

Zimbabwe Pentecostal Clergy and Gowns of Vainglory (Matthew 23:5-8): An Exegetical and Ethnographic Investigation.

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Abstract: The penchant for high sounding nomenclature, high positions, celebrity status and the envied doctoral credentials has engulfed the ranks of the clergy in Zimbabwe's Pentecostal churches at a level reminiscent of the Pharisees of Matthew 23:5-8. Historically, Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe, and, arguably, across the globe, have shown little interest in higher education and critical theological discourse. However, in recent times, it has dawned on Pentecostal Churches that due to globalization and the need to spread mission beyond borders, there is a dire need for the clergy to pursue higher learning. In the quest to satiate the desire for academic credentials as a ticket into senior appointments, grandeur and honour, a frenzy for postgraduate and doctoral degrees has caught Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe like veld fire. This article discusses the resonance of Matthew 23:5-8 to the appropriation of academic titles by members of the clergy in Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. Through a dual lens of Exegetical Method and Ethnographic Analysis, the hypocrisy and pedantry of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:5-8 is compared to the pursuit of bogus academic titles by members of the clergy in selected Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe.

KEY WORDS: Matthew 23:5-8; hypocrisy; unaccredited degrees; Pentecostal churches; the clergy.
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

The article applies Matthew 23:5-8 as a hermeneutical tool for investigating academic scandals that have sucked in members of the clergy in selected Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe.

I. Introduction

Matthew 23:5-8 capture Jesus' chagrin and revulsion at the hubristic and hypocritical behaviour of Pharisees. The attitudes of the Pharisees revealed in the text distinctly resonate with the flamboyance and megalomania of some members of the clergy in Zimbabwe's Pentecostal and Charismatic religious movements. As Clarke (1998) argues, the corruptions of the Pharisees highlighted in Matthew 23:5-8 constitute distinguishing characteristics of false intellectuals, whether Jewish or Christian. In a striking semblance to the vainglory of the Pharisees of Matthew 23:5-8, some members of the clergy in Zimbabwe's churches crave for public respect, high titles and salutations in public domains. Just as Pharisees enjoyed being addressed as 'rabbi' meaning, 'eminent teacher', though they had no title to such addresses, some pastors in Zimbabwe clamour for honours as 'doctors', 'Doctor Prophet', 'Doctor Apostle', or 'Doctor Bishop'. According to Clarke (1998), there were three titles of dignity famously used in reference to the 'doctors' of the Pharisees. The titles ascended in rank from a Rabh (great), followed by Rabbi (greater), and to the Rabban (greatest). In comparison to the Zimbabwean scenario, the three titular ranks aptly compared to the undergraduate, masters and doctoral degree levels. The enviable 'Rabban' level among the Pharisees, just like in the case of the 'Doctoral' level of the Zimbabwean context, gave credence to its holder to assume oracular powers that usurped not only the power of the Law but of God himself. Zimbabwe has replicas of the Jewish rabbins who claim to speak directly with God. One of the rabbins in Zimbabwe, Prophet, E. Makandiwa, controversially claimed that he is more gifted than God (Mpini 2023). The titles of dignity are hardly vindicated by either excellence or substance of teaching content. This article investigates and exposes the fraudulent academic titles conferred or self-imposed on pastors that have an insidious effect on the quality of theological education, discourse and praxis in Zimbabwe.

II. Methodology

The study employed two methods namely, the Exegetical Method and, Ethnographic Analysis respectively. The Exegetical Method provided a doorway into the horizon of the author of Matthew 23:5-8, authorial intent, and relating the world behind and inside the text to the world in front of the text (the Zimbabwean context). The Exegetical Method adopted in this study is informed by the view of Malherbe

