

The mass media is to the general populace what the clergy is to the Church. Evangelism and the teaching of the word of God in the Church is what news bulletins are to the general public. Both the mass media and the clergy serve a system for communicating messages and symbols to their respective audiences, having a compelling function to amuse, entertain, inform, and to inculcate values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour designed to orient people into specific institutional structures.

To sustain the inequalities brought about by class differences and interests, the role of the mass media has sadly been to

promote a notorious systematic propaganda regime designed to protect the interests of the propertied classes. The Bible says in Matthew 24:11, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many," adding in verse 24, "For there shall arise false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." (The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible)

With these words, Jesus Christ was foretelling a predicament of deception in the Church, warning believers of mass deception at the hands of unscrupulous religious charlatans titling themselves as prophets, less for the anointing they purport to carry and more for legitimising their deceptive ways. One normally starts a church as Reverend so and so, then Pastor, and then Prophet or Apostle — all the time attributing these changes to God's instruction.

Prophecy, just like propaganda, can be used as a means to control the masses under a tempestuous cloud of loathsome deception. In countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, often there is a monopoly control of the media, coupled by official censorship that ensures that the media serves the ends of a dominant elite.

In a Church controlled by a false prophet, there is monopoly control of spiritual and administrative matters by "The Man of God," ostensibly carrying out instructions from God himself, having a special calling and anointing — a calling quite unique and always superior to that of everyone else that may ever choose to be part of that church. Disagreeing, disobedience and rebellion mean exactly the same thing in a church of this nature.

Just to set the record straight, this writer totally believes in the validity of the word of prophecy, the existence of true prophets, the power of the Holy Spirit, and salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Prophecy is always designed to direct people towards God's plan, whether this may be through encouragement, warning, reprimanding, punishment, or giving direction. It is never about proving a point about the legitimacy of the prophet in question.

God raised so many men of little means and significance as his prophets from the Old Testament dispensation, and it was never God's worry to necessarily find popular and respected people to be his prophets, and neither did God empower any of the prophets with powers to prove themselves. Even Prophet Elijah's contest with Baal's 450 false prophets was not a show of legitimacy for Elijah himself but an exposure of the deception of Baal. It was a redemption exercise and not a mere show of power.

In 2001 this writer answered to an altar call by Prophet Andrew Wutawunashe at the Chitungwiza Aquatic Complex; not so much of a complex these days. Prophet Wutawunashe had prophesied that God was showing him a "few men who are going to climb the mountain of

politics,” including some who would “become political writers.”

The altar call was not for the Prophet to make politicians and political writers out of members of his congregation, but a confirmation of ambitions and callings already existent within the Church, also an assurance of God’s blessing to such initiatives. Among the few of us who went forward to “receive God’s blessing” were the likes of George Chingarande, Patrick Huni, and Casper Shumba, all published political writers of various convictions and ideas.

It is this writer’s conviction that the purpose of this prophecy was to keep our inherent ambitions and callings within God’s plan, not necessarily to create future politicians for the Prophet or for his church — it was a plan to breed God-fearing politicians and political writers from within the Church. The 1st Corinthians Chapter 14:4 says the purpose of prophesying is to “edify” the Church, “speaking unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” (Verse 3).

Today, we read about a populist Nigerian prophet whose idea of edifying and comforting the Church is to make predictions of soccer results, pretty much just like any other gambler in the soccer-gambling syndicates, only that he says God favours him “to watch these matches before they are played.” Just like rogue gamblers fix matches to suit their predictions, false prophets also fix events to suit their prophecies.

Prophet TB Joshua did it with the first match at the World Cup finals in South Africa in 2010, and repeated it when Zambia was about to play Cote d’Ivoire in the Africa Cup of Nations final this year.

When Prophet TB Joshua is not edifying the Church through predictions of soccer results, he is predicting the deaths of prominent people to edify and comfort the same church. It all started with the revisionist claims that he had prophesied the death of Michael Jackson by confiding in a “family friend” of the Jacksons, a friend he claims he had tasked to bring Michael to Nigeria “to avoid this death.” He has paraded the claimed friend before his congregation a few times.

On February 5, Prophet TB Joshua issued a despondency-bound prophecy about the death of an African head of state, indicating the death would be within 60 days. Immediately after this prophecy the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN), the church he founded and leads, issued a statement vehemently denying that the prophet had ever put a date on the prophesied death, only to release a bragging video to the contrary after the death of Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika fell within the prophesied time frame.

The prophecy about the death of an African head of state had been repeated by TB Joshua on March 18, and finally on April 1, where video footages show him twice saying the death was to be on a Thursday, although he says he was not sure which Thursday.

Confirmed reports say President wa Mutharika had a heart attack on Thursday the 5th of April, but it is not certain when he actually died, with some reports suggesting he died on Friday the 6th.

