

**Human rights abuse by some self-styled spiritual leaders within the “Nyaope religion”
in South Africa**

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by

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In memory of Tsekiso Phillip Thinane

Last but not least: With a heavy heart and with tearful eyes, I dedicate this work to our dear young brother Tsekiso, who after our short but memorable meeting on May 24th, 2021 in the Universitas Hospital in Bloemfontein, suddenly passed away the following day on 25th May. My life has never been the same since he left us, it has been extremely difficult to deal with and to pay the necessary attention to the details. However, God was by my side to make sure I would complete this study to graduation. I would like to say the following to my dear brother: I know that you watch over us as our dear guardian angel, please rest well and know that we will always remember you. We all sense your absence, but at the same time we are comforted by the knowledge that one day we will see you again. *Favourite song - Minister GUC - All That Matters*

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I hereby confirm that I have proofread and edited the following thesis, including the bibliography.

Title of thesis

Human rights abuse by some self-styled spiritual leaders within the
“Nyaope religion” in South Africa

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Abstract

From time to time, stories of self-styled spiritual leaders make headlines in South Africa. Christians continue to witness strange, controversial and illegal activities by self-styled spiritual leaders done in the name of the Christian religion. Various people, including theologians, have expressed concern about the human rights abuse that ordinary South Africans suffer at the hands of such spiritual leaders. This study seeks to uncover incidents of human rights abuse that have happened in the name of Christianity. It endeavours to answer the research question “In what respect does the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders perpetrate human rights abuse?” A case study method will be utilised to investigate cases of human rights abuse. The hypothesis is posed that conduct by such churches or religious circles runs counter to the generally accepted basic principles of Christian missions and points to a completely new form of religion masked as Christianity. Trends in world Christianity is employed as the theoretical framework of the study to understand this form of religion. The South African localised drug Nyaope is used metaphorically to describe this new form of religion and juxtaposes it to a form of religion that Karl Marx described as the opium of the people. Consequently, the term “Nyaope religion” is coined to refer to this form of religion.

Keywords: religion, mission, *Missio Dei*, Christian mission, church mission, Pentecostal mission, theology, missiology, Christianity, Nyaope religion, opium religion, self-styled spiritual leaders

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Chapter 1: Background of the study

1.1 Introduction

First, this chapter introduces the topic of the study and provides the background context. It does this by explaining what the study is about and why the topic is important. Also, it predicts the outcome of the study by providing a preliminary solution to the problem (hypothesis). The chapter then presents the context of the study, justifies the need to conduct it and summarises what exactly the study aims to achieve. After that, the area of concern or research problem relevant to this study is outlined. Finally, the general direction is given by answering the why question that arises from the research problem and further explaining the origin of the final conclusions that the study hopes to reach. Accordingly, this indicates an existing knowledge gap leading to the discovery of new knowledge contained in this work. This chapter systematically outlines problems that need to be solved and questions that require answers that can be provided by this study. In addition, it explains in detail why this study is necessary to fill the research gaps within missiology, how it contributes to new knowledge and how it can benefit the study of theology in general and missiology in particular.

1.2 Background of the study

The reformulated *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996:7) (hereafter “the Constitution of South Africa”) recognises the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion. However, under the guise of freedom, there appear to be further violations and gross abuses of other human rights by some spiritual leaders in South Africa. Controversies by these self-styled spiritual leaders took center stage to demonstrate the emergence, nature and character of a new form of religion in South Africa. Any Christian affiliate in South Africa who pays attention to media reports of religious scandals will be aware of the frequent serious and appalling scandals committed and continued to be committed by the likes of such leaders in the name of the Christian religion.

In a series of recent headline-grabbing scandals, the people of South Africa, particularly in Christian communities, have witnessed strange, controversial and illegal activities, some of which were human rights abuses by pastors referred to in this study as “self-styled spiritual leaders”. These activities have included falsifying resurrection,¹ claiming to heal cancer and

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4PhwYa2s2I> – Alph Lukau claiming to resurrect a person from the dead.

HIV/AIDS by spraying people with insecticide,² making people eat grass³ and animals,⁴ drinking petrol,⁵ consuming excessive amounts of alcohol⁶ and many other acts in the name of Christianity.

The abuse and violation of human rights by these churches make the realization of religious freedom extremely problematic. Such abuses include, but are not limited to, coercing congregants to engage in sexual activities, drinking harmful substances, riding congregants as if they were horses, driving vehicles over congregants, preventing children from accessing education, coercing congregant to neglect their medical treatments and many other suppressive activities that undermine the human dignity of those congregants. One of the main observations of this study is that, directly or indirectly, the constitution can be held responsible for the religious crisis in South Africa in relation to religious freedom and that some churches are used as tools to make religion problematic and controversial. On the one hand, these religious violations received a lot of social and political attention, on the other hand they were mainly entertained or ignored by politicians, depending on whether they had vested interests in them or not. For this reason, South African politicians (who happen to be the policy makers) too often, even when these violations are gross human rights abuses, seem uninterested in developing policies to respond to the abuses of religion in South Africa.

The argument of this study is that the narrow scope of the debate on whether or not religion should be regulated in South Africa, as proposed by the Commission on Religious and Linguistic Rights (CRL), misses the important feature of the larger religious picture in relation to the composition of a new form of religion, the Nyaope religion, which is in contradiction to Christianity. Furthermore, this study argues that a dangerous approach to religion, as portrayed by self-styled spiritual leaders, hinders the very goal of religion, contradicts the missionary goals of the church, and further undermines democratic legitimacy, particularly with regard to religious freedom, as cherished in the Constitution of South Africa.

In addition, this study argues that self-styled spiritual leaders have naturally capitalised on the ambiguous religious direction of the Constitution of South Africa with regard to what is meant by “freedom of religion” and the manner in which confessional religion has been wiped from

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tc_K3j8sTVo – Rabalago Lethebo spraying congregants with insecticide.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxsudMEdg7E> – Lesego Daniel making people eat grass.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBf7knVg0uE> – Penuel Mnguni making people eat animals.

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gt0xae8kbnY> – Lesego Daniel making people drink petrol.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfE99404nkA> – Tsietsi Makiti making people consume alcohol.

the public sphere. It is this ambiguous religious direction that has ultimately made space for a new form of religion, to be referred to in this study as the “Nyaope religion” that has infiltrated South Africa. The content of this study will also show how religious or Christian traditional designations such as pope, prophet and apostle have been misplaced and misused by the self-styled spiritual leaders of the Nyaope religion. This, in a long run, reinforces the argument that the type of religion practised by these self-styled spiritual leaders (and other religious leaders) is contrary to the traditional Christian religion and church mission.

1.3 Problem statement

Illegal conduct in the name of religion has sparked immediate but short-lived protests in South Africa. Abuse such as this constitutes the abuse of human rights. Some self-styled spiritual leaders and religious leaders use the name of Christianity to satisfy their financial greed, while in the same process, they are violating human rights that should be enjoyed by ordinary South Africans. Even though these practices are done in the name of Christianity, the study poses the following question: In what precise manner does the conduct of some self-styled spiritual leaders constitute human rights abuse? Moreover, are churches led by these self-styled spiritual leaders in line with or contrary to the generally perceived basic principles underscored by the understanding of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission? What form of Christianity are these prophets promoting, and is it a true or false form of Christianity? Once clarified, this form of Christianity will be juxtaposed to the form of religion that Karl Marx saw as “the opium of the people” and matched to the South African localised drug nyaope, coining the term “Nyaope religion” to refer to this religion.

1.4 Hypothesis

Theologians such as Resane (2017), Kgatle (2017), Kgatle and Mofokeng (2019), Frahm-Arp (2016), Banda (2019) and many others have attempted to explain the nature and growth of the churches of self-styled spiritual leaders within the context of Christianity in South Africa. Abuse and violation of human rights by self-styled spiritual leaders within these churches have proven the realisation of religious freedom to be problematic. One of the most important observations that emerged from this study is that some churches or religious organisations are used to put an end to religious integrity. For this reason, even when such violations involve serious human rights abuse, South African politicians all too often fail to respond to this crisis in a manner that will bring about a lasting solution to the problem. Based on this analysis, the

study hypothesises that the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders of some religious organisations runs counter to *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission and advances a completely new form of religion behind the mask of Christianity. In this study, the researcher calls this new form of religion the “Nyaope religion”.

1.5 Research questions

The study sought to answer the following primary research question: “In what precise manner does the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion constitute human rights abuse?”

The following secondary research questions guided the study:

- How have self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion perpetrated human rights abuse in South Africa?
- Is the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion in line with or contrary to the Christian mission?
- What role did the Constitution of South Africa play, in the light of freedom of religion, in upsetting Christianity in South Africa and ultimately giving space to the Nyaope religion?
- What role did the 2003 *National Policy on Religion and Education* play in unsettling the efforts of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission in South Africa and laying the foundation for the Nyaope religion?
- What contribution did the “missionless” ecclesiology make to disrupting Christian identity in South Africa and bringing about the Nyaope religion?
- What form of religion is advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa?
- Juxtaposed to the opium religion, can the nyaope metaphor best describe the new form of religion advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders through their conduct?

1.6 Research objectives

The objectives of the research were:

- to clarify how self-styled spiritual leaders have committed human rights abuse in their conduct;
- to demonstrate that the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders is not in line with the Christian mission;

- to determine the role that the Constitution of South Africa played in assisting self-styled spiritual leaders in upsetting Christianity in South Africa;
- to understand the role that the 2003 *National Policy on Religion and Education* played in unsettling the efforts of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission in South Africa;
- to demonstrate that the missionless ecclesiology played a part in disrupting the Christian identity in South Africa;
- to understand the form of religion that is advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders through their conduct in South Africa; and
- to juxtapose the new form of religion advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders to the opium religion and ultimately coin the term “Nyaope religion”.

1.7 Relevance of the study

This study has a direct bearing on and connection with the question on religion that South Africans, the CRL and policymakers are struggling with. It uncovers new mechanisms to better understand the religious system and the missional goal of the church in South Africa. In its entirety, the study will be beneficial in multiple ways, as it can influence the thoughts of policymakers in addressing the crisis in terms of religion that is facing South Africa through the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders. Furthermore, the findings emanating from the study will inform the appropriate action that needs to be taken by policymakers with regard to self-styled spiritual leaders. The question of whether the church should be regulated is of the utmost importance to this study, and as such, it will assist the church in redefining its missional identity in South Africa. Accordingly, as applicable and current to the missional needs of the church, the study will help the church in South Africa to self-correct.

1.8 Theological discipline – missiology

“Mission” can broadly refer to intentional extroversion or concern with what is outside oneself or with others as the primary characteristic of the Christian mission. In other words, “mission” means being intentionally involved in changing and ensuring the societal health of God’s people. The broader idea of mission is carried through biblical reference to the term “sending” from the Greek verb *αποστέλλειν* or *apostellein*, which means “to send”. This idea is about how the immediate followers of Christ (the apostles) became those who were sent to spread His Good News to the fallen world, which will ultimately reunite God with His people (Robert,

2011:11). It is for this very reason that Migliore (2004:265) argues that the mission of the church is to participate in reuniting God with His fallen world through Jesus Christ. According to Corrie (2016:197), “Bosch’s starting point is a new familiar affirmation that the church cannot be the church without mission, so it is missionary by its very nature”. This is the reason why Bosch (1991) understands that the true church of Christ can only be missional by being on the road with the world while being different from the world.

“Missiology” can be broadly defined as the academic study of the Christian mission. In agreement to this definition, Mashau (2012) endorses Kritzinger’s (1987) definition of “missiology” as the study of mission and declares Kritzinger’s definition to be “simple and straightforward in terms of outlining how we should understand missiology as a theological discipline” (Kritzinger 1987:4; Mashau 2012:2).

The task of “being on the road with the world” in South Africa was made impossible due to what Mashau (2012) calls a “mission-less ecclesiology”. He outlines that “mission and missiology have been driven to the periphery of the life of both the church and theological institutions”, arguing strongly that for the longest time, mission has been regarded as an intruder, interloper and irrelevant (Mashau, 2012:1-2)

The crisis in terms of religion in South Africa can be attributed to not only self-styled spiritual leaders but also false Christian gatherings or false churches. The present study investigates acts of human rights abuse from a missiological perspective, while at the same time acknowledging existing gaps (identified by Mashau, 2012) that have contributed significantly towards the new form of religion.

1.9 Theoretical framework

This study employs trends in world Christianity as a lens through which the emergence of the Nyaope religion from within Christianity, or in the name of Christianity, is investigated. This framework will assist in gaining a deep understanding of how the Nyaope religion has developed within an existing religion (Christianity). While new developments, such as new prophetic churches, new Pentecostal churches and charismatic churches, have been formed from within Christianity, trends in world Christianity will show the Nyaope religion as a new development from within, and at the same time contrary to, Christianity and the Christian mission.

The framework of trends in world Christianity is employed in light of recent trending stories of religious movements hiding behind the mask of Christianity in South Africa. This study looks at the social circumstances and the context within which a new form of religion is mushrooming in South Africa. The slow emergence of this new form of religion has awakened and re-established scholarly consciousness of the role that Christian religion should play in South Africa. Reactions to recent religious scandals under the guise of Christianity have attracted scholarly attention to an unattractive side of religion in the new democratic South Africa. Accounts of violence and exploitations committed against the poorest and most vulnerable people of South Africa by self-styled spiritual leaders tend to dominate social media and have become a major topic of discussion among scholars of religion.

1.10 Methodology

1.10.1 Case study method

This study utilised the case study as its method of investigation. The case study method provides researchers with the ability to truly and in honesty examine an occurrence of behaviour within a specific context. While different scholars have argued the concept of case studies from differing viewpoints, the present study utilised this method in a way that would reflect the intended goal of the study. This form of investigation is meant to open the research platform for further examination of the observed religious situation. Furthermore, this method was beneficial in the study, as it assisted the researcher in seeking to provide an understanding of a real-life situation, while at the same time, it provided insight into the behaviour of self-styled spiritual leaders.

According to Miles (2015:309), the key reason for researchers engaging in scientific inquiry is to learn and give insight into how the world operates, to generate new ways of understanding the world and to find interconnection within the complexity of human actions and interactions. In addition, Miles (2015:313) points out that a “further, important aspect of the insight that case study provides to practice is the opportunity to explore accounts of practice differently given the diversity of everyday experiences, knowledge and activities of participants in places”. Zainal (2007:2) repeats Yin’s (1984) definition of “case study method” as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin 1984:16). Neale et al. (2006:3) describe a case study as a story about

something unique, special or interesting, which can be about individuals, organisations, processes, programmes, neighbourhoods, institutions and even events. The case study then gives the story behind the result by capturing what has happened to bring it about (Neale et al., 2006:3).

A case study method is used whenever there is an interesting or strange story to be investigated in order to complete the picture or make sense of what has really happened. Mainly, a case study is utilised whenever social behaviour is observed and investigated and an in-depth explanation thereof is given. For this reason, Zainal (2007) argues that the case study method “allows the exploration and understanding of complex issues” and can be regarded as “a robust research method, particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required”. Referring to Tellis (1997), Zainal (2007:1) states that a “case study helps explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation”. Miles (2015:314) points out that while a case study method is utilised in a move to understand specific contexts or phenomena that exist within the “messy complexity of human experience”, the case is still simply a case, not the phenomenon itself. A case study, therefore, is always a case of something (Miles, 2015:314).

1.10.2 Different types of case studies

Zainal (2007) and Yin (1984) classified case studies into three categories, namely exploratory case studies, descriptive case studies and explanatory case studies.

- **Exploratory case study:** The exploratory method is aimed at exploring any phenomenon or a relatively new field of research that the researcher finds interesting and worth further investigation. This method provides the study with preliminary answers to general questions that can be asked about the intended study. The focus of this method is on the function of exploration.
- **Descriptive case study:** The descriptive method is aimed at scrutinising and articulating data with the aim to describe a research phenomenon. This is done in a narrative manner and includes a detailed account of facts as they occur in the study. The focus of this method is on the function of description.
- **Explanatory case study:** While the exploratory method explores a phenomenon and the descriptive method endeavours to describe it in a narrative fashion, the explanatory method seeks to examine the phenomenon closely in order to explain it in available and acceptable terms. The focus of this method is on the function of explanation.

All three of these methods overlap in this study. The study utilised the exploratory case study method to explore the Nyaope religion as a new form of religion in South Africa, while at the same time making use of the explanatory method to explain the cause and development of this form of religion. However, the intention is to ultimately employ an explanatory case study as the principal method in explaining the emergence of the Nyaope religion in South Africa.

This study is primarily concerned with the comprehension of people's experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach. In their work, Jackson II et al. (2007:21) sought to answer the question "what is qualitative research?" and proclaimed that "the function of all science is to investigate answers to questions about the evolution of an experience or phenomenon via observation". The present study primarily relied on any available textual analyses to understand how the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders constitute human rights abuse and the evolution of their new form of religion.

The qualitative research method offered tools to assist this study in the process of understanding people's daily realities, as this method is interested in people's beliefs, perspectives and experiences. For these reasons, Mohajan (2018:2) maintains that "qualitative research is a form of social action that stresses on the way of people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand their social reality". In addition, this method assisted the study by drawing the logic behind the development of the approach used to arrive at coining the term "Nyaope religion" for an abusive religion by self-styled spiritual leaders. A case study methodology was thus employed in the study.

1.11 Cases investigated in the study

The following cases of self-styled spiritual leaders are investigated in the study:

- Pastor James Maina Ng'ang'a of Neno Evangelism Centre in Kenya
- Pastor John Nduati of God's Power Church and Ministry in Kenya
- A fake miracle in which a businesswoman was healed by several pastors in Nigeria
- Holy sex by self-styled spiritual leaders in Nigeria
- Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa of United Family International Church in Zimbabwe
- Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries
- Pastor Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly
- Prophet Rufus Phala of AK Spiritual Christian Church
- Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Times Disciples Ministries

- Prophet Light Monyeki of the Grace Living Ministries
- Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng of Incredible Happenings Church
- Prophet Bongani Maseko of Daveyton’s Breath of Christ Ministries Church
- Pastor Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries International Church
- The seven brothers of Mancoba Seven Angels Ministry
- Pastor Timothy Omotoso of Jesus Dominion International Church
- Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of Enlightened Christian Gathering Church
- Bishop Tsietsi Makiti of Gabola Church International Ministries
- Bishop Peter Vuyisile Ndlebende of Faith Gospel Ministries
- Prophet Sonny Rakgorwana of the Gracious Armies of God in Christ Centre Ministries

1.12 Definition of important concepts

1.12.1 Religion

The task of defining religion is difficult, complex and delicate at the same time. Religious scholars and theologians have always been at loggerheads about what constitutes a religion and what the definition of “religion” is. Thus, it is difficult to arrive at a universal definition of religion. So far, any existing definition of religion is either too narrow in the exclusion of other religions or too broad in the inclusion of that which is not religion. Every religion has some moral obligation, sense of right and duty to service. The English term “religion” is translated from the Latin word *religio*, which means “obligation”, “bond” and “reverence”. Referring to Tetreault and Denemark (2004), Thinane (2019) explains the meaning of the term “religion” as follows: “‘Bond’ points to the bond between man and gods, ‘reverence’ for the gods and [an] ‘obligation’ to serve (the) gods” (Thinane 2019:6; Tetreault & Denemark 2004:6). Just as in Thinane’s work, the term “religion” in this study is defined as an “imagined human search for meaning”.

According to Karl Marx, religion is a reflection of real human suffering while at the same time it becomes a form of human protest against such suffering in the world. The idea of suffering is captured by Boer (2016:online), who writes: “Religious suffering challenges real suffering. It questions suffering, asks why we are suffering.” Every human being in the world devotes his or her time to finding a reason for his or her existence. The struggle of exploring life for such meaning becomes a projection and a visible protest of human suffering and struggles in the world. Hence, religion should at all times remain a true reflection of human conditions in the

world. Within the same understanding, Friedrich Nietzsche (as quoted in Juhansar, 2011:258) declared religion to be “a part of a slave rebellion on morals substitute for the unsuccessful slave rebellion on reality”. To explain this view further, Uchegbue (2011:57) points out that “Marx sees religion in the first place, as a reflection of people’s actual conditions and realities or the product of alienation in society” and that it is “the frustration produced by the socio-economic order that prompt[s] people to create illusions”. Also, “the fact that people turn to religion is an expression of their being uncomfortable with the distressing condition of social life and of their desire to find a solution to the miseries of life” (Uchegbue, 2011:58). Remhof (2018:1) seems to support this view by writing that “the idea of God emerges to provide light in a dark world. From antiquity to today most people turn to God when awful tragedies happen”.

Religion becomes false when it uses mystification to hide the truth about human conditions and suffering in the world. Man created religion in order to make his real world tolerable; hence, Karl Marx argued that religion is but a reflection of the real world. As an institution, religion ought to organise human’s everyday living in an orderly fashion and even reconcile him to himself so that he can find meaning in his existence. Any form of religion that causes man to lie about his everyday conditions and realities separates man from himself, and in that way, man will not find the meaning of his existence in life. Thus, religion as an imagined human search for meaning should permanently remain true to the task of reflecting human struggles and suffering in the world. Religion should at all times teach human beings moral principles, persuade them to do good and influence societies by its customs, values and philosophies, while at the same time, it remains a cultural phenomenon.

Consequently, this study outlines ways in which the Christian religion is aimed at teaching moral principles to its adherents and influences societies towards good values. This is done against the image of religion as portrayed by the Nyaope religion under the leadership of self-styled spiritual leaders, which seeks to undermine and contradict the mandate of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission.

1.12.2 Freedom of religion in South Africa

The current Constitution of South Africa was formulated in 1996. This constitution recognised the right to freedom of religion. In Section 15(1), Chapter 2, of the Constitution of South Africa (1996), “freedom of religion” is described as including the right to freedom of conscience,

religion, thought, belief and opinion. Shortly after the 1996 Constitution had been promulgated, the big question in the light of freedom of religion as stipulated under Section 15 was as follows: What are the implications and meanings of freedom of religion? To answer this question, the *South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms* (SACRRF) becomes necessary.

According to Coertzen (2008), the terms that are used in the Constitution of South Africa to describe freedom of religion are not very clear. Moreover, He argues that the Constitution of South Africa does not identify in precise detail what exactly freedom of religion implies (Coertzen 2008:362-365). In support of this view, Malherbe (2011) declares that the Constitution creates a space for additional charters of rights “because most constitutional rights are described in cryptic, vague and general terms” (Malherbe 2011:15). According to Section 234 of the Constitution of South Africa (1996:31), under the theme “charters of rights” to deepen the culture of democracy in South Africa, parliament is permitted to adopt charters of rights that are consistent with all provisions of the Constitution of South Africa. Further, Malherbe (2011) states that “any such charter of rights adopted by parliament will then have the force of law” (Malherbe 2011:5).

In 2008, the first draft of the SACRRF was presented at a gathering of religious groups. This charter was formulated by international legal experts, government commissioners, human rights groups, academics and media bodies in consultation with the major religions in South Africa. After the endorsement of the SACRRF in October 2010, this charter became the existing interpretation of what is implied by freedom of religion in Chapter 2, Section 15 of the Constitution of South Africa. According to Coertzen (2014), the charter is “a very useful tool for religions to determine their own identity in forms of rights and freedoms they can legitimately claim” (Coertzen 2014:129).

The SACRRF contains main elements of religious rights and freedoms as protected and upheld by other rights guaranteed in the Constitution. According to the preamble of this charter, its inherent intention is to define the religious rights, religious freedoms and religious responsibilities of every religious group and person in South Africa. Though this study does not intend to discuss the SACRRF in detail, some of the rights and freedoms stipulated in the charter that are applicable to the study are listed below:

- Every person has the right to believe according to his or her own religious or philosophical beliefs or convictions and choose which faith, worldwide religion or religious institution to subscribe to, affiliate with or belong to.
- No person may be forced to believe, what to believe or not to believe, or to act against his or her convictions.
- Every person has the right to freedom of expression in respect of religion.
- Every person has the right to be educated or to educate his or her children, or have them educated, in accordance with his or her religions or philosophical convictions.
- Every religious institution has the right to institutional freedom of religion.
- Every person has the right, for religious purposes and in furthering their objectives, to solicit, receive, manage, allocate and spend voluntary financial and other forms of support and contribution. The confidentiality of such support and contributions should be respected.

In its background information, the SACRRF (2016:4) states:

A religious institution may also not act in a way that is blatantly illegal, for example to force its members to perform acts or rituals that are physically harmful or may damage or destroy the property of others, or to force minors to marry.

Although religious freedom is of paramount importance in South Africa, recent conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders has cast confusion and uncertainty on the question of religious freedom and rights in South Africa. Theologians and religious scholars in particular are at loggerheads about what constitute religious rights and freedoms in light of misconduct and claims made by self-styled spiritual leaders that have brought the name of Christianity into serious disrepute and disgrace. Along the same line, Resane (2017) argues that the unconventional practices of self-styled spiritual leaders are causing serious damage to Christianity and theological fundamentals (Resane 2017:1). Kgatle (2017) declares that these “barbaric acts must be condemned because church is supposed to be a place where people seek protection and strength” (Kgatle 2017:3). Thus, against this observation, both theological scholars and religious experts are duty bound to give new meaning to and an explanation of the capacity or role this new form of religion plays in South Africa.

It remains the view of this study that various complexities and ambiguities that are evident in the Constitution of South Africa (1996), especially about freedom of religion, pervade the interpretation of what exactly is meant by freedom of religion as stipulated in the Constitution.

1.12.3 *National Policy on Religion and Education (2003)*

Between 1996 and 2003, lively debates about the place of religion in the public sphere exploded in South Africa, especially in public schools. According to Dreyer (2007), the *National Policy on Religion and Education* was drafted under Sibusiso Mandlenkosi Emmanuel Bengu, who preceded Doctor Kadar Asmal as minister of Education from 1991 to 1994. The policy, which was drafted as early as 1999 and made provision for single-faith instruction in public schools, was well received by many Christian parents and churches in South Africa. However, as soon as Asmal became the new minister of Education, this changed and the new draft of the policy emerged (Dreyer 2007:43). In 2003, the *National Policy on Religion and Education* (hereafter “Religion in Education Policy”) was released. This policy was meant to transform the single-faith approach to religious education, as documented on 12 September 2003 in the *Government Gazette* No. 25459, Volume 459. The present study argues that whatever religious crisis South Africa finds itself in is due to the mishandling of the place of religion in public schools by the state.

The new Religion in Education Policy distinguished among the features of religion in education as religion education, religious instruction and religious observance:

- **Religion education** refers to the curricular programme for teaching and learning about religion, religions and religious diversity in South Africa and the world.
- **Religious instruction** refers to the responsibility of religious groups, homes, families and religious institutions to instruct learners in the in-calculation of a particular faith or religion. This aspect, as provided to learners by clergy, parents and religious communities, cannot form part of formal school programmes.
- **Religious observance** refers to an instance where learners, teachers and religious groups freely and voluntarily gather for religious acts of worship, praying, rest and religious diets. In this regard, the school governing bodies of public schools may use their discretion to provide or refuse school facilities for such instances. Thus, this aspect too does not form part of school formal programmes if done in an equitable manner among religious groups.

According to the new Religion in Education Policy, religion education is accommodated under the wing of the school subject life orientation. The policy stipulates that the life orientation learning area, through programmes like life skills, religion education and social responsibility,

is well positioned to have an impact on the ethical and moral dimensions of learner development (Department of Education, 2003).

In a country such as South Africa, the role of religion, Christianity and the church in defeating apartheid and bringing about democracy is unquestionable and undisputed. So, to give such a small space to religion in the public sphere, such as education, was an insult to every religious and Christian parent who had fought for democracy in South Africa. In its design, the new policy failed to recognise the need for the spiritual and religious development of learners in schools. The new policy, at the same time, failed and denied both teachers and learners in public schools the opportunity to learn about the spiritual energy and religious value system that the great leaders and struggle icons possessed.

By wiping away confessional and sectarian religion, the Department of Education no longer recognised religion as an important aspect of South African learners in public schools. Furthermore, it meant that public schools no longer belonged to people who practised religion; instead, schools then belonged to the secular state. More detrimentally, they no longer belonged to the sovereign power of God; hence, the new policy had to privatise both confessional and sectarian religion to the home and religious institutions. The new policy ignored the reality that the majority of South Africans belonged to religious affiliations of Christianity.

Religious parents in South Africa had to come to terms and make peace with the reality that religion no longer played an important role in their children's growth, as it had no place in public schools. This meant that the parents of children in public schools could not choose and did not have control over the form of education they wished for their children. This view is supported by Van der Walt (2010), who writes that according to the Religion in Education Policy, parents and learners do not enjoy the freedom of choosing which schools they will support and attend. They are expected to place their children in schools where they can learn to become illiterate in terms of religion and diversity and get along with others right from the outset, which necessitates the absence of all forms of confessional religious education in public schools (Van der Walt 2010:89). In addition, Van der Walt makes the following argument:

It is not pedagogically justifiable to expose a small child to other traditions before he or she has been steeped in the tenants of his or her own religious tradition. It will only lead to confusion in their young minds and will be contra-productive. A child proper understanding of his or her own religious tradition will lead to a more favourable understanding of others as well (Van der Walt 2010:91).

Challengers of the new policy on religion and education mobilised campaigns, public meetings, collective manifestos and open letters opposing the implementation and further enactment thereof. This showed that the parents of children in public schools were outraged by this policy and the direction education was taking by removing confessional and sectarian religion from schools. According to Van der Walt (2011), “these occurrences attest to the fact that South Africans are not quite satisfied with how the state had dealt with the issue of religious diversity in public education” (Van der Walt 2011:382). In his presentation of the new policy, Kadar Asmal, the former minister of Education, denied that removing sectarian and confessional religion from public schools was part of the strategy of the African National Congress to turn South Africa into a secular state. Further, Van der Walt alleges that by this denial, the minister of Education was merely sugaring the bitter pill of secularism for adherents of mainstream religions in South Africa, such as Christianity (Van der Walt 2010:83).

The Religion in Education Policy was implemented against the broader implications of freedom of religion as enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. Serfontein (2014) declares that the policy is unconstitutional and “does not respect religious beliefs, but impresses a secular states world on the youth” (Serfontein 2014:131). Again, Van der Walt (2010) argues that the fact that the new policy has assigned the confessional aspect of religious education to the private realm is a step towards secularism. Furthermore, he contends that secularism in this form is a new religion with the purpose to oust Christian religion from the public sphere (Van der Walt, 2010:82). He reinforces his argument by further mentioning B.J. van der Walt (2007), who similarly sees secularism as a religion that is aimed at taking the place of Christianity in all walks of life. Mayson (2007), as referred to by Serfontein (2014), argues that the new policy on religion and education was not aimed at spiritual and religious people but was instead meant for people to only be informed on facts about other religions.

In conclusion, Serfontein (2014) writes:

When accepted that religious belief (or even the absence thereof) constitutes an important part of identity, the schools refraining from the role of inducing the child in a particular religion with the objective of acquiring that religion, but only introducing him to a large variety of religions, as contemporary education policy wants, it could only further the role confusion prompted by [a] contemporary complex society (Serfontein 2014:32).

Along similar lines, Roux (2003) makes the following statement:

Although it cannot be taken for granted that religious diversity is a problem in education, many educators and parents have negative perceptions about a programme on different religions and belief and value systems. They fear that learners, especially in the Foundation Phase, will be confused and unduly influenced by the content of different religions (Roux 2003:130).

Christianity, in a succession of years, has been confirmed by census data as the largest religion in South Africa. Opponents of the new policy on religion and education argue that the policy violates specific provisions of the Constitution of South Africa about freedom of religion, while at the same time, it deprives innocent children in public schools of a harmonious religious experience. By further implementing this policy, the government of South Africa seems to have demonstrated and emphasised that it has no respect for its people and religious communities. The new Religion in Education Policy has destroyed the religious identity of both parents and children linked to public schools and further contradicted the Christian mission. The disrespect displayed by the government of South Africa towards its religious people, and Christianity in particular, resulted in certain groups and individuals disrespecting the Christian religion; consequently, the Nyaope religion in the name of Christianity has developed and is becoming popular and prominent. With the benefit of hindsight in light of the obvious moral degeneration, corruption and social ills in South Africa, it is important to start discussions that are geared towards the return of confessional religion to public schools in South Africa.

When one looks at the societal, moral and spiritual destruction brought upon the people of South Africa by the new policy, one is compelled to understand why Jesus wept over Jerusalem:

If you only knew today what is needed for peace! But now you cannot see it! The time will come when your enemies will surround you with barricades, blockade you, and close in on you from every side. They will completely destroy you and the people within your walls; not a single stone will they leave in its place, because you did not recognise the time when God came to save you. (Luke 20:41-44)

1.13 Nyaope and Karl Marx's opium of the people

1.13.1 Relationship between nyaope and opium metaphors

Before introducing the concepts of nyaope and opium, it is important to first explain in detail the relationship or connection between the use of the nyaope metaphor in this study and Karl Marx's use of the opium metaphor to refer to a particular form of religion. Karl Marx is known to use opium as a good or bad drug to refer metaphorically to some form of religion of his time, so his claims remain the subject of scientific debate, as will be shown later. By analogy with his use of a drug to metaphorically refer to some form of religion, however, this study uses Nyaope as a bad drug to metaphorically refer to a bad form of religious trends under the pretext of Christianity in South Africa.

1.13.2 What is nyaope?

Nyaope is a street drug that has spread mainly across (impoverished) townships in South Africa. Even though accounts and stories of nyaope may vary from one researcher to another, the point of agreement in this pool of stories is that nyaope as a drug is addictive, dangerous and more popular in impoverished communities that have low socioeconomic status. Mokwena and Morojele (2014) remark:

These areas are also socioeconomically deprived, with high unemployment rates and poverty. The depressed socioeconomic environment results in street trading of a variety of items, which is a platform that Nyaope users utilise to quickly and easily sell items to perpetuate their habit (Morojele 2014:376).

According to Mokwena (2015), nyaope made its entrance in South Africa in the townships of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal as early as 2010 and then moved to other impoverished areas of South Africa. On the other hand, *Tshwane Youth Magazine* (2012) and Tatarwal et al. (2019) claim that nyaope could have originated in the townships of Soshanguve⁷ and Mamelodi in Pretoria in 2000. These claims make it safe to conclude that nyaope originated in the early twenty-first century.

According to *Tshwane Youth Magazine* (2012), the ingredients of nyaope are pool cleaner powder, Rattex and bicarbonate of soda to make it stronger and last longer. Mokwena (2015)

⁷ Soshanguve is a township in Gauteng Province of South Africa situated about 30 kilometres north of Pretoria. Soshanguve is an acronym for SOtho, SHAngaan, NGUni and VEnda, which shows the multi-ethnic composition of its population.

points out that it is not clear what precisely the ingredients of nyaope are because they differ from one seller to another, but a common assumption is that it always includes detergent powder, heroin, rat poison and crushed anti-retroviral drugs.⁸ Thomas and Velaphi, in their 2014 case report on nyaope, list the ingredients of nyaope, which is smoked, as heroin, morphine, methamphetamine, marijuana, rat poison and the antiretroviral medications efavirenz or ritonavir. According to Charlton et al., (2019), most researchers agree that heroin is the main ingredient, and that the inclusion of antiretroviral drugs has been documented (Charlton et al., 2019:43).

Mokwena and Morojele (2014) make the point that “the high unemployment rates of the communities, as well as the unfavourable community environment in which cannabis and Nyaope are easily available” fuel the habit and perpetuate addiction to nyaope. In addition, it is important to mention that “even children from affluent families are susceptible to Nyaope usage and once addicted to the drug (Nyaope), it consumes the user’s entire life” (Charlton et al., 2019:47).

Tshwane Youth Magazine (2012) has observed that users of nyaope tend to lead disorganised lives, do not exercise their thinking in any rational manner and often disregard their own worth, values, ethics and beliefs. Meel and Essop (2018) report that when most healthcare professionals are not aware of drug abuse, users of nyaope who become ill are misdiagnosed with other diseases, such as pulmonary tuberculosis and pneumonia (Meel & Essop 2018:587-588). According to the *Sunday Times* of 29 August 2019, it is common for nyaope users to be involved in criminal actions such as armed robbery, smash and grab, car break-ins and robbing people in broad daylight, even while others are watching.

1.13.3 What is opium?

For centuries, through the Middle Ages into the eighteenth century, opium was seen and accepted as a powerful medicine that treated almost anything and everything from headaches and toothache to sanity (Hoffman 1990:1). However, since then, its medical focus has moved from the idea of a powerful and valuable drug to a dangerous drug.

Opium is a dried fluid obtained from a plant commonly called the “opium poppy”. The opium poppy is accepted as the only source of opium. Both Chalise (2015) and Masoudkibir (2013)

⁸ Anti-retroviral drugs are medication used to treat the human immune deficiency virus (HIV), which, if not treated, may cause acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS).

describe opium (*Lachryma papaveris teriak*) as a brown sticky or crumbly substance formed from the air-dried, milky latex fluid obtained from incising the unripe capsules (poppies) of the opium poppy (Chalise 2015:59; Masoudkabar 2013:733). When the opium poppy is not ripe yet, its seed produces a milky fluid that runs out, and when that fluid dries, opium is formed. The word “opium” is derived from the Greek word *opus* that means “juice” (Duarte, 2005:141).

According to Schiff (2002:1), *Papaver somniferum*, commonly known as “opium poppy”, originated in Asia Minor as the oldest medicinal plant. Tétreault and Allen (2004) describe the opium poppy as follows:

[The] opium poppy is one of the oldest cultivated plants, and its analgesic use can be traced to the beginning of civilization. Opium, which is the dried latex of poppy contains alkaloids presumably involved in ecological defense [sic], with codeine and morphine being two of the most abundant (Tétreault & Allen 2004:1559).

Ray et al. (2006) mention that poppies are ornamental, showy flowers that grow uncontrollably in some parts of the world. It is a species of flowering plant in the family of Papaveraceae, from which opium and poppy seeds originate. The name “poppy” is from the Latin *papaver somniferum*, with *somniferum* meaning sleep inducing. In its raw state, opium can be smoked, drunk or processed into heroin (Ray et al., 2006:2).

Duarte (2005) describes the process of how opium is obtained from the opium poppy as follows:

In summary, the process is started two weeks after [the] leaves have fallen, when [the] seed-containing capsules harden. At sunset, capsules are scarified with shallow incisions to allow [the] latex to flow. It is then thickened due to evaporation in the capsule surface itself resulting in a brown gum which is removed [the] next morning with an iron tool with the shape of [a] small mason’s shovel. This gum is then made into powder (Duarte 2005:141).

Hoffman (1990) mentions that among the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia, opium was known as *hul gil* (the plant of joy) and was used as medicine (Hoffman 1990:2). Brownstein (1993:5391) writes:

There is a general agreement that Sumerians, who inhabited what is today Iraq, cultivated poppies and isolated opium from their seed capsules at the end of the

third millennium B.C. they called opium “gil” the word for joy, and the poppy “hul gil” the plant of joy (Brownstein 1990:2).

As mentioned by Hoffman (1990), opium was prescribed by medical doctors to induce sleep and treat internal illnesses and a widespread occurrence of infectious diseases, insomnia, diarrhoea and respiratory diseases (Hoffman 1990:2-3). According to Lugman (2014), opium was used as medicine for sedation, relieving pain and as a remedy for diseases such as asthma, cancer, spasms, fever and diarrhoea (Lugman 2014:93). A scholar, Doctor Donald Caton, is known to have devoted much of his academic career to the history of anaesthesiology and wrote a paper “In the present state of our knowledge” in which he mentioned that for centuries, physicians had used opium and morphine for the relief of pain and the treatment of diseases “ranging from smallpox, dementia, and cough, to sciatica, diabetes, and colic”. He further mentioned physicians used opium “for a variety of conditions associated with smooth muscle spasm and abdominal pain, for example, cholera, typhus, and renal stones ... [as] [t]hey knew that it abolished the pain and diminished bowel function” (Caton 1995:781).

Paracelsus von Hohenheim (1493-1541) was a Swiss physician who pioneered some aspects of the medical revolution of the Renaissance (Duarte, 2005:142). According to Duarte, 2005:142), “Paracelsus was such an enthusiast of this drug [opium] that [he] would always carry it with him calling it the immortal stone”. Duarte (2005:142) continues as follows on the topic of opium:

Conversely, other authors have proclaimed that opium would act as [an] exciting drug in all cases, increasing physical vigor and clearing the mind. ... This drug has become [a] major therapeutic support during the Victorian era.

Ray et al., (2006) argue that opium was the first authentic anti-depressant in the world (Ray et al., 2006:6). Hoffman (1990), in his paper on opium, explains that it was used for a multitude of purposes: “to quiet infants; as an aphrodisiac; and to give courage to soldiers” (Hoffman 1990:3). Ray et al., (2006) mention that “the practice of giving opium to infants was quite common” (Ray et al., 2006:3).

1.13.4 Opium used for religious purposes

Scholars agree that there was a time when opium was used for religious purposes. Brownstein (1993) points out that initially, priests representing the gods had knowledge of opium and used it to provide healing to the sick (Brownstein 1993:539). According to Schiff (2002), the ancient

Egyptians cultivated opium poppies, and as the use of opium was associated with religious cultism, the use thereof was restricted to priests, magicians and warriors (Schiff 2002:1). This claim is similar to one by Hoffman (1990) that the recreational use of opium was not popular in the Middle Ages, and the use thereof was mostly “limited to medical and some religious practices” (Hoffman 1990:2).

1.13.5 Karl Marx’s religion as the opium of the people

The main aim of religion is to provide answers to human questions that cannot be answered by human reason. Thinane (2019) defines religion as an “imagined human search for meaning”. Even when religion is some form of a fantasy, at the same time, it is realistic and has intellectual value and an idealistic foundation (Thinane 2019:6). As such, the presence of religion can be neither dismissed nor ignored in any society. Whenever human beings face struggles in life, they look up to religion to gain comfort and the courage to continue living. Whenever there is anxiety, life-threatening situations or serious questions that science on its own cannot answer, and needs that cannot be fully satisfied by mere human efforts, then those who believe in a religion turn to it for security. In order for human beings to be at peace with his daily circumstances, he requires religion as his only happiness. As human beings have been separated from themselves by extreme poverty and injustice, religion becomes the only course that can reconcile them with themselves.

One would be correct in saying that Karl Marx, by declaring that religion was the opium of the people, was only expressing his compassion for the poor of his time. However, more importantly, he formally accused a specific form of religion of making delusory promises to people about their future, while at the same time such promises encouraged the poor to tolerate the injustices they suffered from the hands of a few rich capitalists instead of engaging in the struggle against their plight. Marx saw religion as the sigh of the oppressed souls, the spirit of the spiritless system. In this way, Marx identified an important role that religion should play in providing society with some form of meaning and consolation in the context of suffering; hence, Lenin concluded that religion was the opium that anesthetised the people. It is for this reason that Uchebgue (2011) believes that Marx’s conception of an important role that religion should be playing against conditions of intense alienation is more responsible for the formation of his (Marx’s) background and the foundation of his views on religion (Uchebgue 2011:56).

It would be unfair to accuse Karl Marx of having targeted religion as his number one enemy and the centre of his discourse. Instead, Okoro (2012) argues that Marx merely encountered religion while being focused on the socioeconomic analysis of his time. Marx found that the religion of his time more often than not encouraged alienation of the few and oppression of the masses. In addition, he found that religion was used to produce “an illusionary escape” from depressing social realities. Furthermore, religion makes “the poor escape from something that does not care for its people in [a] cycle of oppression”. Hence, for Karl Marx, it was improper for religion to be used as a body of myths that had deceptions that would assist the ruling few with ideologies (Okoro 2012:251).

In conclusion, Okoro (2012) argues that it is the strategy of the oppressor to apply the mechanism of religion to soothe the oppressed and perpetually enslave them (Okoro 2012:251). Having observed extreme forms of oppression and inequality suffered by his society, Karl Marx studied the function of religion in people’s everyday realities and concluded that religion was metaphorically the opium of the masses. In the society of Marx’s time, he felt touched by the extreme inequality, oppression, human degradation, exploitation, enslavement and deep suffering of the masses. Consequently, he started studying alienation, which eventually led him to study religion, and Christianity in particular (Omonijo et al., 2016:3).

