



# Pentecostalisation in the Devhula Lebowa Circuit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa: towards church growth and ecumenism

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## Abstract

The growth of the Pentecostal movement is not only marked by the proliferation of the Pentecostal churches in Africa and the diaspora but also by the adaptation to the Pentecostalist practices particularly pneumatic experiences by mainline Christianity known as Pentecostalisation. Instead of completely joining the Pentecostal movement, some mainline churches adjust their practices to suit their congregants who are more pentecostalist and charismatically inclined. This article uses the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, the Devhula Lebowa Circuit, Limpopo province in South Africa as a case study to illustrate that the adaptation to Pentecostalist practices in the church is the source of church growth and ecumenism. This kind of adaptation has some implications in demonstrating that different Christian traditions can learn from one another to grow in terms of numbers. Secondly, it demonstrates that the Christian tradition can move towards unity by learning from one another instead of being divided along denominational lines. Through a participation observation method, this study shows that Pentecostalisation cannot be viewed negatively but should be revisited by scholars considering church growth and the notion of ecumenism.

## Keywords

Pentecostalisation, mainline churches, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, ecumenism, Devhula Lebowa Circuit.

## Introduction

The Pentecostal movement continues to show signs of growth in the global south particularly in Africa. One of the influences of the Pentecostal movement in Africa today is the adaptation to a more Pentecostal way of doing church, including embracing Pentecostal pneumatic experiences. In this article, this adaptation is framed and conceptualised as Pentecostalisation to explore its role in the Christian tradition. The article uses the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, the Devhula Lebowa Circuit to investigate the role played by Pentecostalisation in the growth of a Christian church and the unity thereof. To achieve this, the writer conducted a literature analysis on Pentecostalisation to understand its background. The history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa specifically the Devhuka



Lebowa Circuit is explored as a case study for Pentecostalisation. The article will highlight the pentecostalist experiences practiced within some parishes in this circuit to demonstrate their significance to the Pentecostalisation in the Circuit. Data in this article was obtained using the participant observation method through lived experiences of adherents of the faith in the Devhula Lebowa Circuit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.

### **Methodology: Participant observation method**

The participant observation method does not directly engage the participants as it happens in focused groups but observes the actions of the participants in order to reflect on them from a scholarly point of view. In this way, the collection of data does not happen from the involvement of the participants but observes them. According to Jorgensen (1989:12), “methodology of observation aims to generate practical and theoretical truths about human life grounded in the realities of daily existence”. The observer can observe the behaviour of the participants as individuals or as a group. In this article, they were observed as the congregants in parishes of the Devhula Lebowa Circuit, not as individuals. The observer’s role is to ensure that the actions of the participants are not misinterpreted in the presentation of the research results. Jorgensen (1989:13) defines it as “a logic and process of inquiry that is flexible, opportunistic, and requires a constant redefinition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in concrete settings of human existence”. Musante and DeWalt (2010:43) concur that “observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit of their life routines and their culture”. In this article, observation is used as a methodology in the evaluation of the pentecostalist practices in the Devhula Lebowa Circuit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.

### **Background to Pentecostalisation**

There is a difference between Pentecostalism and Pentecostalisation. Parsitau in Kipimo (2018:81) defines Pentecostalisation “as the integration and appropriation of the Pentecostal ethos, spirituality, and features by mainline churches”. Kipimo (2018:81) continues to say that when the mainline churches pentecostalise, they do so by becoming like “Pentecostals both in their theology and praxis”. Pentecostalisation refers to the influence of Pentecostalism on other Christian denominations particularly when they adopt the pneumatic experiences of the Pentecostal movement. Kobylinski (2016: 100) in Dube (2019) explains Pentecostalisation as “the gradual transformation of many other Christian churches and congregations into a single, universal type of charismatic Christianity around the globe”. In other words, these denominations adjust or completely transform in terms of their expression of Christianity to have a Pentecostal outlook and approach. Sawa (2021) adds that Pentecostalisation is “the processes of change in the forms of religious expression, life in relationship with God, the understanding of the truths of faith, and participation in Church life”. It is a new way of doing church that embraces pneumatic expressions including lively worship through playing different forms of instruments which was the trend in both the Old Testament time and the early church in the New Testament. Ilunga (2022:5) reiterates “Pentecostalisation affects the worship style of many non-Pentecostal denominations to a level where it becomes fervent, emotional, spiritual, dynamic, exuberant and highly entertaining”. Although, there is a need to admit that Church is not necessarily a place of entertainment but a place of worshipping God. However, for young people it helps if they are both entertained and worship while in the presence of the Lord.

