THE ATTITUDE OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES TOWARDS SYNCRETISM IN TSHWANE TOWNSHIPS

BY

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DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

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JOHN NDHLOVU

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ABSTRACT

A study was carried out to establish the strategy of responding to syncretism practices in the church. Syncretism poses a significant challenge to the Christian witness in Soshanguve Township. The objectives of the study were to create awareness to evangelical churches that syncretism and Christianity are not compatible, and to suggest strategies that confront syncretism. The methodology used in this investigative and evaluative exercise was qualitative. The study revealed that some of the members visit diviners, some of the preachers preached a modified version of the gospel, and some of the members are involved in African religious practice. Some of the members do not understand the gospel and they resulted into syncretic practices. The pastoral leadership may be to blame for, among other things, not preaching the gospel clearly, and not doing appropriate evangelism, not following up those who convert to Christianity, and not being role models in their lifestyle. The research findings have the following implications for the church:

Pastors need to exercise serious pastoral oversight of the flock to avoid filling the church with unconverted members.

Members need to be taught about the non-negotiable core values of a biblical church. The church needs to emulate and practice the Five Solas of reformation. Pastors need to teach biblical truth about demons and how to deal with them biblically. The church needs to develop mutual accountability structures.

The church needs to understand Ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church).

The church needs to be taught about evangelism and discipleship.

People need to be trained to have a Christian worldview and to develop qualified biblical leaders.

KEY TERMS

Syncretism, Inculturation, Contextualisation, AIC: African Independent Church, MIC: Mission Independent Churches, NPC: New Pentecostal Church.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This dissertation investigated the intrinsic nature and prevalence of syncretism in evangelical churches an-d their response to its presence. It was the researcher's hope that the study would enhance understanding the problem of syncretism which, when addressed, will spark a revival of biblical godliness in the church. The problem exists not only in former mission countries, but wherever the dominant Christian practices that contradict the gospel have become acceptable within the church. This research includes some suggested guidelines on how to deal with the problem of syncretism in a responsible way.

The description of the favourable commencement of the reign of King Asa (1 Kings 15:9-15) states: “Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” (1 Kings 15:11). The implication of the statement is that he was guided by the Lord and not by his own will or the practices of his predecessors, who were alleged “to have done evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 21:15). Asa eliminated the worship of idols in Judah, banishing the perverse, and destroying the idols created by his father (1 Kings 15:12). He stripped Maachah, his grandmother, of the title of Queen Mother on the grounds of her creation of an obscene image for the worshipping of Asherah (1 Kings 15:13).

Asa's life ended sadly, and his death was preceded by a terrible affliction of the feet during his old age (1 Kings 15:23-24). He serves as an example of the decline of a man, from his early life characterised by faithfulness, to losing a meaningful relationship with the Lord. The second book of Kings abounds with descriptions of men such as Ahaz, who had lived an ungodly life and had sacrificed his son, forcing him to “pass through the fire, according to the abomination of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 16:3). Studying the Old Testament kings, we thus find examples of leaders who exercised purity in worshipping God and those who allowed syncretism to enter into their impure form of worship. Syncretic worship was dominant in Israel and God used the prophets to censure the practice of such forms of worship. Hosea

rebuked those who practiced syncretic worship, proclaiming the salvation of the Lord. “In that day, declares the Lord; you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master’. I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked (Hosea 2:16-17).

This thesis examined some strange syncretic practices conducted in the Tshwane township Soshanguve. According to a report in the Christian Post, the congregation had a practice of eating grass. Lesego Daniel, a minister, explained the ‘grass eating’ by telling the congregation that Jesus had more disciples than the twelve mentioned in the Bible, adding that they had also done new things that were seen as unusual at the time. He argued that there were many disciples and that the others were deliberately not revealed in the Bible because God wanted someone to do new things. Nathaniel was a disciple, he argues, yet there is no book of Nathaniel.

Daniel also muses about the miracles, signs and wonders that were not mentioned or taught in the Bible. He was quoted saying, “remember I said when the kingdom comes you will be able to see, hear and understand. They could not welcome him to heart because they could not see. When the Holy Spirit comes you will be able to see. Don’t worry when people criticize you because they cannot see the spirit of truth, they could not welcome or understand” (Sowetan, Friday 10th January 2014).

Photographs accessible on the internet show church members lying on a lawn and chewing mouthfuls of grass. Daniel appears to be literally standing on members’ backs during the service as he prayed for them. The photographs created an uproar, as well as accusations that the pastor abused his office. Pastor Daniel’s church is based at Ga-Rankuwa township in Tshwane. The God of Lesego Daniel required followers to eat grass, as well as to drink petrol. In both of these acts of worship it had been young female congregants who have taken the lead (Maluleke 2015:39). A daily newspaper, reporting on the Rabboni worship practices, mentioned the corrosive effect of ingested petrol on the digestive system, as well as its stimulation of the nervous system, causing excitement similar to the effect of certain narcotic drugs, which explains the purportedly strange behavioural reactions of worshippers who have imbibed petrol. Ingesting petrol further poses a danger to the respiratory system, affecting breathing and which may lead to

pneumonia. According to the *Sowetan*, Daniel informed followers that these abnormal actions encourage blessings.

The fact that the pastor continues to receive support even after advocating practices that pose a danger to human health, is particularly perturbing. The question is: What facilitates the unquestioning enactment of such destructive and syncretic worship practices in ignorant and gullible followers?

Nehanda Radio described congregants rolling around on the ground during another unusual practice at the End Time Disciples Ministries church. The report continued that Mnguni, the prophet, stood or sat on congregants, even walking on them. The prophet termed this “the church at horror”, in which there are awful occurrences. Mnguni stated that there was no shame in his followers stripping half naked, hissing like snakes.

The activities at Mnguni’s church are published in the social media on a Facebook page. It is not sufficient for the evangelical churches to attempt to establish a common organization and evangelical programme as a joint endeavour for revival. Rather, the church is called upon to return to its fundamental source of strength and power, the Word of God.

There are, however, also challenges to the concept of syncretism. Some researchers view the influence of, for example, the African Traditional Religions on Christianity, in a positive light. They are of the opinion that syncretism can sometimes be regarded as an influential aspect of religiosity. In this regard, Kurtz (1995:259) refers to the new context of multiculturalism where the aspect of syncretism is very relevant.

Kurtz (1995:260) writes:

> The current religious scene presents a dynamic interplay between traditional practices on the one hand and widespread transplanting of traditions and experiments with syncretism on the other.

The reaction to these challenges differs according to the context.

The whole concept of syncretism is also challenged. Müller (2008:819) writes:

> It is the thesis of this article that the term “hybridity”, which has been well used in post-colonial theory to describe so-called hybrid cultures, may be equally usefully applied in theological studies to describe some of the more recent trends in World Christianity, particularly the phenomenon of African Initiated Christianity. Perhaps it has the potential to circumvent and override some of the more biased connotations associated with typically used concepts, such as syncretism.
>
> Although it is possible to use syncretism in a neutral, phenomenological sense, the word has often been negatively applied to certain forms of African Christianity by observers who themselves hold essentialist understandings of religion in general, and Christianity in particular. In such a view, syncretism then denotes a tainted Christianity, namely a non-pure and therefore false form of religion. The term hybridity, on the other hand, seems to evoke an unapologetic sense of blending, whereby two different traditions contribute in roughly equal measure to a new cultural/religious product.

In this thesis the term syncretism is explained and used from an evangelical position and therefore the main challenge was how syncretism should be regarded in the African context as the perspective of the research community for this thesis. There are references to aspects of inculturation and contextualisation in this dissertation, but the focus was on the dangers of syncretism, where Jesus Christ is not regarded as the true and only Saviour.

From an evangelical position, the main issues that were the points of departure for this thesis, were the value of the Bible as the Word of God; the confession that the Triune God reveals His glory in Christ who is the only Saviour; that sin is a reality and that all people need to be saved from sin; and that the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity who magnifies Christ, gathers the church, and leads the church in all truth.

This researcher spent more than seventeen years as a church member and pastor in Soshanguve, a large township in the north-west of Tshwane (formerly Pretoria), South

Africa. The question that needed to be researched was if Soshanguve had become a breeding ground for false doctrine.

Soshanguve has a multi-ethnic population and the name for the township was derived from the first letters of four of the representative ethnic groups:

SO = Sotho (Tswana, Pedi, South Sotho)
SHA = Shangaan (Tsonga)
NGU = Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, Ndebele)
VE = Venda

The languages of Soshanguve residents represent the most commonly spoken languages of all the major African languages of South Africa. The researcher pursued opportunities to establish whether there could be synergistic opportunities for sharing effective restorative resources to the benefit of the broader church. Anderson (1992) conducted research in Soshanguve, focusing on Pentecostal and African independent churches (AIC) and syncretism. There remains a need for a study that concentrates on the response of evangelical churches towards syncretism. This thesis set out to find restorative solutions to purge affected churches. The study, additionally, examined the impact of Christian education in the Soshanguve township's evangelical churches, considering long-term strategies to bolster Christian faith through evangelism and biblically based qualified leadership and discipleship.

Syncretism is not a subject to overlook or ignore in missiology and its advancement may be regarded as a religious prostitution. Moreau (2000b:924-925) defines syncretism as "the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements". It occurs when fundamental aspects of the gospel are omitted or neglected in favour of religious practices and elements of worship from a recipient culture, for the purpose of social contextualisation (Conn 1986:176).

The Indian theologian, Pinto, describes syncretism broadly as a "fusion of incompatible elements" and more specifically as the "mingling of authentic notions and realities of the revealed faith with realities of other spiritual worlds" (Pinto 1987:22).

Mullins asserted:

> Syncretism is usually understood as a combination of elements from two or more religious traditions, ideologies, or value systems. In the social sciences, this is a neutral and objective term that is used to describe the mixing of religions as a result of cultural contact. In theology and missiological circles, however, it is generally used as a pejorative term to designate movements that are regarded as heretical or sub-Christian. The legitimate cultural reshaping of Christianity is referred to as the "enculturation" or "contextualization" of the gospel, though most social scientists would also include these cultural adaptations as examples of syncretism. (Mullins 2001:809)

Schreiter observed three forms of syncretism. Firstly, Christianity and alternative traditions combine to form a new reality, with the alternative tradition supplying the structural framework. Secondly, the framework for the syncretic system is rendered by Christianity, but undergoes substantial redefining and reshaping, without input from generally accepted Christianity. Thirdly, selected Christian elements are transferred into an alternative system. (Schreiter 2003:146-147). Syncretism marries two or more religions, theologies, ideologies or forms of worship. The Bible offers many examples: the magician, Simon, and his devotees witness the powerful acts of the Apostles and are baptized, despite Simon maintaining the same worldview (Acts 8:4-25); the Israelites practice idolatry, thus becoming God's enemies (Judges 1:19); the Canaanites prostituted their bodies as a form of worship (1 Kings 14:24), sacrificed children and embraced witchcraft (2 Kings 17:16-17). In 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, Paul asks questions that explain that Christianity need to be kept sacred: "What fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial? Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, and do not touch what is unclean" (NIV).

However, churches often facilitate syncretism by tolerating teachings that can be regarded as contrary to sound biblical principles of exegesis and hermeneutics. The literature review included studies covering the factors that cause syncretism, while the thesis was constructed on a foundation of Old Testament passages, namely the Acts,

and Pauline Epistles. In conclusion, the thesis offers suggestions and outline strategies for combating syncretism in the Soshanguve township. The researcher, based on his experience in worshipping and ministering in the Soshanguve township, especially intended the results of this research to be beneficial to the evangelical churches of that township.

The question was whether over-contextualization opens the door of the gospel for Christian worship and syncretism. Valid contextualization must support fidelity to Jesus Christ and the development of a community whose narrative identity is drawn from the New Testament (Newbigin 1989:153-154). Christian beliefs and practices must be biblically based.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem was to investigate and address the prominence of syncretism in evangelical churches in South African urban townships. This demanded an understanding of the African and biblical worldview among the population of the Soshanguve township.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS THAT GUIDED THE STUDY

The main research question was: What should be regarded as unacceptable syncretism in the church and how should the church respond to it?

The sub-questions related to the main research question were:

What should be regarded as the most essential aspect of the Christian gospel?
What is the relation of the church towards other religious beliefs?
How should the church respond to the challenges of indigenous cultural groups?
How should churches in the Tshwane township respond to the challenges of mixing Christianity and other beliefs?
Why do some churches accept the practice of mixing the gospel with other beliefs?
How would the church respond in practice to the challenges of living in a community with many different worldviews?

These questions were also rephrased for the interviews with members of the community.

1.4 DELIMITATION OF STUDY

Fundamental aspects in establishing the study boundaries and parameters were the researcher's extensive personal and professional experience of worship and ministry, as well his vast knowledge of the sociological and multi-cultural complexities of the population of Soshanguve. The Soshanguve township was chosen to limit the scope of the research, although syncretism is an equally serious problem in other South African townships.

It could be said that the observation of the problem and desire to provide healing or solutions had a gradual, natural development throughout the researcher's personal association with the study locality, notwithstanding his own parallel professional and spiritual development.

Hence, the study's field research and its intended practical application in providing solutions to reverse the apparent trend toward syncretism, as manifested in the Soshanguve churches and their founders/leaders examined earlier in this chapter, were limited to the evangelical churches of the Soshanguve township in Tshwane, South Africa.

1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS:

Syncretism: Syncretism is the interpolation of Christian assumptions and beliefs with incompatible facets of a worldview that results in Christian churches adopting practices that are not based on the biblical tenets (Kraft 1999:390). According to the New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus (1991:1003), "Syncretism is an attempted reconciliation of conflicting or opposing beliefs; the development of religion by the subsuming of older forms".

Inculturation: Inculturation refers to the two-way process of modifying Christian teachings to suit the contextual needs of a particular non-Christian culture and the impact of the recipient culture on such modifications. "Inculturation is therefore a dialogue between the gospel and its recipient culture, resulting in the recipient being authentically

transformed by the gospel in a culturally-relevant manner" (Ezeoqu 1997:8).

Contextualization: Kraft (2004:375) defines contextualization as "the process of learning to express genuine Christianity in socio-culturally appropriate ways." It concerns how authentically the gospel is revealed in each new cultural, social, religious, and historical setting. A commonly cited biblical text in support of contextualization is 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, where Paul portrays himself as being all things to all people, so he could save them.

1.6 VALUE OF STUDY

This study has validity for the church in the Soshanguve township and throughout South Africa. The researcher contends that this study will provide a base from which to challenge Christian churches to consider, as an imperative, the authority of Scripture in the church and in daily Christian life. It will not only support local churches but will also benefit the church universally in presenting the gospel more effectively as the church fulfils its mandate of making disciples of all nations.

The research might also be a valuable tool for missions and for evangelists and those involved in counselling, as well as having relevance in fragile multi-cultural environments. Overall, the study intended to make a significant contribution to the continued relevance of Christianity throughout the continent of Africa. It may serve as a resource document for workshops and other training projects, as well as for counsellors. The study findings should lead to renewal of faith and the worship of God in the congregation, rather than an allegiance to the demonic power of an individual and foster a new approach to missionary work.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.7.1 Research method

This chapter discusses the methodology of the research, including its design, the study instrument, relevant ethical issues, and limitations.

A discussion on the sampling technique and method of data analysis is also included. Qualitative research aims to explore the perceptions and understanding of a study population (Hutton 1990:219); in this research it addressed the problem of syncretism in the Soshanguve township.

1.7.2 Biblical exegesis

The research was carried out using a grammatical-historical method (Zuck 1991), along with an examination of relevant commentaries, articles, biblical theology works, and other theological and ecclesiological texts.

1.7.3 Qualitative method

The second phase incorporated a qualitative approach to accurately define the main concerns through interviews, again following the guidelines of De Visser (2001:32-35) and Neuman (1997:253).

The research methodology should help facilitate a process whereby people can consider and develop strategies that bring about change, both in their lives and in churches, in order to better fulfil their needs. This situation required a participatory form of research, which was based on a qualitative research methodology. Marshall and Rossman (1989:79) assert that there are various techniques used for gathering qualitative information. In-depth interviewing was the primary form of data collection for this thesis. The value of conducting interviews to provide data for descriptive research is that the process facilitates greater dialogue and clarification than can normally be obtained from questionnaires.

This form was appropriate for the study in that the interviewer was present to clarify the purpose of questions needing clarity, Additionally, it allowed participants greater scope to express themselves (Neuman 2014:272-273).

1.7.4 Data collection method and procedure

There are several possible sampling strategies available to a researcher undertaking qualitative research.

- **Interviews**

An in-depth interview was conducted with church leaders and members. Notes were taken during both the group discussions and face-to-face interviews. Note-taking facilitates the capturing of expressions which cannot be obtained through human perceptual organs alone (Bush & Harter 1980:12). Certain questions were targeted mainly at pastors, who would be better qualified to offer the information that was sought. A tape-recording device was used to record responses for later transcription and clarification.

The information offered was recorded and analysed.

- **Sampling**

A sample refers to the set of respondents, selected as a subset of a larger population, for the purpose of a survey, while the term sampling describes the process of selecting the subset comprised of individuals who exhibit a range of characteristics that represent the full range of characteristics of the whole population. In statistics, the term population refers to the complete group of eligible persons or inanimate objects from which the representative subset or sample will be drawn.

The sampling process, thus establishes the sample, from whom information and conclusions representing those of the whole population, may be drawn. In research, the sample offers economic efficiency in terms of time and resource expenditure, in comparison with working with the complete population.

- **Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling implies populating the subset of the population that constitutes the sample according to a specific criterion, such as expert knowledge of a specific discipline that will not be represented throughout the population (Cooper & Schindler 2001:193). Thus, the sampled is assembled, based on the in-depth knowledge of the participants in relation to the central questions of the study.

No random method can be applied to purposive sampling selection. Rather the researcher needs some basic knowledge of the composition of the study population, in terms of academic qualifications, professional capacity and experience, and specific fields of expertise, as well as an understanding of the appropriate size of the sample in relation to the study population and purpose (Cooper & Schindler 2001:193).

The purposive selection method is generally most effective for constituting a sample of small numbers of individuals or groups, who in their assembled knowledge and expertise can offer the richest-possible information covering the requirements of the study questions.

- **Sample size**

There are no rules or formulae for calculating qualitative sample sizes (Swinscow 1998). The optimum size depends on the informational needs of the study, the systematic plan envisaged by the researcher to obtain this information, and the number of experts available who together fulfil the criteria of the sample.

The composition of a valid purposive sample is based on the range of information and knowledge, rather than the number of participants required that will constitute an effective and meaningful sample, in terms should be judged on the basis of the study rationale. Qualitative inquiry relies more on the richness of the information offered by the participants and the analysis of the researcher, as opposed to the sample size.

1.7.5 Procedure and scheduling

The time frame of research covered a period of three years and was divided equally into two phases. The first phase consisted of the field work, data processing, and data analysis, while the second focussed on discussing the results, which included feedback to the study participants, the consolidation of findings, and a final research report.

1.8 CHAPTER OUTLINE

CHAPTER 1: This chapter presents the general orientation and background of the topic of the thesis and provided the problem statement, research objectives, relevance of the study and research design and methodology.

CHAPTER 2: In this chapter the relevant literature is reviewed.

CHAPTER 3: Chapter 3 discusses the collection of the data, which included the field research executed to show the state of syncretism in the Soshanguve township churches.

CHAPTER 4: This chapter comprises the data analysis as well as suggestions for the way ahead.

CHAPTER 5: The strategy for responding to syncretism in the Soshanguve township is presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 6: The thesis concludes with the summary and final conclusions as well as the recommendations from the research findings and suggestions for further research.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The successful accomplishment of qualitative research depends on the validity of the input of participants. Therefore, it is paramount that the process should incorporate safeguards against harming participants, either mentally or physically, as well as guaranteeing the integrity of all data (Cooper & Schindler 2003:16).

Research ethics ensures that no party suffers adverse consequences from research activities. Therefore, this researcher adopted all recognised precautions to protect the integrity of all participants.

Preliminary interviews were conducted, and an informed consent letter was distributed to research participants, prior to their participation, to clarify the obligations and responsibilities of all parties involved in the study (see Annexure A).The letter described the topic and purpose of the study, certain procedures and risks, as well as emphasising the need for confidentiality.

Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Free State and the project was classified as a “low risk study” (see Annexure B for the letter of approval). The signed consent forms of all participants remain in the possession of the researcher, while pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants. A complete list of all participants was recorded in a password protected file held by the researcher. The contact details of the researcher and his academic advisor were given to all participants. The focus groups were populated by members of the evangelical churches whose participation was not motivated by the promise of financial remuneration or material benefit. The superior biblical knowledge of the evangelical church members was advantageous to the study.

1.10 SUMMARY

The study assessed the evangelical churches’ responses to syncretism. Syncretism affects the purity of the gospel taught in churches. In both the Old and New Testaments, the people of God were warned about the destructive potential of syncretism. Syncretism challenges the authority of the Christian scriptures and when it is rampant, the message of the gospel loses its value. This study was motivated by the realities of the impact of syncretism on the people of the Soshanguve township in Tshwane and the critical need for the evangelical churches to respond.

CHAPTER 2 ANALYSIS OF SYNCRETISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review identifies and evaluates the writings of scholars and sources that offer content relevant to the objectives of the study, in this case the concept of syncretism. The aim of this thesis was to examine manifestations of syncretism in places of worship in Soshanguve township, particularly the evangelical churches of the locality, recording occurrences of syncretism and evaluating its aspects and impact. This defined the research problem. The review covered previous research, identified some of the limitations in the formulation of previous approaches, as well as assessed areas that had not been covered by previous researchers.

Initially, it had to be established whether the literature showed evidence of the need to investigate syncretism in churches and, if so, what strategies should be applied to investigate its extent and how it should be addressed.

A variety of approaches were revealed in the articles covered in this chapter and categorised accordingly, commencing with definitions of the concept of syncretism. Historically, syncretism had been observed both in past and present mission work and the need to address it had been identified.

2.2 DEFINITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF SYNCRETISM

Johnson (2002:302) distinguishes between the definitions stating that syncretism refers to the blending of religious aspects, while hybridity embraces a broader mix of cultural elements.

The central interest of this thesis was the blending of religious elements, termed syncretism, that are well defined by many of the authors of the texts that were examined. Leopold and Jensen (2004:5) note that “the history of religion confirms that every religion is in ‘essence’ syncretic; there is no pristine origin or essence”. Most of the authors agree that syncretism is adding to existing beliefs or combining two or more beliefs into a

blended belief (Mullins 2001:809; Pinto 1987:22; Schreiter 2003:146-147; Imbach 1984:1062; Droogers 1987:7).

Hughes (1988:670) proposes that all religions have inherent syncretic elements, including some with a negative impact. He reasons that the concept of syncretism is relative to the definition and usage of the term “religion.”

Moreau (2000b:924) confirms the view that syncretism amounts to the blending of ideas, attitudes, and practices and that, in the case of the Christian tradition, this has amounted to the dilution of the essential gospel truths due to the incorporation of non-Christian elements. Kraemer (1956:374) propounds a stronger line, defining syncretism as the illegitimate mixture of religious elements that cannot and should not be integrated, while acknowledging it as a universal phenomenon. He notes that the three great Western monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are fundamentally anti-syncretic, in that their exclusive, objective and dualistic commitments presume the existence of absolute norms that do not allow any incorporation of elements contrary to their core features.

In continuing to expound the irreconcilable distinction between Christian faith and syncretic influences, Kraemer (1956:374) emphasises that Christian conviction regarding the life and revelation of Christ means that all formulas of truth are to be judged by the biblical witnessing of Christ, rather than tending towards a compromised universal religion for humanity.

As fallen humanity is naturally syncretistic, Christian missions should aim at conversion and preserving the substantive meaning of the biblical truths, rather than attempt to circumvent a Christian confrontation with other cultural religious beliefs and practices.

In his early study, Kraemer (1938:203) defines syncretism as an illegitimate mixture that is the mingling of Christianity with various aspects of culture, to the extent that the overall message becomes obfuscated. In later studies, he presented a modified view, stating that many accepted doctrines of the church could be described as “syncretic” (Kraemer 1956:393). His studies show an inconsistent usage of the term and although he was not

tolerant of the dilutions of cultural influences, he did acknowledge that Christianity itself is a hybridised religion.

Kraemer did well by explaining that Christianity does not comprise its principles of faith according to those of other religions. Thorough scrutiny of biblical teachings about true Christianity reveals that it is absolutely bound with what was preached by Christ and the disciples. Focusing on what the Bible says about God and worship, enables us to confront any form of syncretism. A more holistic approach to syncretism will be found in what theologians term “religious syncretism.”

The ground covered in examining a variety of definitions in chapters 1 and 2 indicates a general agreement among theologians with Moreau's simple definition that “syncretism is [the] blending of one idea, practice, or attitude with another”. Traditionally, for Christian theologians, the introduction of non-Christian elements that water down the basic gospel-derived truths amounts to syncretism. However, it is also generally accepted that wherever the church exists, some form of syncretism exists, and it is unrealistic that it can ever be eliminated (Moreau 2000b:924-925).

Hooft traced syncretism from its denunciation by the prophets of ancient Israel showing its existence in Hellenism and Gnosticism, as well as in the Roman Empire, symbolised by the elements combined in the private chapel of Emperor Alexander Severus that included not only monuments to previous emperors, but also the miracle worker Apollonius of Tyana, Christ, the Brahma and Orpheus (Hooft 1963:15).

In our current global context, cultural mixing is prevalent, creative, and dynamic. This demands that contemporary religious scholarship focuses on the specific historical, regional, and social factors. However, caution must override the unmitigated acceptance of standards that are ignored and traversed in the celebration of the cultural mix.

2.3 HISTORICAL APPROACHES OF SYNCRETISM

2.3.1 Rise of syncretism in the Christian church (A.D. 100-313)

Second and third century Christians withstood not only the persecutions of the heathen world, but also the heresies and corrupt doctrines arising within the church. Jesse Lyman Hurlbut refers to four dominant Christian sects (Hurlbut 1970:51-52), as discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1.1 Gnosticism

Hannah (2001:369) notes that "Gnosticism is a religious movement in the early church that embraced some of the features of Christianity but rejected its essential teachings. Gnostics denied God as the creator, the incarnation of Christ and the salvation of the body."

A simple definition of gnosticism is not easy due to the extent of its variation at different localities over different periods. The movement arose in Asia Minor, grafting Christianity onto paganism. The Gnostic belief was that a large number of lesser deities, some beneficent, others malignant, emanated from the supreme God and through these deities, the world manifests both good and evil. Christ was classified as one of the emancipatory deities, in whom the divine nature dwelt for a time. The Gnostics interpreted the scriptures as allegory, making the texts suit the desired interpretation. Gnostic teachings qualify as manmade philosophy based on traditions, rather than divine truth. Gnosticism flourished in the second century but disappeared at the turn of the century

2.3.1.2 Ebionites

The Ebionites, a name derived from the Hebrew word meaning "poor", were Jewish Christians who continued to respect Jewish laws and customs. They rejected the Pauline scriptures, in that the author recognized the Gentiles as Christians (Hurlbut 1970:52). Ebionism is classified as a heresy that regards Jesus as human with the gift of healing and miracles out of reach of other humans (McGrath 1998:348). The Ebionites dwindled away in the second century.

2.3.1.3 Manicheans

The Manicheans originated in Persia and the movement was named after their founder, Mani, who was put to death by the authorities in the government of A.D. 276. Mani stated that the universe consisted of two separate kingdoms, one of light and the other of darkness, which competed for mastery of man and nature. McGrath (1998:351) states:

> Manichaeism was a fatalist position associated with the Manichees, to which Augustine of Hippo attached himself during his early period. A distinction is drawn between two divinities, one of which is regarded as evil, and the other good. Evil is thus seen as the direct results of the influence of the evil god.

The Manicheans rejected Jesus Christ and believed in a “celestial Christ”. They are classed as strict ascetics, who regarded marriage as a lofty institution. They suffered persecutions at the hands of both heathen and Christian Roman emperors. St Augustine, the foremost theologian of the early church, was a Manichean before converting to Christianity.

2.3.1.4 Montanists

The Montanists were followers of Montanus who lived in Phrygia during the second century (Hannah 2001:371). They are described as a second and third century restorationist movement within the church, which they believed had become morally compromised and needed to return to its primitive roots, which included healing, continual revelation, and speaking in tongues.

A review of the early history of the missions of the Christian church reveals that the church had been struggling, from its conception, to deal with syncretism in the cultural contexts into which she moved. Today, there is a stream of charismatic prophetic Christian leaders who claim to heal and overcome other forms of adversity through prayer. Their followers are drawn from mainstream Christianity. Some leaders totally reject alternative forms of medicine and concentrate on aspects of worship that include dreams and visions, which they justify with Old Testament passages in order to sanction such practices. They have deviated from the doctrine and practices of biblical Christianity. Their leaders’ beliefs are

not founded on scripture and they promote themselves as authoritative, irrespective of what the Bible says.

Kennedy (1910:174-181), drawing from Von Harnack, compares syncretism in the early church to syncretism in his time, arguing that syncretism helped Christianity spread to new regions, but at “too great [a] cost”, as paganism infused Christianity.

Von Harnack (1908:viii) also describes the Christian evolution into a syncretic religion, from its pure origin in Jesus, stating, “Christianity was not originally syncretic itself”. He submitted that Jesus’ original teachings emerged within Judaism, not in relation to other religions. Yet Jesus’ early disciples, who were responsible for the primitive shaping of Christianity, mingled his teachings with Greek perspectives and so-called “Oriental” religious elements.

Jesus kept Christianity pure, but his disciples allowed the first elements of syncretism to enter. Von Harnack also mentions that many so-called syncretic religions had little if any universal aspirations. He attests that the disciples of Jesus Christ blended Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and Near East religions.

Von Harnack published a book entitled “What is Christianity? (Von Harnack 1986:13-14), in which he argues that Christianity’s essence not only draws from the teachings of Jesus Christ, but also from aspects of Hellenism.

Von Harnack acknowledges the cultural context in which Christianity was practiced and the historical changes. He posits that the essence of Christianity carries two consequences, the infinite value of the human soul and the calling to a higher righteousness based on love and expressed in mercy (Von Harnack 1986:145), praising the Reformation for restoring Christianity to its original purity (Von Harnack 1986:283). Kraemer was an extraordinarily influential voice in the missiology of the early twentieth century. His approach to syncretism reflects the neo-orthodox distinct character of God through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Kraemer (1956:394) argues that, in the nineteenth century, the school of religious history took an objective stand on syncretism to prove that Christianity was a syncretic religion. It claimed that Christianity possessed many elements from primitive religions–the early Christian commentators, Tertullian, Cyprian and St

Augustine, present proof of incorporation of pagan relics and festivals (Van der Meer 1961).

In the first three centuries A.D. the African church leaders in North Africa condemned paganism. They struggled to remove it from Christianity for five centuries, but their efforts seem to have failed. Paganism undermines biblical teaching and contributes to the church's theological confusion (Daniel 1993:392).

Van der Meer (1961:47) describes practical Christianity during St Augustine's lifetime: "Anybody here can call himself a Christian–the drunkard, the miser, the cheat, the gambler, the adulterer and the evil liver, and the theatre maniac." Van der Meer criticises St Augustine's view as imperialistic, pointing out that the Carthaginian masses lived as pagans rather than real Christians and that the increase in nominal Christians was the product of hasty conversions of North Africans to Christianity in less than a century. The support of the church by the state increased, but spirituality was in decline. The North African Church became severely influenced by paganism, which historically detracted from the doctrinal purity of the gospel and was an unhealthy manifestation both spiritually and morally.

Church leaders had foregone their missionary purpose for increased numbers. The church had not protected her purity and was blind to the effects of the intrusion of paganism.

2.4 SYNCRETISM AND THE CHURCH

Van Rheenen (1997:173) regards syncretism as the conscious or unconscious accommodating of Christian beliefs under the influence of cultural practices to blend with the dominant culture. Shmidt (2013:27-28) disagrees with Van Rheenen, stating that a person drawing on two or more belief systems simultaneously, is guilty of syncretism and taking the best of two religious worlds.

McGuire (2008) observes that religion is multifaceted, and its changes reflect the changes in society. Living a religion attempts to restrict the "unofficial" ways in which religion is practiced. Thus, the "official" religion must respond to the "unofficial."

A notable practical example is what distinguishes the AIC and the APC in Botswana, where the AIC adheres to ancestral worship, while the APC rejects this form of worship. This led to a conclusion that spiritual ecumenism between these closely related churches cannot be attained (Nkomazana 2006:35).

Boff (1985:92), like Van Rheenen, Kraemer and Mullins, views syncretism as confirming that Christianity also has some form of syncretism. A review of the missiological history of the Christian church reveals this struggle within the church itself and of the growth of Christian charismatic prophetic leaders offering healing and material enhancement through prayer. Such leaders are responsible for the movement away from mainstream Christian churches of masses of followers.

Some of these churches encourage unacceptable practices, including the ingestion of medicines, and emphasise dreams and visions as part of worship, justifying such practices with Old Testament passages. They have deviated from the doctrine and practices of biblical Christianity and their leaders' beliefs are not scriptural. They believe themselves to be the authority irrespective of what the Bible says.

Thomas (1992:28) points out that pressure for syncretism comes from two directions: from non-Christian religions and from within Christianity itself. When Christian thinkers also advocate a pluralistic theology of religions, thus asserting the subjectivity of Christian belief statements, the church cannot, but for the threat of religious syncretism.

2.5 SYNCRETISM CHALLENGED

Christian history encapsulates the struggle of God's people to transcend the snares of false religions and philosophies. That struggle still exists today and syncretism continues to be a force separating God's people from God. Each generation is faced with the temptation of syncretism and every syncretic element allowed to creep into Christian practice further dilutes the faith.

One must understand that syncretism can be judged from two perspectives. The one is cultural syncretism where the cultural aspect of a certain religion is linked to cultural aspects of another. The other is where essential aspects of a certain religion are merged

with that of another religion with the consequence that these essential aspects are lost in the merge. This kind of religious syncretism leads to much uncertainty and the loss of religious value.

This kind of religious syncretism is challenged vehemently in the Bible and in the first three of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-7) God warns the Israelites against having alternate gods and practicing idolatry. This is reiterated in many Old Testament references (Num. 12:1-16; Deut. 4:2; Deut. 12:31; Hos. 2:2-13; Zeph. 1:5; 2 Kings 17:33-41). The New Testament also warns against syncretism (John 14:6; Rom. 7:1-25; Gal. 5:1-26).

The Bible is the only measuring rod. Everything needs to be measured by biblical standards to examine its Christian authencity. Van Rheenen (1997:173) states that syncretism is frequently birthed out of a desire to make the gospel relevant. Thus syncretism occurs when Christianity opts for the major cultural assumptions of a society.

Droogers (1989:9-22) defines syncretism as the combination of various forms of religion. It is a thread woven into Christian beliefs and must therefore be challenged and dealt with. Syncretism has been a corrupting issue throughout Christian history and a phenomenon that constantly changes.

We are living in a time of religious tolerance, but Christians must now be exhorted to critique every strange teaching as to whether it is a distortion of the Bible. The course of the last century demonstrates huge shifts and transformations in Christiandom due to the toleration acceded to syncretism.

Pachuau and Jørgensen (2011:20) mention three stages that Christianity has experienced: living with enlightenment, living with modernity, and today with postmodernity.