Describing the society in which Karl Marx lived in simple, terms Uchegbue (2011) writes:

It was a society where the workers were being reduced to mere mechanical instruments of work and production while at the same time the products of their labor were estranged from them and transferred to the bourgeois owners of the means of production and distribution (Uchegbue 2011:55).

According to Omonijo et al. (2016), Marx argued that some Christians taught and emphasised heaven as the goal or reward for acts of goodness while on earth. In addition, Marx observed this to be just a tactic by the ruling class to influence the people to be more agreeable and submissive. Furthermore, Marx believed that Christian teachings that emphasised obedience to authority, humility, gentility and other related issues were manipulations by the upper class or the bourgeois to keep the masses perpetually subservient. In this way, religion was used to control the people. Only after having observed society and the role of religion in it, Marx made the following declaration with regard to religion: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of the soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (Marx as cited in Omonijo et al., 2016:2-3). In this way Karl Marx likened

religion to a sigh, a heart and a soul. Lastly, he equated religion to “opium” by pronouncing that “religion is the opium of the people”. This assertion is at the centre of the present study, and upon Marx’s declaration, the study outlined its foundation to acquire an understanding of a new form of religion in South Africa.

According to Mckinnon (2005), Marx’s understanding of opium falls somewhere between the start and the end of the nineteenth century, hence “in 1843 it is an ambiguous, multidimensional and contradictory metaphor, expressing both the earlier and later understanding of the fruit of the poppy” (Mckinnon 2005:3). Turner (2006) writes that on the whole, Marx thought that it was “in the interest of the ruling classes that people should indulge in this opiate”. Moreover, “the ruling classes encourage the practice of Christianity among those they oppress because, on the whole, Christianity preaches an ethic of submission” (Turner, 2006:321). Omonijo et al. (2016) maintain that the demonstrations of Christian values by Christian missionaries during the time of Karl Marx were only placatory and “designed by the ruling class” to calm the nerves and subjugate the people. Also, Omonijo et al., (2016) argue that the Christians of Marx’s time endured all forms of suffering and injustices because their focus was on heaven as their target destiny (Omonijo et al., 2016:4). In addition, Turner (2006) argues that the oppressed adopted and embraced religion because they regarded it to be genuine and more sympathetic towards the cause of their struggle (Turner 2006:322).

According to Mckinnon (2005), by the start of the nineteenth century, opium a medicine was unquestioned and considered good for usage. People would have understood “opium of the people” as something that can be translated into the twentieth-century idiom as the “penicillin of the people”, and opium use in the early decades of the nineteenth century was “quite normal”. In addition, opium provided professionals of different classes, such as intellectuals, poets and artists, a brief view of another reality (Mckinnon, 2005:3-8). Further, he argues that as medicine, opium was not a bad thing and that Karl Marx could not criticise using it, as he could have used it himself when the need arose, but rather that he spoke of it in light of its being used for purposes such as doping babies and being sold for profit by heartless profiteers. These heartless profiteers cheated sick people out of the only medicine (opium) they badly and desperately needed. Lastly, He claims that for Marx to see religion as the opium of the people, he moved the question of religion out of the theological avenue and made it a political and economic problem; hence, it is of the utmost importance to consider the abstract concept of religion to be real (Mckinnon 2005:20-21).

The idea that Karl Marx himself could have used opium is supported by Boer (2016), who contends that Marx thought of religion and opium being on the same level in the effort to stop pain and suffering. Boer (2016) asserts the following:

Marx occasionally used opium for medicinal purposes. He took opium to deal with his liver illness, skin problems (carbuncles), toothaches, eye pain, ear aches, coughs, and so on – the many illnesses that were the result of overwork, lack of sleep, bad diet, chain smoking and endless pots of coffee (Boer 2016:online).

Yilmaz (2018) points out that in trying to understand why religion functions as opium, one should look more carefully into “the political field, which conditions religion’s function in modern society” (Yilmaz 2018:142). Omonijo et al., (2016) contend that religion, as opium, makes human beings calm, subservient and submissive, even in the face of oppression (Omonijo et al., 2016:4). According to Mckinnon (2005), the use of opium in the nineteenth century increased as the circumstances of the working class declined and outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as cholera, occurred (Mckinnon 2005:15). Shagor (2005) argues that even though the oppressors of Marx’s time were responsible for societal pain and distress, they too, whenever the need arose, made use of opium. Further, opium was used “to calm the jangled nerves of the distressing self-alienation”, that is, “the feeling that one is being exploited ... and be[ing] dehumanised in work”. Moreover, opium is the path of the least resistance taken by “downtrodden people to make the disorientation of self-alienation more bearable”, and as such, religion (opium) then becomes a “form of escapism” to ease an uneasy life (Shagor, 2005:7).

For Karl Marx, religion acts similar to opium “to dull the pain” that has been produced by oppression and to make the oppressed unreceptive to such pain. In the words of Uchegbue (2011), “it plays a useful but illusive psycho therapeutic role by bringing consolations that make its adherents ... forget their frustrations”. Uchegbue maintains that the only reason Marx likened religion to the opium of the people is because of the positive and humanitarian role of religion in people’s lives, which authenticates the practice of religion within societies. As such religion (opium) plays a psycho-therapeutic role in providing assurance, calmness and serenity of mind in the face of misery. Thus, religion helps the oppressed masses not to surrender in their fight against distressing conditions of life (Uchegbue, 2011:60-65).

1.14 The Nyaope religion juxtaposed to the opium religion

1.14.1 The nyaope metaphor

This study employs metaphor to explain and describe the origin, formation and development of the new form of religion in South Africa. The South African localised drug nyaope is identified as a metaphor or figure of speech that will help the reader comprehend the complexity of this new form of religion. Thus, in simple terms, the intention of this study in this regard is to metaphorically make use of the South African drug nyaope to describe, characterise and label this new form of religion, which may be hard to understand, as the Nyaope religion. The name of the drug nyaope is used in the study due to its being a localised term that most people of South Africa are familiar with, just as the saying goes “local is lekker”.⁹

According to Cheng (2014), metaphor is an instance where one object is referred to another:

A metaphor is also when two unlike things are compared directly to show some common quality between the two things. An example of a metaphor is “Time is a thief”. Time is not really a thief, but both can be fleeting (Cheng 2014:314).

Cheng (2014:314) further explains that metaphors have two concepts: the concept of the starting point (target domain) and the comparison concept (source domain). In this study, the target domain is religion as the described concept, while the source domain, analogously, is the nyaope drug.

1.14.2 The Nyaope religion

Social media in South Africa is full of stories of so-called pastors or prophets who commit atrocities in the name of religion. These pastors have covertly, under the semblance of Christianity, fashioned their own new form of religion. What is remarkable about this form of religion is that analogous to nyaope, which is found predominantly in townships and informal settlements in South Africa, these self-styled spiritual leaders advantageously and purposefully establish their new form of religion in places that are underdeveloped and full of working-age people who are vulnerable, poor and desperate for employment and a better living. In fact, Kgatle (2017) argues that these pastors have identified vulnerable communities as a business gap in the market. In these areas, the inequality that exists in South Africa is evident, as the

⁹ This phrase suggests that things produced locally are the best.

economic realities of these townships and informal settlements are spatially disconnected and different from the realities of most urban areas. As a result, self-styled spiritual leaders arrive in these places with messages promising to improve the lives of the people. They promise the people that they can become millionaires, that barren women can have children and that the sick can be healed. And because the people living here are desperate for precisely what these self-styled spiritual leaders are promising, they fall victim to them (Kgatle 2017:5).

Kgatle (2017) further argues that for these self-styled spiritual leaders to be successful in the “market”, they only require a pair of shiny suits and a loudspeaker to attract the masses (Kgatle 2017:6). This is the reason why their new form of religion is popular and thriving in communities that have low socioeconomic status. However, this does not mean that there are no rich and wealthy people amid the followers of this religion. As Kgatle (2017) explains, it “is not merely the poor and the marginalised that follow the prophets – some of the prominent people in society also go to these churches because they too need a miracle of promotion” (Kgatle 2017:7).

In the same way that the ingredients of the drug nyaope differ from one seller to another, the doctrines or sets of beliefs of self-styled spiritual leaders differ from one to another, which makes it difficult for one to identify the origin of their body of teachings, as they vary altogether. It is true that the theology of these pastors has some elements of Christianity, but beyond their theology alone, their practices suggest something of a form of religion that expects its followers to prove their physical courage to please the spirits. This involves actions such as driving over a congregant with a car, where the congregant will then report that he or she did not feel any pain. Indeed, when one is interested in studying other forms of religion, there are many strange and brutal practices that are conducted in the name of religion all over the world. However, the following question arises: Where does one fit the drinking of petrol, eating of grass or snakes and spraying of Doom into the landscape of world religion? Surely there can be a home for this type of conduct by the self-styled spiritual leaders of the Nyaope religion.

The more churches consist of and are led by theologically unguided, misinformed and uneducated pastors in South Africa, the more it will give rise to the Nyaope religion. These self-styled spiritual leaders make claims without theology qualifications that they have been set apart and anointed to perform miracles. Similar to sellers of the nyaope drug, they (self-styled spiritual leaders) mostly target the impoverished people of South Africa. They claim to possess some delusional exceptional connection with God. They then advertise their

questionable church services all over the streets and walls, promising miracles with their questionable and reduced gospel that is aimed at attracting the masses of South Africa similar to the way that the nyaope drug is sold cheaply to the poor and downtrodden people of South Africa. Similar to users of nyaope, these self-styled spiritual leaders rob poverty-stricken people in broad daylight in the name of Christianity. Yet some Christian churches are silent and allow the name of their Master to be misused in the same way that these self-styled spiritual leaders of the Nyaope religion have been doing.

Just as the nyaope drug destroys the relationships of users with their family and friends, the once true and loyal Christians who reject their original churches, loved ones and friends only to join this new form of religion develop new loyalty and start to believe so much in these self-styled spiritual leaders (not in Christ) that they are being deceived by these pastors. Thus, just like nyaope users, the followers of this new religion lose any sense of wrong or right, becoming metaphorically like walking zombies. Hence Mbalula could say that they were “just walking dead” (Dube, 2019:5), because their spiritual leaders had captured their minds to a point of seeing nothing wrong with these pastors’ illegal conduct. Even when these self-styled spiritual leaders act in a way that is blatantly illegal and in conflict with their constitutional rights, their followers see nothing wrong with that.

Another factor that is influencing the followers of this new form of religion to be forever devoted to these self-styled spiritual leaders, even when their conduct poses danger to their followers’ wellbeing, is ignorance and a lack of education. Of course, their lack of education cannot entirely be blamed on their decisions alone, but more on the forever undelivered promise of a “better tomorrow” by the South African government. Their surrender to the illegal conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders reflects a deeply rooted dissatisfaction with a promise that is not kept. Accordingly, in the same way as both nyaope drug sellers and users who are involved in the selling and buying of nyaope to escape poverty and unemployment, these self-styled spiritual leaders and their followers have surrendered themselves to this new form of religion to escape the unbearable poverty and daily increasing unemployment. In the same vein, Kgatle (2017) argues that when there is too much poverty, unemployment and diseases, miracles become the only hope in such a society (Kgatle 2017:7).

Many theologians and religious scholars of South Africa have fallen prey to the mistake of misdiagnosing this new form of religion. Scholars such as Kgatle (2017), in his paper reflecting on the unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders, categorising these so-called churches

under Neo-Pentecostal churches, conclude that the biggest explanation of what encourages such unusual practices is the socioeconomic reality of South Africa (Kgatle 2017:1-8). Meanwhile, Resane (2017) regards them as “New Charismatic Churches” (Resane 2017:1). Even though the nyaope drug includes anti-retroviral drugs (good drugs for a good purpose) as ingredients, it does not qualify nyaope to be called good; instead, it is a bad and dangerous drug that has anti-retroviral drugs in its mix. Similarly, even though this new form of religion has elements of Christianity (a good religion for a good purpose), it does not qualify this new form of religion to be called Christianity or to be associated with Christianity.

A peculiar aspect of the Nyaope religion, as observed by Kgatle (2017), is that the unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders are mainly conducted by men, with a majority of women as their followers. This aspect reveals women as the victims of cultural violence, manipulation, patriarchy and exploitation in the Nyaope religion (Kgatle, 2017:6).

This new form of religion in South Africa has been displayed as an obstacle to the advancement and development of the young democracy of South Africa to the point of compelling institutions such as cultural, religious and linguistic communities to consider a blanket option of regulating religion. The CRL, as one of the institutions in terms of Section 181 of the Constitution in 2015 responding to media reports about the misuse of religion by self-styled spiritual leaders, launched an investigative study on the “commercialisation of religion” in South Africa (Thinane, 2019:77). Concluding its report in March 2016, this commission called for the regulation of both religious organisations and religious practitioners in South Africa (Thinane, 2019:77). Mentioning arguments levelled against the recommendations of the CRL by Christian organisations such as the South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference and Freedom of Religion South Africa, Thinane (2019) writes:

The SACBS [South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference] was of the view that if the commission’s recommendations were to be implemented they would limit freedom of religion and association in South Africa. The SACBS argued that already within the South African system there are various state institutions and legal mechanisms that can deal extensively with corruption, exploitation and other forms of religious abuse by religious communities without hindering freedom of religion and association (Thinane 2019:77-78).

Furthermore, Freedom of Religion South Africa argued that the “control of religious organisations and practitioners by extensive national structures will result in state capture of

religion, and this will give the government the power to silence churches on issues that reflect negatively on the state” (Thinane, 2019:77-78).

After his observation of different forms of religions in the world, Karl Marx saw that there was a form of religion that would stretch so far as forcing its adherents to misleadingly create the imagined ideal world while suffering under the corrupt hands of regimes. Applying this important observation to the context of South Africa, the Nyaope religion has been observed to make delusional claims, such as healing cancer, HIV and all kinds of diseases and being capable of providing a better life for all. Marx, after observing his society, came to the conclusion that religion was but a reflection of the real world. Accordingly, Marx saw that even though the economic conditions of his society were the cause of many struggles, making it worse was a form of religion that taught its adherents that the means to overcome such depressing social and economic conditions was through religious methods. For Marx, these claims were a bad form of religion.

1.15 Limitations of the study

The number of cases that this study investigated was largely informed by stories of self-styled spiritual leaders that had been covered extensively by the media. For this reason, the possibility that the study might have omitted other stories (not covered by the media) that involved human rights violations cannot be dismissed. However, it is probable that the most important stories have been covered, and once this study has been concluded, it will act as a reference for future research.

The lack of reliable data on the involvement or practices of self-styled spiritual leaders compelled the study to limit its scope and focus only on what was available. However, further research on the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders will benefit from this study by using it as a reliable foundation for exploration.

There is no prior research that has suggested that the controversial, illegal activities and religious abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders may point to the unfolding of a new form of religion that can be labelled the Nyaope religion. Therefore, this study developed its new research typology by employing the nyaope drug metaphorically to describe and explain the emergence and development of this new form of religion.

1.16 Chapter overview

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the topic of the study and provided the background information to it. This set the ground by explaining what the study is about and why the topic is important. The outcome of the study was predicted by proposing a tentative solution to the problem (hypothesis). The context of the study was established, justification for conducting it was provided and the aims of the study were stated. Also, the area of concern for the study (research problem) was outlined. Lastly, the general direction of the study is given by answering the “why” question emanating from the research problem and explaining the origin of the final conclusions that the study hoped to reach. This pointed to an existing knowledge gap that led to the discovery of new knowledge. Systematically, this section outlined issues that need solving and questions that need answers, which can only be provided by this study. An explanation is given of why this study is needed to fill the gap, the contribution it makes to new knowledge and how it will be beneficial to the field of missiology.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive summary of previous research that relates to the topic of human rights abuse by some self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion in South Africa. This summary is aimed at presenting current and available knowledge on this topic. Furthermore, theories that support the content of this thesis are identified. The study employed trends in world Christianity as its preferred theoretical framework to look at the social circumstances and the context within which self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa formed the Nyaope religion within Christianity and perpetrated human rights abuse. Lastly, this chapter provides the method (tool) that has been employed by the study to conduct its investigation and answer the research problem. This method gives guidance on how to collect and analyse data. With this understanding, the study utilised a case study method to look into human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa and how their conduct contradicts or rejects the mandate of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission. The method is also used to gain an understanding of how such conduct has amounted to the formation of a new form of religion that is proven to be anti-Christian.

In Chapter 3, the history of Christianity and the Christian mission in South Africa is briefly traced. Thereafter, the Constitution of South Africa is discussed in light of freedom of religion, the ambiguities thereof and the role it has played, along with self-styled spiritual leaders, in toppling Christianity. Lastly, the aftermath of the government policy that prohibited confessional and sectarian religion from public schools and allowed Christian children to be

taught religious studies with a focus on other religions and the role that this new policy played in assisting self-styled spiritual leaders in their efforts to contradict Christianity are looked into.

In the first part of Chapter 4, Karl Marx's critique on religion and the context that led him to declaring some form of religion as the opium of the people are discussed. The second part introduces the South African localised nyaope drug with the aim of juxtaposing it to Karl Marx's opium to describe the new form of religion by self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion in South Africa behind the mask of Christianity.

In Chapter 5, cases of human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders that made the headlines are investigated to substantiate the argument on the new form of religion that is contrary to Christianity. Thereby, Christianity is ultimately absolved from accusations of religious and human rights abuse.

Chapter 6 draws on the wisdom of scholars within the field of missiology, as it is most likely accurate in its analysis and understanding of the Christian mission, so that it may guide the Christian dialogue through its exceptional missiological perspectives, seeking to shape the truth against the current heresies witnessed in South Africa in the form of self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion.

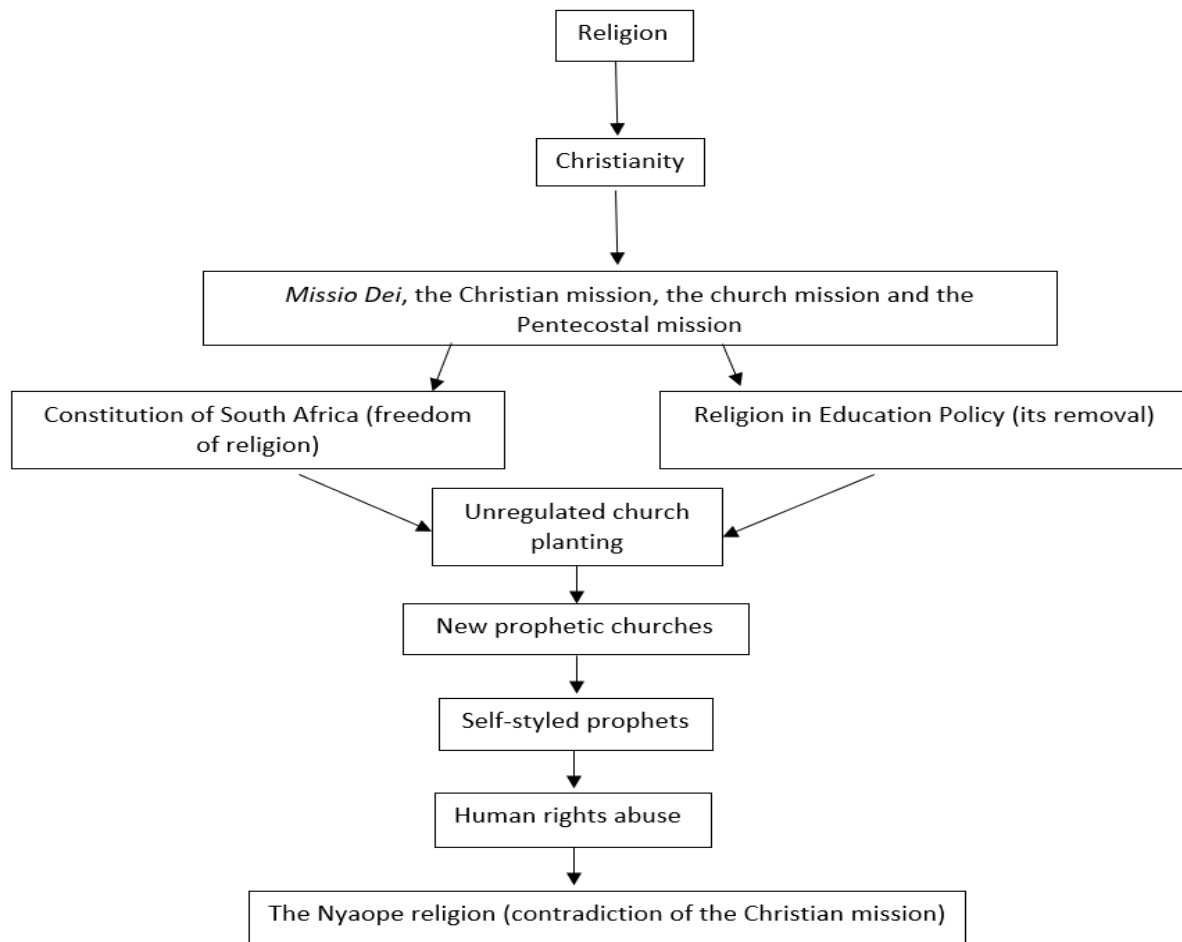
In Chapter 7, a short overview of each chapter in this thesis is given. All of the outcomes or major findings that this study reveals are outlined. A reflection on the findings and arguments to point out areas for possible further research is presented. Lastly, the proposition arrived at after consideration of the entire study and the findings thereof is given.

1.17 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the topic of the study and provided the background information to it. This was done by explaining what the study is about and why the topic is important. The outcome of the study was predicted by proposing a tentative solution to the problem (hypothesis). The context of the study was established, justification for conducting it was provided and the aims of the study were stated. That was followed by outlining the area of concern (research problem) of the study. Then the general direction of the study was given by answering the "why" question emanating from the research problem and explaining the origin of the final conclusions that the study hoped to reach. Systematically, this section outlined issues that needed solving and questions that needed answers, which could be provided by the

study. An explanation was given of why this study was needed to fill the gap in knowledge. The contribution it makes to new knowledge and the benefits it holds for the field of missiology in particular were also discussed.

1.18 Mind map of the study



Chapter 2: Literature study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of previous research that relates to the topic of human rights abuse by some self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion in South Africa. The summary is aimed at presenting the current and available knowledge on this topic. Thereafter, the theories that support the study are identified. This study employs trends in world Christianity as its preferred theoretical framework to look at the social circumstances and the context within which self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa formed the Nyaope religion within Christianity and perpetrate human rights abuse. Lastly, the method or tool that is employed by the study to conduct its investigation and answer the research problem is provided. This method gives guidance on how to collect and analyse data. With this understanding, the study utilises a case study method to look into human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa and how their conduct contradicts the Christian mission and amounts to the formation of a new form of religion – the Nyaope religion – that is proven to be anti-Christian.

2.2 Literature review

2.2.1 Christianity and the Christian mission in South Africa

History has recorded that Christianity arrived in South Africa with settlers from Europe, starting with Jan van Riebeeck as early as 1652 together with other settlers who lived in the Cape. However, this record is disputed by some scholars such as De Gruchy. In his book *The church struggle in South Africa*, De Gruchy (1979) registers the argument that the Portuguese Catholics arrived in South Africa and built a small Catholic chapel in Mossel Bay (Western Cape) in 1501, so there have already been Catholics residing in the Cape before 1652. However, records of this valuable history disappeared due to the Dutch East India Company forbidding the practice of Roman Catholicism in South Africa (De Gruchy, 1979:1). Nonetheless, on 9 July 1737, Georg Schmidt arrived in South Africa as a Christian missionary who volunteered to evangelise the Hottentots (Khoi-Khoi) in the Cape. He undertook the task of reading the Dutch Bible for the Khoi-Khoi people and taught them how to read, write, plant and sow. In 1742, he baptised his first converts of five Khoi-Khoi slaves. However, according to the Dutch Reformed Church, only Reformed ministers, and not missionaries, could baptise people, and Schmidt was not regarded as having been properly ordained. Another problem was the fact that

the Dutch Reformed Church held the view that Christians eligible for baptism must be free and not slaves. According to De Gruchy (1979), Schmidt's conduct caused trouble for him, as "the evangelistic piety and gospel of universal grace proclaimed to the indigenous people collided with the Calvinist orthodoxy of the Dutch Church", showing Schmidt as a threat to the theology and authority of the church. He was suspended of his duties and left for Amsterdam on 5 March 1744, hoping to plead his case there. His attempts of getting permission failed, and he never returned to South Africa. As a result, his missionary activities were ended, and he passed away in 1785 (De Gruchy 1979:2).

Schmidt's departure points to the idea that back then, the church in South Africa had some form of regulatory system to which ministers of the Word had to comply. Since that time, what happened to the church in South Africa is what Jesus Christ warned against in his parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30. According to this parable, while a man sowed good seed (wheat), his enemy came and sowed bad seed (weeds) among the wheat, and so, as the wheat sprouted, the weeds also appeared. These weeds are plants that have the same kind of stalk and colour as wheat. If not eliminated, the seeds of the weed would fall on the ground and reproduce. Once fully grown and ripe, it produces grain that is black and poisonous. This means if the weed is not uprooted, it will produce the same problem at the next harvest. Being puzzled by this parable, Jesus' disciples asked for an explanation and in explaining, He said:

The one who sowed the good seed is the son of man ... the field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil (Matthew 13:24-30).

The weeds were rooted within the same space as the wheat, which would create problems if the servants were to weed it out before the seeds developed, as this would damage the growth of the wheat too. So, the master's decision was to wait so that they could be distinguished by their fruit (Matthew 7:16). This parable will be helpful in trying to understand the story of good and bad practices of Christianity from the missional perspective in South Africa.

The intention of some of the early missionaries who brought the good seed (the gospel) was to Christianise or bring South Africans to Christ. Unfortunately, they did not notice the work of the evil one on the same ground in which they planted the good seed, which resulted in two kingdoms being at war (the good form of Christianity and the bad one). The good form of Christianity consists of true servants of Christ, while the bad form consists of individuals with the intention to infiltrate, deceive and destroy what is good (the gospel). For the purpose of this

study, these individuals are identified as self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion in South Africa.

South Africa gradually became the gateway of scores of Christian missionaries from countries such as France, Scotland, England, the United States of America and the Netherlands, with a clear goal to Christianise, evangelise, civilise and educate South Africans (advocates of a good form of Christianity). As De Gruchy (1979) puts it, “Protestant missionaries of other persuasions arrived by scores from Europe and America to Christianise the heathen” (De Gruchy 1979:2). According to Saayman (1991), the colonialist state anticipated that missionaries coming to South Africa with the aim of Christianising the heathens would aid the process of civilisation (Saayman 1991:2). However, this led to the racial accusation against white people levelled by black theology, loaned and interpreted by Gerald West as a South African proverb from others (Jomo Kenyatta, Desmond Tutu and Takatso Mofokeng), namely:

When the white man came to our Country, he had the Bible and we (Blacks) had the land. The white man said to us, “let us pray”. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible. (West, 2015)

This proverb displays an example of a manipulative and bad form of Christianity in South Africa. According to Mofokeng (1988:1934), this statement signifies that the role that the Bible played in the process of colonising and exploiting South Africans is an indication that South Africans were not aware that they were being tricked into other people’s religion and points to a historic struggle that had been accepted by past to future generations. To take this even further, scholars have broadened this view by including the idea that Christian missionaries had expropriated the land of the indigenous people without any compensation through armed force and had changed African customs, replacing them with Western customs (Kritzinger, 1987:17-18; Mashau, 2020:44; Masondo, 2018:209; Oliver, 2010:4).

Between 1850 and 1900, more Christian denominations opened mission branches aiming to find new converts (a good form of Christianity). However, internal church disagreements and disgruntlements ensued, which led to sporadic splits from mainline churches to the formation or founding of other churches, such as African Independent Churches, the Zion Christian Church and the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe group). Around 1908, American Pentecostal Christian operations arrived, and charismatic churches were established (all of these probably were signs of a good form of Christianity). However, during the same time, unregulated forms of African Independent Churches and other Christian churches led by abusive self-styled

spiritual leaders have erupted. The current study seeks to show the development of this cycle that resulted in a bad form of Christianity that came with self-styled prophecy. The study links these unregulated churches with religious abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa and calls the resulting style of religion the “Nyaope religion”.

2.2.2 *Bantu prophets in South Africa* (Sundkler, 1961)

In Sundkler’s book *Bantu prophets in South Africa*, published in 1948 and then updated in 1961, with his vast missionary experience in South Africa, he discusses the rise of independent churches in South Africa, giving a detailed account of what is referred to as “Bantu separatist churches”, which are not Christian in what is an accepted sense of Christian culture. The focus is on the development of independent churches, mainly in Zululand from 1945 to 1960, and how some African tribes, the Zulu tribe in particular, went out of their way to find a synthesis between their tribal religion and Christianity. Sundkler (1961) further examines their forms of worship and the personalities of their founders. The present study builds on the foundation laid by this book in demonstrating how the churches of self-styled spiritual leaders are not Christian at all and stand contrary to the mission of Christianity in South Africa. The study uses the findings of this book to track and understand the rise of independent churches and the rise of self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa. However, this should not be taken to mean that African independent churches are somehow littered with false teachings, as some self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa are demonstrating.

2.2.3 “The unusual practices within some Neo-Pentecostal churches in South Africa: reflections and recommendations” (Kgatle, 2017)

In his article “The unusual practices within some Neo-Pentecostal churches in South Africa: reflections and recommendations”, Kgatle (2017) reflects on recent unusual practices within what he refers to as “some Neo-Pentecostal churches” in South Africa. He argues that these Neo-Pentecostal churches have crossed the denominational boundaries in South Africa by idolising the “miraculous, healing, deliverance and enactment of bizarre church performances often performed by charismatic and highly influential spiritual leaders”. These unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders include, among other things, making congregants drink petrol, eat grass or snakes and spraying them with Doom. Kgatle extends the argument that these unusual practices are a sign of anti-institutionalism, anti-intellectualism, hypnotism and unemployment, which he lists as possible theological, psychological and socioeconomic

explanations for these unusual practices. He concludes that socioeconomic factors are the main explanation for supporting these self-styled spiritual leaders. Lastly, Kgatle (2017) recommends that religion should not be regulated by the government, as recommended by the CRL. Instead, he recommends that the government should support ecumenical councils, such as the South African Council of Churches, to manage religions. He writes: “The SACC [South African Council of Churches] will determine requirements for such affiliations, such as educational qualification. They must establish and outline basic Christian principles which all Christian churches can follow without questions” (Kgatle, 2017:7). He recommends that these para-churches or independent ministries should be encouraged to associate with well-established churches.

Kgatle’s (2017) article is beneficial to this study as it gives insight into the unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa. In addition, it gives comprehensive guidance on how churches should be regulated to avoid further incidents of human rights abuse by self-styled prophets.

2.2.4 “Reimagining the practice of Pentecostal prophecy in Southern Africa: a critical engagement” (Kgatle, 2019)

In another article “Reimagining the practice of Pentecostal prophecy in Southern Africa: a critical engagement”, Kgatle (2019) looks into bizarre Pentecostal practices in Southern Africa of self-styled spiritual leaders such as Uebert Angel from Zimbabwe, Boateng from Ghana and Bushiri in South Africa. According to Kgatle, “Prophet Shepherd Bushiri is in a league of his own and is a master of practices of Pentecostal prophecy ... especially in South Africa” (Kgatle 2019:1). This he said after having observed how Bushiri’s church attracted a multitude of followers from sub-Saharan Africa to South Africa who spent exorbitant amounts of money just to see Bushiri. Kgatle lists the following types of prophecy strategies by self-styled spiritual leaders:

- Forensic prophecy: This occurs when self-styled spiritual leaders prophesy to people by using their personal details, such as their street address, house number and even the type of food they have eaten.
- Prophet titles: Self-styled spiritual leaders use self-proclaimed titles to exalt themselves over other prophets just to become part of what Kgatle calls a “celebrity cult” (when a person becomes more important than the mission they belong to).

- Prophetic objects: Self-styled spiritual leaders make use of objects such as holy water, sacred oil, candles, incense, stickers, key holders and so forth to exalt themselves or to set themselves apart and use the profit for their own benefit.
- Prophetic consultation: This occurs when self-styled spiritual leaders make a profit out of seeing congregants privately. According to Kgatle (2019) “it is alleged that the prophets charge anything between R5 000 and R7 000 for such services” (Kgatle 2019:4).
- Prophetic miracles: This is when self-styled spiritual leaders perform orchestrated miracles, such as walking on air, raising the dead, taking pictures of people in their absence using iPads and many other performed miracles, just to win more followers.

In its entirety, Kgatle’s (2019) article deals at length with strategies and tactics that self-styled spiritual leaders use to attract people. The present study draws insight from this article to shape its arguments and content.

2.2.5 “‘And they shall make you eat grass like oxen’ (Daniel 4:24): reflections on recent practices in some new charismatic churches” (Resane, 2017)

In Resane’s (2017) article “‘And they shall make you eat grass like oxen’ (Daniel 4:24): reflections on recent practices in some new charismatic churches”, the story of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 is metaphorically applied to give insight into dangerous practices such as spraying congregants with Doom or making them drink petrol or eat grass or snakes, as observed in New Charismatic Churches in South Africa. Resane makes use of a relevant quotation from Daniel 14, namely “‘And they shall make you eat grass like oxen’”, as the premise used to show the danger of such practices, not only to theological fundamentals, but also to human health and dignity. Resane concludes: “These pastors are the embodiment of Nebuchadnezzar, people who lost their sanity, and had become anti-intellectual, anti-institutional, anti-sacramental, and antinomian in their ecclesiastical practices” (Resane 2017:14) The bottom line is correctly captured by Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015:1):

Theology is in exile and, as a result, the knowledge of God is in ecclesial eclipse. Doctrinal occultation has covered the Christian ontology in its epistemological morality and dignity. The government has the civil right to protect citizens whose lives are endangered by these unconventional religious practices.

Resane's (2017) article is used in the current study to place the emergence and conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders within the appropriate biblical context.

2.2.6 “Religious liberties and the Constitution of South Africa: a call for religious accountability” (Mokhoathi & Rembe, 2017)

In 2017, Mokhoathi and Rembe published an article titled “Religious liberties and the Constitution of South Africa: a call for religious accountability”, which looks into the abuse and violation of human rights in South Africa by self-styled spiritual leaders. Mokhoathi and Rembe argue that “even though these acts are claimed to be of faith, they undermine and undercut the rights of the congregants”. According to the authors, some of the acts of such pastors overstep human rights (Rembe 2017:2). They recommend that pastors who are responsible for perpetuating the violation of human rights in South Africa should be held accountable for their ill conduct and they agree with the CRL by imploring the government of South Africa to bring some form of control or monitor the exercise of religious liberties. This article is valuable as it will assist the present study to identify acts of abuse and the violation of human rights by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa. Also, it will help by giving direction on how churches can be regulated to prevent further acts of human rights abuse by self-styled prophets.

2.2.7 Snake churches and the voice of the South African Council of Churches

In his 2019 master's dissertation “Religious communities and South African politics: the case of South African Council of Churches from 1994-2016”, Thinane wrote:

After the attainment of democracy in South Africa in 1994, its newly reformulated Constitution recognised the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion under chapter 2 of the RSA Constitution (RSA Constitution 1996:7). However, the continuous realisation of this right appeared to be trampling on and being in conflict with other human rights in South Africa. (Thinane, 2019:75)

In this dissertation, the researcher deals with the church of End Times Disciples Ministries, then led by 24-year-old Tshepo Mnguni, who made the claim that under God's command, he had turned snakes into chocolate and instructed members of his congregation to eat them. Also investigated was the church of Rabboni Centre Ministries, led by Lesego Daniel, who in 2014, instructed members of his congregation to eat grass and drink petrol as a symbolic way of accessing God. Outlining the response of the CRL, the researcher states that in “March 2016

the commission issued its report and submitted the final version to the parliamentary portfolio called Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs” (Thinane, 2019:76). This report calls for the regulation of religious organisations and practitioners in South Africa (CRL, 2017:8). The commission proposes that there should be a peer review council as an umbrella council that will have peer representation from every religious community in South Africa. Under this council, there will be a number of peer review committees from every religion that will play a role in religious dispute resolution and make recommendations to the umbrella council. The umbrella council should play a policing role, have disciplinary power over religious organisations and practitioners and recommend the granting or withdrawal of licenses to the CRL.

However, the South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference (2016) doubts whether these recommendations would be realised and is of the view that if the recommendations of the commission were to be implemented, they would limit freedom of religion and association in South Africa. Furthermore, the South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference (2016) argues that there already are various state institutions and legal mechanisms that can deal with corruption, exploitation and other forms of religious abuse by religious communities without hindering freedom of religion and association.

Along similar lines, a non-profit organisation – Freedom of Religion South Africa (2016) – argues that the control of religious organisations and practitioners by extensive national structures will result in the state capture of religion, which will give the government the power to silence churches on issues that reflect negatively on the state. One must admit that both the South African Catholic Bishop’s Conference and Freedom of Religion South Africa have a strong argument against the recommendations of the CRL. However, these arguments fail to consider the point that the CRL does not only have the function of promoting the rights of religious communities but also an inherent obligation to protect the rights of South Africans. Thus, the implication of the promotion and protection of the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities needs close consideration. The following conclusion can be made:

Serious attention on this question is necessary particularly on the part of South African policymakers, lawyers and academics to reconcile the gap between the idea of the constitutional guaranteed religious freedom and the manifestations and realization of such freedom of religion in South Africa (Thinane, 2019:78).

Thinane's (2019) dissertation will assist the current study in its journey to understand the reaction of the South African government through the CRL and the plan and some of the recommendations of this commission that implore the South African government to regulate churches.

2.2.8 “Redefining religion? A critical Christian reflection on CRL Rights Commission’s proposal to regulate religion in South Africa” (Banda, 2019)

Several scholars have interpreted the implications of the recommendations of the CRL. Banda (2019) is one such scholar who, in his article “Redefining religion? A critical Christian reflection on CRL Rights Commission’s proposal to regulate religion in South Africa”, critically deals with the understanding of religion as it emerges from both the findings and recommendations of the CRL or, as the question is phrased in his article: “what do the recommendations for the regulation of religion in South Africa by the CRL Rights Commission reflect about the commission’s understanding of religion in the country?”. Supplementary to this question, this paper poses another question: “what it is that the commission seeks to regulate – is it beliefs or expressions thereof?” This question is substantiated by another question asking what the impact or consequences are that will follow the decision to regulate religion (Banda 2019:2).

Banda’s paper starts by providing the background to the work of the CRL in South Africa, mentioning that this commission is one of the six institutions designated to give support to the functioning of the constitutional democracy by promoting and protecting the religious, cultural and linguistic rights of South African communities, but at the same time, it is independent of or free from influence by other state organs. He then introduces the fact that the CRL has engaged a series of investigating hearings after it has become aware of indications of the commercialisation of religion and human rights violations by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa. Banda further highlights that while a section of the South African society has welcomed the recommendations that emerged from this investigation, others have strongly objected to them, fearing that this might mean the end of religious freedom, which will ultimately be replaced by religious persecution in South Africa.

Ahead of engaging the recommendations of the CRL, Banda’s (2019) paper details the following 12-point summary of the findings of the commission:

- Self-styled spiritual leaders charge congregants an exorbitant amount of money for spiritual services.
- Many religious institutions do not comply with the legislation of South Africa.
- Most of the churches of self-styled spiritual leaders operate without governing structures and are owned by their founders.
- Some foreign nationals who lead these churches appear to misuse the South African visa application system.
- Self-styled spiritual leaders are solely responsible for the financial control of their churches.
- Some of these churches continually violate the tax rules of the country by evading tax.
- Some of these churches are engaged in deliberately concealing their money movement.
- It is much easier to establish a new church in South Africa than in other countries.
- The streets of South Africa are full of illegal and unethical advertising of false miracles by self-styled spiritual leaders.
- Property that should normally belong to churches as organisations instead belongs to the self-styled spiritual leaders of these churches in their personal capacity.
- Most of these churches are run like businesses and not religious organisations.
- Most of the self-styled spiritual leaders of these churches do as they wish because churches do not have some form of peer-review mechanism to regulate them.

All of these findings led the CRL to make the recommendation that churches must find a way to self-regulate.

Consistent with the voices that objected to the idea of church regulation, Banda's (2019) paper, after having outlined problems with the report of the CRL, concludes by encouraging religious communities to resist attempts by the commission to regulate churches, since this idea is the outcome of the secular humanistic understanding of the commission that seeks to redefine religion in unhelpful ways to religious communities themselves. The paper then recommends that the CRL should find ways to work with religious communities to identify religious imposters and report them to the legal authorities.

Banda's (2019) article will be very useful to the content of the present study, as it deals with the findings and recommendations of the CRL relating to the conduct of self-styled spiritual

leaders in South Africa. It will further assist the study to understand and investigate possible ways to mitigate the highlighted possible dangers in regulating religion.

2.2.9 “Seemingly harmless new Christian religious movements in South Africa pose serious threats of spiritual abuse” (Pretorius, 2007b)

In his article “Seemingly harmless new Christian religious movements in South Africa pose serious threats of spiritual abuse”, Pretorius (2007b) discusses the dynamics of spiritual abuse by new religious groups and the effects of such abuse on their victims (followers). He argues that, even though these new religious groups may seem harmless on their outward appearance, a closer look reveals how dangerous they are for South Africa. He writes:

Some of these religious groups are described as religious groups with an authoritarian leader or leadership, which suppress the rational thought of their followers, utilise deceptive and unethical recruitment techniques and coercive mind control, and isolate members from conventional society and former relationships. (Pretorius, 2007b:262)

Pretorius (2007b) refers to these groups as “a demanding new Christian religious movement” that consists of people who are passionate about following their leader who is believed to possess a special gift. For the sake of these groups, their followers are willing to abandon everything including their human rights, just to be in the good books of their leaders. Moreover, according to Pretorius, innocent people usually get involved in spiritually abusive systems because of some “attractive bait” their leaders presents (to them), that offers “an idealistic world” (Pretorius 2007b:272). According to his analysis, these (self-styled spiritual) leaders view criticism as an attack from the enemy and thus take it to be invalid. Pretorius declares that it is ironic and sad that “certain persons, who are accorded respect and honour in society by virtue of their role as religious leaders and models of spiritual authority, inflict spiritual wounds” (Pretorius 2007b:273). These leaders then justify such infliction by claiming special insight into scripture that no one else has, as special revelations are endowed upon these leaders. As such, their word is final – “Questioning these leaders amounts to questioning God” (Pretorius, 2007b:275). Ultimately, Pretorius (2007b) asks one question that is fundamental to this study: Should the Christian church as a whole not take a firm stand against this serious infringement of human rights? He then concludes that such abuse is no less serious than any other abuse and should be curbed at all costs.

Pretorius's (2007b) article will be very helpful to the present study as it deals extensively with spiritual abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa. It will assist in obtaining an answer to the question of what sort of human rights abuse the followers of self-styled spiritual leaders suffer in the process of their spiritual experience.

2.2.10 “Unsafe spaces? An ecclesiological evaluation and response to recent controversial practices in some South African neo-Pentecostal churches” (Banda, 2020)

In his article “Unsafe spaces? An ecclesiological evaluation and response to recent controversial practices in some South African neo-Pentecostal churches”, Banda (2020) examines the effects of the controversial practices within some South African Neo-Pentecostal churches. This article highlights that a major characteristic of these churches is their self-styled spiritual leaders who have some form of control over their followers. Referring to his international counterparts Weber, Aguzue and Chitumba, Banda (2020) observes that other African countries, such as Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, as in South Africa have witnessed similar controversial practices of Neo-Pentecostal self-styled spiritual leaders. This pertinent fact is observed too by Chitando and Biri (2016) from a Zimbabwean point of view, arguing that the emergence of Neo-Pentecostal churches seems to have altered the identity of Christianity in that country with a new focus on prophetic healing and deliverance by young pastors (Chitando & Biri 2016:72-85). Another African country that has witnessed the rise of unusual and controversial practices within its religious space is Ghana, as is attested in Omenyo and Arthur (2013) and Quayesi-Amakye (2015). Banda (2020) also refers to Dube (2019a, 2019b) who has argued vehemently that the controversial practices of these self-styled spiritual leaders grossly violate the human rights of their followers. According to Banda (2020), these practices have turned churches into unsafe spaces that abuse and exploit followers. He refers to examples of controversial activities that have taken place in South Africa in the name of the church. These examples include self-styled Prophet Penuel Mnguni, who made his followers eat snakes and used dog meat served with Fanta soft drink for communion and Prophet Bongani Maseko of Daveyton's Breath of Christ Ministries, who made his followers drink motor engine cleaning fluid, claiming it had healing capabilities. He further asks a very pertinent question that is central to the content of this study: “one is left asking what such activities have to do with the mission of the church ... and if such a church is a true church belonging to Christ?” (Banda 2020:2). The current study endeavours to answer these questions raised by various scholars on the controversial practices of self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa.

