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Special Issue Reprint

Syncretism and Pentecostalism in the Global South

Edited by
Marius Nel and Mookgo Solomon Kgatle

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About the Editors

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Editorial

Introduction to Syncretism and Pentecostalism in the Global South

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Critiquing current neo-Pentecostal practices is complex and requires a nuanced approach because this movement's wide range of beliefs and practices. Scholars refer to syncretism as a significant factor in the phenomenal growth of this movement, especially in the Global South (Maxon 2019). It functions within general areas of concern raised by leaders and scholars. Two areas of concern are relevant. Theologically, neo-Pentecostalism is influenced by prosperity theology, emphasising material blessings and personal wealth as a sign of God's favour while exploiting vulnerable individuals and establishing a culture of consumerism, constituting a hierarchical leadership reflecting authoritarian leadership structures that concentrate power in the hands of pastors or prophets, potentially leading to abuse and exploitation and the selective interpretation of scripture, cherry-picking verses to support its teachings, neglecting the broader context and potentially distorting the overall message (Bafford 2019). The sociocultural concerns are the promotion of traditional gender roles by some members, which are limiting and oppressive for women and hinder gender equality as well as a negative, prejudiced approach to homosexuality, leading to the discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals and the exploitation of vulnerable people, promising miraculous solutions to poverty while extracting financial and emotional resources. Syncretistic elements colour all these concerns, reflecting, in many instances, traditional cultural and religious values that may compromise the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Dube 2014).

International Pentecostal scholarship has bloomed during the past fifty years regarding many relevant issues, but there seems to be a lack of evaluation of syncretism and its influence on this movement and potential threat to Pentecostal theology and practice. Therefore, this Special Issue's scope and purpose were the investigating the influence of syncretism on Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism in its various forms. Most articles link syncretistic practices to traditional religion and worldviews in the different contexts of the Global South, where Pentecostalism experienced an unprecedented wave of popularity. The contributors asked whether its popularity can be linked to incorporating some syncretistic features within Pentecostal practice and whether it fits into the ethos and paradigm of Pentecostalism.

The contributors utilised practical, systematic, sociological, and hermeneutical theological perspectives to focus attention on the theological values or dangers with which these practices may be associated.

Traditionally, Western missionaries reaching out to the unreached nations of the Global South called on new converts to abandon all traditional religious and cultural customs and enforced a new worldview, excluding the traditional tribal structural composition of traditional leaders and healers (Stewart and Shaw 2005). They presupposed that the biblical message is equal to their concept of Western "civilisation" (Adamo 2011). In time, some of these converts rebelled against missionaries' claims and encultured, contextualised, concretised, accommodated, and adapted a reformulated gospel in indigenised, localised,

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incarnated, and hybridised forms (see Lapointe 1993; Schineller 1992). They blended their view of God with the traditional concept of religion, arranged church leadership in traditional cultural forms, and established a worship service to account for the cultural values of their people. They valued their own symbols, art, oral narratives, proverbs, values, and performances, such as songs, storytelling, wise sayings, riddles, and dances. And they shared the social life, histories, identities, and economic and political practices unique to their own cultural groups (Domfeh 2007). To illustrate, in Africa, the Ethiopian movement starting in the 1890s, the African-Initiated Churches existing since the early 1900s, classical Pentecostals, and, since the 1980s, neo-Pentecostals emphasised the superiority of traditional religious beliefs and practices in contrast to Western practices. They accepted the traditional spirit world, reinterpreting the Bible and finding much support for their traditions in it. But did they compromise the essence of the gospel and the ethos of their movement (Norget 2007)?

The first contribution, the work of Molly Manyonganise, explores encounters between African religious practices and New Pentecostal Movements (NPMs), attracting thousands since 2008, in Zimbabwe. She asks whether Prophetic Pentecostalism, a prominent element of NPMs, contributed to Pentecostalism's growth. NPMs' emergence challenged Zimbabwean Pentecostal Christians by blending indigenous religious practices with traditional Pentecostal ones during a time when the country found itself in a political and economic desert due to the mismanagement and corruption of government officials. They taught of the value of using objects such as towels, handkerchiefs, wristbands, stickers, oils, and even condoms anointed by the prophet to ward off curses and demonic attacks and receive the blessings promised by the prophet. Such practices are steeped in Zimbabweans' religious worldview and characterize the 'Christianization' of indigenous religious practices.

Francis Marimbe, also from Zimbabwe, focuses on Pentecostal charismatic churches and explores whether their adapted practices represent syncretistic cultural hybridity. She defines hybridity as the creation of new cultural forms by combining elements from different cultures, blending religious practices with local cultural norms. Hybridity can be positive, leading to greater cultural diversity and adaptability. Negatively, it may erode traditional cultures and identities and compromise adapted worship styles, theological interpretations, and church governance. The author's insightful analysis of the interplay between cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism in New Religious Movements reveals a rich tapestry of unique religious expression. Prophets and pastors established the spiritual ethos and influenced their followers' socio-economic practices, in the process blending traditional African spirituality with traditional Pentecostal beliefs. The article is a significant reference point for understanding New Religious Movements and their capacity to blend the African religious worldview with global religious practices.

Thabang R. Mofokeng's research into the role played by the *sangoma*-prophet in South African neo-prophetism reconsidered syncretism and contextualisation in neo-prophetism against the backdrop of the African spiritual healing tradition represented by sangomas. Neo-prophetism is scarred by the negative publicity of several scandals. Does the movement reduce and confuse the Holy Spirit and ancestral spirits, and is the *sangoma*-prophet a valid continuation of the New Testament charism of prophecy? The author finds that contextualisation is inadequate as a paradigm of understanding the interactions between African traditional religions and neo-prophetism. What it requires is a defined Christian identity in continuity with the church's history but without repudiating the necessary discontinuities with African neo-prophetism as a requisite for discipline and intra- and interreligious engagement.

Themba Shingange's research reveals several interconnections between African Pentecostal Christianity and African spiritualities obtained by studying the use of material objects found within some neo-Pentecostal churches against the backdrop of South African cultures and spiritualities. Some categorically demonised the use of material objects, arguing that it is essentially syncretistic. This article problematises the syncretism narrative of the use of material objects and syncretism. It argues that the synchronism narrative

continues the missionary/colonial project that demonised all African cultural and material practices and constitutes a “cultural bomb” that seeks to eradicate African customs, cultures, and religious practices. It does not outrightly dismiss as syncretistic the use of material objects but uses texts referring to the early church’s practices as the basis for justifying the non-syncretistic use of material objects.

Klaas Bom and Jonán Monroy-Soto dialogue with Sepúlveda’s concepts of culture and theology. Sepúlveda rejects the existence of a pure gospel. All preaching represents ‘incarnations’. The only cultural option for Latin American Pentecostalism is the Northern American Protestant mission, but in the case of Guatemala, popular Roman Catholicism has become the cultural reality. This is also the case for indigenous Pentecostals: their reality includes both the indigenous elements and the popular Catholic ones. The concept of culture shifted from a modern understanding, focused on the continuing character, to a postmodern one, understanding culture as subject to change. Cultural values organise and shape those who belong to a given culture. Sepúlveda separates the cultural from the theological. The culture is foundational for theology without making the culture theological. The point of departure is the human being as the meaning maker. The result of this priority is that theology is reduced to a cultural activity of meaning making. He cannot make sense of the idea of a ‘direct’ encounter between God and the human being; his priority of the culture prevents him from understanding Pentecostal theology. Their cultural identity is based on their participation in a shared experience of God in the church. Does Juan Sepulveda’s approach provide an adequate framework for the theological assessment of the possible syncretic characteristics of (Latin American) Pentecostalism? The authors think his approach is still valuable in regard to recognising culture as a fundamental element for understanding the syncretic character of Latin American Pentecostalism but that it needs to be corrected by a more fluid understanding of the constant change in cultural forms and values. They conclude that syncretism is not only an inevitable characteristic of faith but also a point of departure for transformation.

Banda’s article proposed to evaluate the way the African magical view of material wealth was incorporated by African neo-Pentecostal prophets. They taught that anointed objects, such as anointed oil and water, are needed to attain material prosperity. While acknowledging that the prophets empower people to engage with un(der)development that characterises their existence, their view of anointed objects betrays their reliance on the worldview of magic and a revival of premodern Africa. Instead, people need to develop their God-given human creative power to build sustainable economic systems as a condition for economic well-being. Without denying that God still performs miracles, these countries need scientifically and logically sound economic interventions to render them capable of addressing their un(der)development. The author proposes that the prophets’ premodern and uncritical view of material wealth cannot be in line with God’s command to humanity to rule the world. Confronting economic powerlessness through magical charms negates people’s ability to take responsibility for their own lives.

Matshobane provides a perspective on New Prophetic Churches’s popularity and attributes it to their syncretism with African Traditional Religion (ATR) by analysing the prophets’ practices and their syncretic nature. Two interesting case studies describe the ministry practice of prophecy, demonstrating its hybrid, mixed, enculturated nature, arguing that it proves the syncretistic nature of this practice. The author argues that although the incarnation of Christ was contextual, this does not imply that the church must approve all forms of contextual application of the gospel message. Uncritical and unbiblical syncretism imbibe the surrounding culture and allow it to prescribe the way the church should act (acculturation). This article concludes that the source of these prophecies is the spirit of divination or a familiar spirit rather than the Holy Spirit.

Mashabela addresses important representatives of African Independent Churches in South Africa, the Ibandla lamaNazaretha of Isaiah Shembe, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Engenas Lekganyane, and the St John’s Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of Christina Nku. This study is a valuable contribution to their history and concludes that the churches

are characterised by the central role of the Holy Spirit, demonstrated by using salt, water mixed with salt, paper, etc., in a syncretistic manner, but argues that it is acceptable because they continually emphasise God's grace, healing, and spiritual power. They keep to vital Pentecostalism principles, implying that Pentecostals may view them as fellow believers.

Mzondi focuses on the black section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, part of the historical apartheid heritage before the church united in 1996. It regarded ubuntu as a biblical approach and did not consider it a sign of committing syncretism. It found the principle of African ubuntu in the events pertaining to 1906 Azusa Street, led by an African American preacher, William J. Seymour, and showed some indigenous African aspects. This mission functioned in continuity with similar biblical practices found in Acts. The author then proposes a biblical and theological approach that promotes the practice of the *charismata*, including prophecy, visions, and dreams with the sound interpretation of the Scripture and divine healing in Pentecostal churches.

Thinane investigates the practice of using holy water in African Neo-Pentecostal Churches. They consider water a powerful symbol of sanctification, purification, and spiritual cleansing. This water acquires mystical powers when applied in the church, and the leaders use it for rituals such as cleansing, deliverance, and bestowing blessings upon objects. In this way, several traditions of traditional African and Western Christian beliefs about the symbolic power of water are amalgamated. The author concludes that such claims about holy water covertly combine elements of two disjunctive belief systems.

Orogun discusses hybrid leadership in African neo-Pentecostalism, describing both its benefits and warning of the corresponding challenges, using four variables that represent the four areas of leadership. The variables refer to boundaries against extremism, the necessity of serving in leadership, the subjection of hybridisation leadership to moral questions, and balance. These variables serve as pointers to areas where leaders should exercise caution in order to ensure that they retain a balanced approach to defend this movement from its proclivity for extremism.

Kgatle's field of research is divine healing in New Prophetic Churches, and he evaluates their healing practices against the African Traditional Religions. Prophets use prophetic consultation, and Kgatle sees similarities with traditional African religions that may betray syncretism: the propensity of charging fees during consultations regardless of the client's economic status and the prescription of certain sacred products that should be utilised to heal the one in need of help. Although these similarities may illustrate syncretistic practices, there are also significant differences. A traditional healer diagnoses a problem by throwing bones, while a prophet relies on the ability of the Holy Spirit to provide prophetic wisdom with which to diagnose an illness. A traditional healer performs rituals to invoke the spirits when exorcising a demon that caused sickness and disease, while a prophet uses the name of Jesus to cast out the evil spirits. Scholars might not, in an imbalanced way, only concentrate on similarities and syncretism, but they should also consider differences.

Nel refers to the teaching of the prosperity message as one of the reasons for Neo-Pentecostalism's popularity and asks whether it is a syncretistic deviation from the gospel. He finds several defining features of primal spirituality shared by Pentecostal spirituality and African traditional religion. In the process, the African teaching of American prosperity theology adopted and adapted beliefs and practices that fulfil Africans' traditional spiritual needs. He argues that these theological features must be reconsidered by Pentecostalism. They may even lead to abusive practices, resulting in bad press reports that reflect on all Pentecostals. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that the New Apostolic Reformation or prophetic movement has contributed in various positive ways and represents a plethora of views and practices.

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Article

The Prosperity Message as a Syncretistic Deviation to the Gospel of Jesus

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Abstract: The prosperity message preached mainly by independent apostles and prophets in Network Christianity's new prophetic churches with some Pentecostal leanings has become popular among many Africans. The link between the American prosperity message and its African nephew is discussed to disclose the unique African elements, such as Africa's traditional emphasis on a holistic spirituality which includes attaining health and prosperity by pacifying evil spirits and angry ancestors. One of the reasons for the popularity of the prosperity message is that it links closely with the African enchanted worldview and the spirituality that characterizes African traditional religion. This challenges Pentecostals to consider its compatibility with the gospel of Jesus Christ, based on the discipleship of the cross and servanthood, and suggests that the neo-Pentecostal prophet and apostle have become the modern equivalent of Africa's diviner and healer. Their message of prosperity deviates from the essence of the gospel of Christ in several respects: firstly, it entails a distorted view of God and the Bible, described in almost pantheistic terms; secondly, its anthropology and Christology view relegates Christ to a man empowered by the Spirit and elevates human beings' union with God; lastly, its view of revelation authorizes extrabiblical revelation to the same extent as the biblical text. This paper concludes that the prosperity message represents a dangerous fallacy based on a syncretistic contextualization of the gospel to African spirituality.

Keywords: prosperity gospel; new prophetic churches; African syncretistic deviations

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1. The Context: Africa and the Prosperity Message

Prosperity teaching in Africa is popular, as illustrated in a 2006 survey that Pew Research undertook in various African countries. To the question, "would God grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith," 85 percent of Kenyan Pentecostals, 90 percent of South African Pentecostals and 95 percent of Nigerian Pentecostals[1] answered positively.[2] These churches that preach the prosperity message expanded in Africa twice as fast as the Roman Catholic Church and three times more than other non-Catholic churches (Kalu 2009, p. 73). As a result, Paul Gifford refers to the phenomenon as a paradigm shift that stands out in new developments in African Christianity (Gifford 2004a, pp. 23–24; Gifford 2007, p. 22). They emphasize a new black consciousness based on the dignity of Africans.[3] For that reason, their message about realizing the African dream of empowering black people by enrichment has become an attractive alternative to believers (Anderson 2005, p. 71).

Douglas Bafford's ethnographic fieldwork shows that the context for proclaiming prosperity theology is "charismatic" worship services characterized by Spirit-driven, affective worship and the believers' participation in delivering "spiritual gifts" that include healing (Bafford 2019, p. 2). They are led by a "prophet" or "prophetess" that claims an extraordinary and unique relationship with God. The unique element lies in the prophet's ability to bestow material rewards when believers faithfully obey biblical injunctions as they interpret them. Their authority is unchallengeable because they accord the same power and authority to the Bible and their private revelations that they call "*rhema*" and

"revelation knowledge". They interpret the Bible with their new hermeneutical principle that every believer should be healthy, rich, happy and prosperous.

Why are prosperity preachers so popular when their affluence to prove the success of their theology juxtaposes with their clients' experience of extreme poverty? Bafford argues their popularity serves as a "legitimate critique of contemporary economic and social trends, even if their solutions do not accord with dominant liberal norms," especially when viewed in terms of Africa's inequality between the haves and the have-nots. In addition, many poor people seek succor in spirituality, and the promises of the prosperity message catch their attention (Bafford 2019, p. 4). In the process, the message reinforces, psychospiritually, that becoming and being rich is the highest good that one can strive for (Egan 1990, p. 63). Another reason for its popularity is that it taps into the most basic human desires. However, the unbiblical, misleading and ultimately detrimental solution leaves many believers discouraged, disillusioned and bitter when the promised prosperity does not realize (Mbugua 2015, p. 66).

Traditionally in Africa, suffering followed the offending of someone that simultaneously offended the Supreme Being and aroused their anger (Mburu 2019, p. 53). Misfortunes required calling in the assistance of diviners to find out who and what had offended the spirits or the ancestors, to be followed by sacrifices and prayers to overturn the punishment or suffering resulting from witchcraft: the work of malevolent, evil spirits that someone employed. The prosperity message indigenizes the gospel, using the same themes to explain why Africans are poor.

African indigenous spirituality had already emphasized prophethood and holistic healing; hence, many Africans experienced missionaries' Christianity with an emphasis on Bible study as too cerebral and non-experiential. African "spiritual" religions protected adherents from spiritual forces' negative influence in daily life; the Christian message was seemingly powerless against these forces that caused suffering (Taylor 1963, pp. 21–22). Pentecostalism provided for this need with its emphasis on a direct encounter with God and divine intervention in their lives at critical junctures.

2. Theological Presuppositions

Prosperity preachers differ among themselves in terms of some aspects of their message. Still, they agree on the essence, which is captured by the popular African chorus, "Everything will double double: Your house will double double, your cars will double double" (Dube 2014, p. 6). They mainly agree on the following aspects that also illustrate how their shared theological presuppositions represent a syncretistic deviation from the essence of the gospel.

2.1. View of God

While new prophetic churches managed by prosperity teachers subscribe to most of the traditionally accepted Christian teachings on God, their theoretical confessions differ in some critically important respects, following the American prosperity tradition of E.W. Kenyon, Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen and others.[4] They portray God as the One who realizes the promised prosperity, which is the right and heritage of all believers. God's rules and principles that govern the world coincide with spiritual laws that result in prosperity, consisting of certain formulas found in "God's Word". God's Word contains the necessary recipes for wealth. God and God's Word are one; the Bible is a manifestation of God and divine power, implying that employing the Word necessarily leads to the realization of its promises (Copeland 1974, p. 46). The Bible, as the "textbook with God's laws and rules for success," works in an almost magical way when these laws and recipes are being applied. God, as a good God, intends believers to have all the best things in life. Believers realize the good things by carefully following the laws and formulas found in the Bible because God is the owner of a heavenly storehouse with unlimited supplies, and God has given believers the keys to the storehouse without setting any limitations. Now believers should learn to speak, live and act like the rich people God intended them to be, visualizing and

experiencing that it is in the process of happening.[5] Positive confession conceives whatever is in one's mind that will eventually occur when one's words come to pass; words release the force of faith. Hagin's "little formula" for faith consists of four steps: all you must do is say it, do it, receive it and tell it (Hagin 1980, p. 29).

However, the faith formulas reveal a deistic god because they represent ways to manipulate God (Fickett 1984, p. 8), the "slavish puppet of anybody that knows the 'formulas' and 'spiritual laws' of how to control him" (McConnell 1988, p. 133). This mechanistic and manageable God does not represent the God presented in the Bible. This represents a deviation from the message of the Bible that touches the nerve of believers' view of God. The "prosperity god" does not require or result in a unique living, personal relationship with God who reveals and realizes the unique divine will in the individual's life, demanding the believer to trust God and God's control in all situations, including suffering and economic woes. In contrast, prosperity teachers reduce the divine involvement in the believers' lives to a mechanized way that is supposed to unlock divine provision without any proviso. Their message compromises the essence of God.

2.2. Prosperity Theology's View of Christ and Humankind

In theory, prosperity teachers subscribe to the traditional doctrine of Christ. Still, their emphasis on the upgrading of man is so prominent that it threatens the divinity of Christ, as illustrated by the concepts of the "spiritual death" of Jesus, his rebirth and "incarnation" in human beings.[6] They follow E.W. Kenyon, who taught that Jesus left his divine nature in heaven when he became a human being. That is why Jesus referred to himself as the "Son of man" and "second Adam"; he did not have God's nature but accepted that of a human being's (Capps 1982, pp. 91–94) in order to upgrade human beings to be on par with God (Copeland 1979a, p. 90). Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, functioned on earth like any other human being.[7] He was stripped of his deity so that human beings may be adorned with his divine nature, and his death on the cross was not the final work; in fact, it demonstrated his defeat because he received Satan's nature on the cross. That is why he had to struggle in hell for three days to conquer the powers of evil. The real mystery of who the Messiah was and why he came to the earth was only revealed in revelation knowledge to prosperity teachers; no one else has ever shared in this unique knowledge (Kenyon 1969, p. 9).

When he died, Jesus bore humanity's sinful nature and changed the nature that caused them to sin. So now believers lose their ability to sin; they live sinless lives. By his resurrection, Jesus became the first born-again human being. For that reason, Paul in Acts 13:28–33 explains that when God says, "today I have begotten you," it refers to when God raised Jesus from the dead, making Jesus the first person to be born again (Copeland 1979b, p. 9) when he took back the divine nature he had left in heaven.

The doctrine is based on knowledge hidden from other people and does not occur in the Bible; it was hidden from biblical authors (and the first Christian believers as well). The prosperity teacher can only now reveal and share these new truths to a specific group; they become the "privileged few" who will ever know it. The secret knowledge empowers them to interpret the Bible and what is uniquely happening in their lives. Like mythological presentations in second-century Gnosticism, secret knowledge revealed to a few privileged people becomes the way to become and be like God and even to become God. By knowing this secret knowledge, one is restored to become like Adam before the Fall, a perfect being infused with the divine. The secret knowledge consists of the "fact" that Jesus did not die on the cross to bear the price of one's sins. He had to die as a satanic figure to represent the reality of this sinful, fallen world in order for believers to become and live like God/gods. Jesus had to visit hell to reinstate the conditions before the Fall as a prerequisite for believers to become like Adam before the Fall, sinless and divine.

That Christ suffered under Satan in hell can be seen in two passages, according to these teachers. The first reference is found in Matthew 12:40, which explains that as Jonah was three days in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of man would be three days in the heart of the earth. Jesus' words are his response to the request of the scribes and Pharisees

to see a sign from him (v. 38). However, the only sign he offers them is the sign of Jonah; he had spent three days and three nights in the fish's belly as Jesus would also. Therefore, the interpretation changes the large fish into Satan and its belly into hell to be able to reach this conclusion. The second passage is found in Ephesians 4:9–10. The author refers to the grace each believer receives according to the measure of Christ's gift he gave them when he ascended to heaven (or "above"). That he ascended implies that he first had to descend "into the lower parts of the earth," referring to hell. However, the reference is clearly to the incarnation when the divine took on a human body.[8]

Prosperity teachers use their "knowledge" of what happened to Jesus on the cross and in hell to explain how it became possible to be equal with Jesus in all respects (Matta 1987, pp. 35, 37). Traditional theology interpreted Jesus' death as a sacrifice. As a sinless substitute for sinners, he earned forgiveness for them, saving them for a sure (second) death. However, his death did not serve to cancel humanity's sinful nature; believers will still struggle with their inclination to sin until the end of life on earth (Rom 7:21–25). Their relationship with God has been restored, but they remain enslaved to the law of sin.

Prosperity theology argues that Jesus was not a sinless substitute for sinners but a substitutive sinner (Horn 1989, p. 99). His nature changed and became sinful when he was nailed to the cross. He received Satan's nature, resulting in the spiritual death of his sinful nature. In other words, it was Satan that hung on the cross and was sent to hell to enable believers to be born again. And when he died and rose again, believers received the right to become sinless creatures, like the resurrected Jesus, and to receive all the divine privileges, such as health, wealth, happiness and prosperity. Their previously sinful humanity was upgraded to the level of God. Christ became sin so that believers could become divine. To believe that believers are "simul justus et peccator" is self-defeating in the opinion of these teachers.

Prosperity theologians argue that Jesus had to die twice, in a physical as well as in a spiritual way, as the plural use of the noun "death" in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 53:9 explains. However, the plural in Hebrew does not necessarily signify numerical plurality; in many cases, it carries the extent of the term's association. Jesus' death was so profound that the plural explains that he killed death using his own. The teachers' teaching of Jesus' spiritual death implies that the Spirit abandoned him, an unthinkable idea, given the unity that exists in the Trinity.

The fact of the matter is that unrepentant sinners die both a physical death at the end of their lives and death resulting from their due before God's judgment throne. With "spiritual death," the teachers connote that he became like a sinful human, not that his spirit or ability to stand in a relationship with God died.

What confuses many believers is the claim that prosperity teachers have absolute authority because of the unique "revelation knowledge" or "*rhema*" revealed to them. And they justify their denial of what the New Testament clearly teaches about Christ's death by claiming that they, as the anointed ones and prophets, received their knowledge immediately from God. Believers dare not contradict them because they are warned of dire consequences if any should dare to question their authority.

Prosperity's Christology focuses on the effects of the atonement for believers. What is vital is not what Christ did to save sinners but its results, which are to provide human beings with a new identity, like Christ's, with every divine privilege he enjoys as their inheritance. Sin, sickness and human needs are eradicated for them. If believers remain sick and poor, it is because they failed to realize their new identity in Christ (McConnell 1982, p. 34). Because they now live in complete union with God as an incarnation of Jesus Christ, they imply that all Christians are God to the same extent as Jesus (Copeland 1987, p. 9). As one author explains, "If sons of man are men, then it follows that sons of God are gods . . . " He concludes, "Ye are gods! . . . you are no longer an ordinary human being. You are superhuman, super extra-natural . . . you are gods".[9] The devastating effects of original sin, as well as the sinful nature of human inclination to sin, were utterly neutralized in the atonement. Humans who trust in Christ are reinstated in their original Adamic stance; the

image of God is restored fully in their lives, and they become like Adam and Eve before their act of disobedience led to their banishment from the garden of Eden.

The first Adam was perfect and, therefore, a god. He was not only the representative of God, as in the image of God, but he was "god on earth". The second Adam restored that capacity for contemporary believers; they were created to be gods over the earth, and now they have received the ability to become what they were intended to be and what Adam initially was. Christians do not only have God living within them because they are filled with the Spirit; they are gods. Christians are a Godkind creature. God made humans gods under God.[10]

Prosperity teaching does not place humans fully on a par with God; they acknowledge that as gods they do not have the same creative capabilities as the Creator. However, they are "gods under God" and "gods over the earth," although not of the universe. Although the distance between God and humans is radically narrowed, it is still there. However, at the same time, human beings are cast as superheroes reigning victoriously over the earth and its evil powers, claiming the privileges of gods in the form of prosperity and wealth.[11] The teachers love to quote Psalm 82:6 which states that all of them are gods, children of the Most High, as Jesus was supposed to quote according to John 10:34, without referring to the next verse: "nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince (or: fall as one man or princes)".[12] It is clear that the term "gods" as a first denominator is qualified by "sons (or children) of the Most High".