At the symposium Faith Development in Context, held at Andrews University, Michigan, United States of America, in January 2005, Jon Paulien presented a paper entitled “Dealing with syncretism in insider movements.” In the document, he suggests that “in the

process of conversion syncretism will always occur for a time and syncretism is always the intended consequences of a healthy desire to make the gospel relevant" (2005:4).

What Paulien mentions is so true; the greatest challenge for the gospel today is to make it relevant by applying our thoughts and blending them with Scripture.

According to Kraft (2005:361), converts to Christianity do not receive the spiritual power they seek in terms of healings, blessings, guidance, and deliverance in the Christian denomination or sect into which they have converted and thus are bound to continue their pre-conversion habits of visiting shamans, priests, diviners, temples, shrines, and other forms of spiritual empowerment. They may become truly committed devotees of Christ on Sundays or Saturdays, while on Monday they again visit the shaman, since there was no healing in church and the hospital queue is too long or treatment too expensive.

David Lindenfeld and Miles Richardson (2012) cite Charles Stewart who argues that, of all these terms, "syncretism" is the most serviceable and deserves to be used generally for such intermixing. Stewart bases his argument on the common-sense attitude that no culture is an island and borrowing and mixing are the historical norms. The individual practice of syncretism may be conscious or unconscious. Irrespective of the mode of syncretism, newly converted Christians often return to traditional practices in times of crises. Syncretism is sometimes positively evaluated, but this must be scrutinised. Challenges that can be established are the following:

Women are taught to be more loyal to their leaders than to their own husband, which contradicts the scriptural "Wives [should] submit to your own husbands" (Eph. 5:22, NIV). They propagate that Christians should not reject the intermediaries of their tradition, who serve as mediators between them and God. They demand loyalty from their members, which in practice means unquestioning devotion to the leader. They are characterized by immorality and covetousness and the leader often talks more about what the devil is doing, than what God is doing. Their prayers commonly involve making prophetic declarations. The greatest element of Christianity, such as "Christ the Saviour and Redeemer of our sins" is undermined.

Members are at the complete mercy of their anointed leaders. This is a big problem to believers who have not learned sound doctrine. The leaders are not open to correction. After Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven, the gospel he entrusted to the church was soon corrupted. In Galatians, Paul expresses amazement that the distortion of the gospel had taken place so quickly. He also expresses anger that false teachers in the church were hindering the gospel (Ga. 5:7-12).

It is on this practical foundation that this researcher based his intention to evaluate whether there was a need to eradicate syncretism in evangelical churches and to return to a pure biblical Christianity. Effective propagation of the gospel demands consideration of the worldview that is prevailing in a particular community. Pastors need to be informed and equipped to handle influential philosophies and ideas that contradict the Bible and affect their community–philosophies, such as modernism, postmodernism, and pluralism, as well as African traditional religion. Christian leaders should always insist on the traditional Christian doctrines in the authority of Scripture. Most converts into cult movements are results of the experience of being a part of God's inner circle.

Hannah (2001:38) points out the meaning of the term "evangelicalism", as used of a branch of Christendom, the term refers to: "the embracing of conservative perspectives on such doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the inability of humankind to merit salvation, substitutionary atonement, and salvation by grace alone. At the core of the movement are a set of religious values that centre on the necessity of personal conversion and the spreading of the gospel".

A category of the literature on syncretism explores its contexts and practices and presents strategies for combating its occurrences in churches. It needs to be said how we interact with the different categories of literature on the topic. The review of this category essentially covers the research problem, albeit not in the specific context of the Soshanguve township. In exploring the variety of perspectives on the subject, other research findings in the literature were revealed.

The focus of discussion is the circle of mission praxis, which has been approached by various authors who have presented a variety of facets of the subject.

The majority of African Christian theologians struggle to provide evidence that specific African practices contradict the Bible. Several examples of these are next examined and the biblical refutations supplied.

2.6 CONVERSION AND SYNCRETISM

Paulien (2005:13) asserts:

> Conversion is always a process, and in that process, people move from holding beliefs and practices that oppose biblical principles, to a blend of old and new, then as the Word of God continues to impact their value system, they move closer and closer to having a biblically shaped worldview and value system. In the process of conversion, there is the danger of syncretism, the blending of truth and error. The important thing is that people continue to allow the Word of God to shape and direct them in the process. Syncretism can be minimised by engaging in good biblical teaching.
>
> To preach on the activities, events and the impact of the life of Jesus Christ seems politically incorrect and intolerable to many. To discuss Christ these days may lead to accusations of arrogance and narrow mindedness. Therefore, the church wants to present the gospel without alienation any group.

Another author of interest in syncretism is Newbigin, who traces historical developments of true Christianity and analyses its impact and uniqueness in comparison with other religions of the world. She spent a large part of her life as a missionary in India and writes:

> The church has relegated to the private sphere that we as Christians in the West have compartmentalized our lives.
>
> The church should steer clear of this perennial heresy which is really a form of Gnosticism. If the church continues to practice this dualism, then she will surely lose her saltiness to combat the danger of option then the

> church must examine whether she has capitulated to dualism of faith and reason. If the church does not humbly undergo this reflection and self-examination, then she would be embodying a faith much like that of Hinduism than Biblical Christianity (Newbegin 1994:67).

The shift in focus of Christianity to materialism is noted in a book by Enzeweke and Madu: “Most of the new religious movement have been established from purely economic reasons” (Enzeweke & Madu 2006).

The church needs to be careful not to accommodate the worldview of its area of ministry. The church needs to discern every root of syncretism.

Van Rheenen observes that:

> Syncretism frequently begins apologetically, the Christian community attempts to make its message and life attractive, alluring and appealing to those outside the fellowship. Over the years the accommodations become routinized, integrated into the narrative story of the Christian community and inseparable from its life. Syncretism thus occurs when Christianity opts into the major cultural assumptions of its society. (Van Rheenen 1997:173)

Syncretic religion implies following the practices of two separate and opposing systems, which are based on conflicting beliefs. Kraft maintains that a large percentage of Christians worldwide maintain a dual allegiance of one sort or another (Kraft 1989:361). This observation of Kraft is exemplified by the practice of syncretism in the evangelical churches of the Soshanguve township.

2.7 BIBLICAL THEOLOGY ON DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

A true prophet is the spokesperson of God, commissioned by God to relate his message to Mankind. Jesus warned in Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets which come in sheep’s clothing, yet inside they are ravenous wolves” (NIV). The warning is applicable to all who use their power and influence to lead followers of Christ away from the Word

of God. The Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and the Book of the Revelation are filled with examples of false prophets. The image represented in Revelation 13:11 of “the beast with two horns like a lamb but a speech like a dragon” (NIV) reminds us of the close resemblance of what Jesus mentioned in Matthew 7:15. The warning of Jesus against false prophets is as relevant today, as it was then.

In Matthew 7:16-20 Jesus continues to show how the false prophet can be recognized:

> By their fruits, you will recognize them. Grapes are not picked from thorns, or figs from thistles, are they? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the sickly tree bears worthless fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear worthless fruit, but the sickly tree bears worthless fruit. Every tree that does not yield good fruit, is cut down and thrown into the fire, therefore, by their fruit you will recognize them (NIV). Good fruit is indicative of a healthy tree, while an unhealthy one bears a worthless crop. A false prophet may temporarily be able to deceive his followers with his smooth delivery of words and showy deeds, though sooner or later his true character will be revealed. To drive the point home, Jesus repeats the critical line; “By their fruit you will recognize them" (verses 16 and 20, NIV).

Hagner (1993:184) explains it well:

> These false prophets, as they are here called, can undermine the true flock if they are followed. The ultimate test of truth is in what these people do, not what they say. For what they do inescapably betrays their character and points to the judgment that awaits them.

Further into the Gospel of Matthew, the author again quotes Jesus similarly: “For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect if that were possible" (Matt. 24:24, NIV).

The apostle Paul also attests to this by saying:

> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as

> apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve (2 Cor. 11:12-15, NIV).

Paul in the book of Thessalonians says:

> The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thes. 2:9-12, NIV).

These predators were more dangerous because they had infiltrated the Christian community and were doing their damage from within. Through their false teaching, they were attempting to lure sheep from the flock so as to prey upon them in isolation. The churches in Rome, Corinth, Colossae, Thessalonica, Philippi, Crete, and the Diaspora all show additional evidence of a struggle with false doctrines, which, sadly, did not end with the writing of the New Testament. History attests to numerous alternative gospels, which found their market among the followers of the church. The true gospel of Jesus Christ has always had to compete with false doctrine for the hearts and minds of believers.

The miracles of the Old Testament were sometimes performed by the enemies of God through sorcery and witchcraft.

Thus, Brown concluded: “The history of theology is in large part a history of heresies” (Brown 1984: xxiii).

In other words, the struggle between heresy and orthodoxy has taken place in every century of church history. Each new generation of church leadership has had to “exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict (Tit. 1:9). Heresies succeed on the basis that they are presented as the real thing and the magnitude of their threat to the

church is relative to the degree to which they feign orthodoxy. It is not the brazen lie that is most dangerous, for it is easily recognisable. A half-truth is far more damaging.

It is the performance of miracles by false prophets that draws people to churches in large numbers and the answer to this can only lie in the fact that such church leaders are drawing on the powers of darkness to perform these miracles. Paul labelled these as counterfeit miracles, which demonstrates why theological epistemology is so fundamental and must be scripturally based rather than purely empirical evidence. Syncretism is applicable to African theology, but equally so to Western theology that neglects the biblical truths.

Walter Martin examined the gospel mimicry by specific cults:

> The student of cultism then must be prepared to scale the language barrier of terminology. First, he must recognize that it does exist, and second, he must acknowledge the very real fact that unless terms are defined, the semantic jungle which the cults have created will envelop him, making it difficult, if not impossible, to draw a proper contrast between the teachings of the cults and those of orthodox Christianity (Martin 1977:18).

Those who caution regarding teachings against the Word of God, such as the Bereans, were labelled fault finders and accusers of the brethren. In Acts 17:11 Paul declares: “Now these Jews were nobler than those in Thessalonica; they received the Word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (NIV).

A central teaching of Scripture is that Christians are not to worship just any god but the true God. For God says:

> You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God I am a jealous God. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third

> and fourth generation of those who hate me. But showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments (Ex. 20:3-6, ESV).

African Christians need to commit to the Christian faith in their Africaness. Khathide notes: "The challenge of the African is to follow Christ in His call to discipleship, thus forsaking everything that is contrary to biblical revelation and yet, not losing the identity of Africans" (Khathide 2000:5)

2.8 HERMENEUTICAL EVALUATION

2.8.1 Jeroboam sins

Solomon, the son of David, died after ruling Israel for forty years. Rehoboam, his son, succeeded him. The people were very happy to hear that Rehoboam would become their new king yet demanded that he reduce the burden that his father had placed upon them.

Israel was separated into two nations (1 Kings 11:26-32), the ten northern tribes, known as Israel and the remaining tribes in the south called Judah. Jeroboam ruled over the northern tribes, while Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was king over the two southern tribes. Jeroboam then built a city, Shechem, at Mount Ephraim where he lived, from where he ruled the ten tribes. Jeroboam became unfaithful to God and caused the whole northern kingdom to sin against God.

Nelson (1987:73) explains that the key word in the accusation of the prophet to Israel is that "they have forsaken Him". God had promised not to forsake his people, but they have done so. But the blame lies totally with the people and their kings who have forsaken God.

Jeroboam established a bad trend for his successors and fabricated ways in which he thought his rule could be perpetuated. He set an avenue of worship that was not acceptable to God, instituting golden calves as objects of divine worship (1 Kings 12:28). Ellsworth (2000:129) notes that the golden calves, which were stationed at Bethel in the south (approximately 17,5 km north of Jerusalem), were not intended to replace God, but

to aid his worship. In those days, calves and bulls were used to symbolise power and by constructing two calves, Jeroboam may have thought he was bringing double honour to God by focusing on his power.

However, the calves diminished the very one they were supposed to honour, by obscuring the difference between worshipping God and worshipping Baal, in that the calf was also a symbol of the Canaanite fertility religions. Jeroboam was following the bad example of Aaron (Ex. 32-34). It was announced with the phrase "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4, NIV). The wrath of God was kindled by the syncretism of Aaron and the children of Israel.

Moses took a stand to punish the children of Israel and three thousand were executed by sword, while even more were struck by a plague (Ex. 32:27-30). Thus, God distinguished between those who were really his people and those who merely appeared thus externally. He is intent on having people who are truly committed to Him. Jeroboam revealed his rebellion towards God in the following ways:

- He moved the venue for worship from Jerusalem to the cities of Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12: 27-32).
- He appointed priests who were not from the tribe of Levi (v. 31).
- He moved the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth day of the seventh month, to the fifteenth day of the eighth month (v. 32).

Ellsworth (2000:132) notes that Jeroboam joined Cain and Balaam. One follows (Jude 11) when one elects not to follow God's path to salvation and depends rather on one's own works.

One follows Balaam (2 Pet. 2:15) when one uses one's spiritual gifts for securing material well-being and one takes the path of Jeroboam when one turns a heedless ear to God's revealed truth and chooses to follow idols.

God is not honoured by good intentions or by our personal choices. Obedience to his Word is what pleases Him. The Old Testament story of the life and demise of Saul, the first king of Israel, exemplifies the price of dual allegiance. He visited a medium and

committed to the abomination of divination. According to the text (1 Sam. 28:9), Saul certainly understood the laws of God, but in desperation visited the witch of Endor after a series of wrong decisions proved he had strayed and was unworthy to lead the people God had entrusted to him. As the war between Israel and the Philistines commenced, Saul sought information from an improper source, with full knowledge that, as leader of Yahweh's covenant people, the act was inappropriate.

While the prophet Samuel had already enlightened Saul regarding Yahweh's final decision about his life and his rule, the crisis pushed him to seek help from the witch. His awareness of the sinful nature of the visit is emphasised by his decision to disguise himself and visiting her at night (28:8).The Israelites were forbidden to consult diviners, sorcerers, witches, mediums, and those who consult the dead (Deut. 18:9-14). Death was the punishment for sorcery (Ex. 22:18).

Dale (1988:291) emphasises: "In any case, we remember that the scriptures refer to such practices as pagan, rather than futile. Yahweh forbids Israel to use these means, not because they do not work but because they are wicked." Occult activities were consulted by people for answers that they believed God could not give. However, Satan and demons constitute the source of occult practices.

Tokunboh (2006: 374) states that Samuel Waje Kunyop put it strongly, as he observed the state of witchcraft in Africa:

> Belief in witchcraft is approaching epidemic proportions in Africa. While it is easy to understand how nominal Christians can cling to this deep-seated belief, it is disturbing that it is widespread among Christians too. Christian rituals are sometimes seen as little more than a form of protection against witchcraft. Thus, mothers cover the beds of their children with the blood of Jesus to ward off witches and evil spirits before putting them to bed. It is also poured on roads to ward off the witches who cause accidents. The Bible does not support the doctrine of demons, evil spirits and witchcraft that derive from the traditional beliefs; many professing Christians are unaware of what the Bible teaches about on

> this subject. One reason for this is the tendency to interpret the Bible in terms of established opinions and beliefs.

Saul deliberately goes against God's will:

> Then Samuel said to Saul: "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"
>
> And Saul answered:
>
> I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God had departed from me and answers me no more, either through prophets or by dreams, therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I should do (1 Sam. 28:15, NIV).
>
> The God he knew appeared to be at a distance from him and offering no information. Compromising God's standard creates enmity with God.
>
> And the Lord has done accordingly as He spoke through me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbour, to David. As you did not obey the Lord and did not execute his fierce wrath on Amalek, so the Lord has done this thing to you this day (v. 28:17).

From the time of ancient Israel to the contemporary church, people regularly do what the scriptures prohibit.

2.8.2 Contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:16-45)

The powerful encounter at Mount Carmel was a divine response to syncretism in Israel. The people of Israel had been led by their ruler to worship other gods (Baal and Ashrah), but they had not completely abandoned the worship of Yahweh. Let us try to trace the case of Baal worship. Dale (1988:232) provides an analysis of his observation. Jezebel, the Queen was a worshipper of Baal and Asherah, an evangelist for their cause and, thus, of the people that followed the royal example.

Worshiping Baal was supported by a historical tradition that went back centuries. At the time of Israel's crossing of the Jordan, some people of Israel crossed over and converted to Baal worship (Judg. 2:11-13).

Baal, as god of fertility and storms, represented forces that showed direct relevance, in that they were close to the needs of the people by offering fruitfulness of both land and family. Thus, Baal became associated with the provisioning of grain, oil and wine, as well as the delivery of blessings in terms of healing, raising the dead, heal the sick, and joy in the success and beauty of progeny.

No matter what case is made for Baal by the Canaanite apologetics, Yahweh is the only real God and contests all attributed to Baal. The aim of the contest was to prove to Israel that there was no other god but Yahweh, and to reveal the evil of holding to other gods alongside the worship of the true God who had delivered them from the yoke of slavery and established them as a nation (1 Kings 16:29; 18:16-40).

Gray (1964:358) explains the implications as follows:

> By these words Elijah rallies Israel as the elect and covenanted community and emphasizes the gulf between the historical faith of Israel and the impersonal nature-cult of Canaan, though the whole episode emphasizes the sovereignty of the God of Israel over the forces of nature also.

After the death of Omri, king of Israel, his son Ahab became king and reigned in Samaria for twenty-two years. Under Ahab, Israel rejected God by combining the worship of Yahweh with that of Ashrah and Baal. God sent Elijah, the prophet, to set up a contest between the prophets of Baal and Elijah. The goal was to heal Israel of the disease of unfaithfulness to God. The canonized also testifies to such a period in the life of God's people, when they turned their backs on God and worshipped idols or worshipped both God and their idols (2 Kings 17:41).

The whole Carmel contest highlights the differences between Yahweh and Baal. The biblical writers do not downplay this infamous period in Israel's life.

To describe Israel's religion as one which gradually evolved from polytheism to the worship of Yahweh based on one's interpretation of figurines and inscriptions is uncalled for and has no support from the Bible. Such an interpretation seems to be an attempt to force the modern evolutionary paradigm of the origin and development of religion on Israel's religion.

But, according to scripture, Israel's religion was revealed as a religion from God and has always been monotheistic. Israel was delivered from Egypt where polytheism thrived and the land they were given was also occupied by nations who were idol worshippers. Thus, Israel's revealed monotheistic religion became polluted with syncretism as they sought to become like the other nations around them. The biblical authors present the ideal religious experience expected by God from his people but fail to discuss Israel's inadequacies and the divine provision to save them.

2.8.3 Simon Magus

The magicians who confessed to Christ but did not genuinely repent (Acts 8:4-25). Couch (1999: 265) notes:

> Simon Magus may have become a notorious heretic. His ability to perform miracles was so good that many believed his claim to greatness. This man, who for so long has practiced fakery, now finds a different art form. But the signs and miracles of Phillip far exceed anything Simon had accomplished. Simon Magus wanted to be imparted with the Holy Spirit to perform miracles and to add this spiritual power to his inventory of magic tricks.

MacArthur (1994:240) observes that Simon had an egotistical view of himself. He was led to claim greatness for himself. He saw in Phillip's teaching a means of gaining greatness for himself. Magic referred originally to the lore of the Magi, the priests of the Medo-Persians. The practices included mixing science and superstition that included abilities in astrology, divination and occult practices and additional knowledge in mathematics, history and agriculture. It was either demonic or plain trickery.

Bruce (1986:179) also mentions that Simon Magus had only understood the value of miracles and did not have real faith. He looked at a source of power and had only a superficial and unsatisfactory faith.

The record of conversion appears to portray a different picture, like the narrative of the conversion of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:9-24. In this situation, Simon's conversion appears to be less than genuine as reflected in his yearning to buy the Holy Spirit for his own gain so that he could sell his power and make more money. Simon and his band of followers had been deeply impressed by the power of the acts of the apostles and submitted to baptism, yet Simon's worldview of his own powers was sustained. Before encountering the gospel, Simon was a skilful sorcerer who mesmerised his Samarian audience with his display of magic. When Philip arrived bearing the powerful message of Christ's gospel, the perspective of Simon's audience was changed.

Philip brought joy to the people, casting out demons, producing healings that saw the lame walk again, yet he proclaimed all his achievement was his faith in the Messiah (Acts 8:7-8). As a witness of the power of the Holy Spirit that manifested in Philip's ministry, Simon was intrigued and made an offer to purchase the power he had witnessed, but his offer was rejected.

The Holy Spirit is not a power to be owned or a means to egotistical self-promotion. Simon, despite his great mastery of magic, lacked the insight to understand the distinction between the Holy Spirit and magic. Simon attempted to mix magic, religion, and money to extend his power to be something special to others. Peter pointed out that Simon had failed in the need for humble submission before God and that, although he had been baptized on the basis of his public confession of Jesus as saviour, his unchanged worldview prevented his conversion His commitment was not totally surrendered to Christ. He wished to continue as a sorcerer after his so-called conversion.

Kistemaker (1990:297) comments:

> When he saw both great signs and wonders taking place, he was amazed. After his baptism Simon stays close to Phillip and follows him wherever he goes. The magician had interest in the great signs and

> wonders that was happening. He has never seen anything comparable to what Phillip does. Simon reveals that his interest does not know Jesus Christ but in the divine powers Phillip displays. Like Simon, many people in our day and age that are in the Church for many reasons, other than to accept and follow Christ from a pure heart.

Gallagher and Hertig (2004:108) offer a method for discerning between Christianity and popular forms of magic:

> Christianity focuses purely on the omnipotence of God; popular magic focuses on the talent of the ego and its superiority over others. Christianity advocates prayer as its humble request to Divine power, while magic plans methods to satisfy human needs to perpetuate the egotistic power.
>
> Christianity requires its followers to endure the battle and possible suffering to triumph, that is the cross before resurrection, but popular magic sets out to show pain-free, instantaneous and effortless achievement. Christianity demands genuine commitment on the personal level to humanity, and supplication to God's authority, while popular magic is impersonal, lacks commitment to others and uses human charisma to dominate and exercise power.

2.8.4 Church in Colossae

The church in Colossae had to deal with the doctrinal challenges they faced. In the Epistle of Paul to the people of Colossae, Paul reflected on the manifestation of syncretism within the church. MacArthur (1992a: 8) states:

> "The heresy threatening the Colossian church was a strange mixture of Greek philosophy and Jewish legalism" (Col. 1:21-22, 27; 3:5-7). One of the major sects of first century Judaism was the Essenes, who were strict ascetics. They believed that matter was evil, and spirit was good, thus sharing the incipient Gnostic trait with the Colossian terrorists. They were

> rigid legalists even surpassing the Pharisees in that regard. They worship angels and they were also strict vegetarians. They denied the sufficiency of Christ.

The book of Colossians warns believers against vain philosophy. Believers in Colossians were fighting Gnosticism to keep it from wrecking the church. Gnosticism means “knowledge”. Gnosticism accentuates “knowledge”; it signifies analogies to the problem of syncretism, for the epistle refers to the fact that the false teachers promoted the evidence of knowledge at the expense of faith.

Hendriksen (2004a:19) provides an interpretation:

> It is also known that Gnosticism exalted the spirit and viewed matter as the seal of evil. To some of them this meant that the body should be neglected, that its natural cravings should be suppressed, if one were ever to reach the goal of fullness.

MacArthur (1992:7) adds a general note on ancient Greece:

> The Greeks loved knowledge and prided themselves on the sophistication of their philosophical system. They scorned the gospel message as too simplistic (Cor. 1:22-23).
>
> To them Jesus Christ alone was not adequate. To them salvation involved Christ plus knowledge. They claimed visions they had supposedly seen as the basis of their superior knowledge (Col.2:18, NIV).

Heresy dethrones the person and work of Jesus Christ. Heresy should always be countered with truth. While the Gnostics did incorporate Christ into their system of belief, they were not prepared to move as far as accepting Him as God. Their claim was “Christ is not enough to save” (2:10, NIV). This was the main verse that contradicts error and hinges on the whole book of Colossians. Paul goes after this heresy to expose the error. The best defence against error is to know the truth. The Gnostics acknowledged the need

to believe in Jesus, but not at the expense of sacrificing philosophy. Paul warns the Colossians about heretic teachings in the following verses (Col. 2:8-10).

Colossians 2:8 warns “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy” (NIV). Paul’s argument is not directed only at academic philosophy, but to all who undermine the supremacy of the gospel. He stressed the need to avoid intellectualising and applying logic to Christianity. The heresies referred to in Colossians emphasize that intellectualising and the pursuit of philosophy fall solely into the worldview of men but have no place in Christian faith.

Describing the background, Hendriksen (2004a:16) writes:

> Paganism of almost every well-known variety thrived in this region. Such deities as the Phrygian Cybele Sabazius, Men, Isis and Serapis, Helios and Selene, Demeter and Artemis, were worshipped here.

Hendriksen (2004a:16-19) continues to describe the two main dangers that threatened the young church. Firstly, the danger of relapse into paganism with its gross immorality:

> A careful reading of Colossians 3:5-11 proves that this peril was basic. In general, Colossian church members were only recently converted from their dark sensually based world outlook of heathens.
>
> Satan still lurked threateningly, determined to recapture the sheep who were aware of the light of the shepherd.

Secondly, the danger of accepting the Colossian heresy. What exactly does the so-called “Colossian heresy” have to do with all this?

It was clearly the intention of the teachers of error to show the Colossians how they would be able to triumph over heresy, which qualified as an additional danger and one that would impede outgrowing the first. It may be characterised as follows:

- *False philosophy* (Col. 2:8), which, though claiming to have discovered secrets and to have seen visions, denied all the sufficiency and pre-eminence of Christ. The

sovereign majesty and complete adequacy of Christ as the perfect Saviour and Lord is stressed in the following passages: 1:13-20; 1:27-28; 2:8-19; 3:1-4.

- *Angel worship* (Col.1:16; 2:15; 2:18), which also would detract from the uniqueness of Christ, as if He were insufficient for complete salvation.
- *Asceticism (Col. 2:20-23), which, in its unsparing treatment of the body, went* beyond Judaism. The apostle Paul exposes its utter futility and points to Christ asthe real answer to the problem of doctrine and life that vexed the Colossians (Col. 2:20-23 contrast 3:1-4).

Paul brought a message that opposed the heresy that existed in Colossae. He saw that the intellectual approach to philosophy negated absolute faith in God. However, he was not attempting to degrade the knowledge of science but was opposed to a philosophy based on the egotism of the isolating argumentation and debate that characterised Gnosticism and lacked any spiritual soundness. The Bible has never promoted ignorance; Christians should be studious and acquire knowledge in order to be able to effectively defend the gospel truth.

Warren Wiersbe asserts: “The false teachers did not go out and win the lost, no more than the cultist today.

They kidnapped converts from churches" (Wiersbe 2001:125). It is ignorance of the truth that enslaves people to false teaching.

The Gnostics maintained that their teachings came directly from the mouth of Jesus Christ, but additionally claimed that their tradition of philosophic argumentation and logic offered a revelation unavailable to other Christians. This has no basis in the scriptures. The Gnostics taught that angels existed to mediate between God and man. Again, this contradicts Scripture. The intellectual traditions of man can offer no competition to scriptural authority.

Jesus Christ alone has the power to deliver us from evil. Cults that cannot accept the scriptural teachings of Christ are heretical. In Colossae, there existed among both the Jews and Gentiles, those who questioned Christian salvation and the absolute pre-eminence of Christ. In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul attests that “For there is one God and one

mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." MacArthur (1995:71) comments on the heresy:

> Christ is the only mediator; all must come to God through Him (Acts 4:12). There is not an endless series of aeons, or sub-gods, as the Gnostics taught. We do not approach God through the intercession of angels, saints or Mary.

"For in Christ all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form" (2:9, NIV). This text emphasises that Christ represents the physical incarnation of God. The deity adopted the human form in the body of Jesus Christ. The Gnostics failed to accept this humanity of Jesus Christ, conceiving of the Christ as possessing a ghostlike form and not a real body. In their philosophical system, the physical matter, of which the human body consisted, was evil. Colossians adhered to the docetic theory that Christ was only apparent and not actually in the physical body. Had he had a real body, he would qualify as evil, the way Colossians considered mankind.

However, Paul argued; "The Deity lives in bodily form."

By incarnating, Christ became a man, fully tangible and accessible to us. Paul rejected the doctrine of the Gnostics that physical matter was inherently evil and, thus, Jesus Christ could never have had a human body. His ascension into heaven was in his human body.

Christ presides over all spirit beings. As Christians, it is our relationship with Christ that enables us to receive his fullness, although we cannot participate in all deity as specific attributes, such as omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and infinity, which are non-transferable. Alternatively, for attributes such as love and light, and eternal mercy, grace and peace, Christians do not need supplementary inputs, such as truths, alternative philosophies and novel revelations. Christians have Christ that is everything we need. The Apostle Paul clarifies that Jesus Christ surpasses every creature and spirit.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him, who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these He has

given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them, you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3-4, NIV).

Hillyer (1992:161-162) comments:

> All that is needed for the believer to live the life that God intends is available in Christ. The call of Christ is initially to personal faith in Him, but it is a call repeated all through the believer's life, a call to a deeper and richer understanding of the person of Christ and of his demands for spiritual growth and service.

Arnold (1985:236-238) notes characteristics of syncretism in Colossae:

There was a tendency towards henotheism: a trend in Roman Asia minor during the imperial period to ascribe supremacy to a deity in a polytheistic environment. Zeus and Men Tyrannous were two of the deities lifted up above the rest. Another feature was an emphasis on divine intermediaries, in addition to believing in the one supreme deity.

There was strong belief in dangerous spirits and powers–*deisidemonia*. These were malevolent gods and goddess, spirits, and daimones the Colossians so dreaded and sought several ways to appease. There was also the belief in the existence of various supernatural beings that could be called upon to effect curses on agriculture, crossroads, many forms of life including spirits and ancestors and, ultimately, the dead who haunted humans and could wreak terror. Even those who are thought to be benevolent and charitable could be offended by improper or inadequate worship. There was an appeal to intermediaries for protection and deliverance (Col 1:16; 2:10, 15).

Magic played a prominent role in daily Colossian life.

There were ecstatic forms of worship, including the local belief in the "Lydian Phrygian spirit", which provided the best framework for understanding and interpreting the "Colossian philosophy." This also helps to explain the Colossian syncretism that mixed the prevailing local religious impulses with Christian beliefs and practices (Arnold 1985:236-238).

According to the Colossian belief system, Christ was not sufficient; there should be something to supplement Him. They felt the need to acquire additional protection from demons through mechanisms that they were familiar with from the surrounding old religions.

Wiersbe (2001:105) asserts:

> Many Bible scholars have concluded that Colossians is the most profound letter Paul ever wrote. The church today desperately needs the message of Colossians. We live in a day when religious toleration is interpreted to mean ‘one religion is just as good as another. Syncretism poses a major threat to the life of the Church. There are constant attempts to incorporate, harmonise, and unite alternative schools of thought and practices of worship to "improve" Christianity.
>
> Evangelical churches are diluting the faith and bending over backwards to display tolerance to the beliefs or practices of others. While they do not deny the existence of Christ, he has been partially disempowered and robbed. Having reviewed the syncretism of the Colossians, Paul’s warnings should be repeatedly reiterated and contemplated:

Lest any man should beguile you (Col. 2:4, NIV), Lest any man spoil you (Col. 2:8, NIV), Let no man therefore judge you (Col. 2:16, NIV)!

In writing his epistles to the Colossians, Paul’s overwhelming intention was that the people of Colossae, and the Christians who followed, would learn to accept that Christ has “come to have first place in everything” (1:18). The Bible challenges the worldviews that people cling to. It is by revealing the Christian viewpoint as “the truth” and “the light” that we can expose viewpoints that contradict the Bible as “darkness.” The term light speaks for itself as light dispels darkness; the truth of God’s Word transforms false belief.

God has granted us the Bible and the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds. We need to challenge the idols of our own age and cultures and prevent any practices and beliefs that compromise Christ, Christianity and Christian lives. The syncretism of false

doctrine began to manifest in Christianity shortly after the ascension of Jesus Christ and nothing has changed. It remains as serious a problem currently as it was, even among the people of Israel during the time of the Old Testament. When believers study the Bible, they grow their biblical worldview.

The new religious system of a materialistic gospel preached by men and women has contributed much to syncretism, and blended and diluted the message of the gospel.

Every Christian congregation needs to be reminded that the church is given the responsibility of spreading the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ with clarity and simplicity.

2.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the literature relevant to the parameters of the study, initially defining the term syncretism in terms of the Old and New Testament practices in relation to what we experience currently in modern-day Christianity.

Close attention was paid to the definition of syncretism and the need to confront the syncretism practiced in the Soshanguve township. Syncretism is not compatible with true Christianity; it centres around man and contradicts biblical standards. From the start, Scripture is clear about what constitutes true Christianity. Syncretism is denounced and condemned by God, since it conflicts with the first and second commandments in Exodus 20:1-5.

From Genesis to Revelation, God requires emphatically that people preserve themselves and the teachings of the Bible as pure. The church must maintain a clear and undivided allegiance to Jesus Christ, even in the face of syncretism, which has been a negative thread, running throughout the history of Christianity.

The Bible warns of false prophets and that alternative gospels will lead many astray (2 Cor. 11:3-4). Kraemer (1956:397) sums up this topic wisely when he says, “Christianity may adapt to various cultures, but Christianity retains an uncompromising intimacy.” The doctrine of the Bible is being undermined by burgeoning gospel trends. Syncretism changes the gospel and its message. The Christian tenets should remain as God

intended them in Christ Jesus. Jesus answered; “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). There is only one way to know God and that is through Jesus Christ. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with your entire mind” (Deut. 6:5).There is only one way the Bible acknowledges to approach God and that is through Jesus Christ. Syncretism accepts many views of God. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV).

It is easy to see how syncretism undermines the very foundation of the Christian faith. Religious syncretism is not compatible with true Christianity. The Bible condemns the following of other gods. “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:1-2). The Life Applications Study Bible comments beautifully on this passage:

> The Israelites had just come from Egypt a land of many idols and many gods. Because each god represented a different aspect of life, it was common to worship many gods in order to get maximum number of blessings. When God told his people to worship and believe in Him that were not so hard to them, he was just one more god to add to the list. However, when he said; “You shall have no other gods before me,” that was difficult for the people to accept.
>
> But if they didn’t learn that the God who led them out of Egypt was the only true God, they could not be his people, no matter how they kept the other nine commandments. Thus, God made this his first commandment. Today we can allow many things to become gods to us. Money, fame, work, and pleasure can all become gods when we concentrate too much on them for personal identity (Life Applications Study Bible 2005:126 footnotes).

In closure, the researcher has observed that, because of churches breaking away from one another and forming new congregations due to disagreements in leadership, doctrine

and the mishandling of finances, the door was left wide open for an onslaught of syncretism in evangelical churches.

CHAPTER 3 DATA COLLECTION (FIELD RESEARCH): Identifying the presence of syncretism in the studied churches

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the processes involved in the collection of field data. It includes the purposive selection of participants who were best able to provide appropriate data for analysis, the step-by step procedures involved in the choice of willing participants, and a description of the interview process. The empirical perspective constitutes a fundamental component of the research structure.

Empirical research is founded on experiment and observation rather than theory. The process compares and evaluates options, which may establish that an alternative offers a preferred solution to what has been empirically observed as an undesirable occurrence in a specific context. The undesirable situation, in the context of this study syncretism in Tshwane township churches, thus, compelled the researcher to seek a desirable and reasonable solution.