2.2.11 “Opposing abuse in religious high-demand groups in South Africa: case study of the ‘prophet’ of Hertzogville” (Pretorius, 2007a)

In his article “Opposing abuse in religious high-demand groups in South Africa: case study of the ‘prophet’ of Hertzogville”, Pretorius (2007a) analyses how some practices or exercises of freedom of religion can lead to the violation of other basic human rights. He observes that while the drafters of the new Constitution of South Africa might have had good intentions of accommodating all religions, as opposed to the apartheid system that favoured one form of religion (Christianity), in the process, religious freedom has seen the emergence of “high-demand religious groups”, which have opened floodgates for self-styled spiritual leaders who violate people’s basic human rights in the name of religion (Pretorius, 2007a:603). According to Pretorius (2007a:605), one question is paramount to addressing the conflict that exists in balancing freedom of religion and basic human rights, namely: “can freedom of religion overrule adherence to other human rights?” He then answers this question by arguing that freedom of religion cannot be exercised in a way that undermines or is inconsistent with the basic human rights that are contained in the Bill of Rights (Pretorius, 2007a:606). The view here is that while the Constitution of South Africa affords its constituents the right to freely practise religion by participating in rituals and following the teachings of their respective religions, such practices may not and should not contradict the basic human rights contained in the Bill of Rights (Pretorius, 2007a:608). In Pretorius’s (2007a:609) view, freedom of religion has only two elements, namely that every individual has the right to choose or follow a religion of his or her choice and that anyone is free to participate in or attend any religious ritual. However, Pretorius (2007a:609) argues that such a right to freedom of religion may not be exercised in any way that may pose danger to or threaten the existence of basic human rights, as freedom of religion can only function within the borders of basic human rights. Thus, Pretorius (2007a:612) correctly states that “there is no automatic right to be exempted from the laws of the land on the grounds of religious belief”. To give an example of this, he highlights that once it is declared a basic human right for all children to attend school, no religious group or parent can refuse his or her child this right on the grounds of religious belief. Accordingly, religious practices may not be limited unless they cause some form of harm to the wellbeing of an individual or a society (Pretorius, 2007a:613).

Central to Pretorius’s (2007) article, is the story of a self-styled spiritual leader, David Francis, in Hertzogville (a small town situated in the Lejweleputswa region of the Free State Province

in South Africa). Francis ordered that one of his followers, Uncle Paul Meintjies, who had died on 1 July 2004, was not to be buried, as he would soon be raised from the dead. This led to the body of Uncle Paul being kept in the mortuary for more than 50 days, resulting in the decomposition of the body, which caused a bad smell in the area. Pretorius (2007a:615) argues that while Francis's followers were exercising their rights to religious freedom, such exercise violated the basic human rights of the family and the entire community as well. First, the manner in which the body of Uncle Paul was treated was in utter violation of the right to human dignity. Second, the incident deprived the family of their right to mourn the loss of their loved one. Third, the once-respected Uncle Paul's right to be laid to rest in a respectful manner was violated (Pretorius, 2007a:616).

While this article will be valuable in assisting the current study to understand or distinguish the concept of freedom of religion within the context of other basic human rights, it does not ascertain whether or not these so-called "religious high-demand groups or alternative religious groups" are within the Christian religion or not. This study builds on the foundation laid in Pretorius's article to argue that the religion of some self-styled religious leaders at times stands contrary to Christian teachings and orthodox practices.

2.2.12 "Desperation in an attempt to curb modern-day prophets: Pentecostalisation and the church in South Africa and Zimbabwe" (Dube, 2019)

In the article "Desperation in an attempt to curb modern-day prophets: Pentecostalisation and the church in South Africa and Zimbabwe", Dube (2019) looks into new forms of Pentecostalisation by modern-day flamboyant self-styled prophets that have become the order of the day in South Africa and Zimbabwe. He argues that these self-styled prophets have developed a form of gospel that stands contrary to basic Christian teachings. Dube describes the move by these self-styled spiritual leaders as the "excesses of Pentecostalism", meaning that such self-styled leaders seek to excessively emulate the apostles at Pentecost (Dube 2019:26). Furthermore, he observes that these spiritual leaders are followed by people who are eager for a miracle, being compelled by economic, health, social and political challenges that provide an alluring platform for opportunists such as self-styled prophets. Subsequently, he argues that Christians who follow these leaders do so with a strong belief that through their fellowship, they will achieve the kind of life they are longing for (Dube 2019:28). In addition, Dube highlights the sad reality that the vulnerable followers of these churches strongly believe in their leaders and everything they say, which explains why they are always rushing to their

leaders' defence whenever these leaders are accused of any wrongdoing. In their view, their leaders are never wrong, no matter how unacceptable or harmful the committed practices are to their own wellbeing. As if referring to the suggestion of the current study, Dube's paper states that the "advocates of (these) Pentecostal movements have developed their own vision of religion, morality, and social life" by unorthodoxly twisting and tweaking acceptable scriptures to suit themselves and defraud their followers in the process (Dube 2019:28). According to Dube, it is most worrisome that most of these self-styled spiritual leaders "propagate a kind of gospel that is a complete departure from basic Christian teachings" (Dube 2019:25).

Dube (2019) concludes by admitting that there is a great need for an urgent and adequate theological response to these practices, calling for theological educators and students to pay more attention to issues of self-styled spiritual leaders who continue to practise excessive Pentecostalism that violates and disregard human rights. This study answers this call by holistically investigating whether the controversial acts of self-styled spiritual leaders suggest excessive Pentecostalism or something much bigger (a new form of religion). While Dube speaks of self-styled prophets' own "vision" of religion, the current study explains their actions as their own version of religion (Dube 2019:28).

2.2.13 "He told me that my waist and private parts have been ravaged by demons: sexual exploitation of female church members by 'prophets' in Nigeria" (Agazue, 2016)

In his article "He told me that my waist and private parts have been ravaged by demons: sexual exploitation of female church members by 'prophets' in Nigeria", Agazue (2016) writes about self-made pastors in Nigeria, who present themselves as being spiritually and financially favoured by God and practise sexual and fraudulent activities. According to this article, these pastors sexually exploit women under the guise of spiritual cleansing. In addition, Agazue admits that in Nigeria, it is no longer big news whenever some self-styled spiritual leader has sexually abused those in his care (women in particular). This article discusses a number of cases of sexual abuse and exploitation of mostly women and girls by self-styled prophets in Nigeria. Agazue lists poverty and unemployment among the factors that are contributing to sexual exploitation (Agazue 2016:1). According to this article, the self-styled prophets in question are good at coercing women into believing that participating in sexual intercourse with them is fulfilling the will of God and will even save them from being possessed by evil spirits. Among the victims of sexual exploitation by Nigerian self-styled spiritual leaders are

24-year-old Cynthia Nwanguma, a nursing student, who randomly had unprotected “holy sex” for seven days with Dennis Mmadu, a self-styled prophet, who had told her to keep it secret or else she would die. Another case involved a 37-year-old self-styled pastor who told his 18-year-old female follower that her waist and private parts had been ravaged by demons and needed deliverance, otherwise she would not have children. The pastor then informed her that the only way for him to cast such demons out would be through sexual intercourse. Similar to the story of Cynthia Nwanguma, this woman too was told not to tell anyone about this mode of deliverance (Agazue 2016:9). Agazue found that many victims of such violations continued to live in fear even beyond such victimisation, and as a result, they would not disclose or share their painful experiences with others but instead choose to rather die with these secrets (Abazue 2016:10).

Self-styled prophets who conveniently happen to be the founders of their churches are said to be acting in multiple roles of chief executive officers, chief finance officers and consultants of their churches. Some of the fraudulent activities practised by these leaders include selling various items to their congregants at much above their market prices, as they would convince their followers that these materials would heal their sickness, relieve their poverty or even bless them with employment, while in the process, the self-styled prophets are making a profit.

Although this article is useful for the current study, Agazue, like other scholars such as Dube (2019a), believes that these self-styled spiritual leaders represent Pentecostalism. However, the current study seeks to eliminate this view and argues that the distance between Pentecostalism and the practices of these self-styled prophets is immeasurable. This study will go to great lengths to prove that the conduct of these self-styled prophets is far from what Pentecostalism proclaims and thus is contrary to the Christian religion as a whole.

2.2.14 “Conundrum of religious mafia and legislation in South Africa: when does religion become a national threat? Reference to the Seven Angels Ministry” (Dube, 2019)

In his theoretical article “Conundrum of religious mafia and legislation in South Africa: when does religion become a national threat? Reference to the Seven Angels Ministry”, Dube (2019) analyses the hearings conducted by the CRL on the existence and conduct of the Seven Angels Ministry at Ngcobo (formerly Engcobo) in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This came after the Seven Angels Ministry was alleged to be commercialising and mafiarising religion and deprived its followers’ children of their right to education. He makes use of the

term “religious mafia” to describe the religious practices and crimes that are committed behind the mask of religious discourse (Dube 2019:2). He also argues that religious mafias reveal themselves as such by practising constitutional delinquency or subversion of constitutional arrangements (Dube, 2019:3). Furthermore, he further indicates that such religious mafia movements are good at manipulating their adherents into giving up all their belongings to the church leaders as a way of showing obedience to God (Dube 2019:4).

The Seven Angels Ministry was led by seven brothers who considered themselves to be angels and strongly believed that they were more important than all other human beings. This is substantiated by its representative who told the CRL that they were angels and superhuman and said: “I am an angel from heaven, seated at the right of the father” (Dube 2019:5). Dube highlights that the Seven Angel Ministry has been regarded as being controversial from 2016, after the police raided its premises and rescued about 18 children who had been prevented from attending school, as the church disregarded education or its role in society. Dube also mentions that some of the followers of the church “resigned from the teaching profession ... deciding that they could not participate in it after their alleged enlightenment” (Dube 2019:4).

Similar to the current study, in the second part of Dube’s (2019) article, it is argued that the South African government has blundered by removing religion from public schools. Dube (2019:7) asserts that the Seven Angels Ministry is a clear reminder that the study of religion in public schools should be reintroduced to avoid further distortion of religious teachings. While Dube (2019) seems to have covered some of the central elements of the present study, the article only focuses on the Seven Angels Ministry to explain the concept of mafiarised religions. Also, while the term “religious mafia” is quite appropriate in describing the conduct of the Seven Angels Ministry and its likes, the term cannot be used to describe the conduct of other self-styled spiritual leaders who are not necessarily operating in a syndicate-like manner. However, the article is foundational for the advancement of the current study.

2.2.15 *The fourth Pentecostal wave in South Africa (Kgatle, 2021a)*

In his book *The fourth Pentecostal wave in South Africa*, Kgatle (2021a) examines contemporary Pentecostalism in South Africa. The book consists of eight chapters that deal with the evolution of Pentecostalism. Chapter 1 introduces the start of Pentecostalism as recorded in Acts 2:1-4, on the day of Pentecost when followers of Christ gathered together in one place and received the Holy Spirit, Acts 10:44, when the Lord’s followers started to speak

in different tongues, and Acts 19:1-6, when the apostle Paul laid his hands upon believers to receive the Holy Spirit. The chapter then continues to discuss the evolution of three main waves of Pentecostalism in South Africa, namely classical Pentecostalism, Independent Churches and Charismatic Churches (Kgatle 2021a:1-20).

Chapter 2 introduces the idea of another wave (the fourth wave of Pentecostalism), which is different from the first three waves. Kgatle (2021a) mentions that while the first three waves of Pentecostalism thrived under the apartheid system of South Africa, the fourth wave came into existence under the democratic dispensation that began in 1994. Kgatle admits to the difficulty that theological scholars continue to experience in trying to understand the fourth wave within the strange context or in light of the unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders, leading to an investigation by the CRL, which ultimately called for the regulation of religion in South Africa (Kgatle 2021a:21-41).

From Chapter 2 to Chapter 8, Kgatle dedicates his energy towards exploring the fourth wave and its catalysts, strengths and weaknesses (Kgatle 2021a:42-161). Chapter 7 in particular focuses on the abuse of religion by self-styled spiritual leaders and the gullibility of their followers, including incidents of people being ordered to eat snakes or drink petrol, spraying congregants with Doom and spiritual leaders claiming to have resurrected the dead (Kgatle 2021a:129-148).

Kgatle's (2021a) book is instrumental in forming the foundation of the current study. It assists this study in identifying and understanding the waves of Pentecostalism in South Africa and how Pentecostalism has been translated into an opportunity for human rights abuse by some self-styled spiritual leaders. This book is also instrumental in the process of extracting and understanding the Nyaope religion within the context of the fourth wave of Pentecostalism.

2.2.16 “Roadside Pentecostalism: religious advertising in Nigeria and the marketing of charisma” (Ukah 2008)

In his article “Roadside Pentecostalism: religious advertising in Nigeria and the marketing of charisma”, Ukah (2008) focuses on urban centres in Nigeria that have turned into sacred galleries that are bringing about “roadside Pentecostalism”. His paper examines the manner in which roadside Pentecostalist churches attract followers through social visibility, selling personalities, the sale of goods, capturing the imagination and publicly performing unverified miracles on radio and television (Ukah 2008:125). Some countries, such as those of the United

Kingdom, have non-ministerial government departments, such as the Charity Commission, which monitor the activities of charitable organisations, such as churches; however, in Nigeria, as is the case in South Africa, no one monitors or regulates the content and claims of religious advertising (Ukah 2008:126). Ukah (2008) argues that because churches are not monitored nor regulated, religious advertising has been pushed to extreme levels of inventiveness, to a point where pastors have become media celebrities and pop stars who dress in designer suits. These pastors design their adverts in such a way that they feed on people's imagination (Ukah 2008:127-128).

Ukah (2008) also points out a recent strategy or the culture of "first ladyship" in Nigeria, whereby male pastors include photographs of their spouses to appeal to other women, resulting in there being more female members than men in their churches (Ukah 2008:128). He attributes this "first ladyship" culture to the eighth president of Nigeria, Ibrahim Babangida, who supported, publicised and popularised his "first lady" office even to the expense of his own vice-president. The Pentecostal churches then emulated this culture by pastors popularising their wives and making them their second-in-command (Ukah 2008:129-130). In the long run, the first ladyship culture is a strategy that various pastors use to turn churches into family firms that are fully grounded in family control by themselves and their close or immediate families (Ukah 2008:130-131).

Lastly, Ukah (2008) deals with the theme of healing, prosperity and deliverance in a holistic fashion, explaining that these three strategies are used by pastors in their advertising to attract huge audiences. According to him, these pastors capitalise on their claims to heal all sorts of diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and others, knowing very well that many people are in desperate need of a cure, as good medical services have become unaffordable (Ukah 2008:132). This fact is covered by Kgatle (2017) as well, who writes:

The possible theological, psychological and socio-economic explanations for such practices were outlined in detail, given the fact that more than 80% of South Africans have no medical insurance, more than 25% are unemployed, the 3,5 million young South Africans not at school, work or being trained in any skill, as well as a failing public service and education system. (Kgatle 2017:7)

Faith healing is also exercised upon economic poverty as a more materialistic instead of a bodily service. The type of faith preached in this regard emphasises that God is rich and can turn people into instant millionaires. To stress these claims, these pastors will then publicly

display their wealth by living exorbitantly and driving in a convoy of expensive cars that can be seen by people who are mostly experiencing financial failure and are in need of power to prosper (Ukah 2008:133-134).

The third mechanism that these pastors use is the promise of deliverance from some demonic possession. This is considered to be a spiritual war against curses and satanic bondage, and the impression is created that individuals need to be delivered from demonic possession in order to live a better life (Ukah 2008:135-136). In conclusion, Ukah (2008) argues that these pastors operate with the objective to exploit, manipulate and control their followers in seductive ways.

While Ukah's (2008) article does not deal with self-styled pastors as being opposed to the missional nature of Christianity, the present study will make use of its insight to form an academic opinion about how they make use of glamour and unverifiable claims in advertisements to attract followers. Even though Ukah (2008) has focused his investigation on Nigerian Pentecostalism, it provides a good illustration of how most self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa publicise themselves and their services to attract followers.

2.2.17 “Church breakaways as a prototype of commercialisation and commodification of religion in the Pentecostal church movement in South Africa: considering curricula offerings for pastors” (Masenya & Masenya 2018)

In 2018, Masenya and Masenya published their article “Church breakaways as a prototype of commercialisation and commodification of religion in the Pentecostal church movement in South Africa”, in which they attribute the commercialisation and commodification of religion to the ongoing trend of breakaways from the historical Pentecostal churches of South Africa. According to their analysis, the more young pastors, or what they call “fly-by-night pastors”, break away from their Pentecostal mother churches to form their own independent churches, the more they commercialise and commodify religion. Referring to Mapumulo (2017), they further note that most pastors who break away from their mother churches have done so in pursuit of independence and liberty to operate on their own without any hindrance or supervision (Masenya & Masenya 2018:634).

Masenya and Masenya (2018) view the commercialisation of religion as a situation in which pastors put a price on the spiritual services they provide to their followers, while the commodification of religion refers to a process of turning church spiritual services into money-making schemes (Masen & Masenya 2018:632). Relying on a foundation laid by Tolofari

(2008), who has investigated the commercialisation and commodification of education, Masenya and Masenya (2018) apply his findings to the context of religion and suggest that there is a new entrepreneurial approach to church management that is driven by motives of profit. They cite Resane (2018) who describes this conduct as an unscrupulous method of gaining money by means of psychological manipulation and common deception (Masenya & Masenya 2018:636). The new breakaway pastors are said to be selling spiritual products, such as holy water, disc holders, church attire and even pencils, which they claim to have healing powers or some form of blessing. This finding is substantiated by the report of the CRL, which found that items such as T-shirts, Vaseline and towels were sold to followers who were made to believe that they would have good luck if they used them. It is at this juncture that Masenya and Masenya (2018) remark that the “leaders of independent churches know how to use people’s needs against them by promising to meet their needs of unemployment, love and luck in their lives”. In addition, Masenya and Masenya (2018) refer to a joke by the South African comedian Trevor Noah, who, in 2018, joked about these pastors, saying that “instead of feeding the 5 000 hungry people like Jesus did, today’s prophets are being fed by the 5 000 hungry people” (Masenya & Masenya 2018:637).

Masenya and Masenya’s (2018) article proposes intense training of pastoral candidates, which is crucial as the only way to resolve the religious problems in South African churches. They argue that good training of pastors will curtail church breakaway tendencies and give rise to church leaders who will be focused on solving societal challenges as opposed to concentrating their energies upon self-advancement. In this way, the commercialisation and commodification of religion will subside. This article is instrumental in helping the current study to map the origin and background of self-styled spiritual leaders. It is also helpful towards efforts of finding the missing link between the traditional Pentecostal churches and the fourth wave of Pentecostalism, as suggested by Kgatle (2019).

2.2.18 *Breaking the silence on spiritual abuse* (Oakley & Kinmond, 2013)

Most scholars or work presented so far has focused mainly on the perpetrators of abuse and their conduct. The work of Oakley and Kinmond (2013) differs from these in a number of important ways, such as the work being entirely focused on the experiences of victims of abuse within the church context. Also, it introduces the concept of spiritual abuse and correlates it with other forms of abuse. Furthermore, it points to the pastoral gap or lack of counsellors and safe spaces where victims of spiritual abuse can be accommodated.

The first chapter of *Breaking the silence on spiritual abuse*, which happens to be the most important and relevant chapter in light of the present study, examines various factors that relate or give rise to a working definition of spiritual abuse, while at the same time exploring the historical context thereof. Oakley and Kinmond argue that while the term “spiritual abuse” may be contemporary, the practices it describes have existed in the church throughout its history (Oakley & Kinmond 2013:8). These practices include, among other things, pastoral inability to recognise self-failing, the inability to manage challenges and contradictions, and even pride among ministers. They further argue that these practices could have originated in America from the movement known as “shepherding” in the late 1960s and became problematic in the 1970s when concerns were raised about heavy shepherding in the charismatic movement. “Heavy shepherding” is described as a process whereby shepherding becomes a controlling role by identifying faults in other people who would blindly obey instructions without question (Oakley & Kinmond 2013:9). This book considers multiple definitions of spiritual abuse as the mistreating of a person who is in need of spiritual empowerment, when a spiritual leader abuses his or her authority to control or exploit others, when one’s spiritual power is used to practise and satisfy one’s own needs at the expense or to the detriment of others and any misuse of spiritual authority that may result in others experiencing harm. A more preferred definition of spiritual abuse is any form of control, manipulation, exploitation and coercion of people by another within a spiritual context (Oakley & Kinmond 2013:20-21).

Chapter 2 discusses experiences of spiritual abuse in detail, while at the same time, issues of coercion and control that take place in the church context are explored. These issues include manipulation and exploitation. Also discussed is the use of biblical discourse by spiritual leaders to control their followers (Oakley & Kinmond 2013:25-55). Chapter 3 establishes a concrete link between what is accepted as spiritual abuse and various other forms of abuse or what they call “real abuse” (Oakley & Kinmond 2013:56). This is done by exploring both similarities and differences between spiritual abuse and other forms of abuse. Similarities between spiritual abuse and other forms of abuse include aspects such as a warm welcome and a positive relationship among those who will later become the abused and the abuser. More similarities are the initial positive feelings that victims of spiritual abuse experience, the changing nature of the relationship dynamics between the victims and their abusers, and negative feelings that arise, such as betrayal, fear, distrust, powerlessness and anger. In its entirety, this chapter demonstrates and even argues for the acceptance of spiritual abuse as a form of abuse that is similar to other forms of abuse (Oakley & Kinmond 2013:56-72).

This book is very helpful as it will assist the present study to fully understand the experience of victims of spiritual abuse in the church context. It is revolutionary, as it approaches the question of spiritual abuse from the perspective of the abused as opposed to the abuser (or self-styled spiritual leaders) as has been the approach taken by most scholars who have investigated incidents of spiritual abuse within the church context in South Africa. The current study builds on the foundation established by this book to find new insight relating to experiences of spiritually abused individuals.

2.2.19 “Controversial charismatic gifts and the church in Kenya today” (Koech, 2015)

In his article “Controversial charismatic gifts and the church in Kenya today”, Koech (2015) discusses different positions held by various theologians on the controversy over the spiritual gifts of healing, speaking in tongues and prophecy. This work identifies four groups: Pentecostal or charismatic; cessationist; open but cautious; and neo-charismatic. The two groups Pentecostal or charismatic and neo-charismatic have more similarities than differences. These two groups exercise gifts of the spirit, teach about supernatural miracles, signs and wonders and encounters of power, while neo-charismatics downplay the idea of speaking in tongues and are reluctant to be associated with either the Pentecostal or charismatic groups (Koech 2015:26-27). The other two groups (the cessationists and the open-but-cautious group) are more relevant and of particular interest to the work of this study. Cessationists are those who argue that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer relevant and operational in the modern church. They further argue that the death of the biblical apostles marked the end of supernatural gifts (Koech 2015:27). The open-but-cautious group comprises those who maintain a neutral position between the cessationists and the Pentecostal or charismatic groups. While they are not fully convinced by the view that suggests that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer relevant and operational in the church today, they are, at the same time, not fully convinced by the teachings and practices of those churches that emphasise these gifts in modern days either. So, without dismissing the likelihood of miracles that can take place, they are cautious about the possibility of groups that abuse these gifts (Koech 2015:29).

This work is instrumental in helping the present study to understand and classify the views of self-styled spiritual leaders and their followers in relation to miracles or orchestrated miracles that are prevalent within the Nyaope religion in South Africa.

2.2.20 Trends in world Christianity

The Christian religion has witnessed the evolution of different ways of advancing the church throughout the history thereof. Some of these methods have worked and were good enough to preserve the identity of the community of saints as envisioned by Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry and the apostolic age, which ensured collaboration and Christian unity. The first ecumenical councils in the history of Christianity, such as the Council of Jerusalem or the Apostolic Council (AD 50), the First Council of Nicaea (AD 325), the Council of Ephesus (AD 431), the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), the Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553), the Third Council of Constantinople (AD 680-681), the Second Council of Nicaea (AD 787), as well as other Christian ecumenical councils that came later, were efforts geared towards unifying the Christian religion (Davis 1983). Unfortunately, through time, some elements that have evolved out of Christian movements seem to have fragmented, and continue to do so, the Christian religion beyond any possible unity.

In relation to African Christianity, Ngalula (2017) examined three trends marked by the coexistence of three major groups in the following categories: churches that came to Africa as antiquity; churches that came to Africa as a result of the Western missionary process; and churches that came to Africa as a result of or through the work of African revivals, such as African Initiated Churches and African Pentecostal Churches (Ngalula 2017:228-233).

In terms of South African Pentecostalism, Kgatle (2020) has traced the origin of this movement back to the biblical events recorded in Acts 2:1-4, Acts 10:44 and Acts 19:1-6. He then highlights the three waves witnessed by Pentecostalism as classic Pentecostalism, independent churches and charismatic churches as his build-up towards introducing the fourth wave. Unlike the other three waves that existed under the apartheid government, which lasted for decades in South Africa, the fourth wave enjoys the liberty that comes with the new dispensation (democracy), which has prevailed since 1994 to date. Kgatle admits that this new wave has proven itself to be very difficult, since scholars struggle to understand and name it due to the fact that it is characterised by what he calls “unusual practices” (Kgatle 2020:1-15). These practices include, but are not limited to, eating grass and live snakes, drinking petrol, spraying people with Doom to heal them, claims of resurrection, money laundering and many other such unusual practices (Kgatle, 2020:129-133).

The unusual practices witnessed by Christians in South Africa are clear signs that, more than at any other point in the history of Christianity, the church in South Africa is faced with internal elements that seek to render the church of Christ vulnerable from within. Unfortunately, these practices are pushing Christianity into a catastrophic decline. These new trends in world Christianity represent nothing short of a “contra-mission”, as they continue to take a controversial lead over and against historical collaboration or a genuine search for Christian unity. While the primary aim of the church mission has always been about fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, the new trend in world Christianity seems to have reversed and continues to reverse the historical gains of this very commission. More than ever in the whole history of Christianity, especially in South Africa, Christians are witnessing an unprecedented trend that is imposing serious harm upon the Christian religion and its subjects.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive summary of widespread previous studies that in one form or another relates to the theme of the present study, namely human rights abuse by some self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion in South Africa. The summary was aimed at presenting current, relevant and available knowledge on this topic. Also, it identified theoretical frameworks that supported the idea of this study. The study employed trends in world Christianity as its preferred theoretical framework as it looked upon the social circumstances and the context within which self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa formed the Nyaope religion posing as Christianity and perpetrated human rights abuse. Lastly, the method (tool) that was employed by the study to conduct its investigation and answer the research problem was given. This method provided guidance on how to collect and analyse data. In this respect, the study utilised a case study method to look into human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa, the manner in which their conduct contradicts the Christian mission and even amounts to the formation of a new form of religion that has been proven to be anti-Christianity.

Chapter 3: Historical background of Christianity in South Africa

3.1 Introduction

First, this chapter traces the history of Christianity as centred on the person of Jesus Christ, the manner in which it became a global religion and the arrival thereof in Africa and South Africa through various missionary projects. This chapter demonstrates that the early Christian church participated in a number of ecumenical councils uniformly as some form of authoritative regulatory structure to prevent the church from falling into the trap of the Nyaope religion as it is the case in South Africa where the name of Christ is tainted by the heretical and unorthodox practices of self-styled spiritual leaders. Thereafter, the Constitution of South Africa is discussed in light of freedom of religion, the ambiguities thereof and the role it has played in turning Christianity into the playground of self-styled spiritual leaders. Lastly, the aftermath of the policy that prohibited confessional and sectarian religion from public schools by the South African government is looked into. This policy allowed Christian children to be taught religious studies with a focus on other religions or world religions, and as such, has played a role in assisting the self-styled leaders of the Nyaope religion in their efforts to contradict Christianity.

3.2 Historical development of Christianity

3.2.1 Jesus and Christianity

The history of Christianity as a religion, complex as it is, developed naturally through a long period. This history, according to scholars such as McGiffert (1909), Johnson (1985), and Fredriksen (2002) commonly holds that it begun with Jesus of Nazareth (the Jewish Rabbi), who was born more than 2 000 years ago, as it is recorded in the New Testament gospels according to Matthew, Luke, Mark and John. Jesus focused his preaching on the imminent coming of the kingdom of God. Conversely, as Jesus was a Jew, the history of Christianity can also be accepted to be dating much further back to the beginning of Judaism (Hebrew: יהדות), which is an ethnic religion encompassing the collective cultural, religious and permissible tradition and cultivation of the Jewish people (Johnson 1985:8-16).

During the first century CE, Jesus of Nazareth, his earliest disciples (who came to be known as the twelve disciples) and the earlier crowds that followed the apostle Paul were all Jews. However, this community, which was centred and founded upon the person of Jesus himself, over a period of time, became conspicuous for not behaving consistently with the Jewish law

and tradition. After Jesus' death (AD 30/33), his followers were identified as a particular sect within Judaism. Whereas the Jewish adherents saw Jesus as a mere human prophet, his immediate followers acknowledged him as fully God and fully human. Ultimately, this community was defined as being hostile towards Jews and Judaism (McGiffert 1909:1-20), (Fredriksen 2002:8-30).

What was previously known as “the Jesus movement” within Judaism then began the process of becoming a religion in its own capacity. As their convictions on the divine office of Jesus became stronger, they named him “Christ”, which comes from the Greek word *χριστός*, meaning “the anointed one” and in Hebrew *מָשִׁיחַ* (Mašiah, messiah), meaning “the one who is anointed”. This is how Jesus' followers came to be known as or called “Christians” who professed Christianity. They ministered to the poor and the outcasts of present-day Israel and Palestine, leading to the attraction of many non-Jewish people who came to believe in Christ. This new religion, Christianity, was often outlawed under the Roman law, and as a result, many of the adherents thereof were persecuted and executed for their faith. This persecution led to their worshipping in small pockets, and their religious practices started to differ from one town to another. This factor alone led to disagreements that Christians came to witness and struggle with for many decades. Ultimately, in the first and early second century AD, Christianity had spread across the world, including Africa (Fatokun, 2005).

The next sections show that Christianity has always experienced divisions that have nearly brought it to its knees despite numerous efforts by various entities to unify and keep it in its pure form. This history of the church lays a firm foundation upon which opportunistic elements, such as self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion, have formed and thrived as these have been witnessed within the religious space of South Africa in particular and Africa in general.

3.2.2 Divisions and efforts to unify Christianity

At the time when the apostles were alive, there already were tendencies among the Christians that sought to deviate or contradict the Christian teachings, similar to what self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion are doing today in South Africa and Africa. These included the dishonesty by Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, in Acts 5. In 2 John 9, John warned the Christians that anyone who did not behave consistently with the teachings of Christ was without God. Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy 1:3-4, challenged Timothy to oppose anyone who

taught false doctrines. In 2 Peter 3:16, Peter alluded to Christians who distorted the Word of God by twisting its true meaning to their own destruction.

Constantine the Great (285-337 AD), the Roman emperor who ruled from 307 to 337 AD, was the first Christian emperor (previously a devotee of the sun god Sol Invictus). In his years of ruling the Roman Empire, Constantine sought ways to unify Christianity. The conversion of and the role played by Constantine is significant in the history of Christianity, as it sets the stage for subsequent emperors and high-profile leaders to recognise the legitimacy of Christianity. The question of whether Constantine's conversion was genuine is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that according to some scholars, such as Rodriguez (2011), Drake (2016) and Matson Odahl (2007), his conversion was rather gradual or ambiguous.

Similar to the conversion of the thirteenth apostle, Paul, who received Jesus Christ while on his way to Damascus, as recorded in Acts 9 (Drake 2016), Constantine had a vision in the days preceding the Battle of Milvian Bridge when the forces of Constantine and Maxentius were to face each other on the morning of 28 October 312 AD (Drake 2016:17). Just a day before, around noon, while he was praying, a sign appeared above the sun bearing a cross of light with the message "by this (you shall) conquer". Later that night, while deep in his sleep, he saw Christ standing in front of him with the Greek symbol of Christ – Chi with Rho affixed on the top – and heard the voice of Jesus commanding him to use the sign of the cross against his enemies. Following this instruction, Constantine ordered his troops to have the Christian symbol marked on their shields, and after his overwhelming victory over Maxentius, he attributed this conquest to the Christian God (Laughlin, 2007:7). From this point onwards, Constantine had a mission to unify Christianity (Rodriguez 2011:2, 19), or as Drake (2016) puts it, he sought to make Christianity "a big tent religion that would provide consensus omnium needed for effective imperial rule" (Drake 2016:18). These events led to his conversion or allegiance to Christianity, culminating in his baptism on his deathbed (Rodriguez 2011:44, 48).

The seven Ecumenical Councils recognised by both the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church are instrumental in drawing a brief picture of how Christianity battled with multiple challenges that sought to fracture its unity. Each of the seven ecumenical Councils briefly outlined below is meant to show how church leaders and defenders of the faith have always sought to find unity in the church. These councils focused on a number of issues and questions that established the foundation of several core doctrines of the Christian

religion. Although this history is only briefly introduced, it remains extremely important in painting a picture of how various denominations have evolved within the Christian religion and how this evolution has brought the church to its weakest point of being “hijacked” by self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion.

3.2.3 The Ecumenical Councils

3.2.3.1 The First Council of Nicaea (AD 325)

During Constantine’s reign, disagreements erupted between Christians, especially the Egyptian quarter of his empire. The controversy that had set bishops against bishops was due to the teachings of Arius, a presbyter or priest of the church in Alexandria, together with his followers. Arius taught that whereas Jesus was certainly a supernatural figure, he was not fully divine; hence, the theological doctrine that came to be known as “Arianism”. This was against the views of many, including Constantine, who believed and insisted that Jesus was fully divine (Rodriguez 2011:37). Constantine regarded these disagreements as being divisively unnecessary.

Consistent with his objectives of unifying Christianity, in AD 325, Constantine invited about 3 000 bishops and ecumenical leaders to a meeting that came to be known as the Council of Nicaea to engage in this topic. Despite the low turnout of 250 to 300 attendants, the council continued with its agenda (Laughlin, 2007:19). The council vehemently rejected Arius’s teachings as heresy and resolved that the correct teaching was that Jesus is the same as the Father. This led to Arius being condemned as heretic, as he refused to acknowledge the resolution of the council. His refusal caused another division in the church, as he attracted a large following. Moreover, this meant that the resolution as adopted by the council did not represent the collective body of Christians in its entirety. The council adopted the Nicene Creed to resolve the Arian controversy. The Nicene Creed, as stated in Rodriguez (2011), declares:

We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, and Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God from God, Light from Light, Life from Life, only-begotten son, First-born of all creation, begotten from the Father before all the ages, by Whom also all things were made, who for our salvation was made flesh and lived among men, and suffered, and rose again the third day, and ascended to the Father, and will come again in glory to judge

the living and the dead. And we believe also in One Holy Spirit (Rodriguez 2011:39).

In addition to its pronouncements, the Council of Nicaea decided that all churches should celebrate Easter (the principal festival of the Christian church) at the same time, as there was no uniformity in its celebration before the sitting of this council. Rodriguez (2011) notes that while other churches celebrated Easter on the Sunday following the full moon, others celebrated it on the day of the full moon without regard to the day of the week (Rodriguez 2011:39). Uncertainty with regard to the correct celebration of Easter is also stated in Straus (2012), who observed that Christians relied on the non-believing Jewish community to dictate the correct timing for this celebration. This council, through the leadership of Constantine, decreed that it should collectively be observed on the first Sunday following the first full moon (Straus 2012:12).

Other than these efforts, Constantine legislated the observance of Sunday, making it an officially sanctioned Roman holy day and a weekly day of rest, exempted some clergy from taxes, gave churches the legal right to own property, gave orthodox bishops the power to root out heresy (Marcus 2008:97) and even, supposedly, declared 25 December the official birthday of Jesus Christ. However, this claim is disputed by other scholars, as indicated in Abruzzi (2018:6-10).

3.2.3.2 The First Council of Constantinople (AD 381)

Towards the end of the second century, three heresies against the Holy Spirit by the Macedonians (named after Macedonius, the bishop of Constantinople) followed. The first heresy was by Bishop Macedonius, who taught that the Holy Spirit had been created in a similar fashion to the angels but slightly superior to them. He further taught that the Holy Spirit was not part of the Trinity. As a result of these teachings, his followers withheld worship and confession of divinity from the Holy Spirit (Anatolios 2008:442). The second heresy was by Apolinarius, who taught that offices of the Trinity were not equal – God the Father was the greatest, the Son was greater and the Holy Spirit was great. The third heresy was by Eusebius, who taught that the Holy Trinity did not consist of three offices, but God was one Person as He appeared in the Old Testament, that one God was made concrete (incarnate) in human flesh in the New Testament and He then became the Spirit and descended upon the disciples as the

Holy Spirit. Basically, his teaching was that there was no three Persons of the Holy Trinity but only one.

To the devout Catholic emperor Theodosius I, these heresies were a great matter of concern, as they threatened the fragile unity of Christianity, similar to what Arius had previously done. Emperor Theodosius, with the approval of Pope Damasus I, called the First Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. This council, with only 150 attendees in the city of Constantinople, reaffirmed the teachings of the First Council of Nicaea and condemned the heresies that undermined the authority of the Holy Spirit. The council declared, once and for all, the Trinitarian doctrine of the equality of the Holy Spirit with God the Son and the Father, equally, thus accepting that the Spirit was consubstantial with the Father. This led to the Macedonian group walking out in the middle of the proceedings (Anatolios 2008:443). This movement again fractured and undermined efforts of unity within Christianity. Ultimately, the Council of Constantinople decided to add the words “I believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord and Life-giver (or Giver of Life), who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son is worshipped and glorified” to the existing Nicene Creed.

3.2.3.3 The Council of Ephesus (AD 431)

After AD 428, Nestorius, the archbishop of Constantinople, caused controversy and disputes during the fourth century when he taught that the mother of Jesus, Mary, could not be called Θεοτόκος (Theotokos – God-bearer) but rather should be called Χριστοτόκος (Christotokos – Christ-bearer). The expression of Mary as the mother of God had become the devotional language of many Christians as it was advocated by the Alexandrian theology, Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Alexander and many others. Nestorius thought the expression “Christ-bearer” or “mother of Christ” was neutral enough to settle the conundrum between Mary, mother of God, and Mary, mother of man (Schaff 1998:426). This teaching brought Nestorius into theological conflict with the patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril.

First, Cyril wrote a letter to Nestorius trying to persuade him to discard his teaching. However, when his efforts were proven to be fruitless, he wrote to the Eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II and the Roman bishop (Pope Celestine), seeking guidance on what he saw as dangerous heresies by Nestorius and his followers. In AD 430, after the pope had authorised Cyril to formally appeal to Nestorius to discard his position or be excommunicated if he did not retract within ten days, Nestorius asked Emperor Theodosius II to convene an ecumenical

council, as he thought the dispute could only be settled by an ecumenical council. In AD 431, Theodosius II rose to the task and called the council, which attracted the attendance of approximately 250 bishops.

John of Antioch, who was a good friend of Nestorius, together with his bishops, was detained on his way to the council and as a result, could not attend the first sessions. This led to Nestorius refusing to attend, arguing that all the bishops had to be present first. However, Cyril refused to wait for their arrival and decided to open the council in the Church of St. Mary with only 160 bishops (Schaff 1998:430). After a heated debate between these two rival groups, the council confirmed the importance of the Nicene Creed, which stressed the inseparable nature of Jesus Christ and further condemned the teachings of Nestorius, leading to him being called the “new Judas”. Following the fashion of Arianism, this decision of the council aroused another schism, called the “Nestorian schism”, splitting Christian churches between the churches that followed Nestorius and those that rejected his teachings.

3.2.3.4 The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)

In AD 449, the much-disputed Second Council of Ephesus was convened by Emperor Theodosius II, as there was a concern that even though the First Council of Ephesus had condemned the teachings of Nestorius, it did not correct the underlying doctrinal issues with regard to the two distinct natures of Jesus Christ. Further, the council had to decide on whether Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ibas of Edessa and Theodoret of Cyrrhus were tainted by Nestorianism. The heated question debated in this council was whether Christ had one nature of human divinity or two natures of human and divine combined within a single person. The council agreed with Cyril’s logic that Christ was fully human and fully God, arguing that anyone who proclaimed two natures represented Nestorianism (Schaff 1998:437).

In AD 451, Emperor Marcian called another council in Chalcedon to correct and set aside the Second Council of Ephesus. The two rivals who led this round of debates were the Byzantine presbyter or arch monk Eutyches and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Flavian. Following the teachings of Cyril of Alexandria, Eutyches vehemently opposed the teachings of Nestorius that suggested that Christ was composed of two distinct natures (divine and human) that were not unified. Countering this argument, Eutyches emphasised that Christ had one nature (Schaff, 1998:437). However, his insistence brought him into conflict with Flavian and led to his being condemned by the Constantinople local synod, deposing him together with his monks. This

conflict alone caused further confusion and a minor schism. As soon as the Patriarch of Dioscoros saw that this had caused yet another division, being on the side of Eutyches, he appealed to Emperor Theodosius II to call an ecumenical council to settle the matter. When the Council of Chalcedon met in AD 451, it repudiated the idea of a single nature of Christ and emphasised the argument of two natures, being fully God and fully human. This resulted in the supposed Second Council of Ephesus being nullified and the establishment of the Eutychian orthodoxy in the East. Furthermore, the council decided to condemn and expel Flavian and his supporters. This conflict brought another schism between those who thought the Council of Ephesus was legitimate and those who accepted the Council of Chalcedon.

3.2.3.5 The Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553)

Emperor Justinian I, also called Justinian the Great, the Eastern Roman emperor from 527 to 565 thought it was necessary to preserve the unified identity and integrity of the Christian faith by formally having the ecumenical council condemn what came to be known as the Nestorian Writings or heretical Three Chapters, along with the authors thereof (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrrhus and Ibas of Edessa), as they were thought to be sympathising with the Nestorianism. The emperor strongly hoped that this strategy would reconcile those who argued that Christ had only one nature (in which his humanity and divinity were united) and those who argued for two natures, as represented by the Council of Chalcedon (Pavouris 2001:203-213; Stephenson 2004:59-64).

In AD 553, Emperor Justinian convoked the Fifth Ecumenical Council against the resistance of Pope Vigilius, who had been brought to Constantinople against his will after he had refused to condemn the Three Chapters. Presided over by Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople, the council was attended by at least 150 bishops (mainly from the Eastern churches). This council issued what came to be known as the “14 anathemas”, as initially proposed by Cyril during the previous councils that unequivocally rejected Nestorianism, insisting on the unified Person of Christ being inseparable in both his natures and professing faith in the incarnation. Basically, these anathemas can be summarised as follows:¹⁰

- Anathema to anyone who does not confess that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one nature and substance.