The Pentecostalisation of the church in Africa is historical given the fact that in the beginning, the South African church was originally the mainline. However, with the coming of the American missionaries in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the church became pentecostalised with an emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues (Mzondi, 2018). Speaking in tongues can both refer to the languages which other people can understand as it



happens on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). But it can also refer to an unknown language of the Spirit which requires a gift in order to offer interpretation to others (1 Corinthians 14:13). As more Pentecostal churches were established including African Initiated Churches, the religious landscape in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa changed towards Pentecostalism. Recently, there are many Pentecostal churches in Africa as compared to other Christian denominations. Moreover, some of the mainline churches have adopted their style of worship towards the pentecostalist experiences and practices. The latter is the definition of Pentecostalisation in this article, where there is a clear sign of moving towards Pentecostal experiences in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa.

Pentecostalisation contributes to the impact of Pentecostalism because its influence is not only seen in the Pentecostal churches but in other Christian traditions that adopt the Pentecostal styles (Asumang, 2018). Nel (2018:21) explains that “The process of Pentecostalisation is even being followed by many established so-called mainline denominations to prevent further loss of their members to Pentecostal groups, illustrating Pentecostalism trend of Christianity on the continent”. This has been the case in South Africa in recent years where some believers move from mainline churches toward Pentecostal churches. Thus, to prevent this movement, the mainline churches have adopted a more Pentecostal theology and praxis. In the end, Pentecostalisation is what makes Pentecostalism have a greater influence not only on the church but on the rest of society. It is Pentecostalisation that is contributing immensely to the growth of Christianity in the global south particularly Africa because as churches adopt Pentecostal styles they grow numerically (Anderson, 2001, 2005).

### **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa is one of the evangelical churches that operate in many parts of South Africa and beyond. In addition, evangelicals are part of the protestant movement but are different from the Pentecostals. According to Garab and Zarvedinos (2014:5): “Lutheranism in South Africa developed from two main sources. Firstly, from the work of Lutheran missionaries that ultimately led to the establishment of indigenous Lutheran churches and, secondly, from Lutheran settler congregations of German and Scandinavian background that also became independent Lutheran churches”.

Chisale (2020:1) says that The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa was “established on 18 December 1975 at Tlhabane, Rustenburg, in the current Gauteng Province, during the Constituting Assembly, which took place from 15 to 20 December 1975”. The church has about seven dioceses, namely Botswana Diocese, Cape Orange Diocese, Central Diocese, Eastern Diocese, Northern Diocese, South-Eastern Diocese, and Western Diocese. This means that the church influences different countries of Southern African Development Countries particularly, South Africa. The church has over half a million members across the region of Southern Africa (Lutheran World Information, 2009). Furthermore, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa is an ecumenical member as it is part of the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) which is an affiliate of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) since 1976. It is also a member in good standing with the South African Council of Churches (SACC) which is an affiliate of the All-Africa Council of Churches, which is also an affiliate member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) (Mashabela, 2020).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa believes in One God who manifested Himself in three Persons, namely God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These are not three Gods, but One True God who created the heavens and the earth, all seen and unseen in the creation of His hands (Jonathan, 2016). Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa believes in scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), faith alone (*sola fide*), and grace alone (*sola gratia*) (Mathison, 2001). Jesus is the central figure in their worship services and the church wishes to see their members grow together in Christ (Mathison, 2001). Although



Pentecostals believe in the triune God, the emphasis is more on the Holy Spirit given their pneumatological theology. Pentecostals emphasise the direct relationship with God through the work of the Holy Spirit, hence a focus on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues. Though other Christian denominations do speak of the relationship with God, for Pentecostals such a relationship is preceded by the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Kgatle, 2022). However, it will be argued in the sections to follow that there are some parishes in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa that acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit.