The empirical component of this research includes both inductive and deductive logical processes. Inductive refers to the formulation of a premise or hypothesis and deductive to drawing conclusions from a hypothesis in the form of testable predictions (Heitlink 1999:231). The test will offer alternative solutions to the problem that may have been experienced through observing the environment and, consequently, guided the researcher to the formulation of the hypothesis.

The empirical research of this thesis was directed to a problematic situation, defined in the previous chapter as syncretism, that has arisen within Christian churches, due to the mixing of standard Christian doctrine and practice with unbiblical practices. The outcome of syncretism manifests as a deviation from the scriptural basis of Christianity. The introduction referred to the challenges of qualitative research. The way in which it was accomplished in this research was explained. Regarding qualitative research, Patton's

(2002) and Babbie's (2017) contributions are extremely valuable. Reference to their contributions are therefore necessary. Patten (2002:217) explains that applied research is valuable: "The purpose of applied research is to contribute knowledge that will help people understand the nature of a problem in order to intervene, thereby allowing human beings to more effectively control their environment."

In this regard qualitative research is of great value. The focus of the study, the questions asked and the units of analysis lead to enhanced development of ideas (2002:228). Sampling should be the valuable way of the research to establish necessary data collection (2002:236). Validity, however, is something that comes from the information riches and not from the sample size (2002:245). In this study the qualitative approach was chosen to highlight the interaction with the challenges in the community.

Babbie (2017:319) explains that qualitative interviews are essentially conversations to establish the views of respondents. Flexibility is of great importance. Listening very carefully and thinking and talking about the subject during the interviews are essential. The interviewer should, however, not be a totally passive receiver. The object is to obtain information (2017:320). What must be kept in mind is that important insights might be gathered, but that in this kind of research, no general conclusions may be made (2017:326).

3.2 EMPIRICAL PHASE OF THE RESEARCH

This stage covers the findings, testing, and evaluation of the hypothesis based on the research problem. The undesirable situation of the thesis is evident in the observations of the evangelical responses towards syncretism. The situation is caused by a lack of understanding of the impact of the practice of syncretism on Christianity. By definition, syncretism is the mixing of Christian doctrine and unbiblical practices and, as such, constitutes an obstacle in the continuation of a biblically pure Christianity.

The questions put to participants in the qualitative interview were designed to establish the reasons for mixing Christian with unbiblical practices. Eight evangelical pastors and two church members participated in the research interview. Their responses to the eight interview questions reflect their understanding of syncretism.

3.3 FINDINGS FROM EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Section A obtains essential demographic information from the participants and section B contains the interview questions.

3.3.1 Personal information

Age of participants

20-40 years of age: 30%
41-60 years of age: 30%
61+ years of age: 40%

Hence, the largest group of respondents (40%) fell into the age category of 61+ years of age; 30% fell into age category 41-60 years of age; and 30% fell into the age category 20-40 years of age.

Gender

Female: 20%
Male: 80%

The above figures show that most of the respondents were male (80%), while females were in the minority (20%).

Educational level:

Diploma: 60%
Degree: 40%

The above figures reveal that most respondents have diplomas (60%). while the remaining 40% have university degrees.

Occupation:

Retired: 40%
Professional: 60%

The above figures show that most respondents (60%) work in a professional capacity, while the remaining 40% are retired.

Church denomination

Evangelical: 60%
Pentecostal: 40%

The figures above show that most of the respondents belong to an evangelical denomination (60%), with the remaining 40% being Pentecostals.

Position at church

Pastors: 60%
Deacons: 20%
Elders: 20%

The above figures reveal that the majority of the respondents are pastors (60%) while the remainder are deacons (20%) or elders (20%).

Marital status

Single: None
Married: 90%
Divorced: 10%

The above figures reveal that the majority of the respondents are married (90%) and the remainder divorced (10%).

3.3.2 Research questions

The interview questions were derived from an initial survey and were intended to explore the responses of the participants in greater detail. The interview was conducted with the researcher establishing a conversational tone and using the inputs and feedback of the interviewees to initiate further questions.

The researcher aimed to interview ten respondents. All were accessible. Leedy and Ormrod's guidelines and suggestions for conducting productive interviews and developing further questions were invaluable (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:148-152) as was material offered by Osmer on probing questions (Osmer 2008:62-64). Probing questions are intended to achieve greater clarification, justification, or relevance, as well as to request examples, expand the narrative, or give a structure to the order of events and detail

3.3.3 Empirical experiences of the spiritual leaders explored in the qualitative data.

Eight pastors and two church members completed the survey. Due to the broad nature of the survey, the researcher used only the portion of the data relevant to completing the research.

As I interacted with each spiritual leader during the interviews, common elements were evident in each individual experience of Christian churches. The outcomes of each leader's additional perspectives and experiences are briefly discussed next.

Summary of respondents' answers to the eight survey questions.

3.3.4 Summary of respondents' answers to the eight survey questions

What do you regard as the most essential aspect of the gospel?

Participant 1: The theology of the church must be clear and documented. Church members must be taught sound theology without compromise.

Participant 2: A proper teaching of the character and the attributes of God, particularly God's holiness, the nature of man and his total depravity is essential. The meaning and the means of salvation plays an important role as the most aspect of the Christian gospel.

Participant 4 indicated agreement with the above-mentioned participants and responded concisely, listing the essential aspects of the Christian gospel as the Virgin birth, the

substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the final judgement.

How does your church relate to these aspects?

Participant 1: We hold to 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith and we teach this to prospective church members. A person cannot be accepted for church membership if he does not subscribe to the 1689 confession of faith.

Participant 2: Our church emphasises aspects of Christian gospel through preaching.

Participant 4: To deny any aspect of Christian gospel is to deny the gospel.

Participant 9: We preach and believe in the aspects of the Christian gospel.

What relations does your church have towards other religious beliefs?

All participants responded by saying that they do not have a relationship with these aspects.

How should the church regard the challenges of other religions?

Participant 1: The church should **firstly** teach their members about the gospel and how to defend it and share it with others.

Participant 2: The church should teach the biblical doctrine and how to apply it to everyday life.

Participant 3: The church should teach members about the challenges that the church is facing today. These are a big threat to the church.

Participant 5: Wrong teaching must be challenged.

Participant 6: We cannot embrace false teaching. *Participant 9:* The challenge of other religions is an opportunity to share the gospel.

Participant 10: Other religions lack the knowledge of Christ, and they need to be evangelised.

How should the church regard the challenges of indigenous culture?

Participant 2: The church should be faithful in gospel proclamation. The church should clearly teach against a culture that undermines the Word of God, by showing from the scriptures how those practices contradict the Bible. Christians should be taught how to be good Christians while maintaining their heritage.

Participant 3: The true church of Jesus Christ needs to set itself apart from such practices and condemn them in truth and love, while continuing to be faithful in preaching the gospel.

Participant 4: The church should engage the indigenous cultures biblically, recognising the legitimacy of cultures in such a way that they are not unbiblical.

Participant 6: When culture clashes with the gospel there should be no compromise.

Participant 8: The church has been given the Bible as the canon. All cultures should submit to the Bible.

Participant 9: The Bible is meant to transform our cultures.

Participant 10: The church must patiently point out the errors of the indigenous culture and any aspect of that culture that contradicts the word of God must be refuted.

How do churches in Soshanguve respond to challenges of mixing Christianity and other beliefs?

Participant 3: Some churches have a lot of compromising taking place for the sake of unity and public display. A majority of the charismatic and Pentecostals go to the extreme in this regard of mixing Christianity with other beliefs.

Participant 4: I have observed two ways in which churches have responded; the first one is assimilation, in which they adopt some of the practices from other religions, for reaching out to other people. Secondly, rejection, based on what the scripture says. Churches should reject mixing Christianity with other beliefs.

Participant 9: We have a crisis in our communities whereby most professing evangelicals have embraced syncretism. There is tolerance of cultural practices and beliefs. Churches are shying away from challenging people to move away from mixing Christianity and other beliefs. In most charismatics in our communities, you will realise that going to church is no different than going to visit a traditional healer. People go to church not to listen God's Word being faithfully preached but for prophesy, healing and to have their imaginary curses revoked. There is a revival of integrating cultural beliefs into Christianity. There are still a few churches that are committed to biblical Christianity. Those are still holding to the truth of the gospel. The biggest challenge is tolerance and failure to speak out against such practices.

Why do some churches accept the mixing of the gospel with other beliefs in their churches?

Participant 3: That is a case of the blind leading the blind; an unregenerate minister leading an unregenerate congregation.

Participant 4: The desire to please people, even if it compromises essential aspects of the gospel. Lack of theological training from the leaders, and a lack of biblical preaching.

Participant 5: Compromise and having a big crowd is regard[ed] as a ministry success.

Participant 6: Faithful Bible preaching will be a remedy to this situation.

Participant 9: The primary reason is a low view of Scripture and a wrong view of God. Mediocre Christianity also led to that: a lack of biblical teaching and Bible studies, poor training of church leaders, biblically unqualified leaders and lack of discipleship. Church numerical growth is also a cause because leaders are not careful to select only people who qualify biblically for membership.

Participant 10: Scripture is not the sole authority, error in doctrine and practice, lack of accountability by church leaders.

Explain how your church would practically respond to the challenges of living in a community with many different world views?

Participant 1: Evangelism is the key factor to bring regeneration.

Participant 2: Teach people to have confidence in the Bible, teach the attributes of God and practical Christian living. The congregation should be taught about the clash between Christianity and culture.

Participant 4: Engage worldviews with the Christian worldview, showing the accuracy of Christianity and the inconsistency of other worldviews. This should be carried out by means of evangelism and apologetic teachings.

Participant 6: Equip people to recognise false teaching and how to recognise them. The danger of overemphasising a cult should be avoided.

Participant 9: Preach the gospel at all times, engage in proper discipleship, reach out to the community, encourage believers to witness, teach believers to be apologetic.

Participant 10: The certainty and unfailing Word of God are the motivating factors.

3.4 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW AND PROBING QUESTIONS

The design of the interview sheet, for this study, gave respondents enough opportunity to reflect, respond and elaborate on the questions asked. During the interview proceedings, the researcher wrote down the responses from participants, adjusting the order and flow of questions. Follow-up questions were asked to ensure that an atmosphere of common understanding was created. The question sheet was divided into two sections.

An important benefit of using the in-depth interview in this study was that it provided the researcher with the opportunity to uncover valuable insights from people directly involved in churches in the study locality. These insights were revealed through the researcher's formulation of follow-up questions probing for greater detail. One disadvantage was that the data was considerably increased, and its analysis was more time-consuming (See for instance, Adér, Mellenberg and Hand, 2008).

In structuring the interviews, the researcher adopted the following seven stages of the in-depth interview, as discussed by Kvale (1996) and cited by Guion, Diehl and McDonald (2011):

Thematising
Designing
Interviewing
Transcribing
Analysing
Verifying
Reporting

Participant 4 was further probed on the following questions:

What are the syncretic practices in the Soshanguve township?

Participant 4 answered: The first syncretic practice that I have observed is the exaltation of the so-called "Man of God". He elaborated:

What I have observed looking at the landscape of Soshanguve and other townships, there is so much attention put on the man of God as the authority, something that is parallel to African traditional religion. He is also regarded as the mediator. Something that is common to African traditional leader. Spiritual warfare is being engaged by applying the blood on everything that seems to be a challenge in their own lives. There is no situation where biblical counselling is being involved. This leads on shifting blame to situations rather than confronting issues.

Deliverance: The way they approach deliverance is not biblical, but more animistic. They believe that everything has a spirit. They shift the blame to demons, and they will use tangible things like water and oil.

Miracle: What they see as a miracle is not what the Bible teaches. There is a lot of miracle-faking, compared to what Jesus and the Apostles were doing. The miracles of Jesus were literal and evident.

Prophecy: Modern prophecy is more on fortune-telling than the biblical descriptions of prophecy. It is more on telling how God has a plan to bless you. And it has nothing to do with sinful lifestyle. Biblical prophecy was more on calling the nation to come back to God.

The researcher continued to probe the participant on the gift of prophecy. He questioned the respondent on the similarities and differences of the AIC and Pentecostal conception of prophecy.

Participant 4 responded: Prophecy in both churches function in the same way in the AIC as it does in the Pentecostal churches. They believe it is the same spirit who works in their churches. They share the same philosophy but use different terminology. He stated that an AIC prophet would say: “There is a *tokoloshi* which troubles you at night”, while an APC prophet would say, “You have a spiritual husband”.

He continued to postulate that the only difference between AIC prophesy and Pentecostals is that the Pentecostals shout 'fire' when they prophesy.

Is there a spirit of ecumenism among the Soshanguve evangelical, AIC and APC groups?

The question was formulated as a basis for assessing whether any possibility exists that the evangelical churches, AIC and APC can draw closer, to serve God and the community together.

Participant 1: It will not be possible for the three groups to merge because the evangelicals believe in the authority of the Bible alone while the other two believe in feelings and experience.

The researcher then asked:

When you consider how the gospel is distorted, is there a passage that sticks out in your mind?

Several passages were mentioned by individual respondents, including 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 1 Corinthians 9:6; Romans 1:14-16; Romans 10:14-15; Jeremiah 23:1; Jeremiah 14:14;

Ezekiel 34:2. The only passage mentioned by more than one respondent was Matthew 7:15-23 which reads as follows:

“Not everyone who say to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (v. 21).

“On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” (v. 22).

“And then will I declare to them, ‘Never knew you, depart from me your workers of lawlessness’” (v. 23).

The mini survey used in interviewing both pastors and members is included as Annexure A of this thesis.

3.4.1 Experience of syncretism

In the Soshanguve township, far more Christians are members of churches with African roots, than of those emanating from Western roots. Even those formerly described as evangelical churches are now adapting to the Pentecostal style of worship. Welbourn and Ogot (1996) note: “Pentecostalism has provided for African Christians with a place to be at home”.

As the researcher has always believed, the face of Christianity across the entire African continent is Pentecostalism, which is reflected in the current practices in Soshanguve.

Most of the dominant African Independent Churches can trace their roots back to the Pentecostal movement. These include the Zion Christian Church (ZCC, Bishop Lekganyane), St John Apostolic Church (Bishop Masango) International Pentecostal Church (IPCC) (Bishop Modise), and Tyranus (Bishop Mokoena). The churches mentioned above are mainly Pentecostal in practice and their members constitute the majority of Christians in Soshanguve. Anderson (1992:2-6) described African Pentecostal churches as “one of the dominant expressions of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa".

The term African Pentecostal covers three separate Christian groups:

(i) Pentecostal mission churches founded through white Pentecostal missions, but with a largely black membership;

(ii) more recently constituted African Pentecostal or Charismatic churches, similar in practice to Pentecostal mission churches, but established and run by blacks, with no dependency on white Pentecostal authority; and

(iii) the greater majority of Southern African AICs related to the Pentecostal movement, which include the Zionist and Apostolic churches (Anderson 1992b:2-6). In his journal, Anderson states that approximately 30% of the total population of South Africa belongs to either the African Zionist or Apostolic churches (Anderson 2005:68). The spirituality of Pentecostalism aligns with the traditional African worldview.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter covered the researcher's examination of the concept of syncretism in the Soshanguve township churches, based on the understanding and experience of the purposively selected study participants. Syncretism in the Tshwane churches focuses on healing the sick and protecting followers from misfortune. The chapter also considered the idea of ecumenism, in terms of many doctrines that are propagated in the Tshwane churches. The evangelical leaders indicated the biblical impossibility of conforming to non-biblical standards of the world and the failure to conform to scriptural standards.

An analysis of these churches proceeds in Chapter 4 beyond a mere diagnosis of external symptoms to establish the root causes. Only then can effective strategies be proposed to eradicate the heresy of syncretism.

CHAPTER 4 REVIEW, EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS OF ELEMENTS OF SYNCRETISM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and interpret the aspects of syncretism within the parameters of the empirical qualitative data collected by the researcher as presented in the previous chapter. This chapter and the following chapter are pivotal in the structure of the thesis as they review, analyse and evaluate the challenges posed by syncretism from a biblical viewpoint to suggest solutions for churches in the Soshanguve township. The researcher phrased the survey questions carefully to avoid unduly influencing the responses of participants. The first technique employed was analysing and interpreting the information from the participants.

Data obtained from the participants was analysed step-by-step, proceeding with due consideration. This was followed by an interpretive step, after which the implementation commenced. Key issues drawn from the data are discussed in the following sections.

4.2 BIBLICAL LITERACY

The researcher observed that the failure to adopt a biblical teaching method that instils confidence in the gospel is a fundamental driver of syncretism. It was noted that church leaders have not presented the gospel of Christ in a manner that enables followers to maintain confidence in the underlying teachings during times of crises in their life. This failure leaves followers dependent upon their pastors when crises arise. Many aspects of hermeneutics are important to establish acceptable biblical principles for godly life. Many different views exist, but it is beneficial to honour principles that regard Scripture as the sole authority regarding the issues at hand, as non-negotiable.

4.3 EXAMPLES OF SYNCRETISM PRACTICED IN THE SOSHANGUVE TOWNSHIP

The examples of syncretism observed that have been incorporated into church practice range from Western materialistic values and behavioural patterns to African animistic

beliefs. Wherever the church exists, syncretism of some form can be observed. As Scott Moreau affirms “Syncretism or dual allegiance is unavoidable in any fluid situation” (Moreau 2000b:924).

4.3.1 Pentecostalism

Not all forms of Pentecostalism are syncretistic, but there are some forms that show such signs. There are two streams of Pentecostalism, namely classical Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism**.**

4.3.1.1 Classical Pentecostalism

Charles Parham (1873:1929) is the Pentecostal pioneer who formulated classical Pentecostal theology (Goff 1988:660). He was converted and became active in a Congregational Church. In 1893, three years after enrolling at South West Kansas College, he abandoned his studies and joined the Methodist church as a supply pastor. He was inspired by the holiness movement with its emphasis on healing and left the Methodist church to establish an independent ministry in 1895. Three years later, he founded the Bethel Healing Home in Topeka, Kansas, for those seeking divine healing. In 1900, he founded a Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. The teaching emphasis was on the standard Holiness “justification by faith, sanctification as a second work of grace, divine healing and the pre-millennial second coming of Christ” (Bartleman 1980:ix).

Synan (1988:220) notes that “the first Pentecostal denominations were formerly Holiness denominations, such as the International Pentecostal Holiness, the Church of God (Cleveland, Ohio) and the Church of God in Christ.” As the Pentecostal movement spread, other Pentecostal churches were established.

By the end of Wold War II, the three largest Pentecostal churches were the Assemblies of God, the Church of God (Cleveland) and the Pentecostal Holiness Church. These classical Pentecostal churches, which originated in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, are now “the largest family of Protestant Christians in the world” (Synan 1988:220).

4.3.1.2 Neo-Pentecostalism

Khanyile (2016:15) asserts:

> Neo-Pentecostalism idolizes the miraculous, healing, deliverance, success, enactment of bizarre church performance often performed by the charismatic and highly influential spiritual leaders. Neo Pentecostals are new Pentecostal in orientation because they are said to be Trans denominational (not bound by denomination), socially relevant, unorthodoxy, non-dogmatic and cosmopolitan as compared to their classical Pentecostal forerunners. Neo Pentecostalism reflect a popularized rendition of Christianity that provide for the disgruntled third world people through provision of psychological and practical aids the movement helps people survive both socially psychologically. Neo-Pentecostalism provides participation support, emotional relief and sense of belonging.

The researcher also noted the following practices of Neo-Pentecostalism as he engaged with churches in the township of Soshanguve.

4.3.1.2.1 Elevation of spiritual leaders

Some congregants elevate their spiritual leaders to a very high position. They consult one-on-one by appointment, seeking deliverance from bad luck, unemployment, childlessness, failure to attract a marriage partner, etc. A prophetic utterance explains the meaning of the follower's misfortune.

James warns against human elevation: “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because he who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1, NIV). Wiersbe: (2001:358) notes: “Everybody in the assembly wanted to teach and be spiritual leaders, for James had to warn them. They were impressed with the authority and prestige of the office and forgot about the tremendous responsibility and accountability.”

4.3.1.2.2 Holy water oil and charms

Some people believe that holy water oil and charms provide prosperity or protection. This is a big trend in some churches in the Soshanguve township and comes at a financial cost to the congregant seeking help. There is a connection with these views and Traditional African Religion.

Mbiti (1971:98-99) notes:

> But others believe and acknowledge that the objects, in themselves, have no inherent power as such. Instead the objects represent and symbolise power from God. This power may be directly supplied by God or through the spirits, the living dead or as part of the invisible force of nature in the universe. These objects can also lose their effectiveness, and the owner must get new ones or, if possible, get the old objects charged, like a car battery. At this point, religion and magic merge and there is no way of separating them. Some individuals spent a great deal of wealth and effort to obtain this type of magical protection and prosperity.

4.3.1.2.3 Financial contributions for prayers

People sometimes pay huge sums of money just to sit and share their problems with a prophet for prayer, which is called "*one-on-one."*

Paul lists the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 as "not a lover of money." Wiersbe (2001:220) mentions that "It is possible to use ministry as the easy way to make money, if a man has no conscience or integrity."

Covetous pastors always have "deals" going on outside their churches, and these activities erode their character and hinder their ministry." Love of money was a serious problem in the church in Paul's day, and remains so in ours. Paul writes: "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction" (1Tim. 6:9, NIV).

Loving money is destructive. Paul continues in 1 Timothy 6:10 (NIV) "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered

away from faith and pierced themselves with many pangs". If a person is a lover of money, it is difficult for him to be a lover of God. Jesus also attested in Matthew 6:24 (NIV) that "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money".

The qualification in Titus differs in tone from his description in 1 Timothy. With regard to the Apostle Paul's wording in Titus 1:7 (NIV), he states that an elder must not be "greedy for gain". A greedy person is never content with God's provision, but is constantly seeking ways to acquire more money, often in ways that are immoral and unethical. In 2 Corinthians, Paul warns of some ministers who peddle the Word of God for money (2 Cor. 2:17; Titus 1:11).

Likewise, 1 Peter 5:2 (NIV) states: "elders must shepherd the flock of God not for shameful gain". There is further admonition to "keep your life out of the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you "(Heb. 13:5, NIV).

Elders should be free from the love and controlling influence of money. A pastor should not have unchecked control over the funds of the church. Elders must be accountable to one another and to the congregation. "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5, NIV).

As Anyabwile (2012:92) comments:

> Does the prospective elder show more regard for money than for people? If he had to decide between serving people (even at the great cost) and protecting the church financially, which would he choose? Is he the kind of man who would rather be broke and serve the poor or wealthy while surrounded by the hungry?

What Anyabwile refers to in these questions contrasts with what is happening in some aspects in the Soshanguve township. Some pastors are in the ministry for self-enrichment

and to boost their own egos. The church needs to return to the counsel of Paul and Jesus, as summarised in the above-mentioned verses from Scripture.

4.3.1.2.4 Churches are being turned into entertainment

The focus of the church has also sometimes turned to entertainment rather than to worshipping the true and living God. New religions have been initiated, which are no longer Christian. In place of gospel preaching, this "new-and-improved" variety of Christianity substitutes amusements. Believers are called to worship God in Spirit and in truth. “Worship is the activity of glorifying God in His presence with our voices and hearts. Worship is something we do when we come into the presence of God, when we are conscious of the adoration of Him in our hearts, and when we praise Him with our voices and speak about Him, so others may hear” (Grudem 1994:1003).

Everything that we do at the church should focus on worshiping God, not the self, because in our worship God is mostly concerned about the attitude in our hearts. Jesus taught about the reality of true worship. He told the Samaritan woman (John 4:23-24): “They that worship Him should worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (NIV). Comfort and Hawley (1994:76) explain that:

> True worship operates on a clear and definite knowledge of God derived from his Word, it is the action of the new nature, born from above, seeking more of God.
>
> True worship proceeds from a redeemed heart occupied with God, expressing itself in adoration and thanksgiving, through prayer, singing and meditation. True worship is spiritual, reverential and orderly, occupying the worshiper with God. The result of true worship is a peaceful heart and rejoicing spirit.

Worship in spirit is based upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ (1 John 5:20). Worship is the way in which man gives all his faculties to God and opens his life to all that God can offer him. The purpose of worship is to establish a perfect communion with God. “To worship is to bring our whole being into line with the will and purpose of God and to

be open in every part of our being to the impact of God" (Morrow 1956:9).The great philosophic question through the ages has been: "What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" (Westminster Assembly (1643-1652) 2008:5). When we are aware who God is, we will always seek to worship Him in obedience to his commands. Worship should be the lifestyle of the Christian.

Many churches no longer have prayer meetings and Bible studies. Spiritual fervour is dwindling, and enthusiasm for the gospel is becoming extinct.

Gilley (2005:32) sums up the need to clarify the difference between worship and entertainment:

> To allow ourselves to be pressed into the world's mold of entertainment without careful reflection based on the Bible is a terrible loss. God is not calling his people to a life of grumpiness, but surely, we, like the saints of biblical times, are looking for 'the city, which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God' (Heb. 11:10, NIV). It will shape the way we live and enjoy our time on earth.

4.3.1.2.5 Immoral lifestyle

Another challenge relates to leaders living immoral lives. Attention to the fruit of the Holy Spirit, concentrating on the spectacular gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, is necessarily minimised.

The design of Christianity is intended to change lives. If it does not prove its own efficacy, it must be condemned as an imposture. A servant of the Lord should emanate holiness. While holiness is a subject of permanent importance, it is also of particular relevance at the present time. Holiness refers to "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31).

Paul describes the Christians in Thessalonica as people who turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:9-10, NIV). The Church of Thessalonica was marked with holiness. Pharisees believed that they were

the true teachers of holiness, but their teachings were not in accordance with Scripture, and they heard the startling words from Christ, “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9, NIV).

4.3.1.2.6 Meaningless titles

There are many meaningless titles, such as major prophet, chief bishop, apostle, commander, seer, arch prophet, chief forensic, and deputy of God. One cannot develop true Christianity where Christ is not preached, yet everything revolves around these men and women and their self-made titles that create a feeling of importance.

Jesus offers us a model of servant leadership in Matthew 20:26-28 “Whoever desires to become great among you let him be your servant, and whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave, just as the son of man came to serve and not to be served and give his life a ransom for many” (NIV).

Wiersbe (1989:74) alludes: “The humble person focuses on God and others, not on self”. He has no need to be recognized or approved. The goal of a humble person is to exalt God and encourage others.

Jesus, the Son of man, does not only teach servant leadership, but demonstrates it to his disciples (Donahue & Harrington 2002:313). Pride lies behind every sin and especially behind strife and contention. James states: “But He gives us more grace”. That is why Scripture says: “God oppose the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6, NIV).

A servant leader is not interested in status and titles to impress or treat his followers condescendingly, but rather, focuses on their development and well-being. He values his people, not tangible, material things. A servant leader does not appoint himself. It is a position granted by God. The servant leader is a model of service to others; hence, his position alone is insufficient and must be embodied with character built on love. As a product of the Holy Spirit, the servant leader leads from a base of love (Zohar 2002:120).

4.3.1.2.7 Preoccupation with the devil

Church members exaggerate the presence of demons contrary to biblical revelation. When they speak of the demon of lies, the demon of immorality, and the demon of gossip,

they fail to recognise the individual's responsibility for his sins. Rather than acknowledging the reality of demons, they magnify the work of demons. Demons strike fear in the hearts of some forms of new Pentecostalism, necessitating the casting out of demons from those who are possessed, and from localities. This preoccupation with demons reveals a fundamental insecurity.

Employing experience above the authority of scripture

Froise (2005:141), in his PhD dissertation, observes:

> In our evangelical positions, we are justifiably wary of formulating theology from experience rather than allowing scripture to be the source and authority of our theology. We are quick to criticize those branches of the Christian faith that place more emphases on experience than they do on the Word of God. Two dangers result from allowing experience to formulate theology: one is that Scripture is taken out of context to make it conform to the experience.
>
> The other is that the frustration of not being able to honestly find Scripture to support the experience leads to dismissal of the importance of Scripture, which in turn leads to the acceptance of “a prophetic word” as paramount Scripture to validate practice. Since both Jesus and Paul warned about false prophets with their supernatural powers (Matt. 7:15-23; 1 Thess. 2:9) our caution is justified.
>
> However, we need to be consistent in our application of the rule. In the evangelical circles, we read the New Testament account of casting out demons and miraculous signs, but since we do not see these occurrences in practice in modern times, we have shaped our theology to suit our experience, dismissing almost all supernatural phenomena as belonging only to the New Testament period. Indeed, we minimise as either invalid or significant such miracles as do occur.

We need to be very discerning when it comes to miraculous healing. Satan also has the ability to counterfeit miracles as we see how the Egyptian magicians counterfeited the miracles of Moses (Ex. 7-8).God allowed Moses to perform miracles to convince Pharaoh that indeed he was sent by God to deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of Pharaoh. The first miracle was that of Moses and Aaron throwing the rod and the rod turning into a serpent (Ex. 7:8-13).

Pharaoh immediately summoned his magicians who were also able to perform the same miracle. But Moses' snake devoured the magicians' snakes. Next, was the miracle of the horde of frogs that was sent among the Egyptians, followed by the magicians summoning their own frogs (Ex. 8:1-7). Mackay (2001:138) notes:

> Sorcerers claimed to exert influence by means of spells. The word for 'magicians' seems to be a word from Egypt itself for a magician priest (Gen. 41:8,24). They are not to be thought of as entertainers who by sleight of hand provide a source of amusement. They presented themselves as having access to occult knowledge, particularly that to be found in various secret wirings. Throughout the ancient world, magic was inseparable from religion, and in every court, there would be priest who practised such black arts.

The magicians deceived their audience that they were performing the same miracles as Moses and Aaron. However, they were neither able to perform the miracle of the gnats (Ex. 8:16-19) nor were they able to turn the sky dark (10:21-26). God's power cannot be counterfeited for long and a performer using satanic powers to deceive people is quickly exposed.

The most commonly sought-after demonstrations of magical powers are miracles regarding health, power, material well-being, success in marriage, breaking of generational curses, and destruction of one's enemies, especially witches. There is never any mention of heaven and hell or sin and repentance. Most of the religious movements have been established purely for personal gain. Syncretism taints the message of the

gospel with materialism. These syncretic movements generally appeal to those who are insecure, seriously ill, or poverty stricken.

The tragedy is that both exploiter and exploited are ignorant of the true gospel of Jesus Christ which is the only one that truly offers liberation. People are gullible due to ignorance. Anything which exalts experience, while simultaneously removing someone from the continual and careful authority of Scripture. exposes the individual to future peril. Gilley (2006:43) argues:

> If experience is the chief goal of our spiritual lives, then we should expect that experience would become a chief goal of our public worship as well. Too often the music, the prayers and the sermons are attempts to arouse emotions and provide an experience rather than convey truth.

4.3.1.2.8 Shallow knowledge of scripture

The importance of study is often rejected, claiming that one should depend on the Holy Spirit for teaching. They attack theological colleges which train ministers, because they dispute the need for training. Mockingly, it is said that the “seminaries are cemeteries”.

Resane (2016:5) points out the limited training of Neo-Pentecostal pastors:

> Most of the pastors in Neo-Pentecostalism did not receive a proper training in preparation for a full-time ministry that includes doctrinal values and administrative duties of the pastor in the ministry. A pastor might have a qualification in theology, but it does not mean that they are ready for ministry. Most of the pastors in Neo-Pentecostalism reject such a training, let alone academic activities of the theological field.

Those who aspire to be preachers of God’s Word should desire to study it. The Neo-Pentecostalism movement today fails to challenge the African religious worldview; instead, it has been inculcated into their Christian practices. They have baptised it with Bible verses and certain impressive theological words that are generally abused. The implication of African traditional syncretic gospel is a gospel that has borrowed seriously from African Traditional Religion.

4.3.1.3 Reaching God through intermediaries

African Traditional Religion believes in the existence of God, but it also believes that God can only be reached through intermediaries, such as the spirits of the dead. Mbiti (1976:75-85) records four levels of deities:

> God at the top, followed by his 'associates' (nature spirits), then ordinary spirits, who can 'create or reproduce themselves. Ordinary spirits may include the remains of human beings or animal spirits. At the bottom are the ancestors or living dead, the closest and best of the intermediaries who may act maliciously or benevolently, depending on how well they are treated. The power of the ancestor to bless or punish is derived from God, higher spirits, or from themselves.

Nyirongo (1997:51) notes that

> …the argument put forward by the sympathetic theologians is that because God is so awesome, the African feels unworthy to approach him directly. He must then present his needs and worship through intermediaries. The worship and needs presented are passed on to God and, in turn, God sends his favours via the same intermediaries.

Thorpe (1991:108) attests it well as he states:

> In many aspects the attitude adopted by African people to the Supreme Creator resembles the respect accorded their rulers. Throughout Africa, proper procedure must be observed if a person wishes to address a human ruler. An ordinary person cannot simply enter directly into the presence of a chief or king but can do so only indirectly through approved mediators or councillors. This attitude of respect for authority extends to the spiritual arena as well, so that intermediaries are necessary if one wishes to address divinity. This is particularly true regarding the Superior being who is considered to be behind everything; cattle, animal in general, trees and plant life, as well as human beings.

This is borrowed, and it is now at home among the Neo-Pentecostalism leaders. You cannot access Him easily without a mediator.

Nyirongo (1997:54) observes that

> the word mediator is not commonly used in scripture, but the idea of mediation comes up again and again in the Old and New Testaments. A mediator is a person who comes between two parties to promote relations between them, which the parties themselves are not able to effect.

Christ is the only and best mediator between man and God, because He is sinless, and He was the only sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 7:26). In the Old Testament, the lambs and goats without blemish were a representation of the sinless Christ. The priests who directed worship had to first confess their sins before representing the people. Christ is the only mediator, because his blood takes away sins. In the Old Testament, the blood of animals could only cover sins and sacrifices had to be offered again and again. Christ's blood cleanses our sins once and for all. All Christians are now priests, able to confess their own sins and to present other's needs before the throne of God (Heb. 9:12-29).

Our worship can only be accepted by God if we offer it through Christ–not through ancestors, bishops, prophets, or apostles (John 14:14; Rom. 1:8; 7:25; Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5). Jesus is our High Priest. He has charge over all the affairs of God's Kingdom (John 3:35; Matt. 28:18; Acts 3:36). Nyirongo (1997:51) poses the question Who is the mediator? and answers it beautifully by saying: Christ's atoning work on the cross has bridged the gap between man and God. Both the Old and New Testament saints are included in his atoning work. The enmity that once existed between God and man has now ended.

The letter to the Hebrews reveals the reasons in a nutshell:

- Christ is a better and only mediator because as God, *He is sinless* and therefore the only one qualified to be a sacrifice for our sins (Heb. 7:26).

- Christ is a better and only mediator because *He offered his own precious blood* (Heb. 9:12).
- Christ is a better mediator because his blood *takes away our sins*. (Heb. 9:12,13,14, 23-29).
- Lastly, Christ is a better mediator because, *He is eternal God*. He is a priest forever and ever (Heb. 6:20).

Our devotion, worship or spiritual sacrifices will be accepted by God only if we offer them through Christ–not ancestors, Mary or angels (John 14:14; Rom. 1:8; 7:25; Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15).