The privileges of believers include that they are destined to be creators of health, wealth and prosperity through the power of their words and positive confessions. "And since He created our spirits to be like Him, He expects us to be creators as well".[13] In other words, the good news is not that people's relationship with God is restored, empowering them to establish the divine reign on earth, but that they can become rich, healthy and prosperous. The focus shifted from a life in service of the gospel, lived in the hope of the final establishment of the divine reign, to the betterment of one's earthly life. What matters is what believers want and what they can acquire for free through faith. One seldom finds any eschatological expectations of life with God after death among prosperity teachers. The emphasis is instead on material possessions and human desires (Prosper 2012, p. 6).

The deviations from the generally accepted view of salvation and the emphasis on grace and faith are clear. The prosperity message changes the heart of the atonement message of the good news into a deification of human beings at the cost of Christ's suffering on the cross.

2.3. African Definition of Poverty

The basic structure that prosperity theology uses to ground its theology is the Protestant assumption of salvation through faith by grace. It differs in a few presuppositions, the last of which is how it defines poverty.

Africa traditionally defined poverty differently from the capitalist system. In Africa, the basic community consisting of family and community serves as a condition for existence as an individual. It is based on the *ubuntu* principle: a person co-exists with others or because of others; "I am because you are". The only way to exist is with and through the people around one. People worked, played and lived as part of a specific community, not as individuals. Whatever they did was part of a communal effort (Mburu 2019, p. 39). For that reason, people did not attempt to earn a salary to support only their close family of wife and children, as people in the Western world usually do, and they did not spend their money somewhat selfishly to satisfy only their own needs and desires. People in Africa worked to provide for the family, defined in terms of the totality of blood relatives. No one accumulated personal wealth, a cornerstone of the capitalist system. Africa instead used a socialist system where everyone took responsibility for the rest of their community members. Children cared for their aged parents when they could not work anymore, and children learned the value of hard work for the community's benefit. For that reason, it was more important to maintain good relationships with others at work than to finish

the work quickly. Their worldview permits Africans to appreciate relationships between people as one of their highest values. To a certain extent, it shared some sentiments with the ancient Israelite worldview that valued the same traditional concerns that held the family connection as the most significant (Mburu 2019, p. 39).

One result of the African value of family life is that it defined poverty in an alternative way. Poverty did not primarily imply that an individual person lacked the necessary finances to provide the material provisions that a family needed; it is instead associated with any lack in life that reduces a person's status in life. One was poor when one lost the social acclamation and respect of the family and community. As a result, a poor person cannot attend to other people and their needs, disqualifying the person from a life considered to be worthwhile. For that reason, the solution to poverty was not found in generating enough money to subsist on by, e.g., acquiring a job. Poverty "dedefined" people's socioeconomic and political status and identity and reidentified and redefined them within new and depersonalizing social strata seen as horrendous (Quayesi-Amakye 2008, p. 33). When people or a family became poor, they, as it were, acquired a new name, face and identity in society. Other people could not see them anymore, while the rich and powerful became vulnerable victims. As shamed and humiliated persons, they became defaced and depersonalized. Their value depreciated because they had been downgraded by society. In other words, poverty was seen as the realization of a curse in peoples' lives with vital spiritual consequences and causes. When the prosperity message arrived in the African context, it redefined its view of poverty to include Africa's unique definition, serving as one explanation for the impact and popularity of the message.

In line with the African dualist way of interpreting suffering as a curse, the prophets of the independent network churches view poverty as a curse resting on certain people. As a result of the curse, they experience illnesses and diverse adversities, including the lack of the vital material means to survive and earn others' respect. They have lost face in the community and are rejected, all because of the curse resting on their lives. What they need is deliverance from the evil forces that caused the curse and held them in their sway. The teachers ask why biblical faith heroes like Abraham, David, Solomon and Job were prosperous and responded that it was the sign of God's blessing that rested on their lives.[14] Contemporary Christians lose their wealth or have never received the prosperity God intended them to have because Satan's curse on their lives robs them of their heritage in Christ. They cannot become successful and prosperous, as is their right and privilege. Only when an anointed man of God releases the blockage the blessings will start flowing in their lives (Gifford 2004b, p. 172). The "magical name of Jesus" has the power to deliver believers from the curse, but it cannot happen without the mediation of the prophet. Without the assistance of the anointed person, no deliverance from curses can occur.

Because poverty is a curse from Satan, it implies that accursed people are sinful. Poverty is hence also a sin (Folarin 2007, p. 81). Christians that remain in material poverty are sinning against redemption because it is sin that brings on poverty. When they have become atoned with God, they receive material blessings and healing from all their diseases. The implication is that a faithful believer cannot be poor and ill.

In viewing poverty as a curse and sin, neo-Pentecostals do not necessarily acknowledge that poverty may have many causes in the African context, related to historical reasons such as colonialism and social injustices or current political factors like state corruption and instability that leads to slow economic growth. As a result, it disqualifies them from becoming involved in seeking solutions to Africa's widespread poverty endemic. At the same time, it inspires believers faithfully paying for the services of the anointed prophet to hope that the curse resting on their lives would be lifted without realizing that they may be victims of historically or politically generated violence or denying their responsibility for the suffering that may be due to self-inflicted causes, and that they should assist in developing a healthy work ethic of integrity and hard work while addressing the theodicy challenge of widespread poverty in Africa with integrity and honesty.

As explained, Africa's traditional dualist emphasis on the spiritual world in its interaction with the visible world views prosperity in terms of inner peace, social harmony, healing and health and liberation from evil spirits, witchcraft and demons. Much less materialistic than the capitalist system requires, it is concerned with becoming and being rich in a communitarian way (Kalu 2008, p. 124). They have not sold their souls yet to Western materialism since the vast majority suffers from increasing economic poverty, especially in countries that owe more to banking institutions and developed countries than they earn, as national debts have spiraled out of control. At the same time, a new elite middle class characterizes the African democratization process that birthed a neo-colonial political model with its inherent dynamic of unequal power relations; they are primarily the benefactors of Africa's vast resource deposits, economic liberalization and corruption, forming Africa's new economic elite (Deacon and Lynch 2013, p. 110).

3. Effects of Syncretistic Deviations

Suppose the African prosperity message presents a syncretistic deviation from the gospel of Jesus Christ, as the previous section argues. What challenges does it present to the Christian church in Africa? The last section investigates some of the effects and proposes some solutions to address them.

Since its inception at the beginning of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism emphasized direct contact with the supernatural in miracles of healing and deliverance, and the practice of the "charismata", in line with Africa's interest in the spiritual world, partly explains the movement's impact on the continent from its first exposure to it. A vital element of this emphasis for Pentecostals is that encounters with God form the backbone of their spirituality.

Prosperity theology also emphasizes the miraculous and supernatural, resulting in their African-friendly definition of poverty and the significant role of a charismatic leader. He (in most cases, a male) produces and facilitates miracles of healing and provision in material needs in distinction from what Pentecostals traditionally recognized as the work of the anointed pastor. The prophet claims that due to his direct contact with God, he received miraculous power as well as special revelation knowledge hidden from all other people. It changes him into a diviner in African terms, providing an acute need of many Africans for special knowledge about the causes of their mishaps and misfortunes, and ways to handle them.

When other churches criticized the new movement, the prophets ascribed it to jealousy because of the threat they purportedly posed for the continued existence of conventional Christianity scarred by its dead formalism. However, later, the movement did begin to routinize and regulate their practices when it became essential to become more acceptable to the broader establishment (Christerson and Flory 2017, pp. 125–26).

They often oversold the miraculous, and many of their prophecies failed miserably. Some of their large-scale prophecies expected that all wealth would be transferred to qualifying believers, leading to large numbers of new conversions and the appointment of "kingdom-minded" (shorthand for supporters of the prophetic movement) believers in top government, education, media, arts, entertainment and business positions. It would introduce Christ's return to rule the earth by employing these believers.

Overselling the miraculous is also found in some sensationalized testimonies used strategically in worship services and publications. People testify how they became fabulously rich when they consulted the prophet or apostle, followed their recipe for success by giving amply from their poverty, and testify positively of their changed status even before it was realized. The purpose of the testimonies is to build listeners' faith to trust God for the same miracles. Noticeably, most testimonies focus on finances, a promotion at work and the acquirement of wealth. In Paul Gifford's research, he finds that only ten percent refer to moral reform (Gifford 2004b, p. 173).

The challenge of the hype that guarantees that sowing money will result in harvesting blessings in terms of business and personal financial benefits is that it eventually terminates

in many disillusioned customers that leave the movement because they have lost confidence in the leader's ability to help them achieve their dreams. Some of them might even abandon religion altogether, as illustrated by the remark of an African bishop in 2018 that the popularity of the African prosperity message had led to widespread disillusionment among many Christians (Zaimov 2018).

Suppose the church provides a site where Spirit-filled believers are emboldened to bear prophetic witness and learn how to live prophetically in the Spirit in order to engage the world, as Amos Yong (2010) asserts. Should it not also provide a prophetic alternative to African politics and business scarred by corruption, patronage and oligarchy, which continues to be the worst of the colonial past? Should their message of the alternative reign of God not include that the church becomes a display window of the integrity, honesty and harmony associated with the divine presence? Then, church can become an alternative community where people share their lives and livelihood in harmony, resulting in provision for all people, as was the case in traditional African *ubuntu* economies (and some congregations, according to the book of Acts). Unfortunately, and in contrast, some African neo-Pentecostal groups have instead been characterized by a history of corruption and patronage. One such instance occurred when a prophet in Kampala, Uganda, convinced his adherents that if they sold everything they had and gave him the money, he would pay them back many times. This was the only way that they could become instantly rich. Unfortunately, the prophet then disappeared with the money, and no word had been received about him yet (Guyson 2016).

Christians associated with the charismatic network earn adequate protection from swindlers and charlatans. However, it requires the movement to organize itself into a structure that cooperates with law enforcement agencies and the government to weed out similar incidents. Otherwise, the movement can expect governments to respond decisively to such abuses. In Rwanda, for instance, the government in July 2018, in a controversial decree, closed most Pentecostal prayer houses and many Catholic churches to counter what they called the "troubling behavior of unscrupulous individuals masquerading as religious leaders" (Luxmoore 2018). Likewise, Roman Catholic bishops in the Ivory Coast responded to these unfortunate incidents. They opened a hotline against "swindlers and impostors," advising their church members to be vigilant against "badly intentional individuals" who had solicited financial donations while claiming to be Catholic clergy (Luxmoore 2018).

Neo-Pentecostal prophetism is characterized by its attention to the prophet's supposed charisma, requiring the adoration and reverence of adherents. The prophets' status, in many cases, then leads to their enrichment and personal gain when clients are forced to present prescribed gifts for them in order to secure their services (Banda 2016, pp. 208–29). J. Kwabena Quayesi-Amakye correctly calls it "prophetic monetization".[15] On the other hand, the rich prosperity leaders justify their wealthy lifestyles by calling it a demonstration of the success of their theology.

When apostles and prophets assume absolute leadership and are not held accountable and transparent by anybody, they and their followers are not protected from financial practices that frequently have ended in scandals in the past. If the apostle reserves the right to make all financial decisions, the ground is prepared for financial excesses and abuses of power.

To demonstrate the wealth of some African prosperity teachers, *Forbes* found in 2011 that Nigeria's top five wealthiest preachers earned between USD 10 million and USD 150 million a year.[16] For instance, Chris Oyakhilome owns a hotel, a fast-food chain and several mansions, amassing a fortune estimated at USD 30 to USD 50 million (Kingsbury and Chesnut 2018). Another report estimated T.B. Joshua's wealth at around USD 15 million (Guyson 2016). The top six wealthiest pastors in Africa, according to indapaper.com (2018), are all from Nigeria (Maxon 2019). Dominic Umoh concludes that "religion appears to be the most lucrative business today" in the Nigerian church scenario. And that applies to other parts of Africa as well (Umoh 2013, p. 656).

4. Conclusions: A Dire Warning

The study found that Pentecostal spirituality and African traditional religion share significant features that define primal spirituality. This also led to prosperity theology adopting and adapting certain beliefs and practices that contain Africans' traditional spiritual needs. For example, in both traditions, the prophet or diviner facilitates reconciliation with evil forces and angry ancestors, the causes of personal problems and poverty. Neo-Pentecostalism's prosperity teaching also links to the African dualist enchanted worldview. It presupposes that poverty (and prosperity) cannot be understood if the close relationship between the visible and invisible world is not kept in mind because they influence each other directly. By manipulating the invisible world, the circumstances of the visible world can change dramatically for better or worse.

Additionally, African prosperity teachers accept the American assumptions of mind-cure and positive thinking, found in the New Thought movement initiated by E.W. Kenyon.[17] He argued that to become wealthy and prosperous, one should turn into the power of God by believing that it is one's heritage as a child of God, and then one should act as though it has already happened. The believer's faith "compels" God to give them their hearts' desires because prosperity, as salvation, is God's will for all believers, the result of Christ's act of atonement.

Several elements of the prosperity message may lead to abusive practices. Such elements include an epistemology of revelation knowledge that undermines the authority of the biblical revelation to form the basis for the prophet's authority. The prophet then teaches unorthodox and unacceptable views about God, Jesus and humanity, denying the essence of the gospel of grace, and their governance model allows the leader to make all financial decisions without accountability to anybody. Otherwise, the bad press these practices receive will reflect on all Pentecostals. Unfortunately, many researchers, journalists and participators on social media do not distinguish between classical Pentecostals and prosperity teachers. In contrast, as argued, prosperity teachings are incompatible with the Pentecostal ethos and the proprium of its theological tradition.

On the other hand, while the New Apostolic Reformation or prophetic movement contributed some positive aspects and represents a diversity of views and practices, their basic prosperity message represents deviations from the essential gospel. Their leaders should be confronted with these deviations in a spirit of ecumenical love. These leaders should be encouraged to acknowledge theologically qualified teachers with a message based on the Bible, and their own theological schools should also expose students to traditional Christian theology.

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Notes

1 The differentiation in Pentecostalism is complicated by the diversity that marks the movement. One way is to distinguish between classical Pentecostalism that originated at the beginning of the twentieth century, the charismatic renewal of the 1960s, with the experience of Spirit baptism within mainstream churches and contributing to their acceptance of charismatic practices representing a second wave of Pentecostalism, and a third wave of neo-charismatic movements (McQueen 2009, p. 2). The last group is diversified, consisting of various categories: neo-Pentecostal groups, some of which were denominational and others independent, and Word of Faith or non-denominational prosperity churches (Luxmoore 2018, p. 7). The prosperity gospel spread far and wide because the message suited the economic mood of the times. Kate Bowler (2013, p. 125) explains that religious

communities were still barred from the luxury of separating spiritual and socioeconomic spheres and had to assume the task of fostering economic mobility themselves; the spiritual solutions proposed by the prosperity gospel joined up with other forms of social and economic liberation. The Africa of the past few decades was more influenced by the African American Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movement and their leaders than by classical Pentecostalism (Marti, "Adaptability of Pentecostalism" discusses the relationship between prosperity theology and individualization in the North American context; the suspicion is that the new elite middle-class African *nouveau riche* may also be implied by an acceptance of the widespread American individualism). Pentecostal churches and groups teaching the prosperity gospel showed the fastest growth of all Pentecostal groups (Maxon 2019, p. 1). A wave of independent ministries brought an emphasis on spiritual gifts, ecstatic worship and prosperity as an expected blessing for all believers. Their leaders positioned themselves as media literate and expansionist.

[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power/; accessed on 8 February 2023. Discussed in (Phiri and Maxwell 2007, p. 24).

[3] Black consciousness represents the movement that started in the middle of the twentieth century among blacks that stated that the most potent weapon in the hands of their oppressors was the mind of the oppressed. Blacks should rise to a self-awareness, expressing pride in being black and determine to rise and attain the goal of deliverance from racial oppression and discrimination and political and social independence. In particular, black students, professionals and intellectuals formed the heart of the movement and they mobilized the masses.

[4] Horn (1989, pp. 86–89) discusses the influence of American prosperity teachers on these African leaders extensively.

[5] See https://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/Article.aspx?articleid=6505; accessed on 30 January 2020.

[6] (Horn 1989, p. 96). The article does not leave room to discuss the orthodox doctrine of Christ, accepted by most Prostestants and Pentecostals but it is supposed.

[7] David Oyedepo, quoted in (Ntui-Abung 2017, p. 28).

[8] (Hanegraaff 2009, p. 182). In discussing these verses, Ben Witherington III (2007, pp. 288–90) shows that the reference to the one who ascended and who is thought to have descended can refer to the preexistent Christ's descent in incarnation, Christ's descent into Hades after his death (in line with 1 Pet 3) or the descent of the Holy Spirit after Christ ascended to heaven. The least likely is decidedly the descent into Hades despite church fathers like Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, Chrysostom and Jerome's support of it. The view that it refers to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost relies on Peter's speech in Acts 2 and the context in Ephesians 4. To identify the descent with the coming of the Spirit requires that Christ is identified with the Spirit; Paul never held to a simple identity of the two. Three points favor the view that the descent in question is of the preexistent Christ in the incarnation: the focus in vv. 8–9 is on going up, not on coming down, and on the giving of gifts as a result of going up; various early witnesses added the word "first" before "came down" in v. 9, in an early attempt to make clear that the descent preceded the ascent; and the contrast is between going up on high and coming down to earth by the same person.

[9] Quoted in (Ntui-Abung 2017, pp. 38–39).

[10] See (Hunt and McMahon 1985, p. 84), for more quotations and explanations of prosperity teachers that illustrate this dangerous teaching.

[11] Although some early Pentecostal preachers like John G. Lake also used the terms applied much later by the prosperity movement, including the idea that Christians become gods or God-men, the teaching was never accepted by the majority of Pentecostalism and the ideas died an early death in the movement.

[12] David Oyedepo Jnr., in a sermon entitled "Vital keys for unlocking the supernatural," states that many spiritual people are not Spirit-conscious (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tgq33sCo25U; accessed on 2 January 2020).

[13] Chris Oyakhilome, quoted in (Ntui-Abung 2017, p. 18).

[14] Pastor Chris Oyakhilome explains in a sermon that Job lost everything he owed because Satan's curse rested on his life. He again became rich when God delivered him from the curse. The devil was the thief who stole his riches (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQppu1NnbuE; accessed on 17 December 2022).

[15] (Quayesi-Amakye 2016, p. 303). Cf. also the critical work of (Chitando et al. 2013).

[16] https://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/06/07/the-five-richest-pastors-in-nigeria/?sh=74b079896031; accessed on 8 February 2023.

[17] New Thought is a movement focused on mind-healing that originated in the United States in the 19th century. Its origins can be found in dissatisfaction with scientific empiricism and the resultant religious skepticism. Phineas P. Quimby (1802–1866) is the earliest proponent and practiced mesmerism (hypnotism). He taught that physical illness is a matter of the mind. He influenced the theosophical movement, Mary Baker Eddy and her Christian Science and E.W. Kenyon. Many adherents of New Thought consider themselves to be Christian, though generalizations about their relations to Christianity have been questioned (https://www.britannica.com/event/New-Thought; accessed on 8 February 2023).

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Article

Consultations in New Prophetic Churches and African Traditional Religions: A Case Study of Divine Healing in Assessing Syncretistic Practices in the South African Context

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Abstract: New prophetic churches have a different approach to classical Pentecostalism when it comes to the practice of divine healing. Unlike classical Pentecostalism, new prophetic churches embrace the practice of consulting prophets in divine healing in the same way as that in which a traditional healer would be consulted in traditional African religions. During the consultation, the prophet charges a fee and prescribes sacred products that are similar to those of traditional African religious practices. This article uses a case study to illustrate the similarities between new prophetic churches and traditional African religions. Although there are similarities between the two movements, there is a need to also demonstrate their differences. The similarities are framed as continuities, and differences as discontinuities. When diagnosing the problem, a traditional healer throws traditional bones, but a prophet relies on the Holy Spirit to utter a prophetic word. When exorcising a demon causing sickness and diseases, a traditional healer uses rituals to invoke the spirits, but new prophetic churches, with all their weaknesses, would still use the name of Jesus to cast out the evil spirits. The findings in this article have some implications within the theoretical framework of syncretism. The similarities demonstrate syncretistic practices, and the discontinuities demonstrate the nonsyncretistic nature of new prophetic churches in South Africa.

Keywords: new prophetic churches; Pentecostalism; traditional African religions; case study; healing; syncretism; spirit world; traditional healing

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1. Introduction

The growth of Christianity is shifting from the global north to the global south, with Africa playing a major role in this shift (Bediako 1995, p. 190). One of the major contributors to this shift within the Christian tradition is Pentecostalism. While some mainline and missionary churches have shown a downward spiral, Pentecostal churches in Africa have been growing to great numbers in the last 20 years. According to Wariboko (2017, p. 5), "In 2015 the population of Pentecostals (renewalists) in Africa was estimated at 202.92 million, constituting 35.32 percent of the continent's Christian population of 574.52 million and 17.11 percent of total continent's population of 1.19 billion". Studies indicate that this number could double if not triple by 2025 (Sanneh 2013; Anderson 2013; Johnson et al. 2017). There could be more of these churches that are unaccounted for, since some of them are not even registered with formal institutions in their countries for proper statistics. In South Africa, there are a myriad independent churches that can be classified within the broader scope of Pentecostalism. In the last 10 years, South Africa has seen the emergence of new prophetic churches, which are part of Neo-Pentecostalism.

New prophetic churches have become popular in the religious landscape in South Africa, and are also found in countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Ghana. These churches are a different form of Pentecostalism, as their practices differ from those of conventional Pentecostal movements such as classical Pentecostal churches (Chitando and Biri 2016; Manyonganise 2016). New prophetic churches draw their Pentecostal theology

from Neo-Pentecostalism, but emphasize more the prophetic dimension of that theology (White and Pondani 2022, p. 3; Ramantswana 2018, p. 4; Tsekpoe 2019; Banda 2021). Hence, the movement is popular for prophetic deliverance, titles, problem diagnosis, products, and consultations (Kgatle 2019, p. 3; Kgatle and Anderson 2020; Kgatle 2022a, 2022b). The concept of consulting a prophet to access divine healing is common among new prophetic churches. There are activities that happen during these consultations that are consistent with African religious practices. This article argues that, although continuities with African religious practices exist, there is a need to also explore discontinuities. This is achieved by using a theory of syncretism to demonstrate syncretistic and nonsyncretistic practices in new prophetic churches in South Africa.

A case study method was used to show what a prophet healer and traditional healer would do in a given situation. This method is used to show the similarities and differences between new prophetic churches and traditional African religions during healing. A case study approach is used to understand the activities of a specific phenomenon in a real-life situation (Crowe et al. 2011). The life situation in this article is the case of consulting a prophet healer and a traditional healer in seeking divine healing. The traditional African religious worldview is outlined to understand its background of healing and deliverance. The concept of consulting about healing and deliverance in the traditional African religious landscape is studied to compare with new prophetic churches. Thus, this study shows the similarities and differences that exist between African traditional religions and new prophetic churches when it comes to consultations to access divine healing.

2. Syncretism in the Context of Pentecostalism: Theoretical Framework

In general terms, syncretism is the practice of combining different systems of beliefs into one religious movement. Umoh (2013, p. 32) explained, “Syncretism normally refers to merging beliefs of two or more religious systems in order to come up with a new one”. In Pentecostalism, syncretism is used to study the practice of believing in more than one views, ideologies, or even doctrines to create a new worldview or doctrine (Mwiti et al. 2015). Syncretism is also used to study the combination of traditional and Christian beliefs by some Pentecostal subtraditions. It is also used to assess the inconsistencies with biblical and Christian doctrine by Pentecostal churches in the pursuit of mixed beliefs (Mwiti et al. 2015). This approach was used to study syncretistic practices within the Pentecostal movement in comparison with traditional religions and even African-initiated churches (Engelke 2010; Anderson 1995; Anderson 2001; Anderson 2003).

However, Anderson (1999, p. 220) warned that there should be careful consideration in order to not confuse indigenization or even contextualization with syncretism. Pentecostal scholars, particularly from the global north, should not make the mistake of thinking that everything African Pentecostal is syncretistic. With new prophetic churches, scholars can reach the uninformed conclusion that everything associated with these churches is syncretistic. Hence, the syncretistic approach is used in this article to show the similarities and discontinuities between with traditional African religions and new prophetic churches. This approach is used to argue that new prophetic churches are not always syncretistic in their practices; hence, it is important to examine some of the differences they have with African traditional religions. This is achieved by using the case of divine healing in both the traditional African religion and the new prophetic churches. The article focuses on activities that happen in both movements when a traditional healer or prophet healer is consulted for divine healing.

3. Traditional African Religion Worldview

Traditional African religions are popular among the different people in Africa; they are the religions of the continent that have been practised since ancient times, even before other religions (Mligo 2013; Mugambi 2015, p. 45). Traditional African religions are concerned with the indigenous way of relating with the supreme being by using traditional and cultural practices in different regions of the continent (Mbiti 1990, p. x; Mligo 2013,

p. 1). According to Mligo (2013, p. 3), culture is inclusive of "people's traditional religions, customs, traditions, rites, ceremonies, symbols, art, wisdom and institutions". Hence, traditional African religions are an oral tradition, and not a written tradition with well-defined conceptual framework and doctrines.

Given the above, a direct relationship exists between cultural and religious practices in the traditional religions of different African contexts. This relationship makes it dangerous to alienate people from their religious practices as Western missionaries did. This might mean an alienation of people's culture in some instances. Therefore, the best approach to traditional African religions is not the alienation of the cultural practices, but an understanding of their worldview. Hence, this article seeks to understand the practice of consulting a traditional healer during divine healing to compare it with new prophetic churches within the broader Pentecostal movement. The concept of traditional healing is common in the traditional African religious worldview because most Africans link some sicknesses and diseases to the spirit world. Asante and Mazama (2009, p. 495) explained that, "in most African cosmologies, sickness, diseases, and other misfortunes are largely linked to supersensible origins such as the wrath of divinities and neglected ancestral spirits, malevolent spiritual entities, witches, and wizards and sorcerers". Therefore, instead of seeking Western medicine, they believe that they can be healed through traditional medicine by a traditional healer. This notion renders the concept of consulting with a traditional healer for healing and deliverance popular in the African context. In the next section, this article discusses the consultation of traditional healers during divine healing in traditional African religions.

4. Consultation during Divine Healing in Traditional African Religions

Given the link to sickness and diseases in the spirit world, some Africans tend to consult traditional healers to receive healing as opposed to utilizing Western medicine (De Jong 1991). Feierman and Janzen (1992, p. 374) explained that the idea of first consulting a traditional practitioner is informed by the belief that they carry more power to identify the root of the problem if they are not able to refer to a more powerful or appropriate traditional healer that can deal with the problem. Even in instances of accidents on the road, Africans still consult a traditional healer or priest to investigate the cause. Therefore, the contribution of traditional healing cannot be underestimated or overlooked, particularly in an African context where so many people do not have access to medical treatment and care (Jones 2005, p. 28). Hence, traditional healers have continued to exist in the midst of government hospitals and healthcare in many African contexts (Aderibigbe and Falola 2022, p. 202).