The liturgical order of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa which is known as 'Order of the Main Service' is constituted with a Prelude where a leader of the service is required to pray on behalf of the church members, then *introitus* where the liturgist invites church members and calls them for worship (Conradie & Klaasen, 2014). Then in this one, comes the *Gloria patri* which is to invite people to give glory to the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Wordell, 2021). Then members of the church or congregation are invited to confess their sins. The Minister pronounces absolution which is the pronouncement of the forgiveness of their sins. Then the congregation joins together in *Gloria in Excelsis* which is giving glory to God on High (Bear & Johnson, 2022). The Minister blesses the congregation, and the congregation blesses their Minister. Then together they say Amen. Then followed the Word by reading the Old Testament text for the day, Epistle for the day, with a gradualle hymn before reading or chanting the Psalms; text for the day and concludes this section by reading the Gospel text of the day (Armentrout & Slocum, 1999:225). This order is much different from the Pentecostal liturgy, which is mostly filled with lively worship, speaking in tongues, and so forth. However, the argument in this article is that some of the parishes in the Devhula Lebowa Circuit are moving towards a Pentecostal liturgy. In the next section, the Devhula Lebowa Circuit is introduced to apply Pentecostalisation in the circuit.

### **Devhula Lebowa Circuit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa**

A circuit in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa is formed by parishes that are formed by congregations (Chisale, 2020). Devhula Lebowa Circuit (DLC) is found in the Northern diocese. The circuit has 14 parishes that have different congregations and is led by a dean who is elected by full-time pastors. Each parish is managed by a full-time pastor and assistant pastors depending on the size of the parish. All parishes are expected to follow the church order while conducting their services. Although the service is to be conducted in the same way, the context may lead to a little different in some of the congregations. These differences are explained in the section on the pentecostalist practices in the Devhula Lebowa Circuit.

### **Pentecostalist practices in Devhula Lebowa Circuit**

#### ***Lively worship***

Initially, ELCSA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa) had an orderly and disciplined liturgical agenda in which the procedure on how to conduct divine services was outlined in detail. It was Opening and Supplication, Proclamation, Creed, Holy Communion, Sending, and Blessing (Makofane, 2009). Devhula Lebowa Circuit used to be a very orderly circuit with uniformity until the diocese started placing pastors from other dioceses. Singing used to be boring with old people pitching the songs at low keys and singing them slowly which made the young ones lose their concentration and start playing with their phones. They brought different ways of conducting services. There is a multipurpose centre hall which is so big that it was very difficult for members to communicate when the service was on, so they introduced a sound system. The circuit band (normally called the worship team) was formed. It comprised members from all leagues which made it balanced. Lively singing and dancing started, and the atmosphere changed. Services became vibrant and worship became effective



and divine. Those members who left because they were bored by old forms of liturgy came back to church and enjoyed the services. Parishes also joined in instrumental worship and brought life to their services. Because when worship is done with the combination of musical instruments, it makes the congregants active rather than passive.

In addition, the change in the liturgy was brought by the fact that some members of the church including pastors started attending Pentecostal church services, they fell in love with the way they worship God. Those who are in leadership roles would come back and start practicing the things they saw in those churches they attended. Consequently, in the minutes of the synod held in October 2019, it was agreed and highlighted that the Worship Services of ELCSA should be celebrated in rich diversity and members are free to explore different ways of giving praise and honour to the Triune Godhead. Hence, today in Devhula Lebowa Circuit, parishes, music gives space to various styles, from traditional to modern, making use of a range of musical materials and traditions to proclaim the Word of God in different contexts.

