



## CHAPTER 4

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# Encountering African Pentecostalism: Methodologies and Evolving Tendencies

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### INTRODUCTION

African Pentecostal Christianity is one of the fastest growing movements among other Christian traditions in the world (Anderson 2004: 103; Priest and Burris 2012: 118; James 2015). This makes African Pentecostal Christianity a major contributor to the growth of global Pentecostalism and world Christianity (Anderson 2004: 103. See also Anderson 2013). However, it is submitted that the study of African Pentecostalism has been dominated by the scholars in the Global North. In South Africa, while many western scholars have taken interest in African Pentecostalism, only a few indigenous scholars have really come up in terms of conducting studies in the same field. It is only in the last few decades where we see a growing interest in studying new developments within South African Pentecostalism. As one of the emerging scholars in South Africa with a proven record of research outputs on African Pentecostalism, the aim and objective here is to share insights and experiences of conducting research

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in the field. Therefore, this chapter is a reflection of how I study African Pentecostalism, the approaches and main challenges. In order to give a proper discussion on how one studies African Pentecostalism, this chapter is divided into six main sections:

- Background to the study of African Pentecostalism
- Methodologies
- Evolving tendencies
- Challenges
- Contributions of African Pentecostalism
- The Future of African Pentecostalism.

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY OF AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM

I went to a seminary of a Pentecostal tradition, Auckland Park Theological seminary<sup>1</sup> (ATS), that taught fundamental beliefs of Pentecostalism such as baptism in the Holy Spirit and the initial doctrine of speaking in tongues (see Kgatle 2020: 1–7). It is not surprising that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was one of the requirements for enrolment at ATS. Auckland Theological Seminary used to be a seminary of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFMSA)<sup>2</sup> before the two parted ways in 2013 after a series of court battles (see Nel and van Rensburg 2016: 7). Thus, as a Pentecostal church seminary, the curriculum for undergraduate studies at ATS was designed such that it would prepare the student for Pentecostal ministry. Subjects like Church History specifically introduced us to the history of the Pentecostal movement with emphasis on the Azusa Street Revival of William Seymour and Bree Street Revival of John G. Lake (see Kgatle 2016a, 2016b). Correspondingly, missiology was more about the study of missions within the Pentecostal movement, introducing us to pioneers in the South African context such as Elias Letwaba, William Duma, Richard Ngidi, Nicholas Bhengu and others (see Anderson 1992. See also Anderson and Otwang 1993). In addition, subjects such as

<sup>1</sup> Auckland Park Theological Seminary is a Pentecostal and charismatic seminary that used to cater for theological students of Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFMSA).

<sup>2</sup> Apostolic Faith mission of South Africa (AFMSA) is the largest classical Pentecostal church in South Africa alongside other churches like the Assemblies of God and the Full Gospel Church.

Systematic Theology or dogmatics were more about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit among other doctrines like angelology, eschatology and others.

This kind of background affected my Masters and PhD studies at the University of Pretoria. Even though both studies were in the area of New Testament studies, I would still apply the results to African Pentecostal Christianity, given my background in the tradition. This also affected my postdoctoral research which was supposed to be in the New Testament studies but kept on falling back to African Pentecostalism. My focus on African Pentecostalism was affirmed when I received an appointment in 2017 as a Senior Lecturer of Missiology in the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology in the College of Human Science, University of South Africa. This appointment meant that I had to focus on missiology, particularly African Pentecostalism. It was during this time that I started focusing on African Pentecostalism and producing research outputs in the same field. I started attending conferences and presenting papers on subjects related to African Pentecostalism at local and international conferences. I must state categorically that because at this point no black South African scholar had ever made deliberate efforts to the study of African Pentecostalism<sup>3</sup> in a more direct and concerted way, my work started making impact locally and internationally.

The absence of black South African scholars in the study of African Pentecostalism is caused by a number of factors. First, it is the historical absence of African Pentecostal studies in South African secular universities. The study of African Pentecostalism has been concentrated in Bible schools and seminaries (see Balcomb 2015: 8). This is because theology in South Africa has been dominated by “reformed tradition” emanating from the Netherlands, Scotland and Germany. Thus, it was not easy in the past for a seminary lecturer of a Pentecostal tradition to make it to a secular university. The second reason is connected to the first which is historically Pentecostal theology in South Africa was never taken seriously by many reformed theologians. Third, the Pentecostal theologians that rose to