In some of these Neo-Pentecostal churches, the bishops, prophets, apostles and others who are at the top of the hierarchy, fulfil the role of mediator. You need to approach them first so that they can usher your prayers to God. This practice is extremely common in the churches in the Soshanguve township.

4.3.1.3.1 Emulating the tendency of witchdoctors

In African Traditional Religion, the role of witchdoctors is to help people having difficult work situations, unemployment, marital issues, and other problems. Witchdoctors are seen to have the power to deal with problems in the spiritual realm and charge a fee for their services. In the African syncretic charismatic churches today, the man of God has replaced the witchdoctor, but also fulfils the same role. Church members no longer want to hear what the Bible says, but rather what the man of God has to say. Breakthrough and deliverance have become the key words of the charismatic movement. The masses love this new trend of Christianity and are flocking to it in great numbers. These churches attract thousands who are purely there for selfish reasons.

Van den Torren (2015:113) also asserts that:

> Deliverance remains central in South African Neo-Pentecostalism; the importance of tongues diminishes in comparison to the ministry of deliverance. Neo-Pentecostalism fits well with the traditional practices of seeing material objects infused with spiritual power, particularly the power

to protect and heal. Neo-Pentecostalism use the power of amulets and fetishes with utter seriousness–and consequently reject them–but also provides alternatives in the form of anointing oil, blessed water, calendars or handkerchiefs.

4.3.2 African Independent Churches

The practice of African Traditional Religion blended with Christianity is more appealing to the people of the Soshanguve township. Despite the poor character of the preachers and the deceptive kind of preaching and teaching that they propagate, people are still flocking to their churches. Some have been robbed of large sums of money by erroneous teachings, but few want the alternative of the gospel truth that will liberate them from such false teachings.

There is a distinction between African Traditional Religion and the African Independent Churches (AIC). African Traditional Religion predates the coming of Christianity to Africa and is characterized by distinctive African “beliefs” which are not based on the Bible, but have been produced by the community. These beliefs are preserved in African myths, songs, and proverbs. The AIC, on the other hand, is a reactionary movement, dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century. While “reactionary”, it nevertheless claims to be “Christian” with some adherence to the Bible.

African Indigenous Churches were established due to umbrage against missionaries and the colonialist system. Africans wanted to reclaim their traditions and heritage from colonialist dominion. This thesis seeks to restore the true Christianity that every nation and culture must submit to.

4.3.2.1 Ethiopian type of African Independent Church

The term Ethiopian was first used in the context of South African churches, on the Witwatersrand in 1892, and was applied to the newly established church founded by Mangena Mokone. Psalm 68:31 and Acts 8:27 were fundamental in the new name and interpreted to mean “the self-government of the African church under African leaders” (Sundkler 1961:39). “It appears that in the Ethiopian Church there is a transfer to the

spiritual and ecclesiastical plane of the opposition to white authority, which could be made effective only by constructing the African communities under African leadership". De Gruchy (1986) notes that in the Ethiopian Church, the outward forms, structure and theology of the parent Church are usually retained to some extent.

The chief motive for separation from the parent church is a racial one (De Gruchy 1986:45).

Sundkler (1961:38) notes that: "before 1892, there were several break-aways from parent churches".

The most notable one in 1882 was led by Nehemiah Tile, one of several ministers in the Methodist Mission Church. Tile was criticised by a European missionary "because of his strong Tembu nationalistic sympathies" and left the church in 1882. Two years later he formed the "Tembu Church" with Ngagelizwe, the chief of the Tembu, as its visible head.

In 1885, Chief Kgatlanpane of the Bachuana tribe played a key role in breaking away from the London Missionary Society at Taung, Botswana, forming the Native Independent Congregational Church.

Mokone's efforts on the Witwatersrand led to the formation of the Ethiopian Church which was the result of secession from the Wesleyan Church. While earlier secession was based on tribal factors, "Mokone's group was not limited by any tribal interest. The church leader on the West had a wider horizon and appealed to many tribes" (Sundkler 1961:39). Another important Ethiopian group was that of Mzimba. He was first ordained as a minister at Lovedale, a mission station and college in the Ciskei region, founded by the Glasgow Missionary Society in 1841.

4.3.2.2 Zionist-type of African Independent Churches

The Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, founded in Illinois, USA, in 1886, initiated the founding of similar Zionist churches in Africa. The distinctive emphasis on "Pentecost" and "Baptism of the Spirit" was brought to the Zionist group by the three Pentecostal or AFM missionaries in 1908. "The Africans of the Zion Church were not slow to follow. They all received their Pentecost" (Sundkler 1961:48).

The use of the name “Zion” can be traced back to “Zion City” in Illinois, USA. The African Zionist churches use the name “Zion” (*Amazione*) ideologically, claiming to emanate from Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and theologically, stressing healing, speaking in tongues, purification rights and many taboos. Sundler explains that one can differentiate between “Ethiopian” and “Zionist” groups.

Ignatius Lekhanyane of the Pedi founded the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) at Moria, near Polokwane in the Northern Transvaal, now the Limpopo Province, in 1910. Under his son and successor, Edward Lekhanyane, the church grew from less than 1 000 members in 1925 to 200 000 by 1970 and to over 1,000 000 by 1990 (Chidester 1992:134-135).

4.3.2.3 Doctrine of African Independent Church

Amanze (2006: 35) notes that the African Indigenous Churches derive their doctrine from their antecedent mainstream and evangelical churches, but incorporate African Traditional Religion and the Bible. The worldview of the African Independent Churches is traditional African. Anderson (1992b:107-108) believes that this worldview and its operational parameters such as the belief system, should be scrutinized.

The main teachings that spread to the African Zionist churches were “divine healing”, “triune immersion” and “Christ’s second coming.” Their distinctive robes and insignia (white, blue or green, symbolising purity, water and vegetation respectively), coupled with holistic healing in the context of community, are all part of the movement. The leaders are more “healers” than “preachers” and they usually have some visionary experience. Some of the key doctrines attested by Anderson (1992b:107-108) are:

- Healing using symbolic objects.
- Being given a uniform after baptism by threefold immersion.
- Upholding certain taboos (for importance).
- Abstaining from eating pork (92%), smoking (89%), polygamy (69%) and beer drinking (66%).
- The purifying effect of water.

The above-mentioned factors have given rise to doubts about their understanding and interpretation of the Bible. There is also a great need for theological training since most of the leaders are not theologically trained.

Anderson (1993:94) investigated the possibility of theology among the AIC in the Soshanguve township. He began by investigating the literature on theology, and this led him to the conclusion that Pentecostal churches, and especially indigenous Pentecostal-type churches, seldom have a formalised theology like most mission churches.

4.3.3 Black theology

In the Soshanguve township, many church denominations have broken away from "white dominated" churches due to racial discrimination, particularly the mission-related churches such as the Methodist, Baptist, Dutch Reformed, Presbyterian, Anglican, Faith Mission churches and the Assemblies of God. Kato (1985:46) notes: "Black consciousness does not necessarily refer to the pigment of the skin; rather it means awareness that the particular class of people called 'black' have been oppressed."

The primary concern of black theology is liberation (Kato 1985:46). This theology is now rooted in South Africa. Enslavement of Africans by whites cannot be tolerated. Racial prejudice and oppression are wrong and qualifies as a sin. While the researcher fully identifies with the condemnation of all forms of racism, he does not fully affirm some of the teachings of black theology. For the Christian, the Bible is the standard of our theology and our relationship between blacks and whites.

Black theology sets up human experience as the basic term of reference. Kato (1985:48) quotes Ben Moore: "Black theology is a situational theology, and the situation is that of a black man in South Africa." However, Christianity, as a reaction to colonialism, came with lot of compromise and syncretism. The Word of God should be absolute in all of life. The Bible is the Word of God.

The Bible speaks of the dignity of man. The heart of Paul's social ethics is summed up in Galatians:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28) The Bible addresses both the dignity and depravity of all men. All believers, irrespective of colour or race, are liberated in Christ. People need to know that the root problem of racism is sin.

4.4 GENERATIONAL CURSES CLARIFIED

Generational curses are new teachings and ministries of ‘breaking curses,’ or deliverance sessions that are practiced by charismatics/Pentecostals on a regular basis. The proponents of generational curses believe that, when multiple cases of the same problem happen in a family line, it is a generational curse. There are many reasons for the popularity of the generational curse concept. An obvious one is the reluctance of most humans to accept blame for their wrongdoing.

The entire Bible, especially Old Testament passages, is clear on the subject of generational curses. The following passages give more lucidity on the subject: Exodus 20:5; Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; and Deuteronomy 7:9. Mackay (2001:346-347) attests:

> Sin is not a general word for wrongdoing but points to religious and ethical deviance. When that becomes prevalent in one generation, the truth about God is not passed on to the next generation, who consequently receive a warped religious inheritance which leads them to fall off the standard of God's covenant and come under his scrutiny and displeasure.

An instance of how this works out is presented in Judges 2:10-15. It is only by the Lord's intervention in grace that the situation can be transformed. Otherwise those who continue to ‘hate’ the Lord in succeeding generations will be punished by Him. This part of the commandment is a solemn warning that our conduct affects not only ourselves, but our families and descendants. It is the home that is the primary training ground for the next generation, and religious decline does not arise from the failure of the church or the state, but from the failure of the family to live close to God.

MacArthur (2008:36-37) also clarifies Exodus 20:5-6 (NIV).

"I am a jealous God"

This sense of jealousy is akin to the protective jealousy that a man has towards his wife, resenting any attempt to woo her away from him. The Lord is passionately protective of his people, and his anger burns towards anyone or anything that tries to attract their worship.

"Visiting the iniquity of the Fathers upon the children"

This does not mean that children are punished for their parents' sins, which in fact is forbidden according to God's law (Deut. 24:16). It means that the sin of idolatry will affect a person's children for several generations. A man who worships something besides the one true God will pass that idolatry on to his children, and God's judgement will last for several generations.

"Those who hate me"

The Lord made a black and white distinction here; anyone who does not worship Him hates Him; anyone who allows an idol to take precedence in his life hates God. "*No one can serve two masters,"* Jesus confirms*, "*For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24, NIV).

"But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments":

God's judgement would fall on idolaters to the third and fourth generation, but his mercy would be lavished upon thousands. This underscores that God's mercy is far greater and far more frequent than his wrath. Further, Deuteronomy 7:9-10 (ESV) attests to God's covenant of love for those who keep his commandments.

"Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."

God is the active agent behind divine visitation upon the sin of successive generations. Sin is not a substance that is transmitted from one person to another. Generational curses are not Biblical. God does not allow blame games. Everyone is responsible for their own actions; they are not responsible for the sins of their forefathers. Deuteronomy 24:16 states: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers, every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (NIV).

Any interpretation of Deuteronomy 5:9 and other parallel passages that yield a contrary notion need to be refuted. Scripture communicates that consequences do not pass on to the next generation. Through the first Adam “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NIV). Through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, atonement is offered to all (Rom. 5:18).

4.4.1 Sad consequences of this teaching

The sad consequences of generational curses are that

- it denies the sufficiency of Christ for sin atonement;
- it relinquishes people from taking responsibility for their sins and putting them on someone else; and
- it reinforces the primitive animistic belief system that keeps the community in servile fearfulness, especially when repeated problems occur in the family.

We must fully believe the sufficiency of Christ’s finished work on the cross for our redemption. Nowhere in the Bible do we find any example or instruction on how to deal with curses of any kind. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV) states: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new”. Christians are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

4.4.2 Evangelical approach to demonology

There as two extremes we need to avoid. Indeed, it is true that many people are ignorant of the nature and schemes of Satan. Some, on the other hand, go beyond the biblical teaching and find a demon behind every problem they face. A healthy understanding of

demons avoids the extremes. Demons exist but they are not the ultimate. Understanding the teaching about generational curses is vital, because this teaching has robbed so many Christians of their confidence in the gospel and has prompted others to shift the blame for their spiritual obligations to previous generations and their upbringing. God expects everyone to account for his own sins (Gen. 3:14-22). After the fall of man, God wanted each person to be accountable to Him. The tendency with generational curse teaching is that it perpetually teaches people not to take responsibility for sin. In the township of Soshanguve, this kind of teaching draws many people to the church.

4.5 DELIVERANCE CLARIFIED

There is a tapestry of lies, deception, and false teaching in the so-called deliverance ministries. Some people go through unending deliverance from January to December, but even after many deliverance sessions, still feel bound. The 'bishop' will continue preaching about deliverance and demons. Instead of preaching God's Word faithfully, they keep on instilling fear into congregants about demons and Satan.

The Bible describes deliverance as God's actions through which He rescues his people from their sins.

In the Old Testament, deliverance was focused primarily on God's removal of those who are amid trouble or danger.

He rescued his people from their enemies (1 Sam. 17:37; 2 Kings 20:6). A great Old Testament illustration of deliverance is God's deliverance of the children of Israel in slavery in the land of Egypt.

We are also delivered from the influence of the evil spirit by using the armour of God. Koch (1978:287) provides ways of being delivered from the oppression of the devil:

- Come to Christ. In this situation, only Christ can help. Jesus calls all those who are burdened to come to Him (Matt. 11:28).
- Destroy all occult objects Those who would be free must destroy everything of the former life before they accepted Jesus Chris as LORD and saviour.

- Commit yourself to Christian service.

In Acts 2:42-47 (NIV) the commitments of a Christian are listed: “They continued steadfast in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of the bread and in prayers”.

The Christian commitments to the tenets of faith are the defences against the evil forces. Here is clear evidence from the following scriptures: In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul devotes a whole section of the letter to the spiritual armour that God provides. This is a clear passage about our struggles with evil forces. The primary devices against the enemy in this passage are the Word of God and prayer

Lloyd-Jones (1977:11-12) clarifies that grasping and understanding Scripture is more urgently important for all who claim the name of Christ, because Ephesians 6:10-20 is addressed to Christian people only. The statement in these verses is not only full of significance, it is also full of help and of real encouragement. There is surely no theme that is more urgently important to all Christians now than just this.

It is important to the whole state of life, the whole state of the world, and to all the difficulty of living, and especially living the Christian life in this confusing time in which we find ourselves.

A man who does not understand the nature of the problem he is confronting, is a man who is already doomed to failure. The first thing you must do is to understand the nature and the character of your problem. So, we have to realize that we are called in the Christian life, to a battle, not a life of ease, to a warfare, to wresting and struggling. For the Christian to be forewarned as to the character and strategy of the enemy is essential, for to be forewarned is to be forearmed. In Ephesians 4:25-27, the proclamation and the application of the gospel are fundamental. In 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, the knowledge of God is needed. In 2 Timothy 2:22-26, repentance is the proper response to the devil’s activities.

Lloyd-Jones (1977:170) continues to exhort Christians by applying the book of Ephesians to “put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Eph. 6:11, NIV).

> Note that the apostle first of all puts this exhortation in general and then, from verse fourteen onwards, he proceeds to deal with it in detail, giving us instructions about particular portions of this armour. The exhortation in these verses is to 'stand', to 'resist'; not to be afraid of this enemy though he is like a 'roaring lion'. We are to 'resist him steadfast in the faith'. This armour consists of understanding doctrine and the right use of it. We must realize that, if we are in this world, defence against the subtle attacks of the enemy is a necessary constant never to be neglected.

Peacock (2005:189) notes the following from his many years of mission work:

> God is the transcendent or ultimate being in the universe. He is in sovereign control of all that exists. In Christ his Son, he has broken the chief dynamic of opposition to himself and his purposes, which is sin, and by this has also destroyed the work of Satan.
>
> The forces that oppose God were defeated through Jesus Christ, who took on himself the sin of the world. All people who receive this atonement, with the regenerative power, are free from the bondage of sin; they are also free from Satan, who works on people through their own sinful pattern of living. The gospel is the good news of what Christ has accomplished. People who receive the gospel change kingdoms from that of darkness to that of God's Son. Evangelism is therefore a deliverance ministry.

4.6 OVEREMPHASIS ON THE TEACHING OF PROPHECY

Currently, just about anything in the church gets called prophecy. Many bizarre prophetic activities are reported. An incident was reported in the Sowetan newspaper Friday, January 10, 2014, about Prophet Lesego Daniel who made his congregants eat grass. The Star newspaper also reported on Wednesday, June 8, 2016, that the prophet Penuel Mguni gambles with congregants' lives, performing a crazy miracle as he drives over them with his car. He drove over two members of his congregation, and then reversed back

over them to prove his point. “The man of God then commanded them to wake up while the car was on top of their bodies. He asked them if they felt any pain, and their response was ‘we do not feel anything’” After he had reversed off them, he told them to get up, and when they did, they danced and praised God.” He also walked on the backs of others and hit them with chairs and other objects. This has sent shock waves in the community and

social media. Earlier on the prophet gained notoriety for letting his congregants eat snakes and rats.Today, the traditional emphasis of prophecy and healing that was founded in the African Traditional Religion has been re-activated in many churches. Many Christians are confused by that emphasis; it is often based on biblical texts with testimonies of miraculous healing.

Oosthuizen (1989:75) notes:

> The African Independent Churches have made this a prominent part of their ministry. The prophet/prayer healer has a central role in the Zionist churches, replaying the divine within the traditional African culture. The office of prophet/prayer healer in the African Independent Churches fulfils a much felt need as did the traditional society’s age-old role of diviner and herbalist, for which the missionary or pastor in Christianity had no substitute.

The prophetic practice in the Pentecostal churches does not differ from that which is practised in the African traditional churches. This brings much confusion to Christendom. The African theological worldview should be balanced by sound theology; this will avoid the excess of bogus prophets and wizards. The church needs to address these deeply felt needs. The answer is teaching and preaching thorough biblical theology of those controversial gifts.

4.6.1 Definition of true biblical prophecy

Biblical prophecy has its origin in the Old Testament. Moses was the original prophet, the lawgiver and the mediator between God and the children of Israel.

Prophecy meant speaking the very words that God had spoken. The act of prophesy starts when you begin by saying “Thus saith the Lord”, and you could end by saying, “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken”. Their message was not their own. It did not come from their own minds; it originated from heaven’s throne. A final example is found in Jeremiah 1:9: “Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth’” (NIV).

Prophecy is speaking God’s infallible words. Old Testament prophets directed their prophecies to Israel and Judah, bearing God’s word in the following forms:

- Proclaiming God’s message to his people.
- Edifying, encouraging and exhorting them.
- Pronouncing judgement on Israel and Judah for their sins.
- Foretelling of the of the coming kingdom of God on earth in the last days.
- Promising the Messiah who would reign over all the people of the world. Brown (1993:187) identifies several ways to distinguish between true and false prophecies. The problem was acute for Jeremiah and he identified three tests:
  The true prophet stood in God’s presence (as a servant, heard the divine message and was sent by God (Jeremiah 23:18-21). A further test is given here in Moses’ address to the self-fulfilment of the test of authenticity. The validity of a prophetic message is not a subject confined to the Old Testament period. It became an important issue in early Christian times and is still relevant in our own.

The prevailing attitude about prophets in the Soshanguve township does not tally with what is described above. It is more the one described by Awolalu and Dopamu (2005:327) who report on certain churches in Africa:

> They claim to give oracles and perform miracles. Prophets among them give visions and interpret dreams. They use holy water, sacred oil, ashes, candles and incense to heal and to prevent diseases. The cross has acquired a power which is almost magical. They offer prayers with persuasive, evocative and emotive language.

Awolalu and Dopamu (2005:327) identify such churches as “Independent African churches”, and they include such names as “the Apostolic Church, the Church of the Lord, the Cherubim and Seraphim, and the Celestial Church of Christ”.

There are many other churches in the Soshanguve township that subscribe to the same practices mentioned by Awolalu and Dopamu. Most of those prophecies bring harm to churches and marriages because they are shameful, aiming not to build but to destroy.

Grudem (1982:14-15) also notes that “I am asking that the charismatic go on using the gift of prophecy, but that they stop calling it ‘a word from the Lord’, simply because that label makes it sounds exactly like the Bible authority.”

4.6.2 Personal experience does not validate prophesy

Wimber (1986) claims that God gave him visions and specific messages. In his book he used the following phrases:

i. The Holy Spirit confirms it in my heart (1986:210)

ii. I sensed a spiritual sense of God speaking to me (1986:70)

4.6.3 Fallible prophets

In the Soshanguve township, it was heard that Christians claim that God told them to divorce their spouse, because she hindered them in serving the Lord faithfully. The action is taken on the basis that ‘God told me’. Ask one of the 15 million Zionist of ZCC members in this country: ‘In your church what is a prophet?’ They will often say; ‘O, prophets are very powerful. They see what sickness is troubling you, what is causing it, and how to heal it. Even before you tell them, they know! You don’t even need to tell them. He will tell you!’

Most charismatic prophets are no different than the African Traditional Religion prophets and witchdoctors.

4.6.4 New Testament prophets

In the early church, such as in Corinth, prophecy jumped to the top of the list, the gold medal (1 Cor. 14:1-6, 22-25). When Apostle Paul established a church in Corinth, but then had to leave, the best possible successors to leave behind were gifted prophets who could continue building the church upon God's Word, God's revelation. The New Testament prophets ministered in a Christian church that differed from the modern variety.

1 Corinthians 14:29 elucidate how prophesy in the church should be conducted. "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgement" (NIV).

A prophet should be characterized by moral consistency and conform to God's standard (Matt. 7:15-16; Jer. 23:14-16; 2 Peter 2:2-3).

Absolute predictive accuracy (Deut. 18:20-22; Ezek. 13:3-9). Sometimes accuracy is not more convincing, there are a number of non-believers in scripture who prophecy correctly (Num. 22-23; John 11:49-52).

Our modern-day prophets like to use phrases such as: "God showed me or told me something about you", breeding insecurity in people's lives. They do not have a covenant relationship with the local church, wandering from place to place, looking for people who will listen to them and use a combination of power and flattery to attract people.

Robertson (1993:22) states:

> …the warning of Scripture concerning the dangers of false prophecy must be remembered. If revelation has not been completed with the perfection of the New Testament Scripture, then prophecy as the principal revelation gift has now ceased. The modern preacher may be 'prophetic' in his ministry just he may be 'apostolic'. But he must be aware of claiming for himself either the revelation experience of the prophet or the foundational position of the apostle.
>
> There are many cases, both ancient and modern, of lives seriously damaged by an improper claim to prophetic utterance.

The utterances need first to be tested by God's perfect revelation in Scripture; that is the unique standard by which all other 'truth' must be tested (1 Thess. 5:20-21). The Holy Spirit has already spoken in the Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21). Such prophecies must also be considered prayerfully by the local church to discern by the Spirit that they are truly of God (1 John 4:1-3). Infallibility belongs to the Lord alone. We are only human and can easily be mistaken.

God's unique revelation in Scripture, the exemplary life of Jesus, and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, are the Lord's appointed 'tests' to help us if we want to distinguish reality from sham, truth from error. Does the Bible, God's Word, support this new truth? Does this new truth encourage Christlikeness? Does the indwelling Spirit of God confirm this new truth? In a day when there are so many competing voices, that searching Trinitarian test can help to save us from false and spiritually damaging teaching.

Christians today should beware of false prophets (Matt. 7:15), just as Israel was commanded in the past. Those who love God will certainly not want to be drawn to other gods.

4.7 OVEREMPHASIS ON TEACHING ABOUT MIRACLES

Corrie (2007:230) defines a 'miracle' as follows: "A miracle is an unexpected and unexplained event, in which God reveals himself as the gracious redeemer of humanity. This has three dimensions: surprise, revelation and salvation." The Bible records many real miracles, attributed to Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, and others, especially, those performed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

During Christ's ministry on earth, He performed many miracles, especially miraculous healing, all of them with some immediate human need in mind and never just for show, yet also to demonstrate that He was indeed the Son of God. Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the multitudes (Matt. 14:14-21).

4.7.1 What about miraculous healing?

The healing power and the source that is used in the above-mentioned churches is questionable, which qualifies its practice as syncretic. In the African Independent Churches and Pentecostals, it is difficult these days to differentiate their practices from the African Traditional Religion.

4.7.1.1 African Traditional Religion

A survey of the gospels shows that Jesus healed a man with leprosy (Mark 1:40), He gave sight to the blind man (Luke 18:42-430), He healed a man who was crippled and could not walk for 38 years (John 5:5), He restored completely a man's hand which was shrivelled (Mark 3:1-5), He raised the dead (Mark 9:23-25).

The healing of the lame man by Peter in Acts 3:2-8 was unique. Listen what Peter said, "I do not possess gold and silver, but what I do have I give to you, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth–walk" (NIV). Right after Peter uttered those words, the lame man walked immediately.

From these examples, we can easily draw the uniqueness of the New Testament gift of healing. The healing was unassisted; no medical intervention was required.

Are present-day healers doing what Jesus was able to do? We fully believe that God can and do still heal today. He continues to heal miraculously in accordance with his plans and purpose.

When the question arises as to how to distinguish a false prophecy or miracle from those that are truly from God, the criterion of Moses is the obvious test of purpose and motivation.

That is, if the purpose was to persuade people to follow another god or religion, rather than the inspired revelation of the one true God, then that is sufficient reason to reject it. If the prediction made by a false prophet fails to come to pass, that is obviously an adequate reason to reject his authority.

The deceptive counterfeits accomplished by false prophets were intended to persuade people to follow false gods. There is no doubt that the Bible recognizes that Satan can produce a great variety of deceptive signs and wonders for drawing people away from the true God. But how is one to know the difference? Christ has said that counterfeits may deceive even the very elect. But the answer is simple enough. The Bible is the authoritative Word of God, and fully inspired. Today's challenge is that the theology of the church is based on experience rather than the Bible.

Froise (2005:154) asks the question, "Is it important then to apply biblical practices in our present-day ministries, or is this an optional extra for those who wish to do so?"

The primary purpose of miraculous healing was the demonstration of the authenticity of the gospel and its messages.

As we have seen from the syncretic churches that have emerged in the townships, we can agree that the Soshanguve township has become a breeding ground for unorthodox movements. These movements have spread great confusion among the people of Soshanguve and pose a worldwide threat to true Christians. In researching these churches, it is clear that the common thread that binds them is scriptural neglect.

4.8 NECCESSITY FOR INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

Bible interpretation continues to be an issue of great concern even today. Hendricks and Hendricks (1991:31) mention something crucial that should challenge us when we approach the Bible: "The Bible was written not to be studied but to change our lives. Life change is the product we are after." The widespread failure to interpret the scriptures properly is another basic factor that must be given serious attention. Preaching is a call to hard work; hard work in interpreting Scripture correctly.

4.9 APPROPRIATE METHOD OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

4.9.1 Inductive method

Preachers of God's Word must be diligent in their work. They must remember that they are accountable to God for delivering the Word to their congregants. Twisting the meaning

of Scripture is a great offence to God. A good preacher will always consult helpful resources such as commentaries and dictionaries, as well as other good biblical references. Most of the false prophets diverged from the truth by ignoring careful interpretation of Scripture.

Discernment will not be possible if we ignore the correct interpretation of God's Word. Sproul notes: "Sound hermeneutics is crucial to a forceful and faithful impact of the biblical message in the hearts and minds of the African Christians in a contemporary African context" (Sproul 1977:23). The aim of clear Bible interpretation is to know the meaning of the text.

The inductive method of interpreting the Bible demands effort. You need to collect all the facts and allow these to speak for themselves, while presenting them in a meaningful arrangement. The inductive study employs the law of analogy. Everything must harmonize. This is the correct method of interpreting the Bible.

4.9.1.1 Plain steps of studying and sermon preparation

MacArthur ?(2009:18-20) provides these steps:

- **Observation**
  In this step you ask and answer questions, such as What do I see? What are the facts? What is taking place in this passage? Don't take any detail for granted. Every detail in the passage is important, whether big or small. Things that need to be observed are the following: terms, structure literary form, atmosphere. Write questions down. Who? What? Where? When? Look for comparisons (things that are similar; different. Take your time, don't rush.

- **Interpretation**
  Here you answer questions, such as What does it mean? Your main quest in this section is searching for the meaning. You must look for questions, answers, integration. Bible study tools, such as Bible

dictionaries, concordance, handbooks, encyclopaedias and commentaries may be used.

- **Application**

  Here you ask and answer the question: How does it work? How does this work in my life? What does this have to say to me? What effects will this have on my life? (Hendricks & Hendricks 1991:36). Application helps people to apply God's Word in one's life. This is a practical response to the Word of God.

4.9.2 Hermeneutics and its related terms

Dungan (1888:1) attests that, "The study of the methodological principles of interpretation of the Bible" (Springfield 1967:389). "The science and art of Biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill and not by mechanical imitation." (Ramm 1970:1).

Interpret. "To explain or tell the meaning of elucidate" (Springfield 1888:443)

Exegesis. "From *ex*, out and *egeisthas,* to guide or lead, means to lead out. It is the application of the principles of hermeneutics in bringing out the meaning of any writing which might otherwise be difficult to understand" (Dungan 1888:1).

The relation of hermeneutics to exegesis: "Whereas hermeneutics seeks to establish the ruling principles of Biblical interpretations, exegesis seeks to fix the meaning of individual statement and passages" (Harrison 1960:204-205).

4.10 ECUMENISM

4.10.1 Meaning of ecumenism

The researcher accepts that some definitions of ecumenism incorporate other faiths. Malek (1999:17) captures this definition when he states:

> Because the inception of the early church was in this ecumenism milieu, the church, by the virtue of the commission of her Lord, must go into the

> world to take on the very character of the divine universal commission and apply it by means of the present earthly means of today.

Amanze (1999:202) attests:

> Ecumenism therefore was the incarnation of the divine commission of Christ, as He himself is the incarnate 'mission' of God. This mission belongs to the church universally as we universally belong to Christ. Reaching out to those that are in need constitute the hallmark of ecumenism.

4.10.1.1 History of ecumenism

Amanze (1999:137) notes:

> The ecumenical movement in Africa emerged within modern church history. The African movement forms a part of the 20th century worldwide ecumenical movement, which traces its roots to 1910 World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh, at which the delegates included Africans.
>
> The social and political problems of Africa dictate that unless different churches collaborate as a single church, they will not be able to deal with all the pressing needs.
>
> One of the distinctive characteristics of the modern church in Africa, therefore, has been the growing consciousness among Christians that the best way to solve the problem faced by the churches in the contemporary world is by working together (Amanze 1999:137).

4.10.1.2 Positive ecumenism

Ecumenical unity must remain rooted in Scripture because the mandate and the milieu of ecumenism are derived from the Bible (Minear 1977:5). The Christian community has always anchored its views upon the authority of Scripture. The Bible is understood as the inspired Word of God. Church life and its parishioners are normally regulated and guided by the Bible (Lombaard 1999:26).

Therefore, since the Christian community stays in direct contact with the Bible through church activities, such as sermons, prayers and Scripture, it forms the theology of the church and directs its activities.

The separation and disunity of Christians in denominationally orientated churches in conflict with one another, appeared as a burdensome hindrance to missionary witnesses. The doctrine of the evangelical churches comprehends the church as the fellowship of individuals. Jesus will gather his church at his return in his kingdom. There are fundamentals of faith that the universal church should agree upon, to synergise unity.The historical Christian faith within the meaning of the early church confession, regard the Trinity and Christ as human and divine.

The reformation doctrine of salvation is that man is saved by faith alone, and through grace alone, and Scripture alone should be the sole foundation of all Christian doctrine.

The basic understanding for evangelicals is personal conversion and sanctification.

The above-mentioned key themes offer a way to describe some of the hallmarks of evangelical theology. They are neither ideal types, nor are they described here in full detail.

4.10.1.3 Negative ecumenism

Lombaard (1999:26) notes that if the Bible loses its centrality in the ecumenical movement, then the following consequences will become possible:

- The identity and self-awareness of Christianity will be much changed, presumably in the direction of syncretism.
- The ecumenical process will be shattered into at least two major groupings: those who still accord the Bible its traditional authority on faith matters within the church, and those who reinterpret biblical authority in a different, presumably less central, way. Therefore, the Bible remains the main source of unity and the standard in which doctrinal issues are settled in relation to achieving ecumenism. For the church to engage seriously, it must establish Scripture as the main authority (Lombaard 1999:33).

Consequent to the Bible being the source of ecumenism, each church draws its doctrinal position from Scripture. ‘Adhering to Scripture’ therefore implies that the church forms its doctrinal positions. However, doctrinal positions have become the major cause of disunity, though it is important for each church to affirm its position.

Gandiya (1999:56) notes that a survey of church history reveals that most controversies in Christendom have been caused by doctrine.

We need to make it known to the world that Christianity is unique to the world religions and keep our Christian faith sacred.

William Debenski and Thomas Schirrmacher (2008:18) note:

> The practice of ecumenism is that all churches from all theological backgrounds are often invited to share in interfaith and multi-faith activities to promote united interest–and it becomes a crunch-point question whether to say yes or no. If the organisers want only gestures of unity and rule out anything more, non-participation may be the wisest as well as the honest course.

Amos is very clear when he says: “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3, NIV). Where there is agreement there is fruitfulness and growth. We cannot honour God by pretending to be closer to others in theology and spiritual identity than we really are.

Hindrance to ecumenism in Africa is due to church divisions. Darby (1999:64) postulates that, though the word of God and sacramental ordinances are the primary forms of worship, and while each church brags about its distinction, this schism, as reflected among the denominations, cripples the churches’ mandate to reach the society and the world at large. He states that growth into ecumenism, therefore, requires that each church has to know and adhere to its worship style and embrace the differences, as other churches have to theirs (Darby 1999:64).

We cannot faithfully be witnesses of Jesus Christ if we have doctrinal strife among ourselves. We must take care when evaluating potential partnerships.

If unity can be achieved without compromising fundamental Christian beliefs, then unity should be pursued. A robust commitment to ecumenism strengthens the whole church as long as it is bound by the centrality of Christ and the principle of canonicity. As Vanhoozer (2005:42) affirms: “The one gospel is best understood in dialogue with the many saints.”

Vlach (2008) defines radical religious pluralism as “all major world religions lead to God and salvation.” In this approach, salvation of people is “by their own religions, independent of Christ and Christianity” (Gillis 1993:19). The teaching of the Bible about salvation, in Acts 4:12, states “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (NIV).

The mission of Jesus is clearly described in Luke 19:10: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (NIV). Evangelical Christians need to understand pluralism in order to avoid syncretism, which is not permitted by the biblical revelation.

A robust commitment to ecumenism strengthens the whole church, as long as it is bound by the centrality of Christ and the principle of canonicity. As Vanhoozer (2005:30) attests: “The one gospel is best understood in dialogue with the many saints.”

A South African theologian, Saayman (1980:143) wrote on the relationship between unity and mission. He condemns the “evangelical insistence” that agreement on the TRUTH must precede UNITY, since it is not WRITTEN truth, which is the norm, as much as it is CHRIST, the fountain of both TRUTH and UNITY. This Barthian hermeneutic does not deal at all with a definition of TRUTH, neither does it take seriously the huge differences in belief between ecumenics, Roman Catholics, and evangelicals.

4.11 CONTEXTUALISATION OF CHRISTIANITY

Christians cannot think about the gospel without its engagement within a cultural context. The role of context cannot be downplayed in theology. The context of a person affects a person’s understanding of reality.

Bosch (1991:427) notes that “theology should not only the reality of a particular people situated in a particular time and space, but also keep the faith which all Christians share, and which should be respected and preserved.”

4.11.1.1 Definition of contextualisation

Wan (1999:13) asserts:

> Contextualisation is derived from the dynamic relationship between gospel and culture, between "cultural relevancy" and "theological coherence." Contextualisation is the efforts of formulating, presenting and practising the Christian faith in such a way that it is relevant to the cultural context of the target group in terms of conceptualization, expression and application; yet maintaining theological coherence, biblical integrity and theoretical consistency.