### ***All night prayer***

All-night prayer in Pentecostal service and Pentecostal spirituality is a concept of coming together and praying for the whole night (Obadare, 2006). Although some congregations do not pray the whole but only up to midnight, they nonetheless still call it all-night prayer. The previous dean of the Devhula Lebowa Circuit, Rev Dr. Ranneditsheni initiated all-night prayers which were new to the Lutherans in the circuit. At first, people were reluctant to attend not knowing what to expect but eventually, they flocked to the services. It was very strange at first because the congregants were not used to praying for a long time together and loudly, but as time went on, the congregants got used to praying independently. All-night prayer services helped a lot in training church members to pray on their own for a long time. Before covid-19, almost all parishes were having all-night prayers. Now that the rate of crime is high, there is a feeling that it is not safe to have night prayers. There's a church that was invaded by criminals during a night prayer service and members were robbed of their valuables at gunpoint (Solomons, 2022). The good part is that people are used to praying on their own and some do that in their homes.

### ***Prophecy***

In Pentecostalism, prophecy is a message that has been communicated to a prophet by a supernatural entity to share with the people of God at a particular time (Onyekelu, 2022). In addition, prophecy is not confined to Pentecostalism, it is a feature of many cultures and belief systems and usually contains a divine will or law, or preternatural knowledge, or future events (Kugel 1990). In Devhula Lebowa Circuit, prophecy is practiced by some of the parishes, however, it has come with the challenges of some abuses as is the case in some Pentecostal churches. Although some members claim to have such a gift, they are not able to prophesy in church. Some of the young people tried introducing it in their services, but it became a problem when others were abusing it by stating private and confidential family issues. Some even lied about people's issues, fabricating stories that were not true, claiming that it was from God. It was causing problems in families such as dividing family members (Kgatle 2020b). One thing that is causing challenges with those who claim to be prophets is that they prophesy wrong information to gain favour from members, but when the truth and reality emerge, there is always chaos.

### ***Alter call***

In Pentecostalism is very much common that after a confrontational sermon, there should be an alter call for people to be allowed to repent of their sins (Clark & Lederle, 1989). It is a call in which those who wish to make a spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ are invited to come



forward publicly (Streett, 2004). It is believed that the altar is where the presence of God is stronger. In Devhula Lebowa Circuit, this practice is common during outreaches not necessarily during a church service. It is commonly during evangelization, that people are called to the fore to come and be prayed for. However, because some Lutheran pastors are not used to these altar calls and the manifestation of demons during prayer, it can be problematic at times. The authors observed in one of the evangelisation services, that all pastors had gone but only one was left behind to conduct the service. After preaching, the servant of God invited those who wanted to be prayed for. Many people flocked to the front. As she was busy praying a demon in a woman attacked her so that she fell on top of the woman. It was very bad with her skirt flying like an umbrella. People struggled to rescue her but eventually, she was freed. This was a very sad experience for the poor pastor who was traumatised because it was her first time to cast out the demons. She had never been in such a situation but the way it happened, many people were impressed because she managed to cast out the demon and saved the poor woman. The only thing that the circuit doesn't entertain is people screaming and falling during altar calls. They do not tolerate the pastor asking questions to demons as others may perceive the person being prayed for as a demon.

### ***Divine Healing***

Divine healing is a belief among Pentecostals that when a person is sick, they can be prayed for in believing God for their healing (Theron, 1999). This kind of healing is not confined to physical ailments and diseases but also a holistic healing that ministers to a person in totality including Healing the physical, spiritual, emotional, and psychological being of a person (Theron, 2008). In the Devhula Lebowa Circuit, when people are sick, the pastors do attend to them individually and privately. The pastor will have different counselling sessions to find out where exactly is the problem. If it needs professional help, they will be referred to the proper professionals. Where spiritual attention is needed, the pastor will pray, and offer support as part of the healing process. It is a bit different from the practices of some Pentecostals who when people are sick force them to leave their medical treatment. Thus, in the Devhula Lebowa Circuit, there is some balance between works of faith and medical treatment in the context of divine healing.

