

# Commoditisation, Materialism, and Pentecostal Christian Churches

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## Abstract

Commoditisation, materialism and religious exchange have been receiving increasing attention in contemporary Pentecostal Christian churches, noting that some believers advocate that there is a price to pay in Christianity. This may be a reflection of social development, a new form, but it appears to be an old form of the practice of both secular and spiritual. In this empirical study, commoditisation and materialism are noted as factors that play a relational role and outline the changes in the understanding of religious exchange and the economic transaction of monetary. Understanding of spiritual form of payment, pricing in the traditional marketing (tangible price in this regard) and the shift towards a transactional exchange for divine intervention in form of miracle, healing, and provision are examined from being major sources of inner spiritual dilemmas to being principal sources of the desire and inspiration underpinning materialism and commoditisation in various Pentecostal churches today. This paper argues that the virtual neglect of some significant characteristics of marketing such as the exchange process, and pricing from the religious perspective might affect the church as a non-profit organisation. The study reveals that Pentecostal churches can embrace contradictory concepts of commoditisation, materialism, and spiritualism; and emanate to the social shift as a non-profit sector, but the positive potential inherent to Christianity should be reconciled. Based on current literature trends, the results add that there is a secular exchange of spirituality for materialism as illustrated in the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-19), thereby problematizing the current South African religious context. The researcher hopes to add to the understanding of the religious exchange, commoditisation, and materialism relationship.

**Keywords:** Commoditisation, materialism, pricing, non-profit marketing, Pentecostal churches, spiritual

## **Introduction**

New developments in the study of contemporary religion and the so-called born-again (Pack 2017:5)<sup>1</sup> Christians have recently been linked to marketing concepts, exchange process, value proposition, pricing strategy, and commoditisation. In the context of this paper, this study employs the concepts of commoditisation and materialism within the broader economic concept of transaction acts. The study posits a sociological interpretation of the Christian faith compared to a theological interpretation in which spirituality and materialism are often irreconcilable concepts. According to Benyah (2018: 122), prosperity-oriented theology views religion as an economic commodity and considers individual believers as ‘human capital’ and ‘human resources’ whose economic value and potential must be realised. This paper is positioned within the context of non-profit marketing and the role of spirituality and religion in consumption (Choudhury 2019: 1). The use of commoditisation and materialism in not-for-profit organisations are contemporary issues in Pentecostal churches in South Africa. Although they are recognised as important marketing tools, the use of commoditization and materialism for evangelical purposes in some Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic churches is debated.

Commoditisation’ is described by Applbaum (2000:121) as the strategic process of rendering things without a self-propelled economic, historical, or evolutionary tendency as commodities. Commoditisation is seen as a process directed by marketers (and others with a marketing orientation) who act upon their stake in reproducing particular dispositions toward manufactured objects, ideas or experiences for the purpose of ensuring repeat sales. It has been noted by Gould (2013:1) that commoditisation refers to a situation when illiquid financial contracts are changed or modified in a way that promotes trading and results in a more liquid market. Commoditisation is about proprietary things becoming generic, that is, transforming goods or services into a commodity.

Materialism and commoditisation signify the search and reverence of

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase ‘Born Again Christian’ applies to people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior or Redeemer. To be born again in this sense is not an actual physical rebirth, but it indicates a spiritual rebirth – ‘giving your heart to the Lord’ or any other kind of religious experience.