After the death of President wa Mutharika, TB Joshua’s public relations handlers were quite euphoric in proving the preciseness of the prophecy, posting numerous videos on YouTube and also carrying out complementing programmes on Emmanuel TV, SCOAN’s TV Channel. To prove that the prophecy was no fluke, TB Joshua braggingly brought to church a letter he claimed was written to him by President wa Mutharika, purportedly acknowledging that he knew the prophecy was about him. Joshua did not reveal the contents of the letter but allowed photographers to take pictures of the letter’s letterhead and signature.

It turns out that the letter in question was a mere acknowledgment of receipt of a book given to the President by TB Joshua, according to the late Mutharika’s Aide on Religious Affairs, one Billy Gama, and also according to the typist who says she was tasked to type the letter, both of

them claiming to have copies of the said letter.

The prophecy about the death of an African head of state initially sounded like most of TB Joshua's characteristic one size fits all prophecies, with the usual outlet strategy of saying, "I am praying to see if I can stop this," something Joshua would be assured of boasting about if no head of state had died in the whole of 2012.

But also this seems to have been a classic case of the now common "prophesying from a data base" strategy, so much used by young and popular trickster prophets who mischievously memorise mobile numbers of people from written down prayer requests, only to recite them days later before prayerful and unsuspecting congregations, making impressive claims of having known people's problems and ailments directly from God.

People blissfully forget that they provided this vital information themselves. Some junior pastors from satellite churches tell the Prophet information obtained during counselling sessions with their church members, only for the prophet to break into a sudden tongue-speaking trance during an ordinary preaching session, calling out the name of a person he says God is telling him about, and proceeding to proudly reveal that person's problem.

The confirmation of this prophecy by the prophesied person always sends the congregation into raucous shouts of "Hallelujah!" Bibles and jackets hysterically thrown into the air in jubilation, drums and keyboards screaming to high heavens. Back to Prophet TB Joshua, the facts of his prophecy are that the successor of the late Mutharika, Joyce Banda, has been a member of Joshua's SCOAN since 2009, and she is a widely broadcasted supporter of Prophet TB Joshua. Joyce Banda had a public fallout with Mutharika and she is on video publicly asking SCOAN members for prayers "on this persecution." The last visit was in November 2011, after Banda had been reported to be under police investigation for treason, something that emanated from her public endorsement of public demonstrations against President Mutharika. It was also reported that documents linking Banda to a plot to topple Mutharika with the help of "some Nigerians" were in the hands of the Police Chief in Malawi. This man was the first person to be sacked by Banda hours after the confirmation of Mutharika's death.

The possibility that TB Joshua's prophecy could have been based on important intelligence possibly provided by Banda and/or her aides cannot be dismissed easily without investigation, just like the likelihood that Mutharika's death could have been medically induced by people hired to ensure Banda's ascendancy to power is tempting enough to warrant a call for an investigation. In this case the prophecy could have played a huge role in diverting public attention from the possible criminality behind this death, what with everyone crediting Joshua for expert prophesying.

Investigating these matters would make Prophet TB Joshua a murder suspect at the worst, or an accomplice at the least — undoubtedly making him a heroic target of persecution by those supposedly used by the Devil himself to bring down the man of God; that is in the eyes of his followers.

The major attraction to the churches of emerging prophets is the gospel of prosperity, usually preached on the strength of over-promising and the power of testimonies, sometimes heavily exaggerated by those claiming to have been miraculously prospered "after the Man of God prayed for me," or after "our father told me" this and that.

Just like the propaganda model in the US uses terrorism as a national religion to control its citizens, prosperity is used as a hook to attract the attention of poverty-stricken people in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa, overfilling them with a vacuous but addictive hope and faith that a prosperity miracle awaits them if they pray, fast and give away the little they have "to the

House of God.”

The fear of evil terrorists like the ones who carried out the 9/11 attack is good enough to ensure that Westerners trust almost every word about security that comes from their politicians. Equally the fear of poverty and the desire to attain sudden and miraculous wealth make the prophet's followers fanatical about the person and character of the prophet, and viciously defensive against any objections that may be raised in regards to the conduct of the revered man of God. The other day one of the popular prophets in Zimbabwe was exalting back-door dealings by church members for the benefit of himself as “favour from God,” arguing that the person providing the back-door services would have been “strategically placed there by God.” This writer invited the wrath of fellow believers after pointing out that what the man of God had just said was gross heresy.

It is like writing against the brutalities of Israel today. So many times this writer has been warned not to “touch the apple of God's eye,” whatever that means.

Propaganda, poverty, prosperity and prophecy are the four Ps we must watch out for as we seek to lead lives truly led and blessed of God.

Zimbabwe we are one and together we will overcome. It is homeland or death!

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