¹⁰ “ the anathemas of the second council of Constantinople”

<http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/THE%20ANATHEMAS%20OF%20THE%20SECOND%20COUNCIL%20OF%20CONSTANTINOPLE.pdf>

- Anathema to anyone who does not confess that the Word of God became flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Mary.
- Anathema to anyone who denies that Jesus Christ is one and the same with God the Father.
- Anathema to anyone who seeks to divide the unity that exists between God the Father and God the Son, as Theodore and Nestorius have done.
- Anathema to anyone who follows the madness of both Theodore and Nestorius by not acknowledging that the Word of God became flesh in Jesus Christ by subsistence.
- Anathema to anyone who denies that the Virgin Mary is the mother of God made into human flesh into her.
- Anathema to anyone who by way of understanding or teaching, suggests that Christ has two separate natures with each having subsistence of its own.
- Anathema to anyone who divides, splits or even confuses the oneness of God the Father and the human flesh of Christ.
- Anathema to anyone who worships or introduces two natures of Christ as separate entities.
- Anathema to anyone who does not believe that the crucified Jesus Christ is truly God and one member of the Holy Trinity.
- Anathema to anyone who does not condemn but in the same way as aforesaid heretics as condemned by the four previous holy synods.
- Anathema to anyone who by understanding or teachings defends heretics and heretical writings that are composed against the true faith as shaped by the previous holy Councils.
- Anathema to anyone who follows the teachings of Theodore and Nestorius, heretical books inspired by their teachings and all those who opposed the true faith, the holy Cyril and his twelve chapters.
- Anathema to anyone who opposes the council condemnation of Theodore and Nestorius.

Similar to the preceding ecumenical councils, this council too, after the pope had accepted its legitimacy, caused a major schism in the history of the church, as it exacerbated the condemnation of those who supported both Theodore and Nestorius.

3.2.3.6 The Third Council of Constantinople (AD 680)

During and towards the end of the sixth century, the Monothelite and Monoenergism controversies erupted. While the previous ecumenical councils had determined beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ was the Son of God with two natures, many Christians still struggled with his exact nature and the operation thereof, and this led to further attempts to deepen the understanding of how both natures worked in one Person. The Monothelites argued that if Jesus Christ had two unified natures, then He only had one will (thelema – θέλημα), which is expressed in Christ's divine nature. Secondly, similar to Monothelitism, another argument was that Christ had only one energy (Monoenergism – μονοενεργητισμός). While this doctrine, on the face of these two arguments, appeared to be an acceptable compromise between those who argued for and against two natures of Christ, at the same, the argument appeared to be diminishing the fullness of Christ's humanity and denying his human nature after the union.

In AD 680, Emperor Constantine IV called the Third Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, which was attended by more than 150 bishops, in an attempt to reconcile both the churches of the East and the West again. At some point during the proceedings of this council, a priest called Polychronius made a claim that he could raise the dead to prove the Monothelite theory. A corpse was brought in, but after Polychronius had whispered some words into its ears, nothing happened, leading to his becoming the laughing stock of the council (Challies 2014). Just like the previous councils, the Third Council of Constantinople reaffirmed all the decisions and doctrines of the first five councils and furthermore asserted the two wills and two operations that exist in the Person of Jesus Christ. The condemnation of those who supported Monothelitism and Monoenergism led to yet another great schism in the church.

3.2.3.7 The Second Council of Nicaea (AD 787)

In AD 754, Eastern Emperor Constantine V, the son of Emperor Leo III (Byzantine Emperor 717-741) called the council in the palace of Hieria, which stood opposite Constantinople. The council was attended by at least 340 bishops and viewed itself as an ecumenical council. It sought to condemn the use of religious images by Christians and declared any image worshipping to be blasphemy. Thirty-two years later, in AD 786, Constantine VI and Empress Irene Sarantapechaina (acting as regent) called the council that met in the Church of the Holy

Apostles in Constantinople. However, this council was disrupted by soldiers working with the opposition.

Again, in AD 787, the council was summoned to congregate in Nicaea, as Constantinople was no longer safe. Attended by more than 308 bishops, this council overturned the Hieria Council and issued a declaration that allowed images of Jesus Christ, the holy angels, the Virgin Mary and all other saints to be set up or used as symbols similar to the usage of the sacred cross of Christ. It further decreed that alters of the Catholic Church should contain relics of the blessed and the saints (parts of their bodies). This council too brought about an everlasting division between those who believed the Hieria Council was official and those who supported what came to be known as the Second Council of Nicaea.

3.2.4 The Great Schism (AD 1054)

The previous section briefly dealt with the first seven ecumenical councils that sat for over almost 11 centuries, from an early period of Christianity or from when the church was one. The discussion demonstrates that tension kept erupting between two branches of the church (East and West Church or Greek and Latin Church) despite efforts to unite Christianity and the church as a whole. These events culminated in what came to be known as the “Great Schism” in AD 1054. While various scholars, historians and theologians differ on the question of whether AD 1054 was the peak of the Great Schism in the history of the church, very few can strongly deny that AD 1054 stands significant but less decisive in the context of the ultimate schism of the church. Or at least there is a more scholarly agreement that AD 1054 stands at the centre of the beginning of the schism and the completion thereof (Howard 2012:79). Issues that the church (East and West) wrestled with over a period that was characterised by the first seven ecumenical councils included political, ritual, ecclesial, linguistic, liturgical, administrative and doctrinal differences (Trenchard-Smith 2017:3).

The momentous incident that took place between April and July AD 1054, which Howard (2012) describes as an unstoppable force meeting an immovable object, involved Michael Cerularius, the patriarch of Constantinople (1043-1058), and French Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida. In the 1040s, concerns erupted over liturgical usages, ritual practices, clerical marriages, days of fasting and the type of bread used for the Eucharist. While the Western Church (Rome) insisted that the Greek churches should conform to its practices, the Eastern Church (Constantinople) insisted that the Latin churches should conform to its practices

(Howard 2012:67). The Western Church approached the argument from the precedence and special honour accorded to the bishop of Rome (the pope) following the founding of the Christian community by Saint Peter in Rome (Trenchard-Smith 2017:4). Meanwhile, the Eastern Church thought itself important by virtue of being the capital of the Byzantine Empire after the fall of the Roman Empire in AD 476.

In AD 1048, after Leo IX had been elected as the bishop of Rome (the pope), his plans were to reform both the papacy and the church as a whole with the aim of restoring relations and unity. This gave Leo IX the power to impress upon the universal church the argument that as the successor of the apostle Peter, he was vested with supreme authority. In AD 1053, when the controversy over fasting on the Sabbath gained momentum, Patriarch Michael Cerularius decided to write an open letter to Pope Leo IX against the Roman practice of making the Sabbath a day of fasting, the use of unleavened bread for the Eucharist, celibacy for clergy and further declaring that the pope had no authority for making these decisions autocratically (Odom 1963:74-75). The pope saw this as an attack on his supremacy and instructed his favourite cardinal, Humbert, to write a reply reiterating the argument that, as the Roman bishop, his voice was supreme and final. The following year (AD 1054), another letter from Patriarch Michael Cerularius arrived, asking for harmony in those matters that sought to divide the church even further. However, this letter provoked the pope, as he was addressed as “Brother” instead of “Father”, while Cerularius at the same time referred to himself as the “Ecumenical Council”. In reaction, the pope sent a delegation led by Humbert to Constantinople on July 16 of that year to excommunicate Cerularius and his supporters. According to Howard (2012), from this point onwards, “the animosity which they held for each other was a drop of poison that sickened the whole church” and marked what the Great Schism of 1054 (Howard 2012:67). While this schism caused a long-lasting division between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church (both under the umbrella of Catholicism Christianity), the damage did not end there but weakened confidence in the efforts of the Catholic leadership and papacy to bring unity, so much so that it led to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century as a movement that redefined Christian practice.

3.2.5 Protestant Reformation (15th-16th century)

3.2.5.1 *The early Reformation*

The previous sections discussed a period in the history of the church that was characterised by minor schisms to the culmination of the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western churches which divided the Christian religion into two camps during the eleventh century. However, these two camps still coexisted under the big umbrella of Roman Catholicism Christianity. The succeeding years saw an increase of concerns about and criticism against the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church, with the fifteenth to the sixteenth century being characterised by a deplorable state of the church, leading to debates over religious reforms and values. Up to this period, most people still confessed to Roman Catholicism and saw the pope in Rome as the infallible head of the entire Christendom, while at the same time, the Catholic Church crushed any attempts of reform by condemning them as heresy. This continuous resistance to reform resulted in persistent protestation by figures such as Martin Luther (1483-1546). The word “Reformation” comes from two Latin words, *re* and *formace*, with *re* meaning “again” and *formace* meaning “to make or form”.

While the Protestant Reformation is primarily associated with Martin Luther, it followed various attempts by individuals such as Peter Waldo (1140-1218), John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and Jan Hus (1369-1415) that had taken place two centuries before. According to Mccool (2014:6-7), Peter Waldo, the monk of Lyons, who came to be known as “the courageous poor preacher of Lyons”, strongly believed, among other things, that the Catholic clergy should live in poverty, that Jesus Christ (and not the pope) was the only link to the Father, that the pope was not infallible and that everyone possessed the Holy Spirit, regardless of their education or position. This led to him and his followers being anathematised and excommunicated by Pope Lucius III in 1184 at the Council of Verona (Mccool 2014:8).

Similar to Peter Waldo is John Wycliffe, who is referred to as “the morning star of the Protestant Reformation” by Khoo (2017:22). In 1366, John Wycliffe stood in support of King Edward III who refused to pay homage to the pope, arguing that he had no right to collect money from churches, the Anglican Church in particular. Also, Wycliffe declared that Jesus Christ was the only head of the church, and he called the pope “the proud worldly priest of Rome, the most accursed of clippers and robbers” (Khoo 2017:22). He also criticised a number of Catholic religious practices and the Catholic monks, accusing them of being lazy beggars

instead of fending for their own food. His criticism led to his being condemned and his writings being burned (Khoo 2017:23-25).

Another Protestant Reformation figure was Jan Hus (John Huss), referred to by O'Reggio (2017) as “the morning star which led the way to the full daylight of evangelistic doctrine”. Jan Hus openly rejected the idea that the church sacraments provided a way to salvation, fought against abuse in the church, insisted that the church was not only about the pope and his cardinals but, instead, for everyone, spoke up against corruption among the clergy, rejected the deplorable sale of indulgences and further called for equality between the laypeople and the clergy (O'Reggio 2017:98,106-112).

While these early reformers and many others anticipated the coming of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century through the courageous act of Martin Luther, their efforts were geared towards the pure restoration of Christianity as modelled by Christ and his apostles in the Bible. Their efforts culminated in the incidents around Martin Luther.

3.2.5.2 Luther's Protestant Reformation (16th century)

At the centre of the sixteenth-century reformation, is the German monk and theology professor at Wittenberg University, Martin Luther. He was born on 10 November 1483 in Eisleben, a small town in the county of Mansfeld in Germany. As a young boy, he attended the village Latin school at Mansfeld in 1488. During this time, he would have learnt to recite the Apostle Creed and the Ten Commandments by heart, including the idea that the emperor ruled on behalf of God on earth, while the pope or bishop of Rome was the infallible head of the church (Bradshaw, 2016). At the age of 17, he furthered his studies at the University of Erfurt in 1501, where he obtained his bachelor's degree in 1502 and his master's degree in 1505. That same year (July 1505), he entered St. Augustine's Monastery in Erfurt and committed himself to a life of spiritual journey. Upon his return to the University of Wittenberg, he was awarded the degree of doctor of Holy Scripture on October 1512 and took an oath to defend the evangelical truth by all means. His ultimate theological work as professor and district vicar set the stage for his career as a reformer of the church later in 1517 (Bradshaw, 2016).

While Luther was still at the Wittenberg University, he became concerned about some of the practices of Roman Catholicism, such as the clergy's unspiritual demeanour and the sale of indulgences (papal letters that reduced the punishment of sins) towards raising money that would assist, among other things, in the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica church in the Vatican

City of Rome. Bradshaw (2016) quotes Frederick Mecum who remarked that people used embraced indulgences as if they were receiving God Himself. For Luther and those who shared his sentiments, this was pure corruption and deviation from the true gospel, as his understanding was that believers could be justified by faith alone as opposed to paying money for the remission of sins. As one who took an oath to defend the evangelical truth by all means, Luther could not be silent in the face of such abuse of the gospel and felt compelled by his convictions to protest.

On 31 October 1517, Luther nailed his *Ninety-five Theses* or propositions proposing a disputation on the value of indulgences to the doors of Castle Church at Wittenberg University, which were used traditionally as a board that displayed academic notices. According to Mullett (2010:144), by nailing the theses to the doors, Luther was sending an open invitation to his academic colleagues to discuss the question of indulgences, and a copy of the *Ninety-five Theses* was sent to Albert of Brandenburg, the archbishop of Mainz, which ultimately made its way to Pope Leo X. According to Beutel (2003), while there are doubts as to whether the *Ninety-five Theses* were practically posted on the castle church doors, what is certain is that in no time, they had spread throughout the whole of Germany.

In the *Ninety-five Theses*, Luther strongly argued, among other things, against the sale of indulgences, claiming that only repentance was required for the forgiveness of sins. He also questioned the powers that the pope had over the entire church, thus calling for reform. While he was only expressing his intellectual disapproval within the Catholic practices, his theses led to his being called to the Diet of Worms (a formal deliberative assembly) in 1521, which ultimately condemned and excommunicated him from the Holy Roman Empire after his refusal to recant his teachings (Werry & Schor 2015). According to Khoo (2017), on 18 April 1521, when the assembly asked him to renounce his teaching, he responded by saying:

Unless I am convinced by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments that I am in error – for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves – I cannot withdraw, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted.

This led to the emperor exclaiming after the meeting that he could not understand how a mere monk could be of the view that he was right and 1 000 years of Christendom were wrong. At this juncture, it is important to emphasise that even at the point of publishing the *Ninety-five Theses*, Luther still regarded himself as a Catholic and did not intend to start a revolution. In Marshal (2017), Martin Luther is quoted to have confessed to the pope in 1518: “I cannot

believe everyone understood them. They are theses, after all, not teachings, not dogmas – phrased rather obscurely and paradoxically” (Marshall 2017:8).

The work of Martin Luther resulted in a protestant reformation called Protestantism as a new form of Christianity that emphasised the principle of the priesthood of all believers. This new form of Christianity coexisted with Catholicism and gave birth to other reformers, such as Ulrich Zwingli in 1519 and John Calvin in 1541. Some of the branches that emerged from Protestantism include, but are not limited to, Anabaptism, Anglicanism, Evangelism and Lutheranism (Mullett 2010).

The history of Christianity remains complex and multifaceted, and as such, it cannot be simplified, undermined or the significance thereof downplayed. But what stands out in this section is the continued efforts to preserve its identity and unity. While this history is huddled with political influence, at the same time, it is characterised by integrity, honesty, good will and loyalty towards keeping Christianity within its truthful doctrines against all odds. The schisms and theological disputes that characterise the history of Christianity revolved around the question of safeguarding or defending the teachings of Christ and his apostles in their purest form. From its early inception with the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples during the first century, the great Roman Church between the third and fourth century, the Great Schism during the eleventh century, the Protestant Reformation during the sixteenth century and throughout the other schisms that followed, the church has always had to contend with forces that contradicted its teachings.

Over a period of over 2 000 years, the Christian faith has spread across the globe, attracting followers from one continent to another, including Africa. Scholars such as Sanneh (2003) and Ngong (2017) both provide insightful analyses of how Christianity has expanded from the Western world into a global religion as it manoeuvred across various continents, including Africa. Furthermore, Ngong (2017) and Sanneh (2003) explore the detrimental effects of globalised Christianity and the manner in which it has been altered to accommodate local contexts and cultures (Ngong 2017:255-260; Sanneh 2003:18-23). Their analyses are supported by Robert (2011), who highlights that for Christianity to become or gain the status of a “world religion”, it first had to thrive through the intersection of being a universal and a local religion accommodated by local people who would then shape it into their own understanding of religion (Robert 2011:9). Putting this more candidly, Kgatle (2018) contends

that in order for missionary work to have an impact, it should first be locally relevant (Kgatle 2018:5).

3.3 Christianity in Africa

The previous sections demonstrated how complex the history of Christianity is. Similarly, the history of Christianity within the context of the African continent is neither clear nor uncomplicated. The exact dates of the arrival of Christianity in Africa are somehow blurry and lack precision. It is not the intention of the researcher in this section to enter into extensive debates on the origin of Christianity in Africa; however, some of the dates that theological scholars and historians are more likely to agree with are highlighted, which will lead to a context upon which the South African Christian mission will feature. The way in which foreign elements such as the self-styled spiritual leaders of Nyaope religion would ultimately turn the South African Christian mission into their playing ground will also be explored. Mashau (2020) concurs with Henry (2016) that the development of Christianity in Africa resulted in uncontrollable growth of controversial, dynamic and schismatic churches (Henry 2016:1; Mashau 2020:42).

At the start of the twentieth century, statistical data suggested that less than 3% of the African people profess Christianity. However, scholars such as Mbiti (1976), Fatokun (2005), Kalu (2007), Van der Merwe (2016), Sewakpo (2019) and many others have argued vehemently against the idea that Christianity was a latecomer to Africa. Mbiti (1976) argues that all missionaries who are purported to have brought Christianity to Africa, have been, for their own part, brought by God who has already been known in the framework of African traditional religiosity (Mbiti 1976:1). Similarly, Fatokun (2005) claims that the history of Christianity in Africa finds its roots in the earliest days of Christendom during the first century, so much that it could be called a traditional religion in Africa. He bases his argument upon the story in Matthew 2:13-15 that suggests that Joseph and Mary accessed Africa from Palestine with Jesus as an infant after an angel of the Lord had instructed Joseph in a dream to escape to Egypt and stay there until God told him they could return (Fatokun, 2005:358).

Fatokun's (2005) suggestion that on the day of Pentecost (recorded in Acts 2), there could have been converts that brought faith to Africa, is supported by Sewakpo (2019), who suggests that the Lord's disciples from the day of Pentecost as they spread out the Word of God across the world have come to Africa as well. What cannot be disputed in light of Pentecost is the fact

that on that eventful day, among those who were in Jerusalem, there were some who had come from African countries, such as Egypt, Libya and Cyrene. Thus, it would not be difficult to imagine that some of them could have returned to Africa to spread the Good News. All of these claims find support from Kalu (2007), who argues that Africa was among the first continents that became the second home of Christianity after it had abandoned its Palestinian roots (Kula 2007:24).

On the other hand, Van der Merwe (2016) suggests that when Neff (2008) declares that the Christian orthodoxy has been shaped by Africans, he had people in mind like Tertullian from the Roman province of Africa, Origen of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo from Roman North Africa, Clement of Alexandria, Pachomius and Athanasius of Alexandria, all of which came to be known as pillars of the universal church (Neff 2008; Van der Merwe 2016:559-562). In the words of Fatokun (2005), these and many others “had an influence on the subsequent developments in the church” (Fatokun 2005:362). Robert (2011) argues that Christianity had formed its indigenous identity in Africa as early as the fourth century. He maintains that as Christianity manoeuvred through the pressure from other movements, such as Islam and militant Marxism, into African countries, it formed “an ethnic-national Christianity” that retained its African identity to the present day (Robert 2011:19). This analysis suggests that Christianity has indeed come to Africa during the earlier centuries as opposed to later centuries, which came to be characterised by the arrival of missionaries with the aim of evangelising Africa.

3.4 Christianity in South Africa

After the virtual planting of Christianity in Africa, missionaries were sent to the interior of the African continent to Christianise Africans. While the history of Christianity in Africa could be reaching as far back as the first and the second century, it was through the work of the missionaries who arrived at different times and in different numbers that the Christian presence and footprint had been expanded in the African countries, including South Africa. Consequently, the story of the arrival of Christian missionaries in South Africa is the story of how Christianity came to and formed its identity in South Africa.

3.5 Christian missionaries in South Africa

History recorded that Christianity arrived in South Africa with settlers from Europe, starting with Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, together with other settlers who lived in the Cape. However,

this account is disputed by some scholars who argue that there were other missionaries who had come to South Africa before 1652, and that those early missionaries include Portuguese Catholics who are said to have arrived in 1501. The arrival of Jan van Riebeeck was followed by George Schmidt, who is said to have arrived in South Africa as early as 1737 and found the first Protestant mission, which was called the Moravian Brethren. This section will expand on these three main figures or groups – the Portuguese Catholics in 1501, Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 and George Schmidt in 1737 – to illustrate how and when Christianity as a religion by missionaries arrived in South Africa.

3.5.1 Portuguese Catholics (1501)

According to De Gruchy (1979:1), the Portuguese Catholics were the first missionaries who built a small Catholic chapel at Mossel Bay (Western Cape) in 1501. To corroborate this claim, Skhakhane and Mukuka (2000) mention that a small church was built in Mossel Bay in 1501. According to Raper (1987:182), the name “Mossel Bay” was given to this place in July 1501 by the Portuguese navigator Joao da Nova, after seeing Khoekhoen men with herds of cattle there. He consequently called that place a “bay of herdsmen”. To support this assertion even further, South African History Online (2016) mentions that in 1501, Joao da Nova erected a small shrine that came to be regarded as the first place where Christian worship took place in South Africa (although no traces thereof remain). Skhakhane and Mukuka (2000) and De Gruchy (1979) further share regret that history seems to have ignored the early presence of the Portuguese Catholics because during that period, the practice of Roman Catholicism was forbidden in South Africa, at least until 1820 (De Gruchy 1979:1; Skhakhane & Mukuka 200:76). While there is no evidence to support these claims, they are enough to suggest that the Portuguese Catholics could have been among the first missionaries to arrive in South Africa.

3.5.2 Jan van Riebeeck (1652)

The arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in South Africa in 1652 attracted different meanings, such as bringing Christianity to South Africa, setting the stage for British colonial rule and starting the history of the Afrikaner volk (Witz 1997). However, this study is only interested in the role that his arrival in South Africa set the stage for the subsequent arrival of missionary activities.

According to Naidoo (2016), in 1647, a ship belonging to the Dutch East India Company was shipwrecked on the Atlantic coast of the Cape Peninsula in South Africa (the Cape of Good Hope), resulting in its occupants, a crew of more than 60 men, spending more than a year there

before being shipped back to Batavia (the capital of the Dutch East Indies) (Naidoo 2016:19). During their stay in the Cape, the traditionally nomadic pastoralist indigenous population of southwestern Africa referred to as the “Hottentots” (or Khoikhoi) came from the inland and provided them with fresh meat in exchange for iron. This gesture led to the development of an opinion that the Hottentots were docile and could be easily managed. Consequently, the Dutch East India Company made the decision to set up a refreshment station that would provide fuel, fruit, vegetables and fresh meat to ships or people travelling by ship between Europe and India (Fourie 2009:1). The Dutch East India Company then selected a Christian man, Jan van Riebeeck, who left the Netherlands in December 1652 to manage this project. After his arrival on 5 April 1652, the following day, 6 April 1652, three more ships with Christian settlers arrived and began to practise public Christian worship. However, since the Netherlands had just come out of eighty years of war with Spain, it enjoyed religious freedom from the Roman Catholic Spaniards and embraced the Protestant faith as practised by the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* or Dutch Reformed Church. As a result, the Dutch Reformed Church was the only church that had exclusive rights to public worship in the Cape of Good Hope, while other religions, including African indigenous religions, had to be practised in private (Beyers 2016:2).

In this period (1652 onwards), the entanglement of Christianity and colonialism is clear (Bosch 1991:302-305; Saayman 1991:22-35). Concurring with both Du Bois (1938) and Masondo (2018), Mashau (2020) argues that the European imperialist agenda characterised the arrival of Christian missionaries who used the Christian religion to colonise the African people (Dubois 1938:101; Mashau 2020:44; Masondo 2018:2019). This point is observed by Mofokeng (1988) too, who mentions that the missionaries were in a successful partnership with the coloniser and used colonialism as a readily available vehicle to come to South Africa in particular and win her people for Jesus Christ. The arrival of Christianity was characterised by the repression of other religious practices and the prioritisation of the Dutch Reformed Church by the coloniser who sought to Europeanise the Africans even before the process of Christianising them (Mofokeng, 1988:34-35).

According to Coertzen (2008), the relationship between the church and the state during this period followed the Constantinian model, whereby the state determines the outlook on religion, an approach that began in the Netherlands and prevailed in the Cape even beyond 1652. This meant that churches or religion in South Africa was controlled by the state authorities, as was

the case with religion in the Netherlands too (Coertzen 2008:351). While the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck and his companions was partially credited with bringing Christianity to South Africa, the real missionary work in the Cape of Good Hope started in 1737 with the arrival of the Moravians who sought to evangelise the natives (Skhakhane & Mukuka 2000:63).

3.5.3 George Schmidt (1737)

On 9 July 1737, a German missionary of Bohemian descent, George Schmidt, arrived in South Africa in the Cape of Good Hope as a Christian missionary with the mission to evangelise the natives. At the time of his arrival, his ecclesiastical status was that of a layman (Bredekamp 1997:54). Shortly after his arrival, he started preaching the gospel to a small group of Khoikhoi, who were generally considered to be beyond salvation (Rabie 1985:52). Schmidt, against such perceptions, endeavoured to teach them how to read and write and even how to plant and sow (August 2003:62). However, he encountered reluctance on the part of his subjects to give up their old traditional ways of living, which included, among other things, the abuse of alcohol and ritual activities. Rabie (1985) told a story that one evening, Schmidt waited for his congregation to attend the prayer meeting with none of them showing up. He later investigated and found out that they were drinking gin in the hut of one of his first converts. These issues and rumours that he was having an affair with one of his subjects added to the hardship of criticism Schmidt was suffering against his mission. Schmidt was annoyed and wrote a letter to the second bishop of the Moravian Church, Reichsgraf Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, requesting to return home, who responded by advising him to continue with his mission and gave him permission (proxy ordination) to baptise (Rabie 1985:55). Bredekamp (1997) alleges that the reason Von Zinzendorf authorised Schmidt to administer sacraments discretionally was probably to ease his guilty conscience after he had repeatedly failed to respond to Schmidt's request for helpers (Bredekamp 1997:55).

In 1742, Schmidt baptised five of his loyal converts, starting with Wilhelm, calling him Josua, followed by Africo, who was then given the name Christian, and then Kybbodo, who was given the name Jonas. Two women were christened Christina and Magdalena (Bredekamp 1997:55-56). Because the Dutch Reformed Church was of the view that slaves could not be baptised, stories of Schmidt's baptisms caused an uproar, leading to the church council of the Dutch Reformed Church arguing that Schmidt did not have any formal catechesis training and as such, he did not have the right to administer the sacraments or baptise people (Rabie, 1985:55). Controversy about his conduct forced him to leave South Africa in 1743, never to return. He

died in 1785 (Bredekamp 1997:60). His sudden departure brought his mission to its knees. However, in 1792, three other missionaries, H. Marsveld, J. Kuhnel and D. Schwinn, came to South Africa and continued Schmidt's work. They ultimately succeeded in reviving Christianity at Genadendal Mission Station, which eventually became a hub of Christian missionary spirituality that welcomed other missionaries from other denominations from as far as Scotland, the United States of America, England, the Netherlands and so forth (Viljoen 2009:207-208).

Although the arrival of George Schmidt in South Africa gave rise to real missionary work, similar to 1652, this period was characterised by the superiority of the Dutch Reformed Church over other churches. In addition, this period saw British missionaries demonstrating support for colonial rule, which regarded its religion as being more superior to that of the African people (Saayman 1993:38-39). This conduct, the Constantinian model, continued throughout 1948 when the Nationalist Party came into power (apartheid) until the advent of democracy with its new constitution in 1994, when the new government guaranteed freedom of religion. Under the new Constitution of South Africa, the provision of human rights with the inclusion of the right to freedom of religion was meant to provide some form of redress of the old hostile attitude by some religions towards different religions as was the case between Christianity and the African indigenous religions in South Africa ahead of 1994.

The period following the missionary work of Marsveld, Kuhnel and Schwinn was characterised by the arrival of more denominations opening churches in South Africa. However, the start of the nineteenth century witnessed internal splits and saw the establishment of the largest African indigenous churches, such as the Zion Christian Church, formed by the Anglican mission product Engenas Lekhanyane, and the Nazareth Baptist Church (alternatively – iBandla lamaNazaretha), under the leadership of Isaiah Shebe (INkosi yaseKuphakameni). This was immediately followed by the rise of Pentecostalism, which identifies with the practices and beliefs of classical Pentecostal denominations at the start of the twentieth century. The rise in Pentecostalism was inspired by the Azusa Street Mission (formally known as “Azusa Street Revival”) that took place in Los Angeles, California, in 1906, emphasising the gift of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, subsequently giving birth to charismatic movements, and later, neo-charismatic movements. The history of Christianity in South Africa as presented here can be divided into three overlapping periods: the Dutch mission period from 1652 to 1800; the

British mission period from 1800 to the 1900s; and the modern mission period from the 1900s to the present.

3.6 Freedom of religion in South Africa

The previous section briefly outlined periods that were credited with the coming of Christianity as a religion in South Africa, the arrival of different Christian missionaries over time and how the state authorities preferred Christianity as professed by the Dutch Reformed Church to the exclusion of other denominations and religions. This section introduces the idea of freedom of religion in the context of democratic South Africa.

The name “Rainbow Nation” referring to South Africa was given by Archbishop Desmond Tutu immediately after the first democratic elections in 1994 that saw the end of apartheid. The metaphor “Rainbow Nation” points to the coming together of different nations to live in harmony in their diverse identities. The new democracy was followed by the development of a new constitution that would be inclusive and reflect the diverse identity of South Africa. The idea of diversity in the context of South Africa is informed by cultural diversity, sexual diversity, political diversity, language diversity, nationality diversity, racial diversity and religious diversity. Religious diversity features prominently in the makeup of the South African Rainbow Nation, as religion is an important social-cultural system of its people. In South Africa, the religious diversity consists of religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, African traditional religions, Judaism, Christianity and others. In terms of Christianity, this diversity filters through into the diversity of Christian churches.

The new constitution of South Africa as the supreme law of the country that was formulated in 1996 following the first democratic elections in 1994 was titled the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996). The constitution entails all of the fundamental principles according to which South Africa is to be governed, the structure of such government and, more importantly, it includes the Bill of Rights that outlines the fundamental rights of all South Africans. The new constitution further recognises the right to freedom of religion following the example of Article 18 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (United Nations Human Rights, 1976), which gives the provisions for freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Under Section 15(1), Chapter 2 of the Constitution of South Africa, freedom of religion is described as including the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.

The provision of freedom of religion gives leeway to religious groups and individuals to self-determine and organise themselves. This means that religious bodies and individuals can practise or live their religious convictions without any interference and discrimination. The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (United Nations Human Rights, 1976:10) states that the right to freedom of religion means that everyone has the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of his or her choice and determine the manifestation of such religion. Coertzen (2002:190) mentions the authority provided by a constitutional court case in South Africa (*S v Lawrence*; *S v Negal*; *S v Soberg* 1997 (4) SA 1176 (CC), BCLR 1348 (CC)) where freedom of religion is described as “the right to entertain such religious beliefs as a person chooses, the right to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear of hindrance or reprisal, and the right to manifest belief by worship and practice or teaching and dissemination”.

The Bill of Rights continues to call for clarity and reinterpretation by the organised sections of society, such as academic scholars, judiciary, civil society and many others. Similar to all other rights contained in the Bill of Rights, the right to freedom of religion, as guaranteed in the Constitution of South Africa, only provides the fundamental framework of freedom of religion without transcribing its meanings in the context of religious organisations in general and Christianity in particular. Coertzen (2008) is accurate in arguing that the terms that are used in the Constitution to describe freedom of religion are unclear and not explicit. Furthermore, Coertzen (2008:362-365) argues that the new constitution does not identify in precise detail what exactly freedom of religion implies. In support of this view, Malherbe (2011:5) states that the Constitution creates space for additional charters of rights because most constitutional rights are described in cryptic, vague and general terms. In its language, the Constitution creates a climate that has made it possible for dishonest religions to enter the religious space without fear of condemnation, prosecution or punishment. While the idea of a rainbow nation and religious freedom calls for diverse religions existing in harmony, at the same time, it has imposed unwarranted tolerance on the part of religious bodies, such as churches, towards the false practice of religion and people who deliberately contradict the core doctrines of such religions.

After the new Constitution of South Africa was enacted, the big question in light of freedom of religion, as stipulated under Section 15, was what the implications and meanings of freedom of religion are. To answer this question, the SACRRF becomes necessary. According to Section 234 of the Constitution (1996:31), under the theme “charters of rights” to deepen the culture

of democracy in South Africa, parliament is permitted to adopt charters of rights that are consistent with all provisions of the Constitution. According to Malherbe (2011:5), any such charter of rights adopted by parliament will then have the force of law.

In 2008, the first draft of the SACRRF was presented at a gathering of religious groups. This charter was formulated by international legal experts, government commissioners, human rights groups, academics and media bodies in consultation with major religions in South Africa. After its endorsement in October 2010, this charter became the existing interpretation of what is implied by freedom of religion in Chapter 2 of Section 15 of the Constitution. Coertzen (2014) avows that the charter is “a very useful tool for religions to determine their own identity in forms of rights and freedoms they can legitimately claim” (Coertzen 2014:129).

The SACRRF contains the main elements of religious rights and freedoms as protected and upheld by other rights guaranteed in the Constitution. According to the preamble of this charter, the inherent intention thereof is to define the religious rights, religious freedoms and religious responsibilities of every religious group and person in South Africa. Although the current study does not intend to discuss the SACRRF in greater detail, some of the rights and freedoms as stipulated in the charter are listed below.

- Every person has the right to believe according to his or her own religious or philosophical beliefs or convictions and choose which faith, worldwide religion or religious institution to subscribe to, affiliate with or belong to.
- No person may be forced to believe, what to believe or not to believe, or to act against his or her convictions.
- Every person has the right to freedom of expression in respect of religion.
- Every person has the right to be educated or to educate his or her children, or have them educated, in accordance with his or her religions or philosophical convictions.
- Every religious institution has the right to institutional freedom of religion.
- Every person has the right, for religious purposes and in furthering their objectives, to solicit, receive, manage, allocate and spend voluntary financial and other forms of support and contribution. The confidentiality of such support and contributions should be respected.

In its background information, the SACRRF (2016) makes the following statement:

A religious institution may also not act in a way that is blatantly illegal, for example to force its members to perform acts or rituals that are physically harmful

or may damage or destroy the property of others, or to force minors to marry (SACRRF 2016:4).

Although the right to religious freedom is of paramount importance in South Africa, at the same time, it has opened the floodgates to multitudes of individuals with adverse intentions to exploit this right. In many ways, the vagueness of this right has turned South Africa into a marketplace of religions. The recent conduct by some self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa has cast confusion and uncertainty around the question of religious freedom and rights. Theologians and religious scholars are, more than ever before, at loggerheads about what the right to freedom of religion constitutes and what the proper understanding thereof is in light of these self-styled spiritual leaders. While the SACRRF has sought to bring some clarity in the implication of freedom of religion, at the same time, it has failed to provide deterrents against those who exploit it. The misconduct and claims made by self-styled spiritual leaders have brought the name of Christianity into serious disrepute.

Along the same line, Resane (2017) argues that the unconventional practices of these self-styled spiritual leaders have caused serious damage to Christianity and theological fundamentals (Resane 2017:1). Condemning these practices in the strongest terms, Kgatle (2017) declares that the “barbaric acts” of self-styled spiritual leaders should be condemned “because church is supposed to be a place where people seek protection and strength” (Kgatle 2017:3). Thus, against this observation, both theological scholars and religious experts are bound by duty to give a new meaning and explanation of what role this new form of religion in South Africa plays in exploiting the right to freedom of religion.

Central to the meaning of democracy is government by the people, for the people, adhering to the rule of the majority. In any democratic system, power is vested either directly or indirectly in its people. While Christianity in the new South Africa claims more than 80% adherents^{11/12}, this is not adequately reflected in the policies on religion. There is something unbecoming in the observation that in a democratic country such as this, the African National Congress can be called the ruling party, yet Christians are reluctant to declare it a Christian country. The new constitution, in light of freedom of religion, has failed decisively to take into consideration that religion plays an important role in developing any society into a whole and mature community.

¹¹ “South Africa Population 2021” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/south-africa-population>

¹² “Religious statistics in South Africa” https://www.indexmundi.com/south_africa/religions.html

While South Africa is far from being a homogeneous society with one religion, the majority religion (Christianity) should have been used as a starting point to keep this deeply religious society together. Countries such as Argentina, Armenia, Denmark, England, Georgia, Norway and many others guarantee freedom of religion, while, at the same time, preferential status is accorded to Christianity, since it is preferred by the majority of the citizens of those countries. In this fashion, any religion that proves itself to be a unifying force, as it the case with Christianity in South Africa, enjoys support and protection of the state that will safeguard it against any meddling.

The cases of human rights abuse by some self-styled spiritual leaders investigated in this study will demonstrate how the concept of freedom of religion is being exploited by self-styled spiritual leaders in contravention of other basic human rights as provided in the Constitution of South Africa. These cases of human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders will demonstrate the manner in which most of them are exploiting the right to freedom of religion to back their conduct and claims.

3.7 The Religion in Education Policy (2003)

Section 3.5 on Christian missionaries in South Africa has shown that missionaries are praised for bringing Christianity to South Africa. In a similar fashion, the formal schooling and learning system came with these missionaries who established mission schools (Lebeloane, 2006:1). Damons (2016:62) argues that missionaries, along with the British government, introduced education with the political aim of colonising South Africa. This claim is substantiated by quoting a speech delivered by Sir George Grey, the governor of the Cape in 1855, who said:

If we leave the natives beyond our border ignorant barbarians, they will remain a race of troublesome marauders. We should try to make them a part of ourselves, with common faith and common interest, useful servants, consumers of our goods, contributors to our revenue. Therefore, I propose that we make unremitting efforts to raise the natives in Christianity and civilisation, by establishing among them missions connected with industrial schools. The native races beyond our boundary, influenced by our missionaries, instructed in our schools, benefiting by our trade would not make wars on our frontiers. (Damons, 2016:62)

Traditionally, it has been argued by multiple scholars that apartheid policies preferred and favoured the Christian religion. For example, Chidester (2003) states that both religious

education and biblical studies during apartheid promoted Christian triumphalism over other religions in South Africa (Chidester 2003:265). According to Mestry (2006), the Christian Education Policy Act of 1967 favoured the single-tradition approach that promoted Christianity over other religions and even prevented learners from non-Christian religions to be informed about their religions (Macmillan 1967:43-56; Mestry 2006:57). Along the same lines, Squelch (1997:40) notes that the policy of 1976 not only prohibited racial integration but also made clear reference to the Christian and national character that was to permeate South African education for the next several decades (Squelch 1997:40-41).

As attested in the previous sections, in its present makeup, South Africa remains a deeply religious nation, and this is reflected by its constitutional preamble that calls on God to protect its people. Since the attainment of democracy in 1994, South Africa has embraced various religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, the African traditional religions, Judaism and Christianity. All existing religions in South Africa are treated equally by the Constitution, despite the fact that more than 80% of the people of South Africa profess Christianity. With its Constitution as the supreme law, this means that every policy of all spheres of government should be inspired by constitutional values, and the place of religion in education is no exception. In the early 1990s, the National Education Policy Investigation was established to investigate a new possible model that could facilitate the relationship between religion and education in a way that reflected aspirations of democracy.

Between 1996 and 2003, South Africa saw an explosion of lively debates about the place of religion in the public sphere, and public schools in particular. According to Dreyer (2007), the Religion in Education Policy was drafted in 1999 under Sibusiso Bengu, who preceded Doctor Kadar Asmal as the minister of Education (1994-1999). The policy made provision for single-faith instruction in public schools and was well received by many Christian parents and churches of South Africa. However, as soon as Asmal became the new minister of Education (1999-2004), a new draft of the policy emerged and was released in 2003 as the *National Policy on Religion and Education* as documented in the *Government Gazette*, No. 25459, Volume 459, on 12 September 2003 (Dreyer 2007:43). This policy was meant to transform the single-faith approach to religious education.

The new policy, in its attempts to embrace the religious diversity of South Africa, drew a distinction between features of religion in education as religion education, religious instruction and religious observance.

- **Religion education** refers to the curricular programme for teaching and learning about religion, religions and religious diversity in South Africa and the world.
- **Religious instruction** refers to the responsibility of particular religious groups, homes, families and religious institutions to instruct learners in the in-calculation of a particular faith or religion. Thus, this aspect, as provided to learners by clergy, parents and religious communities, cannot form part of formal school programmes.
- **Religious observance** refers to an instance where learners, teachers and religious groups freely and voluntarily gather for religious acts of worship, praying, rest and religious diets. In this regard, the school governing bodies of public schools may use their discretion to provide or refuse school facilities for such instances. Thus, this aspect too does not form part of school formal programmes if done in an equitable manner among religious groups.

According to the new policy, religion education is accommodated under the wing of the school subject life orientation. The policy stipulates that the “life orientation learning area, through programmes like life skills, religion education, social responsibility, is well positioned to impact on the ethical and moral dimensions of pupil development” (Department of Education 2003). According to Coertzen (2002), the term “life orientation” is meant to show the aims of this learning area, which are to guide and sensitise learners to life and its possibilities in relation to their personal, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing (Coertzen 2002:193).

The question of religion in education cannot be divorced from the phenomenon of secularisation (transformation from religious towards nonreligious values) that has swept across the world. Tayob (2018) is accurate in his analysis that suggests that the whole question of religion in education has been huddled along with the larger societal process of democratisation and pluralisation of societies as early as the 1970s, following the precedent of the United States court decision in 1963, ruling that school-mandated prayers in public schools were unconstitutional (Tayob 2018:2). However, in a country such as South Africa, the role of religion, and specifically Christianity and the church, in defeating apartheid and advocating for democracy is unquestionable and undisputed. So, to give such a small space to religion in education was an insult to every religious and Christian parent who had fought for democracy in South Africa.

In its design, the new policy failed to recognise the need for the spiritual and religious development of learners in schools. Instead, it encouraged learners to merely gather

information about other religions as opposed to living their own. At the same time, the new policy failed and denied teachers and learners in public schools the opportunity to learn about the spiritual energy and religious value system that the great leaders and struggle icons had possessed. For example, Forster (2015) demonstrates that faith played an important role in the entire life of Nelson Mandela, the father of democracy in South Africa. The same is demonstrated about Stephen Bantu Biko in Jentile (2018), the revolutionary Oliver Reginald Tambo in Jansen (2018), Reverend John Langalibalele Mafukuzela Dube in Kumalo (2008), to mention but a few. Their undeniable experience and contribution remain a testament of how religion, in this case, Christianity, had helped them to imagine a just society where human dignity was prioritised. This stands parallel with the analysis of Tayob (2018) suggesting that the proliferation of religious representations in South Africa sits side by side with political secularism; hence, presidents, politicians and public officials will regularly invoke it in their engagements (Tayob 2018:6).

By wiping away confessional and sectarian religion, the Department of Education no longer recognised religion as an important aspect of South African learners in public schools. Moreover, it meant that public schools no longer belonged to people who practised religion; instead, schools now belonged to the secular or non-religious state. More detrimentally, they no longer belonged to the rule of God. Hence, the new policy had to privatise both confessional and sectarian religion to the home and religious institutions.

The new policy ignored the reality that the majority of South Africans belonged to religious affiliations, in particular Christianity. A multitude of religious parents in South Africa had to come to terms and make peace with the reality that religion no longer played an important role in their children's growth; hence, it had no place in public schools. This meant that the parents of children in public schools did not have control over the form of education they wished for their children. The new policy sought to exclude religious sentiments and the presence of God from public schools. Moreover, this meant that learners were treated like non-believers who were yet to form an opinion about religion and ultimately locate their own religious identity from a pool of religions of the world. Tayob (2018) calculated that the new policy, which consisted of merely 28 pages, mentioned the word "world" 41 times; accordingly, one would be justified to be under the impression that the drafters of the 2003 policy focused more on the world than the self-sufficiency of South Africa (Tayob 2018:9). This view is supported by Van der Walt (2010), who declares that according to the Policy on Religion and Education, parents

and learners do not enjoy the freedom of choosing which schools they would like to support and attend. Instead, parents are expected to place their children in schools where they will learn to become illiterate in terms of religion and diversity, which necessitates the absence of all forms of confessional religious education in public schools (Van der Walt 2010:89). Moreover, Van der Walt stated that:

... it is not pedagogically justifiable to expose a small child to other traditions before he/she has been steeped in the tenants of his/her own religious tradition. It will only lead to confusion in their young minds and will be contra-productive. A child proper understanding of his/her own religious tradition will lead to a more favorable understanding of others as well (Van der Walt 2010:89).