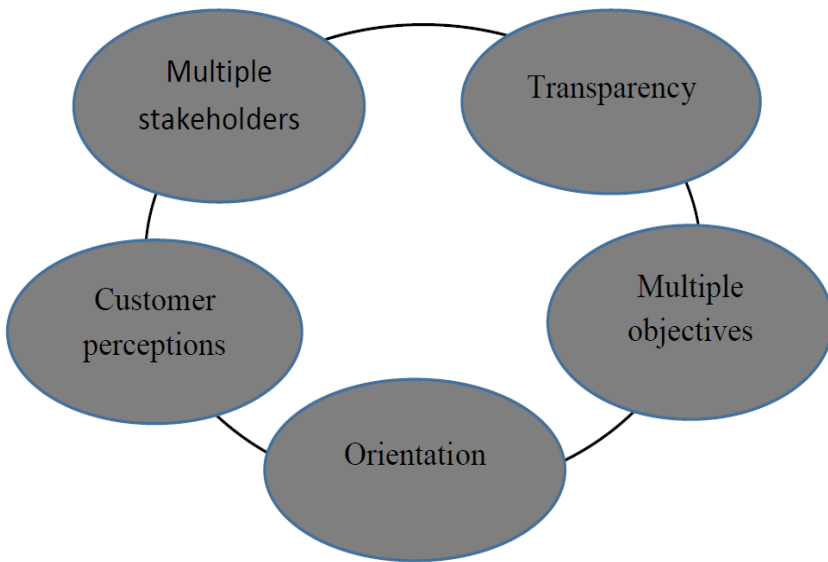
possessions and material wealth. Materialism is considered a consumer value<sup>2</sup> and is defined as, ‘the devotion to material needs and desires, to the neglect of spiritual matters; a way of life, opinion or tendency based entirely upon material interests’ (Kamineni 2005:25; Ugwu & Ugwu 2013:1199). Unusual pursuits of material wealth and excessive materialism have been reported to be incompatible with religious fulfilment. From a marketing perspective, possessions are understood to fulfil almost all human wants; it ensure happiness, define self-worth, play a central role in a person’s life, and symbolise the quality of life (Choudhury 2014:683). However, spirituality (or religiosity) defined as metaphysical experience cannot be pursued simultaneously with materialism. Although the aim of this study is not to provide a historic overview of the Christian mission per se it wants to demonstrate how the church had shifted towards a transactional exchange for divine intervention, especially as it relates to the miracle, healing, and provision. Underpinning this act is a new theology, ‘Prosperity Gospel’ (Ogunlusi 2018:314) specific to Pentecostal churches which posits a belief that only physical matter exists, and that the material is of more value than the spiritual.

The study's aim is to identify the metaphorical use of pricing philosophy (commoditisation), the material dimension among church stakeholders, and the understanding of the relationships between spiritual and secular pricing (with value) while analysing exchange process and the issues that the stakeholders (born-again believers) advocate. More recent practices of Christian churches juxtapose marketing concepts and models by viewing believers as rational consumers and church organisations as firms that collectively constitute a religious market (Cosgel & Minker 2004:339). Non-profitability organisations, especially Christian religious institutions are critiqued for viewing believers as consumers by solving major social problems, and exploiting them as vulnerable (CRL Rights Commission Report: 2017:2). These organisations are also criticised for their traditional approach to social change reflected in how they raise funds. Strijdom (2014:1) states that in recent debates the neglect of the material dimension of religion and the foregrounding of beliefs in the modern academic study of religion has been attributed to a Protestant bias.

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<sup>2</sup> Materialism is the attitude of someone who attaches a lot of importance to money and wants to possess a lot of material things (Collins English Dictionary, 2018:819).

However, Adebayo (2015:150) records that contemporary believers claim that ‘what they are promoting is to orientate Christians to be willing to give up anything which stands between them and heaven and that a religion that costs nothing is worth nothing’. This implies that Christians have assumed that this obedience would lead to the transformation of their physical, social and spiritual lives. One of the religious conventions corresponding with the non-profit organisation is that non-profit stakeholder relationship offerings are mostly intangible (see Figure 1.1) and include knowledge, ideas, networking, financial resources and input of voluntary work (Inha 2015:2).



**Figure 1.1: Key characteristics of not-for-profit organisations.**  
**Source: Adapted from Futcher (2014:594)**

Similarly, Strijdom (2014:1) retorts that ‘material religion’ constitutes a new, key analytical concept in Religious Studies. Houtman and Meyer (2012) propose religion-specific, concrete instances, with multiple objectives and orientations (see Figure 1.1) for example:

- objects like relics, amulets, dress codes, painted or sculpted images, written words, and architectural spaces;

- feelings and sensory experiences like seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching; and
- bodily performances in specific gestures, rituals, ceremonies, and festivals.