5. New Prophetic Churches in the Context of Pentecostalism

New prophetic churches are part of the Pentecostal movement (particularly Neo-Pentecostalism), but embrace prophetic practices more than other Pentecostal churches do (Anderson 1991; Omenyo 2011, p. 30; Quayesi-Amakye 2015, p. 162). These churches are found in different regions in Africa, such as South, East, and West Africa. In South Africa, and as highlighted in the introduction, churches embrace prophetic titles, deliverance, consultations, problem diagnosis, and prophetic products, such as the Enlightened Christian Gathering of Prophet Shepherd Bushiri, and the Alleluia Ministries of Pastor Alph Lukau (Kgatle 2021). In these churches, "pastor" is not the only common title, but there are other titles such as "Major 1"and "Seer 1" (Kgatle 2021, p. 6). This is different from conventional Pentecostalism, where a pastor is known as "reverend" or just "pastor". In addition, instead of conducting normal deliverance sessions, the prophet rather asks their congregants to consult with them, where a certain fee is charged, and a certain sacred product is prescribed for the healing and deliverance of the patient (Kgatle 2022a). These practices separate these churches from classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. In this

article, these churches' characteristics are relevant for a discussion on the consultation of a prophet during healing and deliverance.

In new prophetic churches, the prophet is more important than the participation of all believers. There is much emphasis on the prophet, which results in much dependence on them. Banda (2022, p. 3) explained, "The prophetic standing of the prophets is the most significant feature and source of their growth". In addition, prophets often guide the people to themselves rather than directing them to Christ (Magezi and Banda 2017, p. 4). Furthermore, instead of emphasising that all believers can receive and speak a word, they emphasise that the main prophet is the one carrying the special word from God. Banda (2022, p. 3) further explained: "Whereas in conservative classical Pentecostalism, the gift of prophecy belongs to all the believers, creating a notion of the prophethood of all believers, in the New Prophetic Churches, the gift of prophecy exclusively belongs to special individuals often called 'Man of God' or 'Woman of God'."

Therefore, the participation of all believers is not common in these churches, particularly when it comes to the prophetic office. It is for this reason that the consultation of the prophet by members of these churches is common in Africa. In the next section, the article discusses this aspect of new prophetic churches to indicate their similarities and differences with traditional African religions.

6. Consultation during Divine Healing in New Prophetic Churches

The concept of consulting a prophet is common among new prophetic churches. The concept is informed by dependence on the prophet, as discussed in the preceding section. From a Ghanaian perspective, Quayesi-Amakye (2015, p. 165) wrote: "many who make it a practice of embarking on nothing until they consult the prophet for a 'divine word and advice'. Thus, it is not uncommon to find 'committed regular' clients who 'rush' to the prophets, on almost every issue, stretching from perceived spiritual problems to ordinary mundane matters."

Classical Pentecostal churches perform a normal altar call to prayer for people to receive healing; however, prophets in new prophetic churches go beyond the altar call. They ask their members to book appointments with them to receive special prayers and prophecies that are relevant to their healing. This is sometimes during all-night prayers, when prophets leave the rest of the congregants to pray while some of the members consult the prophet for healing (Omenyo and Arthur 2013, p. 68). In addition, access to the prophet is very limited in a normal service, which alone creates a vacuum for one-on-one prophetic sessions. Therefore, people go to these churches not only for worship, but also to see the prophet on a special appointment, which is not common in classical Pentecostalism.

7. Similarities between Traditional African Religions and New Prophetic Churches

In a situation where an African visits both the traditional healer and the prophet healer, there are some similarities. First, a traditional healer in traditional African religions charges such a patient a certain fee for a consultation with them. According to Crawford and Lipsedge (2004, p. 143), such a payment depends on the time of treatment the patient is seeking and whether is it diagnostic or prescriptive. Payment is mostly demanded prior to the consultation, as lack of payment after treatment can result in serious consequences. For example, a traditional healer can become angry with a patient who does not pay during the consultation and punish them (Dagher and Ross 2004, p. 465). However, not every traditional healer charges for their services. Whatever payment is required from the clients visiting a traditional healer is nothing close to what they pay when visiting the prophets, as discussed below.

Prophets in new prophetic churches are not consulted for free, but charge a certain fee when their members and outsiders want to consult with them for healing. If the same patient who visited a traditional healer visits the prophet healer, they are charged a fee in the prophetic room, which is similar to the traditional room. Therefore, a one-on-one consultation with the prophet is expensive for members of this type of church in Africa.

Kgatle (2021, p. 123) indicated that the prices that such a patient is charged vary from one prophet to another. These prices, according to Kgatle, can range from ZAR 5000 to 7000 per session in the South African context. This is very different from conventional collections of tithes and offerings that are normally taken during a church service and are accounted for in many classical Pentecostal churches. This raises the great challenge of the commercialisation and commodification of the gospel because exorbitant prices are charged to access prayer for healing (Kgatle 2022a). Charging these prices to a sick person is consistent with the practices of traditional African religions as discussed above.

Second, the same patient consulting a traditional healer receives a prescription for certain medications and certain rituals that need to be bought for their healing. Hewson (1998, p. 1031) explained: "Traditional healers prepare and prescribe therapeutic medicines, believing that every disorder has a corresponding plant or animal product that neutralizes its effects". Prescriptions in the form of herbs and rituals serve two primary purposes. According to Dagher and Ross (2004, p. 465), prescriptions deal with evil spirits confronting the patient and serve as a form of protection for the patient. The prescription of herbs and different traditional ceremonies are linked with the sacred products prescribed by new prophetic churches.

The same patient consulting prophets in new prophetic churches receives a prescription of certain sacred products, such as anointing oil, anointed water, wristbands, photographs of prophets, and t-shirts bearing the name of the prophet. Among these products, the most common is anointing oil, which is perceived to be carrying special powers to deal with the challenges that believers in these churches face in their lives. Quayesi-Amakye (2015, p. 167) mentioned that, in Ghana, "anointing oil is believed to neutralize devilish works and cause promotional and preventive effects for believers". In South Africa, churches such as the Enlightened Christian Gathering of Shepherd Bushiri prescribe an oil called "the lion of Judah", which they claim has the potential to deal with challenges and bring healing (Kgatle 2021, p. 122; Kgatle 2019, p. 4). According to Deke (2015, p. 17) the use of these different products in the church is what has brought confusion in the Christian church, and has led to people drawing similarities between the church and traditional African religions. Although sacred products are used in other Christian traditions, prices are well-regulated, such that the consumer is not charged an exorbitant price to access such products. They do not promote a specific personality, as is the case in new prophetic churches in Africa.

8. Discontinuities in Traditional African Religious Practices

In the same case of a patient seeking healing from both a traditional healer and a prophet healer, there are some differences. First, to identify the root cause of the problem of the patients, a traditional healer engages in the practice of "throwing the bones", including speaking to the ancestors. Hewson (1998, p. 1031) said: "The bones are usually thrown like dice on a woven grass mat or on dried animal skin, and clues to the patient's problems can be interpreted from the configuration of the items". Spiritually speaking, these bones are believed to speak to the traditional healer about the problems faced by the patients. Once the traditional healer can receive clear communication, they communicate back to the patient. Thus, the practice of throwing bones serves as a mechanism to access the ancestors in the spirit realm for them to communicate back to the traditional healer about the patient (Dagher and Ross 2004, p. 462). The bones are more of a diagnostic mechanism, as they can trace the root of the problem faced by the patient to bring a solution. De Andrade and Ross (2005, p. 493) spoke to 13 traditional healers in South Africa and confirmed that bones are a diagnostic mechanism. Each thrown bone has a particular message to the traditional healer about the patient.

However, when the same patient visits the prophet healer, diagnosis is performed through different means. New prophetic churches claim to be hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit in identifying the root cause of the problem of their members or outsiders. Therefore, the prophet healer normally prays to and asks the Holy Spirit to reveal the cause of the

problem. The prophets, according to Omenyo (2011, p. 42), claim that they can reveal the personal details of their members, including their addresses, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Omenyo (2011, p. 43) also said that it is for this reason that “they put much emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit which is manifested in healing”. In addition, ministering under the influence of the Holy Spirit should be separated from ministering under the influence of other spirits in traditional African religions. Therefore, prophets such as Makandiwa in Zimbabwe claim to be led by the Holy Spirit and do not follow in the footsteps of traditional priests as some scholars suggest (see Chiwara and Shoko 2013, p. 220). Anderson (2018, p. 8) explained that this kind of manifestation is not “pagan”. The Holy Spirit gives signs of God’s presence that relate to people’s religious context. Thus, there should be a distinction between the manifestations of the spirits in the traditional African religions and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in new prophetic churches.

Second, a traditional healer in the same consultation calls for the performance of different rituals to bring remedy to the patient. These rituals, according to Crawford and Lipsedge (2004, p. 135), involve “making sacrifices of animals such as goats, cows, and chickens. Different animals are preferred depending on the type of problem encountered and the wealth of the family”. The rituals should be observed correctly or they could bring a certain punishment to the family involved (Ross 2010, p. 44). Hence, it is the role of the traditional healer to determine if the problem comes directly from evil spirits or it is because of punishment. Mkabile and Swartz (2022, p. 269) explained that “customs and traditional ceremonies introduce, keep one connected and rooted to one’s ancestors. When one is known by their ancestors then they get protection from the evil spirits and misfortunes”. However, rituals are not only performed to deal with the problem, but also when thanking the ancestors for blessings. It is again the role of the traditional healer to lead such ceremonies, which are conducted in celebration of the ancestors (Hewson 1998, p. 1031).

If the same person pursuing healing were to visit a prophet healer, they normally use the name of Jesus to deliver the person who is bound by certain demons. It is for this reason that new prophetic churches do not speak of exorcism but the deliverance of those who are bound by certain demons. Quayesi-Amakye (2015, p. 170) explained that the name of Jesus is presented as all-powerful, superseding other names, and as able to confront problems that are caused by the spirit world. Omenyo and Arthur (2013, p. 59) added: “Neoprophetic hermeneutics, therefore, has among its cardinal goals to prove that Jesus Christ is the only powerful and dependable one in the fight against evil”. Therefore, healing is not only performed through sacred products and by charging certain fees, but also in the name of Jesus Christ (Mangena and Mhizha 2013, p. 133). The challenge for new prophetic churches, as Magezi and Banda (2017, p. 5) put it, is that, even though they present Jesus as powerful, they simultaneously inflict fear upon their followers to lead them to being dependent on the prophets. This renders Christology much different from the conventional one in classical Pentecostal churches.

9. Syncretistic and Nonsyncretistic Practices in New Prophetic Churches

The practice of consulting a traditional healer and prophet healer for divine healing in traditional African religions and new prophetic churches, respectively, demonstrates that there are similarities between the two movements, such as the fact that both movements charge a fee for a consultation. Charging fees is too commercialized among new prophetic churches, but believers pay because they believe that they need to deal with problems that exist in the spirit world. The second similarity is that both movements prescribe a certain artifact as a way of dealing with a challenge faced by the patient or the person consulting both the traditional and prophet healers. Similarly, the various products that are prescribed as healing products come at exorbitant prices in new prophetic churches. These two similarities demonstrate syncretistic practices in new prophetic churches in South Africa because these practices are consistent with the practices of traditional African religious practices. This means that new prophetic churches use more than one systems of belief in divine healing, as per the definition of syncretism.

However, new prophetic churches have nonsyncretistic practices in the case of divine healing.

When looking at the root cause of the problem, traditional African religions tend to depend on the guidance of ancestral spirits. However, prophets in new prophetic churches tend to depend on the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Although some prophets are secretly linked with traditional African religious practices such as divination, they still acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit when praying in a church setting. The other nonsyncretistic practice exists in how traditional African religions perform rituals and invoke the spirits of the ancestors to exorcise a demon, and new prophetic churches cast out the demon in the name of Jesus. Therefore, these nonsyncretistic practices should be considered, so that syncretism is not discussed in isolation from inconsistent practices with traditional African religious worldviews and cosmologies within the context of new prophetic churches.

10. Conclusions

The concept of consultation, also known as prophetic consultation among new prophetic churches, was studied using the theory of syncretism and the case study of divine healing. The article identified three similarities that exist between traditional African religions and new prophetic churches when it comes to consultation during healing. Both movements have a propensity of charging fees during consultations regardless of the economic status or condition of the person who needs help. Second, both movements also prescribe certain sacred products that should be utilized for the one in need of help to receive healing. These similarities illustrate syncretistic practices with traditional African practices in new prophetic churches. However, in the study of syncretism, scholars should not only look at the similarities, but also highlight differences. When diagnosing a problem, a traditional healer throws the traditional bones, but a prophet relies on the Holy Spirit to utter prophetic words. When exorcising a demon causing sickness and diseases, a traditional healer performs certain rituals to invoke the spirits, but new prophetic churches, with all their weaknesses, still use the name of Jesus to cast out the evil spirits. Therefore, there is a need to look at both the similarities and differences, that is, syncretistic and nonsyncretistic practices, when exploring syncretism in new prophetic churches in particular and the Pentecostal movement in general. Future studies should look at both angles in the study of syncretism, rather than only looking at syncretistic practices and reaching uninformed conclusions.

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Hybrid Leadership in African Neo-Pentecostalism

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Abstract: Across institutions and professions, leadership philosophy is considered the driver of organisational culture in achieving the overall objectives. Although individuals' leadership cultures may vary, intersections and hybridity are present in many spheres, including that of some African Neo-Pentecostal Leaders (ANPLs). To underscore the hybrid leadership of the ANPLs, qualitative research was conducted, with data collected from 20 participants through one-on-one interviews across Africa. The results revealed the hybridisation of African Neo-Pentecostal leadership styles vis-a-vis African monarchical and religious traditions based on four variables: accountability, ownership and succession plan, healing, and gerontocracy. The results also revealed the benefits and challenges of their hybridity. Subsequently, using Jesus's model of servant leadership to analyse the four variables, the benefits and challenges were critiqued. The analysis identified culture, African spiritual worldview, gerontocracy, and submissive theology as factors influencing such syncretic or hybrid practices. The analysis also delineated the theological, socio-economic, legal, and transgenerational implications of such hybrid leadership. This article concludes with cautionary remarks regarding boundaries, servant leadership, and morality.

Keywords: African tradition; gerontocracy; accountability; succession plan; Neo-Pentecostalism; hybridity; syncretism

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1. Introduction

This article poses a few questions that guide its presentation: Are there syncretic leadership relationships between African traditions and African Neo-Pentecostalism[1], and if so, what is the available evidence? What benefits and challenges can be identified from the available evidence? Is all evidence contrary to Jesus's servant leadership principles? What recommendations can be made to improve the leadership hybridity of African Neo-Pentecostal leaders (ANPLs) vis-a-vis African traditional leadership? To address these questions, this article presents a brief historical and contextual clarification of syncretism in the context of hybridity, evidence of syncretistic practices via qualitative research results obtained from 20 respondents mostly located in Western and Southern Africa, and the benefits, challenges, possible factors, implications, and critiques of the syncretistic relationship. Finally, this article concludes with remarks in the context of Jesus's model of servant leadership, boundaries, and morality.

2. A Brief History and Contextual Clarification of Hybridity and Syncretism

In a simple and literal definition, Smith (1974, pp. 1–18) implies that syncretism in anthropology, sociology, and religious studies reflects the assembly and intercourse of different religious traditions. Hartman (1969, p. 7) asserts that it denotes the combination of two or more religions. He cites an example of Hellenistic syncretism, where elements from numerous religions are merged to mutually influence each other. Correspondingly, many authors maintain that syncretism involves combining two or more beliefs into intermingled beliefs and practices (Mullins 2001, p. 809; Pinto 1987, p. 22; Schreiter 2003, pp. 146–47; Droogers 1989, p. 7). However, Hughes (1988, p. 670) believes that syncretic elements are inherent in all religions, including those with a negative impact on specific religious

practices. In other words, syncretism is relative to the definition and usage of the term "religion". Although cultural and religious blends remain the core discussion in this article, the historical perspective will be briefly discussed below.

Ezenweke and Kanu (2012, p. 73) claim that "syncretism" comes from the Greek word *synkretismos*, which originates from the ancient Island of Crete. Noted for their consistent internal crises, the people of Crete often ignored their differences and joined forces to combat external enemies when the need arose. They called this combination of forces *synkretismos*, meaning "to combine". Nyuyki and Van Niekerk (2016, p. 383) add that syncretism has been common throughout history, from the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds to contemporary times. This implies that there is no period without syncretism. Furthermore, syncretism extends beyond religious aspects, as history reveals that even in war, nations and tribes have adopted this principle. This implies that syncretism represents the interaction, intersection, and hybridity of concepts, ideas, and cultures (see Flemming 2007, p. 526). It is little wonder that Hughes (1988, p. 670) asserts that syncretism is relative. Although some older and more conservative authors perceive syncretism from a negative perspective (Nel 2017, p. 4), recent conversations have focused attention on some alternative perspectives. In this regard, Flett (2022) agrees that hybridity offers another way of addressing the questions regarding syncretism. This concept of hybridity is not peculiar to Africa or religions in Africa and cuts across other disciplines and regions of the world (Byron 2021, pp. 425–32; Nel 2017, pp. 4–6; Arroyo 2016, pp. 133–44; Charles 2011, pp. 48–55).

All the above-mentioned definitions and clarifications imply that syncretism can be seen as hybridity in the context of mixing religions, cultures, and other philosophies. Thus, in this article, syncretism is viewed from the perspective of ANPLs' combination of their religious culture with African traditional cultures to provide ministry leadership. In essence, this article will interchangeably use the words syncretism and hybridity; however, the word hybrid was used in the title of this article because it aligns more closely with current conversations around syncretism. The next section examines the relativity of syncretism between African traditions and African Neo-Pentecostal leadership practices.

3. Hybridity of African Culture and African Neo-Pentecostal Leadership

Syncretism exists beyond inter- or intra-religious practices. Nyuyki and Van Niekerk (2016, p. 382) opine that Christianity adopted some cultural elements from Judaism and later integrated some Greek and Roman beliefs from the Greco-Roman worlds to sustain its validity. Hartman (1969, p. 8) argues that syncretic phenomena are not limited to religion, but also extend to culture. This is synonymous with the general idea that African Neo-Pentecostalism incorporates some American culture from American Pentecostalism (Orogun and Pillay 2021, pp. 1–18). This blend of culture and religion has been referred to as 'substitution' by Hartman (1969, p. 8), which involves the infiltration of religion by cultural practices or vice visa. For example, the Tanzanian culture of burying the dead outside the family has been adopted and substituted for any church-centred burial rituals (Hartman 1969, p. 140). Hartman (1969, p. 149) also notes the example of an African leader and a Christian leader with a theological degree, who ordered that no religious ceremonies should be held at the time of his death and willed GBP 20,000 to his private sorcerer. This shows how religious leaders can blend their practices with cultural and traditional religions. In the opinion of Johnson (2002, p. 302), this is a syncretic tradition that encourages the hybridisation of religious and cultural elements.

From the perspective of African Neo-Pentecostal Leaders' syncretic culture vis-a-vis African monarchical and traditional religious cultures, it is evident that beyond the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural influences, African Neo-Pentecostalism has adopted a significant number of practices from African traditions. This is corroborated by Berner (2001, p. 503), who maintains that by regarding "Syncretism on the level of elements", religious groups incorporate elements from different religious systems while concurrently stressing the boundaries between the systems or even condemning the other system. This

is evident in the way some ANPLs condemn African Traditional Religion (ATR) and some monarchical traditions, although traces of these traditions can be found among the ANPLs' practices (see Berner 2001, p. 504). For example, the use of symbolism such as water for feet washing and anointing oil for the covenant of protection are common to both African Neo-Pentecostalism and ATR (see Adogame 2000, pp. 197–99). Additionally, some African monarchical leadership cultures adopted by ANPLs can be seen in their succession plan, gerontocratic leadership, and submissive theology.[2] To support these claims, this article presents evidence from the 20 respondents.

4. Evidence of Hybrid Leadership in African Neo-Pentecostalism

One-on-one interviews were carried out with 20 respondents from different parts of Africa. The results show the syncretic relationship between African traditional systems (monarchy and religion) and African Neo-Pentecostal Leaders' (ANPLs) practices. Four questions related to accountability, succession plans and church ownership, gerontocracy, and healing were posed. The interviews covered a wide spectrum of ministry experiences, locations, and affiliations. Due to respondents' requests, some individuals' and Churches' identities were coded to comply with the research ethics. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, the respondents were free to respond outside the Neo-Pentecostal scope to provide more references and examples. Table 1 shows the research summary.

Table 1. Respondents and their views on the hybrid leadership of African Neo-Pentecostal Leaders.

S/N	Time	ID Code	Location	Syncretism View	Church Affiliation/Experience
1	90 min	FOPSA	Pretoria, S/Africa	Positive	12 yrs. as a provincial pastor, LFC.
2	100 min	JOPSA	Central African Rep	Positive	20 yrs. of missionary experience in LFC
3	60 min	ULOSA	Maiduguri, Nigeria	Positive	7 yrs. in Lifaworld Church
4	97 min	JEROCK	Abuja, Nigeria	Positive	21 yrs. of ministry and leadership experience in PHC
5	90 min	JAROCK	Abuja, Nigeria	Positive	20 yrs. as a Pentecostal lay minister
6	70 min	CIROCK	Abuja, Nigeria	Positive	18 yrs. in a pastoral ministry.
7	30 min	IMROCK	Kaduna, Nigeria	Positive	9 yrs. in a PAHOLAC ministry.
8	80 min	STAROON	Lagos, Nigeria	Positive	24 yrs. as a minister and church admin.
9	80 min	STARSOK	Lagos, Nigeria	Positive	19 yrs. as a minister and church admin.
10	60 min	SEGSA	Pretoria, S/Africa	Positive	15 yrs. in ministry
11	118 min	CHUDAP	Jos, Nigeria	Positive	42 yrs. in ministry. PFN/CAN Sec.
12	90 min	YAPP	Jos, Nigeria	Positive	30 yrs. in ministry. P. F.N/CAN National Council member
13	95 min	DAPSA	Pretoria, S/Africa	Positive	30 yrs. in ministry. Chair NPASA.
14	45 min	OLAUK	United Kingdom	Positive	Finance consultant. 17 yrs. Pentecostal
15	65 min	DRJULIUS	Pretoria, S/Africa	Positive	Pastor and leadership expert (15+ yrs.)
16	30 min	DRTHABISO	Free State, S/Africa	Positive	Doctoral researcher
17	50 min	MRMUSHI	Pretoria, S/Africa	Positive	Security and leadership expert (35 yrs.)
18	45 min	DRJACOB	Free State, S/Africa	Positive	Minister and theology academic (21 yrs.)
19	45 min	PJOEL	Zimbabwe	Positive	Pentecostal minister (17 yrs.)
20	45 min	PJOSHUA	Nigeria/S/Africa	Positive	Pentecostal minister (16 yrs.)

4.1. Respondents' Views on Accountability

Most respondents believed that some African Neo-Pentecostal Leaders (ANPLs) do not place a high value on being held accountable to their congregants. Ministers FOPSA and JOPSA maintained that accountability in their previous church of primary assignment (LFC) followed a bottom-to-top approach but that the General Overseer (GO) reported to nobody.[3] Ideally, heads of organisations report to a Board of Trustees (BOT); however, in African Neo-Pentecostalism, BOT members report to the GO. Throughout the years that FOPSA and JOPSA were in the LFC, the GO was accountable to no one and was unchallenged. However, ULOSA, another LFC respondent, disagreed. In his words "Church leaders are not designed to be accountable to members except in cases where government policy permits." IMROCK, a currently serving clergy in the PHC (full name withheld), disagreed. He claimed that GOs maintained an 'Alpha and Omega' status in African Neo-Pentecostalism, making it difficult for members to demand accountability. In

his words, 'I have a problem with African Neo-Pentecostal leaders not being accountable'. Likewise, SEGSA agreed that every pastor is accountable first to God and then to his family, church members, government, society, and the universal body of Christ. He believed that the government should regulate churches as they do with other religious entities but argued that the government must never usurp their roles.

Furthermore, in the PHC, JEROCK explained that accountability to members was intentionally avoided using the doctrine of spiritual authority to ensure that the leaders were unquestionable. JAROCK also claimed that there was zero downward accountability in the PHC. Departments give monthly accounts to branch pastors, but the pastors give no account of their stewardship in return. The branch pastors give a financial report to the GO but there is no reciprocal stewardship account. Submissive theology or spiritual authority and 'loyalty and disloyalty' training are used to ensure that devotees are voiceless. CHUDAP maintained that servant leadership, which prioritizes accountability, has been replaced with boss leadership among the ANPLs, hence the prevalence of authoritarianism. YAPP claimed that it is dangerous theology when an ANPL claims, 'I am only accountable to God, if I fail, God will hold me responsible.' YAPP called it a manipulation that promotes one-man business practices in the church and a way of dodging accountability. Conversely, STAROON and STARSOK had different experiences at the DCC (full name withheld), where the GO promotes the policy of accountability. Using the acronym REAL (Righteousness, Excellence, Accountability, and Love), the GO and his leadership team submit themselves to BOT members. The church also reports to the Church Financial Accountability Association (CFAA), a body created by Christian leaders, accountants, lawyers, and auditors to help churches develop a culture of accountability. The final authority in the DCC is vested in the BOT. DAPSA, a Neo-Pentecostal veteran, claimed that most GOs are unquestioned and unaccountable to anyone but God and have successfully given false information about their authority over congregants. OLAUK a financial consultant stated, "I have issues with Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa where church leaders claim to be above scrutiny. Evidence has shown that most of the privileged Pastoral positions are abused".

Furthermore, DRTHABISO asserted that similar to the traditional custom of kings, in South Africa, individuals are not allowed to speak directly to kings and can only pass their messages through the king's designated mouthpieces. Likewise, in most Neo-Pentecostal Churches, leaders are highly revered and one of the ways the culture of reverence is sustained is by surrounding the church leaders with 'Protocol and Security' teams to maintain distance between leaders and members. As such common people have no easy access to their spiritual leaders; a situation which could strengthen leaders' sense of superiority and proclivity for lack of accountability. However, there are exceptions. MRMUSHI reported that post-apartheid monarchical practices in South Africa do not permit tax collection by kings. Rather, kings engage in fundraising activities to carry out projects. They can also sell land to farmers and businesspeople. Giving accounts to the kings' subjects or community is out of the question because the kings are the landowners. In addition, in the traditional practice of "Initiation", the Inyangas (traditional healers) and kings are responsible for the schools of initiations[4]. They collect approximately ZAR 2500 from the families of those who are to be initiated. The amount collected sometimes reaches millions of rand and these funds are not accounted for in the public space. Moreover, Zulus believe that the king never lies and cannot be questioned. In a way, whatever the kings claim regarding the funds is sacrosanct and they do not owe anybody an explanation. This applies to some ANPLs. Some deliverance and healing ministers charge members, as in the case of the Inyangas. Most ANPLs collect tithes and offerings, conduct fundraising for projects, and sell religious items such as anointing oil, water, and handkerchiefs. Regarding the collection amounts, they are accountable to God only and the finances of the church cannot be questioned by its members. Bishops, pastors, and prophets are seen as direct communicators with God and whatever they say is final. Although there may be cabinet members, such as in the case of kings or Board of Trustee members and elders appointed by the church leaders, they are simply 'rubber stamp appointees' and whatever the leaders say is final. Invariably,

there are similarities between the accountability of African traditional leaders and ANPLs in contemporary times.

