suffer from personality disorders? How can one explain their appetite for firm and money? Have they just transformed from being magicians? What we need to understand is that the Alternative Personality, or Alternative character, that controls them seems evident in the ministerial lives of the Papas. Thus, theology would benefit from further research on the prophetic fallacy.

Ana Hernandez et al. (2009: 176) hold that behaviour denotes the negative pole of the NEO's Responsibility dimension in the Big-5 model. Hernandez and others think that it is made up of manipulation and disinhibition conduct, whereas it is associated with antisocial disorders and secondarily with paranoid and narcissistic ones [5]. Whereas, Chong (2003:1) holds that the source of the fallacy is that the "either-or" form of the central premise opens up a possibility that both the disjuncts ("think for yourself" and "accept Biblical creation") are true. Chong's "either-or" argument can also be understood, in the prophetic fallacy, as a wishy-washy announcement of God's word. The church, when viewing behavioural disorders, should be wary of the manipulative and persuasive tendencies that come with this behaviour. Is it not true that the prophetic fallacy is accompanied by persuasiveness and manipulative behaviour among televangelists (Papas)? Tim Bogg and Peter R. Finn (2010) define behavioural disinhibition as a pattern of antisocial, impulsive, norm-violating, sensation-seeking, and externalising tendencies and problems that is a primary psychological substrate of several leading behavioural contributors to morality.

The very fact that this definition contains a relationship between manipulation and disinhibition makes the character of Papas interesting. Evidently, they exhibit a strong psychological appetite for conduct that undermines moral character and ethical norms [6]. Are we just accusing these Papas of a personality disorder, or that they are driven by other factors which an empirical study must ascertain? It should be noted that most of these prophets associated with this fallacy derive their authority primarily from their fathers in Nigeria and Ghana. In their view, Kgatle, Mookgo Solomon & Kgatle, Mookgo. (2022: 3) hold that this type of movement/church has become popular in the last few years in South Africa, but has footprints in other regions in Africa, specifically West Africa. More interestingly, those who practice this fallacy adopt new stage names, most likely to be seen and considered anointed.

What is a Fallacy?

A fallacy can be understood from three points of view: that a fallacy is a mistaken belief, especially one based on unsound arguments, a failure in reasoning which renders an argument invalid and lastly, faulty reasoning. The challenge posed by fallacies is the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the word and will of God. For example, Violet Joan Berry (2019: 1) holds that word meanings change over time, and the root fallacy should be avoided. Berry V.J continues saying that, regarding Hebrew and Greek terms, efforts must be made to determine what a word meant at the time it was written. Berry V.J. further notes that, in English-language Bibles, the classic Hebrew use of El Shadd-

ai in Genesis 35:11 (NIV) is rendered as "God Almighty." The root word, Shadad, means destroyer or to overpower. However, in Genesis 28:3 and 49:25, the word denotes association with God as a provider. Etymological fallacies assume that the word's meaning and interpretation are true. A good example is the usage of the word Virgin in Matthew 1: 23; Luke 1:27, where Mary, the mother of Jesus, is said to have been a virgin to marry Joseph. The word virgin is *almah* (הַמַּלְּטָה, plural: *alamot* תְּהַמַּלְּטוֹת), whereas in Isaiah 7: 14 it means miss, girl and nymph or of the bearing age. All these words do singularly mean virgin in Hebrew, hence Mary befit the title virgin, the unmarried. The other word, which is closely linked with virgin, is *betulah*, which means maiden in English. However, both *Almah* and *Betulah* denote a young girl.

In my honours degree program, I referred to the misguided, untruthful, and unreliable prophecies as a Prophetic Fallacy. Often, the will and nature of God are at stake in the Prophetic Fallacy. The prophetic fallacy falls short of both God's logos and rhema. This fallacy often leads to overlooking the historical and contextual nature of the written word of God. A good example is Mark 16:17-18, where the literal is considered forgetting the readership of the Holy Spirit [7]. In this fallacy, the followers are held captive in the word of prophecy, denying the substance of the word. Scripture states that in the last days many will come in my name, doing miracles; yet on that day I will say, "I never knew you." The use of prophecy is neither coincidental nor calculated. What is genuine may be the lack of a correct understanding of scripture. This fallacy also tends to dwell on semantics, verbs, and tense usage. An argument can also be drawn from a semantic interpretation, while overlooking the historical context and the writer's intent. A false authority in scripture is often invoked as a means of defence. To be challenged would indicate a lack of understanding not only of the leadership of the Holy Spirit but also of respect for the anointed one of God.