Hence, for many Christians who value religion, there is a theological shift towards a motivated transactional act of exchange. The theology that underpins this act is not clearly defined. Some scholars (Choudhury 2014; and 2019; Dorn 2015; Ing 2010) emphasise a philosophical, ideological and sociological approach that often resort to rigid categorisation and opposing ideas such as spiritualism at conflict with materialism and liberalism opposing socialism. This may be the result of different religious approaches that aim to reconcile religious values, such as simple living and modest possessions with the ideology of consumerism, its abundance of goods and services and its massive propaganda of the materialistic good life. Consumers attempt to see the world in terms of prescriptive implications linked to religious ideals (Choudhury 2019:1-2).

In another sense, however, this article relates the nature and implications of price changes at different stages of spirituality to the nature of theology that underpins the shift towards a motivated transactional act of exchange and seeks to offer some conclusions about the potential utility and value. Adebayo (2015:151) alludes that the price changes tend to be in reaction to some other issues and activities such as filthiness, covetousness/materialism, and idolatry are not positive spiritual pricing actions in their own right. Choudhury (2019:1) points out that the pursuit of material pleasures, construed as a symbol of the consumer culture and the corrupt influence of consumerism, has been subjected to disapproval in the religious literature. The article builds on these notions and examines how religious price changes historically or are anchored in modernity and are affected by spirituality, socialisation, commoditisation, and materialism.

Koekemoer (2004:9) holds that, in the absence of any specific knowledge about a particular product, consumers will equate a high price with high quality and value. An important factor that is noted in this paper is the notion that the higher cost of the product is often associated with greater quality. Furtwengler (2010:24) emphasises that the ability to get higher prices than the competitors lies squarely on the ability to demonstrate greater value and to monetise that value for the customer. The differentiation in traditional

marketing regarding price and quality is examined and this study considers in more depth how charismatic Christians (born-again believers) develop their argument around the association between spiritual pricing and quality. According to Johnson (2013:1), a greater anointing often demands a greater price. This idea concurs with the assertion in the book of Luke 12:48 which states that 'for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required'. Shifting the point of emphasis from marketing to religion, the study, therefore, points out price variability from the spiritual viewpoints.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Historical Background of Profit and Non-profit Pricing***

For-profit and non-profit businesses both deploy business principles but towards different ends. According to Sandilands (2014:1), the process of marketing differs for example, with the biggest differentiating factor being that the purpose of for-profit marketing is to encourage customers to buy while the purpose of non-profit marketing is usually to encourage people to give. According to Strydom (2011:159), the price is the amount of money charged for a product or service. More broadly defined, the price is the amount of value that consumers exchange for the benefits of having or using the product or service of a specific manufacturer or service provider. It is noteworthy that the price is not only the amount of money paid to a manufacturer for a product or service, but it can also take the shape of payment in kind, e.g., when products are bartered (exchanged).

Brian (2012:5) holds that the ideal of exchange transactions in not-for-profit marketing has two basic requirements. The first requirement is the involvement of at least two parties and the second is the potential value offered by each party to the other(s). Money can be exchanged for products (goods or services), good feelings and/or tax benefits; and time and effort can be exchanged for money and feelings of comfort and/or responsibility. In the case of the church, products such as Christian music, Bible study manuals, and Sunday school manuals can be exchanged for money, while individual time and material possessions can be donated to the church in exchange for good feelings and other non-monetary rewards. Thus, the exchange is not necessarily a purely commercial transaction and involves more than the exchange of money only for goods and services.

In addition to the willingness of one party to become involved in an exchange transaction with another, a marketer also needs to price the value of the service/ product to differentiate a superior product from an inferior product amongst other things. In a market economy, prices for goods and services are linked to sellers and buyers, wages are linked to employers and employees through collective bargaining, profits are linked to shareholders and management, and taxes link companies with the public (Anheier 2000:6). Although there are limitations to how pricing is established in a market economy, the purpose arguably remains a profitable monetary bottom line.

‘African Pentecostalism’, a term used by Ukah (2007: 9) to describe one of the fastest-expanding denominations of Christianity in Africa and South Africa, is also purposed on the monetary bottom line and has more in common with for-profit organisations than with non-profit companies. Faith healing is a more prominent feature of this religion than spiritual renewal of the body, mind, and relationships in the face of brokenness. Deliverance from poverty, ill health and misfortune is central to this gospel advocated by the Pentecostal churches. Hence, this gospel is referred to as the ‘Wealth and Health Gospel’ and a ‘theology of prosperity’ (Ukah 2007:14; Gosling 2014:2). The Pentecostal/Charismatic churches also resemble the for-profit firm in their organizational structure (Ukah 2007:15). These churches are organised as firms or commercial enterprises to engage in the production, distribution, and pricing of religious and non-religious commodities with the primary motive of making a profit and competing for market share.