PJOEL's account of Zimbabwe revealed that leaders are held accountable in established Pentecostal churches as they strive to put systems in place for accountability. Constitutionally, churches in Zimbabwe are expected to have BOTs that require transparency from their leaders. However, in some one-man ministries and equally traditional Apostolic churches where the leaders are seen as semi-divine beings, accountability is out of the question. Referring to a personal experience in South Africa, PJOSHUA cited a case where a female GO threatened to revoke her anointing from her associate when questioned on the poor welfare of associate ministers.

4.2. Respondents' Views on Church Ownership and Succession Planning

With 12 years of experience as a provincial head in the LFC (full name withheld), FOPSA alleged that the children of the GO are positioned for transgenerational leadership and that the GO's family runs all the church-owned schools as their personal enterprise. JOPSA alleged that the international headquarters is under the control of the GO's first son. Sadly, most bishops who were ordained ahead of the GO's son now report to him. The second son also controls international missions. Concomitantly, JEROCK claimed that the LFC was built as a family dynasty. Using the constitution of the LFC to substantiate his argument, JARCOK reported that the GO of the LFC claimed he was under God's instruction to copy the succession plan of an American preacher who transferred the church leadership to his son. Furthermore, CHUDAP claimed that some of the businesses that are run by Neo-Pentecostal churches were registered as belonging to individuals or companies with connections to the GOs, allowing church leaders to evade taxes by using the church as an umbrella for their personal businesses. However, ULOSA supported the dynasty or family business model, stating that "Public sentiment is irrelevant as long as the children of the GOs are qualified." IMROCK and SEGSA held the same view as ULOSA, but IMROCK later admitted that selfishness was one of the reasons that GOs retain leadership within their family.

For STAROON, the ministry should not be a family business but rather succession should be based on calling and family members should not be forced into leadership. Referring to Acts 7:27, STAROON noted that Moses was asked, 'Who made you a ruler over us?' Every man of God will answer this question. If a man's father forced him to be a church leader upon the father's passing, people will ask him, 'Who made you a ruler over us, is it your father or God?' STAROON strongly claimed that the case was different in the DCC because the GO's children were not in any church leadership position. Likewise, STARSOK's position was that 'the African monarchical systems among the ANPLs must be challenged. The idea of manipulating the church to ensure that an offspring of the GO becomes the next leader or president of the ministry is inappropriate. He agreed with STAROON that the case is different in the DCC. Regarding the Neo-Pentecostals in general, CHUDAP maintained that 'priesthood is not about inheritance in the New Testament'. The back-door arrangement of transferring leadership to the offspring of GOs is unacceptable. According to YAPP, "The belief that the church must be taken over by the GO's family is completely wrong . . . most times the work crashes in the hand of the son or wife after his demise." DAPSA also added that "Most Neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are built around powerful charismatic leaders who raise their children to protect the empire". Referencing late Bishop IDY (real name withheld), OLAUK stated, 'It is ethically incorrect to convert the church to a family asset. Likewise, lifetime headship of the church by a person or one family is unethical.' On a positive note, OLAUK cited the Redeemed Christian church of God (RCCG), where Pa Akindayomi handed over to Enoch Adeboye without any bloodline connections.

DRJULIUS acknowledged that South Africa's social development policies discourage personal ownership of church property. Upon dissolving an organisation, the property should be transferred to an existing like-minded organisation, but there have been breaches

of this policy among the ANPLs, which speaks volumes about their sense of accountability. This entitlement culture is akin to the African monarchical system, where the king is entitled to land ownership. DRJULIUS further noted the syncretic connection between the monarchical system and the Neo-Pentecostal succession plan, where some ANPLs have transferred leadership to their families in the last 40 years, just as in African monarchical leadership. Sometimes when the monarchical culture is ignored, church division ensues. The Christian Missionary Fellowship in Cameroon, founded by Prof Zacharias Tanee Fomum, is a perfect example of this. He did not hand over the church to his son or associates. Upon his demise, through his written will he handed over the church to an unknown missionary without any professorial pedigree, as commanded by God. Although crises and division ensued, the sons and daughters of the founder continued to work with the new, unpopular leader while their mother sided with the founder's former associates who believed that the traditional monarchical system afforded them the right to be appointed as successors. This confirms that not all Pentecostal leaders have a syncretic approach to ownership and succession planning.

For DRTHABISO, kingship in Africa runs genealogically, as it did in the days of David in the Bible. The same is applicable to most African independent and Pentecostal churches in South Africa. According to MRMUSHI, traditional leadership runs in the family. He observed that African traditional and Neo-Pentecostal churches have adopted the same succession plan. For example, the founder of the ZCC in Zimbabwe died and his son took over. Likewise, the leadership of the ZCC in South Africa was passed on to the late founder's son. Currently, the grandson is running the church. Another example is the family battle for leadership in the Shembe Church between Mduduzi and his uncle Vela Shembe in Kwazulu Natal. Among the ANPLs, an example is the current case of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) run by the Modise family. The founder died, handed it over to his son, and now the grandchildren of the founder have been taken to court regarding the church leadership. The case between Prince Simikade and King Misuzulu of the Zulu Kingdom is a similar example. Thus, it can be inferred that just as kings pass on their thrones and lands to their bloodlines, the same is mostly true among African Neo-Pentecostal churches.

PJOEL: In Zimbabwe, church leadership is passed down to the GO's children. In the NLCC in Zimbabwe, the son of the GO is currently the CEO of the church. The son might be the next successor pastorally. PJOSHUA argued for and against this, citing two examples. The first was the RCCG Nigeria, where PA Akindayomi handed over to Enoch Adeboye without a bloodline connection. The second was the case of the Church of God Mission in which Archbishop Idahosa's wife became the successor. In both examples, PJOSHUA argued that the succession plan was about what God said to the GO.

There were strong arguments among the respondents for and against family-based succession. There was also the belief that succession plans in African traditional leadership are genealogical. Although some ANPLs use this type of succession plan, it cannot be said that African monarchs borrowed the idea from ANPLs. The African monarchical custom of bloodline succession existed before the advent and proliferation of Christianity in Africa. Thus, it can be inferred that some ANPLs identified with their African monarchical heritage and incorporated it into church leadership, which was easy because in places such as America, from where most ANPLs find motivation and mentorship, keeping leadership within the family is common practice. Thus, there is a syncretic approach to leadership among the ANPLs in their succession plans. In conclusion, this hybridity may represent a benefit to the ANPLs and congregants. On the other hand, these benefits may not be without their challenges, especially regarding abuses of power. However, it is noteworthy that there are exceptions according to the testimonies of PJOSHUA, STAROCK, STAROON, and DRJULIUS.

4.3. Respondents' Views on Gerontocracy

There are opinions for and against gerontocracy in this subsection. DRJULIUS believed that older people had a stronger voice and an upper hand. In the patriarchal African tradition, fathers, men, and older people are accorded higher respect. The older one becomes, the better prepared he is to join community leaders such as chiefs, imams, and 'Lamidos', as in the case of Cameroon. These gerontocratic leaders are sometimes perceived as autocratic authorities in society. As a result, modern churches have adopted these gerontocratic principles from African traditions, which have both positive and negative implications. For example, some gerontocratic principles of leadership represent the virtues of communalism, liberalism, greater security, solidarity, and human dignity. Conversely, today, we have some Christian leaders, especially the ANPLs, who act like traditional chiefs and healers such as sangomas. Today's African church leaders are inspired by the kingship leadership style of traditional systems. MRMUSHI quoted a South African proverb that says, "grey hair is wealth," meaning that the elderly are regarded as wiser because of their life experiences; therefore they have an advantage when it comes to leading and guiding the younger generation. For example, the ZCC, a healing church that requires adherents to provide 24 h service to the church, has more pensioners as clergies and staff because younger people who are busy with money-making ventures are less likely to provide 24 h service to the church. This may be the philosophy behind gerontocracy. However, this is different for African Neo-Pentecostal churches, where young people are on the frontline and the prosperity gospel is at the forefront, making it easier for younger people to embrace. Today, we find so much corruption and crises in Neo-Pentecostal churches because of the popularity of younger leaders who are less committed to service than profit.

In the Zimbabwean context, PJOEL noted the dominance of the older generation in Neo-Pentecostal and African Independent churches. For example, in the AFM (full name withheld), the president, vice president, and Board members belonged to the older generation. Although younger members were being trained in Bible school and given branch churches to lead, the Board and church council were still dominated by the elders. However, in recent times, some churches have been trying to break from this gerontocratic system. This may take much longer than expected because of the traditional belief that the elders are wiser and better equipped for service. This syncretises with the African monarchical system, where the chiefs, elders, and counsellors to the throne are elders, even if the king is young. Lastly, in his 27 years as a Neo-Pentecostal leader, PJOSHUA has seen enough gerontocratic leadership. In the context of Nigeria, he presented a proverb that justifies the gerontocratic culture—"A big Cock does not allow a small Cock to crow." In other words, younger ministers are often silenced and dominated by older leaders. In a situation where a young minister has the elders' support to speak, there is most likely the benefit of Godfatherism. In such cases, the family members, blood relations, wealthy young persons, and ardent loyalists of the GO enjoy such privileges.

4.4. Respondents' Views on Healing

DRJULIUS asserted that the church believes in healing and miracles but that extremism in such practices can lead to abuse. Some ANPLs attribute the healing power to them being instruments of God. They assign to themselves the glory component of healing, which is naturally of God. Subsequently, to sustain the glory component, the ANPLs put insurmountable pressure on themselves to live up to expectations. Thus, they do everything possible to display consistent healing powers and miracles in church services. Today, most congregants are desperate for healing miracles, thereby increasing the pressure on the healers. Consequently, some healing and miracle evangelists and prophets now use traditional healing powers. It is then no surprise that they are affiliated with sangomas, black magic, and other diabolical means. Besides using these mediums, some use more sophisticated manipulations to fabricate fake miracles and healings to fill the demand gap and please crowds. Sadly, despite all the syncretic mediums applied, these healing and

miracle Christian leaders cannot live up to expectations because healing comes from God, not charismatic and manipulative methods. In addition, salvation is the ultimate healing.

DRTHABISO opined that South African Christian leaders administered healing and deliverance from traditional African knowledge before accepting Christianity. Upon the intervention of missionaries, they partially embraced some Western religious cultures but did not accept the obliteration of their African healing processes, which promote the sustenance of healing elements, including roots, water, oil, salt, honey, etc. For example, the founder of the ZCC was the son of a chief traditional healer. Although he adopted some of his father's practices such as healing and cleansing using water, he jettisoned the school of initiation. Yes, today's Christian leaders pray in the name of Jesus but concurrently appropriate healing the African way.

Furthermore, MRMUSHI claimed that the APNLs used oil, water, honey, and other items such as towels, handkerchiefs, etc. These practices are similar to African traditional healing processes. Most likely, the ANPLs used such healing methods to discourage their members from looking elsewhere for healing and miracles. Thus, some form of syncretism occurred between African traditions and African Neo-Pentecostalism in healing practices. Lastly, DRJACOB claimed that the ATR believed in the supreme being and spirits of the ancestors. Since many Africans are afraid of witchcraft activities and attacks, when they visit the sangoma (herbalist) they expect to obtain herbs and related elements to cast out evil spirits and witchcraft. This applies to African Neo-Pentecostal churches today. Africans believe that sicknesses and other misfortunes are not only physical but also spiritual. Therefore, both the ATR and ANPLs use elements that speak to the African worldview to provide healing services.

5. Discussion: Factors, Implications, and Critique

5.1. Factors

From the respondents' data, the factors aiding syncretic leadership among Neo-Pentecostal churches are categorised as cultural issues, African worldview, gerontocratic philosophy, and submissive theology. Each factor is discussed below.

5.1.1. Cultural Issues and Accountability

The respondents attested to the similarities between the ANPLs and African traditional leaders' culture of accountability. The question then is, which of these two adopted the practice from the other? It is a custom for African kings not to be accountable to their subjects, just as patriarchy in African families confers respect and authority to father figures. Thus, the kings could not have adopted such a custom from the ANPLs so it must be the other way around. In the final analysis, this hybridity may not represent benefits for the congregants and African society because of possible elements of abuse. Although there are exceptions according to the testimony of STAROON, STARSOK, and DRTHABISO, it is an abuse of power for leaders not to be held accountable to their members and society. Although this may be custom, as in the case of African monarchy, it raises the question of moral responsibility on the part of the ANPLs.

Correspondingly, two respondents associated the challenge of accountability among ANPLs with African culture. Firstly, STAROON opined that in African Neo-Pentecostalism, charisma sets the tone for the hero worship of GOs, which subsequently engenders autocratic decision making. A case in point is the deep-rooted hero worship in the Yoruba monarchical philosophy of 'Kabi-o-osi', a tradition that means that chiefs, fathers, spiritual leaders, and kings are unquestionable[5]. Similarly, the ANPLs are revered as unquestionable superhumans who function as intermediaries between adherents and God and are therefore accountable to no one except God. Such a philosophy creates a gap and encourages a proclivity for manipulation and the extortion of adherents. Thus, it may be challenging to hold leaders with unquestionable superhuman status accountable. When their authority goes unchecked, abuse is inevitable. STARSOK alluded that poverty further strengthens hero worship. In an environment of abject penury, few wealthy individuals are likely to attract

hero worship from the poor majority. With African monarchs and ANPLs surrounding them and their accumulated wealth, they can be easily idolised. Furthermore, Africans believe that kings, chiefs, imams, and pastors have spiritual powers and, therefore, must be revered, honoured, and dreaded. This disposition forms the basis of the non-offensive and non-confrontational approach of adherents, making it difficult to speak truth to power regarding accountability. This then raises questions about the benefits and challenges of syncretic leadership. This article holds that non-accountable leadership culture places a disadvantage on the hybridity of African traditions and African Neo-Pentecostal leadership.

5.1.2. African Worldview and Healing in African Neo-Pentecostalism

Africans have a rich spiritual worldview. They believe that they have a spiritual connection to their problems. Hence, they seek spiritual powers. They also think there are intermediaries between God and man who can help to solve their problems (see Mbiti 1976, pp. 75–78). For example, the priests in the African Traditional Religion (ATR) assist people with overcoming unemployment, barrenness, marital issues, and poverty, among others. Africans view these traditional doctors as having spiritual powers and who can provide services at a cost. These services have been adopted by some of the ANPLs. As Van den Torren succinctly stated, "In the African syncretic charismatic churches today, the man of God has replaced the witchdoctor" (Van den Torren 2015, p. 113). Thus, the African spiritual worldview has been integrated by the ANPL, who assert that adherents cannot access God without their mediation (Nyirongo 1997, pp. 51, 54). The question then is why did the ANPLs adopt the African worldview in their healing ministries?

The results revealed three reasons the ANPLs easily adopted syncretic healing processes. Firstly, the ANPLs' African identities suggest an affinity with African spiritual worldviews that subsequently influenced their healing ministrations. Secondly, protecting their churches from interdenominational or inter-religious "sheep stealing" encouraged the ANPLs to administer healing in an African way to avoid members looking elsewhere for healing. Thirdly, the quest to maintain self-glory by meeting the demands for healing, as noted earlier by DRJULIUS, allowed for the mix of divine healing and African traditional healing processes. In the final analysis, this hybridity comes with benefits and challenges. The use of herbs, roots, anointing oil, and related elements is not antithetical to the Christian faith. In other words, the hybridity of healing processes via the combination of herbal therapeutic elements and prayers in the name of Jesus is an appreciable development in African Neo-Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, there are two main challenges of this hybridity. One is the extremism of the hybrid healing process that involves human sacrifice and other questionable practices. There is no provision in the New Testament for such practices in the name of healing in the church. The second is the overdrive of healing and miracles practices, which leads to the commercialisation of the process. Selling handkerchiefs and anointing oil for outrageous prices or charging exorbitant fees for healing consultancy are now popular practices among some ANPLs and represent an abuse of the hybrid healing process in the church. Thus, caution and balance are imperative in the appropriation of hybrid healing ministries among the ANPLs.

5.1.3. Gerontocratic Philosophy

The respondents provided valid information that supports the hybrid leadership of ANPLs vis-a-vis African gerontocracy. Preference is often given to age and experience among some African Neo-Pentecostal mega-churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Church of God Missions, and the Winners Chapel, all with headquarters in Nigeria. Why did the ANPLs adopt the gerontocratic leadership style? Firstly, the ANPLs' African identities allow them to easily identify with the role of elders in leadership. Secondly, the custom of gerontocracy is an African philosophy. The proverb 'grey hair is wealth', provided earlier by MRMUSHI, represents this. In other words, African gerontocratic philosophy suggests that older people act from life experiences using ancient wisdom. The cornerstone of this idea is that elderly people are more committed to service

while young people are more committed to profit. Perhaps this is the reason the African monarchical Council of Thrones elders are expected to have such a high level of wisdom for their service. Additionally, this philosophy is common in West Africa. In the Yoruba context, it corresponds with the concept of "Omoluabi". Omoluabi can be simply interpreted as one with a virtuous character. Such virtues include courage, hard work, humility, and respect. In African gerontocratic societies, respect for and adherence to elders' decisions are considered the ultimate virtues of an Omoluabi. Subsequently, the concept confers traditional civility upon an Omoluabi and allows the recipient of an Omoluabi's civility disposition (an elder) to enjoy the privilege of supremacy and honour. Thus, most West Africans, especially Nigerians, adopt the posture of an Omoluabi when interacting with elders, kings, chiefs, and spiritual leaders, including the ANPLs. This disposition allows for the easy adoption of gerontocracy by the ANPLs because it facilitates submission to their spiritual authority in the church.

In conclusion, this hybridity represents an appreciable benefit to the ANPLs and the Christian community. It makes leadership less stressful and equal adherence easier within the missional setting. Additionally, adopting the African gerontocratic leadership philosophy allows for quality service and wisdom-aided decision making among the ANPLs. However, one challenge of this hybridity may be the potential for extremism, which can have two outcomes. The first is the propensity for authoritarianism and the second is the tendency to ignore the contributions of the younger generation. Thus, caution becomes imperative for the ANPLs when using gerontocratic leadership.

5.1.4. Submissive Theology

The doctrine of spiritual authority is a major tool for exploitation and the abuse of human rights among the ANPLs (Orogun and Pillay 2022, pp. 1–28). This doctrine is synonymous with submissive theology. According to Olaniyan (2009, pp. 88–89), religious leaders secure undeserved advantages when they adopt titles such as Bishop, Reverend, Imam, Prophet, and Alhaji or alhaja (titles obtained after a pilgrimage to Mecca). In Fela's opinion, the conferment of these titles can lead to exploitative practices and submission to religious authorities. According to Fela, the two religions (Christianity and Islam) were founded on submissive theologies) that allow religious leaders to exploit their followers for economic gain, a practice he classified as capitalistic (Olaniyan 2009, p. 89; Moore 2009, p. 47). He called these religious leaders 'profiteering businessmen of God' who indoctrinated congregants to believe that absolute submission to church leadership was a condition for wealth and blessings. With such a submissive theology, followers were psychologically manipulated to hold the view that it was not their place to demand accountability from their religious leaders (Orogun 2020, p. 166). Besides Fela's thoughts, the syncretic relationship between the ANPLs and the African monarchical leadership contributed to the spread of submissive theology in Africa. Africans assumed the posture of submission to kings, chiefs, lamidos, and community leaders, a submissive practice that can confer a status of unquestionability on African traditional and religious leaders. As most respondents opined, the ANPLs are unquestionable because they are seen as being closer to God and are therefore not subject to scrutiny. Lumumba (2015) acknowledged that, consequently, it may be very difficult to curb this belief because when leaders invoke the name of God the congregation is frozen, the people are powerless, and the interrogation of the leadership becomes more difficult. The question then is, what motivates the ANPLs to propagate submissive theology? The ANPLs' theology found common ground in African views such as gerontocratic philosophy and the Kabi-o-osi and Omoluabi concepts. Thus, it can be inferred that ANPLs' submissive theology was not founded solely on biblical theology but also on the hybridity of African culture and religious tenets.

5.2. Implications

This article categorises the implications of syncretic leadership among the Neo-Pentecostals as theological, socio-economic, legal, and transgenerational using the respondents' data. Each implication is briefly discussed below.

5.2.1. Economic Implications

As discussed earlier in the section 'African Worldview and Healing in African Neo-Pentecostalism', the hybridity of ANPLs and African traditional healing processes has both benefits and challenges. Despite the good and appreciable benefits of healing, the potential for extremism and the overdrive of healing and miracles activities can lead to the commercialisation of the process. It can also have economic implications for healing recipients. For example, selling handkerchiefs, holy water, honey, and anointing oil for outrageous prices or charging exorbitant fees for healing consultancy can lead to not only the abuse of the hybrid healing advantage but also the economic exploitation of healing recipients.

5.2.2. Social Implications

Earlier, this article noted the benefits of ANPLs' hybrid leadership vis-a-vis succession plans. However, this hybridity also has some challenges, one of which is social in nature. MRMUSHI, DRJOSHUA, DRJULIUS, and DRTHABISO attested to family division and communal disharmony following issues emanating from accountability, transparency, church ownership, and succession plans. MRMUSHI cited the example of a succession battle in the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC), where there was a family battle for leadership in the Shembe Church between Mduduzi and Vela Shembe, his uncle in Kwazulu Natal. DRJULIUS also cited the example of a Pentecostal church called the Christian Missionary Fellowship in Cameroon, where the founder's family has been divided because of a succession plan. In addition, MRMUSHI stated that in recent times, nothing has divided the church more than money or financial matters. In various communities, money has divided kings, chiefs, and families. Similarly, when the ANPLs are financially unaccountable or when the BOT members and related stakeholders disagree with the leadership style of the ANPLs on financial matters, it can lead to social tension and divisions among the Christian community.

5.2.3. Transgenerational Development Implications

This relates to the development of future leaders. Although some respondents agreed that syncretic gerontocracy is good for the church, others argued that it has the potential to limit the capacity and development of the younger generation of leaders. As PJOSHUA stated, "A big Cock does not allow a small Cock to crow," implying that giving preference to elders in all cases may have developmental implications. The older generation is likely to maintain traditions, whereas the younger generation may opt for change. The question then is whether the church wants to only maintain traditions or consider a hybrid of tradition and change. Since change through innovation can engender development, when innovative young ministers are not trained and offered opportunities for leadership, church underdevelopment and the proliferation of traditional practices can easily occur. Moreover, the younger generation is the future of the church. Any form of extremism in gerontocratic leadership can affect the successful development of future leaders.

5.2.4. Legal Implications

In a recent article, it was argued with empirical evidence that some Neo-Pentecostal leaders have abused adherents sexually, physically, economically, and emotionally (Orogun and Pillay 2022, pp. 1–28). Likewise, the respondents suggested that extremism in the spiritual authority or submissive theology of some ANPLs may engender abusive behaviour. FOPSA strongly believed that most projects and church businesses registered in the name of the General Overseer and their family members were financed through fundraising during

church services, with the initial manipulative message that these businesses belonged to the church and that all members were entitled to share the benefits. JOPSA seconded the allegation and claimed that it was a form of larceny and criminal behaviour. In his words, 'The schools were not started as private or personal schools, they are institutions built from church funds and the highest givers are the poor within the church whose children cannot afford such schools' (see Orogun 2020, pp. 177–80). Correspondingly, Falaye and Okanlawon alleged larceny and criminal conversion via the personalisation of church schools (see Okanlawon 2018, p. 37; Falaye 2017, pp. 3–4). Besides church-owned schools, there could be other areas where larceny and criminal conversion are prevalent. The testimony of CHUDAP was that some ANPLs registered their businesses under the church's name, thereby evading taxes. This practice contravenes tax laws and questions the legality of the ANPLs' registered businesses. DRJULIUS noted the government policies for NGOs in South Africa, where it is expected that church leaders will separate church ownership from the General Overseer's personal businesses or investments. Sadly, some ANPLs do not comply with these regulations. Thus, the adoption of the African monarchical principle of ownership by the ANPLs may conflict with existing laws.

5.3. Critique

The goal of this section is to assess African Neo-Pentecostal hybrid leadership through the lens of Jesus's leadership, focusing on the four variables: accountability, succession plans, gerontocracy, and healing.

5.3.1. Accountability and Transparency

In the previous section, it was established that hybrid leadership regarding accountability can have economic, legal, and social implications. Indeed, having authority without accountability can be disastrous. Wiersbe noted that many Christian leaders enjoy the authority and prestige of office and forget about the "tremendous responsibility and accountability" (Wiersbe 1982, p. 358). The hero worship and superhuman status, which confer unquestionable authority on the ANPLs, seem to conflict with Jesus's views. In Matthew 12:36, the clause of accountability excluded no one and stated that 'everyone will have to give account' (NIV). Thus, Jesus recognised accountability as one of the fundamental qualities of leadership. In addition, the feeding of five thousand people provides a good case study of accountable leadership, as demonstrated in Matthew 14:13–21, Mark 6:31–44, Luke 9:12–17, and John 6:1–14. In this scenario, the disciples accounted for the 12 baskets of food that were left over after everyone had been fed. This implies that the disciples may have learnt the idea of accountability by keeping records of budget surplus (12 Baskets) and not letting food go to waste under the leadership of Jesus. Thus, accountability may not be excluded from Jesus's view of responsible leadership. Similarly, regarding watchfulness, in Luke 12:48, Jesus stipulated that to whom responsibility is given, commensurate accountability will be required.

By inference, providing answers to questions from church adherents in all areas of church management may not be antithetical to Jesus's philosophy of accountable leadership. There is no scriptural provision that exonerates leaders from accountability, and likewise, there is no scriptural verse that contradicts adherents' demands for records. It is incontrovertible to infer that accountability is a responsibility and not a choice. With this background, ANPLs need to be cautious when blending missional accountability with African traditional systems of kings, elders, and related patriarchal ideas.