Challengers of the new policy mobilised campaigns, public meetings, collective manifestos and open letters opposing the implementation thereof and any further enactment of the policy. This showed that the parents of children in public schools were outraged by the policy and the direction education was taking by removing religion from schools. According to Van der Walt (2011:382), all these occurrences attest to the fact that South Africans were not quite satisfied with how the state had dealt with the issue of religious diversity in public education.

In his presentation of the new policy, Doctor Kadar Asmal, the minister of Education, denied that removing sectarian and confessional religion from public schools was a strategy of the African National Congress to turn South Africa into a secular state. Van der Walt (2010) argues that by this denial, the minister of Education was merely sugaring the bitter pill of secularism for the adherents of the mainstream religions in South Africa, such as Christianity (Van der Walt 2010:83).

The new policy was implemented against the broader implications of freedom of religion as enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. Serfontein (2014) writes: "The policy is unconstitutional (Serfontein 2014:131). It does not respect religious beliefs, but impresses a secular states world on the youth." Again, Van der Walt (2010) argues that the fact that the new policy has assigned the confessional aspect of religious education to the private realm is in itself a step towards secularism. Besides, he contends that secularism in form is a new religion with the purpose to oust the Christian religion from the public sphere. Van der Walt further reinforces his argument by mentioning B.J. van der Walt (2007) who similarly sees secularism as a religion that is aimed at taking the place of Christianity in all walks of life (Van der Walt 2010:82-83).

Mayson (as cited in Serfontein, 2014) maintains that the new policy on religion in education was not aimed at spiritual and religious people but instead at people who only wanted to be informed on facts about other religions. In his opposition, Serfontein (2014) makes the following statement:

... when accepted that religious belief (or even the absence thereof) constitutes an important part of identity, the schools refraining from the role of inducing the child in a particular religion with the objective of acquiring that religion, but only introducing him to a large variety of religions, as contemporary education policy wants, it could only further the role confusion prompted by [a] contemporary complex society (Serfontein 2014:132).

Along similar lines, Roux (2003) contends that while the problem of diversity in education cannot be taken for granted, parents and educators collectively have expressed a dim view on policies that seek to create confusion by imposing world religions on learners, fearing that they will be confused by such content (Roux 2003:130).

In their design, different religions are bound to pull in opposite directions, and it is hard to imagine that school learners will not be confused whenever they are presented with world religions. This point is captured by Nicolson (1994), who juxtaposed the analysis of Miller (1969) to that of Chidester (1992). Whereas Miller (1996) focuses on teaching techniques that can help to reduce colour prejudice and warns that teaching about multiculturalism can provide learners with grounds for re-enforcing cultural intolerance (Miller 1996:25), Chidester (1992) argues that teaching learners about other religions can increase prejudice, as they will start to realise that others are different or strange (Chidester 1992:88). Ultimately, Nicolson (1994) draws an analogy between learners or teachers and professional counsellors, arguing that just as counsellors do not abandon their love for their own children simply because they are dealing with other children, teachers and learners will not abandon their own religion simply because they are presented with other religions (Nicolson 1994:14). However, Nicolson seems to have overlooked the fact that learners are not professionals, and as such, they cannot be compared to skilled professional counsellors. By introducing learners to world religions, the new policy denied them the only weapon that could assist them to identify the false and manipulative religions that have descended upon South Africa. In addition to the damage done by the undemocratic freedom of religion, the 2003 policy has placed school learners and the entire

society in a vulnerable position of being swept away by manipulative and opportunistic religions.

The Religion in Education Policy has missed the opportunity of developing what one can call a “proudly South African model” of religion in education, despite Naledi Pandor, who succeeded Kadar Asmal as minister of Education (2004-2009) calling it an “exciting and distinctively South African response to an educational challenge faced by our society”, as quoted by Chidester (2006:62). However, her analysis holds no water, as the wording of the policy speaks for itself, stating that it seeks to have an “open, plural, historically informed, intercultural and interdisciplinary study of religion in public schools is consistent with international developments, and it is also a model gaining popularity and relevance throughout Africa” (South Africa 2003). This wording is evidence enough to show that while the drafters of the new policy might have thought of South Africa, they were much influenced by international developments and consequently, tried too hard to be relevant.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter traced the history of Christianity and the Christian mission in South Africa as it related to the topic of this study. This was followed by a discussion of the Constitution of South Africa in light of freedom of religion, as well as the obscurities thereof and the role it had played in collapsing the true nature of Christianity sideways with self-styled spiritual leaders. The last section of this chapter presented a discussion of the aftermath of the Religion in Education Policy that prohibited confessional and sectarian religion from public schools and forced Christian learners to be taught religious studies with a focus on “other religions”. The role played by this policy in helping self-styled spiritual leaders in their resolve to contradict Christianity was examined too.

Chapter 4: The opium religion as the Nyaope religion in South Africa

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the idea of religion in broad terms and then briefly discuss Karl Marx's critique on religion and the context that prevailed during his time and led him to the point of observing and declaring religion to be the opium of the people. The second part of the chapter introduces the South African localised nyaope drug with the aim of juxtaposing it to Karl Marx's opium in order to describe the new form of religion by self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion in South Africa behind the disguise of Christianity.

4.2 Defining religion

The task of defining "religion" is difficult, complex and delicate at the same time. Similar to other social categories, the meaning of religion remains contentious and ambiguous. Religious scholars and theologians have always been in disagreement about what constitutes a religion and the definition thereof. Thus, it is difficult to arrive at a one-size-fits-all definition of religion. So far, any existing definition of religion is either too narrow to the exclusion of other religions or too broad to the inclusion of that which is not religion. Every religion has some moral obligation, sense of right and duty to service. The English term "religion" is translated from the Latin word *religio*, which means "obligation", "bond" and "reverence" (Tetreault & Denmark 2004:6).

The main aim of religion is to provide answers to human questions that cannot be answered by human reason. Elsewhere, Thinane (2019) defines religion as an "imagined human search for meaning" (Thinane 2019:6). Even when religion is some form of a fantasy, at the same time, it is realistic, has intellectual value and an idealistic foundation. As such, the presence of religion can neither be dismissed nor be ignored in any society. Whenever human beings face struggles in life, they look up to religion to gain comfort and courage to continue living. Whenever there is anxiety, life-threatening situations, serious questions that science on its own cannot answer and needs that cannot be fully satisfied by mere human efforts, then those who believe in religion turn to it for security. In order for people to be at peace with their daily material conditions, they require religion as their only happiness. As human beings find themselves being subjected to extreme forms of poverty and injustice, religion becomes the only course that can reconcile them with themselves. Thinane (2019) concludes: "'Bond' points to the bond between [humanity] and gods, 'reverence' for the gods and 'obligation' to serve

(the) gods.” Similarly, in this study, the term “religion” is defined as an “imagined human search for meaning” (Thinane 2019:6).

According to Karl Marx, religion is a reflection of real human suffering while at the same time it (religion) becomes a form of human protest against such suffering in the world. Boer (2016) clarifies that the reason why Marx equated religion to a protest is simply that religion in itself or in its own way says life is not as good as it is supposed to be, thus making life a form of suffering that is confronted by another form of suffering, which, in this case, is religion itself. Every human in the world devotes his or her time to finding a reason for his or her existence in life. The struggle of exploring life for such meaning becomes a projection of and visible protest against human suffering and struggles in the world. Hence, religion should at all times remain a true reflection of people’s conditions in the world.

Within the same understanding, Friedrich Nietzsche (in Juhansar 2011) states that religion is a “part of a slave rebellion on morals substitute for the unsuccessful slave rebellion on reality”. In order to explain this view (Juhansar 2011:258), Uchegbue (2011) pointed out that Marx saw religion primarily as a reflection of the actual conditions and realities of people or as a product of alienation in society, it is the frustration generated by the socio-economic order that leads people to create illusions. He continues by saying that people turning to religion is “an expression of their being uncomfortable with the distressing condition of social life and of their desire to find a solution to the miseries of life” (Uchegbue 2011:57-58). Remhof (2018) concurs that the idea of God emerges to provide light in a dark world. From the beginning of time, people have turned to God when tragedies occur (Remhof 2018:1).

Even though mystification exists as one of the characteristics of religion, religion becomes false when it uses mystification to hide the truth about human conditions and suffering in the world. The view exists that human beings created religion in order to make their real world tolerable; hence, Karl Marx argued that religion was but a reflection of the real world. As an institution, religion is ought to organise human’s everyday living in an orderly fashion and even reconcile them to their true selves in order for them to find the meaning of their existence in life. Any form of religion that causes human beings to lie about their everyday conditions and realities separates them from their true selves, and in that way, human beings will not find the meaning of their existence in life. Thus, religion as an imagined human search for meaning should permanently remain true to the task of reflecting humans’ struggles and suffering in the world. Thus, religion should at all times teach human beings moral principles and persuade

them to do good and influence societies by its customs, values and philosophies, while at the same time, it remains a cultural phenomenon.

4.3 Karl Marx

Karl Heinrich Marx was born on 5 May 1818 in Trier, Germany, and over a period of time, he came to be known as a German philosopher, historian, political theorist, economist, journalist, theologian and many others. Marx received home schooling, first by his father and then by the local bookseller (Faccarello et al., 2016:2). Because both his parents were of Jewish descent, he was, for most of his life, surrounded by famous rabbis. Later, in 1816, his father converted to Christianity (Protestantism) in order to escape the Prussian restrictions against Jews and keep his legal practice (McLellan 1987). This resulted in Karl and his six siblings being baptised as Protestants. However, later in his youth, he rejected religion and embraced an atheist position (Cline 2019).

In 1830, Marx attended the high school in Trier and matriculated in 1835 at the University of Bonn at the age of 17. In 1836, he enrolled at the University of Berlin as a law student but was fascinated by philosophy as well. It was during this time that the young Marx became involved in rigorous debates with the so-called young Hegelians, who were centred on the then recently deceased Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who was considered to be the most important figure in German Idealism. Hegel was famous for his claim that reality and history should be viewed dialectically. Politically and theologically, these debates resulted in the division of his followers into the right-wing Hegelian school (those arguing that his philosophy affirmed Christianity), the left-wing Hegelian school (those who challenged the philosophical affirmations of Christianity) and the middle-wing Hegelian school (those who maintained a neutral position) (Moggach 2018).

4.3.1 Karl Marx's critique of religion

Karl Marx's critique of religion was written in 1843 in "Towards a critique of Hegel's philosophy of right" (Marx 2002). Over a period of time, this critique has been reduced to the following statement: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." While these sentences seem to be capturing the whole idea of what Marx wanted to say about religion, they exist within a much broader picture of what he sought to say about religion and the role thereof. Reading the entirety of his critique provides the context upon which segments of his critique

are to be understood. Below is part of the critique as it appears in Marx's (2000) "Towards a critique of Hegel's philosophy of right":

For Germany, the criticism of religion has been essentially completed, and the criticism of religion is the Prerequisite of all criticism. The profane existence of error is compromised as soon as its heavenly *oratio pro aris et focis* ["speech I altars and hearths"] has been refuted. Man, who has found only the reflection of himself in the fantastic reality of heaven, where he sought a superman, will no longer feel disposed to find the mere appearance of himself, the non-man ["Unmensch"], where he seeks and must seek his true reality. The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But, man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual p'nt d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realisation of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

Marx's critique of religion was centred on his understanding and overall theory of society. This critique finds meaning when it is read along with his critical theories on politics, economy and society, in general, or what is collectively understood as Marxism (Cline, 2019). The critique of religion is all-encompassing; hence, he asserts that it is the prerequisite of all criticism. In order for one to truly understand religion, one first needs to acquaint oneself with an

understanding of other societal institutions, simply because human beings made religion and not the other way around, leading to its being the expression of real suffering and a protest against human real suffering imposed by other institutions of life. For this reason, Munck (2016:176) writes: “The Marxist theory of (general) ideology is thus probably impossible without Marx’s critique of the critique of religion.” This places religion at the centre or the root of every existing society and, moreover, makes it extremely difficult to be dismissed as a mere fantasy.

Marx saw religion as the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions and the opium of the people (Marx 1970:244). On the face of it, what is clear is that Marx identified an important role that religion should play in providing society with some form of meaning and consolation in the context of suffering by comparing it to a sigh, a heart, a soul and opium. For this reason, Uchebue (2011) believes that Marx’s conception of the important role that religion should be playing against conditions of intense alienation is responsible for the formation of his background and the foundation of his views on religion (Uchebue 2011:56).

Some scholars, such as Juhansar (2011), Uchebue (2011) and Boer (2016), seem to accept that in his criticism of religion, Marx was just expressing his compassion for the poor of his time. However, what seems certain from his criticism is that he accused a particular form of religion of making unattainable promises to people about their tomorrow, while at the same time, such promises encouraged the poor to tolerate the injustices that they suffered from the hands of the few rich (capitalists) instead of engaging in the struggle against their plight. In his view, a particular form of religion was made to play a critical role in maintaining the unequal status quo of the capitalist society. Historicising Marx’s critique of religion, Torre (2019) qualifies that Marx’s criticism can be understood, in light of the emergence of the Reformation, directly or indirectly as a critique of Roman Catholicism (Torre 2019:1). This claim is backed by McLellan (1987) who observes that Marx’s views of religion were in harmony with those of Martin Luther, as they both sought to restore the authority of faith by destroying undue faith authorities, to reduce the position of priests to that of laymen and to liberate people from reliance on exterior religiosity to embracing their inner religious conscience (McLellan 1987:14). Thus, it would be unfair to accuse Marx of having targeted religion in its entirety, as his number one enemy and the centre of his discourse.

Instead, Okoro (2012) points out that Marx stumbled onto religion via the socio-economic analysis of his time, as his view was that the religion of his time was the “sole purveyor of alienation to the people” and was used to produce “an illusionary escape” from depressing social realities (Okoro 2012:25). Similarly, Cline (2019) argues that Marx merely thought of religion as a necessary illusion that sought to give the much-needed reasons and excuses to keep people functioning, even under hard circumstances. Quoting Townsley (2005), Okoro declares that religion makes the poor escape from something that does not care for its people in the “cycle of oppression”. Accordingly, religion acquires a new definition as a “body of myths” that provides many of the deceptions that form the basis of the ideology of the ruling class (Uchegbue, as cited in Okoro, 2012). For Marx, it was not right for religion to be used as a body of myths that had deceptions that assisted the ruling few with ideologies.

In conclusion, Okoro (2012) argues that it is the strategy of the oppressor to apply the mechanism of religion to soothe the oppressed and enslave them perpetually. Having observed an extreme form of oppression and inequality suffered by his society, Marx studied the function of religion in people’s everyday realities and concluded metaphorically that religion was the opium of the masses. According to Omonijo et al. (2016), Marx, in the society of his time, felt touched by the extreme inequality, oppression, human degradation, exploitation, enslavement and deep suffering of the masses. Thus, he started studying alienation, which eventually led him to study religion, especially Christianity (Omonijo et al., 2016:3). Describing the society of Marx in simple terms Uchegbue (2011) writes:

It was a society where the workers were being reduced to mere mechanical instruments of work and production while at the same time the products of their labor were estranged from them and transferred to the bourgeois owners of the means of production and distribution (Uchegbue 2011:55).

Karl Marx argued that some Christians taught and emphasised heaven as the ultimate goal or reward for goodliness acts while on earth. However, Marx regarded this as just a tactic by the ruling class to influence the people to be more agreeable and submissive (Omonijo et al., 2016:2). In addition, Omonijo et al., (2016) claim that Marx believed that the Christian teachings that emphasised obedience to authority, humility, gentility and other related issues were mere manipulations by the upper class to keep the masses perpetually subservient (Omonijo et al, 2016:3). In this way, religion was used as a means to control the people. After having observed his society and the role of religion in it, Marx declared that religion was the

sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, and the soul of the soulless conditions. He also proclaimed that religion was the opium of the people. In this way, he likened religion to a sigh, a heart, a soul and even a vehicle of protest. A brief analysis of what he meant by “sigh”, “heart” and “soul” will demonstrate that his evaluation of religion was rather positive and not undesirable.

4.3.2 Religion as the sigh of the oppressed

According to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary (2006), a sigh is defined as taking a deep audible breath (as in weariness or relief). The online Cambridge dictionary (2019) and Collins English dictionary (2002) both define a sigh as breathing out slowly and noisily, expressing tiredness, sadness, pleasure and so forth. According to the online Urban dictionary, a sigh is a release of air to get other people to notice one is depressed, tired, bored or overworked. From these definitions, it can be deduced that Karl Marx saw religion as a system with the purpose of providing humanity with a platform to take a deep audible breath from their miserable and depressing conditions. Accordingly, he saw religion as the only appropriate space for the exploited and the downtrodden to moan, groan and express their pain. For that reason, he accepted religion as the only organisation that could offer the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed some space to express their discontent, displeasure and grievances with the current regime and the ruling class. This idea is further substantiated by his argument that while religion can be taken as some form of an illusion, to expect people to let go of such an illusion is the same as asking them to let go of a condition that requires illusions (life in its entirety). For these reasons, in Volume I of *Capital*, Marx said:

The religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves to him in a transparent and rational form (Marx 1970:244).

Shagor (2005) is of the view that most scholars misjudge Marx’s statement on religion because he is always quoted only on “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature”, omitting “the heart of the heartless world”. In Shagor’s (2005) view, the critique by Marx is directed towards society that has become cruel and heartless towards its people, and not towards religion. His view is that by these statements on religion, Marx authenticated attempts of religion to become the heart of the masses. Moreover, Shagor (2005) asserts that Marx was not without sympathy for people who were in distress and looked upon religion to provide them with consolation, as

he appreciated that people were in distress and religion provided solace, just as those who were physically injured received relief from opiate-based drugs (Shagor 2005:1). For this reason, Juhansar (2011) reasons that when religion fails to perform its inherent task of assisting the oppressed of the world to survive, then human beings will be expected to take this task into their own hands and create a society in which the conditions that give rise to their suffering will be eradicated (Juhansar 2011:1).

4.3.3 Religion as the heart of the heartless world

Whenever one says someone or something is “heartless”, it means that he, she or it is unloving, uncaring, inconsiderate, unconcerned, insensitive and unsympathetic towards a particular person or situation. According to the online Cambridge dictionary (2019), the word “heartless” is defined as being cruel and not worrying about other people. The online Urban dictionary defines one who is heartless as someone who has never loved before and has tried to do so, only to eventually realise that love is a wasted emotion, thus becoming a person that does not all care what they do to hurt someone. Karl Marx saw his world through the lens of these definitions. By the word “world”, he could only be referring to the ruling class, capitalists and those who were responsible for human struggle in the world. In his view, religion was capable of loving the oppressed and the downtrodden; only religion seemed to love, care and be considerate and sensitive towards human conditions against the cruel, unloving, uncaring and insensitive capitalist system (heartless people). Accordingly,

it is clear from this passage that Marx believed it futile to pursue the outright suppression of religion or to seek a promulgation of atheism by decree: as long as humans continue to live in a heartless world, the ideological formation that is the core of religion would be inexpungible (Surin 2013:10).

4.3.4 Religion as the soul of the soulless condition

According to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary (2006), the term “soul” can be defined as the immaterial essence, animating principle or actuating cause of an individual life, or the spiritual principle embodied in human beings, all rational and spiritual beings or the universe. The online Collins dictionary (2002) defines “soul broadly as the essential part or fundamental nature of anything; also, the spiritual part of a person, a person’s feelings or mutual nature as distinct from other faculties.

According to Boeri (2018), the argument between the two greatest figures of Western philosophy, Plato (428-348 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC), reflected that while the body and the soul are two different entities, their existence or function fundamentally is dependent upon each other, as the body cannot function without the soul and the soul without the body (Boeri 2018:1530). Karl Marx could certainly have been aware of the argument between these two figures and the interdependence of these two entities, on the one hand, and Christian theology that referred to the church as the “Body of Christ”, on the other. Thus, he knew of and understood the important relationship that existed between the body and soul. For him to equate religion to the soul meant that he saw religion as the only human institution upon which human beings depended for their survival. To declare religion as the soul of the soulless conditions was just as good as saying that religion was the only thing that could improve the prevailing living contexts. He saw religion as a fundamental and essential part of people’s context. For him, religion was absolutely important and necessary in order to change the human conditions of pain and suffering.

4.3.5 Religion as the opium of the people

Lastly, Karl Marx equated religion to opium by pronouncing that religion was the opium of the people. Whenever people discuss Karl Marx and religion, his statement on religion as the opium of the people (“Die Religion ... ist das Opium des Volkes”) is cited and thought of as the cornerstone of Marxist ideology (Munck 2016:178). This assertion of course stands at the centre of the current study, and it is upon the proper understanding thereof that the study outline its foundation to build an understanding of the new form of religion in South Africa that is characterised by human rights abuse, manipulation and false consciousness. As such, in the study, this new form of religion is likened to the dangerous South African drug nyaope, juxtaposed to the once safe drug, opium, of Marx’s time.

According to Mckinnon (2005), Marx’s understanding of opium falls somewhere between the start and the end of the nineteenth century; hence, he reveals that “in 1843 it is an ambiguous, multidimensional and contradictory metaphor, expressing both the earlier and later understanding of the fruit of the poppy” (Mckinnon 2005:3). The religion of Marx did not exist as a propaganda tool or because it favoured the interests of the powerful class. Turner (2006) asserts that on the whole, Marx thought that it was in the interest of the ruling class that people should indulge in opium. Moreover, the ruling classes encouraged the practice of Christianity among those they oppressed because, on the whole, Christianity has always preached an ethic

of submission (Turner 2006:321), Omonijo et al. (2016) maintain that the demonstration of Christian values by Christian missionaries during Marx's time was merely placatory and designed by the ruling class to calm the nerves and subjugate the people. Furthermore, Omonijo et al. (2016) claim that the Christians of Marx's time endured all forms of suffering and injustices because their focus was on heaven as their target destiny (Omonijo 2016:4). In addition, Turner (2006) claims that the oppressed adopted and embraced religion because they considered it to be genuine and more sympathetic towards the cause of their struggle (Turner 2006:322). Likewise, Torre (2019) understands Marx's usage of religion as something that assisted the oppressed to bear their suffering passively and not actively try to end their oppression (Torre 2019:1).

According to Mckinnon (2005), by the start of the nineteenth century, opium as medicine was unquestioned and considered good for usage. In truth, people would have understood the remark "opium of the people" as something that could be translated into the twentieth-century idiom as something like the "penicillin of the people". Referring to Berridge and Griffiths (1980), Mckinnon further claims that the use of opium in the early decades of the nineteenth century was "quite normal". Opium provided various classes and professionals, such as intellectuals, poets and artists, a brief view of another reality (Mckinnon 2005:3-8). Accordingly,

[o]pium, as a medicine was not a "bad" thing (Marx never thought to criticise the fruit of the poppy itself, and used it himself when the need arose); but it was often used for the dubious purpose of baby doping and was a "good" sold to [sic] considerable profit by shameless profiteers. (Mckinnon 2005:20)

These profiteers cheated sick people out of the only medicine (opium) they badly and desperately needed. Lastly, Mckinnon reasons that for Marx to see religion as the opium of the people, he moved the question of religion out of the theological avenue and made it a political and economic problem; hence, it is of the utmost importance to consider the abstract concept of religion to be real (Mckinnon 2005:20-21).

Yilmaz (2018) asserts that to understand why religion functions as opium, one should look more carefully into the political field, which conditions the function of religion in modern society (Yilmaz 2018:142). Omonijo et al., (2016) contend that religion as opium makes human beings calm, subservient and submissive, even in the face of oppression (Omonijo et al., 2016:3). The use of opium in the nineteenth century increased when the conditions of the

working class declined and outbreaks of infectious diseases, such as cholera, occurred (Mckinnon 2005). Shagor (2005) argues that even though the oppressors of Marx's time were responsible for the pain and distress in society, they too, whenever the need arose, made use of opium (Mckinnon 2005:15). Shagor (2005) writes:

... this opiate is used to calm the jangled nerves of the distressing self-alienation that feeling that one is being exploited, fetishising products over concerns of others and be dehumanised in work ... this opiate is the path of least resistance taken by the downtrodden people to make the disorientation of self-alienation more bearable. Religion (opium), then can be seen as a form of escapism, a misguided to ease an uneasy life (Shagor 2005:7).

For Karl Marx, religion acts similar to an opiate, to “dull the pain” that has been produced by oppression and to make the oppressed unreceptive to such pain. In the words of Uchegbue (2011), it plays a useful but illusive psycho-therapeutic role by bringing consolation that makes the adherents thereof forget their frustrations. Furthermore, Uchegbue (2011) maintains that the only reason why Marx likened religion to the opium of the people was because of the positive and humanitarian role of religion in people's lives, which authenticates the practice of religion within societies. As such religion (opium) plays a psycho-therapeutic role that gives assurance, calmness and serenity of mind in the face of misery. Thus, religion helps the oppressed masses not to surrender in their fight against distressing conditions of life (Uchegbue 2011:60-65). While Marx likened religion to opium, he did not dissolve the original aim of religion into the same pot with the false form of religion that he witnessed in his lifetime. In the current study, opium is seen positively as medicine, while nyaope is seen negatively as an illicit, poisonous, dangerous drug.

4.4 Opium of the people

4.4.1 Opium as medicine

Through the Middle Ages into the eighteenth century, opium was seen and accepted as a powerful medicine that treated almost anything and everything from headaches and toothache to problems with sanity (Hoffman 1990:1). However, its medical focus moved from the idea of a powerful and valuable drug to a dangerous drug.

Opium is a dried fluid or chemical latex obtained from a plant called “opium poppy” (Chalise 2015:59). Opium (*Lachryma papaveris teriak*) is a brown, sticky or crumbly substance formed

from an air-dried, milky latex fluid obtained from incising the unripe capsules (poppies) of the *papaver somniferum* (Masoudkabar et al., 2013:733). When the opium poppy is not ripe yet, its seed produces a milky fluid that runs out, and when that fluid dries, opium is composed. The word “opium” comes from the Greek word *opus* which means “juice” (Duarte 2005:141).

The opium poppy is the main and only source of opium. According to Schiff (2002:1), the medicinal opium plant *papaver somniferum* originated in Asia Minor. In their paper, Tétrault and Allen (2004) write as follows:

[The] opium poppy is one of the oldest cultivated plants, and its analgesic use can be traced to the beginning of civilisation. Opium, which is the dried latex of poppy contains alkaloids presumably involved in ecological defence, with codeine and morphine being two of the most abundant (Allen 2004:1559).

The poppy is a species of an ornamental flowering plant in the family Papaveraceae, from which opium and poppy seeds originate (Ray et al., 2006:2). The name “poppy” is from Latin and means “sleep-inducing”. In its raw state opium, can be smoked, drunk and processed into heroin (Ray et al., 2006:2).

Duarte (2005) describes the process of how opium is obtained from the opium poppy as follows:

In summary, the process is started two weeks after [the] leaves have fallen, when [the] seed-containing capsules harden. At sunset, capsules are scarified with shallow incisions to allow [the] latex to flow. It is then thickened due to evaporation in the capsule surface itself resulting in a brown gum which is removed [the] next morning with an iron tool with the shape of [a] small mason’s shovel. This gum is then made into powder (Duarte 2005:141).

Hoffman (1990) mentions that among the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia, opium was known as *hul gil* (the plant of joy) and was used as medicine (Hoffman 1990:20). Brownstein (1993) indicates that there is general consensus among scholars that the Sumerians, who lived in what is today Iraq, grew or cultivated poppies and isolated opium from their seed capsules. They called opium *gil*, which is the word for joy; thus, poppy or *hul gil* means the plant of joy (Brownstein, 1993:5391). Hoffman (1990) explains that opium was prescribed by medical doctors to induce sleep and treat internal illnesses, various infectious diseases, insomnia, diarrhoea and respiratory diseases. According to Lugman (2014), opium as medicine was used

for relieving pain and for sedation. Also, opium was regarded as a remedy for diseases such as asthma, cancer, spasm, fever and diarrhoea (Lugman 2014:93). Doctor Donald Caton, a scholar who has devoted much of his academic career to the history of anaesthesiology, reveals that physicians used opium and morphine for relieving pain and for the treatment of diseases “ranging from smallpox, dementia, and cough, to sciatica, diabetes, and colic”. According to Caton (1995), physicians used opium for a variety of conditions associated with muscle spasms and abdominal pain, such as cholera, typhus and renal stones, as they knew that it “abolished the pain and diminished bowel function” (Caton 1995:781). Paracelsus von Hohenheim (1493-1541) was a Swiss physician who pioneered some aspects of the medical revolution of the Renaissance (Duarte 2005:142). According to Duarte (2005), “Paracelsus was such an enthusiast of this drug [opium] that [he] would always carry it with him calling it the immortal stone”. Duarte continues as follows on the topic of opium:

Conversely, other authors have proclaimed that opium would act as exciting drug in all cases, increasing physical vigor and clearing the mind. Although not knowing opium action mechanism, this drug has become [a] major therapeutic support during the Victorian era (Duarte 2005:142)

According to Ray et al., (2006), opium was the first authentic anti-depressant in the world (Ray et al., 2006:6). Hoffman (1990) maintains that opium was used for a multitude of purposes, such as for quieting infants, as an aphrodisiac and to give courage to soldiers (Hoffman 1990:3). Ray et al., (2006) affirm that the practice of giving opium to infants was quite common (Ray et al., 2006:3).

4.4.2 Opium used for religious purposes

Scholars such as Hoffman (1990), Brownstein (1993) and Schiff (2002) agree that there was a time in history when opium was used for religious purposes. Brownstein (1993) points out that initially, priests representing the gods possessed opium knowledge and provided healing to the sick. Opium was also used to put people to death swiftly and without pain (Brownstein 1993:5391-5391). The ancient Egyptians cultivated opium poppies; however, the use of opium was generally restricted to priests, magicians and warriors and was associated with religious cultism (Schiff 2002:1). This claim is similar to Hoffman (1990), who maintains that the recreational use of opium was not popular, and the use thereof was mostly limited to medical and religious practices (Hoffman 1990:2). Also, the smoking of opium in religious ceremonies was reported (Ray et al. 2006:3). In support of this argument, Presley and Lindsley (2018)

mention that opium was accepted as some divine mystery or possessing magic abilities. As a result, it was given to people as a cure for a wide variety of diseases until its antitussive, analgesic and anti-diarrheal properties were better understood later (Presley & Lindsley 2018:2503-2518).

4.5 The South African localised drug nyaope

4.5.1 What is nyaope?

Nyaope, also commonly known as “whoonga” in other places within South Africa, can be defined as a street narcotic drug consisting of multiple substances that include, but are not limited to, heroin, rat poison, detergents and so forth. Nyaope has mainly spread across the townships of South Africa, especially the impoverished townships. This drug is known by different area names such as “sugars” in KwaZulu-Natal, “pinch” in Mpumalanga and “ungah” in the Western Cape (Cronjé 2015). It is commonly sold in powder form and is rolled with cannabis before being smoked (Mokwena 2015:251; Skosana 2014), some users graduate from inhaling it to injecting it into their bodies (Nyoka 2019; Nyanda 2019). Even though accounts and stories of nyaope may vary from one researcher to another, the point of agreement in this pool of stories is that nyaope as a drug is addictive, dangerous and is more popular in impoverished communities that have low socioeconomic status. The areas where nyaope is popular are also socioeconomically deprived and characterised by high unemployment rates and poverty (Mokwena & Morojele 2014:376).

4.5.2 The arrival of nyaope

According to Mokwena (2015), nyaope made its entrance in the townships of South Africa as early as 2000 and then moved to other impoverished areas of South Africa. This claim is consistent with that of *Tshwane Youth Magazine* (2012) and Skosana (2014), who supports the claims of Tetarwal et al. (2019) that nyaope could have originated in the townships of Soshanguve and Mamelodi in Pretoria in 2000. It is safe to conclude from these claims taken together that nyaope originated in the early twenty-first century.

4.5.3 Ingredients of nyaope

The ingredients of nyaope are pool cleaner powder, Rattex and bicarbonate of soda to make it stronger and last longer (*Tshwane Youth Magazine*, 2012). Mokwena (2015) reveals that it is

never clear what precisely the ingredients of nyaope are because they differ from one seller to another. However, it is commonly assumed that it always includes detergent powder, heroin, rat poison and crushed anti-retroviral drugs. In their 2014 case report on nyaope, Thomas and Velaphi (2014) writes that nyaope, which is smoked, contains a combination of heroin, morphine, methamphetamine, marijuana, rat poison and the antiretroviral medications efavirenz or ritonavir. According to Charlton et al. (2019), most researchers agree that heroin is the main ingredient of nyaope, and the inclusion of antiretroviral drugs has been documented (Charlton et al., 2019:43).

4.5.4 Factors that influence the use of nyaope

Environmental factors and external factors over which people have no control may influence them to use drugs such as nyaope. Personal factors that induce individuals to use nyaope are factors they do have control over.

Environmental factors that influence people to start using nyaope are a lack of parenting abilities on the part of their parents, dysfunctional families, being unemployed and living in poverty.

External factors influencing the youth of South Africa to turn to using nyaope are easy access to and availability of nyaope, the price of nyaope and socioeconomic factors (Charlton et al., 2019:45). Nyaope is immediately and readily available compared to other drugs, such as heroin and cocaine. Easy access to nyaope is always ensured to users. For example, in the study of Charlton et al. (2019), participants from Hammanskraal and Soshanguve reported that nyaope and dagga were commonly available from their neighbours, at train stations or on their way to school. Compared to other drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, nyaope is relatively low in price and thus affordable in poverty-stricken communities to the poor, school dropouts and unemployed youth (Charlton et al., 2019:45).

With regard to socioeconomic factors, it goes without saying that because nyaope is a drug that is easily accessible and affordable to the unemployed and the poor, users with low economic status for the most part use nyaope as a way of escaping from and coping with the confinement of their unpleasant reality. Concluding their study, Mokwena and Morojele (2014) contend that the increasing unemployment rates of poor communities, together with the state of community environments where cannabis and nyaope are easily available, worsen the situation as these perpetuate addiction to nyaope. Moreover, Charlton et al., (2019) mention that their research

has found that even children from affluent families yield to nyaope usage, and once addicted to it, it consumes their entire lives (Charlton et al., 2019:47). In Nyoka (2019), Angela McBride, the executive manager of the South African Network of People Who Use Drugs, indicates that most users of drugs such as nyaope use it as their way of coping with their life trauma – getting high has become the only mechanism of comfort to them.

In terms of personal factors influencing people to start using nyaope, peer pressure is the strongest predictor. Many users of nyaope start using the drug for entertainment, to impress their friends or to avoid being stigmatised. Unfortunately, they soon become addicted to nyaope. In a study by Mokwena and Morojele (2014), a nyaope user said: “I was influenced by my friends. We started by smoking cannabis, but after discovering Nyaope, we smoked it.” Another one remarked: “my boyfriend and his friends used to smoke it and all they did was fall asleep after smoking it so I decided to smoke it because I wanted to forget about all my problems” (Mokwena & Morojele, 2014:379).

4.5.5 Symptoms and results of nyaope use

In a study by Meel and Essop (2018), they report that when most healthcare professionals were not aware of drug abuse, users of nyaope who became ill were misdiagnosed with other diseases such as pulmonary tuberculosis and pneumonia (Meel & Essop 2018:587-588). Some of the side effects associated with using nyaope include hallucination, delusion and paranoia (Nyanda 2019).

Charlton et al. (2019:44) list some of the commonly perceived symptoms of users of nyaope as follows:

- Nyaope users separate themselves from their loved ones, including family and friends.
- They are often argumentative and confrontational and resent authority.
- They do not have a well-considered sense of wrong or right and seem to have lost their moral bearings.
- They are sloppy and do not care about their outward appearance.
- In terms of physiological effects, some users resemble walking zombies. They are thin, and the use of the drug affects their skin colour as a result of the harmful ingredients of the drug.

Tshwane Youth Magazine (2012) points out that users of nyaope tend to lead disorganised lives, do not exercise their thinking in any rational manner and often disregard their own worth, values, ethics and beliefs. Many nyaope users drop out of school, citing the drug as their reason (Charlton et al., 2019:45). Also, it is common for nyaope users to become involved in criminal activities such as armed robbery, smash and grab and car break-ins (*Sunday Times* 2019). According to an article in the *Sunday Times* (2019), nyaope users make people's lives a "living hell" by robbing people in a broad daylight, even while other people are watching.

Some women who have become regular users of nyaope are said to become nyaope slaves, resulting in their selling their bodies and being pimped out by nyaope dealers to their customers (Conway-Smith 2013). In a study by Malekane (2014), a former nyaope user, Sesy Nomali Masango (21), confessed that shortly after she had started to use nyaope, she cared about nothing else but feeding her addiction. She lost interest in everything else, including her daughter and her family. Masanga further indicated that most women who smoked nyaope were forced into prostitution and ended up contracting HIV/AIDS, as they did not use condoms while they were intoxicated (Malekane 2014). When cramps and the craving for nyaope become unbearable, nyaope users resort to doing hurtful and unthinkable things to themselves and their loved ones in order to feed their habit (Nyoka 2019).

4.6 The nyaope metaphor

This study makes use of nyaope as a metaphor to help explain and describe the origin, formation and development of a new form of religion in South Africa. The drug nyaope is identified as a metaphor or figure of speech that will help the reader to comprehend the complexity of this new form of religion. Thus, in simple terms, the intention of the study is to metaphorically make use of the drug nyaope to describe, characterise and label this new form of religion, which may be hard to understand, as the Nyaope religion. The term "nyaope" is used in the study because it is a South African localised term for the drug that most people of South Africa are familiar with.

According to Cheng (2012), metaphor is an instance where one object is used to refer to another or when two unlike things are compared directly to establish some form of commonality between them. An example of a metaphor is the saying "time is a thief". Time is not literally a thief, but both are fleeting. The utterance here is interpreted as meaning something different to what the words would mean in their normal usage; this means that a word will have one

meaning if taken literally, but completely another if spoken metaphorically. Cheng (2014) further explains that metaphors have two concepts, namely the concept of the starting point (target domain) and the comparison concept (source domain) (Cheng 2014:314). Accordingly, in this study, the target domain is religion, as a described concept, while analogously, the source domain is the nyaope drug.

4.7 The Nyaope form of religion

Disclaimer: Similar to Karl Marx's usage of opium metaphorically, the current study merely makes use of nyaope as a figure of speech in an attempt to understand the new form of religion in South Africa. As such, the study does not suggest in any way that the followers or leaders of these religions are users of the nyaope drug.

Karl Marx was opposed to a form of religion that gave comfort to the poor and disadvantaged people while suppressing their economic and political consciousness. He was opposed to a form of religion that was used to explain reality and recent discoveries of science away. Marx was observant of the fact that at the time of his writing, opium was a readily available painkiller that was used to numb pain but not cure it. Accordingly, he did not think of religion as a solution to ending poverty, but as opium, religion was there to numb the pain of poverty. Likened to opium, Marx's religion was there to comfort those societies that were suffering. Unlike an opium religion, the Nyaope religion turns the attention of its followers from their everyday struggles and points them to delusional claims of an imaginary life, which, in the long run, discourages them from challenging the very system that oppresses them.

In the same way that the ingredients of nyaope differ from one seller to another, the doctrines or sets of beliefs of the Nyaope religion differ from the one self-styled spiritual leader to the other. It is difficult to pinpoint the origin of their body of teachings, as they vary altogether. It is true that the theology of these spiritual leaders has some elements of Christianity, but beyond their theology, their practices suggest something of a form of religion that expects its followers to prove their physical courage to please the spirits. Indeed, when other forms of religion are studied, there are many strange and brutal practices that are conducted in the name of religion all over the world. However, the question that arises is where the drinking of petrol, the eating of grass or live snakes and the spraying of Doom fit into the landscape of world religion.

Similar to the drug nyaope, the Nyaope religion is found mainly in the impoverished areas of South Africa. In these areas, inequality is evident, as the economic realities of these townships

and informal settlements are spatially disconnected and different from the realities of most urban areas. So, as a result of the circumstances of these areas, self-styled spiritual leaders arrive here with promises to improve the lives of the people. They promise people they will make them millionaires overnight, barren women that they will have children and the sick that they will be healed. And because the people living in these places are desperate for precisely what these self-styled spiritual leaders are promising, they are swindled by them. This is the reason why the new form of religion is popular and thriving in communities that have low socioeconomic status. However, there are still rich and wealthy people in the midst of the followers of this new form of religion too. As Kgatle (2017) reveals, it is not merely the poor and the marginalised that follow self-styled spiritual leaders but prominent people too, some of them in need of the miracle of promotion (Kgatle 2017:7).

These self-styled spiritual leaders knowingly establish their new form of religion in places that are underdeveloped and full of people who are vulnerable, poor and desperate for employment and a better living. According to Kgatle (2017), these pastors have identified vulnerable communities as a “business gap in the market”. Similar to sellers of the nyaope drug, self-styled spiritual leaders target mostly the impoverished people of South Africa. They then advertise their church services all over the streets and walls, promising miracles with their gospel that is aimed at attracting the masses of South Africa in the same way that the nyaope drug is sold cheaply to the poor and downtrodden (Kgatle 2017:5).

In the same way that the nyaope drug destroys relationships between the users thereof and their families and friends, the Nyaope religion does too. Once true and loyal Christians who left behind their original churches, loved ones and friends to join this new form of religion develop new loyalty and start to believe so much in their self-styled spiritual leaders to a point that they would take no heed of people telling them that they are being deceived by these pastors. Also, similar to nyaope users, the followers of this new religion seem to have lost any sense of wrong or right and blindly follow the instructions of their leaders. Hence Mbalula (as cited in Dube, 2019) could say that they were “just walking dead”, as their self-styled spiritual leaders had captured their minds to a point of their seeing nothing wrong with their illegal conduct. Even when these spiritual leaders act in a way that is blatantly illegal and in conflict with their constitutional rights, their followers see nothing wrong with that (Dube 2019:5).

Another factor that is similar to that of nyaope users is the lack of knowledge and education demonstrated by followers of the Nyaope religion. Of course, their lack of education cannot

entirely be blamed on their decisions alone, but also on the forever undelivered promise of a “better tomorrow” by the government. Their surrender to the illegal conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders is a reflection of their deeply rooted dissatisfaction with the promise of better lives for all that is never fulfilled. Accordingly, in the same way as both nyaope drug sellers and users are involved in the selling and buying of nyaope as a way to escape poverty and unemployment, the followers of the Nyaope religion surrender themselves to this new form of religion as a way to escape the unbearable poverty and increasing unemployment in South Africa. Along the same line, Kgatle (2017) claims that when there is too much poverty, unemployment and diseases, miracles become the only hope in such a society (Kgatle 2017:7).

In his observation of different forms of religions in the world, Karl Marx saw that there was a form of religion that would go as far as forcing its adherents to create an imagined ideal world while suffering in the hands of a corrupt regime. Applying this observation to the context of South Africa, the Nyaope religion has been observed to make delusional claims such as being able to heal cancer, HIV and all kinds of diseases and being capable of providing a better life for all. Marx, after observing society, reached the conclusion that religion was only a reflection of the real world. Thus, he saw that even though the economic conditions of society were the cause of all struggles, it was worsened by a form of religion that taught its adherents that the only way to overcome these depressing social and economic conditions was through religion. For Marx, this was a bad form of religion.

4.8 Characteristics of the Nyaope religion

This section highlights pointers, characteristics or what Kgatle (2017) would call the “unusual practices” of the Nyaope religion. These include the following: anti-organisational character; antisocial character; dangerous character; physiological addiction; anti-accountability; popularism; prophetism; mafiarism; cultism; commercialisation; and forms of human rights abuse in Nyaope religion.