## **The Culture of Free Offering, Biblical Exchange, and Materialism in Contemporary Pentecostal Churches**

Historically, Christians have sacrificed much in pursuit of their faith. Jesus gave his life for humanity and encourages his followers to do the same by sacrificing their desires and needs without expecting payment in return: ‘You received without payment, so give without payment’ (Matthew 10:7-15). Kioulachoglou (2018:2) agrees that faith in God and the teachings of Jesus cannot be exchanged for profit and should be free for all. Open source information technology offers a vehicle for non-profit exchange in the twenty-first century. Christians are to do good without expecting any remuneration or return. According to Reese (2011:1), free service, beyond profit and budgets is equated with a ‘spirituality of giving’. In turn the church’s teaching on giving

constitutes a spirituality of joyful and hopeful living to the glory of God.

The Christian message is that all of value have been given free of charge and that those on the receiving end should in turn give as freely as they have been given (DJL 2014:1). There are both positive and negative effects to the concept of 'giving' (Ogunlusi 2018:322). If people are to give freely they can potentially empower others both spiritually and economically. However, if believers give for the sake of gaining future prosperity, they might be left off worse financially, socially and spiritually by their unrealized expectations and the false promises of financial gain.

Through the powerful use of symbolism, religion and Christianity in particular has the ability to influence behaviour and shape daily practice. Analyses of the associations between religion and economic and sociological actions (behaviours) are not new in the social sciences. Prominent early scholars such as Tawney, Weber, and Marx have done much work to show the significance of the linkages between religion and economic organisation among followers of a particular religion (Taru & Settler 2015:114). Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, examines the significance and implications of possession and wealth on the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, particularly distractions from the pursuit of a righteous life (Weber 1930:157). This implies that for Christians, everlasting rest, belongs to the next world. An earthly existence demands that man should be certain of his state of grace and do the works of him who sent him (John 9:4 NIV). These works do not include leisure and enjoyment, but refer to activities that serve to glorify God, according to the definite manifestations of His will such as spiritualism, generosity, and charity (Weber 1930:157). Weber demonstrates the growing problem of reconciling transactional relationships and the for-profit motif in religion with Christian ethics.

In contemporary society, churches promote wide-ranging beliefs of wealth, prosperity and material goods (Taru & Settler 2015:120). The traditional Christian message of sacrifice has been influenced by theologies of health, wealth and prosperity with often negative effects on the socio-political and economic sphere. The prosperity gospel has replaced traditional Christian values messages of material gratification (Ogunlusi 2018:325).

From a sociological perspective practices within the early church included spiritual exchanges. According to Christian scriptures, only the sacred could be exchanged (Leviticus 27:33 NIV). In early Israel, a man could remove



and give his sandal to another party in order to make a matter concerning the right of redemption or the exchange of property legally binding (Ruth 4:7 NIV). Pure gold could not be given in exchange for the sacred, nor could silver be weighed as its price. The biblical narrative of the exchange between Gehazi and Naaman talks of the value assigned to materialistic things by Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27 NIV). Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, the man of God runs after Naaman, the Aramean, for a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.

By extending the concept of commoditisation and materialism (exchange of money), one can make the two concepts more meaningful and meet the challenges of unsaved as a product satisfies the need and wants of consumers. Christianity proclaims modest living and frugality but in contemporary Pentecostal society, these values have been replaced with aspirations of material wealth. Ashley (2007:1) illustrates how religious exchange for profit presents in the modern world (socialisation):

I usually ball fliers up and throw them away, but this one caught my eye. It had black and white pictures of Jesus and a Bible at the top. A woman describing herself as ‘religious and holy’ offered a free blessed candle with each consultation for spiritual healing, promising to show how she would remove sorrow, sickness, pain, and all bad luck. As a woman who has the God-given power to heal by prayer, she has helped thousands, the flier claimed. Curious as to whether this was a free service or if someone would need to dig into their wallet for the privilege of being healed, I called the number printed at the top of the flier. A very pleasant-sounding woman answered, asking me how I’d heard of her services. Answering my queries as to cost, she told me a spiritual reading ran \$30, and a tarot card reading was \$40. That wasn’t a bad price at all, she told me.