(1961), that although generally, the task of a biblical exegete is to dig out the original or intended meaning of a given text, in the case of interpreting New Testament texts, it should be understood that although directed to first century audiences, New testament texts are also directed to people of all time. What this approach to exegesis entails, therefore, is the need to primarily read the New Testament text in its original historical setting but allow the same ancient text to speak to the contemporary context of the reader. At the point of allowing the ancient text to dialogue with the contemporary Zimbabwean context, hermeneutics starts unfolding. Hermeneutics, thus, builds on the results of exegesis to bring forth a more profound meaning of the New Testament text. The hermeneutical paradigm in this research revolves around congruent behavioural and cultural traits between the ignominious Pharisees of Matthew 23:5-8 and the pedantic title-chasing clergy in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Ethnographic Analysis was deployed in the study as a port of entry into the Zimbabwean religious community for the purposes of observing and interpreting the behaviour and interactions of members of the clergy. As, Caulfield (2020), contends, Ethnographic Analysis is a qualitative research method which allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of a group's shared culture, conventions, and social dynamics. Caulfield (2020) further argues that Ethnographic Analysis allows the researcher to isolate specific communities for study within their own society. Considering that the study is focusing on an open and easily penetrable public setting of members of the clergy, overt ethnography was preferred in which the didactic and transformative intentions and purposes of the research are explicated and laid bare. Ethnographic Analysis is a relevant approach in this study because the writer, as a member of the clergy in Zimbabwe, has direct access and first-hand information on the behaviour of Christian leaders in Zimbabwe. As Taylor et al (2006) argue, Ethnographic Analysis allows for research to be carried out either, in an emic (within a cultural framework) or etic (from outside a cultural context) approaches. In the context of this research, emic ethnography was appropriate since the exploration and analysis of data was carried out within the writer's Zimbabwean cultural context. Since Ethnographic Analysis focuses on subjecting study to specific cultures, the study identified the Matthean Jewish culture of Matthew 23:5-8 and Zimbabwean pastoral community as objects of hermeneutical study. The Pharisees and pastors' attitudes towards titles of honour were identified as the significant variable for analysis. Existing literature on Matthew 23:5-8 and attitude to academic credentials and dignity titles among the Zimbabwean clergy was reviewed.

In addition to reviewing documentary evidence and using observation, the writer also interviewed a few snowballed informants who included university religious studies and theological seminary lecturers. Four senior theological seminaries' principals, two faculty theology deans, three Pentecostal churches' leaders and three holders of honorary doctorate degrees were interviewed on what reasons they think undergird the proliferation of unaccredited, scandalous academic credentials. The Chief Executive Officer at the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education responsible for quality assurance, standardization and supervision of higher education was also interviewed in the data gathering process. Ethics of research which include informed consent and protection of the interviewees through use of pseudonymity were applied in the data gathering exercise. Although the problem of members of the clergy who crave for lofty titles and unearned degrees cuts across denominational divide in Zimbabwe, this study dwelt mostly on a few major Pentecostal movements, charismatic and prophetic movements as a delimitation strategy.

III. Matthew 23:5-8 and the Zimbabwe context.

Generally, Matthew 23 is ascribed to Matthew, the former tax collector and one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. However, recent scholarship has challenged the congruity and continuity of the chapter with the overall structure and plot of Matthew's Gospel. Viljoen (2018) posits that although Matthew 23 features as 'the bleakest and unloveliest' chapter and spot in Matthew's Gospel, it resonates with the burgeoning acrimony and tension between the Jews and Jesus. The tension between Jesus and the Pharisees, as Gundry (1973:48-49) argues, sprung mainly from the separatist, ostentatious and holier-than-thou disposition of the latter. According to Barclay (1959), the Talmud lists seven categories of Pharisees as follows:

- I. The Shoulder Pharisees who meticulously observed the law at the same time wearing their good deeds on their shoulders in order to be seen by people.
- II. The Wait-a-little Pharisees who professed the strictest creed of the Pharisees but were notorious for speaking what they did not do.
- III. The Bruised and Bleeding Pharisees who bruised and wounded themselves by bumping into buildings, walls and obstructions after closing their eyes at the appearance of women.
- IV. The Pestle and Mortar Pharisees also called the Hump-backed Pharisees or the Tumbling Pharisees who exuded outstanding humility by bending like a pestle in a mortar, often showing a hunch-back. At times they would barely lift their feet from the ground as a result of which they tripped over obstacles.
- V. The Ever-reckoning or Compounding Pharisees who kept a record of their good deeds believing that God was indebted to recognize their deeds in terms of a profit and loss account.