5.3.2. Ownership and Succession Planning

In the previous sections, the challenges of hybridity vis-a-vis ownership and succession planning were discussed extensively. All the associated legal, social, and economic challenges are driven by extremism. However, when there is a commitment to responsible leadership, the benefits of hybrid succession planning to ANPLs can be enormous. Some respondents' views validated the benefits of hybrid leadership in succession planning. They

strongly agreed that God's call was the most acceptable yardstick for selecting ministry successors and that if ANPLs' family members were qualified by this calling, there was nothing wrong with the idea. The involvement of Jesus's family in the New Testament provides a good case study. Bible scholars identified James, Joses, Simon, and Jude as the brothers of Jesus in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 (see Lovorn 2011). Three views have been advanced by scholars on the siblings of Jesus: that they are his actual siblings, his stepbrothers, or his cousins (Bibleinfo 2023; Lovorn 2011). In all these views, the underlying idea is that they are members of Jesus's family. This case study reveals that Jesus's family members were not strangers to his ministry. For example, Jesus's mother and brothers accompanied him to Capernaum after the marriage at Cana in John 2:12. In Acts 1:14 they were all present when the Holy Spirit came upon believers at Pentecost. Much later, Jesus appeared after his resurrection to his brother James, which led to his conversion in 1 Corinthians 15:7, and by the middle of the first Christian century, James had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:18–19 and 2:9). Paulson (2023) in his reference to James 1:1 called James the chief spokesman for the Jerusalem church in addition to the fact that he was the author of the book of James. Jude also wrote a book in the New Testament as documented in Jude 1:1. These examples reveal that in the ministry of Jesus on Earth, his family members were not excluded from leadership responsibility, just as the African tradition of succession planning prioritizes family members' participation. Therefore, the adoption of the African model of succession planning by the ANPLs is in line with Jesus's model of leadership. However, caution against extremism needs to be taken to avoid the abuse of privilege in leadership. The family of Jesus presents a good example, as there are no records to show that his brothers abused any privileges. James, in particular, was seen as a wise man of inestimable value to the church of Jerusalem.

5.3.3. Gerontocracy

A few respondents asserted that gerontocracy was advantageous. Conversely, others believed that it promoted the exclusion of the younger generation from leadership roles. Whether the respondents spoke for or against it, the key factor here is balance. The Bible in Lev 19:32, Job 12:12 and 1kings 12:6 recognises the role and the wisdom of the elders in the church. Interestingly, Jesus's brother, who heads the Jerusalem church, was called Elder James. However, Jesus's principle of inclusion created a space for the younger generation. The word "children" that is used in Mark 10:13–16 can pass for a description of the younger generation. Jesus forbade the disciples (elders personified) from hindering the younger generation. He also debunked thoughts that undervalued or underutilised the younger generation, as he asked the elders (disciples), "Who is the greatest?" and addressed their hierarchical mindset with his words, "Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1–5, NIV). Thus, in some cases, age may not necessarily be an advantage in kingdom service. In this sense, hybrid leadership via gerontocracy is valuable but it must not exclude the participation of the younger generation.

5.3.4. Healing and Miracles

It was argued earlier that hybrid leadership in the context of healing by the ANPLs was a welcome development. The use of elements such as water, salt, oil, and honey was easy because the ANPLs adopted the African worldview. Interestingly, this is consistent with Jesus's healing ministry. In John 9:6–7, Jesus used mud mixed with saliva and water to administer healing. In addition, in Luke 4:40 he performed healing through the laying of hands. James, the brother of Jesus who was assumed to understand the ministry of Jesus, called for the use of oil to anoint the sick alongside the prayer of faith (James 5:4). These three scenarios indicate that using elements such as soil or mud, saliva, honey, or water alongside prayers of faith in the name of Jesus is a biblical practice. With this background, the hybridisation of African healing processes, especially the use of herbal therapeutic procedures alongside prayers by the ANPLs, is appreciable. However, caution must be taken against extremism, especially the adoption of practices such as human sacrifice in

the name of healing. Just as Moreau observed, the ANPLs must avoid the "dilution of the essential gospel truths due to the incorporation of non-Christian elements" (Moreau 2000, p. 924).

6. Final Remarks

Since it has been established that hybrid leadership has both benefits and challenges that require caution, how can the ANPLs appropriate it with caution? The four variables representing the four areas of leadership in the context of this article require caution. This article suggests that being cautious means responsibly applying or appropriating hybrid leadership. The first point of caution is to set *boundaries* against extremism. This article submits that ANPLs cannot go wrong with creating boundaries. Consequently, legal implications such as larceny and criminal conversion can easily be avoided. In addition to setting boundaries, a *heart of service* is imperative for exercising caution. When leaders have a heart of service, service comes to the fore and self-centredness takes a back seat, making it difficult to assume the posture of extremism. In Matthew 20:20–28, Jesus presented the heart of service as a core value of responsible leadership. When hybrid leadership is approached from the perspective of servant leadership, the proclivity to commercialise healing or extort and exploit subscribers or adherents can be avoided. Likewise, taking the posture of a servant will naturally help the ANPLs to see the younger generation differently, not as those with less wisdom and capacity, but as those to be nurtured, supported, and empowered over time. The third point of caution is that the ANPLs should always *subject every hybridisation process to a moral question*. For example, when blending prayers with African traditional healing processes, the moral question could be a scale for evaluating actions such as human sacrifice. Jesus's context is also very important when responding to moral questions. For example, in Matthew 5:21, Jesus restated the Old Testament law of "Thou shall not kill." This instruction provides a scale for measuring the syncretic participation of ANPLs in any healing process that requires human sacrifice. Finally, in these three points of caution, the denominator is balance. Hybrid leadership can never go wrong with a balanced approach. The quest for balance can help to overcome the proclivity for extremism.

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Notes

1. Historically, Neo-Pentecostalism emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, but here, it refers to the newer African versions from the 1980s to date. These include the faith and miracle, prophetic, healing, and deliverance movements in Africa. Note that these newer African versions are categorised as classical, contemporary, and paradigm Neo-Pentecostal churches (Orogun 2020, pp. 10–11, 24–25).
2. Submissive theology is a concept of religious manipulation, where religious leaders coax their followers into blind adherence, which rejects independent thought or decision making informed by intellectual reasoning. This concept emerged from the Pan-African philosophical consciencism of Fela Anikulapo, who suggested that Christianity and Islam were foreign religions used by their leaders (Arabs and Westerners) to suppress Africans' capacity to reason and fight against modern slavery. In his opinion, the two religions use the concept of Arabisation and Westernisation in collaboration with African associates through a subjugating theology to sustain modern slavery in Africa. He further claimed that these African associates included pastors

and imams who use their titles and positions to secure advantages to silence the masses in the face of colonial and post-colonial oppression (see Olaniyan 2009, pp. 88–89).

[3] General Overseer is the self-conferred title by the founding or presiding leaders of African Neo-Pentecostal churches, especially in South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana. It is to some degree a position of supremacy, authority, and command. In some cases, it leads to authoritarianism.

[4] A system of initiating young people into adulthood in a traditional way.

[5] Kabi-o-osi is the etymological root word for 'Kabiyesi' in the Yoruba language of western Nigeria. Kabiyesi is the name given to kings, whereas the root 'kabi-o-osi' is the functional definition of the name. Kabi-o-osi means 'you are unquestionable'. By implication, kings, leaders, fathers, and all men and women in positions of authority cannot be questioned or challenged. They are semi-divine beings whose actions are justified in their own rights.

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Uncovering Covert Syncretic Holy Water among ANPCs in South Africa

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Abstract: In most societies where Christianity is dominant, it has manifested itself in different ways, reflecting its admixture with indigenous religious practices, an admixture commonly seen in most African contexts. This is evidenced by overt syncretic practices and rarely covert syncretic practices that conceal the blending of beliefs, including belief in the mystical powers of water. In part, this explains why African Christian believers, particularly African Pentecostal believers in most African countries, often uncritically believe claims about holy water. To that end, this article examines the literature to uncover the existence of covert syncretic holy water in African Neo-Pentecostal Churches (ANPC), particularly in South Africa, where ANPC pastors make arbitrary claims about the power of holy water. Contrary to the apparent syncretism, claims about holy water as witnessed among ANPCs in South Africa, covertly combine elements of two belief systems (ancient African traditions and contemporary African Christianity), resulting in covert syncretic holy water. As little or no literature understands the covert syncretic holy water, the work of this paper warrants future research to further examine the covert syncretic holy water, particularly in relation to ANPC holy water claims.

Keywords: pentecostalism; Neo-Pentecostal Churches; African traditional beliefs; Christian beliefs; covert syncretic holy water

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1. Introduction

Syncretism constitutes an important, but controversial, research topic throughout the religious space and especially in theology, as it manifests itself in the realm of the Christian religion in relation to other indigenous religions. Consequently, or as a result, there is a very extensive literature on the subject of syncretism, especially in host communities where Christianity is dominant. The importance of syncretism in the religious space is clearly shown by scholars such as Ringgren (1969, pp. 1–14), Baird (2004, pp. 48–58), Pandian (2006, pp. 229–33), Leopold and Jensen (2016), and many others, who have shown great interest in the study of its nature. Similarly, in terms of the Christian faith, several scholars such as Gort (1989), Schreiter (1993, pp. 50–53), Zehner (2005, pp. 585–617), and Chung (2001) emphasized its manifestation in different geographic areas, while Berner (2001), Stewart (1999, 2016), Ezenweke and Kanu (2012, pp. 71–84), and Nel (2018) underlined its manifestation in Southern Africa. Umoh (2013, pp. 32–40), Mofokeng (2021, pp. 75–98), and Masuku (2021, p. 3) underscored it in terms of African Initiated Churches (AICs), while, correspondingly, Anderson (2001, pp. 98–119) and Kgatle (2023, pp. 1–9) described its manifestations in the African Neo-Pentecostal Churches (ANPCs) area in the South Africa.

Although the scholars listed above have done exceptional work in describing syncretism in its various manifestations, there is still an opportunity to explore relatively unexplored territory related to covert syncretic holy water. In contrast with what one might term 'overt syncretism' or overt syncretic practices, which are often obvious and take place in full view, covert syncretism or syncretic practices are either intentionally or unintentionally obscured. Put simply, covert syncretic practices, unlike overt syncretic practices, are neither overtly practiced nor imperceptible to the eye and thus often fall

through the cracks of scholarship. To this end, this article attempts to unearth the covert syncretic holy water in African New Pentecostal Churches (ANPC), particularly in South Africa, where ANPC pastors have been known to make arbitrary claims about holy water. In this paper, syncretism refers broadly to the integration between indigenous religious practices with the teachings and practices of Christianity. As such, it is used here to help describe how the African religious approach to the importance of water finds a syncretic expression in the use or understanding of holy water by NPC leaders in South Africa. In other words, this paper will attempt to show how traditional African belief in the power of water covertly presents itself or is integrated into the holy water claims by ANPC pastors in several African countries, but particularly in South Africa.

This paper consists of approximately six subtopics, each geared towards exploring covert syncretistic holy water as often witnessed within or on the basis of ANPC claims in South Africa. First, the broad definition of syncretism is provided, or appropriately presented, to set the stage for the discussion of covert syncretism. Second, the spiritual significance of water in general and sacred water in the context of African religions is presented. Third, the symbolic spiritual significance of water is similarly considered in the context of, or emphasized in, the Christian religion. Fourth, the concept of living water is considered in relation to both traditional African religions and Christian biblical accounts. Fifth, and, accordingly, the account of Jesus Christ turning water into wine is considered in more detail, as it arguably identifies the use of water as the first and dominant feature in the miracle narrative. Sixth and, finally, the idea of holy water is presented as it relates to various religious traditions including African Initiated Churches (AICs) and African Neo-Pentecostal Churches (ANPC), among others, culminating in the conceptualization of covert syncretic holy water.

2. Syncretism

Although the definition of syncretism can be a well-known phenomenon that is monotonously repeated, it is important that its basic understanding is expressed here in a manner consistent with the direct scope of this paper. Broadly speaking, syncretism describes the reflective or covert process by which particular cultural and religious practices are constituted at a particular point in their existence. According to Baerman (2007), syncretism occurs whenever multiple practices are collapsed into a single pattern, resulting in a unique practice (Baerman 2007, p. 539). According to Ezenweke and Kanu (2012) the concept of syncretism can broadly be traced back to the ancient custom or practice called 'syncretismos' (Greek), which involved people living on the island of Crete who, although often fighting among themselves, joined forces to fight their foreign enemy (Ezenweke and Kanu 2012, p. 73). This is in the region of what Madsen (1967) would see as a process of acculturation manifesting itself or resulting in a new form of culture (Madsen 1967, p. 369). Somewhat complexm yet linguistically simple, Hill (1999) used words such as borrowing and code-switching to describe syncretism as a process of borrowing or code-switching between practices, particularly religio-cultural practices (Hill 1999, p. 244). Similarly, but more from a religious perspective, Kamstra (1970) defined syncretism as referring the 'coexistence of elements foreign to each other within a specific religion, whether or not these elements originate in other religions or for example in social structures' (Kamstra 1970, p. 10). Peel (1968) appeared to be hitting the nail on the head with his description, which suggests that syncretism describes what happens when people abandon their previous religion for a new one and end up mixing old with new beliefs (Peel 1968, p. 121).

In accordance with the above briefly reviewed collection of literature, in this article, syncretism refers broadly to a process of hybridization, cultural borrowing, or blending of doctrines within the religious space that encompasses Christianity and African religious concepts. This intermixture is considered purely for its manifestation as opposed to being considered on the basis of its authenticity or lack thereof. With the increasing claims about holy water in Pentecostalism, particularly in the New Prophetic Churches (ANPC) in South Africa, there is a significant need to reflect on the hybridization or syncretism that

continues to manifest within the use of holy water. What should be emphasized, however, is that this article theorizes a form of syncretism encompassing the concept of holy water, without commenting on the benevolence, suitability, or unscrupulousness of such a mixture. Consequently, the intent behind this theory is to support attempts to articulate reasons why most Africans, particularly South Africans within ANPCs, are easily tricked into believing claims about holy water.

3. Overt and Covert Syncretism

As outlined above, much work has been done on the concept or manifestation of syncretism, but it remains characterized by inherent complexities, which prevent its full understanding. Perhaps what complicates it is the fact that it encompasses multiple dimensions and practices, which make it difficult to understand. Accordingly, any exploration of syncretistic practices, regardless of the complexity involved, usually begins with the obvious (overt syncretism) and then moves on to what remains hidden, or what might be termed covert syncretism. In other words, overt syncretism is the premise that enables the discovery of covert syncretistic practices, which subsequently evolve into overt syncretism.

The mere fact that there is a practice called syncretism does much to support the apparent existence of what may be termed overt syncretism. Although syncretism has been introduced above, it remains necessary at this point to describe or define somewhat fully what exactly is meant by overt syncretism as the precursor of covert syncretism. Overt syncretism refers to a process in which syncretic practices, or the intermingling of religious beliefs as it were, occurs in an explicit or blatantly recognizable fashion. In other words, particularly in the context or domain of religion, open syncretism openly acknowledges the reality of intermingling beliefs or practices, to the point where a distinct hybrid system has emerged. This is often characterized, among other things, by the visible or easily recognizable presence of different religious symbols and the visible performance of different religious rituals within a single religious framework. However, as discussed below, in contrast with overt syncretistic practices, covert syncretism is extremely complex as it tends to be characterized by intense abstruseness.

Covert syncretism refers to a case where syncretic practices or beliefs are intentionally or unintentionally, as it were, hidden from perceptible scrutiny. In most cases, the driving factors behind covert syncretism are either the intentional preservation or unintentional maintenance of indigenous cultural beliefs or practices that find inaudible expression in mainstream belief practices. In other words, the integration of different beliefs or covert syncretic belief practices, so to speak, are obscured either intentionally or unintentionally. On the one hand, when the concealment of such practices is intended, knowledge of their presence is strictly limited to an individual, a select few, or a secret group. In a hypothetical scenario involving a church founded by an individual, they would then choose to either solemnly keep the secrecy of such a practice to themselves or share it with an intimate partner. In another hypothetical scenario involving a cult or closed group, secrecy is then revealed to the select few who have proven themselves worthy or have shown unwavering loyalty to a group's founders. However, when the concealment of such practices is unintentional, the intermingling of belief practice is effective but remains imperceptible to the practitioner, be it the initiator or the follower. Covert syncretism, then, is either a carefully guarded or an entirely unknown blending of religious beliefs and practices that are not openly revealed to outsiders or at times understood by its practitioners. Such blended beliefs or practices, thus, become a subculture, working discreetly towards maintaining a unique identity and intentionally or unintentionally remaining hidden from scrutiny.

4. African Religions and Water

In any literature review that cites ancient beliefs about or practices relating to the use of water, it is unreservedly recognized that ancient cultures appear to have valued it far more than modern societies. This is more akin to what Laborde and Jackson (2022) tried to recall by reciting Hamlin's (2000) argument, albeit in relation to European societies,

that pre-modern European societies were somewhat richer in vocabulary expressing the value of water than new generations (Hamlin 2000, p. 313; Laborde and Jackson 2022, p. 359). Similarly, the manner in which Africans have historically maintained a spiritual connection to various aspects of creation, including water, has been a major subject of study in African literature for many years (Gumo et al. 2012; Olupona 2000). Historically, and more generally, Africans worship water in all its guises, not only because it remains a scarce, essential commodity, but because it exists in the spirit world sphere with magical properties used in various ritual ceremonies involving purification or cleansing, baptism, bestowing of blessings, and revitalization, among others.

Consequently, or perhaps as Panyin Hagan (2020) maintained, most African cultures accept the spiritual importance of water, such that its absence in the form of droughts, lack of rain, or even dying rivers is interpreted to mean or suggest the spiritual absence of the supreme being in such respective human community (Panyin Hagan 2020, p. 2). Similarly, or to emphasize how the constant presence of the divine is symbolized by the presence of water, Müller and Kruger (2013) suggested that for Africans, the presence of water signifies a form of continuity linking creation's past and present (Müller and Kruger 2013, p. 143). What is underscored here is that, for most African cultures, the continued presence of water signifies the continued life of creation, or, at best, a sign of how God continues to breathe life into His creation. Actually, this very fact is noted by Panyin Hagan (2020), stating 'African cultures characterise water, by virtue of its life-giving nature, as both physical and spiritual in essence—but even of greater spiritual utility than physical' (Panyin Hagan 2020, p. 2). This explains in large part why the San people of southern Africa ensured the continued provision of water by performing the rain-making ritual in special locations for many centuries in the history of their existence (Lewis-Williams 1980, pp. 471–73).

Consistent with the above logic regarding the natural elemental use or perspective of water in Africa, it is more likely that the spiritual significance of water or teachings about it will be assimilated into African religiosity in a syncretistic mode, or, at best, play an integral part in the imagination of most African Christians. In other words, or at least as remains to be seen in relation to ANPC devotees, regardless of how many thousands of years this water-related spirituality existed, Christians of African descent often tapped into such spiritual remains when performing rituals or encountering holy water claims. Such devotees, whether in the form of ANPC leaders or mere followers, would almost immediately believe that water has spiritual magical properties or supernatural functions appropriately intended to fit any human trials.

5. Christianity and Water

Right from the onset of the Old Testament in the book of Genesis, the essential presence of water as a component of life wherein it is stated 'The Earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters' (Genesis 1:2). The multiple mentions of water right at the beginning of time seem to somehow envision water as a dominant element in God's creation, or at least as having some sacred significance in relation to creation. This is then followed by multiple Old Testament instances where God is portrayed as using water as a key symbolic element of spiritual life or in connection with the miracle of salvation. Among such instances of water being used in conjunction with miracles of salvation is the Great Flood of Genesis 7 where water was used to remove human corruption and consequently bring about redemption of Noah's household. Similarly, at the Red Sea in Exodus, water is again used to destroy the Egyptians, while at the same time saving the Israelites from Pharaoh (Exodus 14:1–31). Comparably, during the crossing of the Jordan River as described in the Book of Joshua, the water is cut off to allow the Israelites to cross safely (Joshua 3:4). As will be seen in the case of the New Testament, water was used metaphorically in the Old Testament to symbolize either holiness or some sort of impurity, particularly in connection with the credible presence of God. An example of this is in the book of Chronicles, wherein shortly after David was anointed king over Israel, he began longing to drink specific water saying

'Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate' (Chronicles 11:17). Consequently, when three mighty Philistines brought it to him he refused drinking it saying, 'Far be it from be before my God that I should do this. Shall I drink the lifeblood of these men? For at the risk of their lives they brought it' (Chronicles 11:19). The fact that water brought to David was from the very place he requested, but he refused to drink it due to the impurity associated with the Philistines as idol worshipers and fortune tellers (1 Samuel:1–5; Isaiah 2:6), in many ways speaks to the extraordinary spiritual element of water or its usage.

In the Christian New Testament, at the very beginning of Christ's earthly ministry, the use of water is mentioned again when John baptizes Jesus and proclaimed the imminence of God's kingdom (John 1:29–34; Matthew 3:13–17). Although Matthew 3:11 is less inclined to suggest that water itself has a sacred element, his emphasis on a baptism with water for repentance recognized its purity or spiritual significance. As a result, Christian baptism and its execution have been characterized almost exclusively by the constant use of water to this day. Beyond the point of baptism, about three of the four Gospels correspondingly records the famous miracle of Jesus walking on the water of the Sea of Galilee during a storm (Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–52; John 6:16–21). On the last day of the feast, Jesus Christ once more revealed the spiritual significance of water in a figurative way, saying 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"' (John 7:37–38). As a result, water has been used in a variety of metaphorical ways in the New Testament as is the case in the Old Testament scriptures to symbolize sacred processes such as salvation, eternal life, and even spiritual purification associated with the holy presence of God (Hebrews 10:22; Revelations 22:1, 2, 6, 17). Therefore, for this purpose, consistent with its biblical characteristics, it can be argued that water possesses at least two characteristics, wherein first it has powers to destroy, as demonstrated through the flood account (Genesis 6: 17) and the flight of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 14:1–15:21). Considering the biblical view of water, both in the Old and New Testaments, it is clear that the Bible writers sought to give some importance to the spirituality associated with the use of water. Consequently, or at least in relation to the Christian tradition, water plays an important spiritual role, whether in relation to salvation, baptism, miracles, or generally for multi-spiritual functions well beyond its superficial and natural purposes.

6. The Living Water(s)

In Christianity, as in traditional African religions, the term living water depicts a metaphor of spiritual sustenance or a life-giving symbolism. While in Christianity the living water describes the eternal spiritual life that Jesus Christ gave and can give to believers, in traditional African religions, it is assumed that waters such as lakes, rivers, and springs also have life-giving ancestral spirits. In this way, the concept of living water has a profoundly life-giving meaning in both Christianity and traditional African religions. Furthermore, to the extent that water plays an important role in the fertility of fields and plants, and provides much-needed nutrients for the human body, and it is seen in many cultures as a symbol of life itself; hence, the broad term living water. As correctly noted by several scholars including but not limited to Avidar (2018), almost all human cultures on the African continent share the sentiments underscored by the phrase 'water is life' (Avidar 2018, p. 1; Chitata et al. 2023). Referring to it as being among Arab proverbs, Hoffman (2019) restated 'The Arab saying "water is life' is truism—without water you die"' (Hoffman 2019, p. 2). The understanding here is that water not only sustains life, be it in plants or human bodies, but it signifies a natural resource from which life originates. Resonating with this understanding, Laborde and Jackson (2022) recited the profound words Deborah Bird Rose who once remarked that 'indigenous people engage with water as a type of kin. Not only is it the source of life, or a resource for life, it is also another form of life itself' (Laborde and Jackson 2022, p. 360). Not surprisingly, then, scholars such as Bernard (2013) have written excellent articles on the concept of living water as understood from the perspective

of South African Nguni healing traditions, which mention mythical underwater serpents or mermaids associated with sacred water (Bernard 2013, pp. 138–49). Similarly, Panyin Hagan (2020) argues that Africans have the general mind-set or conviction that water connects the Supreme Being with all the living things, which includes but is not limited to human beings. As if seeking to substantiate this even further, he mentions 'In the African mind, drought, unfavourable patterns of rainfall, famine and the conflicts that result from these are the consequences of the individual and collective moral and spiritual offences that humans commit against nature and the Supreme Being' (Panyin Hagan 2020, p. 2). Undoubtedly, or at least as shall be seen, this very indigenous concept of living water is becoming dominant in the way African Christians see water, or at best influencing their attitudes towards the use of what is claimed to be the 'living water' in spiritual circles.

In the context of Christianity, the notion of living water underscores water as a symbol of salvation, encompassing the true knowledge of the triune God composed of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, the living water symbolizes the ceaseless salvation or everlasting life that God continually bestows on believers—the Christian community by implication. In the Old Testament, particularly in the Book of Jeremiah, he metaphorically identified God the Father (Yahweh) at least twice as the source of living water. In either case, the Israelites are rebuked for forsaking the Lord for other cisterns that could in no way quench their spiritual thirst (Jer 2:13; 17:13). In the New Testament, this is equally demonstrated in John, where Jesus has a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well and metaphorically speaks of His salvation as living water and as 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (John 4:10–15). Likewise, the understanding of Jesus Christ as the source of life is further strengthened in the seventh chapter, where it says 'Rivers of living water shall flow from his belly' (John 7:38). In this regard, the belly from which flows the living water or eternal life belongs to Jesus Christ and is given to Christian believers or to humanity in general (Schnackenburg 1968, pp. 153–54). Furthermore, the symbol of the living water is used in relation to the Holy Spirit in a manner similar to how it is used symbolically in relation to Jesus Christ. In fact, Christ's mention of rivers of living water as recorded at John 7:37–39 referred partly to his presence as a symbol of eternal life and partly to the coming of the Holy Spirit. In this way he sought to identify or relate the streams of living water flowing from within his followers or those who believed in him to the constant presence of the coming Holy Spirit. As a result, many scholars view water and Spirit together, drawing a connection between them. This is as a result of the symbolic use of water as being representative of the Holy Spirit in several scriptures (De Gruchy 2010; Johnson 1995).

Consequently, it can be argued that, in relation to the concept of living water, there has come an intertwining of Western Christian culture and the indigenous African cultural elements, which remain inextricably linked whenever the idea of living water is expressed. In this regard, syncretism exists when the African concept of living water is secretly central or plays the role of inspiring Africans to believe its related claims. On the surface, claims about living water are made as if they came solely from the context of Christianity, yet they touch on the African cultural element that exists naturally in the mind and body of the unsuspecting recipient. Although viewed from a historical perspective, in the context of African cultures, living water remains functional within the framework of modern claims and, as such, assists those determined to harness African believers through religion. While the unsuspecting believer in the matter of the living water will never feel caught between two ideologies, that does not preclude the fact that two sets of traditions are at play in responding to claims about the living water. Consequently, it can be argued that there are elements from more than one tradition or cultural contact when Pentecostal ministers make claims to the living waters or are acted upon by their followers in the context of African Christianity.