Sandilands (2014:3) disagrees with the above type of sale and states that ‘retail sales of the primary product or service do not apply to the non-profit corporation (This is church commoditisation)’.

As Ashley (2007:1) points out, the concept of buying and selling to describe the current stage of religious exchange is obviously convincing, more so because it is important to understand a consumer paying a price for being a consumer of department stores and a Christian paying a spiritual price as a follower of Christ to the same account. The spiritual price equates to physical

cash payments. One may object, however, that religion has always been an attempt to distinguish the real from the fake, the genuine from the ‘made-up’ (van de Port 2005) in Klaver, Roeland, Versteeg, Stoffels & van Mulligen (2017:240). In terms of the spiritual aspect of pricing, one may also agree with Ashley (2007:2) that those who are truly gifted by the Spirit will share freely and that those who seek to profit in the name of Christ for money or otherwise will come to see the true way of God’s healing grace, by giving freely in order to receive it freely. What we, therefore, see in this generosity in comparison with profit marketing, can be said that the process of marketing in Ashley’s story above is purely profit-oriented.

In the understanding of contemporary conservative Christian ethics, the story of Naaman, in the Bible (2 Kings 5:1-19), where material gain in exchange for a spiritual blessing or miracle of healing is denied, is discussed in this context. The story is a portrait of how God saves without any regard of monetary value. According to Keathley (2013:1), the healing of Naaman, the Leper, is not just a story of the healing of a man from one of the most dreaded diseases of ancient times, but it is a story of salvation. Spiritual salvation can only be found in Jesus Christ and the story articulates how men, not unlike modernday consumers seek products to satisfy their needs, albeit in this case spiritual products.

As argued here, Christian theology is irreconcilable with materialism and ‘salvation’ has spiritual meaning. Keathley (2013:5) refers to 2 Kings 5: 4-7 as an illustration of how salvation cannot be acquired or bought and the price not negotiated (Hult, Pride & Ferrell 2012:605). These verses highlight how the desires and needs of human nature also manifests in the religious realm. The narrative of Naaman illustrates the difference between Biblical exchange, and desires for materialism or wealth. The story affirms that Naaman took a large amount of silver, gold, and clothes as payment (vs 5), with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha (The Prophet). Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, ‘Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean’.

This story articulates how miracles and blessings are bestowed upon believers without any effort or payment. The desire for money, power and wealth could lead one to focus on materialism and commoditisation while one’s spirituality, effective witnessing, or deserving of responsibility or leadership in the body of Jesus Christ could lead to spiritual pricing and the authentication of spiritual services and evangelical beliefs.

## **Research Approach**

### ***Research Methods and Hypotheses***

The study used quantitative methods and qualitative methods and was undertaken between 2016 and 2019. Data were collected through qualitative in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation and a desktop review. Data were analysed thematically and a formulated hypotheses was tested. The study was conducted in Pentecostal churches in Durban, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

Christian practice, perceptions, concepts, and awareness about commoditisation, materialism, free will offering, pricing, and exchange were explored. The views of congregants about the fulfillment of their wishes, goals, and desires and its link with their Christian practice as well as the concepts of divine intervention, miracle, healing, and provision were also explored.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Interviews were conducted with representatives of local churches in six (6) Pentecostal churches to explore their opinions on commoditisation, materialism and the involvement of marketing/pricing concepts in church operations. Four pastors and four 4 ministers were interviewed to further explore their attitudes, opinions and interests on the commoditisation of church products. Christian television commercials screened on digital satellite television (DSTV) were studied with reference to the practice of exchange, commoditisation and materialism and four topics were specifically explored: (1) sponsor; (2) thematic contribution; (3) content description; and (4) media/network stations. The commercials were screened on 8 networks including RTM (Redemption Television Ministry), CTV (Celebration Television), Emmanuel Television, Break TV (Breakthrough Ministry), RLW TV (Rivers of Living Waters Ministry), GNF TV (Abundant Life Ministry), Eziki TV (Forward in Faith Ministry) Prophetic Channel TV, and eTV (Shalom Ministry).