<sup>3</sup>There are exceptions, such as Professor Victor Molobi, whose excellent work is an interface between Black theology and African Independent Churches (AICs) (see Molobi 2000). Madipoane Masenya, a womanist Bible scholar, has a few publications on African Pentecostalism (see Masenya 2004, 2005, 2009). Other black South African scholars such as Dr Agrippa Khathide could have risen as Pentecostal scholars but he devoted more attention to a church seminary. The point I am making here is that we have many of black theologians with one or two publications on African Pentecostalism but it does not make them Pentecostal scholars the way we would perceive Allan Anderson, Amos Yong or Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu.

prominence were white and male, which raises the challenge of race and gender in the study of African Pentecostalism. However, this is not a peculiar challenge to African Pentecostalism, as many other black intellectuals faced similar challenges in South Africa. The last challenge was a lack of a learned society and/or journal that promoted publications in African Pentecostalism. I will try to address some of these challenges in subsequent sections of this chapter.

## APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGIES

In this section, I summarise the dominant approaches and methodologies that I have employed to acquire and present knowledge on African Pentecostalism, with special reference to the South African context.

## CHURCH HISTORY

I study African Pentecostalism from a church history point of view, using socio-historical analysis—an involvement of social issues in historical analysis. Socio-historical analysis assists in not recycling the historical research already done by other scholars but to look deeply at the social factors in church history. In many of my research outputs involving church history, I used the AFMSA as the classical Pentecostal church to look at the social issues in the church. In the first publication I looked at the sociological and theological factors that caused schisms in the AFMSA. The findings were that sociological factors such as racial segregation contributed to the secessions of most black pastors from the AFMSA. Similarly, theological factors such as the use of substances in healing and deliverance ministries caused pastors like Mma Nku not to be welcome in the church and therefore went on to start her own church, Saint John Apostolic Faith Mission (see Kgatle 2016a. See also Kgatle 2019a). In another article, I looked at how the AFMSA has been divided according to racial groups as per the divisions by the apartheid government, such as black, Indian, mixed race and white (Kgatle 2017a). The divisions in the AFMSA mean that a Pentecostal church supported racial segregation by the apartheid government in South Africa.

## THEOLOGY

My other publications have addressed theological themes in African Pentecostalism using various methods. I studied the role of music in Pentecostal worship and found that Pentecostals sing to access therapy for various ailments that they face in life. Thus, singing in African Pentecostalism is not a liturgical obligation during a spiritual service but something done to fulfil a therapeutic role (Kgatle 2019b. See also Chitando 2002: 66). In African Pentecostalism, although music involves other elements such as dancing, singing and playing various music instruments, the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in connecting the worshippers with their God (see Chitando 2002: 66). Another article has addressed the theme of hermeneutics in African Pentecostalism as a hermeneutics that does not only rely on the interpretation of scripture but also the direct experience with the Holy Spirit. However, it was proposed that the hermeneutics of experience in African Pentecostalism needs to be balanced with the correct interpretation of scripture (Kgatle and Mofokeng 2019). The last but equally important theological discussion is on ecclesiology in African Pentecostalism, which differs from one stream of Pentecostalism to another. However, a proper African Pentecostal ecclesiology should juxtapose spirituality with ethical dimensions in order to guard against the abuse of religion in South Africa (Kgatle 2020. See also Sakupapa 2018: 1; Mwambazambi 2011: 8).

## MISSIOLOGY

It is argued that in religious studies, the purpose of a scholar is to describe a religious phenomenon but she or he cannot evaluate religious practices. In their article, Chitando et al. (2014), “On top of which mountain does one stand to evaluate religion? Debate from a Zimbabwean context”, raised methodological challenges in the task of evaluating religion or religious practices. This is where missiology comes in because missiologists are permitted to some certain limit to evaluate religious practices. Therefore, in studying African Pentecostalism, a missiological approach has helped to evaluate, for example, the use of social media by prophetic churches in Southern Africa (Kgatle 2018a: 1–7). Through a missiological perspective, I found that some prophetic churches actually used pseudonyms to promote themselves on such platforms. Similarly, one was able to make proposals that in order to have authentic growth prophetic

churches should use authentic names on Facebook and other social media platforms. Secondly, on such platforms, the prophets should encourage their followers to post real testimonies than to post false testimonies. Finally, prophetic churches can avoid negative publicity by careful evaluation of what needs to be publicised and what needs to be only shared with the church members (Kgatile 2018a: 1–7).