7. Turning Water

Beyond the context of holy water in the Jordanian context, the water element is once again introduced by Jesus Christ when, in John 2:1–11, he turned it into wine, underscoring its (water) importance in connection with miracles. In this episode, Jesus is said to have attended a wedding in the village of Cana, where his mother and disciples were present along with him. Here he (Jesus) performed his first recorded miracle, turning water into wine after his mother reported to him that the wine had run out. The text reads: 'When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come"' (John 2:3–4). To this end, Jesus commanded the six stone water jars to be filled with water, which he immediately turned into wine. Although not much context or practical benefit can be derived from this story, this scenario seems to have reinforced the use of water or the notion of it as an important religious symbol related to miracles. Perhaps what makes this story so typical of a miracle story is that it is the first recorded miracle in which Jesus transformed something ordinary (water) into something extraordinary (wine). As a matter of record, this is the first time in the context of Christ's earthly ministry that a sudden need (lack of wine) arises that impels Him to perform a miracle in response to or as a divine way of responding to the need. Peters (2020) about this miracle writes, 'Again, in John 2:11 Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine was called the beginning (a numerical word) of miracles in Greek; however, some vulgate manuscripts preferred using ordinal numbers instead' (Peters 2020, p. 4). In other words, the miracle of turning water into wine as described in the book of John represents Christ's first divine act of mediating, in a somewhat less dramatic way, a messianic solution to human desperate needs.

It is not surprising, therefore, that those who claim miracles often conveniently start with the use of water analogous to Christ's first recorded miracle (Nel 2018, p. 30). In South Africa, this was observed with Apostle Phillip Sithole, founder of Divne Word Ministeries, of Hammanskraal, who, in 2016, not only claimed to have turned water into wine, but also anointed noxious live wires to be harmless and ordered his parishioners to touch them (Matsengarwodzi 2016). Similarly, the senior pastor of Jehovah Mightier Than All Prophetic Church, pastor Ebelenna Chukwu, shared a video of himself sharing with members of his church what appeared to be water turned into a wine. In reaction to a public outcry and disbelieve, pastor Ebelenna Chukwu justified the miracle through a publication on social networks writing:

> 'Water has been turned into wine during a cult. If you do not believe, you are an anti-Christ. Mark 9:23 Jesus said to him, "If you can, all things are possible to him who believes. John 14:12 Truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and he will do greater works, because I am going to the Father. John 20:29 Jesus said to him, because you have seen me, you have believed. Happy are those who have not seen and have believed!'[1].

Consequently, in Christian cycles, holy water is believed to have the power to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, or the profane into the sacred. Arguably, this is more in the region of what Panyin Hagan (2020) meant when stating that water plays an important role in facilitating human associated transition from the profane to the sacred state (Panyin Hagan 2020, p. 2). In most traditional Christian denominations such as Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and various others, the baptismal water is first consecrated or blessed with the sign of the cross by a priest prior to actual baptism. Beyond playing a significant sacrament role in baptism, or, at least that is the case in Roman Catholicism, holy water is used for a variety of sacramental purposes, some of which include blessing people, blessing objects, and sometimes even exorcism. During the actual baptism, water, usually blessed by the priest or deacon, is poured over the person's head. Traditionally, blessed water is contained in a font at the entrance so that Catholics, either entering or exiting, can dip their fingers and make a sign of the cross, either to commemorate baptism or as a symbol of purification.

This water is also often used symbolically to bless objects such as rosaries, crucifixes, statues, and other items, depending on accession. As this water is also said to have a purifying or protective effect, it is sometimes used symbolically during the exorcism rite, especially when evil spirits are suspected, so to speak. Without going into detail about the use of holy water in the context of Catholicism, it is safe to say that this use has been the framework for the use of holy water in most traditional churches for years. In other words, the sacramental use of holy water as observed in Catholic circles represents the conventional use to which most traditional churches have very often adhered or practiced.

8. Holy Water

In general, holy water refers to water that has been consecrated or blessed by a religious person. Beyond its natural purposes, or by extending its natural purifying properties, water has been used by several religious communities as a means of moral or ritual purification. In ancient traditions, it was inherently believed that water possessed special powers, including the ability not only to purify, but also to heal and even protect against evil. Purification defines sacred in this regard, although distinct from the realm of religious circles, as will be seen below in a section relating the concept of holy water to Christianity and hence its syncretic use within ANPCs. In other words, the broad notion of holy water in terms of its purity properties or purifying special powers dates back to ancient times, long before holy water meant exclusively for religious purposes. In ancient Greek religions, both people and places were purified with conventional water so as to distinguish what would be considered religious from the irreligious, the holy from unholy. In other words, such cultures used pure ordinary water to impart a certain level of sanctity to an object, or to ensure a certain level of inviolability, so to speak. Consequently, or similar to the notion of living water discussed above denoting water as the source of life, the idea of holy water in ancient African belief simply denoted the use of a pure form of water that bestowed a degree of sanctity on the target or recipient.

Aside from its natural symbol of purification, in many religions, water blessed by the clergy for purposes of devotion and ritualistic cleansing is considered sacred, hence the notion of holy water. In the Old Testament, the idea of holy water seems to have appeared in several instances where it is used symbolically for the purification of objects or for the Israelites, according to Yahweh's direction. Such appearances include, but are not limited to, an instance where according to Exodus 30:17–21, Yahweh instructed Moses prepare water in a basin for the washing of the priests. Perhaps to emphasize the symbol of purity or the cleansing power of holy water, in Psalm 51:7, David asked God to cleanse him with hyssop and wash him so that he would be whiter than snow. Hyssop's purported antiseptic properties notwithstanding, David desired purification with water that could only come from God or was blessed by God, which was essentially the meaning of holy water, perhaps even by ancient standards. The idea of holy water in the New Testament, while remaining connected to the Old Testament origin, is related to water having its origin in the holy presence of God. Although John the Baptist could have baptized Jesus in pure water, such water would arguably henceforth be considered holy because it testified to the presence of God in the form of Jesus Christ. For this reason, the Jordan River has been considered a holy site for centuries, and has thus attracted pilgrims from around the world simply because its waters once covered the holy presence of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Jordan River is considered a holy site by most religious communities, which include both Christians and Jews, simply because the holy Jesus Christ was once immersed in its waters. As a result, most religious communities, and especially Christians, not only immersed themselves in the Jordan, but even collected its waters for various purposes, including deliverance, cleansing, and healing.

9. AICs on Holy Water

The generational connection between African Independent Churches (AICs) and African Neo-Pentecostal Churches (ANPCs) has been discussed in the literature by several scholars such as Engelke (2010), Pfeiffer (2005), Meyer (2004), and many others, exploring such a relation from multiple perspectives (Meyer 2004; Pfeiffer 2005). There is a very extensive literature detailing the nature of AICs across Africa and southern Africa in particular, including how such a movement has retained African character in its practices (Kealotswe 2004, pp. 205–22; Ositelu 2002). Not only that, there is a large body of literature detailing how the AIC traversed the African continent and clearly took on multiple faces, reflecting the African character of each receiving context, including in countries such as South Africa (Adedibu 2018, pp. 1–9). Both AICs and ANPCs have unique links in many respects as they both sprung up in the African context and seem to be heavily influenced by Pentecostalism (Mwaura 2004). As is certainly the case with most ANPCs, Kalu (2003) was correct in stating that any close examination of Pentecostalism or its growth in Africa points in one way or another to a multidirectional and sometimes evasive religious identities (Kalu 2003, p. 87). In other words, there is a degree to which Pentecostal movements in Africa are reinventing their identity, and thus it would be impossible to ensure categorization, so to speak. As a result, far too often, or at least as scholars such as Bediako (2000) have observed, those who analyze Pentecostal accounts in Africa use opposing lenses to portray African Pentecostalism against mainstream or established Christian denominations, so to speak. His precise words in this regard were 'much academic analysis tends to press the evidence into something of a dualistic dialectic that sets African pentecostalism and its socio-political effects against "mainline" churches which then appear to be ineffectu' (Bediako 2000, pp. 311–12). However, this does not mean that it will be impossible to discuss how ANPCs have defined themselves as opposed to or different from most traditional churches in Africa, particularly in certain aspects such as the use of holy water. Although some ANPCs appear to be quite sophisticated compared with AICs, which are more traditional and culturally African in their approach, both groups are largely made up of churches, run by Africans for Africans, so to speak were founded against Western Christians cultural imperialism (Mildnerová 2014, pp. 15, 18). Actually, some have even attempted to argue that ANPCs should be seen, regardless of Western Pentecostal orientations, as an extension of AICs or in the light of efforts and initiatives deepening AICs' African oriented vision (Mofokeng and Kgatle 2019, pp. 5–9). At this point, it might seem somewhat obvious that these two traditions, which share the roots of African Christian identity, would, in one way or another, exhibit some degree of syncretism in their practices, which include the use of holy water, among others. To this end, it is perhaps important to first examine the syncretic element in the use of holy water in the realm of AICs before venturing into the ANPC context. In other words, there is perhaps no better way to reflect the remaining sacred water practices of an African origin blended with Christian beliefs than through African Independent Churches (AICs). AICs and ANPCs have deep-rooted connections (Da Silva 1993; Meyer 2004). In many ways, the syncretic use of holy water within the context of AICs, will in part perhaps give an expression on the understanding of the syncretic use of holy water within the ANPCs context.

In African Independent Churches (AICs) as well as in other religious traditions, water holds a powerful element needed for spiritual transformation and it is thus used in a whole range of rituals such as healing, blessing, purification, baptism, and many other water-related rituals (Drewal 2008; Ogungbile 1997). However, what is perhaps more important to note here is that AICs use holy water in an African inclined syncretic way, precisely because of their propensity to integrate traditional African beliefs within the sphere Christian practices. Perhaps one can examine two aspects of ritual in which water plays a role, namely baptism and healing practices. In traditional or cultural practices in Africa, baptism is seen as an opportunity to initiate the baptized into their ancestral roots in order to assimilate them into their respective cultural communities. In most African cultures, a river has a special spiritual meaning and is mostly preferred in the context of cleansing from

old to new. This partly explains why African baptisms are often performed in the river, precisely because the flowing river water symbolizes spiritual transformation, washing away old self and sins. Consequently, in most AICs, converts are preferably baptized in the river in the presence of the entire congregation, who then welcome them into the seemingly purified community (Zvanaka 1997, p. 73). Whenever the baptized enter and exit the flow, it symbolizes the purification or conversion process that identifies them as one who has transformed their old self into a new one, qualifying them as a full member of their culturally rooted community. Furthermore, the symbolic gesture of pouring water over the initiate's head signifies an assurance that the baptized has undergone the water purification from head to toe, as the initiate would still be standing partially submerged in the water. In other words, this deliberate visual representation, which characterizes baptism in relation to traditional African baptism and Christian baptism, merely symbolizes the assurance that the baptized will be fully cleansed and transformed into a new position within the respective community. Similarly, in traditional African healing rituals or practices that seek to restore one's health, water is believed to have spiritual properties that can either heal or treat any physical ailment. Just as water is used during baptism to transform the baptized into new, it is also believed to possess powerful properties that can restore or renew health. Consequently, African herbal remedies or medicines are often mixed with water, as only water has healing properties, thus ensuring that health is fully restored.

10. ANPCs on Holy Water

African Neo-Pentecostal Churches (ANPCs) refers to African Pentecostal Christian churches, which were largely found in the late 20th century. Very extensive literature exists examining the origin, evolution, and spiritual identity of ANPCs (Anderson 2005; Banda 2023; Kgatle 2020). Aside from their evidently strong Pentecostal character, which encompasses an emphasis on a personal relationship with God, speaking in tongues, belief in the power of the Holy Spirit, etc., these churches are often known for incorporating African culture into their styles of worship. Based on this, it goes without saying that such an incorporation of African culture into worship is evident in many ways, including in the concept or use of holy water. Most Pentecostal traditions use holy water similar to other Christian denominations, but ANPCs use it more in almost all practices, including but not limited to bestowing blessings and casting out demons. From time to time, leaders within these churches sprinkle water on congregants or any material objects symbolically to bestow blessings, cure ailments, and at times for exorcism. Not only that, while holy water is offered free of charge in most traditional mainstream churches, ANPC prophets have increasingly adopted the practice of putting a price on holy water that must be taken home for domestic use.

As most ANPCs are independent and single-handedly run by their founders, they tend to have no formal liturgical processes and consequently follow the directives of the leader, including in the region of water rituals. Anderson (2005) spoke of how South African Pentecostals in the early 1990s at the Praise Tabernacle Church in Soshanguve admired Nigerian evangelist Emmanuel Eni after he told the story of how a mermaid-like water deity took him under the sea and bestowed on him extraordinary powers (Anderson 2005, p. 77). It can be argued that this community welcomed the testimony of the water deity because it resonated very much with African water spirituality (Drewal 1988; Olupona 2000), and for them such an experience made Emmanuel Eni a powerful human being. The water-related syncretism emerges not only on the part of Emmanuel Enis, but also on the part of the congregants, who seem to appropriate African water spirituality through the act of deification of one with knowledge and experience of African water deity. Consistent with this observation, Rey (2013) postulated that mermaids, or water deities, as spiritual spouses of pastors, played an important role in popularizing ANPC's deliverance practices, as they created the impression that such pastors had exceptional spiritual powers (Rey 2013, p. 71). When ANPC ministers such as Emmanuel Eni testified that they have been freed from attachment to African spiritual beings such as water mermaids, the real

intention is evidently to inspire reverence among African followers by tapping into their deeply rooted African beliefs and indigenous precepts. Such testimony becomes a purely devotional performance, with the intention of leading African congregants to interpret them in accordance with their indigenous precepts and inadvertently ascribe to or follow such pastors for their water-related spiritual powers. In other words, they (ANPC pastors) invest in stories such as this with no intention of demonizing such experiences, but essentially taking pre-existing African system of beliefs about water-related accounts and dynamically using them to serve their interests. In fact, Anderson (2005) made this exact observation, further stating:

> 'His ministry impressed a great many South Africans, for not only did his testimony of intimate relations with evil spiritual powers as a priest of the water goddess fascinate San Pentecostals, but his high-powered preaching and exuberant dancing were welcome in ana African society where such religious enthusiasm was evidence of spiritual power'. (Anderson 2005, p. 77)

According to the respective presented in this paper, and including the above scholarship, in reference to ANPC claims, syncretic holy water refers to a perception of holy water that arises through a combination or blending of different religious and spiritual traditions. In other words, in this regard, the term 'syncretic holy water' refers to the unique outcome through the merging or combination of two somewhat water-unrelated beliefs embodied through practices, teachings, and claims. This appropriation of traditions related to holy water was largely corroborated by water-related incidents in the African Independent Churches (AICs) and across generations by ANPC claims related to holy water.

11. Covert Syncretic Holy Water

In contrast with overt syncretic practices, which are often obvious and take place in full view, covert syncretic practices are either intentionally or unintentionally obscured to suspecting minds. In other words, unlike overt syncretic practices, which are often discernible, covert syncretic practices, which include syncretic holy water, among other things, are neither overtly practiced nor imperceptible by the eye. In covert syncretistic practices, the assimilation, or the process of assimilation of elements from different traditions into a harmonious whole or new synthesis, occurs in somewhat obscure and less obvious ways. Likewise, the manifestation of such a mixed reality scarcely arouses suspicion, be it from its practitioners or subjects, and thus can easily deviate scholarly comprehension. In this way, practitioners of covert syncretic practices, knowingly or unknowingly, continue to express teachings aligned with the dominant tradition or mainstream belief, while simultaneously holding onto another belief. On the surface of such practices, the incautious eye will see only the presentation of a dominant or mainstream doctrine and not the covert adherence to other traditions. However, covert affiliation does not necessarily have negative implications for conforming to the dominant tradition, but simply means that there is an existence or an unexpected interplay of different faith traditions that are diluted into a dominant faith practice.

Covert syncretic holy water, or its definition in relation to ANPCs, which this article focuses on, thus refers to the secret fusion of two independent traditions in the form of Christian and African traditional beliefs when it comes to the symbolic power of water. Although the Christian faith or Christian teachings still enjoy a dominant position in this respect, the adherence to the African belief in the symbolic power of water remains surreptitiously rooted in the conduct of African believers. In other words, African traditional belief in the symbolic power of water resonates unhindered or continuously within the belief system of African believers, particularly ANPC's followers, as witnessed in South Africa. On the surface, the ANPC's claims of holy water appear to be entirely consistent with Christianity, but instead have some resemblance to African beliefs in the power of water. Therefore, whenever ANPC pastors make claims to holy water, or ANPC followers encounter such claims, they either knowingly or unknowingly rely on African belief systems to validate such claims. Although the belief in the power of water is practiced in the

context of Christianity as the main religion, the reception of such a practice or belief therein is deeply rooted in traditional African beliefs.

Consequently, claims or concepts of sacred water among ANPCs are more likely to be accepted or rooted within the framework of traditional African beliefs in the symbolic power of water.

12. Conclusions

In many religious or spiritual traditions, which include but are not limited to African traditional religions (ATRs) and Christianity in the form of African Neo-Pentecostal Churches (ANPCs), water is considered a powerful symbol of sanctification, purification, and spiritual cleansing. Considering ANPCs, particularly in the context of South Africa, holy water claims are used covertly in a syncretic manner through rituals such as cleansing, deliverance, and bestowing blessings upon individuals or objects. Consequently, in their claims about holy water, ANPC leaders covertly mix several traditions in the form of traditional African and Western Christian beliefs about the symbolic power of water. Thus, ANPCs, albeit without clear reasoning, encompass a multi-pronged (African and Western Christianity) approach to the use or claims of holy water. Contrary to the apparent or overt syncretism, this paper uncovered conclusively that claims about holy water as witnessed among ANPCs in South Africa, covertly combine elements of two belief systems (ancient African traditions and contemporary African Christianity), resulting in what is presented here as 'covert syncretic holy water'.

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[1] https://afrinik.com/nigeria-pastor-claims-to-have-turned-water-into-wine-video/ (accessed on 8 July 2023): Pastor (Ebelenna Chukwu) claims to have turned water into wine.

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Looking Back: Theological Reflections on the Intersection between Pentecostalism and Ubuntu within the African Section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa

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Abstract: Syncretism in the African section of South African Pentecostalism followed the emergence of the Ethiopian movement. The latter took the lead in promoting the syncretising of Christianity and African culture and practice (hereinafter referred to as Ubuntu). A similar syncretism emerged in the Christian Catholic Church in Zion in Wakkerstroom, the "black section of the Apostolic Faith Mission", soon after the departure of Reverend Pieter Le Roux, who was appointed to lead the Apostolic Faith Mission in Johannesburg since John G. Lake was returning to the USA. This article intends to show that such syncretism did not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it was influenced by the interpretation of some portions of Scripture, the influence of John Alexander Dowie's praxis and some dreams and visions of a leader of the Christian Catholic Church in Zion in Wakkerstroom. This form of syncretism later permeated subsequent sections of African Pentecostalism in the Apostolic Faith Mission, resulting in the emergence of two categories of African Pentecostalism in the church: namely, those who accept this phenomenon and those who abandon it. These past developments position the Apostolic Faith Mission as a prime example to use in analysing syncretism in Pentecostalism and how it could be addressed by taking cognisance of Ubuntu without committing syncretism. Hence, the following question arises: How can theological reflections on the past experiences of the black section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa contribute to promoting a biblical approach that takes cognisance of Ubuntu without committing syncretism? This article applies the Magadi research method conceptualised for practical theology to answer this question. It further demonstrates that it is possible to promote a biblical approach that embraces Ubuntu without committing syncretism.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; syncretism; Ubuntu; Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa

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1. Introduction

Here are two perspectives on the history and syncretism of culture and religion. Kurtz (1995, p. 260) posits that "[t]he current religious scene presents a dynamic interplay between traditional practices on the one hand and widespread transplanting of traditions and experiments with syncretism on the other". Leopold and Jensen (2004, p. 5) argue that "the history of religion confirms that every religion is in 'essence' syncretic; there is no pristine origin or essence." The author holds that it is possible to hold to traditional practices without being syncretic. This view translates into Africans embracing the Christian message through the African worldview lens (Umoh 2012, p. 5) and hinges on Anderson's (1999, p. 226) view that:

> *Those who censure Third-World Pentecostals for their alleged "shamanism" or "syncretism" often fail to see that parallels with ancient religions and cultures in their practices are also often continuous with the biblical revelation.*

Later, Clark (2001) hinted at the challenges of syncretism in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, which is considered to be one of the largest Classical Pentecostal denominations in South Africa and is founded on William Seymour's teachings. Hence,

this article focuses on the intersection between Ubuntu and Pentecostalism in the African section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. Zionism spread to South Africa through the efforts of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) minister Reverend Pieter Le Roux, who embraced John Alexander Dowie's teachings on divine healing. He was later appointed to lead the Christian Catholic Church in Zion in Wakkerstroom.

A few years later, he embraced William Seymour's teaching on Pentecostalism (baptism in the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues) after listening to William Seymour's protégé, John G. Lake, after which he soon spread the message of Pentecostalism to the followers of Zionism in Wakkerstroom, considered the African section of the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM). John G. Lake appointed him the leader of the AFM in Johannesburg prior to returning to the United States of America. Reverend Le Roux subsequently left the Wakkerstroom church in the hands of a local leader, Daniel Nkonyane. Nkonyane continued this work and later added some praxes he copied from Alexander Dowie (divine healing), as well as his visions and understandings of Exodus 4: 1–4 and Revelation 7: 9.

It seemed normal and natural for Daniel Nkonyane to introduce these practices in the church, since they resonate with the Ubuntu worldview. His praxis set a precedent for other members and leaders who associated with the church in Wakkerstroom and sympathised with the Ethiopian movement, which Reverend Nehemiah Tile championed in South Africa in the late 1890s. While Nehemiah Tile was the trailblazer for the Ethiopian movement that emerged in the 1890s, Daniel Nkonyane became the trailblazer for fusing Ubuntu with Pentecostalism. This development led to the emergence of African Independent Churches in the early 1900s in South Africa and in the neighbouring countries. Thus, the stage was set to syncretise Ubuntu with Pentecostalism. Contrary to Nkonyane, some Pentecostal leaders within the African section of the AFM, Elias Letwaba and Richard Ngidi, opted not to fuse Ubuntu with Pentecostalism.

The literature notes that syncretism is mixing two or more beliefs into one or adding elements to an existing belief (Mullins 2001, p. 809; Schreiter 2003, pp. 146–47). Considering that African spirituality influenced William Seymour's Pentecostalism (Togarasei 2005, p. 371), the Pentecostalism discussed in this article refers to one founded by the African William Seymour (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013, p. 143; Hollenweger 1994, p. 210). It is described as baptism in the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues (Kgatle 2020b, p. 2; Martin 2004, p. 48). The question arises: How can theological reflections on the past experiences of the black section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa contribute to promoting a biblical approach that takes cognisance of Ubuntu without committing syncretism?

The Magadi research method (Mzondi 2022b, pp. 9–10, 13–14) is used to reflect on the intersection between Pentecostalism and Ubuntu within the African section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. It is a practical theological approach that seeks to analyse a phenomenon and identify convergence points for demonstrating theological and biblical foundations to apply them to Christian practice. The method applies the three steps of **Appreciation**, **Announcing,** and **Presenting**. The first step identifies positive aspects/developments in a phenomenon, namely Ubuntu. The second step presents the common aspects between the phenomena (Ubuntu and Pentecostalism), while the third step determines if the aspects in the second step are theologically sound and biblical.

2. Appreciating Ubuntu

The Appreciation of Ubuntu is the first step of Magadi (Mzondi 2022b, pp. 10, 14). It discusses and appreciates the positive aspects of Ubuntu to identify the point of convergence between Ubuntu and Pentecostalism, which is the focus of the second step of Magadi (Mzondi 2022b, p. 10), **Announcing**.

Expressions of a Supreme Being in Ubuntu

Ubuntu promotes the existence of a supreme being. This being is believed to be the creator of all creation, including the universe, human life, animal life, and vegetation (see Mbiti 1991, p. 70). Adherents of Ubuntu in South Africa call this creator *Ramasedi* (Setswana/Sesotho), *UMvelinqangi* (isiZulu), or *Qhamatha* (isiXhosa). This creator, considered remote from humanity, can only be approached through the mediation of indigenous healers, diviners, and ancestors, who are believed to be near the creator (cf. Mbiti 1976, pp. 75–85; Nyirongo 1997, p. 51). The gap between the creator and human beings is reflected by a spiritual hierarchy that shows the position of the creator at the top, ancestors in the middle, and human beings at the bottom (Mbigi 1997, p. 54).

Adherents of Ubuntu believe that daily activities and events are influenced by the creator through the ancestors. The latter individuals communicate with humans through dreams, bad and good events, and illnesses, and humans in turn consult indigenous healers and diviners for the interpretations of dreams, bad events, or illnesses (Ntlha 2017, pp. 6–7, 30–32). The creator gives indigenous healers and diviners the ability to identify the cause of sickness/illness or bad luck and to prescribe relevant herbs to heal sickness or illness or remove the cause of bad luck. In other cases, sacrifice is the most relevant solution. These individuals may also see a person who comes to consult about their dreams or visions and tell them what to do (Hirst 2005, p. 1; Mzondi 2019, pp. 48–54, 69).

Hence, adherents of Ubuntu mainly use animal sacrifices to appease ancestors who present their request to the creator. Additionally, the practice of songs, accompanied by indigenous music instruments, and dance form an intrinsic practice among the followers of Ubuntu in ceremonies, celebrations, and rituals. Recitation of *sereto/isiduku* (reciting of clan lineage) (Mzondi 2022a, p. 2) also forms part of ceremonies, celebrations, and rituals.

As can be seen from the above discussion, Ubuntu is theistic in that it first promotes and elevates the supreme being that affects the physical. Second, it teaches that this supreme being is accessed through the mediation of indigenous healers, diviners, and ancestors. The latter communicates with human beings, including indigenous healers and diviners, through dreams, visions, incidents, and sickness/illness. Sacrifices are most appropriate to appease the ancestors, and song and dance form an intrinsic component of ceremonies, celebrations, and rituals.

3. Announcing Convergence and Divergence between Pentecostalism and Ubuntu

This section focuses on Magadi's second step (Mzondi 2022b, pp. 10, 14), **Announcing**. The goal of this step is to establish points of convergence and divergence between the Azusa Street phenomenon and Acts 2 and between AFM South African Pentecostalism and Ubuntu.

3.1. Acts 2 and the Azusa Street Pentecost Experiences

The literature points out that William Seymour and others who experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues believed that they experienced what the Apostles and others experienced in Acts 2: 1–13 (Apostolic Faith 1906, p. 2; Cox 1995, p. 37). They also believed that other believers, both their contemporaries and future believers, could also experience it. This experience includes noises heard when singing and dancing (Mzondi 2019, p. 50). Acts 2: 4–6 describes the noise accompanied by worship and speaking in languages others heard and understood. Nel (2019, p. 2) indicates that the 1906 Azusa Street event shows that indigenous African elements had already been incorporated into Protestant Christian worship, such as trance, ecstasy, visions, dreams, and healings in continuity with similar biblical practices.

3.2. Ubuntu in the AFM South African Pentecostalism

Several African Pentecostals (Elias Mahlangu, Edward Motaung, Christina Nku, Daniel Nkonyane, Ignatius Lekganyane) emerged from the African section of the Apostolic Faith Mission. However, this sub-section of the article looks at how four African AFM

leaders, namely Daniel Nkonyane, Christina Nku, Elias Letwaba, and Richard Ngidi, either syncretised or opted not to syncretise Pentecostalism with Ubuntu. The first three are first-generation African Pentecostals while Ngidi is a second-generation African Pentecostal.