- VI. The Timid or Fearing Pharisees who viewed divine punishment as dreadful and to be avoided in observable, ceremonial ways such as cleansing of the outside of the cup and the platter. To them, religion was about evasion of the terrifying judgment of God over sin.
- VII. The God-fearing Pharisees who truly loved God and derived delight from faithful obedience of the Law of God in spite of how onerous it might be.

Barclay (1959) points out that the common attribute among the seven categories of the Pharisees is that they loved to be addressed with the title 'Rabbi', a title that signified greatness and honour. The title, 'Rabbi' was a prefix to the names of doctors who had distinguished themselves as erudite learners and pontificators of novel schemes in divinity or were heads of religious philosophical sects whose popularity enthralled many followers to them. The 'Rabbi' title was the equivalent of the modern 'Doctor' (Dr), title used to address academics. Chitando and Biri (2016), have observed that, in Zimbabwe, many pastors and church leaders are stampeding to be addressed as "Dr" or "Professor" in order to enhance their social status. Chitando and Biri (2016), note that one of the prominent Pentecostal church leaders in Zimbabwe, Walter Magaya, went on to name his church "PHD" ministries as a pointer to the insatiable quest for the titles of honour in the Pentecostal movement. Machingura and Mawere (2024), have pointed out that in Zimbabwe, there has emerged an unscrupulous quest and scramble for fake degrees which they have sarcastically called, "titlemania or taitolomania". The 'Dr' title comes with the adorning of special gowns or academic regalia. In the case of the Jews, the gown was a special cloak with blue threads in the fringe, the blue colour blue depicting heavenly purity. According to Matthew 23:5, the cloak of ostentation made the Pharisees conspicuous and distinct. Jesus criticised the Pharisees for enlarging the fringes of the gowns in order for them to be seen of men. The Matthean Jesus' chagrin and revulsion with the Pharisees' gowns lay in the aura of ostentation and vanity that characterized them.

The Pharisees were accused for lacking the substance of the title of 'Dr' due to the perfidy and shallowness of their teaching which did not penetrate beyond externalism. According to Barclay (1959) the Jewish doctors were fond of the 'Rabbi' title because it made them look big and enviable in the eyes of the world. The Matthean Jesus in chapter 23 connotes that the profession of the 'Dr' title by the Pharisee was scandalous just as it was phoney and mark of hypocrisy. The use of the 'Rabbi or Doctor' title in Jewish circles outraged Jesus who often contended with Pharisees in polemics regarding matters of the Law of Moses. In an apparent shaming of the Jewish doctors, information in chapters 1-22 of Matthew shows Jesus epistemologically knocking down purported Jewish teachers of the Law left right and centre (Matthew 12). In Matthew 12, Jesus exposed the ignoramuses of the Jewish doctors by asking them rhetorical questions like, "Have you not read?" (Matthew 12:3,5) and, saying, "If you had known" (Matthew 12:7). In these and many other instances recorded in the Gospels, Jesus exposed the phony rabbi titles of the Jewish doctors.

The phenomenon of sycophant doctors who lack in substance and academic profundity is a shameful reality among the clergy in Zimbabwe. In a study on 'Qualification, Award, and Recognition Fraud in Higher Education in Zimbabwe', Garwe (2015), established that qualifications fraud does exist in Zimbabwe. Garwe (2015) found out that unspecified numbers of Zimbabweans possessed unearned, unaccredited and bogus qualifications but mostly doctorate degrees from foreign countries. A blogger on X, Hunyanya Marufu, @chevo_serg89654, on 23 December 2023:2:58PM remarked, "I believe phony doctorates are a moral scandal in the church in Zimbabwe today. Many ministers in Zimbabwe are deliberately misrepresenting their academic qualifications with fake degrees especially doctorates". Most of the academic scandals in Zimbabwe have been perpetrated by bogus and unaccredited institutions that offer easy and empty doctorates. According to the *Zimbabwean* of 22 July 2014, an unregistered Calvary University headed by Professor Washington Mahiya enrolled an array of respected persons who included a former Apostolic Faith Mission Church president, a former provincial overseer and two senior pastors. The bogus Calvary University identified a niche market for degree hungry people who needed doctorates and other postgraduate degrees to bolster their senior appointments as well as open freeways for potential promotions in the church echelons.