Corrie (2007:66-67) notes:

> Some Christians regard the notion of contextualisation as being at the best suspect." They regard it as a way of smuggling syncretism into the church in the guise of promoting relevance. The reality however is, contextualization is a biblical, theological imperative, not an optional pursuit for those interested in 'Third World theologies.'"

William Barclay rightly states:

> It is not Jesus' purpose that we should turn all men into one nation, but that they should be Christian Indians and Christian Africans, whose unity lies in their Christianity. The oneness in Christ is in Christ, and not in any external change. The unity in Christ produces Christians whose Christianity transcends all their local and racial differences; it produces men who are friends with each other because they are friends with God;

it produces men who are one, because they meet in the presence of God to whom they have access (Barclay - accessed 13 August 2016).

Kato is explicit in his definition of the term and its relation to worship:

> Contextualisation can also take place in liturgy, dress, language, church service, and other forms of expressions of the gospel truth. Musical

> instruments such as organ and piano can be replaced or supplemented with indigenous, easily acquired instruments, such as drums, cymbals, and cornstalk instruments. It must be born in mind, of course that the sound of music must not drown the message. Clergy do not have to wear a Geneva gown or even a dog collar. Not only should the message be preached in the language best understood by the congregation, but the terminology of theology should be expressed the way common people can understand (Kato 1985:24).

Hesselgrave carefully distinguishes between liberal contextualization and orthodox contextualization. While the former stresses the discovery of truth by the method of dialogue, leading often to a new syncretic gospel and new interfaith spirituality, the latter views the world with its different cultures, as basically separated from God. The approach is didactic and, therefore, prescriptive, since the gospel is viewed as the final authority. The results are the spiritual transformation of those who believe (Hesselgrave 1991:133-144).

One needs only study the various sermons preached by Paul to note how he "contextualized" his message without compromising it (Acts14 & 17).

Any translation work we do should not soften the gospel. Contextualization should never aim to make the gospel more playable or more acceptable to a sinner. In fact, one test of whether an attempt at contextualization has been successful is to ask if it has made the understanding of the gospel clearer.

The gospel is relevant to every sinner. Our job is merely to present the gospel accurately and clearer.

4.11.1.2 Criteria for healthy contextualisation

Corrie (2007:70-71) lists four criteria for healthy contextualization:

Doctrines as formulated and understood in the tradition of the church.

1. Contextualization must take account of church tradition as another source of theology.

   As the books of the Bible participate in the context in which and for which they were written, so were the creeds developed through the centuries of church history. Many Christians, in reciting the Nicene or other creed, do not realize the intense theological battles preceding their formulations. This should embolden us to formulate relevant theology for our current global or specific context, but without disregarding the wisdom of the receiving tradition.

2. Contextualization must be dynamically relevant to the interlocutors.

   Interlocutors are communicators through whom the theology is formulated and by whom it is received. They determine the type and content of the formulation. There should be freedom to find or create, within receiving cultures, new culturally specific forms that convey the intended meaning contextually more reflective than can be delivered by the biblical or missionary cultures.

3. Contextualization must remain open-ended

   No society is static. Anthropologists recognize that in each society there is an on-going process of cultural evolution, as one culture meets another. The theologizing process must involve culture or there is a danger of focusing theologically on former stages of culture, irrelevant in the modern age. Contextualization must remain open-ended, recognizing its own purpose.

4. Contextualization must be dialogical

   Contextualized theology is both particularistic in pointing to a unique context and universalistic because it shares with similar theologies the same authoritative biblical revelation that must validate them all. Although no single cultural formulation of the gospel must dominate others, there must be a dialogical element in all theologies, enabling them to listen to and enrich one another. This element ensures the church remain unified and universal.

Bosch (1991:428) notes the danger of absolutism contextualization “when theology only emphasize the context, it becomes linked to the danger of 'absolutism contextualization.” Bosch (1991:432) also notes that “contextualization has a constant danger that attempts to allow the context to determine the nature and theology of that context.” Theology must not be reduced to the product of its surrounding context. Bosch (1991:431) also warns that: “contextualization or contextual theology is not a remedy to every ill, and the context is not to be taken as the sole and basis authority for theological reflection.”

4.12 GOSPEL AND CULTURE

4.12.1 What is culture?

Mayers (1974:98) gives the following definition about culture:

> Culture is everything with which an individual is concerned and involved in a society. This sounds like a non-academic definition of a very important concept. Culture can be defined in a couple of hundred ways, but the point is that every thought a person thinks, every hope he has, every step he takes, every belief he holds, and every interaction he undertakes is controlled by his culture. Every move he makes is trained in him by his culture. Any Christian who takes the great commission seriously, must exhibit an understanding of different cultures.

Scripture and the local culture are not to be ignored, which implies the understanding that scripture is authoritative and demands obedience to all its declarations. An extremely important question concerns the relation between gospel and culture. Biblical authority is seriously undermined when culture or the people’s “context” is given authority over the scriptural “text”.

McGavran (1974:68) notes:

> Estimating the components of another culture as reasonable, given those circumstances are not the same as judging them to be right. For the Christian, only what is in accord with the will of the Triune God for Man

as revealed through the Bible and Jesus Christ, is right.

The teaching of Hiebert (1985:53-58) demonstrates strength in its respect for all human culture, notwithstanding its unwavering acknowledgement of absolute Biblical authority. Hiebert (1985:56) also maintains that “every culture has positive elements that can be used by Christians, as well as aspects which express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil that must be challenged”.

The good news of the gospel is relevant to all people of all nations.It is crucial for Christians who are fully committed to Christ to avoid the pitfall of patronization and presume that the recipient culture requires anything greater than that. It is imperative that no suggestion is conveyed in the teaching method that God and Jesus Christ belong to the delivering culture. As Creator, God loves to be worshipped in all languages and cultural contexts. Authentic worship occurs through the one universal heart language of all mankind. This is the beautiful picture revealed in Revelation 7:9: “With the great multitude… from every nation, tribe, and people and language, standing before the throne and before the lamb” (NIV).

God wishes to bring people of all nations, ethnic groups, languages and cultures into a relationship with Him, and we have the privilege of joining Him in this process if our teaching is carried out solely for his purpose and not our own.

The gospel dwarfs all cultures. The change demanded by the gospel of Jesus Christ is not a superficial change, but that deep, sincere change of heart and life we term ‘conversion’. Only the gospel can effect change in the human’s heart. Emphasizing cultural differences, notwithstanding it’s undermining of scriptural authority, is a recipe for syncretism. Every culture should submit to the Bible.

The authority of scripture is seriously undermined, when culture or the host’s “context” has been given priority over the “text” of Scripture. Tennent (2010: 23) gives the following advice: “The gospel must become more robust in responding to very specific challenges that hitherto went unnoticed.”

People should be taught to critique culture. When culture begins to judge God's revelation, the church is on the way to syncretism. Since the gospel is the Divine Revelation, it must be clearly distinguished from culture which is constructed through the works of man. Note, for example, that when Paul set out to correct the Galatian problem of legalism, usurping the liberty of God's grace, he set forth the gospel as an authoritative revelation which he had received directly from God (Gal. 1-2). To preach "another gospel", contrary to the one he preached, called forth the strongest curse (Gal. 1:5-9, NIV).

When he rebuked Peter, Paul did so based on the gospel, since Peter was not manifesting that unquestionable, unalterable standard. (Gal. 2:14-16). Imagine Peter defending himself: "No, Paul, this whole issue is cultural; you cannot insist that I behave the way you do. There is no objective gospel by which we stand or fall!"

To equate the gospel with culture may result in making sin relative. Cultures are in constant change and exchange. Practices condemned today become acceptable tomorrow. Yet, the Gospel does not change. Sin must be defined by the unchanging standard of scripture. Conversely, if gospel is not distinguished from culture, relative forms and practices may become entrenched with no hope of reversal. When that happens, church traditions become as fixed as scripture. Changes of form or practice are tantamount to changing scripture.African Traditional Religions (ATR) and African Independent Churches (AIC), while essentially different, share cultural roots. The quest of Africans is for recognition of their identity, in the context of African culture and values. Culture plays a significant role and the danger is that it may usurp scriptural authority.

4.12.2 Cultural imperialism

"'Cultural imperialism' occurs when the stronger society imposes its culture on the weaker society" (https://english.stackexchange.com). The kind of Christian practice that requires people to worship and practice their faith according to foreign patterns is becoming prevalent in the Soshanguve township. The practical implication is: "*Our way of life is the only path to Christianity."* It is usually delivered by Western Christians to black township Christians. It has the potential to attract followers in the form of those who are westernizing, but the masses of traditional people find little or nothing in this form of

Christianity that meets their needs, simply because it is practised in foreign ways to which they cannot connect. Imperialism makes people defy the gospel and view it as another form of colonialism.

The practice of imperialism and colonialism causes many Africans to perceive their Christianity as being worth less, as is clearly the case from a cultural perspective.

4.13 INCULTURATION

God our Creator is the one who placed people of different cultures in different places. Bosch (2014:458) notes: “Inculturation is one of the patterns in which the pluriform character of contemporary Christianity manifests itself.” Bosch continues: “The Christian faith never exists except as “translated into a culture.” He then cites Koster (1984:178): “It should, therefore, come as no surprise that in the Pauline churches, Jews, Greeks, Barbarians, Thracians, Egyptians and Romans were able to feel at home.”

Bosch (2014:458-59) asserts:

> Western Christians were unconscious of the fact that their theology was culturally conditioned; they simply assumed that it was supracultural and universally valid. And since Western culture was implicitly regarded as Christian, it was equally self-evident that this culture had to be exported together with the Christian faith. The West has often domesticated the gospel in its own culture, while making it unnecessarily foreign to other cultures.

On the other hand, Gensichen (1960:125) notes: “Inculturation does not mean that culture is to be destroyed and something new built up on its ruins. Neither, however, does it suggest that a particular culture is to be endorsed in its present form.”

4.14 CAUSES OF SYNCRETISM

4.14.1 Desperation

Desperation drives people to believe any teaching, true or false, hoping for the solution they seek. Hence, desperation may lead to syncretism.

The Star newspaper, dated June 8, 2016, reported on a prophet, Penuel Mguni, who drove over two members of his congregation with his car, to prove God's power.

The joumalist, Mkhwanazi-Xaluva, wrote:

> Mguni had too much control over the minds and bodies of his disciples. He could order them to do anything extreme, such as strapping bombs to themselves and blowing up malls. All of these stunts were highly disturbing. But when people are desperate, they cling to anything that promise them hope. They are poor, and their children are unemployed. And when they have tried and failed to improve their lives, the pastor promises them miracles. He is exploiting them (The Star, dated June 8, 2016).

Most often false prophets entice their followers because they offer a way of life that appears easy, uncomplicated by rules and commandments. They widen the narrow gate set forth by God (Matt. 7:15-17).

4.14.2 Accomodating a community worldview

The worldviews of the Soshanguve township people have not changed; some are still practising ancestral worship while they call themselves Christians.

It is true, as we have seen from the above discussion, that Christianity is a dimension of culture. Christians are called to propagate the gospel, to equip the saints and not to be side-tracked by other things. Godly methods of gospel presentations will produce true disciples of Jesus Christ.

4.14.3 Ignorance to the truth

One of the causes of syncretism, globally, including the Soshanguve township, is ignorance, according to Kato (1985:11). What Kato describes as biblical and theological ignorance, applies to both the evangelical church leaders and followers. People are told what they want to hear but charisma and an unwillingness to follow the truth allow them to deceive themselves.

Traditional healers are still valued by many Christians. In times of crises, they run to them first. They are basically saying: “Christianity does not have the answers I require, but witchcraft, sorcery and evil spirits do.” In most Christian circles, Christianity has not been fully accepted on the basis of salvation from sin, but as a means to overcome dominant problems. Pastors and elders in the evangelical churches have a role to teach God’s Word faithfully to their members.

People need to be taught about the authority and sufficiency of Scripture throughout life. Kato (1985:11) quotes Mbiti, stating: “Missionary Christianity was, from the start, not prepared to face serious encounter with either traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa.” All these can be blamed on the ignorance of our forebears. As Kato (1985:11) rightly observes: “The church has now found itself in the situation of trying to exist without a theology.”

Kraft (1996) in Winter and Hawthorne (2006:391) assert beautifully:

> But God’s working within culture never leaves that culture unchanged. God changes people first, then through them the cultural structures. Whatever changes are to take place in the structures are to be made by the people themselves based on their understanding of the Scripture and God’s workings in their lives, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, not pressured by an outsider.
>
> Though contextualization within a new culture risks a nativistic kind of syncretism, a Christianity that is dominated by foreign cultural forms, with imported meanings, is anti-Scriptural and just as syncretistic. We are

> therefore to follow scripture and risk the use of receptor culture forms.

Christians need to pray and herald the unique Christ. Christians should realize that to stand for the uniqueness of Christ will not be popular with the current levels of ungodliness in the world.

4.14.4 Lack of genuine conversion experience

Another major cause of syncretism alluded to during this study, involved a lack of conversion experience. Conversion implies a "change of worldview." Where people are not converted, they will continue according to their existing worldview and it will result in syncretism. Hiebert (2002:5-25) describes three stages in the historical progression of the church's understanding of the conversion process:

> First level conversion is at the level of behaviour and rituals. It is easy for people to fake behaviour without genuine repentance.
>
> Second level conversion requires accepting the crucial events of the New Testament and the prophecies of the Old Testament. In the twentieth century, Protestant missionaries began to stress the need for transformation of the individual's belief. People had to believe in the virgin birth, in Jesus' crucifixion, entombment, resurrection, ascension, second coming, and several other core teachings specific to the different denominations engaged in the missionary venture.
>
> Third level conversion is changing the worldview. If conversion does not happen at the worldview level and stops at the level of behaviour, rituals, and beliefs, when the gospel is subverted, and the result is syncretic Christo-paganism or dual allegiance, which has the form of Christianity but not the essence.

Instability and deception thrive when Christians do not make an effort to grow in their Christian lives. This is evident in the Soshanguve township as we see the mushrooming of unbiblical churches and the gullibility of people to such doctrines, without seeking to

discern truth from error. As Bassett (1981: 82) notes: “The aim of the gospel is not to please our human hearers, but our heavenly God. True evangelism has the same aim as the one it seeks to portray. The secret of Christ’s life must become the secret of a preacher’s life.”

4.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to establish a biblically based model, through which to analyse the health of churches by incorporating the field research and biblical principles. The analysis examined the key issues of syncretic practices in the Soshanguve township in the light of fixed biblical criteria. The types of syncretism practised in the Soshanguve township that do not align with biblical practices were analysed and revealed that many churches were established for personal gain and not for worshipping the Kingdom of God.

The following causes of syncretism were also highlighted:

1. Desperation of people for prosperity and also for healing. The state of desperation drives people to believe any teaching, true or false, hoping for the solution they seek. Hence, desperation may lead to syncretism.\

2. Accommodating community worldview, the worldviews of the Soshanguve people have not changed; some are still practising ancestral worship while they call themselves Christians. Christians are called to propagate the gospel, to equip the saints and not to be side-tracked by other things. Godly methods of gospel presentations will produce true disciples of Jesus Christ.

3. Ignorance of the gospel truth. People need to be taught about the authority and sufficiency of the scriptures throughout life. Kato (1985:11) quoted Mbiti: “Missionary Christianity was, from the start, not prepared to face serious encounter with either traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa.” All these can be blamed on the ignorance of our for-bearers. As Kato (1985:11) rightly observed: “The church has now found itself in the situation of trying to exist without a theology.”

4. Lack of genuine conversion experience. Conversion implies a “change of worldview.” Where people are not converted, they will continue according to their existing worldview and it will result in syncretism. In most Christian circles, Christianity was accepted not fully based on salvation from sin, but as a means to overcome dominant problems. As Bassett (1981:82) notes: “The aim of the gospel is not to please our human hearers, but our heavenly God. True evangelism has the same aim as the one it seeks to portray. The secret of Christ’s life must become the secret of a preacher’s life.”

The key issues of these churches, such as lack of biblical literacy, the varied types of syncretism practised, and the cultural associations were analysed in terms of the causes of syncretism, and the need to interpret Scripture clearly, as stated in the Old Testament and the Gospels.

It is fundamental to understand that the gospel is sufficient. Pastors and elders in the evangelical churches have the role to teach God’s Word faithfully to their members.People need to be taught about the authority and sufficiency of Scripture throughout life. Kato (1985:11) quotes Mbiti: “Missionary Christianity was, from the start, not prepared to face serious encounter with either traditional religions and philosophy or the modern changes taking place in Africa.” Health and wealth gospel is one of the dangerous threats to the modern church, in leading followers to believe that the Bible is not sufficient.

According to Bosch (1973:77),

> we are in danger of adulterating the gospel. If we start with our own past and our own traditional ideas, and then search for parallels and similarities in the Bible, syncretism is to decorate the traditional god, beliefs and practices in Christian robes. While indigenization is to clothe the God of the Bible and the Christian faith in the cultural robes of a particular people.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation clearly indicated that both the Old and New Testaments reject dual allegiance. The importance of keeping the gospel pure and unadulterated, was, is, and will always be, the main concern of a Christian church.

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the recommendations and evangelical responses towards syncretism in the Soshanguve township.

CHAPTER 5 DATA INTERPRETATION – Suggested strategies of evangelical respond towards syncretism in Soshanguve Township

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher aims to conclude this thesis with biblical solutions and applications for combating syncretism in the Soshanguve township churches and the world beyond. The chapter commences with an exposition and defence of evangelical theology, emphasising the doctrine of Scripture, and an explanation of the gospel, offering a clear presentation of Christianity. The voice of Christianity needs to be heard in the community and society at large, as the traditional Christian doctrine is being challenged and the doctrine of Scripture undermined. The thesis commences with an overview and critique of the practice of syncretism. The interviews with the Soshanguve evangelical leaders and church members demonstrated that there is a keen awareness of the danger that syncretism poses. Throughout this chapter, the researcher suggests strategies in response to the data collection and analysis discussed in chapters 3 and 4. In order to broaden this case study to be applied to similar churches further afield, the remedial focus and application might not only be relevant in the Soshanguve township, but wherever syncretism is perceived as a threat to Christian churches.

Christians need to be sensitized about the grave danger of syncretism. People often try to improve the gospel, but in improving it, they end up losing it. It is essential that gospel communicators should be fully conscious of the kind of syncretism they are facing in their specific context. It is imperative that the Soshanguve township gospel communicators come to terms with these realities. The evangelical response towards syncretism is engagement, as was discussed in the introduction of Chapter 1, the literature reviews in Chapter 2, the data collection in Chapter 3, and the data analyses in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents an approach and method on how to engage with syncretism in the churches of the Soshanguve township and in churches in general.

5.2 DEFINITION OF EVANGELICAL

Alaister McGrath offers the following definition of the term evangelical:

> A term initially used to refer to the nascent reforming movement, especially in Germany and Switzerland, in the 1510s and 1520s, which places special emphasis upon the supreme authority of Scriptures and the atoning death of Christ (McGrath 1998: 348-349).

Hannah produced a similar definition to McGrath:

> Evangelicalism, as used as a branch of Christendom, refers to the embracing of the conservative perspective on such doctrines as the trinity, the deity of Christ, the inability of humankind to merit salvation, substitutionary atonement and salvation by grace alone. At the core of the movement are a set of religious values that centre on the necessity of personal conversion and the spreading of the gospel (Hannah 2001:368-369).

Tennent (2010:225) similarly states: “Evangelical means being committed to the centrality of Christ, historic Christian orthodoxy, and the urgency to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, calling the world to repentance and faith. Evangelical faith helps us to remember the centrality of the gospel.”

5.3 EVANGELICAL DOGMA

An evangelical church is also known by its submission to the Bible as the final authority for life, a Christ-centred gospel and a Trinitarian view of God. Evangelicals view themselves as “people of the book”. The sixteenth century reformers reclaimed the early Church’s faith in itself. The reformers insist that the church should be Christ-centred in its gospel proclamation and this should be the life and the identity of the church. In as much as the reformers laid claim to this heritage of the early church, we observe that there was a movement of protest as well as a reformation; a protest because it decried the dilution of the Christian faith that crept into the institution of the church and saw the regression as another gospel, not the one delineated in Scripture. It was a reformation because it was a call-back to the foundations laid and built on by the apostles and the earliest church.

Henry (1947:88-89) writes:

> The evangelical task primarily is the preaching of the gospel, in the interest of individual regeneration by the supernatural grace of God, in such a way that divine redemption can be recognized as the best solution of our problems, individual and social. This produces, within history, through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, a divine society that transcends national and international lines.
>
> The corporate testimony of believers, which is their purity of life, should provide for the world an example of a divine dynamic to overcome evils in every realm. The social problems of our day are much more complex than in apostolic times, but they do not, on that account, differ in principle. When the twentieth century church begins to "out-live" its environment as the first century church outreached its pagan neighbours, the modern mind, too, will stop casting about for other solutions.

The evangelical dogma is summarized in the belief of Jesus Christ's death for our sins and the salvation of all who believe in his name. Erickson (1993:13) refers to evangelicals as:

> Those who believe that all humans need salvation and that this salvation involves regeneration by the supernatural work of God. Based upon his grace, this divine act is received by repentance and faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Further evangelicals actively and urgently seek the conversion of all persons worldwide to this faith. They regard the canonical scriptures as the supreme authority in matters of faith and practice.

Stott (1999:15) asserts that evangelical faith "is original, apostolic, New Testament Christianity." He also states:

> Evangelical came into widespread use only in the early eighteenth century, in relation to the so-called Evangelical Revival associated with John Wesley and George Whitefield. But in the seventeenth century it

> had been applied both to the Puritans in England and to the Pietismus in Germany, and in the sixteenth century to the Reformers. They called themselves *evangelic*, short for *evangelic viri, 'evangelical men,'* a designation which Luther adopted as *die Evangelischen.*

This evangelical defence of Stott (1994:15-18) asserts that proto-evangelicals include figures such as John Wycliffe, who was named *Doctor Evangelicus*; and the great church father, Augustine, who promoted the idea of getting back to the basics of the New Testament, in reference to the term 'euangello' from which evangelical Christians derive their name. All these attributed ultimate authority to Scripture and salvation to the crucified Christ alone and that the divine grace is the only remedy to human guilt. The epitome of this notion is captured by the British evangelical preacher, Calver and Warner (1996:26) asserted that the distinguishing features of evangelicals have always included an insistence of four priorities:

- Supreme authority of the scriptures.
- Redemption only through the sacrifice of Christ.
- Requirement of a personal conversion.
- Urgent need for evangelism.

The evangelical ecclesiology holds itself accountable to the gospel. For the evangelical church, the church is called into being through Jesus Christ and empowered as witness to the gospel.

5.4 QUESTIONING SYNCRETIC ELEMENTS IN THE CHURCH

Across the Christian landscape churches emphasise a variety of notions that eclipse the foundation of the gospel. The following description is not intended to caricature certain traditions, but it may help in illustrating how various traditions replace the gospel as the primary means, as well as to identify any subtle syncretic elements.

5.4.1 Pentecostals and charismatic churches

The emphasis is placed on experiencing the Spirit. We certainly need to be intimately acquainted with the Spirit. But an experience with the Spirit cannot replace the centrality of the gospel message. In fact, what the Spirit most longs to do, is to make the gospel real to our hearts (2 Cor. 3:18-4:4), and the way we are filled by the Spirit is by grasping and believing fundamentally in the gospel. When we teach people to seek closeness to God through ecstatic experience, rather than pointing them back to renewed faith in the gospel, we are eclipsing the gospel with secondary experience. The Spirit itself cannot do this. The role of the Spirit is to guide us to the glories of the gospel (John 15:26).

The other emphasis is that of 'prosperity gospel'. The emphasis is placed on the victorious, blessed life God wants you to have. I do not have a problem teaching that God wants to bless his children. But what really changes us is not the hope that God can give us more material stuff in the future; rather when we see that God Himself is greater than any blessing He can bestow, and that even if we lose everything and still have Him, it will be enough. The real danger of prosperity is that it directs our eyes away from God to his gifts.

5.4.2 A felt needs gospel

A 'felt needs gospel' is the gospel that is concerned about the current trends in the community; always trying to conform to their current culture. It is the gospel that has been stripped of its evangelical essence and mimicking the world's philosophy. It is the false gospel of "easy believism".

According to Pruitt (2014:26):

> Easy-believism may well be the "gospel" of modern Western Christianity. It is a "gospel" without real conviction of sin. It is a "gospel" that demands no repentance at all, or at best a very shallow repentance. It is a "gospel" of human manipulation. It is a "gospel" that is often recognizable by the claims of hundreds, thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of professions of faith through the ministry of a church, while there are many

> fewer baptisms and much smaller growth in that church. It should be expected that any church that claims to have won hundreds or thousands to the Lord in a year should be growing, but often it is not the case in churches where the "gospel" of easy-believism is the norm.

Most of the churches that want numerical growth in congregants without them being faithful to the gospel, opt to be a felt needs gospel. Gilley (2006:38) succinctly attests that "the Christian community at the present time appears to be in lock step with the world system. Whatever the world is selling, Christians seems to be buying. They may perfume it a bit, hang some religious ornaments on it and throw some scriptures into the mix." Veith (1994:212-213) shares a story of a church that used to be known by its faithful proclamation of the gospel, that opted for being a seeker church.

> First came the market survey, which pinpointed a number of steps necessary to implement such growth in a postmodern age. For example, it was determined that the church must change its name because the term 'Baptist' was a turn-off in the community. And people would come to church if it was convenient, so it was necessary to relocate to a prime location off the freeway. A modern facility was erected with all the bells and whistles that reflect a materialistic society. On the other hand, religious symbols such as the cross were offensive to some, so the symbols were expunged. Not only symbols but words are offensive as well; it became necessary, therefore, to eliminate terms such as redemption and conversion. Of course, negative subjects such as hell and judgement had to be replaced with positive ones. In abandoning its doctrine and its moral authority and in adjusting its teaching to the demands of the marketplace, the church embarked on a pilgrimage to postmodernism.

Let me highlight some concerns on this movement; there is no teaching about anything negative. Sermons focus on what is deemed positive, with an emphasis on persons, more than on God. There is no in-depth teaching about the Bible. There is a big emphasis on

numbers. The services are more about entertainment than worship. We must not underestimate the power of the gospel. The gospel has the power to change us on the spot. God purposed his church to be built up through the careful, accurate, and clear preaching and teaching of his Word. Nothing else will accomplish the task. If the Scripture is not diligently, systematically and correctly taught, Christ's church will not be equipped. There are no exceptions to this mandate. The church must proclaim the word of truth; it must be the utmost priority. Congregations which focus on techniques, programmes and entertainment, at the expense of the centrality of the Word of God, may build large followings, but they will not build Christians. Only the Word can do that.

5.4.3 Fundamentalist churches

McGrath (1998:251) describes the fundamentalist churches as follows:

> Biblically, fundamentalism opposes the notion of any form of biblical criticism, committing to interpreting Scripture completely literally. Theologically, fundamentalism has produced a rigid set of doctrines.
>
> Sociologically, fundamentalism is reactionary, with a strict criterion for membership and a strong working-class association.Guidelines for behaviour are not a problem. The problem begins when the emphasis on those guidelines eclipses the gospel itself. Behaving like a Christian does not transform anyone. Only being overwhelmed by the God of the gospel can transform a person.

5.4.4 Reformed churches

There exists an assumption that if you can master the TULIP (five points of Calvinism), you qualify as spiritually acceptable. The correct doctrine is of course essential, but no doctrinal flower can change your life. Only the beauty of Jesus can transform your heart. People need to be careful not to replace the adoration of God with information. The scriptural information is essential, but we need primarily to be motivated by the sacrifice made for us by Christ on the cross and the power of the gospel. In general, the foremost problem is not with what is being taught, but where the emphasis lies on what is taught.

Heresy is not just about wrong teaching; it is about putting undue emphasis on certain aspects of good teaching. Horton (2008:119) notes: “We can lose Christ as easily by distraction as by denial. Christ-less Christianity can happen through addition as well as subtraction.” Gospel-centred churches must emphasise most of all the news about what Christ has done for us. The secondary matters flow from that, as long as Christ’s purpose and sacrifice are not eclipsed.

5.5 NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL

It seems from 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Timothy 2:8 that this is, as Paul would say, of “first importance.” This is “His gospel.” A correct understanding of the gospel is extremely important. How do we know what the gospel really is? Corrie (2007:137) defines the gospel clearly:

> The word ‘gospel’ (*evangelion* in Greek) is used over seventy-five times in the New Testament in the sense of Good News. In Mark 1, it is good news of the coming of God’s kingdom; the two expressions of gospel and the kingdom of God, are indeed very close in meaning. But it is at the same time, the good news of Jesus Christ, for the great herald of the gospel is its content, the one in whom God fulfils Old Testament promise and expectation. The irreducible, non-negotiable content of the gospel is this unique historical event of God’s coming in Christ to redeem and restore his lost and disordered creation. Indeed, Mark’s gospel opens with the words: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1, NIV). Nevertheless, the good news is not mere narrative but also “the power of God for salvation” (Rom.1:16, NIV).

The expression underlines its sovereign and transformative character. Its source is God alone: it is a pure gift. Messengers may announce it but can contribute nothing to it. Indeed, my attempt to combine it with human efforts undermines its essential nature. The gospel is God come in power through the eternal Son and eschatological Spirit, to recreate humanity and cosmos.Syncretism in churches is caused by a lack of strong

emphasis on the Scripture in contrast to what the surrounding culture teaches. People need to have biblical answers to their ethical questions.

The respondents in this thesis mentioned the following Bible passages as coming to mind when considering how the gospel is distorted: Acts 2:14-41; 2 Timothy 4:1-8; Matthew 7:15-20; and Matthew 7:21-29. The following case study describes how these passages deal with the faithful proclamation of God's Word.

5.5.1 Christ-centred preaching from Acts 2:14-41

Where in the Bible do we go for a methodological example of preaching? Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:14-41 is the recognised place to start. Peter's sermon is the cornerstone of the practice of preaching in the Christian church in Acts 2:14-41.

Acts 2:14-41 reports the first Christian sermon ever preached. The apostle Peter stood before multitudes of non-believing Jews and Gentiles on the Day of Pentecost to explain the supernatural incidents of that day. God used Peter to convert three thousand people.

Peter's sermon was plain and persuasive. His message was also sound because it was filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter quoted frequently from Old Testament readings. It is the Bible that God uses to convert sinners. Peter's sermon was entirely centred on our Lord Jesus Christ, for Christianity is the work and the way of Christ. The goal of all evangelistic preaching is that Christ must be preached to connect man with the living Christ. A true Christian is not a person who knows about Christ, but one who knows Christ.

Marshall (1980:73) emphasises that Peter is filled with the Spirit and thus speaks from God. DeSilva (2004:889) also explains that the Christians believed that the gift of prophecy by the Spirit was now available in the church. Peter's sermon therefore had the implication that it really comes from the Spirit.

Conzelmann (1987:20) refers to the fact that, for Luke, this speech explains the transition to the apocalyptic future.

Peter's sermon addresses five elements that we can use to evaluate modern day gospel so that we may grow in our love for the true gospel

Explanation of the Pentecost (v. 14-21).

Peter begins by explaining the amazement of the crowd during the Pentecost experience. He rejected the myth that people who attend Pentecost are drunk (v. 16).

He turned to Joel 2: “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

*“*In the last days I will pour out my Spirit to all flesh*”* (v. 17, NIV). The last day began when Jesus came to earth as God man and Israel’s Messiah. At Pentecost God poured out his Spirit upon all flesh. The Spirit is still poured out upon all who receive Christ.

“And your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams*”* (v. 17, NIV).

In the new age of the Spirit, there was prophesying and visions. In the first century church some Christians did have visions and dreams and prophesy, because there was not a complete canon of Scripture. It is important to note that, in the quotation from Joel 2, there is no mention of tongues. The gift primarily mentioned is the gift of prophecy. Prophecy in the New Testament describes the receiving of a special revelation from God and communicating it in the common language of the people. Prophecy in both the Old and New Testament was “Thus says the Lord, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Keep in mind that the founders of the early church, such as those in Acts 2, did not sit in the service with Bibles on their laps. God spoke to these people directly through prophets. This gift was needed when there was no complete canon of Scripture.

Today, we might say prophecy is the ability to declare the inerrant Word of God; however, with the completion of the Bible there is no need for prophesy, visions and dreams. It is so sad that, today, the so-called prophetic word spoken to people is taken more seriously than God’s spoken Word. The Bible is sufficient and inerrant. The Bible fully reveals God to man. The Bible is sufficient for living and leads to salvation. The Bible is our final authority (2 Tim. 3:16). Karl Barth confessed: “I have read so many books in my entire life, but the Bible is the only book that reads me” (Hull 2006:218). Today’s prophecy makes non-believers and nominal Christians comfortable. Today’s prophecy is a Christian version of the teachings of the sangomas.

Always bear in mind Deuteronomy 18:21-22 (N.I.V): “Even if his prophesy comes true but is against the Scripture he must be executed.” Remember that Satan also has prophetic ability (Rev 16:13-14). You cannot use experience as a basis for truth. The scripture is our basis for truth. “And it shall be that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (v. 21, NIV).

The overwhelming reason why Peter chose to quote Joel 2, was to stress to the unsaved Jews that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was for both Gentiles and Jews. Here is an example of the great mercy of our God! He offers to those who deserve judgement a means of escape and overcoming. All who call on Christ will be saved. To call upon Christ is to acknowledge one’s total inability to save oneself. The offer of salvation is open to all those who believe in Christ and call upon Him to save them (John 5:24; John 3:16). When men and women believe in what God has said about Jesus Christ and call upon the name of the Lord, asking Jesus to be Lord of their life, then they will receive the Spirit of God with all its fullness. What is the message in Acts 2:vv. 14-21, (NIV)? “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!”

In this regard Kistemaker (1990:91) gives important information:

> The wording of this particular verse from Joel indicates that Peter no longer addresses the multitude in general. He confronts the individual listener with Christ’s gospel and tells him to call on the name of the Lord. At this point the listener understands the term *Lord* to mean God; but in the conclusion of his sermon, Peter clearly states that God made Jesus “both Lord and Christ” (v. 36). When the believer calls on the Lord’s name (compare 9:14), he calls on Christ.

Peter called the people to attention: “Men of Israel hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you (confirmed) by God, with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourself know” (Acts *2:*.22, NIV). Peter began with the basic truth that they know.

Peter's preaching was Christ-centred. He established his preaching on the fundamental truth of Christianity. He preached that Jesus Christ is the divine Messiah. MacArthur (1994:59) writes:

> Peter establishes Jesus's credentials by demonstrating how his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation prove Him to be the Messiah. As his sermon unfolds, Peter flows through those four elements in chronological order." *"This man delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God"* (Acts 2: 23). He elucidated that the death of Jesus Christ was in God's plan.

The only way for God to deal with our sins was to put Christ to death for our sins as the sacrificial Lamb of God. Christ's death proves that He is the Messiah and that it was God's plan.

*"*You nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death*"* (v. 23b). It was as if He was pointing directly at each one of them. It takes bravery to proclaim the inerrant Word of God. Peter has been changed; he is no longer the same person who denied Jesus three times.