Literature supports the assertion that involving marketing activities in the operations of church programs contributes to the development of sustainable evangelical Pentecostal strategies and practices. This perceptive leads to the first research hypothesis which states:

**H1:** Involving marketing concepts (product, promotion, place/distribution, pricing, etc.) in the activities and operations of the church, by developing and using different exchange and relationship strategies for

different congregations of the church through transactional or relational nature, has a positive impact on and is important for the development of sustainable evangelical strategies and practices of the church.

**H1a:** Congregants are committed to and involved in the spiritual and physical activities and operations of the church through financial support, tithe, free offering, donations, material possessions, moral support and individual time for the operations of the church.

**H1b:** The absence of the profit-driven nature of the church (a non-profit organisation) should not allow a great diversity of preferences and a subject of materialism in Christian organisations.

**H1c:** The commitment and involvement of the congregants are important for and have a positive impact on the development of sustainable evangelical Pentecostal strategies and practices of the church.

One of the assumptions of this study is that, when involving marketing concepts, the congregants of the church should be exposed to the pricing from being one of the sources of religious inner problems to being a principal source of the desire and inspiration underpinning commoditisation and materialism in various Pentecostal denominational churches. Therefore, the following research hypothesis is formulated:

**H2:** The spiritual pricing strategy should be developed bearing in mind the characteristics of profit strategies.

**H2a:** The pricing in the traditional marketing (product pricing in this regard) should be examined from being one of the sources linked to religious inner problems to being a principal source of the desire and inspiration underpinning materialism in Pentecostal churches.

**H2b:** The stronger the congregant identifies with a spiritual pricing strategy, the greater his willingness to observe it is.

**H2c:** For different congregants of the church, it is necessary to develop different pricing strategies, therefore, change in price should not be in reaction to some other issues and activities such as filthiness, covetousness/materialism, and idolatry, which are not positive spiritual pricing actions in their own right.

The above hypotheses were empirically explored and categorised into themes based on 1.) the involvement of marketing in the activities and

operations of the church; 2.) the example of the concept of exchange, free offering and price tag (Ashley's 2007:1); 3.) the story of Naaman and 4.) the perception that the use of pricing strategies by the church contaminates the gospel of the early church.

## **Research Findings and Discussion**

The aim of the interviews was to firstly understand if pricing strategies among Pentecostal churches were different or similar to commercial commoditisation and marketing concepts (product, promotion, place/distribution, pricing, etc.) and secondly to explore whether congregants are committed to and involved in the spiritual and physical activities and operations of the church through financial support, tithe, offering, donations, material possessions, moral support and the donation of time to support the spiritual operations of the church.

Following from the interviews, the selected themes in the different churches related to each other. However, engaging these themes within the historical context of exchange and commoditisation, the study found that the Pentecostal churches in Durban do not have a clearly defined strategy for marketing, value proposition, pricing strategy, and commoditisation. The churches depend primarily on donations for church programmes. Some churches also raise funding by making and selling souvenirs, handkerchiefs, picture frames, spiritual candles, charging entrance tickets for special church programmes. Pentecostal churches, however, do not have a clearly defined business strategy or a vision of the business. Conversely, neglecting the role of the church as a non-profit organisation reveals the objects of the trade from the church activities that proffer values or worths as seen in the pricing strategy of any given profit organisation. However, this result suggests that there exist some level of similarities between business activities and church activities. One of the pastors asserts that Jesus informed to 'Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone (Mark 16:15)' - therefore, to effectively carry out this great commission, modern communication media such as television, radio, tapes, cinema, internet, socio-media tracts, books, can aid to convey spiritual messages to people. However, these media activities carry a cost. In addition, one respondent added that schools, colleges, and seminaries owned by churches can also be priced/valued through school fees/ books/ learner guides, as long as the merchandise being sold honour God, is sold at a fair price, and does not violate any laws such as copyright laws. Some churches

generate an income through bookstores and others sell textbooks or curricula to students. Despite poorly defined business strategies, it is nevertheless clear that to fulfill the great commission all efforts should be made to promote Christ and to develop other marketing offerings to generate income.