Mzondi (2019, pp. 48–49) points out that Daniel Nkonyane's ministry revolved around dreams, visions, worship practices, and divine healing and deliverance. Nkonyane based his teaching and praxis of barefoot worship and the use of a stick (*isikhali*/weapon) on the passage in Exodus 3: 1–6 and 4: 1–4, respectively, and he based his praxis of using a church uniform on the example of Alexander Dowie, the passages in Revelation 7: 9, and the angel in the white robe (cf. Draper 2016, pp. 58–59; Sundkler 1976, p. 53), and his dream of the white robe (Mzondi 2019, p. 48).

Nkonyane's practice of divine healing flowed from his working relation with Reverend Le Roux at the Christian Catholic Church in Zion in Wakkerstroom (Sundkler 1961, p. 48). He later left the church to establish the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion. The church embraced Pentecostalism and added the praxis of African song and dance in its liturgy; this is the hallmark of Zionism in the country and neighbouring states.

Christina Nku (commonly known as MaNku) was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church and later became an ordinary member of the AFM. She experienced a series of dreams and visions from an early age. In one of them, she chose a hymn book an angel held out to her instead of money the devil advised her to choose (Landman 2006, p. 8; Mzondi 2019, pp. 74–75). She also experienced seizures and fainted frequently. Elias Nkadimeng of AFM prayed for her recovery and advised her to sacrifice a cow in honour of her ancestors as her illness was due to her divine calling (Landman 2006, p. 11). However, her dreams and visions created a rift between her and Reverend Le Roux, then the leader of the AFM of South Africa, who did not approve of them. She later left the AFM and established St. John Apostolic Faith Mission.

Later, MaNku practiced divine healing and deliverance based on her dreams and visions, where she saw her ancestors escorting her from hell and a later vision where she was instructed to use the colours blue and white for a church uniform (Landman 2006, p. 12). She later included the use of holy water in her ministry of divine healing and deliverance (Landman 2006, p. 16; Mzondi 2019, p. 76). It is not surprising that Nku's church also embraced Pentecostalism and included ancestor veneration in her church liturgy. St John Apostolic Faith Mission became the hall mark of Apostolic churches in the country and in the neighbouring states.

Consequently, Daniel Nkonyane and Christina Nku ended up including the aspect of veneration of ancestors in their liturgy because they argued that it represents their African culture and identity of dreams and visions from the ancestors, as well as received instructions related to divine healing and deliverance. The praxis of Daniel Nkonyane and Christina Nku show the intersection of the Gospel with African cultures (cf. Daneel 1987, p. 26). The pair also believed that the gift and practice of prophecy flow from the Holy Spirit, although this differed from AFM practice. Christina Nku's church describe themselves as *kereke ya moea* (spirit led church) to emphasise the role of the Spirit and prophecy in the church. The church also incorporated a unique genre of African music into their worship, resulting in unique songs, instruments, and dances that survive to this day. Nku's church sing *Sepostolo,* characterised by hand clapping, slow or fast dancing around in circles, and spinning to the beat of a drum.

On the other hand, Nkonyane's church believed in the practice of speaking in tongues and prophesying as the Spirit leads. Nkonyane's church sang what is called *isiZioni*, characterised by women singing slowly and men joining while holding sticks and moving bodies forward and backward. Dancing around and spinning in a circle also occurs.

Notably, Anderson (2000, p. 37) mentions that the Holy Spirit was central in Nkonyane's church and Nku's church, similar to the AFM of South Africa. He further classifies them as Zion-Apostolic Churches (Anderson 2000, pp. 105, 260). However, while the historic and spiritual character of these churches is consistent with their relationship to the South African AFM, Larbi (2002, p. 151) argues that they are not truly Pentecostal.

On the contrary, two Pentecostals from the African section of the AFM, Elias Letwaba and Richard Ngidi, followed a different praxis. Elias Letwaba, Nku and Nkonyane's contemporary, was raised in the Bapedi Lutheran Church (Morton 2016, p. 3), and later embraced Pentecostalism after meeting and listening to John G. Lake preaching in Johannesburg and later returned to his hometown (Burger and Nel 2008, p. 207; Kgatle 2016, p. 328). He was gifted in divine healing and is considered the first influential African Pentecostal in the AFM (Kgatle 2016, pp. 330–31; Mzondi 2019, p. 71). Letwaba's ministry shows that even though he practiced Ubuntu and embraced Pentecostalism, he opted not to fuse Pentecostalism with the Ubuntu praxis of ancestor veneration (Mzondi 2019, p. 70). Nor did he deviate from the established AFM 's liturgy, but rather followed the Pentecostal teachings he had received from John G. Lake (Kgatle 2016, p. 329; Mzondi 2019).

Richard Ngidi, originally from the American Missionary Society, later joined the AFM (Khathide 2010, pp. 43–44). He was also gifted in divine healing and saw numerous visions during his ministry (Khathide 2010, pp. 63–82).

4. Presenting a Suitable Approach

This section focuses on the third step of Magadi (Mzondi 2022b, pp. 10, 14), **Presenting**. It intends to present a theological and biblical approach to discerning and testing the spirit behind spiritual encounters, as stated in three passages.

Acts 16: 16–18 relates Paul's encounter with the prophesying young girl at Ephesus; I Corinthians 14: 26–33 provides guidelines for prophesying in the local house church; and I Thessalonians 5: 19–20 contains Paul's instruction to the believers not to stifle the spirit and prophecy, but to test all prophecy. These three Scriptures form hermeneutical tools to engage prophecy, dreams, and visions to propose the intended approach.

4.1. Prophecy, Dreams, Visions, and Divine Healing

Prophecy and the Holy Spirit were central to the practice of Daniel Nkonyane and Christina Nku. As mentioned above, Mzondi (2019, pp. 47–48, 76–77) mentioned that both experienced dreams and visions that led them to introduce spiritual aspects that resonate with the Ubuntu worldview of using tangible elements in healing like water, robes, sticks, and other objects (see Burger and Nel 2008, pp. 242–49; De Wet 1989, pp. 107, 112; Molobi 2008, p. 7).

Similarly, prophecy and the Holy Spirit are central to the AFM, which is founded on the teachings of Alexander Dowie (Oosthuizen 1987, p. 21) and John G. Lake. The latter was a former member of Dowie's church before joining William Seymour (Burger and Nel 2008, pp. 31, 91, 96; Clark 2009, pp. 175–76). The church also denounces the use of alcohol, polygamy, and the use of tangible elements in the liturgy (Larbi 2002, p. 148). Dowie and Pentecostalism hold that the Holy Spirit is the enabler of visions, dreams, and divine healing as the fulfilment of the Lucan corpus (Luke 24: 49; Acts 1: 8; 2: 1–6). The AFM prides itself on being one of the denominations that hold and believe that this phenomenon will not stop happening (Nel 2008).

4.1.1. Applying the Scriptures to Address the above Praxis

Some AFM theologians confirmed the use of tangible elements in the African Pentecostal section (Burger and Nel 2008, pp. 242–49; De Wet 1989, pp. 107, 112; Molobi 2008, p. 7). Hence, the author opts to apply Figure 1 below, adapted from Mzondi (2010, p. 139), to demonstrate the sequence of discerning and testing the spiritual praxis in the context of the AFM and the wider Pentecostal Christian tradition.

The first step is testing the practice and the role of visions, dreams, and divine healing in the ministry of Daniel Nkonyane and Christina Nku. The next step is testing Nkonyane's interpretation of Exodus 4: 1–4 and Revelation 7: 9. The last step is testing the gift of divine healing in the ministries of Nkonyane, Nku, Letwaba, and Ngidi.

Figure 1 promotes moving from the text to the context by using texts that demonstrate the use of visions, dreams, prophecy, and healing.

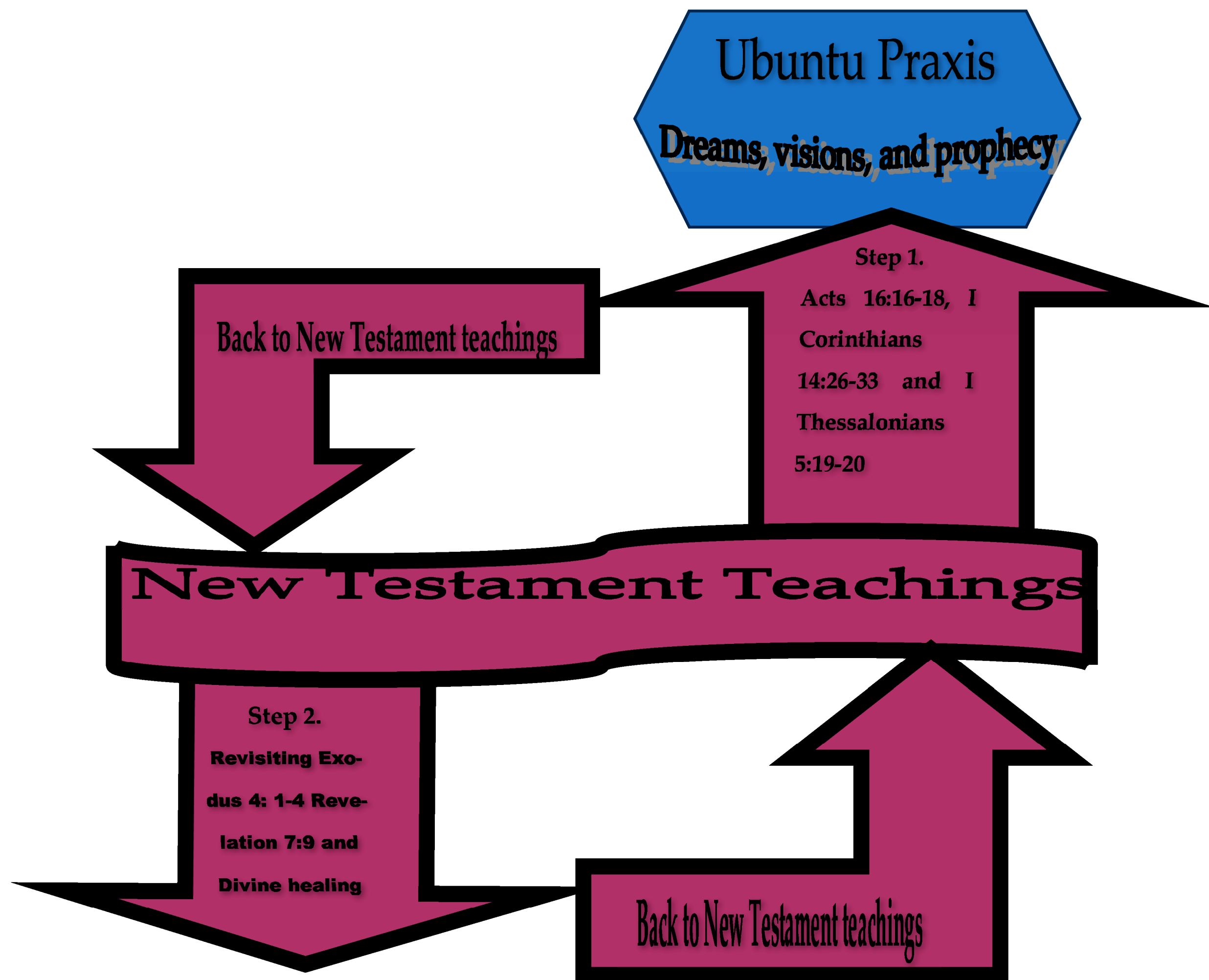

Figure 1. Movement from New Testament teaching to and from *Ubuntu* praxes of dreams, visions, divine healing, and Bible interpretation.

Two steps flow from Figure 1 above: namely discerning prophecy, dreams, and visions, and revisiting Nkonyane's interpretation of Exodus 4: 1–4 and Revelation 7: 9 as well as his divine healing praxis. The first step assists in distinguishing between prophecy and divination (Kgatle 2019, pp. 3–4). The second step helps to judge the teachings of Pentecostal pastors (Keener 2014, p. 375). The two steps flow from the view that Pentecostals share a high view of Scripture and use the Protestant Bible (Nel 2020, p. 1). Figure 1 echoes Shingange's views about applying Africa Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH), as he argues that African Pentecostals should "return to the dependency on the Bible; however, they should also seek to strike a balance between the importance of the Word of God, the need for Spirit, and the African realities. This will mean the contextualisation of reading the Bible in the light of the primacy of the Spirit whilst taking cognisance of the unique needs and realities of African people". (Shingange 2021, p. 34).

4.1.2. Step 1: Discerning Prophecy, Dreams, and Visions

Paul is the relevant New Testament model of discerning prophecy, dreams, and visions. As noticed above, Acts 16: 16–18, I Corinthians 14: 26–33, and I Thessalonians 5: 19–21 are considered to apply the process in Figure 1.

Acts 16: 16–18

Paul's encounters with the slave girl in Acts 16: 16–18 occurs in the context of his third missionary journey guided by the Holy Spirit (Holladay 2017, p. 370) as he saw a

vision of a man asking him to come to Macedonia. He and his team went to Macedonia and reached the capital city, Philippi, where they spent some days with Lydia, who believed in the Lord (Acts 16: 9–15), and later encountered a young girl prophesying about them (Acts 16: 16–17). His encounter with the girl on the way to a prayer meeting suggests three steps, namely exercising quietness, listening to the Holy Spirit, and taking the appropriate actions. Hearing the girl prophesy (Acts 16: 17) for many days (Acts 16: 18) did not overwhelm him; instead, he remained unmoved. His posture suggests that he was listening and seeking divine direction or intervention (Acts 16: 18). Hence, he was troubled, seemingly after ascertaining the source of the prophecy, causing him to act appropriately (Acts 16: 18). This approach teaches Pentecostals not to be quick to act but to listen to the Holy Spirit, who in turn will guide and cause them to take appropriate actions. Paul's action teaches that spiritual sources, other than the Holy Spirit, can give correct prophecy.

Applying Paul's approach suggests that Pentecostals should engage prophecy, dreams, and visions by first moving from the Scriptures, then moving to the context (dreams and visions), as other spiritual sources can provide correct prophecy. Second, they should listen to the Holy Spirit for guidance on taking appropriate actions. Third, they should take the appropriate actions after hearing from the Holy Spirit.

I Corinthians 14: 26–33 and I Thessalonians 5: 19–21

The Corinthians verses covers the teachings on gifts of the Holy Spirit and how they should be operated in the local church (Carson et al. 1992, p. 261), while the Thessalonians verses contains a warning that believers should live appropriately (Carson et al. 1992, p. 357). Paul advised the believers in Corinth and Thessalonica to allow the gift of prophecy to function under specific instructions. First, believers should not despise the gift of prophecy but allow its praxis (I Cor 14: 30; I Thess 5: 19; Hamp 2017, p. 228). Prophecy should edify believers and not cause confusion (I Cor 14: 26, 33). Second, this should be performed by allowing three, one person at a time, to prophesy while others discern what is said as they exercise spiritual restraint (I Cor 14: 29, 32; Keener 2005, pp. 117, 119). Third, believers should test every prophecy (I Thess 5: 21). Paul's instructions in the two Scriptures suggest that Pentecostal local churches should first have a team of prophets who will discern each other's prophecies and test the spirit behind each prophecy. Only three people should prophesy, one at a time. Second, prophecy should edify the church.

4.1.3. Step 2: Revisiting Nkonyane's Interpretation of the Scripture and Practice of Divine Healing

Exodus 4: 1–4 and Revelation 7: 9

Exodus 4: 1–4 is found in the context of God appearing to Moses and instructing him to deliver the nation of Israel, and Moses' concern that they will not believe God sent him (Hammilton 2011, pp. 69–70). Revelation 7:9 appears in the interlude that shows the 144000 saints between the sixth and seventh seals (Holladay 2017, p. 852).

Daniel Nkonyane used Moses' encounter with God of the burning bush in Exodus 4: 1–4 to introduce the practice of using a stick in divine healing and deliverance. He also followed Michael Mngumezulu's understanding of the apostle John seeing many people from different nations dressed in white robes (Rev 7: 9) and accepted Alexander Dowie's practice of wearing a white gown (see Sundkler 1976, pp. 48–50).

Nkonyane's understanding of the Scriptures resulted in him introducing the use of tangible elements in the church's liturgy. The process of placing the two Scriptures in Figure 1 shows that Nkonyane understanding of the texts was literal and experiential (Nel 2021, pp. 3–4). Hence, Pentecostals are often accused of the same tendency seen in current arguments about the subjective interpretation of the Bible (Nel 2017; Resane 2017) that leads to incorrect and dangerous practices (Keener 2016, pp. 107–8; Kgatle and Anderson 2020).

This error can be resolved by applying the practice of the Berean church (Acts 17: 10–11) as a relevant model to encourage local Pentecostal church members to engage the teachings of Pentecostal pastors so that they can differentiate between true and false teachings. The

practice of the Berean church points to a search for consistency with the Scriptures, like the Jewish practice of examining the Scriptures and listening diligently (Keener 2014, p. 375). Thus, providing the necessary checks and balances to avoid subjectivism in biblical interpretation and promoting the reading of the Bible in the community of believers recognises the Pentecostal approach from text to experience and back to the text (Grey 2011, p. 154).

Divine Healing

Pentecostals hold that the gift of healing is one of the continuing spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 9; Nel 2008, 2021, pp. 3–4). Nkonyane, Nku, Letwaba, and Ngidi have all practiced divine healing in previous generations of African Pentecostalism (Anderson 1992; Landman 2006; Kgatle 2020a; Khathide 2010).

However, Nkonyane and Nku advocated for the use of tangible elements in divine healing (Anderson 199, pp. 107–8), while Letwaba and Ngidi did not (Kgatle 2017, pp. 6–7; Kgatle 2020a, pp. 8–9; Mzondi 2019, p. 83). Letwaba and Ngidi imitate the miracle recorded in Acts 3: 1–11 (the healing of the cripple at the Temple), where Peter and John healed him in the name of Jesus.

The current African generation in the AFM continues to practice healing by the laying of hands in the name of Jesus. Applying four of the five *solas* of the Reformation (Strauss 2021, p. 1), *sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, and soli Deo gloria*, it is suggested that Pentecostals from the AFM and other Pentecostal churches should note that the gift of healing flows from the grace (*sola gratia*) of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it should be used in the light of the Scripture (*sola scriptura*), using the name of Christ alone and faith alone (*sola fide*), and aiming at the glory of God alone (*soli Deo gloria*).

5. Conclusions

The focus of this article was to provide some theological reflections on the past experiences of the black section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. The reflection contributes to promoting a biblical approach that takes cognisance of Ubuntu without committing syncretism. This was seen in the 1906 Azusa Street event that involved the manifestation of some indigenous African aspects in continuity with similar biblical practices in Acts, thus promoting the view of embracing Ubuntu without committing syncretism. It uses the Magadi practical theology research approach to, first, appreciate Ubuntu; second, show points of convergence between Ubuntu and Pentecostalism; and third, propose a biblical and theological approach that promotes the practice of prophecy, visions, dreams, sound interpretation of the Scripture, and praxis of divine healing among Pentecostals in the Apostolic Faith Mission of SA and other Pentecostal churches.

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Article

Africa Independent Churches as Amabandla Omoya and Syncretism in South Africa

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Abstract: This article presents a historical contribution of African Independent Churches in South Africa, particularly with references to the Ibandla lamaNazaretha of Isaiah Shembe, Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Engenas Lekganyane and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of Christina Nku. There is no doubt that these churches continue to be attractive and relevant to the South African context in the 21st century. They form an integrated part of African Christianity in South Africa. The article investigates ways in which these churches respond to the spiritual and cultural needs of Africans. It is interesting to look at how the Holy Spirit, healing, prayer and prophecy manifest in these churches. The concept of African Spirituality is discussed and contextualised within these churches.

Keywords: African Spirituality; ancestors; Ibandla lamaNazaretha; Pentecostalism; St John's Apostolic Faith Mission; syncretism; Zion Christian Church

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1. Introduction

African Independent Churches in South Africa are churches in Africa that are relevant to Africans as opposed to the Western or missional churches. African Independent Churches are unapologetically known as Amabandla Omoya, meaning the "Churches of the Spirit", while Western missional churches are known as Amabandla Omthetho, meaning churches of the law. African Independent Churches successfully retained the reality of the Holy Spirit and divine healing, which are appealing to Africans in the church today. They have protested against the under-emphasis of the Holy Spirit in the African community by traditional/Western churches. The Ibandla lamaNazaretha or Nazareth Baptist Church, Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) are churches of the Holy Spirit, Amabandla Omoya, which is the foundation of Pentecostalism. They emphasise the gifts of the Holy Spirit, preaching salvation, divine healing, laying of the hands alone and performing miracles. As these churches developed spiritually, syncretistic practices emerged, such as blessing and use of papers, needles, strings, walking sticks and water as products used in healing and protection, church uniforms and other ritualistic practices aligned with African Traditional Religion (ATR). These churches highlighted syncretistic practices and shifted them away from Pentecostalism. The article is based on a three-fold Pentecostalism and syncretism-centred discussions: first, the article explores an essential role of the Holy Spirit and syncretism in African Independent Churches with special reference to Ibandla lamaNazaretha of Isaiah Shembe, Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Engenas Lekganyane and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of Christina Nku. Second, it provides some recommendations on how these Pentecostal-type African Independent Churches can adjust their practices to be relevant in the Pentecostal context and, lastly, how Pentecostalism can accept them as they are.

2. An Overview of the Study

African Independent Churches are also known as African Initiated Churches or African Indigenous Church or African Instituted Churches. Resane (2020) states African Initiated Churches are established:

> by Africans either as a reaction to established Christianity or based on a voluntary or divine revelation commission. This phenomenon can be traced from the 1880s to the present. It is an unavoidable and realistic phenomenon in Christian history studies in South Africa. (p. 3)

It is critically important to study the spirituality and theology of the African Independent Churches (AIC) in the context of Pentecostalism and syncretism as a central theme in the 21st century. AIC has brought another form of the church Reformation theology in Africa, which has also influenced the whole world. AIC's contribution has gained momentum in the form of establishing itself and learning about it since its birth, current gain and the future. Buthelezi (1995, p. 1) says African Independent Churches "call themselves "amabandla ka Moya, churches of the Holy Spirit". Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches call themselves "amabandla ensindiso, churches of salvation". This does not mean mainline churches such as the Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Congregationalist are not amabandla ka Moya and ensindiso. Mogashoa (2012, p. 189) states, "Pentecostalism appealed to the African people". Pentecostalism has a strong hold in AIC circles, which is why Africans are attracted by AIC spirituality and theology. This is influenced by African thinking that life is centred around the wholeness of an embodiment of the Holy Spirit and community. The article explores some of the issues around Pentecostalism and syncretism as a form of AIC attractive context and wholeness of life. The Ibandla lamaNazaretha, Zion Christian Church and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission, for Resane (2020, p. 6), are "churches branded themselves with the name "Zion" as a symbol of the New Jerusalem". The article is written from a historical theology perspective and an African Spirituality context. In conclusion, a recommendation is made as to why Pentecostalism should accept these independent churches.

3. African Independent Churches as the Healing Community

In Africa, healing is not an end in itself but is about abundant life in a salvation context. Healing is connected to the healthy life of people in "harmonious adjustment of the visible and the invisible world" (Dube 1989, p. 111). In South Africa, AIC believed and defined the church as a healing community, which was not defined and unused by the Western tradition or church (Becken 1989, p. 229). According to Msomi (1967, p. 66), on a Sunday, in AIC, a divine service is incomplete without a healing prayer. Msomi (1967, p. 66) stated: "Healing plays the central role. Healing is the main attraction. There is a great concern for the sick members. They don't believe that there can be a Christian Community without healing". AIC understands the church as a healing community because the Holy Spirit is central and provides health and healing in the African context. Africans believed that health and healing could not be absent in communal life. AIC context of the church as a healing community gives a profound sense because the African community embraces peace and a sense of belonging. In AIC, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are central and intertwined with prayer, prophecy and healing, especially during divine services. The sacrament of baptism is essential in this independent church, while Holy Communion is used sometimes or not used at all by other independent churches. In South African established churches, both sacraments are part of the church life.

4. Spirituality and Theology of the Zion Christian Church

The prophet Lekganyane established the Zion Christian Church at Mamabolo, Pietersburg, now called Polokwane in Limpopo, in 1924. ZCC headquarters is at Moria, Limpopo, where annual conferences are held (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 227). Lekganyane believed in the Spirit of God and healed people through the same Spirit. When he prayed, prophesied and

spoke in tongues, the Spirit was leading him to experience this. His ZCC church is one of the "dikereke tša Moya", meaning churches of the Spirit (Häselbarth 1965, p. 12). The Spirit of God is present in Lekganyane and in his life. This is visible during his prayers, prophecies, healing people and speaking in tongues. Thus, his church is not led from a human and ideological perspective but from the Spirit context. In the current context, ZCC members normally say, "Moya wa Modimo o gona wa phela", meaning the Spirit of God is present and live. This is mostly said by people who have experienced healing. This discussion is about the Spirit within the notion of Pentecostalism.

Lukhaimane (1991, p. 227) states that healing in ZCC is central as it attracts many Africans. "Engenas Lekganyane seems to have convinced many Africans about the way to their spiritual salvation. They would find this through the knowledge of the Bible and erudition, but also through good deeds to their neighbor". The context here is that Africans are attracted and spiritually find salvation because the Bible is constructively used to encourage Africans to take care of their neighbour. This means the church gospel is attractive, relevant and useful to Africans.

Moria is regarded as their Zion City. ZCC is the largest church in South Africa and outside it; it is also business-oriented as it is self-reliant (Mogashoa 2012, p. 190). For many years, Lekganyane suffered from an eye disease. He received a vision that told him to move from Mamabolo to Johannesburg in 1912 to be cured by the church through an immersion baptism three times in water. He shared many dreams with his parents without getting an explanation. In Johannesburg, he was baptised by Elias Mahlangu and Joseph Mahlangu to become a member of the Zion Apostolic Church (ZAC) in South Africa. He was never a member of the Free Church of Scotland. He was ordained as a minister by the Mahlangu brothers and ministered at ZAC in Transvaal. However, in 1918, Lekganyane, together with his followers, left ZAC because of the leadership and his prophetic differences with the Mahlangu brothers. He then joined Edward Motaung, who was a leader of the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission (ZAFM) in Lesotho. The ZAFM Council accused Lekganyane of violating the church constitution because he took a second wife, leadership and appointed preachers, amongst other issues. In 1924, Lekganyane left the ZAFM to establish the ZCC after he prayed to God in the mountain at Mount Thabakgone, Limpopo. His followers joined his ZCC (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 228). Lekganyane experienced God's calling, and he was healed from an eye disease through baptism. He was a gifted prophet, preacher and leader. It is clear that God called him to open his own church so that he can freely use his spiritual gifts in service of humanity. This is evident, as discussed earlier in a brief introduction of Lekganyane and his church work.