The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe church has been a lucrative niche market for degree hungry pastors who are eager to position themselves for "cash cow" executive appointments during the church's unfolding administrative restructuring. The AFM church has thus been a good hunting ground for the unscrupulous degree milling institutions which grant academic credentials to recipients who have not fulfilled the necessary requirements. According to the *Zimbabwean* (2014), institutions that have been embroiled in academic racketeering in Zimbabwe include Calvary University, the International Institute of Philanthropy, Trinity International University, Triune Bible College, Pan African College, and Atlantic International. In a public press statement of 08 March 2024, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), decried the illegal award of honorary degrees by International Institute of Philanthropy. ZIMCHE stated that the International Institute of Philanthropy was awarding several honorary degrees in violation of section 75(3) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No 20), Act of 2013 as read with section 10(1) of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education Act (Chapter 25:27) which prohibit institutions not registered and accredited by ZIMCHE to offer degrees. ZIMCHE went on to order the International Institute to withdraw all the honorary

degrees it had awarded and to inform all recipients accordingly. Members of the clergy who included founders of new churches, pastors and gospel musicians had benefitted from the generous donations of degrees by the International Institute of Philanthropy. ZIMCHE is yet to reign in a number of other fly-by-night degree awarding institutions that mostly work with Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. Recently, another unregistered institution operating by the name Koinonia School of Theology under the guise of affiliation with an unknown American based theological university started dishing out doctorate degrees to pastors in Harare.

Most of the bogus degree issuing mills operate from the United States of America. According to the Christianity Today Magazine (1960), the United States office of Education published a list of bogus institutions that were into the nefarious habit of offering bogus degrees to members of the clergy in a manner that brought the name of God and Christianity in particular, into disrepute. Some very senior members of the clergy in Zimbabwe's Pentecostal churches but more pronouncedly in churches like the Apostolic Faith Mission with origins in the United States, boast of possessing doctorate degrees from the United States of America. In most instances, the doctorate degree claimants cannot adduce transcripts and evidence of having carried out academic research in the form of dissertations or published theses. The holders of the fake doctorates are announced and paraded at mega church conferences, seminars and bible college graduation ceremonies. In the AFM church, the holders of fake degrees have coalesced into a powerful cult of charlatans as they address each other "doctor" unashamedly without verification of the authenticity of the doctorate titles.

IV. Gowns of Vainglory

Typical of the Pharisees mentioned in Matthew 23:5-8, the fake doctors in Zimbabwe love to adorn flamboyant red gowns, multi-coloured cloaks and hoods that impose grandeur but all phony grandiloquence. In this article, the regalia have been described as "gowns of vainglory" as they do not represent the actual level of knowledge held by those who wear them. Whereas regalia are supposed to be symbols of achievement, authority, power, depth and sublimity in knowledge (Guggenheim 2016), some members of the clergy in AFM church wear gowns that are meant for those who have earned doctorate degrees with alarming disdain and shameful pedantry. What the false doctors among the clergy in Zimbabwe are doing is reminiscent of Shakespeare (1784)'s popular scene in his play, 'Macbeth, Act 1, scene 3' in which Macbeth asked, "Why do you dress me in borrowed robes? Banquo remarked, New honours come upon him, like our strange garments which cleave not to their mould but only fit over time with the aid of use". In Shakespeare's Macbeth, Macbeth learned that he had been conferred a new title and power as the Thane of Cawdor while there was still a legitimate Thane. The language of "borrowed robes" and "strange garments" resonates graphically with the frenzy for red gowns and berets of doctorate degrees that has swooned through Zimbabwe's Pentecostal churches' pastoral ranks in recent times. Macbeth questioned why he was being crowned with undeserved title, authority and power. Banquo explained that there are strange garments which are worn incongruously, do not cleave to their mould but only fit over time due to aid of use.