### ***Speaking in Tongues***

Pentecostals believe in a direct relationship with God through the work of the Holy Spirit (Banda, 2020). It is for this reason that Pentecostals emphasise the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues or *glossolalia* (Macchia 1998 cf Lindhart 2014). The Devhula Lebowa Circuit has no problem with speaking in tongues, but they discourage playing with tongues where some people use their speeches and claim to be speaking in tongues (see Kgatle, 2020a). Some people abuse this gift by claiming to have it but they disorganise the church by uttering strange words. Some display pride towards those who cannot speak in tongues. It also becomes a problem when those who cannot speak in tongues are undermined and called names. However, there are Lutherans who run away from their church denominations because some believe their pastors are not empowered by the Holy Spirit, because they have not heard them speaking in tongues in the main church service. But in reality, all believers have some level of charismata, though they cannot speak in other tongues. Thus, speaking in tongues should not be overemphasised over and above other spiritual gifts.

### **Pentecostalisation: towards church growth**

Pentecostalisation contributes to the growth of the church. The process of church growth requires an integration of different components of the church (Sawa, 2021). Asumang (2018:117) explains "Pentecostalisation has played a major role in restoring dynamism to traditional mainline churches, both protestant and catholic, spurred exponential growth of new



independent churches and resulted in socio-cultural and increasingly political transformations in the global south". Churches that can use different approaches in worship styles and preaching can reach out to more people than churches that are only using a single style. For example, churches that have not addressed the theme of divine healing in their approach have seen themselves losing members to churches that minister to the sick (Mbe, 2007). Chiloane (2001:86) points out that among Lutherans "There is still that uncertainty as far as healing services are concerned and such services help a lot, and they stop an exodus of Lutherans into Pentecostal churches or Zionists hunting for healing and prophecies". The lack of adopting Pentecostal pneumatic styles is what contributes to the decline of Christianity in the global north as most believers are longing for a more experiential form of Christianity than a theoretical one.

Moreover, Pentecostalisation suits the main young people who want to experience lively worship in church and other Pentecostal experiences such as baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues. Most mainline churches do not have youth, or they just have a few who are accompanied by their parents. The youth are responding to the vibe in the so-called Pentecostal churches, whereas the mainline churches are still focused on the old ways of worship. Thus, the mainline churches that can pentecostalise can keep their youth and attract other young people in their ranks. Wild-Wood (2008) explains that throughout history it has been found that the power of God works among young people as most of them are energetic and available for the work of God.

Pentecostalisation can bring some form of renewal for mainline churches such as Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa which have been conservative for many years (Sawa, 2021). Nel (2018:21) explains: "The Pentecostalisation of Protestant Christianity is a result of a combination of factors such as the loosening of the grip of naturalism and rationalism on Western culture, leading to a renewed openness and desire for direct encounters with the supernatural, particularly among young people".

In other words, by adopting Pentecostal theology and praxis, the mainline churches can renew their churches in areas such as music, sermon presentation, healing, and so forth. Worship is one of the visible signs that the mainline church is moving towards Pentecostal praxis as they endeavour to worship differently compared to traditional hymns sung at the church (Roger, 2018). This is important in Africa as most people are already used to the notion of singing and dancing, thus it benefits the church as they adopt a livelier worship style. Makofane (2018) says that although people do not see a problem with singing from the hymn book, the challenge is that some of the hymns are still Eurocentric. Therefore, Pentecostalisation in a way becomes a tool for the signing and praising of God in an African context. In Pentecostalism, does not end with singing and dancing, it extends towards the pneumatic expressions such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and so forth. Other activities ignited by worship include prayer and preaching.