4.8.1 Anti-organisational and street nature of the Nyaope religion

The Christian religion, by nature, is organisational; hence, it has attracted labels such as a “community of believers”. Churches within the Nyaope religion are strongly opposed to organisational structures. Scholars such as Resane (2017) and Kgatle (2020) have investigated movements within Neo-Pentecostal churches that are opposed to organised structures. Their arguments regarding the anti-organisational nature of Neo-Pentecostal churches can easily be

applied to movements within the Nyaope religion, as these too are opposed to organisational structures and formalised entities. Organisationalism and accountability go hand in hand with each other, as, at the centre of every existing organisation, accountability is spread among various roles and responsibilities. However, churches within the Nyaope religion display hostility towards formalised organisations. The self-styled spiritual leaders within this form of religion can be described as autocratic leaders who, as individuals, control and make decisions about all matters and do not welcome any input from other group members. Over time, these leaders become organisations by themselves, and as such, are accountable to no one but themselves.

Any behaviour that goes against the nature of other established organisations can be described as anti-organisational. The majority of churches within the Nyaope religion are, in one way or another, opposed to organised structures. Even though at face value they appear to be more of an organised crime in religion, they are all independent and accountable to no one but their gods. Both Resane (2017) and Kgatle (2017) note that their unorthodox practices are a sign of non-denominationalism and anti-intuitionism. Of course, there are other non-denominational churches in South Africa that do not engage in unorthodox practices but serve their congregants faithfully (Kgatle 2017:5; Resane 2016:5). Unlike in organised crime, the self-styled leaders of the Nyaope religion seem to be operating in a street crime manner or in the same way nyaope gang leaders operate such as engaging in activities of robbing, abusing, assaulting and prostituting their victims.

Chapter 5 of this study presents the way the majority of self-styled spiritual leaders see themselves as accountable to no institution but themselves and their god. A prime example of this character is seen in the case of the seven brothers of Mancoba Seven Angels Ministry who, in their quest to prove their claims of being angels from heaven, disregarded the Constitution of South Africa, prevented school children from attending school and disregarded the laws of the country to a point of inciting organised violence against it.

4.8.2 Anti-social nature of the Nyaope religion

Any conduct that seeks to undermine the communal spirit of living together can be described as anti-social. Anti-social behaviour is when the actions of an individual or group seek to harm, lack consideration for the wellbeing of other people or violate the basic human rights of other persons and disrupt the societal spirit. The majority of self-styled spiritual leaders

within the Nyaope religion, just like in the case of nyaope users, engage in activities that outrightly undermine the societal communal spirit and violate the wellbeing of their congregants. In Chapter 5, multiple incidents of self-styled spiritual leaders who conduct themselves or practise religion in a way that is contrary to acceptable social behaviour and violates the human rights of others will be explored. A prime example of this is self-proclaimed Prophet Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly who sprayed Doom (a multi-insect killer) directly into the faces of his congregants while fully aware of the dangers thereof.

4.8.3 Dangerous nature of the Nyaope religion

Any behaviour that imposes a risk of physical harm to others can be labelled as dangerous. The following cases that depict the dangerous side of the Nyaope religion are discussed in Chapter 5: Pastor James Maina Ng'ang'a of Neno Evangelism Centre, whose style of ministry entails deliverance by violent acts of slapping and pinning congregants to the ground; Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries, who instructed his congregants to eat grass and drink petrol to prove the power of his god; Pastor Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly, who sprayed Doom into the eyes of his congregants, claiming to heal their ailments thereby; Prophet Rufus Phala of AK Spiritual Christian Church, who made his congregants drink Dettol, which is normally used to disinfect dirty areas and surfaces, claiming to heal their sickness; Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Times Disciples Ministries, who claimed to have turned a live snake into chocolate and instructed his congregants to eat it; he also made them eat weave straight from their heads and drove over his congregants, claiming to do miracles; Prophet Light Monyeki of Grace Living Ministries, who made his congregants drink rat poison mixed with water to demonstrate the power of God; Prophet Bongani Maseko of Daveyton's Breath of Christ Ministries, who made his congregants drink Havoline, an engine cleaning fluid, claiming that this chemical would attack viruses and detect demons in their bodies; and several other self-proclaimed spiritual leaders, such as Pastor Andries Zendile November from Victorious Faith Ministries and Pastor Timothy Omotoso of Jesus Dominion International, who coerced and manipulated women to sleep with him to prove their love for God.

4.8.4 Psychological dependence of the Nyaope religion

The Nyaope religion is characterised by followers who are psychologically dependent upon their leaders in the sense that their everyday behaviour is governed by the teachings of their

leaders. This form of dependence can also be described as a form of addiction, as these followers will tolerate anything that their leaders say or do. Followers in this form of religion believe so much in their leaders that they cannot function without the guidance of their leaders in all areas of their lives. This is exemplified by the way Prophet Bushiri's followers depended on him and his god for their own success. Kgatle (2021c) puts it as follows: "What all these people are actually saying is that they would not have made it in life if it were not for the God of Major 1 [Bushiri] ... as the force behind their success" (Kgatle 2021c:20). There is nothing wrong with people admiring their spiritual leaders, but when such admiration turns into unquestioning, uncritical, profound adoration, then it is no longer mere love but more the type of worship that is reserved for God; hence, worshipping God is always attached to such an individual, as in the case of Prophet Bushiri. Worshipping pastors is very common within the Nyaope religion, with followers not realising that they have stopped worshipping God by putting their leader ahead of God, as they demonstrate more faith in their leader instead of God.

4.8.5 Lack of stability and accountability in the Nyaope religion

Self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion consider themselves to be alpha and omega with regard to accountability. They receive their counsel directly from God and not from mere human beings; hence, they should not be questioned by people. Kgatle (2020) has observed that at the time when the CRL recommended that there should be some form of a peer review by which churches should be structured for some form of regulation, some pastors were strongly opposed to any suggestion that sought to compel them to be accountable for their actions. Similarly, the self-styled leaders of the Nyaope religion reject any system that seeks to relegate them into being accountable. Kgatle (2020) further argues that these pastors reject suggestions of accountability because they prefer to be the sole leaders of their churches, as they want to control the administration, the finances and the livelihoods of their members (as evidenced in most of the accounts about the Nyaope religion in Chapter 5) (Kgatle 2020:3). The leaders within the Nyaope religion go as far as declaring that they are accountable only to God, knowing very well that none of their members will dispute such assertion.

In situations where one human being is in total control, as is the case in the Nyaope religion, there is a lack of stability in the sense that things can change without warning. Because the life and functioning of the entire church rely heavily upon the shoulders of the Nyaope spiritual leaders, whenever there is a crisis, it automatically translates into the sudden destruction of such a church. For this reason, when the leader of a church of the Nyaope religion is arrested, the

entire membership of the church will camp outside the court to show support, as was illustrated during Bushiri's court appearances.

4.8.6 Prophetism in the Nyaope religion

In the Old Testament, as Christians know it, the history of Israel is inundated with stories of men and women as mouthpieces of God called by him to speak his words unto the nations. Examples of prophets in the Old Testament include, but are not limited to, Moses, who was called by God to rescue the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, and major prophets such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel. Minor prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. However, modern Africa alone has seen the rise of scores of prophets of the Nyaope religion purportedly called to call out cell phone numbers, identify numbers, tell congregants what they ate for supper, surprise congregants with knowledge of their children's names and many other small-detail prophecies.

Focusing on Pentecostal prophecies in South Africa, Kgatle (2019) deals with fashionable styles of prophetism, such as forensic prophecy, which involves personal details in the form of residential addresses, car registration numbers, peoples age and banking details. Kgatle further refers to a study by Nehandaradio that has gone much further and has nailed such prophecies down to revealing phone numbers, dogs' names, the previous night's dinner and even the details of what couples speak about in the privacy of their bedroom (Kgatle 2019:3). The various forms of prophecies by the Nyaope religion and their self-styled spiritual leaders are discussed in Chapter 5 of this study and will demonstrate that what scriptures such as Matthew 7:15 warned against – "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" – were true prophecies.

4.8.7 Mafia style in the Nyaope religion

This point is demonstrated by the prophecy-syndicate kind of relationship that is maintained by the controversial circle of prophets whereby the leader of the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church, Shepherd Bushiri, is the spiritual son of the British-Zimbabwean founder of Spirit Embassy the Good News Church, Uebert Angel, who is the spiritual son of the Ghanaian prophet and founder of Power Chapel Worldwide, Victor Kusi Boateng, who is the spiritual son of the Zimbabwean prophet and founder of United Family International Church, Emmanuel Makandiwa, who ultimately became the spiritual son of the Nigerian pastor and founder of

Christ Embassy Church (Kgatle 2021c:21-22). This controversial relationship is also witnessed between Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries and his two spiritual sons Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Times Disciples Ministries and Pastor Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly. These two sons received their call into ministry in a similar fashion to how their spiritual father had received a vision from God instructing him to start the church (Kgatle 2021c:24-27). In the case of Pastor Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries International, Lukau received his call to the ministry while under his late spiritual father, Pastor Jacques Vernaud of Assemblies of God, who had imparted the Holy Spirit on Lukau, after which he opened churches in Africa. Lukau ensures that his spiritual sons and daughters have similar gifts to those he possesses as he sends them across Africa to look after his interests (Kgatle 2021c:28).

4.8.8 Commercialisation of the Nyaope religion

In this study, the commercialisation of religion refers to the act of running religion principally for financial purposes. Several pastors in South Africa generate so much money from their churches or use their churches to clean the money they have obtained illegally (money laundering) and use it to start empires of wealth (Du Plessis 2020; Mahamba, 2020; Ukpong 2020).

Responding to allegations of the commercialisation of religion, Shepherd Bushiri of Enlightened Christian Gathering Church did not shy away from expressing business inclinations but said: “I am a businessman and that is separate from being a prophet. My prosperity is from private businesses” (Fihlani 2018). Bushiri’s approach to ministry is characterised by a commercial mentality; hence, during the early stages of the Covid-19 hard lockdown in South Africa, he was among the first pastors who asked his church members to continue paying money into the church account, saying “You are saying it’s a ‘Sunday and I cannot go without my offering’. There’s a church account I’m putting on the screen right now”, with the banking details of the church appearing on the screen of the video.¹³ He continued: “I want you to put your offering in the church account. Put your seed, put your tithe, don’t hesitate. Don’t listen to the devil. Don’t listen to what people say. Don’t listen to what your mind says. Listen to what God says” (Jordaan 2020). His conduct triggered public outrage with the likes of @president_kamo saying on Twitter: “The most selfish and cruel thing that one can do is to take someone’s hard earned money that they sent you as a kind and loving gesture

¹³ https://twitter.com/president_kamo/status/1247082358425227264 – “Prophet Shepherd Bushiri asking his church members to continue tithing despite the Covid-19 hard lockdown”.

and you take it and give it to #Bushiri.” Also, Macca@opelisti responded to this as follows: “LOL [laughing out loud] this guy knows why he came to ZA. And sheeple will follow instruction of the wolf in sheep clothing. A fool and his money are soon parted.” Smbulo @Sambulo23399443 said: “This is criminality police must arrest this devil and put him to jail what have he done in fighting covid #19? South African following this criminal must see to it that he is the devil not a man of god as he always say.” Kaviraj bhudai @trivznto responded: “His greed is not for God’s work yet for his own personal gain now that’s the work of the devil churches temples even mosques should actually pitch in to help the needy the all have trust funds do God’s work help the people in need” (@president_kamo, 2020).

According to Kgatle (2021c), Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministry International has exorbitant wealth as one of the richest pastors in Africa. Lukau owns a multi-million-rand mansion in Sandton Johannesburg, which is exactly where his church headquarters are. In addition to his excessive wealth, he also has a collection of cars, such as Lamborghini, Range Rover, Rolls Royce, Ferrari and Bentley, and even a private jet. Similar to Shepherd Bushiri, Lukau has high-class business interests as the chairman of his business group, which includes AL Strategic Investments, AL General Trading, AL Petroleum, AL Travel AL Energy, AL Capital, AL Media, AL Training & Virtual Systems and AL Estates (Kgatle 2021c:30-31).

4.8.9 Cultism of the Nyaope religion

The majority of churches within the Nyaope religion fit the description of Pretorius (2004), who defines “cult” as a religious group that follows a radical leader. By following its leader, the group conducts itself in a manner that often threatens the basic principles and cultural norms upheld by society in its entirety (Pretorius 2004:609). In fact, Kgatle (2021c) explicitly declares that South African self-styled prophets display cultic tendencies. Similar to Pretorius, Kgatle defines cult as a group of people that challenges tradition by introducing its own belief systems and is led by a radical leader who is believed or treated as though he or she is more important than the cause of the group (Kgatle 2021c:3). This group either directly or indirectly isolates itself from the common public, as they believe they are the only ones blessed through the knowledge of their leader. Their leaders are mostly believed to possess a special gift or are very close to God. Leaders of the Nyaope religion display features of cult leaders such as being self-appointed, claiming to possess special knowledge and being very persuasive (Pretorius 2004:610). All self-styled spiritual leaders whose stories are told in the next chapter demonstrate qualities of cult leaders, as they too believe they possess special powers, have a

unique relationship with God and persuade their followers to believe that they will only be successful if they follow instructions without questions.

Referring to Stanford, Kgatle (2021c) highlights useful pointers that characterise cults as follows:

- Cults always have ringleaders who manipulate people into following them, as they are believed to possess supernatural powers.
- The Bible is at the centre of cults to authenticate their message and teachings.
- While they appear to have adopted characteristics of New Age, secular humanism and pagan religions, they are neither related to them nor do they represent them.
- The followers of a cult are prohibited from reading or questioning the cult leader's interpretation; instead, they are taught to trust the leader's word.
- They treat their followers as inferiors and isolate them from forces that may question their doctrines.
- The followers of these churches listen more to the word of their leaders than the Word of God.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter briefly introduced the concept of religion and discussed Karl Marx's critique on religion and the context that had led him to declaring the religion of his time as the opium of the people. Also, it introduced the South African localised drug nyaope as it is juxtaposed to Marx's opium of the people to describe the new form of religion, the Nyaope religion, by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa under the pretence of being a Christian religion.

Chapter 5: Cases of self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa

5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks into cases of human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders, compiling stories that made the news. Thereby, the argument that the new form of religion is contrary to Christianity and which ultimately absolves Christianity from accusations of religious and human rights abuse is substantiated. Cases covered here include self-styled spiritual leaders who, at one point or another, have attracted the spotlight by engaging in unusual practices and allegedly using their churches to abuse their power, endanger the lives of their congregants, sexually and financially abuse their congregants, exploit their congregants or violate their congregants' human rights. In the main, this chapter covers reported stories of self-styled spiritual leaders who have participated in and perpetrated unorthodox practices that have dismayed and offended the people of South Africa in the process. The way these stories are told is not consistent, as they are told and reported differently by different people. The reason for this inconsistency is to avoid being monotonous. So, the stories below do not start or end the same way, but the necessary details are provided to draw a full picture of the human rights abuse perpetrated by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa.

It is important to mention that South Africa is not unique when it comes to cases of unusual and unorthodox practices of self-styled spiritual leaders. The world, and Africa in particular, have seen an unprecedented rise in self-styled spiritual leaders. The next sections first identify some stories about self-styled spiritual leaders from across the African continent, followed by occurrences that took place in South Africa. Many of these leaders have branches of their church in other parts of the world, Africa in particular, and their headquarters in South Africa.

Warning: Some of the stories contained in the section below contain graphic content that may upset sensitive readers.

5.2 Unusual practices in Africa

5.2.1 Kenya

5.2.1.1 Pastor James Maina Ng'ang'a of Neno Evangelism Ministries

Pastor James Maina Ng'ang'a is the founder of the Neno Evangelism Centre in Kenya. It said that he gave himself to Christianity while he was in prison within intervals between 1972 and

1992. Within the last interval leading to his release in 1992, a preacher who had come to minister in prison led him to salvation, resulting in Ng'ang'a becoming a street preacher in Mombasa and finding Neno Evangelism Ministries after his release from prison (Ouma 2019; Whownskenya 2020). He then became popular for his sermons that were characterised by his exorcising demons from his followers, leading to tremendous growth of his ministry and the expansion thereof to Nairobi (Ouma 2019).

According to Parsitau (2019), Ng'ang'a is the leading exorcist across Kenya who regularly performs unusual deliverance practices in his church. His style of deliverance, which has become the norm in most Pentecostal and charismatic churches of Kenya, mainly features violent acts of slapping congregants and pinning them to the ground and fondling women's breasts or parts of their bodies, claiming to rid them of demons. Parsitau (2019) mentions incidents such as when Ng'ang'a violently slapped an old diabetic man who also had kidney failure, claiming to rid him of the diabetes demon. In another video, which attracted local and international outrage, Ng'ang'a is seen violently and repeatedly beating and slapping a young boy on the forehead, also claiming to rid him of demons (Parsitau 2019). Ng'ang'a then turned from the boy to other members of the church who were near the altar, including a woman who, upon realising that the preacher was approaching her, tried to run away. Ng'ang'a followed her and continued hitting her violently, commanding demons to leave her (Milimo 2019; Oruta, 2019). This particular video prompted the American rapper Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr., known as "Snoop Doggy Dog", sharing it on Twitter, saying: "When you are late on the offering money, the Rev needs his money." Later, the video was deleted (Namunwa 2019).

Parsitau (2019) remarks that acts such as these show the immense spiritual power that pastors like Ng'ang'a have over helpless people who do not realise that they are victims of well-grafted manipulations in the hands of pastors. Parsitau (2019) adds:

From the nebulous Ng'ang'a, what we see is an intense, loud, malodorous, violent melodrama, in which, as if he himself is demon-possessed, yelling into the microphone "fire, fire, fire" as he "assaults" the demon-possessed flock.

5.2.1.2 Pastor John Nduati God's Power Church and Ministry

During the early 2000s, Pastor John Nduati of God's Power Church and Ministry in Nairobi made claims of healing HIV/AIDS, to a point of describing his church as the last hospital in Africa for victims of HIV. According to Astill (2001), at a time when Kenya recorded at least

2,5 million HIV cases, only 20 000 could afford antiretroviral treatment, Nduati made claims that he could miraculously heal 1 000 HIV patients per week in his church. He reported that in 2000 alone, he could have healed about 50 000 people with AIDS. Because of this claim, people who had tested positive for HIV/AIDS flocked to his church to receive their share of healing. One of his congregants, Joseph Mbugwa, who was reported to have tested positive five times, testified that after having attended the church service on 1 April 2001, he later tested negative. He went further to say: “Even before the test I knew, I felt peace – the fever and fatigue had gone. When I got my results, I knelt down in the clinic and praised God”. In Jenkins (2001), a woman called Janet gave similar testimony and declared that she had been healed immediately after the pastor had prayed for her. She said: “Thank God I heard about Pastor John Nduati, that is when I came to this church on 15 November ... the pastor prayed for me and I received my miracle” (Jenkins 2001).

However, dismissing these claims as fraud, a medical scientist who specialises in immunology, Professor Tula Bowry (cited in Astill, 2001), said: “To me, this is a sign of total poverty and desperation.” Another immunologist, Davy Koech, warns that while it is important for people with AIDS to have a positive attitude about their status at the time when the pastor makes such a claim, AIDS patients will be alone when confronted by the devastation of the second test (Jenkins, 2001). According to the *Terra Daily* (2003), Nduati had interviewed AIDS patients one after the other ahead of his healing miracle, asking for their names, whereabouts and details of how they had been infected by AIDS. The *Kaiser Health News* (2001) quoted Nduati, upon healing 41-year-old Francis Manene who had AIDS, praying:

You are mighty and wonderful and there is no other God like you. This brother has a bad disease. He would like to be healed. Change him from positive to negative, and he will live to glorify your name.

According to the *Kaiser Health News* (2001), Nduati dismissed any suggestion that the healing was not real.

5.2.2 Nigeria

5.2.2.1 Fake miracle businesswoman healed by several pastors

In Nigeria, a 44-year-old Muslim woman, Bose Olasukanmi, is said to have been used by multiple pastors to perform fake miracles at their respective churches. In Sunday (2020),

Olasukanmi narrated her story of how she had endured abandonment and unbearable suffering after the death of her husband in October 2018. Because she only possessed a primary school certificate, she could only get low-profile jobs enabling her to live from hand to mouth. One evening, as she was walking by herself on the road, she was hit by a car, which left her with a broken right arm and left leg. From that point on, her life became even more difficult, as she had no money and could not provide for herself. She then met a woman called Fatila Musa who comforted her and gave her some money for her needs. However, within a short period, Musa found a way to exploit Olasukanmi by inviting her to her church. According to Sanusi (2020), Musa indicated that she had been contracted by a number of pastors to supply them with people that could pretend to be sick in order to obtain fake healing at a later stage. Olasukanmi said:

When I accepted, she told me that I should use what I have to get what I want. I did not understand what she meant by using what I have as [a] woman to get what I want considering what the accident had done to my body. She then told me that what I have can help me to get what I wanted and that that gift I have is my broken right arm. (Sanusi 2020)

After a day of rehearsal, Fatila took Olasukanmi to Radiant Army Deliverance Ministry International, where she acted as if her hand was healed by the pastor who, in return, paid her N9,000 (+/- R300) (Sunday 2020). Olasukanmi is said to have undergone this type of miracle healing in several states of Nigeria, including Rivers, Ebonyi and Lagos. Pastors who performed this miracle on her include, but are not limited to, Pastor Chris Okafor of Mountain of Liberation and Miracle Ministry, and Prophet Abbey Godswill of Ambassadors of Christ Assembly (Sanusi 2020). However, later Pastor Okafor sought to exonerate his church from this allegation by arguing that his church only realised after the miracle had been performed that the woman was in business and a fraudster but decided, out of compassion, to give her N400,00 to “empower her to stop going from one church to the other” (Oji 2020: online).

Pongo (2019) has several videos of Olasukanmi supposedly being healed by several self-styled spiritual leaders at different times. This was a win-win situation for Olasukanmi and the spiritual leaders, as they attracted more members, which would increase the offerings to the church, while at the same time, Olasukanmi could make some money for herself. Hence, Sanusi (2020) called her “the fake miracle businesswoman” who had made a profit through the trade of receiving healing miracles for her deformed arm. It could not have been difficult for her to move from one church to another, as in Nigeria, churches led by self-styled spiritual leaders

are almost everywhere (Agazue 2016:1). Pongo (2019) is correct in arguing that these churches have become the biggest fraud in Africa, led by entrepreneurs pretending to be pastors. He further submits: “It has become a money making scheme and it is fast growing with new prophets joining the ranks almost daily” (Pongo 2019).

5.2.2.2 *“Holy sex” by self-styled spiritual leaders*

Still in Nigeria, Agazue (2016) presents at least three stories of women who have fallen victim to claims of spiritual cleansing through “holy sex”. However, this section focuses on only two of them, as the third story involves a 19-year-old woman, who, even though she had been promised to receive spiritual cleansing, gave full consent to having a sexual encounter with the pastor. The first case involved a 24-year-old student nurse, Cynthia Nwanguma, who was tricked into having unprotected sex with Prophet Dennis Mmadu for seven days to heal a “strange illness” that had made her barren. Ejaiife (2012) also presents this account and mentions that Prophet Mmadu met Nwanguma at the local area of Lagos state, Igando and took her to his house. It was there that he started prophesying that Nwanguma had a strange illness in her stomach that would make her barren for the rest of her life. He told her that she was lucky to have met with him at the right time for her spiritual healing. Prophet Mmadu then made Nwanguma swear that she would not tell anyone about her problem or else she would die. He then told her that she would need to have sex with him for seven consecutive days in order to be delivered from her barrenness. To assure her further, he showed her several photos of men and women who, in the past, had benefited from his spiritual service (Agazue 2016:8; Ejaiife 2012). Before engaging in the act, he apparently pretended to be anointing her private parts and breasts with oil in order to make the act seem legitimate so that Nwanguma would not suspect him of being a fraudster (Inyang 2012).

The second case involved an 18-year-old woman called Mary, in Kogi State, who fell for a trap of having unprotected sex with a 37-year-old self-styled spiritual leader (Agazue 2016:8). According to Mary, the prophet told her that her waist and private parts had been despoiled by demons and that she would not be able to have children unless she subjected herself to deliverance. He announced that the only way for him to conduct such deliverance was through sexual intercourse. Mary too was warned not to tell anyone about this method. Ahead of the intercourse, the prophet rubbed Mary’s waist and private parts with a mixture of anointing oil and unknown substances (Agazue 2016:8). According to Ademiluka (2021), only after Mary had fallen pregnant did her parents learn about what had happened between her and the prophet

(Ademiluka 2021:7). They then reported the case to the police and had him arrested (Ademiluka 2021:7). Interestingly, further investigations into this so-called prophet revealed that he was a serial rapist who had mastered the skill of luring vulnerable women into having unprotected sex with him by citing spiritual cleansing (Ariyibi 2014).

5.2.3 Zimbabwe

5.2.3.1 Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa of United Family International Church

For years, the founder and leader of United Family International Church, Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, and his wife, Prophetess Ruth Makandiwa, have been accused of performing fake miracles in Harare (the capital city of Zimbabwe). These miracles include the instant reduction of a woman's stomach size during a Passover meeting in April 2015. In a video posted on YouTube,¹⁴ a woman called Beatrice Muza, in a red dress, appears to be having a fat stomach, which she subjects to the prophet's healing. The big stomach deflates as soon as Makandiwa lays his hand over it, with the congregation clapping to celebrate the miracle. However, close investigation of the miracle revealed that the woman had stashed a balloon around her waist inside her dress, and that another church female worker standing behind her had been arranged to deflate the balloon, making it appear as if her stomach size was reducing while Makandiwa was performing the miracle (Sibindi 2017). A video uploaded by ZimEye (2015) clearly shows the female church worker deflating the balloon. Furthermore, the woman's husband, Joseph Muza, in an interview dismisses his wife's claim of having such a fat stomach (ZimEye 2015).

The *Sunday Mail* of 6 August 2017 reported the story of a businessman, Upenyu Mashangwa, and his wife, Blessing Mashangwa, who had filed a lawsuit against Prophet Makandiwa and Prophetess Ruth over a 2012 debt cancellation miracle after Makandiwa had encouraged them to ignore paying their debt but rather continue contributing to the church. This resulted in the Mashangwas giving US\$1,1 million to the church, but losing their house through insolvency (*Sunday Mail* 2017). This case is a clear example of how self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion take advantage of unsuspecting followers just to get their hands on people's hard-earned money. Unfortunately, when congregants are brainwashed like this, they only realise that they have been swindled once the damage is done and lives are devastated.

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQW2jevc_0Q "Prophet Makandiwa humiliated in fake miracle".

Prophet Makandiwa's other instant miracles include restoring a man's voice after he had lost it for two months, healing the after-effects of a stroke, freeing women from menstrual pains, replacing and recreating damaged kidneys, healing brain cancer, reinstating dysfunctional muscles, healing infertility, making the lame walk, curing disabled people, lengthening shortened limbs and many others (YouTube 2015).¹⁵

5.3 Unusual practices in South Africa

5.3.1 Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries

Pastor Lesego Daniel is the founder of Rabboni Centre Ministries, situated north of Pretoria in South Africa. According to Kgatle (2021c), Daniel is said to have founded Rabboni Centre Ministries in compliance with a vision that he had received from God instructing him to start a church. This vision was also received by his two spiritual sons – Pastor Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly and Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Times Disciples Ministries, also in the north of Pretoria (Kgatle 2021c:26). Daniel is mostly known for two unusual incidents when he instructed his congregants to eat grass and drink petrol to prove the power of God (Kgatle 2017:3; Mulutsi 2020:74-76). The eating of grass and drinking of petrol appeared to have happened several times as reported by various writers.

On 10 January 2014, it was reported that as soon as Pastor Daniel gave the instruction, dozens of men and women dropped to the floor and started to eat grass (Reilly 2014). Daniel is reported to have informed his followers that eating grass would purge them of all their sins and heal all their ailments (Sethusa & Mathebula 2014). Later, on 25 September 2019, Daniel made his congregants drink petrol, which he claimed would turn into pineapple juice. It was reported that one female congregant emerged from the audience, shaking, dancing and reaching for the bottle, asking for more petrol to drink. Having eaten and drunk, they claimed that the grass tasted like biltong and the petrol like apple juice (Thinane 2019:75). According to Pondani (2019), the YouTube video clip on this incident gave the following disclaimer: “the level of the anointing is not the same, if you cannot turn water into wine, please do not try this.” Pondani further records that the church commented in the following words regarding this incident:

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n48d4Wj18xQ> “ZA astonishing healing! Emmanuel Makandiwa heals broken bones instantly in the name of Jesus”; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJGbCG76HKA> “Prophet Makandiwa instant miracles 102”; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGB803i8R7Q> “Prophet Makandiwa – instant miracles – 301 B”; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc8cl_GA6bc “Prophet Makandiwa: lengthens short limbs – 8 March instant miracles B”.

“Jesus Christ turned water which was used for ceremonial washing into wine; this was not clean but unclean water meaning that this water was not intended for drinking, but Jesus Christ in His glory turned what could not be consumed to what could be consumed.” (Pondani 2019:49-50).

According to Kgatele (2017), Pastor Daniel’s followers became very excited after they had drunk the petrol, which explains their strange behaviour and claims that the petrol tasted like apple juice. Kgatele further notes that the God of Lesego Daniel asked young women and some men to eat grass and they did (Kgatele 2017:3). The same God later desired congregants to drink petrol and again the young women took the lead. Talking about Daniel’s arrogance after he had made his followers eat grass and drink petrol, Maluleke (2014) reveals that there was a “triumphal smirk on his face and a disdainful tone in his hypnotic voice” as he made fun of his “grass-eating followers” (Maluleke 2014:1).

5.3.2 Pastor Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly

Pastor Lethebo Rabalago (also known as the “Prophet of Doom”) of Mount Zion General Assembly based in Limpopo is one of the South African pastors who has made the news by participating in and perpetrating human rights abuse through unorthodox religious practices. Mount Zion General Assembly is situated in Zebediela, about 61 kilometres from Polokwane (the capital city of Limpopo) (Shilubane 2019:81). Both Kgatele (2017) and Shilubane (2019) point out that Rabalago is one of Lesego Daniel’s disciples, as both of them have the same ecclesiastic approach or, as Kgatele (2017:4) puts it, they “carry the same spiritual and ministerial DNA” (Kgatele 2017:4; Shilubane 2019:81).

In November 2016, Rabalago was reported by multiple media houses and covered on a number of social media platforms after he was seen spraying Doom (a multi-insect killer) directly into his congregants’ eyes, claiming to be healing them from various ailments. In a YouTube video,¹⁶ he is seen spraying it directly into the faces and on the feet of several members of his congregation. According to Shilubane (2019), the incident started with Rabalago calling the sick in his church to come forward. Responding to this call, a Mrs Mitala stepped forward, telling Rabalago that she suffered from an ulcer. He sprayed her with Doom, upon which she reported that she had received healing and deliverance (Shilubane 2019:82). A few days after

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXCMzblzWW8> “South African pastor claims he can cure cancer and HIV by spraying Doom”.

this incident, realising that this conduct had caused public discomfort, in another video,¹⁷ Rabalago partially sprayed Doom into his mouth to prove that it was harmless. Rabalago openly posted pictures of himself spraying the congregants with Doom and added a caption as though testimony by a congregant saying:

I came here with a pain on my back and stomach. Now, after the prophet sprayed me with Doom I am healed. My nose was blocked for a week, but after the prophet sprayed me with Doom, I feel healed. I thank God for healing me. (Kgatle 2017:4)

Rabalago sprayed Doom into the faces of his congregants despite the warning on Doom cans instructing consumers to handle it with care, as it may cause skin sensitisation and irritation of the eyes, skin and mucous membranes. As a matter of fact, Rabalago was fully aware of the dangers of his action but insisted that Doom became harmless when it was used to do the work of the Lord, as he claims that God is the one who instructed him to administer it in this manner. Relying on the *Daily Sun* of 2016, Kgatle (2017) quotes Rabalago saying: “It’s not about Doom. I can use anything that I am instructed to use” (Kgatle 2017:4). Also, still defending his methods, relying on Muvenzhe (2016), Shilubane (2019) quoted him saying: “we did everything to heal people and cast out their demons. I put big speakers on them, I drive over them, and they never get injured because it is the power of God in me that makes everything possible” (Shilubane 2019:82). Restricting this strange understanding of God to Rabalago alone, Kgatle (2017) comments: “The God of Lethebo Rabalago can instruct him to use anything. His God can make a dangerous insecticide like Doom to be [sic] harmless and bring healing to the sick” (Kgatle 2017:4). As a matter of fact, elsewhere Rabalago is quoted citing multiple things that God can use to deliver people:

God can use anything, God can use the mud, God can use saliva, God can use even poisonous things to deliver people. If they see a man of God using that thing it’s a sign of attracting men, so this is a magnetic anointing we are “magnetizing” men into Christ. They don’t believe it can happen but once we put that magnet there, they see it’s possible and then they come. (Masuabi 2016)

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjNL3pmmfSA> “South African prophet healing members with insecticide spray”.

5.3.3 Prophet Rufus Phala of AK Spiritual Christian Church

Only a few weeks after the incident in which Prophet Rabalago had been involved, Prophet Rufus Phala of AK Spiritual Christian Church, based in Moletji on the outskirts of Polokwane in the north-eastern area of South Africa, Limpopo, made the news when he told his congregants to drink Dettol, claiming that it healed sickness. Although Dettol is normally used to disinfect dirty areas and surfaces, Phala was drawing a parallel between his claim and when Jesus turned water into wine. Phala knew and admitted that Dettol was harmful but professed that God was the one who had instructed him to give it to his congregants. The harmfulness of this detergent is described as follows by a medical doctor, Doctor Mabowa Makhomisane, in Sebola (2016):

If it goes into your stomach and gets absorbed into your body, it decreases the amount of oxygen in your system. This might cause [you to] collapse and die ...
If you vomit the liquid into your lungs, it causes aspiration pneumonia. Your lungs will get swollen and you won't be able to breathe (Sebola 2016).

Motau (2016) quotes Phala saying: "It's Dettol but immediately after God touches it, it's anointed. It can change from Dettol to water or from Dettol to Juice." Both the juice and healing assertions received their backing from one of the congregants who testified: "When I drank it, it was pineapple juice. One man was using crutches but after drinking it, he stood up and walked." *The Citizen* (2016) reports that Phala claimed to have received testimonies from his congregants saying that they had been healed after drinking Dettol. It is not surprising that the congregants of this church claimed that Dettol tasted like pineapple juice, as a similar claim was made by the congregants of Lesego Daniel, who is the spiritual father of Phala.

The Limpopo Health Department expressed its dismay of this conduct through its spokesperson, Thabiso Tefo, who is quoted in Motau and Shange (2016) expressing the concerns of the department with regard to pastors placing the lives of their congregants at risk. Furthermore, the Limpopo Health Department has called upon the CRL to investigate these matters, as they have dire consequences for the health of congregants. This story did not go unnoticed on social media and elicited much criticism. Comments such as the following were posted on Facebook:¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/EyewitnessNews/posts/prophet-rufus-phala-of-ak-spiritual-christian-church-in-moletji-outside-polokwan/1385554508155749/> "Dettol pastor told congregants to drink the antiseptic because 'it's anointed'".

Religion is a way to make collective foolishness and retardness acceptance. Tell people they'll turn into frogs by noon and they'll tell you to prove it, tell them God said they should drink Dettol, they'll require no proof. (Linda Sengwayo)

Hahahaha this pastor! He has to drink three or four bottles of dettol in full view of the congregation, so as to lead by example, but because he knows very well that thing is not edible, and also has the side effects if ever swallowed, he can never try it himself, instead he looks into stereotyped congregants who belief in everything he preaches! Mxm modern pastors. (Kotz Ramokhele)

People [are] strong to drink detergent? Pastor Dettol is damaging these people. Dettol is for external use only. Anointing oil is put on the forehead not to drink it. Pastor Dettol wanted to [be] famous so that he can deceive many people who can compensate him. (Michelle Robertson)

5.3.4 Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Times Disciples Ministries

Thinane (2019) has written about self-styled Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Times Disciples Ministries who is popularly known as the “snake pastor” in South Africa. In 2015, Mnguni brought South African faith communities into total confusion after making a claim that under God’s command he turned snakes into chocolate and instructed his followers to eat it (Thinane 2019:75).

In the same year (2015), Mnguni was reported to have made his women congregants eat weave straight from their heads. Describing the sequence of unusual practices of Mnguni, Henrico (2019) writes: “In 2015 headlines were made by a pastor who made congregants eat snakes, drink petroleum and remove their clothing as part of their religious worship” (Henrico 2019:8).

According to *Drum* (2016), Mnguni again made the news when he allegedly drove over two members of his congregation, who reported not to feel any pain and, in the end, stood up and danced and praised God for the miracle. This act described in Pondani (2019) is correctly counted among religious activities that could cause harm to people. Apparently, Mnguni regularly demonstrates his power by riding on his congregants as if they were horses. Pondani further argues that practices such as these not only affect the manner in which people perceive healing and deliverance, but also are a shame to the friends and families of these congregants (Pondani 2019:43).

Early in 2017, social media in South Africa reported that Mnguni had asked his followers to masturbate in church. This story is covered in Kgatle (2017), who observed that Mnguni requested members of his church to undress while in church and masturbate until they all reached orgasms. This act was performed by both men and women who were present on that day. Once they reached an orgasm, they could be heard screaming, with some falling into a deep sleep after the act (Kgatle 2017:4).

Once again in 2017, Mnguni was reported by eNCA (2017) to have taken a poisonous flower, praying for it and then giving it to self-proclaimed Apostle Tompane in demonstration of God's power. Tompane, who was instructed to eat the whole flower, reported that it tasted like no ordinary food.

The full statement by the End Times Disciples Ministries, as posted on its official Facebook page¹⁹ on 3 November 2017 with regard to these scenes, is of the utmost importance, as it comprehensively paints the official picture of what Mnguni's teaching on God's power is, as the church believes it to be at their disposal, or at least Mnguni's disposal. The statement is titled "Demonstration of God's power" and reads as follows:

The man of God taught about the faith with the glory that never fades. Glory that is in the spirit that allows you to command anything to be anything you want. As he was ministering He called a cockroach to appear in the church indeed a cockroach appeared and the man of God explained that in the glory that never fades because it is in the presence of God by just speaking upon the cockroach it will no longer be just a cockroach but it will be food from above for whatever we touch or speak upon becomes from what is from above for we carry the glory that never fades. He then called out the congregation to come forward and eat. Assuring them that as they [were] about to eat they will be eating the mystery Christ.

Analysing this statement provides answers to many questions regarding congregants who play along in these acts by allowing their bodies to be used in experiments. This means that their complacency starts at the point where they accept teachings such as these to be true and biblically founded. If a group of people is indoctrinated into believing that anything can be

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/351175848381100/posts/03-november-2017fridayallnightprayerlivewith-prophet-penueldemonstration-of-gods/885434798288533/> "End Times Disciples Ministries – Demonstration of God's power".

changed into anything, then they will freely participate in conduct that seeks to test and prove such teachings. Thus, the actual miracle happens in teachings and manifests as unusual conduct. Similarly, Nyaope users will ordinarily learn about the effects of using the drug from one another, and in their quest to become high, they accept anything without question just to accomplish this goal.

5.3.5 Prophet Light Monyeki of Grace Living Ministries

Prophet Light Monyeki is the leader and founder of Grace Living Ministries based in Soshanguve, Pretoria. Monyeki made headlines in July 2017 when he made his congregation drink rat poison mixed with water to demonstrate the power of God. It is reported that after mixing these in a bottle of water, he said: “We do not need to proclaim faith because we are believers. If Nyaope boys can smoke Rattex for more than 8 years, who are we? Death has no power over us” (*The Citizen*, 2017). He then declared life over the concoction, and nourishment together with healing to the sick of his church (*The Citizen* 2017). Then he first took a sip and passed the bottle around for his congregants who voluntarily rushed forward to drink it (eNCA 2017). This conduct, like many other unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders, evoked general criticism such as the following:

This pastor is SICK! Rat poison to your congregants? Have you tasted it? First heal yourself from whatever is causing you to feed your members with a deadly substance. (Sampson Gyebi Dankwa)

Why are you giving people poison in the form of Rattex. You are ungodly and an absolute disgrace to your so-called profession. SHAME ON YOU! (*NZ Herald*, 2017) (Brenda Crooks)

This is disgusting. People are abusing the name of God, and the people who are ignorant of their faith will perish in the process. (Al-Othman 2017) (Rose Ramahlafi)

However, Terrence Malinga, a member of Grace Living Ministries, is said to have defended Monyeki’s conduct as follows:

General Light Monyeki. Nothing can stop us. Appointed by God not people or media. So if God allows it. We gonna do it. There more you talk bad about our family there more crazy God makes us. If you think it’s demonic or satanic. Come

deliver us then. We are willing to kneel down before you and get deliverance. But if u can't do that. Keep your opinion to yourself. (*The Citizen* 2017)

It is indeed no coincidence that Monyeki compared his conduct to that of nyaope users. Only those intoxicated by nyaope will believe that drinking rat poison demonstrates the power of God. For a prophet to feed his flock what is clearly marked “poisonous” and for the flock to drink the poison without question or hesitation are indeed bizarre and animal-centric, to say the least. Nyaope users are aware of the danger attached to using it, but they do it anyway. The congregants who voluntarily rushed to the front to drink the poison demonstrate the actions of nyaope addicts who would do anything just to get high.

5.3.6 Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng of Incredible Happenings Church

Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng of Incredible Happenings Ministries is also commonly referred to as “Pastor Mboro”. According to Maluleke (2014), the word *mboro* means “penis” in Shona. However, this definition is challenged by Motsoeneng himself as per Pondani (2019) who writes: “Although Mboro is a Shona noun translated as ‘penis’, prophet Mboro disputes the meaning of his name saying that Mboro is a Sotho noun ‘moporofeta’” (Pondani 2019:47). Chabata and Mavhu (2005), in their paper, support Maluleke (2014) by including the word *mboro* in the list of Shona words that can be regarded as obscene: “The following are a few illustrative examples of Shona words that may be regarded as obscene: *mboro* (penis), *beche* (vagina), *chindori* (clitoris) and *jende* (testicle).” Also, it is important to mention that Pastor Motsoeneng seems to be mistaken in arguing that *mboro* is derived from *moporofeta* (Sesotho term for “prophet”) because the term *mboro* has no root in *moporofeta*. The term *moporofeta* can only be nicknamed into *moporo* or *mporo* without turning the “b” into a “p”, resulting in *mboro* (Chabata & Mavhu 2005:257; Maluleke 2014:1).

Kgatle (2017) argues that even though Motsoeneng makes use of unusual practices from time to time, similar to Mnguni, Penuel and Rabalago, he is in a league of his own. He is known to be guarded in public by about 15 heavily armed bodyguards and is often seen driving around the townships in an expensive luxury car, flanked by bodyguards (Maluleke 2014:1).

Referring to an article in *The Citizen*, Kgatle (2017) mentions that it is alleged that Motsoeneng sometimes fondles the private parts of his female congregants while praying for them. According to Motsoeneng, he is often required to touch those parts, which he euphemistically calls “biscuits”, as he prays for the afflicted women (Kgatle 2017:5). Pondani (2019) describes

a dehumanising act committed by Motsoeneng when he insisted on testing the functionality of a couple's genitals after he had prayed for them by observing the "erection miracle". He was also seen on television expelling demons by inserting his fingers into two women's private parts (Pondani 2019:47).

Pastor Mboro inclination to touch his congregants' private parts seem to prove the Basotho common proverb that says *bitso lebe ke seromo*, which loosely suggests that a person's name has some influence on the character traits of the owner of such name (Mokoae 2016). Maluleke (2014) and Pondani (2019) concur as they emphasise that the word *mboro* means "penis". One can, at this juncture, submit that the penis is the male sex organ that has definite roles such as a urinary function, when it acts as a channel for urine to exit the body, and a function in sexual intercourse, which is the act whereby the penis fondles with the female genitals, just as when Motsoeneng fiddles with the private parts of female congregants (Kgatle 2017).

Motsoeneng even once made a claim on his Facebook page that he had gone to hell and killed Lucifer to rid the world of its evils. After he claimed to have been in hell, News24 (2019) quoted him saying:

When I got to hell, there was a queue of millions of people waiting to be braaied [barbecued] by Satan. I even saw some prominent South African politicians ... I was so shocked because they lived like angels here on earth. I thought they went to heaven ... When Satan saw me, he panicked and directed his army to kill me. Like Samson in the Bible, I defeated them. Satan was my last victim.