Kistemaker (1990:93) explains:

> Peter removes any doubt whether God acted rashly in formulating his purpose to hand over Jesus to the Jewish people. He adds the term *foreknowledge.* With this word, Peter points to God's omniscience by which every part of his plan is fully know to God in advance. Peter explains the resurrection of Jesus quoting Psalm 16. Jesus' resurrection proves that He is Messiah (vv. 24-33). The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ should be the major theme of all preaching. Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-10, in order to show that Psalm 16 is a reference to Jesus Christ. *"*This Jesus God raised up again to which we are all witnesses.*"* Here Peter is stating that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not a secret, it was evident to all. Christ sends the Holy Spirit to prove that He is God (vv. 33).

Kistemaker (1990:94) explains that Jesus was delivered from the agony of death because the sinless Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world, but also that death no longer had any power over him.

Marshall (1980:75) explains that Peter did not need to prove that Jesus was resurrected. He simply proclaimed and bore witness to it. Peter explained the authority of Christ by quoting Psalm 110:34-36.

Jesus holds the keys of life and death, heaven and hell. Jesus is Lord whether man acknowledges it or not; whether you believe it or not. Those who reject Jesus in this life will eventually face his wrath on the judgement day.

Mike Ratliff rightly said "Soft preaching produces hard hearts, while hard preaching produces soft hearts towards God and his righteousness." (Ratliff 2011:online).

*"*And [they] said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, men and brethren what shall we do?" *(*v. 37)

They were convicted of the truth. The success of Peter's preaching was not dependent on his cleverness, but upon the Holy Spirit. There is no repentance if you don't preach Christ.

Paul said "Faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of God" *(*Rom. 10:17, NIV). Peter led them on how they should respond to the gospel message in three ways "And Peter said to them, repent" (v. 38, NIV). There is a need to change the thinking about Jesus Christ. Accept Him as your Lord and Saviour. Kistemaker (1990:105) asserts:

> Repentance signifies that the man's mind is changed completely, so that he consciously turns away from sin (3:19). Repentance causes a person to think and act in harmony with Jesus' teachings. The result is that he breaks with unbelief and in faith accepts God's Word.

Similarly, Berkhof (1941:486) notes: "True repentance encompasses three elements: intellect, emotions and volition."

According to Jesus, instruction in what our response must be is not merely an implication, but rather part of the gospel message itself. That is what the risen Christ teaches his disciples in Luke 24:46-47 (N.I.V): “The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his nations to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.” We are justified by faith alone in Christ alone and not in ourselves at all.

The Spirit of the Lord makes a radical change in us, what the Bible calls new creation and the new birth. This is good news and this central message of the gospel is and must remain clear. “And let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus for forgiveness of sins” (v. 38). Repentance is the means to forgiveness and baptism is the outward evidence of true repentance. Peter continues: “Be baptized every one of you.” There is no mentioned in the Bible that baptism by water is a means of salvation. A Christian should be baptized to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a sign that a person has joined the company of God’s people.

Kistemaker (1990:105) notes: “Repentance, baptism, and faith are theologically related. When the believer who repents is baptized, he makes a commitment of faith. He accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour knows that through Christ’s blood his sins are forgiven.” “And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38, NIV)

“For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as our Lord Jesus Christ shall call to Himself” (v. 39, NIV). The forgiveness of sins and the promise of the Holy Spirit are not the possession of everyone, but only those who are called by God to salvation. This verse tells us plainly that we do not find Christ, but that Christ finds us.

He exhorted them saying: “Be saved from this perverse generation” (v. 40, NIV). True Christians are to be separated from the evil of their day and set apart for Christ.

A Christian is a changed person, transformed from the pattern of this world. The way to be separated is to obey God’s Word.

Three thousand souls were genuinely saved (v. 41, NIV).

Acts 2:41 states: “So then those who had received the Word were baptized, and they were added that day about three thousand souls.”

We have seen from this passage that there is no true repentance without of Christ-centred preaching. We need to show them the need to live in obedience to God, no matter what the cost. Let me reiterate the following verses (v. 37, NIV) to the question: “What shall we do?”to which Peter responds: “Repent, be baptized and receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.”

Paul’s famous words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 (NIV) serve as an example:

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel preached to you which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word, I preached to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scripture, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve (vv. 1-5). Peter exhorted people (Acts 2:38, NIV) when he said “repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”.

5.5.2 Applicability of 2 Timothy 4:1-8 about gospel preaching

2 Timothy 4:1-8: a charge to preach the Word

Paul uses nine commands in this passage, five in verse 2, and four in verse 5. Further, in vv 6-8, he notes his finishing reflections. “Preach the Word” (v. 2) refers back to Scripture (vv. 16-17).

Guthrie (1979:166) refers to the fact that the aorist tense for the verb and the imperatives

“…adds solemnity and abruptness to the injunctions. “To preach the word must be done in the sight of God and Christ Jesus because there will be judgment in the end” (Young 1994:50).

The five imperatives (obligations) of a faithful preacher are the following:

- **Preachers are commanded to be prepared to expound God's Word at all time** "Be ready in season and out of season". Preaching should be a life-consuming passion. Any Christian may be called on a rescue mission. You are like a paramedic who is always prepared to rescue souls. This is a call to an evangelistic thrust.
- **Preachers are commanded to reprove.**
- **Preachers are commanded to rebuke.** Such an approach is desperately needed in our day of watered down, feel good Christianity.
- **Preachers are commanded to exhort with complete patience.** Exhort means to strongly encourage, in this case to correct Christian behaviour. Some people need rebuke and some need encouragement. It has been perpetually said that the preacher's job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfort. See also Guthrie (1979:166) who emphasises the need for longsuffering. Patience does not mean tolerating sin. The reason for preaching is clearly asserted (1 Timothy 4:3, NIV): "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires". Sound doctrine means healthy doctrine. Sound doctrine results in healthy Christian living. Look today how families are separated due to a lack of sound doctrine.
- **A preacher should not preach just to make you feel good, he should preach the truth because the truth shall set you free.** Kelly (1978:206) explains: "Timothy must **refute** error by reasoned argument; and he must not hesitate to **rebuke** when censure is called for. More positively, he must **exhort** (this is a more suitable rendering then 'encourage', which some prefer), i.e., urge his flock to repentance and perseverance." This is a powerful temptation to the preacher who wants to be popular and thrive according to worldly standards. If preaching is not central and serious, then we don't have a church.

It will be arrogant on my side to preach something extraneous or to preach about myself. It is the Word of God that must be preached. We come with a man-centred edition of the gospel in order to make the gospel sound better to unbelievers' ears, in order to try to justify God before the bar of the unbelieving world. The results of such attempts litter the history of the church. "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardships, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil the ministry" (v. 5). Christians are commanded to be sober in all things. To be sober is to be thoughtful, clearheaded, serious.

Paul instructs Timothy not to lose sight of evangelising the lost. A Christian should not lose zeal for the lost souls. Jude 1:3 states: "All saints should contend earnestly for the faith delivered to them."

Paul in this verse reflects on the impact of his ministry, looking at his finishing line with great joy. Paul describes his death. Listen to what he says: "Already poured out" (vv. 6); the idea of complete giving, totally given to God. No reservations. He sees himself laying down his life for the gospel. "The time of departure is at hand" (v. 6b, NIV). He gives us a picture of someone who finished a course and is waiting to go. Preparing to pass on the baton to Timothy. Listen to Paul's three phrases on finishing well: "I have fought a good fight, finished the race, I have kept the faith" (v. 7, NIV).

As Paul looked towards his coming death, he also looked back and gave three positive statements about his ministry. In 1 Timothy 6:12 (NIV), Paul commanded Timothy to do as he had done: "Fight a good fight of faith." Paul continued by saying that he had completed the mission he was called to perform by God. Paul specifically records that he has held to the truth. Keeping the faith is the key to our Christian lives. Paul has dedicated his life to the one thing worth dying for. He is grateful that he finally completed the assignment God set for him and that he kept the faith.

Paul knew that there was a crown waiting for him in heaven and that he was certain to receive it. He creates a picture of a graduation ceremony. "And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing." It means true believers who have set their minds on the return of Jesus Christ. This is a fight worth fighting.

When we preach or teach the scriptures, we open the door for the Holy Spirit to work. God has not promised to bless oratory or clever preaching. He has promised to bless His Word. For Christians, there is no legacy that you can leave others than to have helped people come to know Jesus Christ as the Lord and saviour. I would like to invite you to be more intentional about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

This gospel we have received is complete, lacking nothing. Thus, to add to it, is only to detract from it and from God's glory.

5.5.3 Warning against false teaching

In Matthew 7:15-20 the warning against false teaching is evident. DeSilva (2004:868) refers to the pressing need of a clear distinction between true and false teaching in the early church. Clear injunction and advice are given (DeSilva 2004:868). It is also important to note that Christians will be able to detect the false teachers. Furthermore, it is important to note that the judgment of God must be part of the message. The moral *direction* and the moral *suggestion* of the preacher's life must also be consistent (Bruner 2004:353).

5.5.4 Warning against false heresy

In Romans 16: 17-18, Paul gave a sound admonition to believers:

> I urge you brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned, keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive (immature) people" (NIV).

The apostle John in 1 John 4:1 also warns believers: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (NIV).

Acts 17:11 attests: “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they receive the message with great eagerness and examine the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (NIV).

According to Ezra 7:10: “He set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it and to teach his statutes and practices in Israel” (NIV).

The central preaching of false teachers contains little on the substitutionary death of Christ. The false teacher deceives and ensnares the gullible by claiming to do miracles He uses lies to advance himself and his doctrine. He targets the unstable and worldly (2 Peter 2:14-18). False teachers study the fleshly desires of sinful people, and then entice them into their churches by playing to those lusts. He rules according to his own ideas and authority rather than the Bible but decorates his ideas selectively with the Bible.To avoid the deceitful, deadly teachings of false teachers, Christians must cling to God’s Word like Cape Town pedestrians cling to light poles when the Southeaster blows. It is a matter of life and death.

5.5.5 Applicability of Matthew 7:21-29 to gospel preaching

5.5.5.1 Warning about counterfeit Christians

Matthew 7:21-29 may be considered the most frightening verses in the Bible and covers three basics lessons that we need to learn about the integrity of the gospel in order to stay true to it.

The warning in Matthew 7:21-23 states: “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 21 NIV). The problem with many believers is that their Christianity is just lip service. This verse teaches us that it is possible to do the works of the Lord, while your heart is not with Him. This is a sobering reminder that true doctrine should go together with true practice (orthodox and orthopraxy). This is a continuation of what we have learned in the previous verses, when Jesus warned us to be aware of false teachers (vv. 15-20). Let everyone examine himself. Jesus’ words are of the utmost importance and should be heeded. (DeSilva 2004:267). The authority of Jesus’ words is

from God. “He speaks for God, redefines the law, and makes his word final word” (Gardner 1991:138).

Prophesy in the Bible is more about cautioning people in terms of their sinful lives as opposed to today’s prophesy that offers false hope and comfort. To be a prophet was to be the mouthpiece of God. We can look back at prophets like Jeremiah and Nathan, who confronted King David regarding the sin of adultery. We can look again at Jesus’ ministry; He was a great prophet, remember His encounter with the Samaritan woman. Jesus was also a great miracle worker, as can be seen in Matthew 8:1, the man with leprosy, and healing of two demon possessed men (8:28-32), etc.

The passion of Jesus was not all about prophesy, miracles and the casting out of demons. His greatest passion was liberating people with the truth. Prophesy, casting out demons, and performing miracles were secondary (John 8:28). He wanted people to have a full grasp of the kingdom of God. This should be a warning that we should not necessarily follow someone who reputedly performs miracles. It is clear in this verse that doing great miracles in his name does not prove anything. Notice also his word “*many*” when He was teaching “Enter through the narrow door, wide is the gate and many are found in it” Jesus also mentioned “*many”* at the beginning of verse 22 (NIV).

Jesus gives us the standard for being accepted by Him (v. 21), by way of contrast: *“*But only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven”. God wants an obedience that

is not only on the surface, but comes from our inner being. “The will of my Father” refers to the character and conduct of the kingdom of God. The test of faithfulness as a disciple of Jesus Christ is based on whether an individual’s life conforms to the character of the kingdom.Concerning these aspects of the Sermon on the Mount, Senior (1997:110) writes:

> Therefore, the gospel of Matthew sees these teachings of Jesus not as mere examples or ideals but as moral imperatives, as revelatory examples or ‘focal instances’ that instruct the Christian on how one is to live in the world–even while conscious that the capacity of each Christian to respond to the gospel

> is something that develops over time and that the array of alternative moral actions available will always be limited.

The measuring stick of entering the kingdom is obedience. If we believe that Jesus is Lord, we must obey Him. The mark of true discipleship is not simply hearing and believing but believing and doing. We enter heaven by obedience not by works. What is most frightening is that the same Jesus who is warning us today, will be our judge (Rev. 20:11-15). You need to know that payday is coming. God knows what you are doing in your private space. These verses should also remind us that God is fully conscious of all we do.

To make this matter clear, he gives us the example of two housebuilders–the houses are identical. The difference lies in the foundations (Matt. 7:24-27). Building on a solid foundation means taking God's Word into practice. He who builds his life and places his hope on the word of God alone; not on ceremony, ritual, visions, experiences, feelings, or miracles, is the one who builds upon rock. As far as the interpretation of this parable is concerned, Christ himself is the rock (Rom. 9:33). A wise builder must anchor the foundation on solid rock.

1 Peter 2:6 states: "For in Scripture it says "see I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious corner stone, and the one who trust in Him will never be put to sham" (NIV). The solid rock that Jesus is referring to here is his teachings. That is the solid foundation on which true churches and believers must base their lives. Harrell (2004:46- 47) attests:

> Regarding the living Lord of the Word whom we approach, Peter stressed that: A living stone; at Caesarea Philippi, when Peter's faith prompted him to confess that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Lord pronounced the confessing disciple blessed, and changed his name from Simon to Peter, meaning rock (Matt. 16:16-18). However, the bedrock upon which salvation is build is Christ, not Peter. Therefore, Peter rightly refer to Christ as a living stone. This image conveys to us the truth that our Saviour is stable and solid.

We rejoice that most of our churches in Africa are full to capacity, but the question is: How immovable and weathering is the foundation of those churches?

Building on sand is building purely on human philosophy and reveals the shallowness of your knowledge and faith in God (Psalm 1). Such a person has no biblical conviction. To build on sand is to be self-sufficient and self-righteous, always learning but unable to come to the knowledge of truth. Jesus says the storms will reveal whether we have a true foundation or not. The storm is the test of our foundation; The storm will test your foundation and this test cannot be avoided. The storm may refer to life's difficulties.

We must ensure that we have a truly intimate relationship with the Lord, not just a superficial relationship. Do you have a relationship with Jesus? He is the kind of friendyou can talk to about anything and everything; the friend you know will be there when you are in deep trouble. Your relationship with the Lord should develop deep roots. How is your foundation? Jesus spoke with authority, not as a teacher of the laws. Jesus presented matters of great significance. His teaching did not confuse his listeners because He was speaking the truth. He spoke about God's love out of a great concern for their souls. He spoke with authority (v. 28).

He was unlike the scribes and the Pharisees, who were not convinced of anything. Jesus taught with authority, because He is the authority. He accomplished his purpose, as He was understood. As Christians we should not fear to share our faith, because the authority is not in us, it is in God's word. This teaching should make us examine ourselves introspectively.

A correct understanding of the gospel is essential. As a gospel-centred people in multiple contexts, we must never lose sight of the centrality of the gospel itself. We must be vigilant to watch out for any tendency to substitute the gospel of Christ for another gospel, whatever shape and form. We must retain our allegiance to the Triune God of the Bible. The evangelical church must be known for its insistence in the evangel and the gospel of Jesus Christ, as the true touchstone for the Christian faith.

5.5.6 Exploring the gospel

It seems from 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Timothy 2:8 that this is, as Paul would say, of “first importance.” New challenges to the clarity and sufficiency of the gospel arise in each generation. Corrie (2007:138-141) explores the gospel effects by identifying eleven gospel essentials, which are discussed in the next sections.

5.5.6.1 Good news of reconciliation

The gospel is good news that God has overcome humanity’s estrangement from himself caused by sin, excepting the angelic rebellion, as the source of every other aspect of human and cosmic alienation. It is profoundly theocentric and all else that the gospel promises flows from the one focal point of reconciliation with the Creator. The good newsis that rebels are redeemed from condemnation and become children of God and heirs of the blessings of salvation.

5.5.6.2 Good news of deliverance

The gospel is the good news of deliverance from the enslavement from the kingdom of the devil. God makes salvation a reality in effecting an inner spiritual and moral transformation. Those who are in Christ are new creatures born again (2 Cor. 5:17).

5.5.6.3 Good news of restored community

The Genesis account of primeval human rebellion against God is rapidly followed by references of breakdown in the closest of human relationships in a sin-fractured human community. However, the gospel announces a salvation that is in Christ, known through solidarity with Him, and all that are in Him constitute together a new humanity. Sin destroys relationships and the disintegration of society ensues. The good news is of a community restored in Christ. Humanity is to be characterized by the love which God displayed in planning its redemption. This is good news in a warring world.

5.5.6.4 Good news to the poor

The gospel takes no account of economic distinctions. Mary’s song proclaims the radical reversal of social status that God accomplishes (Luke 1:51-53) and Luke records that

those who first heard the gospel of Jesus' birth were shepherds from the lowest strata of society. The poor are welcomed into the community of the redeemed where they are valued as people and not despised as poor.

5.5.6.5 Good news of creation

The gospel addresses humanity's physical environment. In consequence of Adam's rebellion, Genesis speaks of the curse inflicted on an earth that was created 'very good' (Gen. 3:15-19). This entailed a multiplicity of physical ills such as sickness, accidents, starvation, natural catastrophes, death and more. However, Jesus' ministry includes the healing of the sick, blind and lame, the feeding of the hungry, the resurrection of the dead and subjugation of recalcitrant natural forces.

5.5.6.6 Good news of victory

The gospel is the good news of Christ's victory over Satan and every evil force including witchcraft and sorcery. The Bible articulates our spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-18. The New Testament suggests that Satan's power is rooted in human rebellion against God. Human sin enthrones him as 'prince of this world' and 'god' of this age (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor.4:4), rather than the possession of any legitimate authority, which also explains why Scripture presents him as the accuser (Job 1-2; Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10). Redemption from sin and from Satan is integrally related.

5.5.6.7 Gospel as eschatological tension

The term 'eschatological' is defined by Unger et al. (1957:373) as "a theological term employed to designate the doctrine of the last things, particularly those dealing with the second coming of Christ and the events preceding and following this great event." Every aspect of the gospel is an announcement of the future as well as the present good news. The actual experience of salvation is not yet complete but carries the promise of future fulfilment.

5.5.6.8 Gospel and universality

The universal thrusts present throughout the scriptures find full expression in the New Testament. It is pre-eminently apparent in Paul's mission and writings, for "Is He not the

God of the Gentiles too?" (Rom. 3:29). Nor is it merely a question of geographic extension, but also of social ethnic and gender exclusiveness, embracing every class and condition of humankind. The Acts of the apostles show the difficulty with which this crucial dimension of the gospel was understood and embraced in the context of Jewish ethnicand religious particularism. All equally need God's good news, and all may equally benefit from it, for He shows no favouritism. The gospel is for the world.

5.5.6.9 Gospel and life

It is vital that the gospel be visible in the lives and works of a believing community and of the human messengers. The heralds do not only declare good news, but they must also be good news. Gospel living and gospel proclamation are inseparable. God's people demonstrate the gospel in action (Col. 3:12-25).

They must be salt and light in the society, a radical witness to another way (Matt. 6:13-16). The Christian life is to be lived out daily by believers. We are to shine as a light in the present darkness of a sin-ridden lost world. The challenge Christians face in every place and time is to resist the pressure to conform to the surrounding culture, at which point the gospel is muted, and those who should be heralds simply mirror the society's own values, thereby ceasing to be messengers of the good news.

5.5.6.10 Gospel and proclamation

Gospel and mission are indivisible. Good news must be declared. The notion of the gospel contains the imperative of proclamation, made explicit in Peter's words: (Acts 4:20) "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard". Similarly, the Gospel of Matthew closes with the 'great commission.' The great commission is the final and only possible response to the preceding narrative. Paul also mentions in Romans 10:12-17 that the gospel must be proclaimed to men and women.

5.5.6.11 Gospel and our response

The gospel must be received. Jesus called for repentance and belief in the gospel, stating that only those who receive it can truly benefit from it. Certainly, its growth within the society is good news for the society as a whole. So what response does the gospel call

for? What should we do when we sense our need, our understanding of who God is and who Jesus is and what He has done? According to the Bible, “to repent of our sins and believe in Christ alone and to rely upon Him for victory over temptations.”

The New Testament often mentions repentance and belief together. When Paul met with the Ephesian church leaders, he summarized the message he preached in (Acts 20:21 NIV): “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”. Jesus instructs us to “repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). What is repentance? It is simply turning away from our sins. To repent is to recognize that you are a sinner and to renounce sin. The gospel brings blessings that are shared by all, though many may reject it.

5.6 SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE INVOLVED IN SYNCRETISM

5.6.1 Show them the essence of Christianity

Lack of commitment to Jesus Christ will lead to mediocrity and spiritual superficiality as attested by Ruiz (2005:8): “We see some spiritual superficiality shown in a lack of commitment to the demands and values of the kingdom of God”.

The danger with most of the leading pastors in the church is that they value people according to what they have and what they are doing, instead of prioritizing character.

5.6.2 Teach them about the non-negotiable core values of a biblical church

- To promote the true worship of God;
- To make Christ preeminent in all that is done;
- To be constantly highlighting the gospel of Christ;
- To preach and teach solid biblical theology;
- To develop and sustain biblically qualified and functioning leaders.

5.6.3 Emulating and practice the five Solas of reformation Sola

Five Solas are important in eradicating syncretism, because without them there is no gospel. The gospel hinges around Sola five, which summarizes the urgent need of the hour. Five of these convictions are necessary in order to be faithful to what God has revealed. It comes as an answer to the most common responses of the participants in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

5.6.4 *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone)

2 Tim 3:16-17 In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV), Paul reminds Timothy of the reliability and profitability of the scriptures.

Lessons that this passage teaches:

The entire Bible is inspired (v. 16): 'To inspire' means to breathe out by. The bottom line is that the scriptures are as reliable as God is reliable. Hughes (1988:238) affirms the inspiration of Scripture by attesting that; "you can hear the meaning in the transliteration of the Greek word Theopneustos (God breathed - Theo = "God" and pneustos = "breath"). More literally, "All Scripture is breathed into by God." This belief that Scripture was "breathed into by God" perfectly expresses the view held in the first century about the Old Testament writings.

The entire Bible is profitable (v. 16).

How is scripture profitable?

In every counselling situation, a permanent solution can be found in obeying and submitting oneself to the authority of the Bible. It might be, for example, a marital problem or an addiction; the Bible is able to direct us to a permanent solution. Scripture is useful for correction. Scripture is useful for training in righteousness. The Bible message must be taken as a whole.

The Psalmist praised God: "Your Word oh Lord is eternal, it stands firm in the heavens." (Psalm 119:89, NIV) If we read the Word of God, we shall know the will of God. Scripture equips (v. 17). In the scriptural context, 'equipped' implies having enough resources to

minister to others. Through the Bible, the minister is made ready to handle any peer pressure, marriage, a demanding job, and ministry in the church. In the challenges we will meet, the Bible will completely equip us. We need to apply scripture in daily practical life.

Using Scripture results in maturity The Bible will help you to form a Christian worldview, so that you think and respond to all of life as God intends. It is the permanent authority of God. The psalmist devoted 176 verses of Psalm 119 to the celebration of Scripture. The scriptures are life. We are commanded to study Scripture (Joshua 1:1-9; 2 Tim. 3:15; Acts 17:11). Our goal is to approach Scripture reverently and prayerfully. I want us to develop an appetite for Scripture (Psalm 19:9-24). If you love the Bible, you will always make time to study it.

5.6.4.1 Canon of Scripture

Roman Catholics consider the books of the Apocrypha as canonical, while Protestants do not. The books of Apocrypha were written after the Old Testament was completed and before the New Testament began.

Sproul 1992:21 notes:

> The first formal canon of the New Testament was created by the heretic, Marcion, who produced his own expurgated version of the Bible. To combat this heretic, the church found it necessary to declare the exact content of the New Testament. The vast majority of books that are now included in the New Testament clearly functioned with canonical authority from the time they were written.

Some of the Reformed tradition has pointed to a *providential specialissia* (special providence) in this regard. It is the invisible hand of providence in the history of the church along with the explicit promises of Scripture regarding the church and God's own Word that gives comfort to our souls.

5.6.4.2 Metaphors for Scripture

- **Scripture as a lamp**

Psalm 119:105 attests that “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (NIV). Also, Psalm 119:130 attests that “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (NIV).

The Psalmist explains God’s Word metaphorically as a spiritual illumination, the light of which is good for unregenerated people and believers.

- **Scripture as a hammer**

Jeremiah 23:29 says: “Is not my Word like fire, said the Lord, and like hammer that breaks the rocks into pieces” (NIV).

Scripture speaks of the hardened heart of Man. God’s Word, like a hammer, is able to break hardened hearts into pieces.

- **Scripture as a sword**

In describing the whole armour of God given in Ephesians 6:17-18, the apostle Paul lists only our spiritual offensive weapons. The one is “prayer” and the other, the “sword of the Spirit.”

Hebrews 12:4 describes God’s Word similarly as “sharper than any double-edged sword” (NIV). God’s Word has the ability to pierce man’s heart.

- **Scripture as a seed**

Luke 8:11 describes God’s Word similarly also as “The seed is the Word of God” (NIV). When this precious seed is planted in the “good soil” of the heart of those ordained to eternal life, it brings good fruit.

- **Expositional Scripturale preaching**

In a time when syncretism is rife in churches, particularly in the Soshanguve township, there is a simultaneous outcry of expository preaching in the pulpits of many churches.

- **Defining expository preaching**

Vines and Shaddix (1999:29) define expository preaching as:

> A discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth from the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners."

Christians who have a high view of the Bible regard faithful preaching as a priority in their churches.

Robinson (1980:21) is perhaps more profound in his definition:

> The communication of the biblical concepts derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through preacher, applies to the hearers.

A Christian who takes the Bible seriously will always regard faithful preaching as a priority in his/her life.

- **What is the preacher's responsibility?**

MacArthur (1992b:26) answers this question as follows:

- He is a messenger not an originator.
- He is a sower not the source (Matt. 13: 3, 19).
- He is a herald not the authority
- He is a steward not the owner (Col.1:25).
- He is a guide not the author (Acts 8:31).
- He is a server of spiritual food, not the chef (John 21:15, 17).

5.6.5 *Sola fide* (faith alone)

Faith is crucial in understanding the doctrine of salvation. We are not right with God in ourselves. We are under his wrath for our sins.

5.6.5.1 Justification

Montgomery (2001:132) states that 'justification' means 'to make righteous'. "Justification is an act of God by which he declares sinners to be righteous by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone." This is what Paul is teaching in Romans 3:21-26. In v. 22 Paul says: "This righteousness of God comes through *faith* in Jesus Christ to all who believe." He argues that "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through *faith* in his blood" (v. 25).

McGrath (1998:187) asserts: "The reason some people do not understand why faith alone justifies, is that they do not know what faith is."

Migliore (2004:236) aptly summarises the aspect of justification:

> As the first moment of this process, *justification is God's gracious forgiveness of sins that is received by faith alone* (Rom. 3:23-28). Accomplished and manifested in Jesus Christ, it is God's free, unconditional, and unmerited acceptance of us in spite of our sin and alienation from God, from others, and from ourselves. 'Justification' is a term from the judicial sphere and means 'acquitting' or 'making right'. That we are justified means that our broken relationship with God has been restored by an act of free grace and forgiveness. God's act of justification is by grace alone (*sola gratia*), in Christ alone (*solus Christus*), received by faith alone (*sola fide*).

Faith is not assent to an abstract set of doctrines but is a union between Christ and the believer.

Hebrews describes faith as follows (Heb. 11:13, NIV): "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we don't see. This is what the ancients were commended for". Most doctrinal winds cause people to be the victims of syncretism. People who are desperate about their situation or have abandoned faith in God may blend Christian faith with other elements.

5.6.6 *Sola gratia* (grace alone)

Grudem (1994:729) notes: “God did not have any obligation to impute our sins to Christ or to impute Christ’s righteousness to us; it was only because of his unmerited favour that He did this”. God’s grace is manifested in the following ways:

- **In the election**

  Ephesians 6:17-18 explains by saying:

He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in one he loves (NIV).

His electing of believers is his act of Grace to all who believe in Him.

- **In the redemption**

  The work of God’s grace to his people is revealed in redemption. (Eph. 1:7- 8).

In him we have redemption through the blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding”.

- **In the effectual calling**

  Ephesians 1:11 (NIV) also asserts that:

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are god’s possession to the praise of his glory.

Boice (2001:124) asserts: “The greatest biblical picture of the grace of God calling a dead sinner to life is probably Jesus raising Lazarus, recorded in John 11”.

God’s Spirit works through the preaching of the Bible, to call to faith those he has previously chosen for salvation and for whom Jesus specifically died.

Apostle John puts it: “And from his fullness, have we all received, grace upon grace” (John 1:16, NIV).

To Christians, God’s grace is inexhaustible and boundless.

5.6.7 *Sola Christus* (Christ alone)

It is very important to emphasise the central position of Jesus Christ in explaining how the church should evaluate syncretism. Jesus must always be at the centre of all discussions on the church. Migliore (2004:162) writes in this regard:

> For Christian faith ‘the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth’ is identified as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and ‘the Holy Spirit’ is primarily defined as the Spirit that prepares the way for the coming of Christ, empowers his ministry, and brings his work to its consummation. Christology is not the whole of Christian doctrine, but it is the point from which all else is illuminated.

Christ is not divided. Christ is the essence of the proclamation of the gospel in the world.

In the words of Tozer (1974:10-11):

> To urge men and women to believe in a divided Christ is bad teaching for no one can receive half of Christ, or a third of Christ, or a quarter of the person of Christ! We are not saved by believing neither in an office nor in a work. Christ is Lord; everyone who receives Him must surrender to his authority.

Boice (2001:105) also notes:

> Any gospel that talks merely about Christ-event, meaning the incarnation without the Atonement, is a false gospel. Any gospel that talks about the love of God, without showing that love led him to pay the ultimate price for sin in the person of his Son on the cross, is a false gospel. The only true gospel is the gospel of 'one mediator' who gave himself who gave himself for us (1 Timothy 2:5-6). If our churches are not preaching this gospel, they are not preaching the gospel at all, and if they are not preaching the gospel, they are not true churches. Evangelicalism desperately needs to rediscover its roots and recover its essential biblical bearing at this point.

Matthew 16:13-17 is one of the most crucial passages in the Bible The priority of Jesus' ministry in the world was to reveal Himself, his person and his work, as well as to teach and demonstrate who He was. 'Who is Jesus' is always a great question to ask people. The disciples were also clearly aware of the popular opinion about Jesus Christ. We will see how the people thought about Jesus (John 10:19-21, NIV).

The reply was: "Some say John the Baptist", because Jesus had preached the same unwelcoming messages that John the Baptist had been preaching, for example, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17, NIV). Another reason was that Jesus preached with boldness that characterised John the Baptist. Herod had said to his servants: "This is John the Baptist; he is raised from the dead and, therefore, these powers are at work in him" (Matt. 14:2, NIV). But then others answered "Elijah; the great prophet of the Old Testament". People thought Jesus could be Elijah because, according to the Bible, Elijah didn't die a natural death on earth; he was taken up to heaven by the whirlwind upon a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11, NIV)

Others said "Jeremiah" (Matt.14:2, NIV); some people saw how Jesus preached about the coming judgement on Jerusalem, just as Jeremiah had done. And they took him to be Jeremiah, raised from the dead and sent to them by God.

And still others, according to the disciples, were saying that Jesus was "one of the prophets", as many clearly suspected (John 1:45; 6:14; 7:40).

Jesus was not interested in what others thought of him. He came straight to the point. “What about you”? Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you think I am?” (Matt.16.15-16, NIV).

You will notice that, when Jesus asked the question, “But who do you say that I am?” He asked it of the disciples as a group. But the answer was given by an individual, namely Peter. As usual (Matt. 15:15; 19:27; John 6:68), Simon Peter was the spokesman of the disciples. He responded correctly, showing no doubt in declaring: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter emphasises Jesus in his answer to the question, as if to stress that there is no other.

He is saying: “You alone are the Christ, the only Christ. And there is no other Christ but you” That is the first great essential in this confession; that Jesus is the Christ. This confession was Peter’s response to the revelation God the father had given him. Jesus makes a point of telling him that this is truth. It is not something that Peter had worked out for himself.

Jesus said: “This truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven” (Matt. 11:25-27, NIV). The knowledge was granted as a gracious act of God. Without hesitation Peter declared Jesus to be the Messiah(Matt.16:16). Christianity is about an individual’s relationship with God. Peter not only confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, but as the Son of the living God. He is the true and real God.

Those who truly confess the Lordship of Christ, which is to confess Him as Lord and saviour (1 John 4:14-15), are truly blessed. Flesh and blood cannot bring understanding of the things of God (John 3; 1 Cor. 2:14). When people fellowship with Jesus Christ through his Word, the Spirit opens their minds and hearts to more and more of his truth and power.

5.6.8 *Sola Deo Gloria* (to God be the glory alone)

Exodus 20:3 says: “You shall have no other gods before me” (NIV). This obligation rests upon all those who owe their existence in God. Murray (2016:225) says: “The instinct to

worship remains in every human heart yet it leads not to God." The apostle Paul thought about God and stood in awe of Him at the end of the doxology in which he marvels about the glory of God. Romans 11:36 declares: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen" (NIV). Then we must give God all the glory.

The Psalmist expressed this beautifully when he looked upon heaven with great awe:

> The heavens declare the glory of God;
> The skies proclaim the work of his hands.
> Day after day they pour forth speech;
> Night after night they display knowledge.

Isaiah 43:7 refers to "everyone who is called by my name, whom I have created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (NIV). Similarly, God indicates that He is jealous of his glory: Isaiah 48:11 states "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another" (NIV).

5.6.9 Teaching biblical truth about demons and how to deal with them biblically

The fear and emphasis of demonology is at stake in the Soshanguve township. There is a great need for biblical teaching about demons. Scripture affirms the reality of demons. Demons are fallen angels. They are the angels who rebelled together with Satan. In several places in the Bible demons are called unclean spirits. For example, the demons that are referred to in Matthew 17:18. The same reference is found in Luke 10:17-20.

Can a Christian be possessed by a demon?

The biblical teaching is that demons cannot dwell within a true believer. 2 Corinthians 6:15-16 attest that:

> What harmony does Christ have with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Salvation brings true deliverance and protection from Satan. Paul says: “We are more than the conqueror through Christ” (Rom. 8:37, NIV). True repentance should be taught so that a Christian should be grounded. Easy-believism is sweeping many Christians into syncretism. Instead of teaching people to respond to signs and wonders of the gospels, preachers need to address the need for true biblical conversion.

Van Rensburg (1999:3-20) explains that cognisance must be taken of the reality of the dark spiritual world. It is however very important to have sound ways of dealing in the church with them. Prayer and loving accompaniment of the person in need is all important. New relations should be developed.