### EVOLVING TENDENCIES

In South Africa, the abuse of religion by some pastors has dominated the discourses in African Pentecostalism in the last few years. Since 2014, South Africa has experienced the abuse of religion by some prophets of New Prophetic Churches<sup>4</sup> (NPCs) within South African Pentecostalism. These prophets have promoted such practices as eating grass, drinking petrol, eating snakes, walking on air, resurrecting “dead” bodies and others. The pastors that came to the limelight on these practices include Prophet Shepherd Bushiri of Enlightened Christian Gathering, Pretoria, Pastor Lesego Daniel of Rabboni Ministries, Soshanguve, Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng of Incredible happenings, east of Johannesburg and Pastor Alph Lukau of Alleluia ministries, to name but a few. In the wake of the abuse of religion by some NPCs prophets within South African Pentecostalism, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (the CRL Commission) in South Africa began two investigations: on the commercialisation of religion (Kibuuka et al. 2016) and on the abuse of people (CRL Rights Commission 2017). Both reports made critical conclusions in relation to the proliferation of these religious groups in South Africa.

In response to the CRL investigation, reports and findings, a number of scholars have come up to address the abuse of religion in South Africa in light of the outrageous acts. What seemed to be the centre in my research on the abuse of religion are three main questions: what are the reasons behind religious abuses? Why is society vulnerable to the abuses? What can be done to address the gullibility of some members of society to the abuses? Regarding the first question: there are many reasons that caused the

<sup>4</sup>In my new book I have categorised the New Prophetic Churches as the “fourth Pentecostal wave in South Africa”. This is informed by the churches’ emphasis on the prophetic titles, prophetic utterances, prophetic deliverance or what is known as “one on one prophecy” and miracle money (Kgatile 2019c).

pastors to abuse religion. For example, there is the lack of theological training among many NPC's pastors. Psychological factors are also at play given the fact that some followers insist on supporting their pastors even when they are aware of their wrongdoing. This means that some followers might have been hypnotised to support the pastors at all cost. The reason many people are vulnerable to the abuses are the socio economic challenges that remain intergenerational in Africa, such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. However, Banda (2019a), like many othersscholars and sectors of society, suggests religion should not be regulated just because some pastors are abusing it. He argues that instead, the government should take care of the socio-economic challenges in order to protect its people.

At the centre of abuse of religion is the issue of women abuse where some pastors were involved in alleged rape cases. One of the cases involves Pastor Timothy Omotoso<sup>5</sup> who was standing trial at the time of writing as he was accused of rape and human trafficking. This case was in the public interest and broadcast live on national television because of the bravery of one of the alleged victims, a young woman and a former member of the accused's congregation. However, there are other unknown and unreported cases where a pastor is involved in women sexual violence especially with teenage girls. Maluleke (2015: 35) spoke of Paseka Motsoeneng, who has a tendency of touching his female congregants inappropriately when praying for them, calling them biscuits. According to Agazue (2016: 4) this is done to convince "...the female victims that the sex acts will save them from being possessed by an evil spirit or simply enable them to fulfil the will of God". This type of abuse equally calls for a scholarly reflection that will address the challenge of women abuse in Pentecostalism and how such abuses have been dealt with in the past.

The problem of abuse of religion is also related to the prosperity gospel where some pastors abuse the finances of their churches (Mashau and Kgatle 2019). Moreover, many of the NPC's prophets have joined the message of the prosperity gospel<sup>6</sup> in requesting people to sow seeds so that

<sup>5</sup>Tim Omotoso is a Nigerian and senior pastor of a Jesus Dominion International, based in Durban, South Africa. He was in prison and on trial at the Port Elizabeth High Court for rape and human trafficking at the time of writing.

<sup>6</sup>Prosperity gospel is a notion of relating the accumulation of material possession to a divine blessing. The message of the prosperity gospel is that believers must tithe, sow seeds and give other offerings as an access to the divine blessing that will ultimately unlock the physical blessing or material wealth (see Heuser 2015; Togarasei 2011; Gbote and Kgatla 2014).

they can receive blessings. According to Ramantswana (2019: 6) believers are promised ‘blessings in the form of health, protection over one’s material possessions, release from the curse of poverty, financial breakthrough, flourishing of business and an increase in material wealth’. However, as believers are called upon to give, according to Mashau and Kgatle (2019: 2), it is only the prophets who receive the blessing. However, most prophets in South Africa deny taking advantage of the people but say, they are wealthy because of other interests. For example, Bushiri is quoted in Dube (2020: 5) as saying, ‘I am a businessman and that is separate from being a prophet. My prosperity is from private businesses’. Thus the message of prosperity gospel is also an important point of discussion in African Pentecostalism.