Beyond the name alone, the behaviour of Motsoeneng (Mboro) strongly illustrates the confusion demonstrated by self-styled spiritual leaders of the Nyaope religion who cannot distinguish their role from that of gynaecologists who specialise in female reproductive health. True Christian pastors understand their role, which is preaching the Word of God and providing spiritual leadership to the members of their church. Hallucination is anything from illusory perceptions to mistaken ideas and mental disorders. Any message that is conveyed by users of nyaope whenever they are intoxicated suggests that they are far detached from reality; they are immediately transported to a space where they see themselves in a much higher world, where they are in the know of what sober people cannot even begin to imagine. This informs the day-to-day reality of the Nyaope religion, where self-styled spiritual leaders see themselves as detached from their current circumstances. It is for this reason that the leaders of the Nyaope religion claim to have unusual abilities such as being able to take pictures in heaven or hell.

5.3.7 Prophet Bongani Maseko of Daveyton's Breath of Christ Ministries

Another prophet who has joined the controversy around pastors in South Africa is Prophet Theo Bongani Maseko of Breath of Christ Ministries in Daveyton, a township in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality of Gauteng. While other pastors who engage in controversial conduct are mostly inclined to deny the danger associated with their acts, Maseko has admitted that his conduct is rather dangerous. Maseko is reported to have made his congregants drink engine cleaning fluid, claiming that the chemicals in the fluid will attack viruses and even detect demons in their bodies. This happened after he himself had a taste of this "medicine", which he said tasted like honey. He is quoted to have said the following to his congregants:

This is Havoline, but now I say this is the unseen and unheard power of God. This is the fullness of Christ in this bottle. No poison will prosper against you. But all your afflictions will be over today. You will be delivered and healed by the Image of my Father. I say Father thank you for healing your people ... You can cast out any disease and devils. By looking at this bottle you are now free! By touching it, you are imparted with a strange anointing from above. (*The Citizen* 2017)

When none of his congregants fell ill following the healing session, Maseko excitedly said: "They were all healed, they came with a testimony. Five people have been healed" (*The Citizen*, 2017). Defending himself, Maseko contended that, through prayer, a poisonous chemical could turn into something consumable. He admitted that he did not bother to do research on this product, as he strongly believed that, through prayer, anything was possible. He referred to Mark 16:17-18, where Jesus listed some of the signs that would accompany those who believed in him, and one of these was that those who believed in Christ would drink deadly poison without being harmed (Manda 2017). However, while Jesus might have suggested these signs to accompany those who believed in him, He did not encourage anyone to test the validity of his message by drinking poison. In fact, this is opposed in Matthew 4:7: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Moreover, it is important to mention at this stage that pastors such as Maseko fail to comprehend that the fact that nothing bad happened to their congregants at that point in time does not rule out the possibility of it happening later in their lives. This very fact is pointed out by the chairperson of the CRL, Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva:

These pastors keep upping the stakes, very soon something bad will happen and we don't want it to get to that point ... Luckily nothing bad has happened so far.

Soon people will die from these things. There is nowhere it is written in the Bible where it refers to engine cleaning liquid curing people. (eNCA 2017)

Similar to other controversial acts by pastors who perpetrate human rights abuse, the conduct of Maseko saw criticism on social media, especially on Facebook,²⁰ with several comments such as the following:²¹

Yo, charlatan Maseko don't give them engen oil, give them anti-freeze or potassium cyanide instead. For with those two you'd not only be demonstrating the power of yours and their sky daddy but more importantly you'd also be serving the country by getting rid of the stupid among us. (Morena Tshenolo)

My people are perishing for lack of knowledge. I think this ministry must be checkmated. What Bible are you guys reading? When you are born again, no more demons. You speak and demons listen, Jesus Christ taught us to lay our hands on the sick and they shall be healed. He never said, spray Doom, Drink oil or snakes. This is the end indeed. (Kelvin Nathaniel Oyedokun)

Are you crazy brother? What Bible are you reading? The Holy Bible says that if you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord you will be saved forever. No one needs to take poison for this. Oil was made for engine and not for humans. (Paulo Est)

I'm done feeling sorry for such people, they never learn. They love miracles too much that even if the pastor or prophet could say take a gun and kill yourself and they'll be resurrected in 3 minutes, they'll do it. That's how much they are blind! (Thabo D. Mnisi)

If these comments by ordinary South Africans on social media are anything to go by, they are an indication that the majority of people can see through Nyaope self-styled spiritual leaders. These comments show that there are many South African believers who advocate for the pure Gospel of God.

Chevron South Africa, a company producing Havoline oil in South Africa, unequivocally states that its products are neither safe to be consumed by people nor suitable for any healing purpose.

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/TheophilusBonganiMaseko/posts/1866512390262252> "Updates Part 4#The fullness of Christ is in this bottle. Healing and strange deliverance #Mark16:17-18".

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/sowetanlive/posts/prophet-bongani-maseko-of-daveyton-breath-of-christ-ministries-is-making-his-co/1672778332762830/> "Pastor uses engine fluid to heal and deliver members".

“Caltex engine oils contain a petroleum-based mineral oil which should not be consumed. If these products are ingested, it is recommended that vomiting is not induced and that medical advice should be sought as a precaution” (*Times Live* 2017).

Similar to the case of Prophet Monyeki, Prophet Maseko has given his congregants a substance that is poisonous and dangerous to their health. It is one thing to drink a harmful substance such as Havoline oil, but admitting the harmfulness thereof and drinking it in any case is similar to the actions of nyaope users. This fits the definition of addiction – while many nyaope users are aware of the harmfulness and danger of using it, they continue to make use of it because it is highly addictive. Gowa and Fuzile (2013) record the story of the Duncan Village man who was addicted to nyaope after it had been introduced to him by his friends. He indicates that even after getting terrible stomach cramps from using it, he would not stop using it. His story shares features with that of followers of the Nyaope religion who are introduced to a dangerous religion and end up relying on it or the leaders of such churches.

5.3.8 Pastor Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries International

Pastor Alph Lukau and his wife Celeste Luka are the founders of Alleluia Ministries International Church. Alleluia Ministries International Church was started in South Africa by the couple and later branched out into other countries across Africa, such as Zambia, Angola, Namibia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its headquarters is in Sandton, South Africa. Lukau is affectionately called “Papa” and his wife “Mama” by their followers (Kgatle 2021c:27).

In 2019, Lukau made a spectacle of himself and his church when he claimed to have prayed for a dead man dubbed “Elliot”, who was then brought back to life. In a video²² that went viral on social media, Lukau claimed that in Alleluia Ministries, miracles are their “daily bread”, promising his congregants that each of them would leave the church with a minimum of seven outstanding miracles. The video shows a multitude of abandoned wheelchairs of congregants who, on that specific day, had allegedly been raised from their wheelchairs. As Lukau started to sing the song “We bless your name almighty God, we bow before your Throne”, he was interrupted by a woman shouting “Pastor Alph, Pastor Alph, man of God, something is happening outside”. The woman went on to explain that there was a family outside that was about to take their deceased son to Zimbabwe and that the dead person’s fingers had begun to

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4PhwYa2s2I&t=2s> “Alph Lukau raises a man from the dead”.

move as the hearse reversed into the church premises. This led to Lukau leaving the stage and going outside to attend to this matter. Upon arrival, he ordered the coffin to be opened and brought to an open space. He briefly questioned the grieving family, who confirmed that indeed their son had died on the Friday before the eventful Sunday (24 February 2019). Lukau laid his hand on the dead man, who was suddenly seen sitting up with his mouth wide open. Then Lukau shouted “the coffin is empty”, as if drawing a parallel between the empty coffin and Christ’s empty tomb (Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12 and John 20:1-18). To confirm this, the same woman who had shouted and called Lukau to come outside could be heard shouting again that “the Bible is coming to life, Jesus Christ is Lord”. After this, the resurrected man was paraded into the church where he was fed a plate of food (Chutel 2019).

According to Dube (2020b), this staged miracle led to the intensification of calls for foreign national prophets like Lukau to go back to their own countries and perform such miracles on their own people (Dube 2020b:5). This prompted the CRL to launch a nationwide investigation into these phenomena, leading its deputy chairperson, Professor David Luka Mosoma, to say: “The time has come for South Africans not to be duped, to ask critical questions when certain events occur in the country or any other environment in which they find themselves” (Chutel 2019). Also, a #resurrection challenge²³ was launched on social media, mocking Lukau and his followers. Three cases of fraud in connection with this performance were opened; one by a funeral parlour in Gauteng, one by people who said they were concerned citizens and another by Pastor Motsoeneng, who also subsequently staged a protest at Lukau’s church offices, accusing him of bringing Christianity into disrepute (Jordaan 2019). Some perceived this move by Motsoeneng as acting as the better of two evils, as he had also been involved in controversial acts, as discussed above.

Two members of Alleluia Ministries International Church were arrested in connection with the orchestration of this miracle. In a statement, the church denied the orchestration of the fake miracle, saying that at no stage did Pastor Alph claim that he had resurrected the person shown in the video, who was identified to him as Elliot. The church further argued that the video footage demonstrated clearly that by the time the mortuary vehicle had arrived at the church premises, the person in the coffin could be seen moving already and that prior to even praying for Elliot, Pastor Alph had categorically stated that Elliot was breathing (Jordaan 2019)

²³ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-02-26-five-of-funniest-resurrectionchallenge-attempts/> “#Resurrection challenge”.

According to both Chutel (2019) and Lubaale (2019), it was later discovered that the resurrection show was a staged and orchestrated act for Lukau to exhibit his “supernatural powers” to attract more followers to his church. Members of Lukau’s church had approached a number of funeral parlours earlier to procure a hearse, stickers and a coffin (Chutel 2019; Lubaale 2019:11). The investigation further revealed that the resurrected man was a Zimbabwean national named Brighton, working in Pretoria, who in the past, had allegedly participated in Lukau’s healing scandals by pretending to be bound to a wheelchair. A colleague of Elliot corroborated this by referring to a different incident:

He arrived in a wheelchair and was hit by a stick to prove that he can’t feel anything on his legs. He sat still while receiving the beating and, after a prayer, he stood from the wheelchair and it appeared as if he had been healed ... Brighton told us that he did this for extra money to be able to support his two children and wife. For the wheelchair act, he did mention he was paid R1,500. (Pheto 2019)

Elliot’s employer, Vincent Amoretti, revealed that three of Elliot’s fellow employees had informed him that several times Elliot had tried to recruit them for the church, probably so that they too could make some extra cash (Pheto 2019). This story shows how far the poor are willing to go just to make some money to survive.

5.3.9 Seven brothers of Mancoba Seven Angels Ministry

Seven Angels Ministry Church is named after seven brothers who are the sons of its founder, Siphwiwo Mancoba, in 1986. After Siphwiwo Mancoba’s death in 2015, his sons took over the church through the leadership of Banele Mancoba. The church is located in the Eastern Cape in the small town of Ngcobo. In 2016, 21 children who had been prevented from attending school were rescued from this church by the police in collaboration with social workers (Dube, 2019:4; Macanda, 2018).

Appearing before the CRL in 2018,²⁴ the seven brothers’ unwillingness to cooperate with the commission became clear from the beginning of the session. For instance, when the spokesperson of the seven brothers – Banele Mancoba – was asked if they were willing to take an oath (verbal promise committing to telling the truth while holding the Bible) or affirmation (verbal and formal declaration in place of an oath), he refused taking an oath, saying that he could not take an oath as he had done so on his throne. Also, when asked to raise their right

²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAwcmWthPa4> “Seven Angels Ministry”.

hands while making an affirmation, they refused to do so or directly repeat the affirmation word by word as directed by the commissioner of the CRL. For example, instead of repeating the phrase “I do hereby solemnly affirm that the evidence I shall give”, they kept on saying “Ewe” – “yes” in Xhosa. Furthermore, they informed the commission that they could not comply with the summons that required them to bring some documents, as they did not have even a single document of what was required (e.g. proof of banking).

The idea of Seven Angels Ministry was explained by Banele Mancoba, which clarified why Seven Angels Ministry had never been registered as an organisation. According to Banele, the seven brothers are not ordinary human beings but angels, who, while in heaven, created their parents, Noluvo and Siphwo Mancoba. Afterwards, they gave clear instructions to their father that he had to prepare the earth for their arrival, as they would come to flesh through him. So, it is through this instruction that their father became the founder of Seven Angels Ministry in 1986. Furthermore, Banele explained that in the midst of this process, another angel, Lucifer, broke away from heaven and came to breathe upon the entire education system and the Constitution of South Africa allowed by Nelson Mandela as one who sacrificed the world on a table to Satan. Hence, Seven Angels Ministry is opposed to the idea of schools and the Constitution and even spreads the message that children should not go to school and the general public should not adhere to the Constitution, as both are filled with the spirit of Satan. Dube (2019) quotes Banele, who emphasised their being angels, as follows:

We are saying as Seven Angelic Ministries, firstly I am not a pastor, I am an angel from heaven, seated at the right hand of the father, we say that children should not go to schools because the devil has intervened with the schools. We will continue to tell learners to stop going to schools and not to listen to the constitution because the devil has taken over the schools (Dube 2019:4).

In his concluding remarks, Banele went further to accuse the judicial system of turning South Africa into Sodom and Gomorrah. Upon being pressed to clarify their view of the South African Constitution, Banele answered that they did not agree with the Constitution as it recognised same-sex marriages, gave rights to people who practised witchcraft and had Satan in it as its driver. Accordingly, as the seven angels, they are beyond the Constitution. Responding to this, the chairperson of the CRL, Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva, made it clear to the seven brothers that for as long as they were within the borders of South Africa, they should abide by the Constitution and its laws. However, the brothers refused to agree and maintained that they

would continue to flout the Constitution by encouraging people not to adhere to it and its laws and even to tell children not to attend school. The events that unfolded next proved even further that indeed the seven angels were determined to disobey the Constitution and the laws of the country.

On 21 February 2018, an attack was launched on the Ngcobo police station by a gang of robbers who randomly fired shots at the officers on duty, which left five policemen and a former soldier dead. Three officers who were on duty were killed immediately. Two more were found about six kilometres away, and another one died later at the hospital. A retired soldier who was walking by the police station was also killed when the robbers fled the building after having stolen about 10 firearms and a police van. Later on, the investigation revealed that the Mancoba brothers, or at least three of them, were responsible for the attack. The police received a tip-off from the community that Seven Angels Ministry was hiding the killers. Moreover, the police uncovered that behind the church was a cave where unregistered luxury cars were hidden. The fleet of luxury cars included, among other vehicles, BMWs, Mercedes-Benzes and twin-cab bakkies. This happened after the community had expressed concerns about secret activities taking place at Seven Angels Ministry. One of the community members is quoted in Macanda (2018), saying:

We are not sure whether this is still a church because there is a lot going on there. There are even old people that live there and children. We have been saying in the community meetings that this house must be monitored.

Reacting to the way Seven Angel Ministries treated and abused women, the South African minister of police at the time, Fikile Mbalula, was quoted by Dube (2019) to have said: “The women have been brainwashed. They are just walking dead. That thing [Seven Angel Ministry] has captured their minds is not a church but is a Satanist place of witchcraft” (Dube 2019:5).

Commenting on this church, Dube (2020b) maintains that the mere mention of the brothers being angels is a clear sign of their mental destabilisation, which will, in turn, filter through into the mindset of their members. He further outlines that the fact that these brothers regard themselves as superior to other human beings relegates their followers into mere servants of masters who see themselves as being superior to other human beings (Dube 2020b:3).

The way Seven Angels Ministry is organised seems to fit the description of cultism in South Africa, as identified by Pretorius (2004), as he outlines that most South African cults are

geographically isolated and function as communes in remote areas. As if talking specifically about members of Seven Angels Ministry, he affirms that the members of such cults sell their property, homes and assets and pledge their income to the cult as a way of demonstrating their commitment towards the teachings and aims of the cult (Pretorius 2004:608).

5.3.10 Pastor Timothy Omotoso of Jesus Dominion International

Pastor Timothy Omotoso, the founder of Jesus Dominion International Church with about 20 branches across South Africa, reporting to the main branch in Durban, was arrested on Thursday, 20 April 2017 after allegations that he had molested a number of young women in his church. In an investigation by the SABC current affairs news feature programme “Special Assignment”, interviews were conducted with about 30 girls who allegedly had been sexually abused by Omotoso under the pretext of healing them.²⁵

Before his final arrest, it was reported that he had tried to evade arrest several times, such as by lying about his arrival time at Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) Airport and even hiding in a toilet cubicle. He was finally arrested on 20 April 2017 and charged with human trafficking and sexual assault (SABC News 2017). The allegation was that since 2002, Omotoso had taken a number of women and girls from his church branches to one of his houses in upmarket Umhlanga, north of Durban, where he had sexually abused them (Mthethwa & Pillay 2017). Once the 58-year-old Omotoso was arrested, scores of his supporters camped outside the courts where he appeared, calling on God to assist “Daddy”, as they fondly call him. One of his supporters, Luvuyo Nyongoma, who attributed his knowledge of God to Omotoso, indicated that he was willing to lay down his life for his pastor. He was quoted saying:

It hurts. I don't want to lie. If Tim Omotoso is removed from my life I am zero. I would either die or go back to jail, or go back to where I came from. It hurts me a lot, because if it was up to me, and you can replace someone's place, I would volunteer in court, take him out and put me in. (SABC News 2017)

In the Eastern Cape High Court, when the trial started, Omotoso appeared with two co-accused women (Zukiswa Sitho and Lusanda Solani), who allegedly had assisted him by recruiting the victims and training them how to conduct themselves around the pastor. The trio faced 63

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MdYtTPtwIFU> “Special Assignment – Breaking the silence, 17 April 2017”.

charges that included human trafficking, rape, racketeering and contravention of the Sexual Offences Act (Fourie, 2018).

On 10 October 2018, the first victim to take the stand in the case of human trafficking against Omotoso was Cheryl Zondo, who had attended the Jesus Dominion International Church from the age of 13 in Secunda, Mpumalanga. At the time of the trial, Cheryl was a 22-year-old marketing management student at the University of Johannesburg. Cheryl told the court that she had admired Pastor Omotoso from the first day she had watched clips of him performing miracles, but as soon as she got closer to him, he made her perform sexual acts on him (*Times Live*, 2018). According to Cheryl, every girl who stayed at Omotoso's house was given a nickname and called his "wives" collectively. She said: "We would be called in ... at different times; he would send one of the groomers to summon us to his bedroom, where we would be at his mercy." Once inside the bedroom, the summoned girl would find Omotoso lying half-naked, indicating to the victim to come and lie down next to him before demanding sexual acts. In graphic detail, she told the court of how Omotoso had made her perform oral sex on him and saying:

He would do this to me every weekend, on Saturday and Sunday, if there was time. If I was there on school holidays, he would expect me to do this every day. The only time I would catch a break was when I was on a menstrual cycle, which I had to report to him by SMS. (Manona, 2018)

Cheryl Zondo's account was corroborated by former Idols South Africa participants, the twins, Anele and Neliswa Mxakaza, who were not shocked by what Cheryl had told the court. In Selisho (2018), they are quoted having said:

The rape allegations were not new to us. The girls would talk immediately after it happened in the house. When one [of the girls] was called to the upper room we knew what was going to happen to them. We were made to keep quiet and never say anything. We run away ... because we knew what was happening. Even when we had left the church we were still not free to talk. We were afraid that something bad will happen to us or our families.

Initially, when the stories about Omotoso broke, the twins were among followers who strongly supported the pastor to a point of expressing that they loved him dearly (Magwaza 2018). One of the twins, Neliswa, expressed her love for Omotoso by saying: "Besides the fact that I love him, God has shown me and revealed to me the kind of man he is ... God showed me he's a

true man of God, and he is next to God's heart" (Rose 2018). However, on 29 January 2018, in a joint statement, the twins apologised to all women of South Africa and directed their support towards other girls who had been abused by Omotoso:

We wish to send our heartfelt and sincere apologies to all the women of South Africa for we appear to be taking [the pastor's] side when he faced rape and sexual charges, and mostly, we wish to apologise to all the victims [the girls who were allegedly raped]. We know them all and we took them as our blood sisters, but when they came out we were made to turn our backs against them and support the [accused]. (Sabanyoni 2018)

The twins further indicated that they had not willingly supported Omotoso; instead, they had been coerced or threatened into supporting him in newspaper interviews. The two girls had moved to Omotoso's house in Umhlanga shortly after their 2013 Idols South Africa competition when the pastor had asked them to join his gospel group, Grace Galaxy (Rose 2018). They expressed that they had the worst experience while staying at Omotoso's house in Umhlanga, as they were forced to make the pastor happy at any cost. They were even threatened that God would punish them if they said anything bad about him, as, from a young age, they had been made to believe that Omotoso was the only person close to God and that only through him they could have a relationship with God (Sabanyoni 2018).

While other pastors within the Nyaope religion have been reported to have sexually assaulted older women, Omotoso had brainwashed his victims from a young age with the purpose of indoctrinating them that having sex with him was consistent with their outlook on religion. Placing them together under one roof was his strategy to manipulate them into believing that their experience was a way of life. Furthermore, once brainwashed, these girls would not say a word to report or expose the pastor's conduct.

Recently, a similar case has been reported in Charles (2021), whereby 58-year-old Pastor Thubakgale of the Devine Deliverance Church based in Seshego, Limpopo, similar to Pastor Omotoso had presented himself to his subjects as a most powerful man of God with a rare ability to heal the sick and dispose of demons. According to Masudu Malabi Dzhanghi, the regional spokesperson of the National Prosecuting Authority (as cited in Charles, 2021), Thubakgale demanded to be called a judge as he claimed he was going to be a judge with God on Judgement Day. He instructed his congregants to bring all their money and even their

retirement savings to the church. His congregants and sex victims respected him and obeyed anything he said, as he was perceived to be part of the Holy Trinity (Charles 2021).

5.3.11 Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church

Prophet Shepherd Bushiri is the Malawian prophet and founder of the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church in several African countries, including South Africa. He is referred to as “Major 1” or “Papa” by his followers. Bushiri is said to have been influenced by Uebert Angel, the British-Zimbabwean founder of Spirit Embassy the Good News Church, as his spiritual father. According to Kgatle (2021c), Uebert Angel, who claimed that he had received his gift of prophecy from a Ghanaian prophet, Victor Kusi Boateng (founder of Power Chapel Worldwide), is the one who conveyed the gift of prophecy upon Bushiri. Boateng trained Bushiri how to conduct prophecy and preaching and even proclaimed Bushiri to be his successor in the prophecy industry; hence, he refers to himself as a retired professor of prophecy and calls his spiritual son (Bushiri) a universal phenomenon. Angel’s influence on Bushiri can also be seen in Bushiri’s style of dressing and preaching (Kgatle 2021:21).

Kgatle (2021c) notes that Bushiri has been inspired by his father to make a living from a business as opposed to depending on people for an income. This explains his response to allegations of commercialising religion, when he said: “I am a businessman and that is separate from being a prophet. My prosperity is from private businesses.” His business interests, or rather, what Kgatle (2021c) refers to as his “business empire”, includes real estate, telecommunications companies, transport businesses, hospitality businesses, an electronics company, gold mining and his international company called SB Investments (Kgatle 2021c:21-24).

Bushiri has politicians, sportsmen and businesspeople in his large pool of followers. Kgatle (2021c:20) identifies politicians such as Andile Mngxitama, the founder of Black First Land First, and Naledi Chirwa, a former member of parliament of the Economic Freedom Fighters, and sportsmen such as Tiyani Mabunda, the Mamelodi Sundowns soccer player as followers of Bushiri. Willah Joseph Mudolo, the president of global operations of the African Development Funding Group, later became Bushiri’s co-accused in fraud and corruption cases (Khoza 2020).

Like other self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion, Bushiri makes claims of being able to heal from blind people to those who have various diseases, such as diabetes, stage

one to four cancer, tuberculosis (Bhengu 2019) and HIV/AIDS. Bushiri is quoted as having said:

I'm just a messenger of God's work. God heals people in our meetings. One time I got doctors here in Pretoria to bring patients with HIV – they tested them before to show they are HIV, I prayed for them and again afterwards and now they were HIV-negative. (Maseko 2018)

Claims such as the above have led to many people, like Sibanda (2021), questioning why Bushiri could not heal his own daughter, Israella, when she died of a lung condition in a Kenyan hospital early in 2021. Bushiri blamed the South African government for the death of his daughter, saying that the delay that had been caused when his family was leaving from Lilongwe Airport in Malawi had led to the death of his daughter. This delay was caused by an extradition trial between South Africa, the Malawian government and Bushiri, and according to Bushiri, his daughter's death could have been prevented had she arrived at the hospital in time (Sibanda 2021).

5.3.12 Bishop Tsietsi Makiti of Gabola Church International Ministries

In 2017, the South African Christian community was once again dismayed by Gabola Church or the “Boozing Church”, which had found religious expression of its very own. Gabola Church was under the leadership of self-proclaimed Pope Tsietsi Makiti, who, according to the *Daily Sun* of 26 September 2017, within just two months of the existence of the church, had moved from being a pastor to being a bishop. Makiti's ordination as pope was announced by his executive personal assistant and church co-founder Nigel Lehapa, who said: “Bishop Makiti would be ordained as a Pope of Africa, the highest rank within religion because of his popularity throughout the world and because he is now a professional.” Makiti's ordination was to take place in Evaton North on the weekend of 30 March 2017) (*The Citizen*, 2018). According to *The Citizen* of 27 March 2018, the main branch of this church was in Evaton North outside Sebokeng in a tavern owned by a Pastor Freddie Mathebula, who usually took over sermons from Makiti during church services.

Gabola Church is mainly characterised by worshipping and the delivery of sermons in taverns and shebeens (illicit bars or clubs) while its members get drunk and are regularly baptised with alcohol of their choice. The church does not follow any prescribed order of having services as advocated by conventional churches (Dube 2019:2). The South African Council of Churches

called Makiti's religious outfit "a cult and disgrace to Christianity" that represented the end of times (*The Citizen* 2018; *The Sowetan* 2017). According to the *Religion News Service* of 21 April 2018, Archbishop Modiri Patrick Shole, director of the South African Union Council of Independent Churches, condemned this church in the following words: "Gabola has nothing to do with the word of God. Those are not church services ... They are using the Bible to promote taverns and drinking liquor. It is blasphemous. It is heresy and totally against the doctrines." Makiti contended that the reason why some pastors spoke ill of Gabola Church was because the ways in which Gabola Church did things appeared to be strange to these dissatisfied pastors (*Daily Sun*, 2018). In his view, these pastors were jealous and afraid that Gabola Church would steal their members. Makiti is quoted to have said: "They think we as the people of Gabola undermine their Jesus. Jesus was not in South Africa. He is just arriving now with Gobola Church and its Bible." Moreover, Religion News Services quoted Makiti saying the following about people in other churches:

They say they are holy but they drink by the back doors, in secret. They think God does not see them ... But the Lord zooms in on them and can see them. We drink openly at our services. We do so in peace and we love each other."

Furthermore, the *Daily Sun* (2018) recorded that Makiti was in the process of writing his own bible, which, according to him, was to "decolonise black people". This bible was to have its chapters named after the *kasis* (places) where Gabola had branches. Makiti gave examples of chapters in the following style:

Evaton North: Chapter 1, Verse 1

Leave every Gabola church member to come to the first black African Pope, equal to none, for the kingdom of God is for the ones like them now (and) forever, Hallelujah, Amstel.

Orange Farm: Chapter 1, Verse 1

Our God Lord has created us the first Gabola church in Freddie's tavern, for all who believe as is baptised as its membership will not perish but have life everlasting.

The Daily Sun of 26 September 2017 quotes Makiti as having said that with God in their taverns, they would see crime being reduced and love and respect promoted. He also

maintained that people who drank beer were happy and peaceful, as it meant they were living in the shadow of God.

The Sowetan of 18 December 2017 further reveals that Makiti claimed that in his previous life, he had been a junior pastor in the Old Apostolic Church, which he left disgruntled as there were no opportunities for him to rise to the ranks of leadership. Another reason for Makiti's being disgruntled to the point of establishing Gabola Church was that as a member of the South African National Defence Force, he had applied to be a chaplain and had been rejected. He expressed his dissatisfaction in the following statement:

I have been serving in the army since 1987 and in the '90s I applied to be a chaplain and I was inspired to open this Church because I was not accepted as a chaplain even though I have capabilities.

Makiti and his Gabola Church claim that they do not ask for any money from their followers. In the words of Makiti: "we don't take tithes from our congregants. The only tithe we have is in the form of congregants buying their own drinks while we conduct our services" (*Sowetan*, 2017). However, it is clear that Makiti stands to benefit, as taverns, clubs and shebeens would invite him in a similar way they do with popular DJs for gigs and pay him a portion of their profit, as he would have generated some unusual income for them.

5.3.13 Bishop Peter Vuyisile Ndlebende of Faith Gospel Ministries

In 2013, the founder of Faith Gospel Ministries, Bishop Peter Vuyisile Ndlebende, allegedly raped one of his congregants and made use of scripture to comfort her afterwards. According to Mafokwane (2014), a woman who took care of Ndlebende whenever he visited Johannesburg accused him of raping her in October 2013 at a hotel in Sandton. Apparently, this had happened after several failed attempts by Ndlebende in 2012. Graphically, she described the way she had been raped, beginning with Ndlebende grabbing her by hand and telling her not to be scared, as all was well. He then pulled the woman closer, ripping her shirt while she kept on saying no. He pushed her to the bed and pressed her thighs down. She kept saying "no, please don't", while he kept comforting her and told her that she need not be scared. After being overpowered, she was raped. Afterwards, Ndlebende apologised to the woman, asked her to pray about it and even quoted 1 John 1:9 to her, namely: "If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness."

According to the woman, she kept the incident secret because he was a bishop of the church and she feared that if she exposed him, the members of the church were likely to believe him over her. She said: “I just prayed for myself and asked God for protection.” However, soon afterwards, Ndlebende instructed her to send him her HIV status and made other advances. The woman then decided to report his conduct to one of Ndlebende’s junior pastors, who referred her to his wife. Unfortunately, the pastor’s wife just gave her a book by Joyce Meyer with the title *Living beyond your feelings: controlling emotions so they don’t control you* (Mafokwane, 2014). It is sad that this woman, who went to a junior pastor in a state of pain and embarrassment, was only referred to another woman but received no justice, as this woman only told her to contain her emotions and appreciate the rape by the bishop as a blessing.

This story is a practical example of what most rape victims in churches go through whenever they report cases that involve powerful pastors. Victims of sexual abuse in churches would rather suffer in silence instead of being blamed and criticised as if they had been responsible for being raped. This fact is appreciated by various scholars, such as Kennedy (2003) and Lind (2005), who maintain that it is common for churches to turn a blind eye to misconduct by clergy and then blame the victims in the process. Moreover, self-styled spiritual leaders know that it is unlikely that their churches will believe ordinary congregants over them (Kennedy 2003:226-235; Lind 2005:65-88).

5.3.14 Pastor Andries Zendile November from Victorious Faith Ministries

In 2016, Pastor Andries Zendile November from Victorious Faith Ministries in the Free State used his shoe to heal a woman’s vaginal pimples. He had been called to the ministry after being mentored by his spiritual father, Bishop Ndlebende of Faith Gospel Ministries. Similar to other self-styled spiritual leaders who believe their prayers can literally move mountains, November believes he can pray and use anything to heal his congregants. He describes the incident as follows:

The woman came to me about pimples on her vagina. This made it impossible for her to sleep with her husband. Because the problem was on her private parts I decided to use the shoe rather. I believe in miracles and God uses anything to heal. (*All4Women News*, 2017)

In a YouTube video uploaded by Victorious Faith Ministries,²⁶ November asks one of his male congregants to untie his shoe and give it to the ill woman, who then places it on her close to her private part, or as November calls it, her “vhangalala”. Without touching or praying for the woman, the shoe alone causes the woman to dramatically fall to the floor, still with the shoe between her thighs. Immediately after this act, the healed woman is escorted to the bathroom by another woman, who then returns with the confirmation that indeed the vaginal pimples are no longer there and the woman can now go home to sleep with her husband. The cured woman can be seen crying while November is shouting to the other one: “Tell her to hurry home!”

According to Masweneng (2017), November went further to make claims about healing people with HIV/AIDS, who would test negative for the virus after his prayers. Masweneng (2017) quotes November as follows:

I also cured a lot of people of HIV/AIDS, immediately after praying for them I ask them to go to the nearest clinic and test. Most of them come back negative, and those that are positive I encourage them to have faith and continue to pray for them. I specialise in deliverance for those who are demon possessed, spiritual husbands and diseases.

Ndlovu (2019) tells about a woman, Samantha Revesai, who was approached by members of another church in Johannesburg South. She said that after telling the people who had approached her that she really needed money, one of them invited her to church the following week. She explains what happened upon her arrival at the church:

They gave me a paper. They were two of them [papers]. The first one was written that I was positive [HIV]. They already knew my name and surname so they went, I don't know to which doctor, and the paper said I was positive. The second one said I was now negative [HIV] ... I was not positive. I have never been positive. They wanted me to act as if I was positive and then pastor prays for me and I would be healed and more people would come to the church. They promised me money. They said they would give me R1 500 every month. (Ndlovu 2019)

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTOv5X2-FLw> “Bloem pastor 'heals' woman's ‘vaginal pimples’ with his shoe”.

5.3.15 Prophet Sonny Rakgorwana of Gracious Armies of God in Christ Centre Ministries

Following the style of Tsietsi Makiti, Sonny Rakgorwana, another self-proclaimed prophet of Gracious Armies of God in Christ Centre Ministries was reported on in the *Daily Sun* of 12 August 2019 to have been giving his congregants alcohol to make them ready to accept God. According to the *Daily Sun*, as he was giving his congregants alcohol as part of their deliverance, he said: “This is the body of Christ and it has become our lifestyle ... The moment you eat this the right way you become a spirited person. You’re in the spirit and the following part goes from one part to another”. This conduct received the approval of self-proclaimed Pope Tsietsi Makiti of Gabola Church. Makiti was quoted to have said:

I see no harm in the pastor’s practice. He has my blessings ... my church practices this every day. This allows people who are discriminated against by other churches to find a home while doing what they love best ... We must meet with the Prophet so that we can advance this mission. In God there’s liquor. Amstel. Amen! (Manqena 2019).

Resane (2017:5) contends that this type of conduct by these pastors, whereby congregants are made to eat grass or snakes or drink petrol, lowers the status of their followers to that of “wild animals”. Moreover, Resane (2017:5) points out that upon closer examination of these practices, one can conclude that it is “a high-risk religion”. Reverend Keneth Meshoe, the leader of the African Christian Democratic Party, has condemned these dangerous practices of snake pastors and has called upon trained ministers of the Word to rebuke individuals who, as Pondani (2019) puts it, are making a “mockery of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Pondani 2019:50).

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored cases of human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders. Stories that had made the news in Africa and South Africa have been presented to substantiate the argument that this form of religion is contrary to the Christian religion, as ultimately, this study sought to absolve Christianity from accusations of religious or human rights violation. In the main, this chapter covered reported stories of self-styled spiritual leaders as they participated in or perpetrated unorthodox practices that dismayed and offended some people in South Africa, Christians in particular.

Chapter 6: Missiological perspectives against the Nyaope religion

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, the manner in which a series of early Christian ecumenical councils, from as early as the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and the first council of Nicaea (AD 325), up to the second council of Nicaea (AD 787), was convened to represent divine authority in dealing with multiple controversies and heresies that had emerged within the vast history of the Christian religion and how they resulted in various schisms, leading to the Great Schism in AD 1054. This complex history showed that through the vast history of Christianity, there had always been men and women who had worked tirelessly to correct errors and confront all forms of heresies that befell the church of Christ.

This chapter applies the wisdom of selected academic scholars within the field of missiology who are most likely accurate in their analysis and understanding of the Christian mission, so that they may guide the Christian dialogue through their missiological perspectives, seeking to shape the truth against the current heresies witnessed in South Africa in the form of self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion. It is the view of this study that the original Christian religion that was handed down by the apostles was pure; however, it became corrupted through the hands of history as many individuals with adverse intentions (similar to those of self-styled spiritual leaders) have sneaked in and tarnished the name of Christianity.

As was done with the work of the early ecumenical councils, the wisdom of these scholars will be used to form and define the truth in Christian teachings against current heresies. Their academic research-based wisdom is guided by years of experience and expertise that are much needed in South Africa, as the country is facing the crisis of the Nyaope religion seeking to undermine the course of Christian purity and when religious falsehood is weakening Christian integrity. Their objective scholarly knowledge is most needed during this point in Christian history when Christianity has been globalised as opposed to when it consisted of only a small group of people during the existence of the Lord's disciples. This chapter endeavours to utilise their wisdom to offer a missiological perspective on four themes, namely *Missio Dei*, the mission of Christ, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission, to reject the teachings and practices of the Nyaope religion in the same manner that the ecumenical councils successfully rejected heresies.

6.2 The Nyaope religion in light of *Missio Dei*

Missio Dei is a Latin theological expression for “the mission of God” or “God’s mission”. This expression denotes the mission of God with a focus on his redemptive purpose and action in human history. This term points to the mission of God as He integrally makes use of his people as instruments to achieve his divine purpose (Thinane 2021:2). According to Bosch (1991), this expression can be traced as far back as the time of Saint Augustine (AD 354-430) (Bosch 1991:390). At the same time, Saayman (1991) refers to it as the great mission of the triune God in the entire world as it is characterised by the mission of Jesus the Messiah in Luke 4:18-21 as the most comprehensive and satisfying paradigm for *Missio Dei* (Saayman 1991:5). The simplest way to think demonstratively about this form of mission is by imagining God the Father as sending God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as his missionaries on earth to oversee the project of his redemptive purpose and action on earth. Mashau (2012) contends that the three entities of the Trinity are equally active or involved in this project as the missionary God (Mashau 2012:3). Explaining the relational aspect within the Trinity as far as *Missio Dei* goes, Breedt and Niemandt (2013) and Bevans and Schroeder (2011:10) speak of God as a naturally missional God. They explain that the “self-diffusive, gathering, and sending nature of God means that missionality starts with a relationship, a going beyond oneself, being in relation and calling others to relation” (Bevans & Schroeder 2011:10; Breedt & Niemandt, 2013:1).

Missionaries, in this respect, function like appointed ambassadors carrying one another’s accredited authority to fully and officially represent themselves in specific assignments. In the physical absence of God the Father on earth, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, with their accredited divine authority, execute the will of God the Father.

Bosch (1991) notes that throughout the vast history of the church, for a long period, the concept of mission neglected to put God at the centre. Some of the ways in which the project of mission was understood focused on the salvation of individuals, on individuals being led to the blessings and privileges that were enjoyed by the Christian West or on individuals working towards expanding a particular church denomination. So, the church was always finding a way of placing individuals, as opposed to God, at the centre of mission. However, developments in systematic and biblical theology have disposed of human beings and rightfully placed God at the centre as the One who is actively involved in his own salvific project. This understanding is instrumental in preventing the church of Christ from being preoccupied with other than true

Christian concerns (Bosch 1991:389). Further on, Bosch (1991) emphasises the importance of this theocentric perspective by stating as follows:

In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that the church. Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is church because there is mission, not vice versa. To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love towards people since God is a fountain of sending love (Bosch 1991:390).

Mashau (2012) is very intentional on the aspect of *Missio Dei*, as he makes it the cornerstone of the Christian theology by grounding the four dimensions of missiology, namely Christology, trinitarian doctrine, pneumatology and eschatology, upon the concept of *Missio Dei*. He further stresses that not only churches but theological institutions as well should rise to the task of being missional by spreading this understanding through various curricula. He writes:

The entire curriculum of theological training should therefore be missional, permeated by our theological understanding of God's mission and the missionary nature of the church as an instrument participating in the mission of God to advance his kingdom. (Mashau 2012:8)

In fact, in agreement with Kritzinger (1987), Mashau (2012) argues that *Missio Dei* is the only key to be used in unlocking biblical text (Kritzinger 1987:7; Mashau 2012:5). Bosch (1991) points out the statement made by the German delegation after the Tambaram Meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1938. After being made aware of this key, the delegation declared: "We are convinced that only this eschatological attitude can prevent the Church from becoming secularised" (Bosch 1991:389).

Proper understanding of *Missio Dei* demands that the glory of the entire mission project should be directed towards God as the One who is at the centre, and not a mere human being. However, the conduct of the spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion vehemently cast off the significance of God in the focus of the church mission and thus contradicts the true nature of Christianity. As demonstrated in Chapter 5 of this study, the majority of self-styled spiritual leaders fail to recognise the theocentric nature of the Christian mission. Instead, they all seem to be hungry for power and willing to stop at nothing to ensure that they remain at the centre

of their mission projects. Scholars such as Resane (2017) and Kgatle (2020) demonstrate that self-styled spiritual leaders desire to be at the centre of everything by rejecting organisational culture, maintaining independence to avoid accountability, running the finances of the church and micromanaging everything that relates to their churches, including their followers, just to sustain their selfish desires. In fact, Resane (2017) goes as far as stating that some self-styled spiritual leaders are elevated to the position of highly achieved celebrities within the Christian community (Resane 2017:1-17). Reflecting on this individualistic attitude that is portrayed by self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion, Banda (2020) makes the following remark:

The churches appear more driven by the individualistic vision of the founding leaders than an objective theological and biblical truth. Vision is used here in the sense of what the Christian leader idealises as his or her God-given ministry or mission, or calling (Banda 2020:4).

This tendency is an outright rejection of the trinitarian and ecumenical unity that is demonstrated in the understanding of *Missio Dei* and the essentiality of catholicity and apostolicity as demonstrated in Saayman (1991). Instead, these self-styled spiritual leaders treat their churches as though they were their own private companies. Saayman (1991) writes: “Neither church nor mission exists as an end (Saayman 1991:6). Both are directed towards the coming of God’s jubiliary reign.” Moreover, according to Kgatle (2017), these churches outrightly refuse to be part of Christian ecumenical movements such as the South African Council of Churches (Kgatle 2017:2).

To put it more bluntly, Breedt and Niemandt (2013) declare that for any church to be considered part of the Christian community, it should first be relational and missional or otherwise it cannot be seen as a church that lives in fellowship with the triune God (Breedt & Niemandt 2013:1). Speaking of communality as social security, Banda (2020) brings to the fore that communality is there to remind church leaders that they exist equally, within the priesthood of all believers, with other members of the church. Furthermore, communality should exist within the church space to challenge the misuse of power, safeguard against abuse of religion, stand against blind loyalty and defend ordinary church members from possible abuse by leaders (Banda 2020:9). Therefore, after Pastor Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries made his congregants eat grass, claiming that he had received such instruction from God by the Holy Spirit, Kgatle (2017) pertinently asks:

The question is: “why people would support the eating of grass and the drinking of petrol? Is it a norm that when pastors engage in unusual practices the congregants remain loyal even when such practices pose danger to their health? (Kgatle 2017:3).

Self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion are considered to be and treated as though they were deities by their followers. They teach their followers to respect them as gods themselves; hence, they enjoy being called a “man of God”, reserving divine favour for themselves alone or excluding themselves as the only favourites among the flock of God. Maluleke (2015b), in stressing that these churches are more human-centred than theocentric, declares: “Whatever else the snake-eating phenomenon is about, it is initially about the leader, his self-image, self-esteem and vision of himself.” The emphasis on being called a man of God, as if equal to Moses in the Old Testament, seems to undermine the priesthood of all believers, which asserts that every human being has access to God through Christ as the only high priest. Instead, self-styled spiritual leaders bestow upon themselves titles such as “man of God”, “prophets”, “apostles” and many others just to have Christ’s priestly mediator position focused upon them as opposed to God.