In a community, in which evil spirits and demon possession are well-known phenomena, there is a strong need for teaching on how to overcome these forces. Victory over demons is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Van Rensburg (1999:81-88) explains how the pastor should engage in a holistic approach to help the troubled person. In a reconstructive covenant model, there should be restoration. He uses the word *katartizein.* The person in sin should be restored in a personal relation with God. Next the person in sin should be build up *oikodomein* by the ministry of deliverance. The faith of the person should receive full attention. He or she should be strengthened in faith (*sterizein)*. Lastly, the person should be admonished and encouraged to live a new life with Christ and of rejection of the evil occult world. (*parakalein/nouthetein*)

My observations through the interviews that I have conducted with Christian leaders in most Christian churches in casting out demons has nothing to do with repentance, faith in Jesus Christ and resisting the devil. They emphasise exorcism.

A person needs to be made aware of the issues to be dealt with, in order that he may be delivered from the dominion of the devil and demons. Jesus said:

> When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none, he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came. And when he comes and finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; they enter and dwell there and the last state of that man is worse

than the first (Luke 11:24-26, NIV).

Charles Ryrie (1999:192) states:

> Normally one should not look to exorcism as the way to attack demons, but rather one must use the normal weapons of our warfare against Satan and his demons. The Christian should treat demon molestation as he would resist temptation or fight against the activities of his flesh. He should examine himself to see if there are any areas of rebellion against the law or will of God, confess any and all known sin, rely on the power of the indwelling Spirit who is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4), and use all the armour of God (Eph. 6:13-18). Even if exorcism can be called for in extreme instances, the exorcist cannot prevent demons from attacking the same person again, for no human being can guarantee to bind demons or send them to the abyss. Paul reminds us that we struggle against the powers of darkness all our lives. Therefore, the Christian must be alert (1 Peter 5:8), be clothed in God's armour, and use the things that contribute to healthy spirituality (Rom. 12:2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 4:8). A note of caution: not all problems are initiated by the demons; not all physical illnesses, not all emotional problems, not all sins. Some arise from natural causes, some from the flesh. Casting out demons would do no good in such instances but fighting the good fight of faith will benefit in all things.

I concur with Ryrie (1999:186) when he says: "To deny the existence of demons is not scepticism, it only displays ignorance. To be unrealistic about their power is foolhardy."

Grudem (1994:432) emphasises:

> It is important for Christians not to become overly curious in this area of demonic conflict. Though it is a ministry that the Lord gives to all Christians the authority to engage in, Scripture nonetheless tells us that we are to be "babes in evil" (1 Cor. 14:20).

> When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, “I will go to my house from which I came.” And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of what man becomes worse than the first. So, shall it be also with this evil generation (Matt. 12:43-45, NIV).

Jesus made the disciples aware that casting out demons was not a fundamental ministry or calling for believers. The ministry’s priority entails making disciples of all nations. A healthy understanding of demons avoids the extremes. Demons exist, but they are not ultimate.

5.6.10 Training people to think for themselves

Evangelical pastors should teach their people to think biblically and not to depend on their pastors or elders for theological answers. They must learn to depend on the scriptures in order for them to effectively critique error. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the pastors will also inspire them to know the truth and to defend it.

What is desperately needed in today’s churches are Christians who are thoroughly versed in the Bible, in contemporary theology, in world trends and social conditions, and in the African world and its thinking.

The Berean Jews were of a nobler character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11, NIV).

MacArthur (1996:121) asserts:

> The noble Bereans sifted the evidence and concluded that the gospel Paul proclaimed was the truth that filled Old Testament promise. Most people who reject the gospel have little knowledge of scriptures. Some of the Bible’s harshest critics, over the centuries, have displayed a shocking ignorance of its teachings. The primary duty in evangelism then must be

to demonstrate the truth of Christianity from the scriptures.

5.6.11 Develop mutual accountability structures

The reason syncretism is growing relatively quickly in the Soshanguve township is because there is lack of accountability among the preachers in their doctrine and moral life. Accountability protects us from harm from ourselves and others. Accountability helps to remind us that we are answerable and responsible for our actions to one another and to God. The goal of accountability is for our spiritual development into Christian maturity. The leaders in the Bible knew accountability well.

Pastors who do not seek accountability will be ineffective for Christ and they will turn to erroneous preaching and no one will correct them. Every effective minister and growing Christian was in some form of accountability group. Most of the churches that exhibit syncretism are led by leaders who allowed pride to overcome them and failed to listen to others, because of their maturity and growth.

5.6.12 Need for understanding Ecclesiology

5.6.12.1 Meaning of the word church

There is a great need today to understand the nature of the church in Soshanguve. Many movements that exist in Soshanguve do not exhibit the true characteristics of the church as outlined in the Bible. Lack of understanding has even caused the well-known evangelical churches to lose confidence in their doctrine and practice, and resort to syncretic practices to conform to the local worldview.

Grudem (1994:853) proposes: “The community of all true believers for all time. This definition understands the Church to be made of those who are truly saved.”

5.6.12.2 Universal church and the local church

- **Universal church**

All genuine believers throughout the world belong to the universal body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Heb. 12:23; Acts 14:23, 27). The universal church consists of all those who are repentent of their sins.

- **Local church**

A local church is the church that a believer belongs to for commitment and spiritual growth. In a local church you apply the principles of 1 Corinthians 12:25; encourage one another (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:25), pray for one another (James 5:16), seek good for one another (1 Thess. 5:15), and be humble towards one another (1 Peter 5:5).

The obligation of every Christian is to belong to a local church for accountability and to serve the Lord with their spiritual gifts. It is the place where you invest your time and abilities for God. The fulfilment of responsibilities such as church discipline, teaching, and accountability, the preservation of doctrinal unity, the election of church officers, and the handling of finances requires a membership of committed people.

5.6.12.3 Relation of the church to Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the founder of the church (Matt. 16:18). The founder of the church also became the chief cornerstone through his death and resurrection (Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20). He purchased the church with his own blood (Acts 20:28). As founder, He is also the one who sent the Holy Spirit.

The church is the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7-8; 21:9; Eph. 5:21-33). This picture gives us the passion of Christ for the church.

We cannot live our Christian lives on our own (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The bride submits to the groom as the church must submit to Christ.

The Church is a family of God (Gal. 6:10; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17; Eph. 2:19).

5.6.12.4 Purpose and service of the church

This purpose can be summarized in the following three headings:

- **Exalting God**

  A faithful church is a God-centred church, not man-centred. The church exalts God through worship and praise (John 4:23-24). Worship consist of ascribing the honour to God that is due to Him and declaring his glory, both in words and praise (Ps. 29:2; 95:6; 99:5; Heb. 12:28). The church is the only sphere on earth that is meant to truly worship and praise the Lord.

- **Edifying believers**

  In 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul says: "Let all things be done for building up" (NIV). When believers are gathered together the purpose is two-fold; to glorify God and to build one another up. Such edification takes place through the ministry of the Word (Acts 20:32).

- **Evangelizing the lost**

  The church is called to spread the gospel to the world as commissioned by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20, which assert the Great Commission: "Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and 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" (NIV).

Jesus has authority in all of life. Many passages, especially in the gospel of Matthew, attest to his authority. There was authority in his teaching (Matt. 7:29), authority in healing (Matt. 8:1-13), authority over Satan, and He delegated that authority to his disciples and apostles (Matt. 10:1) and even in forgiving sins (Matt. 9:6). At the close of his Gospel, Matthew made it clear that Jesus has ALL the authority. Christians and non-Christians are called to obey Christ because He has all the authority. The only command in the entire Great Commission is to "make disciples." Wiersbe (2001:107) notes:

> The term 'disciple 'means; 'a follower'. Christians are the followers of Jesus Christ, as a disciple, learned from his teacher. Discipleship is a binding duty for all Christians, even today. The neglect for teaching the

Word of God and discipling converts is a fundamental cause for the spread of syncretism.Obeying the command of Christ is vital for the church to operate in a way that glorifies God. The church of today has developed a consumer mentality. Many churches focus on providing people with what they want to hear in the same way as the entertainment industries. Many churches in the Soshanguve township were established by pastors with no theological training.

"You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching" (Acts 5:28). The church must be characterized with the same zeal in every age. The salvation of sinners brings glory to God.

5.6.12.5 Church built upon Jesus Christ

"And I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18, NIV).

This passage does not support any such authority for mere men as his successors.

The expression *this rock* does not signify the apostle Peter. Jesus said: "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church".

The great comfort is that Jesus considers the church his very own. Peter was also a powerful and effective human link between Jesus and the church, the most influential means of the inward and outward church growth. It was Peter who preached the sermon on Pentecost, and as a result, many people were converted (Acts 2:41).

Signs of a purer church.

Grudem (1994:874) notes some factors that are indicative of churches of greater purity:

- Biblical doctrine (or right preaching of the Word).
- Proper use of sacraments (or ordinances).
- Correct usage of church discipline.
- Effective prayer.
- Effective witness.

- Effective fellowship.
- Biblical church government.
- Spiritual power in ministry.
- Personal holiness of life among members.
- Care for the poor.
- Love for Christ.

The New Testament mentions a few additional factors. We are to strive for spiritual worship (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16-17), effective witnessing (Matt. 28:18-20), and personal holiness (1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12; 14).

5.6.13 Need to understand the theology of suffering and death

People in the Soshanguve township need a theology and faith that can see calamity, suffering, sickness, business failures, sorrow, pain and even death, as experiences that brings glory to God. They need to understand that whatever happens to them this side of eternity, whether good or evil, should not cause them to lose their focus on God. Paul, in Romans 8:28-39 (N.I.V), made a strong case on how a Christian should stand his or her Christian ground during calamities. The same scriptural passage also states: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (v. 28, NIV). We are sustained by trusting God’s invincible promise to make all things serve our eternal good.

Not ‘we think, or wish, or even pray’–‘By faith we KNOW’ this to be true: God rules so supremely over every single detail and disturbance in your life–nothing has *ever* surprised Him and nothing *ever* interrupts his sovereign plans to do good to his children. Do you think you will be the first exception?

We must stand with Joseph (Gen. 50, NIV) and say, “What you meant for evil, God meant for good!”

(i) "Those who love God"-summarizing a basic reality of every Christian (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9);

(ii) “Those who are called"–describing the position of every believer as (v. 29) will confirm (v. 31b). With God on our side, even our enemies serve his purpose of working for our good! (cf. Ps. 56:9; 2 Chron. 32:7-8) What a great four-word summary of the whole Bible and the whole gospel: GOD IS FOR US! There is no more condemnation! Our faithful, covenant God is so radically, eternally committed to us that *nothing and no one* can successfully obstruct his plan to do good to us forever!

If God did that, don’t you think He can govern the world for our good and meet our *every other* need? (cf. Ps. 34:7-8; 84:11; 1 Cor. 10:12-13, etc.)

Do you see how *all-encompassing* this promise is? If we will allow it, it stands ready to *sweep away every* fear and *every* doubt we will *ever* face. Child of God hear this: Your Father *has never and will never* hold back *one single* person, gift, blessing, comfort, privilege, or anything which would be for your good both now and eternally! Now Paul looks ahead to the final Day of Judgment and asks who our accusers may be (vv. 33-34). We can imagine that Satan will want a word in, along with our enemies, and possibly even our own consciences.

Yet, all such accusations will fall to the ground in the face of God's justifying work (v. 33). Note, we are "His elect"!

Christ has: (i) "died" to secure our justification, (ii) "risen" and, (iii) “ascended” to the "right hand of God" His purpose is that He can forever defend those He has justified (vv. 34, NIV).

Is there even one conceivable foe that can sever us from Christ's love?! Not even the worst that the world can throw at the Christian could accomplish this (vv. 35-36).

The believer not only 'survives' the onslaughts of vv. 35-36, but we actually "conquer–for even such tragedies work for our good (v. 28), all because of his great love for us.

Piper (2012) describes the ‘great promise’:

> We *overwhelmingly conquer* not by escaping these terrible things, but by watching God turn these enemies of our joy into servants of our good.

> The great promise is that nothing will ever enter your experience as God's child that, by God's sovereign grace, will not turn out to be a benefit to you. This is what it means for God to be God, and for God to be *for you*, and for God to freely give you all things with Christ (Piper 2012:116).

> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv. 38-39, NIV)

Not a single experience in the entire universe can threaten our assurance for one second!! By the end of v. 39, *seventeen potential threats* have been mentioned, and all have been blasted away by this great cry: NOTHING CAN SEPARATE ME FROM THE LOVE OF GOD. But be wary! It is not a blank cheque for anyone–only those who are IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD! Paul knew what he was talking about because he had himself experienced them all and worse. Paul dares to claim that we are more than the conquerors. Stott (1994:259) notes: "Our confidence is not in our love for him, which is frail, fickle, and faltering, but in his love for us, which is steadfast, faithful and persevering."

Klaiber (1997:46) writes:

> The answer which God gives to human needs in Jesus' ministry can scarcely be more fittingly summarized than in Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV), Jesus' call, "Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," characterizes not only his preaching but his behaviour as well. His table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners and his service of liberation and healing were lived out invitations to the "exhausted" who struggled under the burden of sickness, poverty, suffering and guilt. Throughout the Bible, God demonstrates compassion to the oppressed, the sick and the poor.

5.6.14 Teach about evangelism and discipleship

Bosch (1991:75) notes that “disciple” is far more central in Matthew than in other synoptic gospels. The term occurs seventy-three times in Matthew, compared to forty-six times in Mark and only thirty-seven times in Luke. It is, in fact the only name for Christ’s followers in the gospels. The verb that mostly goes with “disciple” is the verb *akolouthein*, “to follow (after).” This verb is also more common in Matthew than in his sources. For Matthew, the expression “disciple” does not refer to the twelve only (as it does in Mark and Luke). For Matthew, the first disciples are the prototype for the church. Every disciple follows the Master, but never alone; every disciple is a member of the of the fellowship of disciples, the body or no disciple at all.”

To be a disciple is not just the same as being a member of a local church, but to be a member that is passionate to win souls and model new converts to the pattern of Jesus Christ. This is the responsibility of the whole church, rooted in the local. When evangelism is done under pressure, there is a danger that the discipling process is cut short, thereby increasing the danger of syncretism. The conversion process needs to be seen as a growth process. Evangelism should be done with discipleship in mind. Evangelism must communicate the gospel at the worldview level. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NIV).

Christians in the early church had passion and the burden for lost souls. Saving souls from the dominion of the devil and sin was the passion and burden of Jesus Christ and the apostles. They were willing to travel great distances and manyt days to reach lost souls. As tradition holds, their passion for the lost souls and their love and obedience to fulfil their Lord’s Great Commission, took them to many countries, through much suffering and even martyrdom.

But they never lost their passion for the lost souls. All efforts by the pagan emperors failed to destroy this love for the unsaved. The church grew in the midst of persecutions.

Unfortunately, the church of today has lost its passion for lost souls.The most we can say of the African traditional worshipper is that there is a craving for spiritual reality. Byang Kato asserts:

> If Biblical Christianity is to survive and flourish in Africa, we must hold fast the truth that Man's fundamental problem is sin against God, and that salvation is only through Jesus Christ. We must hold to the uniqueness of Christian revelation through the written Word and through the Living Word. To seeksalvation elsewhere than through the shed blood of Christ is heretical. It is the preaching of another gospel, which really is no gospel (Kato 1985:22).

Kato continues:

> The evangelical church in Africa, as a whole, is at a historical turning point. Her future will be decided by what happens in the next few years. If she is to meet the challenge, theological training must be strengthened. Every possible means of teaching the church must be expanded. And deepened and strengthened. This must be done at every level, but particularly at the highest leadership level. While it is true that Africa needs help of many kinds, it is in the area of church leadership that evangelicals are most lacking. This is an expensive proposition, but it must be done. To prioritise includes the following:

> Seminary training: It is true that Jesus used humble unlearned Galilean fishermen, but it is also true that he commissioned well educated men such as Paul and Luke and gave them vital roles in defining and defending the church doctrinal position.
>
> Publications: Most theological writing by African authors, at an academic level is by liberals or those sympathetic to liberal theology.
>
> Theological society: A theological society should be formed to provide evangelical African theologians with a platform for propagating sound theology and gaining a hearing in educated circles (Kato 1985:13).

Discipleship is vitally important to sustain the truth for the coming generations. It is mandatory in the Bible. Paul regarded it as of the greatest importance.

Timothy was to work hard to pass on the truth that Paul entrusted to him, since the gospel was passed to him from his grandmother, his mother and Paul. Paul is pleading to him not to drop the ball. Timothy was to mentor others who are faithful. To be a Christian is to be a disciple. We are called to bring people to Christ and disciple them. This is what Christ has called for Christians to do as the Great Commission. It must be our practice as Christians to invite people to church. As Christians we are in a relay race. We pass a baton to others. Our mission as a church is to make disciples who are true followers of Jesus Christ. The gospel is not something we keep to ourselves. It is a joy to see people developing in loving God and in serving Him. Our model for discipleship is Christ.

Every Christian is in a relay race (2 Tim. 2:2, N.I.V): ”You then my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust (hand over) to reliable men who will be also be qualified (do well) to teach others”. Elijah had Elisha, Moses had Joshua, and Paul had Timothy. Our mandate is to disciple others, as it is clarified in 2 Timothy 2:2. Each of us is to take the baton and pass it to others. None of us is a solo effort. A person who is solo does not hand over the baton; he does not do well in teaching others. Look at the four sets of people involved; Paul and Timothy, both reliable men, both teaching others. It takes a leader to raise other leaders. Christ entrusted the gospel to twelve disciples. We hear of the early church fathers, some from Africa, handing down responsibility for the gospel from one generation to the next. Somebody invested the gospel in us and we need to invest it in others. When you fail to disciple others, it means that you are not reliable.

God’s purpose for ministry is developing leaders in local churches to take over the ministry.

The ‘Call Committee’ process and redeployment are not concepted in the mind of God. The fruitful ministry of a leader is seen by the kind of leaders he produces to step into his shoes. I believe that the local church should be the training ground for church leaders. You need to learn and bump your head in the local church. When the leader is away, God’s work should continue as smoothly as ever. Discipling people involves reading books together, developing people in maturity for Christ and delegating tasks and

responsibilities to people, in accordance with their individual levels of Christian growth and capability.

Putting 2 Timothy 2:2 into practice, you may feel that you do not know much. Find someone who knows less than you do and tell him/her what you know. Find someone who knows more than you do and listen to him/her. Teach and be taught. All of us need to be in sync with discipleship. We are like a chain that is linked together. Discipleship must be done out of love. Sacrifice your time and your life for discipleship. Those who are being discipled should show seriousness because it takes time and preparation.

Discipleship is like raising a child. For a child to grow and become a mature part of the family, he or she must be taken care of. Not only food and water must be provided, but also the love and support that will enable the child to become a mature, confident person. In the Christian faith and life, people must be taken care of. You must teach your child good behaviour and warn him about dangers. You cannot merely give children positive instructions.

Children need negative instruction too and it is the same in the church. “So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you day and night with tears” (Acts 20:31, NIV). The goal of discipleship is love and love always entails positive counsel and negative rebukes. It is in the love of other Christians that care is taken seriously. Christians are good in leading others to Christ, but we lack in discipleship. Teach disciples about Christianity, they need to learn about its correct doctrine and morality. What we usually do, is because of the example that we are following. It might be cleaning at the church, packing chairs in the morning, our prayer life, our love for God and his work. You must leave a legacy of faithfulness.We all have the obligation to share the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost and to help people grow in faith. Discipleship is all about building up relationships. At the core of your relationship there is openness of friendship.

When you are discipling another person, you are exhibiting how to live a godly life. You are teaching him or her Biblical reactions. Men should disciple men and women should

disciple women. A leader must develop a plan so that the relationship should have a clear goal.

Jesus started with twelve disciples but maintained three, namely Peter, James and John in his inner circle. Identify three persons you would like to disciple in the things of the Lord. Everyone must have people to disciple. We do this in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20, NIV). If discipleship is absent from the church and home, Christians will not understand how to live out their faith; they will not be able to share their faith or to handle problems; nor will they grow spiritually because no one is modeling as an example to them and showing them the way.

5.6.15 Train people to have a Christian worldview

Richard Gehman (2005:55) states:

> The best way to describe the African traditional worldview is “holistic” because ATR (African Traditional Religion) affects the whole of life from birth to death. The notion of two compartments in life, the secular and the sacred, is a foreign concept to traditional Africa.

Daryll Forde (1954:xvii) wrote:

> It has not been possible in this book to attempt the complex of describing and analysing the multifarious social changes and the transformation of beliefs and morals that are so marked a feature of Africa today. There are, of course, various forms of syncretic belief systems among the different groups of people in the township of Soshanguve. Religious diversity was integral to traditional African societies before the advent of the practice of syncretism.

Clifford Geertz, a leading American anthropologist defines worldview as:

> A historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge

> about and attitudes towards life. Further, that it acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations by formulating concepts of a general order of existence and clothing these concepts with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz 1973:89).

Cultural and religious beliefs exert a powerful influence in our lives.

Phillip Graham Ryken advances this definition of 'worldview':

> A worldview or "world-and-life view", as some other people call it, is the structure of understanding that we use to make sense of our world. Our worldview is what we presuppose. It is our way of looking at life, our interpretation of the universe, our orientation to reality. It is the comprehensive framework of our basic belief about things, or the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns (Ryken 2013:19).

Everybody has a worldview. Whether you know it or not, we all have fundamental perspectives on the world that shape the way we live. One's worldview manifests in what one thinks and loves, says and does. Worldview thinking helps Christians in the marketplace of ideas. It does this by showing how Christianity relates to everything in life.

It is crucial for Christians to have a truly Christian worldview. Living wisely in the world requires a proper perspective. Black Africans have their own traditional worldview, and they handle everything in their lives according to the way they view the world and life.

Turaki (1999:10-11) notes:

> The African recipient was not simply a vacuum, but had an African worldview, heavily loaded with both religious and cultural values and perspectives. Right from the beginning, Black Africans had been religious in accordance with their cultural values and perspectives. Africans understand and accept Christianity because they are religious by nature and can become Christians while not abandoning their identity as

> Africans. The African receives the gospel while standing on the platform of his African and religious and cultural heritage.

Allen Anderson, a man who spent many years in South Africa, a man that I engaged with personally, when he lived in the Soshanguve township, notes: “If an inaccuracy or misunderstanding exists, it is never deliberate and usually disappears after biblical teaching” (Anderson 2001:100).

Evangelism must communicate the gospel at the worldview level. It must meet people where they are and lead them to an encounter with the almighty God who demands our total allegiance.

Prichard (1996:206) defines worldview clearly by saying: “A Christian worldview is a Christian understanding of reality.” There are many synonyms for Christian worldview such as ‘thinking Christianity’, ‘a Christian mind’, ‘integration of faith and learning’ and ‘a Christian view of culture’. In classical terms, a Christian worldview means that an individual understands the world through Christian theology. To have the Christian worldview is to see the world as it really is, by thinking God’s thoughts after him. One who is thinking with a Christian worldview develops a framework revealed in the Bible. In essence, a Christian view is Christ’s view of the world. An important contribution in this regard comes from Van der Walt (2003:120ff.) where he explains that the Christian worldview means that that there must be no dualism between the sacred and the world. The Christian view must be that Christ is Lord over all and everything. Essential is the view of creation, fall and redemption.

5.6.16 Develop qualified biblical spiritual leaders

MacArthur puts it clearly when he states:

> Leadership in the church is not built on an individual’s natural abilities, education, common sense or human wisdom. It is built on his knowledge and understanding of scripture, his allegiance to it, and his submission to the Holy Spirit’s applying the truth of God’s Word in his heart and life. A man who is not clinging to God’s Word and committed to live it is not

> prepared to preach it or teach it. The truth of the Word must be woven into the very fabric of his thinking and living (MacArthur 1997:37).

We need to take leadership seriously in the church because people become what their leaders are. As Hosea said: "Like people like priests" (Hosea 4:9, NIV).

Dever notes: "Instead of searching for leaders with secular qualifications, we are to search for character, reputation, ability to handle the Word, and demonstration of the fruit of the spirit in their lives" (Dever 2013:245).

Van Engen (1996:235) also aptly explains the need for sound leadership. Extremely important is the example of the servant leader: "his (sample JN) component of the pastoral servant-leader speaks about who we are, not professionally, not intellectually, not in task, not in strategy–but personally. It speaks of how we order our priorities, how we handle our workload, how much time we have for people, how we shape our family life, what attitudes we express toward others, what openness and authenticity we show with others, how we resolve conflicts, what we choose as our standard of living, how to exercise self-discipline, and so on."

Dever, MacArthur and Van Engen concur with the biblical definitions in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 about the qualifications of leaders in the church. Most of churches in the Soshanguve township overlook the biblical qualifications of their leaders.The Bible clearly demands the plurality of elders in each local church.

5.6.16.1 Biblical qualifications of church leaders

The essential qualifications of elders are mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The focus is on who the person is, rather than what a person does. The focus is on the character of a person, rather than talents or personality.

Desire to serve *(v. 1) (a sense of God's call)*

A leader needs to aspire to the office of an elder (1 Tim. 3:1). He needs to manifest a sense of calling to serve God's people. If God prompted a man and he desired to pursue the ministry, Paul states: "He desires a good work." Vines and Shaddix (1999:46) assert:

> Every preacher must have certainty about his call, a confidence that will make him willing and able to pay the price of hard work. Your perspective about your call to preach is largely determines how you approach the pulpit. If you are going to be effective as a preacher of the gospel, you must understand that you have a prophet's call. Preach with an awesome sense that God is preaching through you. Some men go to the pulpit thinking that when they preach, they merely are speaking about God. When you have a biblical message and are spiritually prepared, however God speaks through you. Such a perspective will change your whole appreciation for what is happening in the preaching event.

Personal character

Above reproach: The primary character of a leader should be *above reproach*. This is the key to all characteristics of a church leader. There should be nothing in his life that can obstruct people to accept the gospel message.

Van Engen (1996:236) refers in this regard to wisdom:

> It is the role of wisdom to inquire of us whether we are truly men and women of God. The sage exhibits great wisdom about life, nature, personhood, and interpersonal relationships. The sage is healer, counselor, up builder, encourager, reconciler. Among essential characteristics are immersions in the wisdom of the Holy Scriptures and demonstration of a genuine personal piety which shines forth in conversation and action. The sage knows how to pray - and does so in the understanding of God's grace for his people.

Temperate: v. 2 (NIV). He should always be sober minded.

Self-controlled: (v. 2, NIV). He should exhibit self-control in all spheres of life.

Not given to much wine: (vv. 3 N.I.V). He must always be sober, not to be influenced by alcohol in his decisions (Eph. 5:18).

Not quarrelsome: (v. 3, NIV). He must possess good communication skills and be a peace maker who promote reconciliation. If he is quarrelsome, he may not be able to lead and may even divide the congregation. Paul writes: “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2Tim. 2:24-25, NIV).

Not a lover of money: (v. 3, NIV). He must not chase after riches; he must be a man who understands contentment. Throughout the Bible, there are examples of and warnings against people who use their religious offices to achieve financial gain at the expense of others (Num. 22-24; 1 Sam. 2:13-17; 2 Kings 5:20-27; Isa. 22:15-25).

Strauch (1992:99) asserts that “money is an irresistible magnet for many people. They are deceived by the burning desire of greed.” So, we must carefully examine a man’s financial integrity before he is chosen to be a deacon.

1 Samuel 12:3 (NIV)

> Here I am bear witness against me before the Lord and his anointed, whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? I will restore it to you”

Respectable: (v. 2, NIV). Leaders should have a good standing in the community and be respected for their high moral integrity. This qualification has serious spiritual implications because elders must commend the gospel and everything that conforms to sound doctrine. Even non-Christians should feel ashamed about their critical comments. If the church allows a person who is not respected by non-Christians to become an elder, the unbelievers will mock the church for being hypocrites. An elder must, thus, have good reputation with non-Christians. His personal life should be well-ordered so that people can easily trust him with their personal matters.

Gentle: (v. 7, NIV). He must emanate the example of Christ’s humility (Phil. 2:2-10). Jesus truly loved people and gave himself to serve people with gentleness and humility.

Good reputation with outsiders (vv. 3, NIV).

Hospitable: (v. 2, NIV) He must be a lover of strangers; his house must always be open and welcoming to visitors as he is a servant of all. Christian leaders must get to know their church members, as well as newcomers, by inviting them to their homes.

Leadership functions

Able to teach others: (v. 2, NIV) He must be rock solid in the gospel truth. He must be characterized by doctrinal integrity and be able to refute those who err. He must be able to interpret the scriptures intelligently. Spiritual leaders are expected to be teachers who communicate Christian truth. When we appoint biblically unqualified leaders, we are lowering the standard of leadership in the church.

Family relationship

Husband of one wife: (1 Tim.3:2; Titus1:6). He must be a one-woman man, devoted to his marriage and be exemplary in his marriage relationship. This emphasises the importance of marital and sexual faithfulness and highlights that this may have been a problem in the Ephesian and Cretan churches. Overall, it is best if a man is never alone with a woman who is not his wife.

Unfortunately, many men have disqualified themselves from ministry because of an unwise decision regarding their contact with women. Remind yourself that any fall in this area would ruin your testimony and your ministry. It will bring shame and disgrace to you, to the person involved, to your family, to the fellowship of the church to which you belong and to the Lord. Stay away from obvious areas of temptation (Ps. 101:3).

Manage his own household well. Elders' children must be respectful and obedient. A man cannot be a qualified elder if he fails to lead his own household. If he cannot manage his smaller household, he cannot manage God's larger household, the church. I used to say, "family should be a mini church through exemplary living".

Beeke (2008:33) asserts:

> The Christian relationship with his family is inseparable from personal

> sanctification, according to the Puritans. The Scripture set forth the ways in which we are to live righteously, and since the Bible takes great pains to teach how parents and children should relate to one another, these relationships are an index of sanctification. So, it is of primary importance that Christians recognize that holiness begins at home and extends to all of life. Puritans pastors spent much time teaching fathers how to exercise spiritual leadership in the home. They also advise Christian mothers of their role in the biblical pattern, and they taught children to show proper respect for parents in the service of God.

Not a recent convert: (v. 6, NIV). A leader must be tested so that he cannot frustrate people's lives. Merkle (2009:69) emphasises: "When a recent convert takes on an important and respected leadership role without the deep maturity that comes with time, he may become filled with pride and end up ruining his ministry and defaming the name of God."

Note the emphasis on character; leaders are not chosen because they are intelligent, powerful or rich. Some churches make a mistake of choosing founding members and leaders even when they do not meet the biblical qualifications.

5.6.16.2 Titles of the office

The New Testament uses two words for the office of elder. The word 'elder' (*presbyteros*) and 'bishop' or 'overseer' (*episkopos*) are used synonymously (Acts 20:1717, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1-2). 'Elder' emphasises the maturity of the man, both in spiritual matters and life experience. 'Bishop' or 'overseer' emphasises function, signifying guardianship over others and focusing on the general responsibility of the leader for the spiritual oversight over the local church.

These words are used interchangeably, indicating that bishop and elder do not describe different roles. A third word is often included in the discussion of the primary office, namelythe word *pastor (poimen)* which focuses on the shepherding function of the elders' work (1 Peter 5:1-2) and is commonly used today. All elders have a pastoral role in shepherding God's flock**.**

5.6.16.3 Role of elders

In the Old Testament elders functioned in various leadership roles. They almost always functioned as an institutional body or council, either of a tribe or a special group such as the priests. They were judges and counselors who had authority in Israel. It can be concluded that the concept, and the origin of the office of an elder in the church, was influenced by the Old Testament and by the synagogue. The general characteristic of the elder, as one who guided with wisdom and led with authority, was brought into the church from the Jewish community.

5.6.16.4 Primary responsibilities of elders in the local church

Firstly, elders are expected *to give guidance.* Elders are leaders and they are called to lead (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-3). It is the shepherd and not the sheep that have the spiritual wisdom and experience to give good direction to the church. This of course does not mean that they are to “lord it over” the church, but they should lead with love and humility.

Secondly, the elders are *to teach* the people the Word of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1). Feeding the flock is the primary responsibility of the elder. He must know the scriptures and bring them accurately to the challenges that the member is experiencing.

Thirdly, the elders *should protect* the members from doctrinal error (2 Tim. 2:24; 3:17; Titus 1:10-16). Paul instructed the elders of Ephesus to exercise spiritual oversight over the church (Acts 20:28).

Harrell (2004:138) attests that

> …the call to shepherd the flock involves elders in feeding, guarding, guiding, and protection those otherwise vulnerable to starvation, attack, wandering and injury. Elders are not called to entertain God’s people, by pandering to their misguided desires for ear tickling and superficial fare (2 Tim. 4:1-5). They are called to serious, sacrificial and vital ministry. The flock of the shepherd is precious beyond reckoning, having been purchased by the blood of God’s Son (Acts 20:28). The church cannot

> function effectively without delegated leadership. The effectiveness of any kind of leadership depends on exercising some level of authority (1 Peter 5:2-3). The church needs leaders with authority in order to give the church direction.

Wiersbe (1982:139) writes:

> The pastor is not a religious lecturer who weekly passes along information about the Bible. He is a shepherd who knows his people and seeks to help them through the Word. The church often delegates issues to the body of elders, yet the congregation still plays a role by voting on essential issues like building projects, budget approval etc. The church has final authority on matters of disciplining its membership (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5).

The elders set the direction of a church and the congregation that submits to elder leadership will function smoothly and in an orderly manner. The elders are accountable for exercising their responsibility under the authority of Jesus Christ. Elders must exercise their leadership as those who will account to the chief shepherd Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-5).

Strauch (1992:88) gives resounding advice on the appointing of church leader: “Insist on biblically qualified men for church offices, even if such men take years to develop. Complete obedience to God’s Word is always the best church policy.” Governance and leading are the primary distinctive between elders and deacons.

5.6.16.5 Deacons

The title ‘deacon’ is used in many ways in the church today. In some churches, the deacon holds the most important position in the church, while in others ‘deacon’ refers to a lesser office. “In the New Testament, the word ‘deacon’ (*diakonos*) means ‘servant’. This word along with the verb ‘to serve’ and the noun ‘service’ is translated according to the general idea of serving or ministering” (Strauch 1992:69).

It is generally agreed that this role commenced when there was a need for elders to serve the needy (Acts 6:1-4). These men were called alongside the apostles to deal with a temporary crisis in the Jerusalem church. The first clear reference to the office is found in Philippians 1:1 where the apostle Paul addresses the elders and the deacons of that church along with the rest of the believers. About two years after Paul wrote to the Philippians, he wrote to Timothy at Ephesus defining the qualification for the position of deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

5.6.16.6 Qualifications for deacons

Scripture requires an equally high standard for a deacon, as that of an elder (1 Tim. 3:8- 13). Deacons are also to be spiritually mature and have been tested and approved in terms of Christian maturity. The main difference between elders and deacons has to do with being able to teach. The ability to teach is a requirement for an elder but not for a deacon.

As is the case with elders, there is no specific number of deacons required in a church and the growth of the church will determine a suitable number.

5.6.16.7 Responsibilities of the deacons

There is considerable information concerning the duties and responsibilities of elders but little regarding deacons. Traditionally, the office of deacon has been primarily concerned with the material and practical ministry, while eldership is concerned with the spiritual welfare of church members. The example of this ministry is encapsulated in Acts 6.