### **Pentecostalisation: towards Ecumenism**

Ecumenism according to Crafford (1993) is the product of an idea in which Christians seek to bring together churches. The main idea is to unite all churches regardless of different ways of conducting their services. Ecumenism remains a challenge for many Christian church denominations as there are differences that exist among them such as the way people worship and their belief systems (Kgatle & Lephoto, 2022). It is very difficult for both the mainline churches and some of the Pentecostal churches to bend or alter the way they practice their faith. When they meet, it is evident that they are not speaking the same worship language. The order of the day is determined and directed by those who oversee the gathering on a particular day. It is worse if ecumenism is defined beyond praying together to an understanding of sharing life resources and other spiritual gifts (Sawa, 2021). Through Pentecostalisation various denominational boundaries can be crossed when denominations



of other Christian traditions can adopt Pentecostal liturgies and approaches. As more church leaders open to Pentecostal practices this opens an interaction between different denominations and Pentecostal churches around the globe.

Thus, Pentecostalisation should not be viewed negatively as the influence of a single tradition over others but as a tool that can bring different Christian church traditions together for worship. Kangwa (2016:581) points out that it is Pentecostalisation that encourages both the charismatic and the conservative to work together to achieve unity in the body of Christ. Mwale and Chita (2018) add that Pentecostalisation allows interaction between people of different denominations to unite in spirituality and this unity has a bearing on their social life. Even on the day of Pentecost they were all in one accord and though they spoke different languages, they could still be able to hear one another (Lederle, 1984:4). This means that unity is not only important for the church but the society in general benefits from a united church. This unity is possible when there are common ways in which different church denominations can come together to unite to serve God. When there is an understanding that different gifts of the Holy Spirit should benefit all the different Christian church denominations as opposed to only benefiting one specific denomination.

### **Pentecostalisation and Africanisation**

When the western missionaries arrived in Africa, they discarded a lot of African elements including styles of worship. The church became western and stereotyped. Pentecostalisation helps in the issues of Africanisation and decolonisation. African people wherever they are located love to sing, dance, and shout. Therefore, when they come to a church setting, they expect to have similar experiences in terms of worship styles that include music. Today Pentecostal churches are attracting and winning members because they are flexible and accommodating. Moreover, Africans have been experiencing pneumatic experiences such as chanting and prophecy in the African traditional religions. Hence, they love Pentecostal churches that continue with the experiences of speaking in tongues and the prophetic word. Similarly, some Africans when they fall sick do not only consult the medical doctor but believe that they can be healed traditionally. In Pentecostalism, divine healing has been a component of Pentecostal theology that replaces traditional healing. Therefore, when the mainline churches pentecostalise, they help their congregations to be relevant to an African person in an African context. Failure to align to an African context becomes a source for some members of mainline churches to cross the floor to Pentecostal churches. Failure to align to the African context might also result in many mainline members being exposed to charlatans who are there to take advantage of unsuspecting congregants. Thus, when talking about Africanisation and decoloniality, Pentecostalisation becomes a relevant force to unthink the west and to be relevant to the African people.

### **Conclusion**

This article looked at the concept of Pentecostalisation by using the Devhula Lebowa Circuit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa as a case study. The article defined Pentecostalisation as the adoption of pentecostalist practices by mainline Christianity as a way of appealing to their membership that is more pentecostalist and charismatically inclined. In the Devhula Lebowa Circuit, this is seen by acknowledgment of the pneumatic experiences such as lively worship, altar calls, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and divine healing. The main purpose of this article was thus to demonstrate that the pentecostalist practices in the Devhula Lebowa Circuit are a source for church growth and ecumenism. This means that the Devhula Lebowa Circuit can reach out to more people as there is more than one approach to ecclesiology in their ranks. This activity is a source towards moving toward the unity of more than one church denomination within the protestant movement and beyond. This is important given the growth and influence of Pentecostalism in the global south and Africa in particular.





Hence, future studies can look at Pentecostalisation in the global south as influenced by the growth of African Pentecostalism.

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