Through the recurring theme of the absence of profit which the study suggests, it allows for a great variety of preferences subjective to materialism in a given Christian organization, which demonstrates that there are profit options. On the basis that profit is the difference between the firm's revenues (total sales) and the total costs, sales should be increased (Perreault, Cannon, & McCarthy 2008:43). It is also possible that churches could raise funds through voluntary contributions such as tithes and offerings. In addition, it is significant to note that the church implementation of differences in pricing was driven by value, quality of life and spirituality. Thus, the profits appear to be attributed to differences in goals and pursuit of life: one eternal salvation – Hebrew 5:9, the other immediate or ephemeral, which can be summarised as spirituality and materialism, respectively. The findings confirm the hypotheses of H1a and H1b and, ultimately, the main hypothesis H1.

The commonality between spiritual pricing and pricing of commercial goods lies in the fact that discipleship, the essence of Christianity, does come at a price. The cost of discipleship is self-denial and commitment to the cause, explained by Luke in Luke 9:23 as 'taking up your cross'. It is further enunciated that discipleship is a sacrifice whereby the self must be denounced and must cease to be the object of one's life and actions. In addition, it is noted that paying a price as a Christian involves a vital reorientation of the principle of life. The divine must receive priority above self-will, which, in a way, is different from paying a price in a traditional marketing system that is centred on the customer (Kotler & Armstrong 2010:19). These findings confirm H2 based on the context and the evidence of the cost/price related to becoming a Christian. There is consistency with circumstantial evidence that except a man is born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Through recurrent themes of using pricing strategies by the church which brings about change in price that leads to filthiness, covetousness/materialism, and idolatry, numerous Pentecostal churches have sought to create pricing strategies that conform with those of for-profit organisations. However, realigning themselves to materialistic objectives instead of spirituality has determined how materialism and daily spiritual experience are related to a change in spiritual pricing strategy. Accordingly, the dominant

finding relating to this theme suggests that materialism has been associated with various negative remarks, some of which include frivolities, physical things, and economic/social blessings. The effect of these negative remarks is that churches are likely to become too materialistic and thereby forsake the power of God in their lives to heal or address life-threatening situations (Benyah 2018:138). The majority of respondents believed that though that material goods bring contentment and play an important role in one's life and development. However, they emphasised that a materialistic way of life might become the norm and a point of reference for social comparisons, filthiness, covetousness, and idolatry.

Finally, the conducted interviews proved the H2 hypothesis which argues that the spiritual pricing strategy should be developed bearing in mind the characteristics of profit strategies. Hypotheses H2a and H2b were also validated. It was proved that some congregants, who identified more with the non-profit aspect of the church, tend to raise financial questions about the church, while some depend on their relationships with God and a positive perception of the tithing and offering from the Bible. It was also proven that the willingness to give to the church was more pronounced depending on the individual's identification with the level of spirituality and relationship with God. One of the respondents, Pastor Keith, retorts that having a profitable life in Christ implies a life that is totally surrendered to the Lord Mark 8:36 (For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?) has reference in this regard. It was pointed out that one must be willing to die daily. This means that one's self-will is subjected to God on a daily basis which Palmatier (2008:8) termed as 'relational-based exchange'. Cost and exchange were considered to be necessary among Pentecostal Christians. The representatives of a particular church interviewed stated that one must be ready to tear off one's old garments and get into new garments (costs), in accordance to Mark in 8:37 - or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? According to Palmatier (2008:17), this relates to the interpersonal relationship from the perspective of customer relationship management which implies involving managing detailed information about individual customers.