Long-lost African Magicians

Growing up as a young man in the mid-80s, I recall when magicians often flooded our schools. These magicians came to entertain us, making money and getting from unsuspecting pupils into sleep, sleepwalking, biscuits out of paper and so forth. It was nice to watch. But suddenly this magic movement came to an end. Does it mean these magicians suddenly became born again and joined Churches? Where did they go? This section examines these magicians in greater depth, drawing on available information. I suspect that they entered the Church while carrying their magic trends. We must account for the fact that Africans and African religion emerge from shrines. The need for the shrines was generally to hear from the gods and to receive from them. Those who served at the shrines were not only great but also revered as spiritual or wise men (see Zacchaeus Zulu, 2025: 8). Augustine Deke (2015: 11) suggested that Africans enjoyed prophecy. As such, he added that any voice that confirms their misery or good fortunes is respected [8].

Surprisingly, Banda (2022) reported that contemporary African Prophets incorporate African Traditional Religion (ATR) and magical practices. Pelly, Jerry, and Daniel Orogun (2024: 95) noted that traditional healers and neo-Pentecostals share a common appeal to combat evil forces. They later posit that, likewise, Nigerians celebrate prophets, as they do traditional spiritualists, and Zimbabweans adore prophets as they do their convention-

al spiritual nangas (native doctors). This argument rests on the understanding of a relationship that has come to exist between the Prophets and, in this case, witch doctors. This interesting relation demonstrates the desperation with which the practitioners of prophecy have come to embrace. Accusations and counter-accusations among themselves have taken shape, as they offer superior power over the other, as though it were self-obtained rather than a gift from God. Interesting examples are situations in which these gifts are held under the family name, as if they were assets for inheritance. Hence, this gift not only originates in West Africa but can also be inherited by a wife from a parent or husband.

Collium Banda (2022) identifies common trends among these prophets, who present themselves as superior to the biblical prophets. Banda states that they present themselves as superior to biblical prophets and even claim to possess a new and superior revelation of God than that in the Bible. Banda (2022) distinguishes these Prophets by their ministerial titles, such as Major One, Sir, Ambassador, Seer, and so forth. Banda finds among some those who refer to themselves as Forensic prophets offering forensic information and healing to their congregants. They build synagogues rather than churches; they have shrines and altars from which healing and prophecy are the business of the day. A salvific message is not available in such movements [9]. They thrive on poor women, men seeking firm and those who need a magical breakthrough.

Banda (2022) argues that these papas offer anointed objects to their followers to overcome spiritual powerlessness, poverty, and other challenges. Through these objects, their followers are subjected to cultic instructions to ensure the objects function properly. They are also not free, as they are sold at an exorbitant price in U.S. dollars. This is purely commercial rather than Christian. Jesus said, "Freely you have been given; freely you must give." As with African shrines, they offer healing objects for sale. Isn't it interesting that these trends have become prominent after the demise of the magic movement in most parts of Africa? Because of a lack of theological grounding, the ultimate weakness of these prophets has been their reliance on the prophetic fallacy. They do not see value in formal theological training as they argue against it. They are spirit-led as they claim.

Masiwa Ragies Gunda and Francis Machingura (2013: 16) present substantial evidence from one of them: a Zimbabwean Prophet who claims to help people lose weight through prayer and to help them conceive and give birth to a bouncing baby within days. Such fantasy seems so real to these prophets that they share it with their followers as gospel truth. Since their followers are spiritually captured, they cannot refuse the instructions from the mighty voice of the man of God. Gunda and Machingura (2013: 16) suggest that most Zimbabweans experience spiritual capture due to the substantial material wealth these prophets have acquired. Due to extreme poverty levels in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is very easy for people to believe in a person who just yesterday was poor. These prophets who draw large crowds through miracles and the prosperity gospel, which seem to offer solutions to poverty, in this case, without hard work. The

consistency with which this fallacy has been deployed in Africa is alarming. Systematic theology must seriously join the school of thought that examines this fallacy and shapes the narrative [10].

Conclusion

We have observed that, in modern times, the prophetic fallacy is consistent with the Tele-Preachers. They present themselves as the solution not only to the spiritual forces but also to the poverty that engulfs most citizens in Sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, we have noticed that those who consistently practice this fallacy have no regard for the logos and rhema of God. These Tele-Preachers, or Papas, derive their authority from their spiritual fathers from Nigeria and Ghana. Surprisingly, most practitioners of this fallacy are in Africa. They hold people captive by deploying threats to the congregants. I recommend that theology conduct an empirical study of prophetic fallacy to ensure a conclusive result.

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