To deny the theocentric nature of *Missio Dei* even more, they indoctrinate their followers to believe they can only access God through them and not necessarily Christ. Because of this very impression that they are at the centre of divine favour, their congregants are more eager to see these “men of God”, as they naturally believe seeing them translates into seeing God. Kgatle (2019) reveals that congregants of Enlightened Christian Gathering Church coming from all over the world to South Africa are willing to pay huge amounts of money and camp for hours just to see Prophet Bushiri (Kgatle 2019:2). Indeed such determination to see a self-styled prophet leads one to suspect that such congregants do so while secretly praying: “If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole” (Matthew 9:21). This directly demonstrates what Bosch (1991) says about the pre-development context in which *Missio Dei* was misunderstood to require the expansion of denominations (Bosch 1991:389). Hence, Kgatle (2019) highlights the point that the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church has become very popular in South Africa, attracting thousands of followers. He further notes that in December 2015, during the Crossover Night on New Year’s Eve, Bushiri filled the First National Bank Stadium with 94 000 people, far exceeding the capacity of the stadium (Kgatle, 2019:2). However, Corrie (2016) warns that the danger that comes with this attitude is that Christians become more

preoccupied with counting the number of people and the growth of the church, resulting in the gospel losing its intended message that is meant for the world (Corrie 2016:198).

Saayman (1991) asserts that the proper understanding, reflection and presence of *Missio Dei* should be characterised by the true proclamation of liberty to those in captivity, the true preaching of the gospel to the poor, truthfulness in restoring sight to the blind and true liberation of the oppressed. Furthermore, according to Saayman, *Missio Dei* is the horizon underneath which the Christian community lives and works, the horizon spanning and illuminating every activity in the life and being of the church (Saayman 1991:5-6). Concurring with Kritzinger (1988), Saayman (1991) maintains that mission should be understood as an attempt to embody the liberating manifestation of God in every human endeavour (Kritzinger 1988:6; Saayman 1991:7). However, contrary to this understanding of *Missio Dei*, the Nyaope religion is characterised by preaching falsehood to the poor, the further oppression of poverty-stricken captives and using the name of Christianity to reinstate blindness. As a matter of fact, by making themselves central to the life and being of their churches, these self-styled spiritual leaders seek to turn Christianity into what Saayman (1991) rejects and calls “some peripheral idiosyncrasy which can be left to some little group of enthusiasts” (Saayman 1991:6).

6.3 The Nyaope religion and the mission of Christ

The mission of Christ or Christian mission in broad terms speaks about the specific involvement or participation of the Christian religion within the broader scope of *Missio Dei*. This participation is outlined as the Great Commission by Jesus Christ himself after his resurrection, instructing his disciples to spread the gospel to all the nations of the world:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
(Matthew 28:16-20)

Bosch (1983) emphasises two points on the Great Commission: firstly, that these words are very important as they call Christians into action in explicit terms; secondly, the placement of the Great Commission in Matthew as the last words that Jesus said on earth means these words cannot be taken lightly (Bosch 1983:218-223). Kgatle (2018) gives it another important angle; he contends that this very closing instructive passage, as it bears expectation on the part

of the Lord's disciples to carry on with his ministry in light of the cross, informs the meaning of all other themes within the gospel. In essence, what Kgatle is saying is that, even though this passage appears at the end, the proper reading and understanding of it clarify all other gospel themes. As Kgatle puts it: "The Great Commission is Matthew's table of contents located at the end." In addition, as if connecting or expressing its meaning over all human generations that have come after the apostles, Kgatle further declares that "Matthew 28:18-20 is a charge given by Jesus to his disciples in order that they may continually reproduce themselves for as long as Christ desires" (Kgatle 2018:2).

The Great Commission is in many ways inseparably connected with the divine mandate that Jesus Christ has outlined at the start of his ministry, contained in Luke 4:18-19. This mandate is He has come to preach the good news to the poor of the world, to proclaim freedom to all the captives, to restore sight to the blind, to ensure that the oppressed are set free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour upon the existence of each and every person on earth.

Bosch (1991) writes: "Mission is a multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualisation, and much more" (Bosch 1991:512). Further, Bosch suggest that this mission, derived from the Great Commission, entails two mandates: firstly, the announcement of good news about salvation through Jesus Christ; and secondly, calling Christians to responsible participation in human society, which also comprises efforts to bring justice and human wellbeing or wholeness (Bosch 1991:413). Interpreting this statement further, Corrie (2016) maintains that this form of mission demonstrates the existence of God's kingdom when it brings about justice and humanisation to society (Corrie 2016:198). As if closing this argument, the following statement:

We understand Christian mission to be a wide and inclusive complex of activities aimed at the realisation of the reign of God in history. It includes evangelism but is at the same time much wider than that. Perhaps one could say that mission is the cutting edge of the Christian movement – that activist streak in the church's life that refuses to accept the world as it is and keeps trying to change it, prodding it on towards God's final reign of justice and peace. (Botha, Kritzinger & Maluleke, 1994:21)

The mandate expressed in the Great Commission by Jesus Christ and the mandate He had outlined at the beginning of his ministry seem to explain the Christian mission in its entirety.

Out of this, one gets the picture of what Bosch (1991) proposes as a multidimensional ministry that is characterised by, among other things, peace, justice, true healing, service, freedom, favour and good news. However, the unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion stand contrary to this projected Christian mission.

From as early as before the advent of democracy in South Africa, the Christian mission, in general, by collective churches was characterised by consistent outcries of peace, justice, freedom, societal wholeness and so forth. However, since the beginning of the Nyaope religion, with its self-styled spiritual leaders, their conduct has muddied the identity of the Christian mission, as they use the name of Christ to achieve their objectives. Due to the conduct of these self-styled spiritual leaders, the Christian religion in South Africa is associated with acts of rape, fraud, fake prophecies, unsafe healing practices, the misuse of power, mafia tendencies and pastors demonstrating an extravagant lifestyle. Contrary to the positive multidimensional ministry that Bosch (1991) speaks about, the self-styled spiritual leaders of the Nyaope religion specifically use the Christian mission not to advance the Christian mandates as contained in Matthew 28:16-20 and Luke 4:18-19. Instead, they use the name of Christianity to advance their own economic survival. This fact is captured as follows by Dube (2020b):

The rise of Christian ministerial practices that emphasise wealth and prosperity ultimately raises questions about the appropriateness of using church ministry and theological education as instruments for economic survival (Dube 2020b:1).

Dube (2020) further highlights that this very important discovery has received recognition in Magezi and Banda's (2017) work from a Zimbabwean perspective, as they too argue that the emphasis on wealth and prosperity of these self-styled spiritual leaders elicits questions about whether it is appropriate for people to use the name of Christianity as an instrument for economic survival and wealth (Dube 2020:1). Moreover:

This is tantamount to abuse and even [the] commercialisation of religion. Apart from the abuse, they are forced to develop an affinity towards the prophet – who is a conduit towards blessedness – instead of empowering people to develop a closer walk with God (Magezi & Banda 2017:1-3).

Another difficulty in relating the conduct of the Nyaope religion with Christianity lies with its rejection of the message underscored within the Great Commission itself. This form of religion fails dismally to comprehend that making disciples means promoting discipline among Christians, as demonstrated in Christ. The inherent goal of this command is to foster and

promote discipline by all means. This discipline is about teaching people to grow or mature in their relationship with Christ, so that, through him, they will come to know God more profoundly. However, self-styled spiritual leaders do not preach the good news to the poor in order to win them over to Jesus Christ, but are, instead, motivated by money. This means that they establish churches and engage in the ministry, not for the sake of making disciples, as instructed by the Great Commission, but, instead, as a lucrative career path that will make them rich, similar to how entrepreneurs approach their business plans. This is observed by Banda (2020:7), noting that these churches collect so much money that these self-styled leaders are listed among the richest entrepreneurs. The leaders in this form of religion are more preoccupied with money than with preaching the gospel; even when they pretend to be preaching the gospel, they do so with the intention of making a profit. Most of them live in big, expensive mansions, own luxurious private jets, regularly stay in five-star hotels and own several properties under their names; yet the livelihoods of their congregants are characterised by extreme poverty. This is fully captured in the CRL report of 2017, which states that it has become a trend for self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa to exploit the Christian religion for maximal profit while some of these churches are itemised as non-profit organisations and being exempted from paying tax. This conduct is hopelessly contradictory to and inconsistent with a true understanding of the mission of Christ as underscored within the Great Commission. Their efforts are not guided by a love of the gospel or teaching it, but, in fact, are driven by a love of money and the glamorous lifestyle that comes with it. Instead of giving glory to God through genuine teaching of the gospel, they commercialise the Christian mission in order for them to receive worldly glory and wealth.

Considering all these factors, it is hard to reconcile the conduct within the Nyaope religion with the Christian mission. When these self-styled spiritual leaders, who corruptly call themselves Christians, contradict the basic template (command of the Great Commission) that is meant for Christians, insisting on calling them Christians is an utter violation of the Great Commission itself. How does one continue to call self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion Christians when their conduct is undermining the very basic prescripts of the Christian religion? How does one continue to call these self-styled spiritual leaders Christians when they are preoccupied with lifting themselves up instead of God? How does one continue to call these leaders Christians when the only thing that matters to them is their private interests, which are contrary to what Jesus Christ has commanded within the Great Commission? How does one continue to call them Christians when they are lacking the discipline that is needed to make

disciples? These self-styled spiritual leaders are fraudsters within the Nyaope religion using Christianity as a cover to conceal their business interests.

6.4 The Nyaope religion and the church mission in the Christian tradition

Van Aarde (2017) points out that based on the letter to the Ephesians, God's mission and the church mission are inseparably interrelated. Also, the mission of the church or *missio ecclesiae* serves the mission of God, *Missio Dei* (Van Aarde, 2017:284-285). Mashau (2012) concurs that the mission of the church serves the *Missio Dei*; therefore, the worship and glorification of God is its ultimate goal (Mashau 2012:7). Breedt and Niemandt (2013) make it clear that the church exists because of God's mission and not *vice versa*. In addition, they emphasise that the church should consistently recognise that God is the One who is in the mission as the initiator and the determiner of the appropriate action, and the church is only privileged to join him in reaching out to the nations; hence, it is always important for the church to adhere to and understand what God wants to do in his own mission and to do exactly according to his will. They further stress that the mission of the church is much more about God and who He is than about the church itself and what it does (Breedt & Niemandt, 2013:2-3). Van Aarde (2017) puts it bluntly that God is the authoritative custodian of his own plan and everything has to be worked out precisely according to that plan. Furthermore, the participator role of the church, as far as this plan is concerned, is merely to unfold and execute it (Van Aarde 2017:284).

Bosch (1991) reasons that creative tension (where the church hangs between being the body of Christ and being part of the world) is built upon the ability of the church to be seen as being missional, as it is missionary by its very nature (Bosch 1991:372, 381). This creative tension is also highlighted by Botha (2006), referring to Gort (1980) who asked the following question: "How can the Christian congregation discover that which God is doing outside the Church?" Botha (2006) then records that the significant issue emanating from this question demonstrates the creative tension between the mission of God and the mission of the church (Botha 2006:8).

According to Van Aarde (2017), the New Testament epistle to the Ephesians, through the two prominent key concepts of οἰκονομία or *oikonomia* (stewardship or manager of affairs) in Ephesians 1:9-10 and 3:2 and 9-10, and πλήρωμα or *plērōma* (fullness or completeness) in Ephesians 1:20-23, 3:19 and 4:10 and 13, gives the theological basis or foundation upon which the relation of *Missio Dei* to the church mission is to be understood. He substantiates his argument by referring to Bassham (1990), who states that the mission of the church is to be a

sign of the presence of that kingdom through its words and actions (Bassham 1990:57; Van Aarde, 2017:285). This point is supported by Botha (2009), as he refers to the church as one of the signs attesting to the fact that the trinitarian God is constantly at work to establish the kingdom of God in the world (Botha 2009:3). Elsewhere, Van Aarde (2016) indicates that the concept of stewardship, as communicated by the apostle Paul to the Ephesians, points to the role of Jesus Christ in completing or executing the plan of God, and is extended to the role that ought to be played by followers of Christ in fulfilling God's plan or *Missio Dei*. According to Van Aarde (2016), the church "stands at the very centre of God's plan and plays an essential part in the execution of God's plan to whom has been given the task of οἰκονομία (Eph. 3:9-10)" (Van Aarde 2016:9).

At this juncture, it is important to briefly define the term "church" as far as it is associated with mission, resulting in church mission. While the word "church" may be used to refer to the physical building, denomination, religious organisation or place of worship within the Christian religion, these are merely what symbolises the presence of the church. There are at least three Greek words that can assist the process of linking the words "church" and "mission" together, namely ἐκκλησία (*ecclesia*), κυριακός (*kuriakon*) and ἀπόστολος (*apóstolos*). In the New Testament, the Greek word that is commonly used to mean "church" is ἐκκλησία (*ecclesia* or *Ekklesia*). It is a combination of the Greek prefix *ek* (out) and the word *kaleo* (to call), culminating loosely in "the called-out ones". However, in a direct fashion, the word "church" comes from another Greek word κυριακός (*kuriakon*), which means "the Lord's" and is interpreted as "those belonging to the Lord". This word appears only twice in the New Testament – in Corinthians 11:20, "So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat" and in Revelation 1:10, "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet" (Hubert, 2009). The Greek word ἀπόστολος (*apóstolos*) literally means the "one who is sent off" and is used in the New Testament to refer to Jesus' twelve apostles or, literally, Jesus' twelve sent ones. When these three words are brought together, one can derive their meaning as something like "The Lord's called ones who will be sent", as this may be consistent with the key episode wherein Jesus called his first disciples in Matthew 4:18-22, Mark 3:16-20, Luke 5:1-11 and John 1:35-51, who He will, in return, send out, as reported in Matthew 28:16-20.

According to Luke 4:18-19, as already stated, from the onset of his earthly ministry, Jesus has been seen and heard identifying with the poor and marginalised. While He demonstrated his

undeserved love for all people, at the same time, He cared deeply for the poor and marginalised. This is evidenced by the way Jesus would often place the poor at the heart of his teachings. For instance, in Luke 6:20-21, He said to his disciples: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh.” He also gives the following instruction:

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
(Luke 12:33-34)

Numerous instances such as the above are an indication of how deeply Jesus Christ cared for the plight of the poor, to a point of designating them as his dear followers or his true church. This fact is observed as follows by Klaasen and Solomons (2019) in their reflection on missiology:

The poor and marginalised is the church in both substance and function. This radical notion of church echoes the community of Jesus, the community of the apostles, the institutional community, and the informal gatherings of people who seek to be faithful to the mission of God. The church is the church of the poor and marginalised for all people. Only when the church is self-reflective and self-critical. (Klaasen & Solomons 2019:21)

What has become a dominant feature of the Nyaope religion is the lavish lifestyles of self-styled spiritual leaders, characterised by their designer clothing, as they compete with one another to be heard or seen as being on the list of the richest pastors in South Africa. It has become a trend for these self-styled spiritual leaders to openly brag about being rich. In Mapenzauwa (2020), Bushiri is quoted criticising people who disapprove of this conduct by self-styled spiritual leaders, saying as follows:

There is a tradition of vilifying men of God who have been blessed with a fortune, there is this perception that men of God are not supposed to be rich. I don't know where this perception comes from, but if you read the Bible, you will note that men of God were rich, including Abraham.

In dealing with the “unsafe spaces” into which the self-styled spiritual leaders of the Nyaope religion have turned the church mission, Banda (2020:2) expresses his deep astonishment with regard to the conduct of these spiritual leaders in the following words:

These dramatic scenes raise questions about what a church is and what it ought to do. As one sees pastors proudly posting pictures and videos of themselves performing these theatrical acts, one is left asking what such activities have to do with the mission of the church. A church that uses dog meat and Fanta drink at the Lord's Table leaves people wondering whether the leaders understand what the Lord's Table is about and if such a church is a true church belonging to Christ.

It is hard to reconcile the idea of the church mission with the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders in the Nyaope religion. While Jesus Christ identified poverty in association with the kingdom of God and even declared that the poor are blessed, the Nyaope religion promises the poor of South Africa that wealth is a sign of God's blessing. These leaders reject Jesus' poverty-based church mission, which was underscored through his teachings and at the same time, they encourage the poor to give their last cents to fund their own luxurious lifestyle. There is a big difference between the Nyaope religion and Christianity as far as the church mission is concerned. Whereas the true church of Christ is characterised by extraordinary efforts by Christians to oversee the responsibility of making life better for the poor, the Nyaope religion is characterised by the mission of self-styled spiritual leaders to rise to fame and fortune through exploiting the poor of South Africa, while they are enjoying their opulent lifestyle made possible by the generous tithing from their poor congregants.

6.5 The Nyaope religion and the Pentecostal mission

This section looks into the Pentecostal mission or mission of the Holy Spirit in a much broader sense than it is normally used within the bounds of Pentecostalism, as it relates to the growth of charismatic movements or churches outside established churches characterised by the emergence of classical Pentecostalism. Instead, this section will look at the broader meaning of the Pentecostal mission as it relates to other, broader forms of mission such as *Missio Dei*, the mission of Christ and the church mission.

The Greek term Πεντηκοστή (*pentēkostē*) is used here as it refers to the commemoration of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus Christ while in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Weeks or, as it is called in Hebrew, שבועות or Shavuot. This feast was traditionally celebrated on Πεντηκοστή (*pentecostē*), which means the 50th day after the first day of Passover, as recorded in Acts 2:1-31.

After Jesus Christ had commissioned his disciples to go unto the nations and make them disciples and preach his gospel, in Luke 24:49, He says: “And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But remain in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Acts 1:4 records Christ to have commanded them: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.”

The previous sections focusing on *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission and the church mission have indicated that they are all inter-reliant on one another as they exist in obedience to the call of the Great Commission to serve or fulfil the purpose of *Missio Dei*. However, for human beings to participate fully in these missions, they need to be guided or encompassed by the Holy Spirit. This means the primary work of the Holy Spirit towards missions is to work within human beings and make them useful as far as *Missio Dei* is concerned. The work of the Holy Spirit as far as missions are concerned is to lead the way for the Christian community towards the fulfilment of *Missio Dei*. It is for this reason that Bosch (1991) speaks of the Holy Spirit as a guide, a catalyst and an inspirer towards the all-encompassing mission. Furthermore, Van Aarde (2016) argues strongly that while the mission of God is channelled from God to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, in return, the Holy Spirit empowers the church, as it is entrusted with the task of carrying the mission of God to the world. Jesus Christ knew and understood how important it was for his disciples to be clothed by the power of the Holy Spirit ahead of their participation in these missions (Bosch 1991:114; Van Aarde 2016:297). As Saayman (2013) puts it, since Jesus himself relied upon the anointing of the Holy Spirit to fulfil his calling, He “endowed them with the Holy Spirit and transferred his vocation to them” (Saayman 2013:134). Bosch (1991) states that the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church is to purify and illumine every individual, especially church people who are called to participate in the mission of Christ (Bosch 1991:206). Thus, the work of the Holy Spirit purifies and produces Christ-like character in people who are involved in the fulfilment of *Missio Dei*.

Self-styled spiritual leaders in the Nyaope religion conduct themselves in a way that suggests that the presence of the Holy Spirit is limited to only them. This is evident in how they succeed in deceiving their followers by claiming to have heard or received their instruction from the Holy Spirit. These leaders, in their own vanity, misleadingly invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit to authenticate their unorthodox practices and do wrong. A typical example of this involves Pastor Christ Penelope of Seven-Fold Holy Spirit Ministries in Siyandini Village in Giyani, Limpopo, who is known for farting on the faces of his congregants to heal and bless

them. He claims that whenever he sits or stands on his congregants, they do not feel pain, since the Holy Spirit would be one in charge and not he personally (Mdluli, 2020). Kgatle (2017) has observed the case of Pastor Lesego Daniel, who had instructed his congregants to eat grass and had claimed that the Holy Spirit was the one who had instructed him to do so. However, Kgatle (2017) makes it clear that Daniel was the one who gave the instruction and then implicated the involvement of the Holy Spirit within it (Kgatle 2017:3). This means that while true Christians allow themselves to be used by the Holy Spirit in fulfilment of the greater scope of *Missio Dei*, self-styled spiritual leaders of the Nyaope religion engage in performative use of or falsely invoking the presence of the Holy Spirit as some form of a license for or authenticator of their unusual practices.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter relied upon the wisdom of academic scholars within the field of missiology who gave their missiological perspectives in the understanding of the concept of *Missio Dei* in relation to the Nyaope religion, the idea of the mission of Christ in relation to *Missio Dei*, and the proper understanding of the church mission and its role towards fulfilling the scope of *Missio Dei*. The contribution of several noteworthy scholars was used as a form of Christian dialogue guiding one through and against the current heresies by the Nyaope religion as witnessed in South Africa. Taken together, their insight demonstrates how far away the Nyaope religion and its teachings are from the ideals and teachings that are upheld by the Christian religion. This contribution, in its vastness, demonstratively substantiated the hypothesis of this study, which predicted that the conduct of the Nyaope religion, as advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders, stands contrary to the Christian mission in its entirety and points to a completely new form of religion behind the mask of Christianity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, findings and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines multiple ways in which the content of this study will contribute to the broader spectrum of theology, and specifically to the missiology field through the manner in which it has introduced and discussed the Nyaope religion as a new phenomenon in missiology. Also looked into are the key findings that the study in its totality has arrived at or revealed. The strengths of the study are discussed on the basis of what the study has been able to achieve. Thereafter, some recommendations for further investigation and specific interventions as far as the Nyaope religion is concerned are provided, and areas in which further research is possible as far as the content of this study is concerned are identified. Last, closing statements relating to the work of this study in its totality are made.

7.2 The Nyaope religion: contribution to the missiology discipline

Overall, this study will be useful in several ways as it will influence the thoughts of academic scholars, policy makers, and society at large in dealing with the religious crisis South Africa is facing through the behavior of self-styled spiritual leaders. In addition, the course makes a significant contribution to the broader field of knowledge of theology and, in particular, missiology. This is done as the study, firstly, presents the Nyaope religion as a new phenomenon or religion within the religious space of South Africa and, secondly, introduces the Nyaope religion as a religious entity that seeks to contradict or reject the generally accepted basic principles of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and Pentecostal mission.

The juxtaposition of the drug opium and the dictum religion as opium of the people by Karl Marx with the South African localised drug Nyaope, which leads to the conceptualisation of the Nyaope religion as a new form of religion in South Africa, offers the field of theology in its entirety with a new framework for research and analysis of various forms of religions in the world of religions.

The question of whether churches should be regulated was at the center of this study and as such it will help the church in general to redefine its missionary identity in South Africa. Because the results of this study are applicable and timely to the missionary needs of the church, they can help the broader church in South Africa to self-correct and fill gaps that seem

to be utilised by individuals who engage in religion with ulterior motives that contradict the idea of religion, in general, and the generally accepted basic principles of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission.

This study examined human rights violations from a missiological perspective while acknowledging existing gaps identified by Mashau (2012) as churches and theological institutions do not have a focus on missional ecclesiology. These gaps have contributed significantly to the formation of a new form of religion. Consequently, the content of this study will help churches and theological institutions alike to put mission and missiology at the centre of theological formation.

The content of this study, as it relates to the South African Constitution in light of freedom of religion and the Religion in Education policy, will be beneficial in assisting churches, theological institutions, academic scholars, policymakers and the general public in forming an opinion about the state of religion in South Africa.

7.3 Findings in the case studies of the Nyaope religion

This study looked at the social circumstances and the context within which a new form of religion has mushroomed in South Africa. The study employed trends in world Christianity as a lens through which the emergence of the Nyaope religion from Christianity, or in the name of Christianity, was investigated. This theory has been able to fulfil the primary purpose of the study, which was to understand new trends in Christianity. While the trends exposed in the study occurred within the context of Christianity or in the name of Christianity, at the same time, they encroached upon the fundamental values of Christianity and ultimately isolated or identified themselves as contrary to Christianity. Furthermore, this lens assisted in the process of absolving Christianity from accusations of human rights violation and allocated abusive conduct to self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion, and not Christianity.

First, cases of human rights violation by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa were cited by compiling headline stories of these self-styled spiritual leaders perpetrating human rights abuse through their unusual conduct. The human rights of congregants in these churches are abused through coercion or manipulation. These cases included stories of self-styled spiritual leaders who, in the name of Christianity, assumed powerful positions while, in the process, they were belittling or marginalising the rights of their congregants by treating them like animals, going as far as making them eat grass or drink poison. These leaders endanger the

lives of their congregants by manipulating or coercing them into putting their lives at risk to prove the strength of their faith by subjecting their bodies to dangerous practices.

Some congregants are sexually abused by self-styled spiritual leaders who make various claims to manipulate women, and young girls in particular, to take part in sexual activities with them. Exploitation is another strategy that has been mastered by self-styled spiritual leaders who coerce their congregants into engaging in criminal activities, such as pretending to be ill and then healed, dead and then resurrected and many other acts of false appearance. Another form of exploitation that has been mastered by self-styled spiritual leaders is financial exploitation, when these leaders misuse their powers of influence to take assets or money from vulnerable congregants who, in return, freely give all they have with the hope of spiritual change. They do not know that they are enriching their self-styled leaders who rise to fame and fortune through such acts of manipulation.

Thereafter, the study traced the history of Christianity and the mission thereof, with its mission, in the main, entailing evangelisation and teaching of love, forgiveness, trust and many other virtues with the aim of reconciling people with God. Contrary to these virtues, as is evident in Chapter 5 presenting stories of a form of religion that uses the name of Christianity falsely in order to exploit people, self-styled spiritual leaders in the Nyaope religion manipulate their congregants into serving their personal needs and resort to unorthodox practices to gain power over other people. These leaders use the name of Christianity to teach a harmful religion for their selfish desires. Unlike in Christianity, congregants within the Nyaope religion fall into the trap of being raped, being financially exploited, participating in harmful behaviour and many other practices that contradict the well-intentioned Christian religion. Unlike Christianity, which teaches that its adherents are freely saved by grace, the Nyaope religion teaches its adherents to earn their way to God by engaging in unorthodox practices just to prove the strength of their faith. While in Christianity adherents are taught to have a loving relationship with God by serving him, adherents of the Nyaope religion are taught to serve, respect and honour their leaders in various ways, which include engaging in harmful acts. Whereas Christianity teaches its adherents that God has sent his begotten Son to die for our sins and that whoever believes in him will have eternal life (John 3:16), adherents of the Nyaope depend upon their self-styled spiritual leaders to regularly deliver them from demonic possession. While Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ is the only way to God (John 14:63), adherents of the Nyaope religion hero-worship their self-styled leaders in order to access God.

Whereas Christianity teaches that every human being has sinned before God (Romans 3:23), in the Nyaope religion, adherents are taught that their leaders are absolutely holy. While Christianity teaches that its adherents have the spirit of discernment (Hebrews 5:14; Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:9-11) to guard against false prophets who come to them in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15-20), adherents of the Nyaope religion lack this spirit, as they are seen falling into the trap of false prophecy.

The study then showed that the Constitution of South Africa, through its ambiguous language of freedom of religion, had undermined the role played by Christianity under apartheid by giving leeway to religious groups and individuals to self-determine and organise themselves in whichever religious way they saw fit. In its current form, especially when it relates to freedom of religion, the Constitution of South Africa allows and protects self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion to falsely practise, manifest or live out their unorthodox religious convictions without being regulated in any way. Self-styled spiritual leaders are protected by the Constitution even when they blatantly violate the human rights of their members by coercing or manipulating them into participating in unorthodox practices that are harmful to their wellbeing. In Chapter 3, it has been argued that while the right to freedom of religion is important in a democratic society such as South Africa, at the same time, it has become a dangerous weapon in its vagueness, as it can be used by anyone to abuse religion. Furthermore, Chapter 3 outlined that while Christianity, as the major religion, had contributed immensely towards bringing democracy to South Africa, the advent of democracy, with the Constitution in its current form, undermined this role, as it turned its back against Christianity as the dominant religion and opened the floodgates for foreign teachings. The vague language of freedom of religion has turned South Africa into a religious "marketplace", characterised by barbaric acts that, firstly, undermine Christian religion and, secondly, bring about human rights violation. While for many years, Christianity in South Africa has held on to being the majority religion with more than 80% adherents, the Constitution of South Africa does not recognise this important position, as it accords all religions equal status. Chapter 3 argued that as the main religion, Christianity in South Africa should enjoy the support and protection of the state, which, in the long run, will safeguard its teachings against false meddling. This has been found to be the case in countries such as Armenia, Argentina, Denmark, England, Georgia, Norway and many others that, similar to South Africa, guarantee freedom of religion without undermining the status of Christianity as the major and influential religion. In its current form,

the Constitution, pertaining to freedom of religion, has been exploited by self-styled spiritual leaders who enjoy its protection as they trample upon the teachings of Christianity.

Also discussed in Chapter 3 was the 2003 Religion in Education Policy and the consequences thereof, which have undermined the status of Christianity in South Africa. It has been observed that while the 2003 Religion in Education Policy sought to diversify the religious outlook of learners, at the same time, it secularised South Africa and ignored the important role that religion, in particular Christianity, could play in unifying a nation such as South Africa. This policy exposed South African school learners to foreign religious teachings in the name of “other religions”. Instead of building upon the parental foundation in Christianity, this policy sought to treat Christian-believing learners as unbelievers who ought to be taught about the multiple religious opportunities of the world. By wiping away both confessional and sectarian religion from the public school curriculum, this policy failed to recognise the important role that religion can play in instilling order in a society such as South Africa. The policy forced Christian parents into making peace with the understanding that the role of their confessed religion in the spiritual growth of their children is unimportant. Similar to the Constitution of South Africa pertaining to freedom of religion, this policy opened the floodgates and made the ground fertile for self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion to do as they wish in terms of unorthodox practices in South Africa. In addition, it was argued that this policy sought to exclude religious sentiments and the presence of God from learners in public schools, as it treated them like non-believers who did not have a religion of their own and were to locate their choice of religion within the pool of religions provided by the world. This was done despite the reality that Christian parents had mobilised campaigns, public meetings, collective manifestos and open letters to challenge the implementation of this policy upon their children. The enactment of this policy disarmed its subjects from the only weapon that could have been useful in discerning opportunistic religions such as the Nyaope religion.

This subject of a missionless ecclesiology was briefly observed in Chapter 1, with Mashau (2012) arguing that mission and missiology have been driven to the periphery by churches and theological intuitions across the world, and in South Africa in particular. In conjunction with both the Constitution of South Africa as it pertains to freedom of religion and the Religion in Education Policy, the current study observed that a missionless ecclesiology opened gaps and made the ground fertile for foreign teachings advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion. When churches and theological institutions fail to perform the task of

teaching about the true meaning of *Missio Dei*, the Christian mission, the church mission and the Pentecostal mission, foreign teachings occupy the Christian religious space and give birth to harmful religions, such as the Nyaope religion. When ordinary Christian believers surrender, the collective and organised effort of spreading true Christian teachings to their children and fellow human beings becomes a signal for self-styled spiritual leaders to exploit people with their false teachings of mission. Chapter 3 briefly discussed the history of the Christian mission in South Africa, recording the arrival of Christianity as a religion in South Africa and some of the good intentions by early missionaries who had come to plant Christianity in the country. Such missionaries include the Portuguese Catholics in 1501, Jan van Riebeeck and his crew in 1652 and George Schmidt and his successors in 1737. While their mission ended up mixed with politics, on the surface of it all, these missionaries had good intentions as they related to evangelising the people in South Africa. This study argued that while these missionaries had opened the path for the Christian mission, churches and theological intuitions have undermined the fundamental role that mission ecclesiology or the study of church mission can play in unifying the South African society against foreign teachings such as is the case with self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion.

In the last part of Chapter 4, characteristics associated with the kind of religion advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders were discussed. These characteristics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Anti-organisational: In such churches, self-styled spiritual leaders are opposed to organisational structures and prefer autocratic leadership in order for them to have an unquestioned influence upon their followers.
- Anti-social: In such groups, self-styled spiritual leaders conduct themselves in ways that undermine the communal spirit that is upheld by the Christian religion (Romans 12:16-21).
- Dangerous: The leaders of these churches impose a risk of harm to their followers by forcing or manipulating them to engage in dangerous acts to prove the strength of their faith. Chapter 5 of this study is filled with stories of self-styled leaders who went as far as coercing their vulnerable congregants into drinking petrol, drinking rat poison or subjecting their bodies to be driven over.
- Manipulative: Self-styled spiritual leaders manipulate their followers into participating in unusual practices, such as pretending to be disabled, dead or to have been healed

from various illnesses. Some followers are even manipulated into engaging in sexual activities with their spiritual leaders.

- **Opposed to accountability:** Self-styled spiritual leaders regard themselves as the law unto themselves and thus not accountable to anyone but their gods. The ruling of their churches is a one-man show, with the functioning of the entire church depending upon them alone.
- **Exaggerated prophecies:** Self-styled spiritual leaders deploy multiple false tactics to manipulate their followers into believing anything they say. In Chapter 4, Kgatle (2019) is cited as he addresses these styles of prophecies, which include, for example, forensic prophecy that involves calling out congregants' personal details, such as their residential addresses, car registration numbers or age.
- **Mafia-style:** Some self-styled spiritual leaders are in a syndicate-like relationship with one another. This is exemplified by the relationship of Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Centre Ministries with his two spiritual sons – Prophet Penuel Mnguni of End Times Disciples Ministries and Pastor Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly. Likewise, Pastor Alph Lukau of Alleluia Ministries International received his calling into the ministry from his late spiritual father, Pastor Jacques Vernaude of Assemblies of God; Pastor Lukau, in return, made his own disciples,
- **Commercialising religion:** Self-styled spiritual leaders occupy religious spaces principally for financial gains or use their churches to clean their illegally obtained money (money laundering) and start wealthy empires, as is evidenced by a number of self-styled spiritual leaders covered in Chapters 5.
- **Cultic nature:** Self-styled leaders within the Nyaope religion fit the description of cultic leaders as they introduce their own belief systems and isolate their followers from the common public as receiving blessings through the knowledge of their leaders. Chapter 5 noted stories of self-styled spiritual leaders who, similar to cult leaders, are worshipped, while in return, they treat their followers as inferiors who cannot question their conduct.

Karl Marx's critique on religion was discussed in Chapter 4, briefly looking into the context that had led him to declare religion as the opium of the people. Marx saw some form of religion as the sigh of the oppressed, the heart of the heartless world and the soul of the soulless conditions to emphasise the important role that religion ought to play in people's lives. Accordingly, the current study metaphorically juxtaposed opium to the South African localised

drug nyaope to help explain and describe the origin, formation and development of the new form of religion that is advocated by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa. The study argued that in the same way that the ingredients of nyaope differ from one seller to another, the teachings of the Nyaope religion differ from one self-styled spiritual leader to another. Furthermore, just as the ingredients of nyaope are said to always include antiretroviral drugs (medicine with the original purpose of healing or treating HIV/AIDS patients), the various churches within the Nyaope religion include and misuse the name of Jesus Christ. In this chapter, it was also argued that similar to the nyaope drug, the Nyaope religion was found or readily available mainly in impoverished areas of South Africa, as people residing in these areas would do anything to escape poverty, unemployment and illness. Just as Karl Marx's critique of religion compared religion to a substance that was intended for medicinal or healing purposes, this study likened the new form of religion in South Africa to a substance, the nyaope drug, that was meant to impose danger on its consumers, hence calling it the "Nyaope religion".

7.4 Strengths of the study

The study has several strengths, as listed below:

- The study has been able to simplify the complexity of recent religious trends in South Africa by making use of a localised term ("nyaope") to describe or draw a much broader picture on the recent development as far as religion is concerned.
- The study has generated new data that will assist the process of making sense of recent religious events in South Africa. In essence, what this means is that the Nyaope religion will add to a pool of theories and frameworks that seek to describe the complexity of religion as has been the case in South Africa.
- This study has successfully made use of a case study method to enhance the understanding of recent unusual religious practices of self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa. The usage of this method has enabled the study to broaden each case according to the merits and available facts thereof.
- The study has been able to successfully test and prove its expressed hypothesis, which predicted that the unusual practices demonstrated by self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa stood contrary to the values held by Christianity and thus represented a new form of religion on its own.
- While most of the cases studied in this study were mainly about or involved the South African context, the newly generated data, as far relating to the use of the nyaope drug

to describe the unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders, can easily be transferred to another setting that has cases of unusual or unorthodox practices of self-styled spiritual leaders.

- This study successfully made use of a localised drug, nyaope, to find new ways to present an analysis that was composed as far back as 1843 from a specific context and socioreligious demographics. This means the process is twofold: while it educated about an analysis that was done more than 150 years ago, at the same time, it created new and valuable content for the future.
- Since this study involves human experiences that received media attention, it was easy to use multiple perspectives that were provided by different people who had witnessed or seen the same event. This gave the researcher more room and flexibility to choose which perspective, from the pool of perspectives, was accurate and important.

7.5 Recommendations for further study

Many questions that beg further investigation have come to the fore in the study, such as further development on the notion of the Nyaope religion and the characteristics and in-depth understanding thereof. The following recommendations in terms of further research are proposed:

- Further research is needed to look into the effects of relegating confessional and sectarian religion from public schools to private homes and religious institutions.
- Further research is needed to investigate the repercussions of sustaining ambiguities in the meaning of freedom of religion as enshrined in a young democratic constitution as is the case in South Africa.
- An in-depth exploration of forms of human rights violation that are associated with self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion is recommended. Research in this regard can compare a variety of human rights violations with religious or spiritual violations.
- Research can be conducted to establish the viability of and develop approaches to assist the process of redefining or reformulating terms and meanings of freedom of religion.
- Research looking into the possibility of reviewing the Religion in Education Policy to cater for fair inclusivity of the Christian religion as the major religion in South Africa is recommended.

- Comparable research can be conducted with a larger number of cases involving self-styled prophets in South Africa that are not contained in this thesis. Also, such research can cover other African countries, using similar approaches, as they too have seen an unprecedented rise in cases of self-styled spiritual leaders who perpetrate human rights violations through unorthodox practices.
- The levels of inconsistencies, ambiguities and lack of information in all reported cases covered in this study may further be investigated in order to draw a complete picture of the Nyaope religion in South Africa.
- The analogy that is used in this study to compare Karl Marx's declaration of religion as the opium of the people, and the nyaope drug to describe the new form of religion in South Africa, can be used further to arrive at different outcomes.
- There is an opportunity of advanced research that can use a similar approach to the one in this study but diverse analogies to fully describe the behaviour of self-styled spiritual leaders within the Nyaope religion.

7.6 Limitations of the study

The following limitations of the study are noted:

- As mentioned in Chapter 1, the majority of the cases that this study focused upon were largely informed by stories of self-styled spiritual leaders that had been covered mainly by secular media. For this reason, the reality that this study might have missed out on other stories that had not been covered by the media but involved similar human rights violations within the church context cannot be ignored. Moreover, this aspect made the task of collecting data difficult as the stories had been spread all over various media platforms.
- The lack of reliable data focusing on the involvement and practices of self-styled spiritual leaders compelled this study to limit its scope and focus only on what was already available in the public domain.
- As the cases that were studied in this study had happened at different times with various practices of numerous individuals and had been interpreted or reported by various individuals, ranging from news reporters to ordinary citizens, on social media platforms, inherently, this study, in its outlook, is characterised by inconsistencies and ambiguities or a lack of certainty.

- While the cases investigated in this study bear similarities here and there, in the main, they differ from one another, and each of them has its own context and analysis. Consequently, it has been tremendously difficult to reconcile them or find a unifying factor among them. Thus, one case could not be used to make sense of another.
- While multiple scholars have made an effort of finding ways to describe the advent of unusual practices of self-styled spiritual leaders in South Africa, none has gone as far as comparing their style of religion to a form of drug (at least not as far as the researcher is aware of). Accordingly, the task of juxtaposing these unusual practices to Karl Marx's analysis of more than 150 years ago was extremely difficult and required creativity.
- As there were no available data that used the nyaope metaphor to describe religious events in South Africa, the composition and validation of this new set of data were moderately voluminous and time consuming.
- While this study benefited from the flexibility of choosing from the pool of perspectives as far as reported cases were concerned, the unreliability of such perspectives cannot be dismissed; a person who has given his or her perspective of an incident one day may have a completely different perspective of the same incident the next day. This means that the conclusions contained in this study can evolve or change on the basis of changed perspectives or even future discovery of fake news used to formulate a perspective.

7.7 Concluding remarks

These concluding remarks relate to observations as they are highlighted parenthetically in all the chapters of this thesis. The Constitution of South Africa, in its ambiguity pertaining to freedom of religion, has opened South Africa up to being used as a religious market by self-styled spiritual leaders. While it may be important to maintain freedom of religion as an integral part of the Constitution, it is, at the same time, extremely important, especially now that society at large and policymakers know better or have seen enough of human rights abuse in the name of freedom of religion for them to reformulate the implications thereof in a way that will prevent individuals from misusing it or perpetrating human rights violations, while at the same time claiming to be exercising the right to freedom of religion. The current wording of the description of freedom of religion seems to have only considered perfect and reasonable use of religion without foreseeing the possibility that individuals may use it to violate other human

rights. The reformulated wording should rise to the task of ensuring that individuals are protected from any possible abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders. Furthermore, it is important that the reformulated version guarantees the citizens of South Africa that there will be consequences for anyone who commits spiritual and religious violations in the name of religious freedom.

The 1996 Religion in Education Policy that was enacted in 2003 contributed towards making South Africa fertile ground for self-styled spiritual leaders. While the early years of democracy from 1996 to 2003 witnessed excessive debates on issues of religion in education in South Africa, it is important for this policy to be reviewed with the benefit of hindsight as it relates to the collapse of a once strong religious fabric, in particular when it comes to Christianity. The question of the importance of religion in education can, if possible, be decided by a referendum, in which citizens can make their voice heard through referendums, and then perhaps South Africa should go in that direction. Once this policy has been revised and reformulated to take account of South Africa's religious demographics, it will allow genuine Christianity to be taught in schools.

This study, in its reflection on freedom of religion and the Religion in Education Policy, has argued that it is important for the democratic outlook of South Africa to reflect the fact that Christianity is the majority religion in South Africa, claiming more than 80% of believers. Similar to how the African National Congress is the ruling party by being the political party that has the majority of elected positions in parliament, Christianity, as the leading religion, should be accorded the deference it deserves in matters that concern religion in South Africa. Christianity should be given authentic and broader powers, similar to how political parties exercise the authentic power of their sovereignty.

The argument above has led to the conclusion that the narrow frame of debates on whether or not religion should be regulated in South Africa, as proposed by the CRL, misses the important feature of the bigger religious picture, which is the composition of a new form of religion, the Nyaope religion, which is contradictory to Christianity. While arguments opposed to the regulation of religion may seem stronger, most of them have been conducted or guided by the impression that the conduct of self-styled spiritual leaders belongs within the bounds or scope of Christianity, while, as a matter of fact, they contradict or stand in complete violation of what Christianity is all about. Hence, it is important to allow some form of religious regulation to clamp down on unusual practices done in the name of Christianity.

All things considered, it is important that religious communities, in particular Christian churches, are formalised and organised in structures that will ensure regular accountability. This would ensure that religious movements have order and harmony that are governed by some form of a chain of authority or structural responsibility. The ultimate goal of the formalisation processes is to create harmony and a better form of accountability and to reduce the possibility of human rights abuse by self-styled spiritual leaders who have become a law unto themselves. Moreover, this will regulate the currently uncontrollable influx of corrupt individuals who are making use of the name of Christianity by establishing churches only to feed their hunger for wealth.

Similar to the brave call made by Saayman (1991) for the church to rise to the task of redefining mission for the political context that existed in South Africa during that time, this study argues strongly that the time has arrived for the church, which understands the religious dimension of its mission, to redefine its Christian religious responsibility. This should be done in a way that would absolve its pure nature from the entanglement of the Nyaope religion by self-styled spiritual leaders in a revolutionary stance similar to that of the early Christians who condemned unorthodox tendencies as heresy.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined various ways in which the content of this study could complement the broader field of theology, and in particular the branch of missiology, by introducing and discussing the Nyaope religion as a new phenomenon. It also examined some of the key study findings that the study achieved or revealed. It highlighted some of the study's strengths and showed what the study could achieve. There were then some recommendations for further investigation, including specific possible interventions related to the Nyaope religion. It identified some areas where further investigation into the contents of this study might be possible and listed the limitations of the study. Finally, concluding remarks and overall conclusion are given on the work of this study in its entirety.

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