Strange garments in Macbeth fit in aptly into the scenario of "doctor" titles that are fraudulently pasted and labelled on some members of the clergy. The more the titles are used in church gatherings, bible college classes and graduation ceremonies, the more the claimants of false doctorates assume semblance of credibility just as Shakespeare's Banquo stated that, "they only fit over time due to aid of use". In the AFM church, bogus doctors have legitimated their false doctorates through repeated use of those titles over many years. Guggenheim (2016), contends that in *Macbeth*, clothing metaphors are used to symbolize power, identity and transformation, titles and roles and well people who have the titles and roles fit into those new designations. The Zimbabwean pastors who claim to hold doctorate degrees, like, the rabbi of Matthew 23:5-8, have dismally failed to demonstrate transformation and academic profundity that is commensurate with their professed academic titles. Most of the doctorate degree claimants in the AFM church have not made inroads into universities as lecturers because their purported degrees cannot satisfy tests of accreditation and quality assurance. Beyond the AFM church pulpits, the "doctors" retreat into shells of irrelevance and shame.

A recent discussion in an AFM national pastors WhatsApp forum is quite telling on how worse the clamour for fly-by-night doctoral degrees has become. A pastor was congratulated for "attaining" a doctorate degree after appearing in a picture adorning an awkward looking red gown holding what looked like dubious doctoral certificate. Members of the group started questioning the veracity of the degree. One of the pastors on the group whom I shall call Pastor Doubt for the sake of protecting their identity, wrote, "congratulations man of God for the doctorate. I hope it is a genuine doctorate...". Another pastor whom I will call Pastor Query also said, "Guys, these doctorate degrees are too many these days in our church". A lengthy debate ensued in which the members expressed disappointment with the proliferation of "doctors" whose study history cannot be traced. The statement by Pastor Doubt that he only hoped that the doctorate degree was genuine reveals that pastors in AFM are now gaining courage to call out their colleagues faking the 'doctor' title. Pastor Query, who, I learnt, is a former trained teacher, presented scepticism with the rate at which pastors are "attaining" doctorate degrees which, under normal circumstances, are hard earned qualifications. Most of the pastors who suddenly appear in

graduation regalia allegedly study via online international universities or some unregistered bible colleges that claim to be affiliates of foreign based universities. According to Mananavire (2015), the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education Chief Executive Officer, Emmanuel Ngara warned education-hungry and title seeking Zimbabweans to stay away from dubious local, international and online international degree awarding institutions that are not registered with ZIMCHE. Despite such a chilling warning from ZIMCHE, many pastors from the Pentecostal fold have continued doing degree programmes with international online institutions such as Atlantic International University, St Linus University, Azalia University, Logos and Vision Universities which are not recognized by the degree regulating council in Zimbabwe since they are not registered or accredited in their countries of origin.

V. Reasons behind fake academic titles and false credentials

The first and most worrisome of the reasons behind the fake titles and certificates is that a culture of chicanery, deceit and dishonesty has engulfed academia in Zimbabwe. The issue of fake titles and credentials has been discovered to be a national issue. Nemukuyu (2021), cites the case of a former top manager at the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education, itself being the watchdog for quality assurance and standardization in higher education. The former Chief Operating Officer of ZIMCHE was found guilty of forging an ordinary level certificate, two diplomas in Accounts and Secretarial Studies as well as a Higher National Diploma in Office Management. As a result of the discovery of the forgery of the academic credentials, the former Chief Operating Officer's degree in Politics and Administrative Studies was withdrawn by Great Zimbabwe University. Technically, the employment of the fraudster Chief Operating Officer at ZIMCHE was synonymous with setting a thief to catch a thief. How the Chief Operating Officer going to oversee academic standards and accreditation issues was a riddle given their own phony character. Mutisi (2023) also points out that the distasteful trend of people forging their qualifications in Zimbabwe is a national dilemma possibly caused by the desperate effort to push oneself forward in an aggressively competitive job market. High academic qualifications are perceived as tickets to good quality life and better opportunities especially in the diaspora where academic qualifications are considered as a benchmark for remuneration packages. Mathanda (2024), sadly writes, "In recent times, citadels of academic excellence have been entangled in scandals over the issuance of fake academic qualifications". Mathanda further opines that the increase in the demand for fake academic qualifications in Zimbabwe has been fuelled by the intense competition for jobs, limited opportunities, desperation to advance careers against a background of corruption and economic turmoil. The economic meltdown in Zimbabwe has been seen as one of the reasons for the upsurge in academic fraud as people grope for anything that can help them access better livelihoods. Academic certificates are being "cooked" and sold to those who need them urgently and do not have the patience of enduring the process of studying for and earning them (Mathanda 2024).