The above is supported by the fact that the willing members of the congregation are more willing to engage in activities related to church as compared to unwilling members. Given that all secondary hypotheses were accepted, however, H2c which states that it is necessary to develop different pricing strategies for different members is not accepted. The price should not

be manipulated in reaction to some other issues and activities such as filthiness, covetousness/materialism, and idolatry, which are not positive spiritual pricing actions in their own right. It was revealed that religious price should not change even from ancient to modern or reform as a result of modernity or materialism. Pastor Rene Degee of Inter-fellowship Ministries (Wentworth, Durban) articulates that the congregants of a church should not be differentiated as the producers of resources needed to sustain the church. She pointed out that, however, two factors could be responsible in case there is a change: (1) the wrong motive for ministry, and (2) materialism. This interview revealed that the world of contemporary religious experience is changing much faster than the discipline that claims to study it. On the other hand, it was pointed out that Christianity still largely avoids analysis of key issues around giving, self-denial, self-examination, prayers, fasting, interceding and the work of the Holy Spirit, and struggles to highlight differences between spirituality and materialism. It is nevertheless clear that Christianity should contribute to the critical analysis of social problems (needs and wants of congregational members), moral values and the promotion of cultural and spiritual respect across religions.

## **Conclusion**

The marketing of spiritual products has become common practice and is evident in the advent of spiritual products and services following the commoditisation process. The fact that society is now becoming industrialized has also helped some Pentecostal churches to extensively use television, tapes (music titles) and spiritual books; thus, turning them into commodities. According to the CRL Rights Commission Report (2017:1), there is the commercialisation of religion and abuse of people's belief systems. This article argues that, if church wants to become a highly valuable organisation within the society, it must, first and foremost, identify the non-profit goods and services from its activities; create a favourable status and image in the society, and a positive public attitude towards the issues relevant to the activities of the church organisation. The article has also indicated some complexity of the issues. It is argued that pricing should not be identified with non-profit goods and services, but rather as fundraising by voluntary contributions (Tithe and offering) and as a religious way of qualifying certain people (believer), and practices (Christian commandment). Hence, the emphasis of 'commoditisation' to promote trading



and transforming goods or services into a commodity/ product.

Modes of spiritual pricing were discussed on the basis that information/products or services on many spiritual topics have been systematically commoditised. For example, the spiritual knowledge that used to be difficult or costly to access (the case of Naaman, for instance) is available today as a tangible product on the shelf of convenience shops with a price tag. This paper proposes that pricing choices for non-profit organisations (church in this regard) should not be taken lightly and are worthy of considerable thought, conversation, experimentation, and evaluation. Thus, this paper supports the rebuke by Jesus to the people of His day for misusing this principle of pricing, and for making His house an auction barn or place of commodities. Matt. 21:12-13 says, ‘And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all of them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, it is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves’.

Religious organisations, like all other organisations, should consider all the societies, organisations and individuals who have a direct or indirect impact on the organisation’s operations and activities. Business strategy is poorly defined within the religious environment in which the Pentecostal churches exist and should be addressed. CRL Rights Commission Report (2017:1) highlights that citizens had a right to believe as they wished. However, harmful religious practices such as feeding people snakes, grass, petrol and other harmful substances; driving them over or spraying or pouring harmful substances over them eroded the person’s human dignity and are not acceptable. Similarly, this paper points out that it is not clear also that the great commission was to invest great efforts in promoting Christ, and, in this way, developing other marketing offerings with profits. Special attention should be paid to materialism when defining spiritual pricing, making sure that important spiritual characteristics are not left out. It is proved that there is a carryover of the American influence on South African Pentecostal churches, thereby, guided by firm or commercial enterprises orientation, engaging in the production, distribution, and pricing of religious and non-religious commodities with primary motives of making a satisfactory profit and maintaining a market share.

However, it is proved in this paper that the stronger the congregant identifies with a spiritual pricing strategy, the greater his/her willingness to

observe it. It is also proved that congregants/members identified differently with spiritual pricing, giving, tithing, and offering, depending on their relationship with God and their perception of the spiritual pricing strategy. It was also proved that the willingness to participate in the activities of the organisation was more pronounced in individuals who identified more with the spiritual pricing strategy.

Finally, commodities and materialism should serve the environment and human well-being, and should not be identified with spirituality when it comes to church activities. Although this paper addressed most confronting pricing choices, it calls for both full-time and seasoned pastors not to compromise spiritual quality with commodities or materialism. The paper assumes that the interpretation of church, commoditisation, and materialism are naturally contradictory. One might interpret their occurrence in the modern world as a case of successful consumerism invading the realm of spiritual reproduction. However, on the other hand, it can result in another interpretation by assuming that Pentecostal churches have naturally started lending their activities to commercialisation.

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