### MAJOR CHALLENGES IN STUDYING AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM

I want to present two challenges one has faced when studying African Pentecostalism. The first challenge is categorisation of Pentecostal streams. I learnt later after writing an excellent article (Kgatle 2017b), “The unusual practices within some neo-Pentecostal churches in South Africa: reflections and recommendations” that calling churches such as Rabboni Ministries, Incredible Happenings, neo-Pentecostal was not enough. Anyway, anyone can become neo-Pentecostal, maybe I should have been more specific, like in my latest articles, and called them NPCs, discussed above. Thus categorising the Pentecostal streams is not an easy task. The situation becomes even more complicated because at times what one calls Pentecostal, other scholars might not recognise as Pentecostal. Nonetheless, my argument for the inclusion of NPCs has always been that any church that preaches salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, divine healing and related dimensions qualifies to be categorised under Pentecostalism. It is true that many NPCs are Non-Denominational Pentecostals (NDP) but we cannot totally dismiss churches like NPCs because some of them abuse religion. After all, the abuse of religion happens across all church and other religious traditions.

The second challenge is the insider and outsider debate and questioning the objectivity of the insiders doing research on Pentecostalism. In my view being an insider only becomes problematic when African Pentecostal



scholars as insiders condemn others before even stating the perspectives of those they are condemning; when they are overly judgmental, which presupposes that they know and are correct in all aspects of their beliefs and practices. It happens when African Pentecostal scholars as insiders cannot differentiate between being of a Pentecostal tradition and doing research among Pentecostals. In order to remain objective, African Pentecostal scholars as insiders need to suspend their faith commitment and judgmental attitude in order to gain the perspective of other religious actors, especially those with whom they disagree. In other words, they need to remain insiders insofar as this relates to their faith but become outsiders when it relates to research. African Pentecostal scholars as insiders need to first understand how and why religious actors and consumers engage in a particular practice before arriving at a conclusion. In addition, the voices of religious actors, even when the African Pentecostal scholars as insiders disagree with their perspectives, need to be heard before conclusions are drawn (see McCutcheon 1999).

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM TO HUMAN FLOURISHING

While some scholars say that African Pentecostalism (and religion more generally) contributes to inequality (see for example, Chitando et al. 2023), there is also evidence about the contribution of African Pentecostalism to human flourishing and development in the continent. There are many churches that are engaged in rolling out poverty alleviating projects that enhance human flourishing and development. In order for African Pentecostalism to strengthen its contribution, there is a need to embrace the philosophy of Ubuntu.<sup>7</sup> Ubuntu has potential for development in Africa. According to Banda (2019b: 2010) “Ubuntu as relationality does provides a good ground for human flourishing because it provides interdependence, communal support, communal networking and

<sup>7</sup>The philosophy of Ubuntu recognises human existence in connection to the existence of others. In other words it is a philosophy captured in the words “I am because you are”. This philosophy has been used in Africa to encourage co-existence among human beings. Africans use this philosophy to argue that a fellow human being cannot suffer while others are living in opulence. Similarly, this philosophy can be used in African Pentecostalism to motivate pastors to consider others as much as they consider themselves.

communal security that is needed for other people to thrive”. Banda (2019b: 205) suggests “a bottom-up grassroots-oriented understanding of Ubuntu”, instead of the common top-down hegemonic view. A bottom-up approach may be more fruitful in responding to Africa’s dehumanising socioeconomic and political situation”. In other words, instead of always encouraging members to contribute towards the enrichment of their pastors, African Pentecostal pastors need to take the initiative to empower their congregants who are at the bottom of an economic graph in Africa. Banda (2019b: 207) further suggests human flourishing that will not discriminate against women in favour of men in terms of economic benefits and emancipation. It must not discriminate against fellow Africans, as we have seen many attacks of foreign nationals in South Africa. The xenophobic attacks on fellow African people are signs of anti-human flourishing, self-hatred and Afrophobia because the same attacks are not launched on, for example, white foreign nationals.

#### THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM TO GLOBAL PENTECOSTALISM

The growth of African Pentecostal Christianity means that the movement is a major contributor in both the global movement of Pentecostalism and world Christianity. This means that African Pentecostalism as studied by African scholars is also expected to lead discourses within global Pentecostalism. In order for the above to materialise, African scholars should take part in leading societies and conferences that address the emerging trends in the field. In other words, as much as local discourses in Africa are important, such should be discussed and raised at an international level for full participation in global Pentecostalism. This calls for African Pentecostal scholars to take part in societies such as the European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism<sup>8</sup> (GloPent), Society for

<sup>8</sup>The European Research Network on Global Pentecostalism (GloPent) is a network that brings together scholars of Pentecostal and charismatic tradition together in an initiative to share research together. Although it was originally coordinated by leading scholars from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the University of Basel, the University of Birmingham, the University of Cambridge, the University of Heidelberg, SOAS University of London and the University of Uppsala, lately it brings together scholars from all over the world.