Mwareya and Bhobho (2022), have argued that pastorship in South Africa is deemed a ladder-way to personal achievement and a comfortable life. Mwareya and Bhobho (2022) further contended, "In a country of record joblessness, being a pastor is a chance for the unscrupulous to feast on tithes, get lavish allowances, a \$4000+ salary, and public adulation". In order to become a pastor, one needs to possess a qualification in Theology from diploma level. One with a degree in Theology and Pastoral Studies has an advantage. The scenario in South Africa is similar to that of Rwanda where President Paul Kagame defrocked non-degree holding pastors and demanded that an average pastor should hold at least a first degree in Theology. According to Mbonyinshuti (2021), the pressure on churches and faith-based organizations to be headed by degree holders has created a need for the opening of institutions that offer degrees in theology. Degree mills will by hook and crook find ways of cashing on such situations where thousands if not millions of faith people want to get a degree for purposes of ministry. Holders of fake degrees from countries like Zimbabwe will also seek to migrate to Rwanda to get employed as pastors. Zimbabweans have migrated to South Africa and Rwanda in large numbers to start church ministries or to work under churches in those countries. Possession of degrees in Theology and Pastoral Ministry is key. Degree mills and the forgery industry have taken advantage of the demand for theology degrees to make a financial killing by exacting huge sums of money from those who want to acquire pastoral diplomas and degrees without spending years in a university or theological seminary.

In Zimbabwe, founders of new churches want to be addressed as "Dr Apostle", "Dr Prophet", while leaders in established Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission would want to be addressed as, "Dr President", "Dr Secretary General". The insatiable appetite for these lofty titles has created favourable conditions for merchants of fake certificates to proliferate. According to Christianity Today (1960), fly-by-night and briefcase universities in America export fake doctorate certificates to the degree mongering people of Global South taking advantage of the unmitigated "doctor" titlemania. Whereas degrees in Theology are supposed to be enhancing the hermeneutical and homiletical skills of pastors, it is disheartening to note that holders of fake degrees in theology peddle appalling heresy in churches. In the quest of trying to cover for their shallowness in biblical interpretation, the holders of fake doctorates resort to mystical utterances and glib rhetoric under the guise of deep revelation (Renner 1990:77). The phony doctors of theology are aptly described

in 2 Peter 2:17 as “wells without water, clouds that are carried about with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever”. Like deep wells in which there is no water to draw from, the holders of “doctor” title have nothing of substance to offer to the church congregation. Though the titles they carry may appear deep like a well, they are waterless. The word waterless is the Greek word, ‘αυδρωος’ which refers to a situation in which a well is expected to be having water but when the thirsty person throws a tin into it to draw water, the tin hits a dry, waterless bottom. Peter describes false doctors as waterless wells.