The above-mentioned qualities are the researcher's direct response to the conduct of church leaders in the Soshanguve township as referred to in Chapter 4. The qualifications discussed are the basis for ascertaining those who qualify to be elders and deacons. God's plan is that qualified, divinely appointed men should lead his church, determine its direction, teach the Word, and give guidance and direction to Christians.

Every applicable New Testament reference indicates that men called to be elders, overseers or deacons should lead in love and humility and those that are following should follow in love and humility (1 Thess. 5:12-13, NIV). Leaders should set a pace for those

that are following them. They must be ahead of their followers in all matters. Our churches will not be effective if they are led by new believers or non-studying believers who are strangers to their Bibles.

5.6.16.8 Biblical way of choosing church leaders

It is always best for the leadership team to initiate the search for new leaders. Chosen persons must be guided through a one or two-year training programme. We need to recognize those that the Spirit has appointed as overseers and shepherds of God's church (Acts 20:28, NIV). They should be Christians who have proven their interest in God's work, prior to being appointed, and the qualities the Bible prescribes for spiritual leaders should be made known to them. The two lists are similar; they cover matters of character and reputation, family management, character and the ability to teach.

The pastor should initially meet with candidates and clearly spell out the job responsibilities. It is important that the potential leaders know what is expected of them and they must be willing to give high priority to these responsibilities. This means scheduling time for their assignments. If potential leaders are married, their wives should also be consulted. It is essential that they have support from their family. Leaders need public recognition and affirmation. Thus, when the prospective leader is prepared to serve in accordance with the outlined terms, the appointment should be made in front of the entire church membership. He should then be publicly commissioned.

When Joshua was appointed the new leader of Israel, Moses and the priest, Eleazar, commissioned him in the presence of the entire assembly (Num. 27:18-23). Similarly, when the seven administrators were chosen, the apostles publicly laid hands on them and presented them to the entire congregation (Acts 6:6). Such public commissioning serves two valuable functions.

Firstly, it strengthens the call and the convictions of the newly appointed leaders. In the face of discouragement, they can look back to this memorable event and be reminded of their solemn vows to serve God and his people. They will also remember that it was God who called them and equipped them to serve.

Secondly, at a public commissioning, members of the church or fellowship participate in the new leader's consecration. They acknowledge that God has set apart these men and women for special leadership responsibilities. They pledge to support and pray for them. Thus, a new spiritual bond is forged.

Alexander Strauch notes: "The structure of the church both reflects and determines our theology and beliefs, since the structure of the church matters both practically and theologically, we must ask if there is a scriptural base for insisting on one form of church government" (Strauch 1995:102).

5.6.16.9 Senior pastor and his role

The senior pastor is one of the leading elders. The Bible expects him to manifest the same qualities of elders as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:1-5. He is devoted full-time to the work of the ministry. He must spend most of his time in prayer, study, counseling and preparations for special equipping ministries of the local church.

Vines and Shaddix (1999:47) note:

> The primary scriptural analogy for the pastor comes from the word *poinmen*, or "shepherd." Though the word is used only in few places in reference to the pastoral office, the picture permeates Old and New Testament regarding the leadership of God's people.

Baxter and Houston (1982:13-24) furnish the following character-traits of a godly pastor:

- **Purity of motive**

  Many good men have started out their pastoral ministry on a very promising note, but they failed to get far because they fell into immorality with women, became involved in financial scandals, or became victims of pride. If you allow your ministry to be a show case or if you allow your heart to be envious of other ministries, then you are soon at your destruction, if you allow yourself to look at female with a lustful eye again be aware that you are close to fatal destruction.

- **Diligence and hard work**

  The work of the ministry must be done with diligence. It is our duty to help others attain eternal glory. This is not work to be done with careless hands and minds. Paul says, “Who to me if I don’t preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16, NIV). No one has ever been a loser in serving God in God’s way.

- **Prudence and efficiency**

  This work must be done prudently, in an orderly and systematic fashion. Conversion, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ must be taught first and frequently and thoroughly.

- **Certainty about basic doctrines**

  We must also emphasise the certainty with which we teach our basic doctrines. To teach Christ to our people is to teach everything. Focus on the central truths.

- **Plain and clear teaching**

  Preach simply and clearly. To be completely understood, one must speak at the level of the audience. It is your business to be understood. Dependence upon God and docility before others

- **Prayer is vital**

  We need to believe and to depend upon Christ in everything. We must go to Him for light, life and strength. We must have recourse to the Lord who called us. Depend deeply upon the Lord. Develop a prayerful life.

- **Humility**

  Hate the pride in yourself. Your work must be done with absolute humility. Do not act as if you have arrived, and all the others have to sit at your feet. Humility should teach us to learn everything willingly and then be willing to teach all.

- **A balance between severity and gentleness**

  The must be a prudent mixture of severity and gentleness, both in our preaching and discipline. Each must be admonished according to the context of his individual character and the context. If there is no severity, then they will be contempt for our reproofs. If it is all severity, then we will be taken to be domineering rather than persuaders of the truth.

- **A zealous and affectionate spirit**

  It is also important that we are sincerely affectionate, serious in our intent, and zealous in all our public and private exhortations. The importance of what we are commissioned to teach must condemn all coldness or sleepy dullness, in which we may be tempted to indulge. Let us then, with much affectionate desire for our hearers, sharpen our words in such a way that we even pierce the stony hearts. To speak coldly or lightly of heavenly things is far worse than not to speak of them.

- **Reverence**

  Let all our work be done reverently, as becomes those who are conscious of the presence of God. For reverence is the affection of the soul which comes from the deep apprehension of God. It reveals the mind that is intimately conversant with God. Do not joke or entertain your audience superficially. Set a spiritual tone. Let all that we speak be spiritual, as from Holy Scriptures. Do not despise or mock the uneducated.

- **Caring love for people**

  Our whole ministry must be carried out in tender love for our people. We must let them see that nothing pleases us more than what benefits them. Let them see that all you do is for their development and not for your own end. Show them at least some practical gestures of your sincerity towards them. Friendship must always be cemented by piety. For a bad man can never be a true friend. If you befriend their wickedness, you will show that

you are such yourself. Do not pretend to love them by their sin, and do not truly seek their salvation.

- **Patience**

  Even when our ministry is scorned and rejected, we must still persevere in caring for our flock. Do not expect fools to respond gratefully like the wise. It is the new man in Christ that can respond with meekness and patience.

Jefferson (1980:59-61) summed up the work of the pastor in a metaphorical passage:

> The feeding of the sheep is an essential duty of the shepherd-calling and is known even to those who are least familiar with the shepherd and his work. Sheep cannot feed themselves nor water themselves; they must be conducted to the water and the pasture. Everything depends on the proper feeding of the sheep. Unless wisely fed, they become emaciated.

5.6.17 Teach about gender in church leadership

Men and women are equally different.

Strauch (1999:6-7) refers to two positions regarding the gender debate:

- ***Egalitarian view***

  The egalitarian or feminist view is also referred to as biblical feminism or biblical equality, thus, implying that men and women are equal in roles. This is a new and extremely recent idea without much of a track record historically. Feminists teach that God created men and women equally to bear the divine image. Furthermore, they conclude that true equalityrequires equal ministry opportunities for both sexes. They believe that the submission of a woman in marriage and womanly restriction in Christian ministry are inconsistent with the true picture of biblical equality. In their view, Christ's work on the cross restores the original equality for the sexes that is envisioned in (Genesis 2) because in Christ "there is

neither male nor female."

- ***Complementarian view***

  The complementarian view implies that the role of a woman complements the role of a man. According to the complementarian viewpoint, it is equally true that God created men and women to be different and to fulfil distinct gender roles. God designed the man to be the husband, father, provider and protector. He is to be head of the family and to lead the church family. God designed the woman to be wife, mother and nurturer. She is to help and submit to the man's leadership. God designed these differences during the Creation. The Bible uses key terms such as head, helper and submission, to describe these differences.

  The Bible is clear about the complementarian view. The wife's role complements what the man is doing. We are created to complement one another in our role, rather than to compete with one another. I want us to allow the Bible to speak for itself, not speaking to belittle women. Genesis 2 is the chapter that was foremost in the mind of Christ and his apostles when they taught about marriage and gender roles.

- ***God's creation order***

  Adam was occupying a position of leadership as we saw his skill in naming all the creatures including naming his wife Eve and tilling the ground in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15-19). The woman's source of origin was the man. She was fashioned out of Adam's ribs. God designed the man to be the father, provider and protector. He is to be the head of the family and to lead the church family.

The leadership model provided in the New and Old Testament is that men primarily lead the people of God. In the garden, God did not want Eve to account, he wanted Adam to account. Even in the family when things go wrong, we want the father to account. The Bible commands wives to submit to their husbands in marriage and husbands to love their

wives. No one is left without a role. God designed the woman to be the wife, mother supporter, and encourager, and to cherish. She is to be an active helper and submit to the man's leadership. Some women call men their covering, and it is true. The man is the covering both at home and church. He is the one who is accountable to God.

God made a helper suitable for him (Gen. 2:18). Eve was not another male. She was Eve not Steve. She was not a clone of Adam or a twin. She was similar but different. She had her own biology, physiology and anatomy. She was made to complement man.

Our roles complement each other. This brings harmony into relationships. Paul and Peter based their marriage teaching on Genesis 2 (Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Peter urges wives to submit to their husbands, even if he is not a believer, because through her godly conduct he might be saved (1 Peter 3:6).

What is submission? Submission implies the act of submitting to authority, something that we do dutifully on a daily basis as Christians. However, there is no instruction to the Christian husband to force his wife into submission. Rather the Christian wife voluntarily helps and submits to the leadership of her husband, because she believes it to be God's design for her in the relationship.

Titus 2:3-5 describes some other roles of the godly woman: "Teach what is good, encourage younger women to love their husband and their children. To be a diligent homemaker, to be submissive your husband" (v. 3, NIV). Köstenberger and Schreiner (1995:169) note that:

> Women are uniquely blessed to be able to honour God by emulating both sides of the authority-submission relationship, which is modelled within the Godhead. Jesus humbled himself and became obedient or submissive to the Father; the Father then expressed his loving approval by exalting the Son in heaven. Jesus is also the Lord and head of the church, which becomes occasion for the church to submit to her Lord's authority and leadership.

What submission is not: Submission does not mean that the wife is inferior or less important. In the home, when the husband leads like Christ and the wife responds like the bride of Christ, there is harmony and sharing that is more beautiful and more satisfying than any pattern of marriage created by man.

Biblical headship, for the husband, is a call to take primary responsibility for Christ in servant leadership, protection and provision. God lays upon men and husbands the primary responsibility for Christ-like, servant leadership in the church and in the home. Biblical submission for the wife is the divine calling to honour and affirm her husband's leadership, supportive of his role according to her gifts.

Reasons why leadership authority is vested upon the shoulders of men in the home and church? Jesus Christ selected male leaders for his church (Matt. 10:2). God is called our Father. Jesus was a man. Elders are men (1 Tim. 3:17); the eldership role in the church is designated to men. The role of elders is leading and teaching. The role of deacons is that of serving and running the church efficiently and may include both men and women. Elders are chosen based on their exemplary family leadership. Submission and leadership in the church, Jesus' male gender and his deliberate choice of twelve male apostles is based on God's creation order in Genesis 2.

Köstenberger and Schreiner (1995:169) note:

> Preaching to, and ruling over men, are not the only frontline ministries in the kingdom. Women are called just as men are, and sometimes to the same task, though these tasks are often executed in different venues. The boundaries are not determined by giftedness or opportunity but by divine assignment. Women and men are called equally, but women are not necessarily assigned the same tasks as men.
>
> In 1 Timothy 2, the boundaries happened to be based on gender. Women should also be warned that success in the ministry is not the divine criterion for what they can or should do in the Kingdom. A woman may even be acknowledged by others to be effective in the ministry, though she is violating biblical boundaries. However, the end does not justify the

> means when the person stands before the Creator God.

Jesus had to be male; had he been a woman, he could not have exercised authority over male disciples. According to God's created design of the male-female relationship, the male partner is invested with the headship role. The head of the church is Christ, a man.

Dever (2000:245) discusses the hierarchy of subordination or submission:

> Egalitarian today is often so closely allied with anti-authoritarianism that authority itself is condemned. But Scripture presents authority as coming from God. He alone is the sovereign Lord, and all sovereign is entrusted by him (Eph. 3:15). The submission of children to parents, wives to husbands, members to elders, all points to the submission of human to God. It is therefore appropriate that churches limit the role of public teaching to men, symbolizing something of the authority that God has called men normally to bear.

The Scripture is clear in the New Testament that "women should not teach or exercise authority over a man" (1 Tim. 2:12). God designed that women should fulfill their role in the home which is a huge task for the man to do (Prov. 31:10-31; Titus 2:4-5). In our egalitarian age, we must unashamedly embrace gender as a gift from God, as Genesis 1 and 2 clearly demonstrate.

5.6.17.1 The invalid claims of feminism

First witness to the resurrection (Matt. 28:1-10) To give testimony about certain events as an eyewitness does not necessarily mean that you are a leader or a teacher in the local church.

Women as Paul's co-workers. It is true that some women were Paul's co-workers. "Co-workers" does not necessarily mean that they had equal authority as Paul. Paul was fond of complimenting those that were helping him in the ministry, all of whom supported Paul during his missionary journey, but they did not all have ruling authority in the churches. Paul's co-workers worked with him in various ways.

*"*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28, NIV). This scripture is the key passage on which the feminist movement supports their feminist belief. The passage implies a relinquishing of discriminatory notions of superiority, through a unity in Christ and the recognition and practice of the faith and love He teaches, that transcends the worldly differences of nationality, status and gender.

We all become parts of a single body in Christ, sharing the same values with the same dignity. There are no longer distinctions; the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us all equally and together we qualify for entry into God's kingdom through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour. This passage does not abolish the natural differences in the roles of men and women.

Deborah (Judges 4:8): The prophetess Deborah faithfully delivered God's messages to Barak (Judges 4:6-7) and courageously accompanied him to the place where he was assembling troops for battle (Judges 4:10). In her role as prophetess (Judges 4:4), she delivered messages from God to specific recipients, which clearly was not the role of a priest or a king (Judges 4:8).

Does the story of Deborah show that women can lead the people of God in churches, in which the men are passive and not leading? No! Deborah did not do that. She refused to lead the people into military battle, insisting that Barak take the lead. Clearly, she recognized male leadership and encouraged and exhorted Barak (Judges 4:6-9, 14). The story of Deborah should motivate women to encourage men to take their leadership positions which God has called them to do.

The issue of women in the ministry is not a small matter because we are called to obey the whole counsel of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Either we reject or obey the scripture, which is a momentous one, for in encountering it we are confronted with interpreting and applying it. We are called to be subjects of the authority of God's Word. God's Word teaches men and women how to relate to one another. Feminism has had a massive impact on our marriages, families, educational system and social construct.

Accepting women as pastors and elders in our churches will have harmful effects as churches become more and more feminized. It will precipitate a severe loss in male membership and male participation, and young boys who currently attend will abandon the church when they come of age. The church should not tolerate any alternative view. Every doctrinal issue must be debated from the authority of scripture.

That is why the Bible puts a strong emphasis on the plurality of elders, because their role is to protect the church from wrongful unbiblical teachings, as well as to discipline those that err. There are doctrines on which Christians may “agree to disagree”, such as details about the end times, while continuing serving the Lord together in the same local church. Regarding feminism the authority of scripture is at stake. The egalitarians are quick to advocate “let us stop fighting about this matter”. We cannot stop fighting about something that is unbiblical; we are called to contend for the faith. We do not have the right to take a specific biblical teaching and extract a popular principle from it.

Such a precedent would allow people to evade any command of the Bible that suits them. If that occurs the Bible will cease its authority in all matters of life and godliness. Advances in women’s education do not change Paul’s instruction; the changing times do not affect God’s unchanging Word. Obedience to God should be the motivation of the church. We must use our gifts in a way that is prescribed by the Word of God. The cultural pressures are so great that no church or denomination can simply avoid the controversy. Denominations and local churches must spell it out in a statement of faith or policy. Paul did not lack the courage to stand up for unpopular teachings of God’s Word (Acts 20:26-28). He did not compromise the gospel regarding the doctrine of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, nor by faith plus circumcision (Acts 14:19-23, NIV). Paul insisted on the purity of the gospel that he had proclaimed and said: “For am I seeking the approval man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10, NIV).

It is important for church leaders and for every Christian to ask themselves this same question. Unity cannot exist in the church separated from doctrinal integrity. When the authority of Scripture is undermined, the gospel will not be acknowledged much longer. The pastors and elders who lead the local church may only be men.

Jesus and the apostles used the strong and convincing argument of the creation order of Genesis to prove headship and submission; the universal practice of the churches, the order within the Godhead, the command of Jesus Christ, and the Christ church relationship. Paul is adamant about headship and submission. These are doctrines that define Christian faith. They are non-negotiable. They are the core of our Christian belief. The doctrines of God, sin, hell, salvation, heaven, and sufficiency of scripture all fall into this category. This is the hill to die on. These are the tenets of our faith, separating us from other cults. This is the faith that you cannot recant even under torture and threat of death. These are the truths that you cannot compromise.

5.7 FIDES QUA CREDITUR

McGrath (1998:349) explains:

"Christian theology has always recognized a distinction between the act and content of Christian faith. This distinction is expressed in Latin terms as *fides qua creditor*, meaning "the faith by which it is believed." It also refers to the specific content of Christian faith, expressed in various creeds, confessions, doctrines and other statements of faith."The sixteenth century reformers reclaimed the early church's faith themselves. The reformers insisted that the evangel of Jesus Christ is, or ought to be, at the heart of the church; its very life and identity. In the reformers reclaiming of the early church heritage, it is evident that there was a movement of protest as well as a reformation; a protest that decried the dilution of the faith that had crept into the institution of the church. This regression was an alternative gospel and not the one delineated in the Scriptures. It was a reformation because it returned to the foundations that the apostles and the earliest church had laid and built upon.

5.8 DEPICTIONS OF IMMATURE BELIEVERS

In order to portray the immature believer, or church, not equipped by the teaching of the Word, Paul uses the illustration of a child. The proof of immaturity is found in two characteristics found in all children.

Firstly, Ephesians 4:13 (NIV): “We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” Children are notoriously fickle and changeable. They lack self-control; they are creatures of extremes and are ruled by emotions. So, too, immature Christians are on an emotional, spiritual and doctrinal roller coaster.

Secondly, children are easily deceived: “And carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (vv. 13, NIV). Fledgling Christians will remain as such if they have no means of withstanding constantly being deceived. Rather than being equipped by the Word, immature believers are taken in by false teaching. They lack the knowledge and discernment to filter out wrong teaching and are gullible to whatever teachings they are exposed to.

5.9 WHAT DOES THE GOSPEL-CENTRED CHURCH LOOK LIKE?

All gospel ministries should be fuelled by a passion for God’s glory and the priority of thegospel. Those who are serving in the ministry of the gospel should echo the passion of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:16, 23 (NIV) where he exclaims: “Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel” and “I do all these for the sake of the Gospel.”

The gospel will never be appreciated by the world. It is our special task, as preachers, to protect it. The gospel is complete, it does not need any modification.

Keller (2012:29-52) makes the point that it is essential that our churches understand the gospel correctly, be shaped by it, and communicate it faithfully. He makes the following points about the gospel:

> It is good news, not good advice. It is not primarily something we do, but something that has been done for us. Therefore, the Gospel is directly related to sovereign grace. It is good news concerning a rescue from deadly peril that has been fully accomplished and provided.
>
> Its focus is on God’s action through Jesus Christ. It centres on what Jesus Christ has done to restore our relationship with God. Right at the heart of

> the gospel is divine substitutionary atonement.The gospel has two perennial enemies: legalism and nominalism. A very sharp distinction between these false doctrines and the gospel is crucial for the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit to work.
>
> Preaching general biblical truth and biblical content is not preaching the gospel. It is possible to be 'biblical' and yet avoid the gospel.
>
> However, biblical truth, history, and doctrine must form the backdrop of effective preaching of the gospel. The more we understand the whole corpus of Biblical doctrine, the more we will understand the gospel itself– and the more we understand the gospel, the more we will come to see that this is what the Bible is about (Keller 2012:32).

The gospel must be understood within the grand narrative of cosmic redemption. Keller uses the cycle of four stages, namely creation, fall, redemption, and new creation/ consummation as the critical point of the biblical narrative. The gospel should be tied to the Bible story line and themes.

Because of the magnitude of the gospel and the material that relates to it, there is no single way in which to present the biblical gospel. The Bible does not give one standard outline. "As such the gospel has a supernatural versality to address the particular hopes, fears and idols of every culture and person" (Keller 2012:44). The gospel should not be reduced to a trite simplistic formula. This has obvious ramifications for the methods of evangelism.

Keller (2012:46-48) makes the point that the gospel affects everything and changes everything. He defines it as the A-Z of the faith, for all believers at all times, rather than the ABC of the faith for novices.

He continues that due to its richness, depth of coverage and infinite applicability, as the Word it represents the perpetual fountain or source of Christian knowledge of God's plan for his people (2012:36). It demands to be taught comprehensively, in a balanced methodical manner, free from personal emphasis.

Every evangelical church should affirm the priority of the Gospel. The Bible alone is the final infallible rule of faith and practice. This prepositional revelation is fully inspired, inerrant in its original manuscripts, and faithfully transmitted (2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 10:35). Concentrate on training men in the scriptures, employing the original languages to facilitate their ability in exegeting the Word of God.

Africa needs her Polycarp, Athanasius and Martin Luther, ready to contend for the faith at all costs.

Greear (2011:222-230) highlights three priorities of the gospel-centred church:

- The gospel-centred church prioritises preaching the message of the gospel. Where there is no proclamation of the story of Jesus Christ there is no gospel ministry.
- The gospel-centred church emphasises what Christ has done more than what we ought to do.
- The gospel-centred church demonstrates the beauty of the gospel in the community.

The faithful proclamation of God's Word should be the concern of every Christian.

A successful church is measured qualitatively by its faithfulness to the Bible and not quantitively by statistics. Getz (2007:16) points out: "It is clear from the New Testament story that numbers and quantitative growth never became a means of measuring success for New Testament churches." Getz (2007:48) encourages today's church when he shows passionate love for the glory of God. He continues: "We must not compromise the biblical truth of Christology. If we do, we compromise the very essence and heart of Christianity, which will be tantamount to theological suicide." A sound church is built upon the foundation of sound doctrine.

In contrast, Murray describes the challenge to modern-day Christianity from syncretism (2016:195):

> A wave of colour blindness about theology appears to be passing over the land. The minds of many seem utterly incapable of discerning any difference between faith, faith, and faith, creed and creed, tenet and

> tenet, opinion and opinion, thought and thought, however diverse, heterogeneous, contrarians, and mutually destructive they may be. Everything, forsooth, is true, and nothing is false, everything is right, and nothing is wrong. You are not allowed to ask what God's truth is, but what is liberal, and generous, and kind. There is no more discernment of truth.

5.10 CONCLUSION

This researcher's persuasion, passion, and purpose is that the Christian church can re-embrace the evangelical tradition and return to true Christianity as delineated in the gospels. The Christian faith arises in the revelation of God made through Jesus Christ (Jude 3; 1 Cor. 15:3; John 14:6). The gospel is the revealed mystery of God. Jesus Christ personified the mystery of the kingdom of God (Mark 4:11).The apostle Paul used the word *mystery* twenty-one times in his epistles. For Paul, the *mystery* is the declaration of spiritual truth revealed by God through divine inspiration (Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:25-26).

God has revealed his complete Word to his saints (Col. 1:26). Paul says in Galatians 1:6-9: "If anyone is preaching to you the gospel contrary to which you received, let him be accursed" (NIV). This assertion is supported with the words of Jesus: "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6-7, NIV).

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter of the study draws conclusions and makes recommendations that might be useful in helping Christians understand the danger of ignoring the current syncretic practices in the church, prominently covered in the daily media, as well as the evangelical response towards syncretism. Suggestions for further research are also presented.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

All forms of pluralism, syncretism, polytheisms, superstitions, and idolatry must be confronted and critiqued for the sake of God's kingdom and the salvation of souls. Despite societies and cultures having changed radically, this is the obligation that remains.

As Wiersbe (2001:105) succinctly states: "Wrong doctrine always leads to wrong living. Right doctrine should lead to right living."

The researcher suggests the following recommendations that will help to eliminate syncretism in the Soshanguve township churches and beyond.

- The congregation should be taught to read the Bible in a biblical context as the Word of God. Prosperity preachers cite scriptures, especially those of the Old Testament, but overlook the circumstantial context of the text they cite.
- Present the demands of the gospel and true discipleship comprehensively (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 2:38; 3:19, 26; Phil. 1:29).
- Instil in them the spirit of the Bereans (Acts 17:11). It is one thing to respect pastoral authority (Heb. 13:17), but a very different thing to blindly follow a leader who diverts from the correct interpretation of the teachings of Scripture (Rom. 16:17-18; Phil. 3:17-19).
- Preach the Bible's warning against greed (Prov. 23:4-5; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:6-17; Acts 13:5-6; Acts 20:20-35).
- Counsel the congregation in coping with the pressures to which God's children are exposed to in our fallen world (John 15:18-21; 16:33; 17:14-16; Acts 11:13).

- Present Christ as a ‘pearl of great price’ that surpasses in value anything that this fleeting world may offer (Phil. 3:7-8; Matt. 6:33; 13:44-46).
- Teach about biblical contentment and warn about the dangers of prosperity gospel (Prov. 23:4-5; Luke 12:15; 1Tim. 6:6-17; Acts 13:5-6; Acts 20:20-35).
- Prepare church members to suffer persecutions for Christ and how to live with integrity in this fallen world. (John 15:18-21; 16:33; 17:14-16; Acts 11:13).
- Preach Christ so that people can see that indeed Jesus Christ is the true wealth to be treasured, and that people should understand that they are facing God’s wrath without Christ (Phil. 3:7-8; Matt. 6:33; 13:44-46).
- Churches must be taught to emulate and practice the five Solas of Reformation.
- Churches in the Soshanguve township must relentlessly teach and model the Word of God, must instruct in the biblical basics and foundational doctrine, must prioritise a church membership process, and must target families for discipleship. They must also provide more resources to equip members of the congregation.
- People should be taught the biblical truth about demons and how to defend themselves biblically.

6.3 NECCESITY OF BIBLICALLY QUALIFIED LEADERS IN THE CHURCH

The necessity of biblically qualified leaders in the church was also duly accentuated in Chapter 5 of this study. It is generally said “everything stands and falls on leadership.” It is true that church leadership must be entrusted in the hands of qualified leaders and must discipline men from the outset, effectively training suitable candidates, instructing, warning unqualified leaders, and establishing church-based pastoral training. For those experiencing the call to vocational ministry, further quality training must be offered. In developing leaders, churches must also restore a process of serious public recognition for all elders, must equip more bi-vocational pastors and church planters, and must identify and train more deacons and deaconesses in the churches.

Tennent (2010:25) observes:

> The mainline Protestant churches were desperate to make certain that

> the church retains its position at the cultural centre. The mainline churches and particularly the universities, divinity schools, which trained most of the pastors for the mainline churches, wanted to make certain that Christianity remained intellectually respectable.

Everyone needs to be confronted with God's call of repentance and put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Day of Judgement approaches. As Wiersbe (2001:105) succinctly states: "Wrong doctrine always leads to wrong living. Right doctrine should lead to right living."

As an African theologian, Byang Kato was well aware of the 'theological pitfalls' in Africa, when he asserted (1985:37):

> What we need in today's Africa is not to return to the old traditional religion, or even a borrowing of some of the pagan practices to add to Christianity in Africa, and promote the Christian message for Africa in all areas of life and everywhere possible as ambassadors of Christ

6.4 NECCESITY TO UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

The total teaching of Scripture is that the church is built on Jesus Christ, not on Peter. Jesus affirms that He will build his church; "and I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt.16:18). Ryle's (1856:107) commentary states:

> TheJesus which promised to build upon a rock is the 'blessed company of all faithful people.' it is not the visible church of any onenation, or country or place. It is the whole body of believers of every age, and tongue and people. It is a church composed of all who are washed in Christ's blood, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by Christ's spirit, joined to Christ by faith, and epistles of Christ in life. It is a church of which every member is baptized with the Holy Ghost and is really and truly holy. It is a church which is one body, all who belong to it are one heart and one mind, hold the same truths, and believe the same doctrines

> as necessary to salvation. It is the church which has only one head. That head is Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus had the whole church in his mind, He was not just building a local assembly, but a universal church composed of all who make the same confession of faith that Peter made. To come to church for purely selfish or self-centred motivations assumes that God has no glory of his own. However, when you hear over and over how God will meet your needs, how He wants to change your life, how He loves you and accepts you just as you are., you can begin to feel as if the church is all about you. In fact, you can begin to think God's sole purpose of existence is to fix all your problems, meet all your needs, and generally make your life better, have raised an entire generation of people inside and outside the church who do not have a clear understanding of God's call upon their lives.

Their understanding of church is that it is a place where their needs get met, not that it is a place of service to the Highest God. Ironically, you cannot find one instance when Jesus made following Him easy; in fact, you find just the opposite in the following verses: "Jesus replied, 'no one who put his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 9:62 NIV).

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it'" (Matt. 16:24-25). "In the same way, anyone of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Hendriksen (1978:737) asserts "wholehearted devotion, all-out loyalty, complete self-denial, so that one places himself, his time, his earthly possessions, his talents, etc., at the disposal of Christ is what Jesus asks."

Church is about God, and God does not share his glory with anyone. He wants his glory alone.

6.5 FURTHER RESEACH INTEREST

Leadership succession in congregational church government.

The role of pastoral spiritual formation in the Baptist Union of South African churches.

The role of the church in confronting corruption in the Government in the South African context.

6.6 CONCLUSION OF STUDY

Our journey through biblical history showed the fate of the Old Testament leaders who incurred the wrath of the Lord by ignoring the message dutifully brought by the prophet or through their submission to idolatry. In covering the gospels of the New Testament and particularly the books of St Paul, in which he deals with the earliest forms of syncretism encountered as Christianity spread to surrounding peoples, it was made clear that a true church is simply a church that has Christ as her Lord and Master in life and practice. It is that and that only.

Alternatively, by the universally accepted definition of syncretism as the “mixing” of other beliefs with Christianity, which can only lead to the dilution of the firm principles which define and support Christian doctrines and practices, as taught by Our Master. Syncretic practices cannot provide for our salvation and entry into The Kingdom of God, as established by our faith, repentance, and belief in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. But syncretism also goes beyond the mixture of Christianity with other religious beliefs and includes the mixture of Christian beliefs with other worldviews, as well as ideologies that are contrary to Scripture. MacArthur (2007:45) notes:

> When false teaching goes unchallenged, it breeds more confusion and draws still more shallow and sincere people into the fold. If not vigorously resisted, apostasy will spread like leaven through seminaries, denominations, mission agencies and other Christian institutions. False teaching attacks the church like a parasite, affecting our cooperative testimony, inoculating people against the truth of the gospel, proliferating false and half-hearted disciples, and filling the church with people who are actually unbelievers.

As responsible shepherds of the worldwide Christian church community we cannot afford to ignore the threat of mixing Christian doctrine with religious and cultural elements that lead to the distortion of the truths of the gospel, and thus the Word of God.

A profound point of view leading to a final quote which places the Christian journey as a member of the universal Church of Jesus Christ, is expounded by Stuhlmueller and Senior (1983). Coming at the end of a theological thesis proposing a plan for disarming and banishing syncretic practices in the church, the quote may at first seem antithetical, if not alarming. While no worldly organization can be compared to Christianity, the following analogy assists our grasp.

The church, though it is concerned with the growth of membership, is not a business or profit-making organization, but stands closer to an academic institution that prides itself in producing graduates entering the working world with truly valid educational standing alongside their qualifications, which are essentially only of nominal importance. It is the knowledge and skills that really count.

Jesus Christ and the church He established is concerned with you and me and our acquisition through faith and repentance of Christian skills, which are the daily practice of the teachings of our Master, setting an example by which other humans may respond by adopting a similar Christian worldview and lifestyle.

How transcendently Stuhlmueller and Senior have managed to express this point:

> One of the most important things Christians need to know about the church is that the church is not of ultimate importance! However, to say this is not to deny its divine origin, nevertheless, the point of the church is not the church itself. The church's foundation and continued existence are not to providerefuge from a sinful world or to provide a warm and supportive community for lovely souls, or even less to be a plank of salvation on the tempestuous sea of damnation.

The point of the church is to rather point beyond itself, to be a community that preaches, serves and witnesses to the reign of God. In doing so, the church shares and continues

through the power of the Holy Spirit, the work of its Lord. So completely does the church live for God's reign that, when it is finally fully established, the church will be subsumed into its all-encompassing reality (Stuhlmueller & Senior 1983:157).

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Newspaper Items

Sowetan 10 January 2014

15th July 2015 Africa News Agency

8th June 2016 The Star

Shepherd conference manual 2010 (South Africa)

Newspaper Item

Sowetan January, 10, 2014

Africa News Agency July 15, 2015

The Star June 8, 2016

Shepherd conference manual 2010 (South Africa)

ANNEXURE A : FORM OF CONSENT

PhD (UFS) MISSIOLOGY

Rev John Ndhlovu

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

University of Free State

PhD Study.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES TOWARDS SYNCRETISM IN TSHWANE TOWNSHIPS

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research is to empower the church to know how it should respond to the challenges of syncretism.

Your participation will involve answering questions.

Risks and discomforts

There are no certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Potential benefits

The participants will benefit by getting information after the research. The participants will not be compensated for taking part in the research.

Protection of confidentiality

Your identity as a participant will be protected/ or only be revealed if you give permission and the information that will be gathered from you will only be used for academic purposes.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Rev John Ndlovu or Professor P Verster (Head: Department of Missiology) at University of the Free State on (015) 4012972

Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's signature_____Date:_____

Witness's signature_____Date:_____

Researcher's

Signature-_____Date_____

PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name; optional
2. Age group (13-19; 20-40; 41-60; 60+
3. Sex: male/female/Not willing to disclose
4. Education level: none; elementary/basic; secondary; tertiary
5. Occupation:
6. Church denomination:
7. Position at church:
8. Marital status; single; married; divorced

RESEARCH PROBLEM

My research problem is to investigate for myself and as to the benefit of the kingdom of God, the syncretism in evangelical churches and to find a stratergy to combat the same.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What do you regard as the most essential aspect of the Christian gospel?
- How does your church relate to these aspects?
- What relation does your church have towards other religious beliefs?
- How should the church regard the challenges of other cultures?
- How should the church regard the challenges of indigenous culture?
- How do churches in Soshanguve respond to challenges of mixing Christianity and other beliefs?
- Why do some churches accept practices of mixing the gospel with other beliefs in these churches?
- Explain how your church would practically respond to the challenges of living in a community with many different worldviews?

ANNEXURE B: LETTER OF APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

UFS·UV THEOLOGY TEOLOGIE

29-Jan-2018

Dear **Rev John Ndhlovu**

Ethics Clearance: **CRITICAL RESPONSE OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHES TOWARDS SYNCRETISM IS SOSHANGUVE TOWNSHIP**

Principal Investigator: **Rev John Ndhlovu**

Department: **Theology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to you application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Theology. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2017/0302**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for two years from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours faithfully

Dr. Juanita Meyer
Chairperson: Ethics Committee

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