Pentecostal Studies<sup>9</sup> (SPS) and the World Christianity Conference.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, African Pentecostal scholars should publish in high impact journals of international standard like *PentecoStudies*, *Pneuma*, *Journal of European Pentecostal Theological Association*, *Studies in World Christianity* and others. Becoming a member in these types of societies and presenting papers at such platforms will afford African Pentecostal scholars an opportunity to make their research findings known to the global community and possibly to collaborate with leading international scholars in Pentecostalism. But for this to happen, African Pentecostal scholars need to regroup and organise themselves into a well-functioning network or society. A society in African Pentecostalism will help to promote Pentecostal research in an African context. A society in African Pentecostalism will equally help to assist the emerging scholars in Pentecostalism. Such a society can have its own journal that will publish both established scholars and the emerging ones. Therefore, there is a need for the society of African Pentecostalism and the *Journal for the Study of African Pentecostalism* (see Kgatle 2018b: 5).

### THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM

The prediction is that African Pentecostal Christianity is more likely to grow to ever higher numbers in the future, given its appeal to young Africans. This means the field of African Pentecostalism has a future in both church seminaries and secular universities across the continent. However, the future of African Pentecostalism lies in African scholars approaching the field from a multidisciplinary approach, between theology and other fields of study. In other words, African Pentecostal scholars can no longer only speak of history, theology and missiology of African Pentecostalism. It is important to look at African Pentecostalism and other fields like anthropology, sociology and others. Anderson (2004: 263) puts it across this way:

<sup>9</sup>Although the Society for Pentecostal Studies was founded by scholars in the United States, its meetings are attended by Pentecostal scholars of biblical studies, theology and other disciplines from all over the world.

<sup>10</sup>The World Christianity Conference organised by the Department of History & Ecumenics at Princeton Seminary is an international and multidisciplinary conference that has attracted scholars from all over the world to discuss evolving trends in World Christianity.

Probably more than most other subjects, Pentecostalism has been studied in a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary way, and no discipline can rely on its own resources exclusively. Social scientists with their emphasis on empirical evidence are essential for a proper understanding of Pentecostalism. The literature on Pentecostalism has been enriched by the proliferation of social scientific studies since the 1960s, particularly in the disciplines of social history, anthropology and sociology.

In addition to the multidisciplinary approach, the future of African Pentecostalism lies with the young and emerging as well as established African scholars who will tell the African story in their own voices. This is already happening in West Africa, given the rise of Pentecostal researchers such as Asamoah- Gyadu, Matthews Ojo, Afe Adogame, Cephaz Omenyo, Asonzeh Ukah, Quayesi Amakye, Peter White and many others. These scholars are doing research in their own contexts, such as Nigeria, Ghana, etc. Similarly, in Southern Africa in countries such as Zimbabwe, there are scholars like Molly Manyonganise, Kudzi Biri, Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei and others. In South Africa, there is a need for similar scholars who will emerge and conduct research in their own context. The young scholars will require support in terms of paper presentation, as well as writing for journal and book publications. Hence, the importance of collaboration between the established academics and the emerging ones.

## CONCLUSION

It is very unfortunate that it took many decades for African scholars to rise to tell their own story about their encounters with African Pentecostalism. This is surprising, given the growth of African Pentecostal Christianity in different regions in the continent. It is, therefore, important to learn from both leading and emerging African Pentecostal scholars of the approaches and challenges in studying the movement. The insights given in this chapter make a valuable contribution to the study of African Pentecostalism in shaping and paving a way for upcoming scholars. The upcoming scholars should pay attention to the approaches they will use in the field and actually open up to a multidisciplinary study of the movement. This will allow studies of African Pentecostalism to deal with challenges like the “insider and outsider”, categorization and others. A multidisciplinary study, for example, will open opportunity for an encounter between African Pentecostalism and economics in order to assess the contribution of the

movement towards development in Africa. A multidisciplinary study will also guarantee the future of African Pentecostalism and continue to make it a major contributor to the study of global Pentecostalism and world Christianity.

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