Holders of pseudo degree qualifications claim to have fresh, deep spiritual insights and boast of knowing what no one else knows. They have a habit of mythologizing the scriptures to create an impression of being profound. Like the false rabbi of Matthew 23:5-8, the false doctors in Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches are high sounding yet do not deliver life transforming teaching of the Gospel. As Manyonganise (2012) argues, teaching in the church is supposed to tackle the deepest and intractable problems of human existence. To the contrary, holders of fake doctorates who hold lofty but hollow titles scratch on the surface of the Gospel emphasizing on less important aspects of biblical doctrine like the Pharisees (Matthew 23:23). The format of teaching of pseudo doctors is that which, according to Jesus, deals with money and neglects the life transforming and “weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and mercy”. As Soboyejo (2016), argues, the teaching of the false rabbi and “doctors of theology” emphasizes on money and prosperity gospel whose aim is to jettison the salvation message of Christ. Jesus noticed the same trend in Jewish rabbi who were so meticulous in monitoring tithes of anise and cumin but did not pay attention to issues of social justice, mercy, and how faith relates to everyday life of the believers. Similarly, the preaching and teaching of the holders of fake doctorates in Zimbabwe rarely transcends material possessions especially cars, houses, visas and businesses. It is a type of Gospel which enriches the preacher leaving the congregants wallowing in poverty. Just as the rabbi were obsessed with titles, power and high seats, the Zimbabwean clergy who falsely claim to be “doctors” have a penchant for self-aggrandizement. When they go to church podiums, they enjoy being addressed by their unsubstantiated “doctor’ titles just as they do not miss an opportunity to broadcast their personal achievements, how well travelled they are, how educated they are. At times they unashamedly lie about their personal achievements for the sake of projecting a superior image of themselves.

Main findings of the research

The main findings of this research are as follows:

1. There are striking similarities in the character dispositions of the Pharisees of Matthew 23:5-8 and the title- and power- chasing clergy in Zimbabwe. Although the world of Matthew 23:5-8 is located in the first century, and the Zimbabwean context is situated in the twenty-first century, the way traits of megalomania and narcissism manifest in purveyors of false knowledge and worth was similar in both contexts.
2. The traits of false pretence and holier- than-thou attitude in the Pharisees of Matthew 23:5-8 insidiously impacted on the first century believing community just as the academic hypocrisy of some members of the clergy in Zimbabwe is causing serious harm to the Christian church both doctrinally and theologically.
3. Just as the false rabbi in Matthew 23 majored in the minor at the expense of major and weightier matters of the law, the false doctors of theology in Zimbabwean churches have literally jettisoned the salvation message of Christ replacing it with the self-enriching prosperity gospel.
4. Whereas the Pharisees of Matthew 23 taught the Law of Moses in a manner that Jesus commended but failed to observe it in spirit and letter, the teachers of the Word of God in the context of Zimbabwe exude poor exegesis despite the fact that most of them claim to be holders of degrees in theology.
5. The use of costumes and gowns as symbols of titles, power and esteem in the Matthean world resonates with the use of gowns to depict undergraduate, masters and doctorate degrees in present century Zimbabwe.
6. The common factor between the use of gowns of knowledge in Matthew 23 and in the Zimbabwean context is that, the costumes became more of gowns of vain glory than regalia of knowledge. In both contexts, gowns were used to show off and to undermine the worth of other believers.
7. Some members of the clergy in selected Pentecostal churches cited in the article should be assisted to learn that possessing bogus certificates brings the Gospel of Christ into disrepute.
8. Theological education in Zimbabwe needs thorough monitoring and supervision to ensure that fake, substandard and counterfeit learning is not consumed in the seminaries. The Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education, ZIMCHE, has to extend its quality assurance and standardisation checks to theological institutions in order to ward off degree mills.

VI. Conclusion

The study has revealed that the issue of titles, power, esteem and wealth in the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe have a direct bearing on levels of education and attitudes towards biblical doctrine and the original

teaching of Christ. The lack of robust standardisation, accreditation, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms in theological education in Zimbabwe account for too many cases of fake certificates, diplomas and degrees being distributed like confetti in the country. There is a critical need for more research to be carried out on the extent to which foreign based degree mills have permeated the Zimbabwean theological landscape. The Council for Higher Education does not seem to be doing enough to curb the heinous and malodorous system of 'buying and selling' of academic credentials. The higher degrees regulating authority could do more to reign elements who are making doctorate degrees seem cheap and commonplace. There is a serious need for ZIMCHE to educate the nation on the significance of doctoral gowns, honorary doctorates, earned doctorates and what it takes for one to be conferred a doctor of philosophy degree. The chaos prevailing in Pentecostal churches on academic titles can be corrected if ZIMCHE carries out educational campaigns on the significance of academic accolades and credentials.

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