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Problematising Prophetic Pentecostal Christianity and Sustainable Development

During the 1980s and 1990s, we saw Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity's rise that focused on the individual, hard work, investment in self-improvement, sober living, and the nuclear family. These churches have played an important role in Africa's sustainable development, offering skills training, care for the vulnerable, financial support and planning sessions, and encouraging prosperity through hard work. During the 2010s, in South Africa, we have seen the rise of Prophetic Pentecostal Christianity that preached a strong message of prosperity through faith in miracles and not hard work. These churches do not prioritize self-development, skills training, or helping people manage their finances. They demand that followers give all their money to the churches as a statement of faith that God will miraculously bless them with wealth. This often leads impoverished people into greater poverty and raises many challenges for sustainable development.

On the other hand, these churches offer people psychological and spiritual support in dealing with unemployment and poverty because they reframe poverty as the devil's work and claim to be able to vanquish the evil spiritual forces that hold people in poverty. They offer the hope of a miracle, especially the miracle of a job in a country where the unemployment rate is over 40%. In 2021 a new trend has been observed in some Prophetic Pentecostal Churches who are, reframing 2021 as the 'year of rest', a year of jubilee ordained by God in which people should not work. The unemployment caused by COVID is therefore positively framed as a divine gift. This paper examines this teaching critically analyzing whether these churches promote sustainable development or undermine the 2030 UN SDGs.

Keywords: Prophetic Pentecostal Christianity, prosperity through faith, unemployment, South Africa