Lukhaimane states, "The Holy Spirit was regarded as a driving force in the development of the church. In principle, every member received the Holy Spirit at baptism" (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 233). The work of the Holy Spirit in ZCC was to heal the people and to drive away evil spirits from people, and prophecy is visible. In ZCC, wine symbolised the blood of Christ, and bread symbolised the flesh in Holy Communion. Baptism is performed in a three-fold immersion in water at a safe river. Baptism happens after candidates have completed the teaching about the theology and practice of the church, which leads them to receive a baptismal card (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 233). Again, in ZCC, the presence of the Holy Spirit affirms an identity of ZCC as the church of the Holy Spirit. This is central and the fruit of Pentecostalism. Healing and prophecy led by the Holy Spirit are the backbone of ZCC spirituality. However, the ZCC is not only emphasizing the Spirit, but the two sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are prominent as they are practiced from the biblical approach, and Jesus Christ is at the centre. However, currently, Holy Communion is no longer always practiced as the sacrament of ZCC, but the Holy Spirit and baptism continue to exist and are highly acknowledged in the church. The ZCC approach here is purely Pentecostalism.

Anderson (2000, p. 70) explains, "Lekganyane used to heal by laying on hands alone, but as the church developed, this become impractical and he began to bless various objects like strips of cloth, strings, papers, needles, walking sticks and water, to be used for

healing and protective purpose". This healing approach emerged later in the ministry of Lekganyane. He performed healing miracles, such as healing a crippled young man in Johannesburg in 1944 (Anderson 2000, pp. 70–71). In Pentecostalism, the early life of Lekganyane and his established ZCC have visible means of divine healing and miraculous events primarily performed by the Spirit. He healed people through the Holy Spirit, especially by laying hands on people and by prophecy. This was informed by his gift of Pentecostal ministry as he was profoundly a Pentecostal. However, later on, he introduced other forms of healing, such as the blessing of papers, walking sticks and others, which are well-versed in syncretism. This latest type of healing is basically introduced because Africans are now healed in local congregations through the ministry of prophets as the ZCC church was growing throughout South Africa and other countries in Southern Africa.

African Traditional Religions practice using healing products such as salt, water and others, which are visible means and present in AIC ministry. Lukhaimane (1991, p. 233) states that the role of ancestors in ZCC was important. Anderson (2000) heard from interviewees who:

> believed the ancestors to have protective powers over their living descendants and that the basic traditional beliefs concerning the ancestors are still prevalent amongst the members of the indigenous churches. Ancestors still have an important role in the lives of most African Christians. (p. 180)

Kgatle and Mashau (2023, p. 2) have a different view about the role of ancestors as they state, "Ancestors are human and remain humans in the afterlife and therefore cannot be worshiped". They reject a notion of ancestors' worship in the context of African Christianity and Pentecostalism, while the ZCC embraces ancestors as central players of productive life in African Christianity, Pentecostalism and syncretism. ZCC is central to African Spirituality because it appeals to Africans who believe that ancestors are part of their daily lives. The Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ and ancestors continue to be intertwined in the African Spirituality. These are the realities of Africans' daily lives because this is Christianity in Africa. Mtetwa (1996, p. 21) states in African Spirituality, "Religion and culture are inextricably intertwined"; thus, a dichotomy of African Spirituality into the sacred and secular is theologically and practically distorted by the Western. Setiloane (1980, pp. 50–51) further states that the African Spirituality experience is not a "dichotomy between the secular and the sacred. All life is sacred". African Spirituality is a driving force to place Western Christianity into African Christianity. Thus, African Christianity is already present in AIC circles; this is because the Holy Spirit plays a huge role in the church. African Spirituality is always intertwined with the Holy Spirit in and outside church circles.

When the isagoma, meaning the diviner or traditional healer, is baptised in AIC, they get rid of traditional medicines and throw away dice and charms into the sea, and "then uMoya of Jesus comes to us". They are no longer just focusing on healing but also prophesy (Oosthuizen 1989, p. 189). ZCC discourages the newly baptised traditional healers from using dice and charms (Mashabela 2017, p. 4). Healing and prophecy become central in the ZCC, AFM and Ibandla lamaNazaretha, amongst other AICs. The practice of traditional healers is dismissed; however, such gifted prophets are given a space to practice prophecy in the form of healing and spiritual counselling. This is implemented through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

For Africans, witchcraft is a reality that is associated with misfortune or illness, but ZCC offered a spiritual solution to these challenges. ZCC membership grew faster because of illness and other problems. "Prevention of misfortunes by means of blessed water and sanctified papers played an important role. The laying of hands on the sick was an important means of prayer" (Lukhaimane 1991, pp. 234–35). Other methods of healing, such as confessing sins, pricking, salt water, coffee and tea, copper wires, vomiting and sanctified papers, were used to heal people. This resulted in the unemployed being employed, the barren women receiving children, etc., and, as such, people joined the church (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 235). These healing methods were developed later on as the church was in spiritual development. This ZCC approach to healing has given security and a better life for many

African people. It was not just about ZCC membership growth but about solutions to daily challenges faced by Africans.

5. Spirituality and Theology of the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission

African and prominent women such as Christina Nku, commonly known as MaNku, have contributed to the church Reformation on African soil and the whole world. Mogashoa (2012, p. 194) says, "Women also became founders of Zionist-Apostolic churches. The spontaneity and the healing of bands of the Zionist-Apostolic churches encouraged the talents of women and their capability for leadership". The prophet Christina Nku was born in 1894. When she was a young girl, she used to have many revelations. She became seriously ill at the age of twenty and experienced more heavenly visions. In one of her visions, God promised her that she would not die (Anderson 2000, p. 72). She was the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) member prior to establishing her own church. She left the DRC and became the Apostolic Faith Mission member, where "she was treated for ill health by a Zionist leader" (Mogashoa 2012, p. 194). After she was married to Lazarus Nku, she became ill again and was unconscious as she saw a vision of a large church with twelve doors. She was told to be baptised with a baptism of John and Jesus. She and her husband were baptised in the Apostolic Faith Mission in 1924 (Anderson 2000, p. 72). According to Resane (2020, p. 5), "her Pentecostal experience was confirmed, especially the baptism of the Holy Spirit". Her baptismal immersion experience is affirmed in the context of the Holy Spirit.

She never stayed long in the Apostolic Faith Mission church as she had a vision to build a twelve-door church near Evaton, South of Johannesburg, in 1933. She started praying for that land in order to build the church (Anderson 2000, pp. 72–73). In 1939, she successfully built the church called St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (hereafter AFM) on a land that was predominantly white people, and black people were not allowed to build anything at Evaton (Mogashoa 2012, p. 195). Her church is known as the Temple and is regarded as the largest building in Gauteng. Bishop Lazarus Nku, the husband of Nku and Elias Ketsing, the preacher whom she met in 1918[1], assisted Nku towards AFM development (Anderson 2000, p. 73). Nku unconditionally accepted her calling of establishing the church. Her calling is a spiritual gift in service to the people of God. She implemented her spiritual vision of building a twelve-door church because it was a moment of healing and hope, as per her dreams. The Spirit of God was upon her to liberate the people from spiritual and economic injustices. It seems that AFM's introduction of the bishop was for administrative purposes, while Christina Nku's role was spiritual.

Nku spent her daily life in a covenant of prayer. She, dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues. This happened because she is a gifted healer and recruited people into her church, AFM. The name "St John" was added because she named her son John. AFM was founded according to the Pentecostal movement (Anderson 2000, p. 73). Nku was led by the Holy Spirit; hence, her church, AFM, is inclined towards the Pentecostalism principle. Surely, she was able to pray for people who received healing from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Anderson (2000, p. 73) states, "But her practices, particularly in her healing rituals, brought increasing distance between St John and the white-led Pentecostal movement". People used bottles and buckets of water, which Nku prayed for, for the powerful healing of people. The church became popularly known as the Water Church (Anderson 2000, p. 73). The presence of the Holy Spirit and prayer is central to Nku's gift of healing. Water is the central method of healing the people. The context of healing people with water was appealing to African people who eventually joined AFM. The Holy Spirit has given life and healing intertwined with water to provide spiritual solutions to Africans. This was central to Nku's African Spirituality and theology. Water in AFM might be viewed as syncretism because, in this context, water is not used in the form of baptism but also healing. Water is very central not only in baptism but also in the healing context because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and prayer. This is also profoundly a Pentecostal context.

6. Spirituality and Theology of the Ibandla lamaNazaretha

The prophet Isaiah Shembe had a visionary encounter with God. Becken (1965, p. 2) states Shembe was born in Bergville District, near the Drakensberg mountain, and his date of birth is unknown. He heard voices speaking to him at the age of 12–15 years. They spoke to him to become a Christian, but he did not respond to his call. Later, he moved to Harrismith District, Orange Free State, and he was married. He then experienced the strongest voices, which forced him to join the church. Finally, "He underwent the catechetical instructions in the local Methodist Church, at that time known as the 'Wesleyans', in order to be baptised" (Becken 1965, p. 2). However, another source indicates the birth year of Shembe to be 1865 (Marinovich 2018, p. 34; Mzizi 2004, p. 191); this is not a favourite of scholars of Shembe, as popular dates, again, approximations, as earlier stated, are 1867 (Oosthuizen 1981, p. 12) and 1870 (Papini 1999, p. 3). There is a view that it is incorrect to claim that Shembe's date is unknown. It is highly possible that the birth date of Shembe is unknown, and it is incorrect to dismiss the view of Becken, who personally interviewed John Galilee Shembe, who is the son of Shembe.

He never liked European education. He worked in a town where he and his migrant workers taught each other to read and write isiZulu. Before he was baptised, he was already preaching, and people were following him. When he was ready to be baptised, he asked to be baptised according to the biblical notion of immersion baptism; however, a Methodist white minister rejected it. Shembe found William Lesheja, a minister in the African Native Baptist Church from Johannesburg came to Harrismith to baptise him together with his few followers by immersion. Some of his followers were later baptised at the Methodist Church (Becken 1965, p. 2; Vezi 1996, p. 36). Shembe received God's calling at a young age to serve the people and God. This has unconditionally led him to attend catechetical instructions at the Methodist Church in order to be baptised. However, he was denied the right to be baptised with an immersion baptism at the Methodist Church. Finally, pastor Lesheja baptised him by immersion to become an African Native Baptist Church member.

Another view is that other authors such as Morton (2014, p. 74), Jarvis (2019, p. 10) and several other articles, state that the minister who performed Shembe's baptism is called Leshega. This is an unknown author's view who is not in favour of the old source of Becken, and furthermore, they say, "The problem of using old sources, and accepting the data they provide at face value instead of verifying it with other sources, preferably recent. Additionally, it is important to justify the choices one makes in the instance of several choices and renditions of facts". Becken's source is not used because it is old but primarily because it is one of the historical and original contributions and sources in the academic world. Thus, the minister named Lesheja by Becken cannot be dismissed because it is old, and recent scholars use the minister name Leshega. The minister's name, Lesheja, is what Becken found during his interviews with the son of Shembe in 1965. Thus, Lesheja's name should be accepted as one of the contributions to South African education and scholarly work.

For three years, Shembe and Lesheja worked together in the African Native Baptist Church. Shembe was a gifted healer as he laid his hands on the sick people who received healing, and people were healed through his preaching of the Word. He was appointed an evangelist in the African Native Baptist Church. He celebrated Holy Communion and the ceremony of feet washing in this church, and he never used medication since 1900 until his death in 1935. Lesheja requested Shembe to separate from him because of Shembe's approach to ministry. In 1903, Shembe formed the Nazareth Movement (Becken 1965, p. 2). Shembe was an anointed man of God. He healed people through laying hands on people, and his preaching of the Word of God brought healing to people. However, the separation of Shembe and Lesheja was a different approach to ministry, which was closed by the formation of the Nazareth Movement.

Mthethwa (1989, p. 247) explains, "He had not been converted into Christianity by any person, but by visions". Shembe healed people immediately by talking to them or by sending his messengers to tell a sick person that they were healed. It can be understood

that Jesus Christ, in this context, was understood as the "Black Messiah". The sick laid hands to receive healing because they had "faith in God and in Jesus Christ". The healer healed the sick because they believed in Jesus Christ. The sick are healed without medicine (Becken 1989, pp. 235–37). The sick people are "healed through the power of the Holy Spirit, UMoya, acting through the agency of healers and of the congregation as whole" (Motala 1989, p. 198). The Holy Spirit is the real presence of religious power in the Ibandla lamaNazaretha church to heal and edify people (Van Wyk 1965, p. 4). The sick are expected to declare to the healer the nature of the sickness, and their faith plays a central role in healing. Support is given to the sick (Motala 1989, p. 198–99). Shembe was teaching and preaching about the Holy Spirit and its work in his church and the daily lives of people (Becken 1965, p. 7). Shembe was a spiritually gifted healer and prophet, healing people not only in the church but also in the community. Shembe applied a Pentecostalism principle to heal the people. In Ibandla lamaNazaretha, the Holy Spirit is visible to edify and heal people through the means of prophecy and prayer sessions. Mogashoa (2012, p. 189) stated that it is not difficult for African people to join churches such as Ibandla lamaNazaretha because the church is "indigenous, spiritual, Pentecostal and Zionist at the same time". Furthermore, the Holy Spirit and healing are inseparable in the Ibandla lamaNazaretha at its "cultic centre", in this case, at Ekuphakameni and Nhlangakazi (Resane 2020, p. 14). This shows that the Ibandla lamaNazaretha has always been the Pentecostal Church from an African perspective.

He started preaching Christianity in 1900. He established the Nazareth Baptist Church, also known as Ibandla lamaNazaretha, a decade later (Mthethwa 1989, p. 246). Shembe preached, baptised and healed people until he stayed at a place called Ekuphakameni, where he found rest. He established a healing centre, and his followers received God's blessings. This place became a church centre and a holy city for events such as rallies, work camps, etc. The church's second place was the holy mountain Nhlangakazi (Becken 1991, pp. 157–58). Nhlangakazi festival was held in July every year, where sick African people receive healing (Becken 1965, p. 10). Ekuphakameni is regarded as a holy and high place of worship. Both Ekuphakameni and Nhlangakazi are central places for the church and a place of rest and healing.

He reoriented European missionaries to teach the "gospel of the heart" because Christianity was about a change of heart, not a change of culture. He opposed an early missionary preaching of changing a culture instead of a heart. He dismissed biblical texts that were against his Zulu and Sotho culture (Mthethwa 1989, pp. 246–47, 55). Ibandla lamaNazaretha is the Zionist Church type because Zionist healing is associated with worship (Motala 1989, p. 198). "Like the ZCC, this church also combined spiritual life and economic life" (Mogashoa 2012, p. 190). Missionaries regarded the African culture as evil; hence, missionaries demanded that Africans change their culture. Shembe defended African practices of culture as a blessing. His approach to preaching was closely spiritual for people to change their hearts in order to preserve their African liberating culture. The missionary preaching approach was irrelevant because it pushed away an agenda of Africans to abandon their culture. Shembe's preaching approach was Spirit-centred and very contextual to Africans. Religion and culture are intertwined in the Ibandla lamaNazaretha.

In 1903, the Nazarite Movement was established. Shembe worked during the week and preached on weekends, and many people followed him. In 1908, Shembe left the migrant labour and moved to Ladysmith District, where he focused his ministry more on preaching, baptising and healing people (Becken 1965, p. 2). Ibandla lamaNazaretha was established by Isaiah Shembe at Ekuphakameni, a high place, in 1910. The church was growing (Becken 1965, p. 5). "The place Ekuphakameni symbolised a holy mountain for the church". The church is formed from the Zulu social structures, and its leader was a high priest addressed as inkosi, chief and Zulu dance (Mogashoa 2012, p. 190). There are two pilgrimages: the first is the January Feast of Tabernacles on Inhlangakazi mountain, and the second is the great festival in July at the Ekuphakameni headquarters. In the July festival, Shembe explains the church teachings (Resane 2020, p. 4). The January festival at Inhlangakazi occurs first

because Isaiah Shembe had a vision in December 1913 near Umphumulo. He spent two weeks in this mountain praying and fasting. This festival focuses more on healing. After the January festival, people move in a procession to Ekuphakameni. The meaning of the July festival held at Ekuphakameni is about praise and thanksgiving for what God has done for people. Prayers are offered, asking God for projection, the spread of the Gospel and repentance from sin. This is also a moment for a church leader to preach, heal, baptise and minister Holy Communion (Becken 1965, p. 9). These two festivals are central in the life of the church and also bring the whole church members together.

In 1911, a woman called Ellen Shobede married a son of the Mjadu family who was unable to be healed by "doctor-priests". "When Shembe came, he prepared water for her and put her into it, and the woman was healed" (Becken 1991, p. 158). Her family of Mjadu believed that Shembe healed her because of God. Shembe baptised people at various rivers that had snakes or crocodiles before he prayed to ask God to take them out of the water. What he asked for happened, and people were baptised in these rivers (Becken 1991, pp. 158–60). Shembe was a gifted prophet who healed people because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was evident when he asked God to take out snakes and crocodiles in the water for him to baptise people. He performed such miracles in the presence of the people.

In 1910, Shembe decided that a special day of worshiping God was on Sunday. However, in 1913, he decided to change the day of Ibandla lamaNazaretha worship of God to be on Saturday. This was informed by his understanding of the Sabbath day, and Ibandla lamaNazaretha members and non-members were expected to live a holy (Christian) life and prepare themselves spiritually for the Sabbath. The Bible and Shembe's hymnal are used for worship (Mthethwa 1989, p. 250). For Shembe, a day of worshiping God was very significant. Church members prepared themselves spiritually for worship services. This is profoundly important because the Holy Spirit and prayer are at the centre of worship and healing.

On Sunday morning, AIC members visited the Durban Sea wearing their colourful uniforms, washing their feet, and inserting their holy sticks and flags into the sand. These black Christians were at the ranks of the sea, enjoying singing, dancing, preaching and praying. Individuals were dipped into the waves. Traditional churches worship God in church buildings (Becken 1989, pp. 229–30). The significance of the sea was that it was a powerful landscape to worship God. The sea is a gift from God. It was a meaningful place to embrace God's creation. It was a very strange thing for traditional churches to see AIC members worshiping God next to the sea.

In the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, the stick was carried during baptism (Becken 1989, p. 232). A barren woman "was offered a reed mat with the words: On this mat are sitting beautiful children. And when Shembe entered, somebody whispered to her: There comes the messenger of God who brings good news for you". The sick people are healed through prayer during the service (Becken 1989, pp. 237–38). Salt is used for the purpose of vomiting and taking out evil, cleaning people's stomachs, and mixing with water and ash for medical reasons. Salt is regarded as the special power, purity and projective aspects, and protection is against evil spirits (Oosthuizen 1989, pp. 170–71). This type of healing is related to issues of spirituality and giving a prosperous life. These churches go deeper and deeper to use salt and other natural forms of healing as they believe that God's creation products, such as salt, trees and others, are central to human healing and getting rid of evil and poison. Praying and calling the Holy Spirit are closely connected to such natural products in service of African human healing and spirituality.

7. The Spirituality of Holy Communion in Ibandla lamaNazaretha

Pastors wear clerical gowns when they bless Holy Communion and at the Sabbath services. The church leader wears green and blue in addition to the black talar. In Holy Communion, there is a washing ceremony, which is followed by the distribution of the Holy Supper (Becken 1965, pp. 7, 9). Holy Communion is significantly intertwined with a washing ceremony. Thus, this celebration is unique because of its wishing part.

8. Is Pentecostalism Able to Accept These Independent Churches

In Pentecostalism, these churches understand baptism as the role of the Holy Spirit, who is received by people who are cleansed and their sins are removed. The Holy Spirit is at the centre of the AIC theology, which offers a comprehensive way of spiritual life. The Holy Spirit's insights reveal a profound contribution to the daily life of AIC members. Independent churches such as the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, Zion Christian Church and St John's Apostolic Faith Mission emphasise the Holy Spirit to a range that the Holy Spirit become so central to every aspect of their Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, practice and doctrine. AIC focus on the Holy Spirit is strongly influenced by Christian expression and context.

These Pentecostal-type African Independent Churches must be accepted by Pentecostalism as they are because they still emphasise the presence of the Holy Spirit, and syncretism is alive. This is not a strange phenomenon, and it must be embraced and an enhanced phenomenon in Africa. Transforming Pentecostalism is necessary here. This is an open approach, which calls pastors of mainline, African Independent Churches and Pentecostal churches, academic theologians, university, and theological training institutions to have conversations around issues of Pentecostalism and syncretism, which are necessary for the well-being of African Christians.

9. Conclusions

The study has shown that the Holy Spirit within the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, Zion Christian Church and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission is so central within the context of syncretism as elements such as salt, water mixed with salt, papers, etc., are prominent in the ministry. The interpretation of baptism as a sacrament is understood in the context of receiving God's grace, healing and spiritual power. The study shows that these three-fold African Independent Churches' first practice is the Pentecostalism principles, as these churches are still developing syncretism, which emerged later. However, there is no need for these churches to move away from syncretism. Pentecostalism should accept them as they are. This should be viewed as transformative Pentecostalism.

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Note

[1] This does not mean Elias Ketsing, the preacher and Christina Nku started to build the AFM church in 1918. This explains the year in which they met.

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New Prophetic Churches and Syncretism: A Critical View

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Abstract: New Prophetic Churches (NPCs) are a recent phenomenon within Pentecostalism in South Africa that have gained popularity. Their popularity is arguably due to their syncretism with African Traditional Religion (ATR), especially in its ministry practice of prophecy. The main objective of this article is to restore the sanctity of the prophetic ministry from a syncretic practice in NPCs back to its biblical foundation, by firstly highlighting the syncretic nature of NPCs prophetic ministry with divination, commonly practiced by native doctors in ATR. This study is a literary analysis of the practices of NPC prophets and their syncretic nature, using two case studies of NPC prophets. Osmer's theoretical framework is used to describe syncretic practices of NPCs and the rationale behind such practices, then a normative reflection of the traditional practice is presented and pragmatic ways to realign NPCs into mainstream Pentecostalism are proposed. The findings reveal that most NPC prophets are faith healers operating in familiar spirits, not the Holy Spirit. The bible rejects divination; therefore, NPCs must determine what identity they choose between ATR and Christianity, because they cannot simultaneously operate in both.

Keywords: New Prophetic Churches (NPCs); African Traditional Religion (ATR); Prophecy; Syncretism; African Pentecostalism

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1. Introduction

The popularity of the New Prophetic churches emerged at the turn of the millennium, due to the escalating number of unemployed people in South Africa and the rise in living costs. The prophets seem to be giving hope to these gullible, desperate audiences of southern Africa who are looking for a quick solution out of their poverty (Resane 2020, p. 100; Dube 2020, p. 42).

The prophetic element of New Prophetic Churches (NPCs) is arguably a practice introduced by Uebert Angel (native name Hubert Mudzanire) of Zimbabwe, who also mentored Shepherd Bushiri, a famous Malawian native who has become a specialist in prophecy such that his followers called him Major1, to distinguish him from the rest (Kgatle 2020c). This prophetic element is so because NPCs specialise in personal prophecy, where specific private details of individuals prophesied over are made public by the prophet, presumably without being told by the recipient or any other person. The main characteristic of these churches, among others, is personal prophecies, which are meant to expose the covert demonic operations in the lives of individuals and the cause of their misfortunes. This type of personal prophecy is known as 'ukuchazwa' ('fortune telling') in the South African cultural context, and is used mainly by sangomas (native doctors) to foretell the future of individuals. This personal prophecy is what Kgatle calls forensic prophecy, where the prophet reveals the phone numbers, car registration numbers, birth dates, and the specific meal that a person ate the previous day to demonstrate the superior spiritual capabilities of the prophet (Kgatle 2019, p. 3).

The ability of the NPCs to address the felt needs through prophecy makes them a popular choice for many who need answers for their troubled circumstances. Their ability to use social and electronic media in marketing their prophetic videos has made them famous and attracted many people to their churches. Their grandiose lifestyles make them

fit the profile of 'gurus' or some special 'demigods', which makes people conclude that their lifestyle is by reason of their prophetic abilities. This phenomenon of honour and great awe is evident among African traditional healers (izangoma), also known as native doctors, who are held in high esteem by their communities due to their ability to prophesy or diagnose their clients when coming for consultation. There are similarities between how the NPC prophets and the native healers operate, which will be the critical argument of this article on the role of syncretism among NPCs.

The main objective of this article is to restore the sanctity of the prophetic ministry from a syncretic practice in NPCs back to its biblical foundation by firstly highlighting the syncretic nature of NPCs' prophetic ministry with divination, commonly practised by native doctors in ATR. This study will be a literary analysis of the practices of NPC prophets and their syncretic nature. This article uses the theoretical framework of Osmer (2008) to ascertain what this prophetic ministry is and why it operates the way it does. What should be the proper boundaries or parameters within the biblical framework when it comes to serving or operating the gifts of the spirit? This article confronts divination from a biblical perspective (Deuteronomy 18:9–14 https://bible.com/bible/114/deu.18.9-14, accessed on 19 August 2023), and proposes the servant attitude of Luke 17:10 (https://bible.com/bible/114/luk.17.10, accessed on 19 August 2023) Philippians 2:3–8 (https://bible.com/bible/114/php.2.3-8, accessed on 19 August 2023) and 1 Corinthians 14:3 (https://bible.com/bible/114/1co.14.3, accessed on 19 August 2023) as a biblical practice in prophetic ministry that NPC prophets ought to consider if they are to operate within the biblical framework.

2. African Perspective and NPCs

Africans are generally spiritual because of their foundation of primal religion, which views everything that happens around their lives from a spiritual perspective of cause and effect, always wanting to know what the reason is for things to be the way they are, especially if they are negative (Nel 2019; Omenyo 2011). Neo-prophetic pastors aware of Africans' natural spiritual inclination have closed the gap that the missionary churches could not fill among Africans. According to the South African cultural atlas, the Christian population stands at almost 84.2% (Scroope 2019), meaning that most people are somewhat conversant with the message of the gospel about Jesus Christ the saviour, healer, baptiser in the spirit and soon coming king, which are the tenets of the Christian faith in the Pentecostal tradition where NPCs originate (Dayton 1980).

NPCs originate from Charismatic Pentecostals and strongly emphasise the gift of the spirit, including prophecy. They allow the prophetic ministry to freely operate in their congregations through a company of prophets, or those with a prophetic gift who may or may not be the leading pastor of the church. This free operation of gifts in the congregation is also known as the priesthood of all believers, where the gifts are active in the whole church, including the gift of prophecy, also practised in African Initiated Churches (AIC) like the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), where the prophetic ministry can operate upon those who are gifted and not just the pastor or leader of the church (Ramantswana 2018). One of the foundations of Charismatic Pentecostals that provided a launching pad for NPCs is the emphasis on the pioneering, charismatic, iconic leader gifted in healing and deliverance, with a strong emphasis on the message of prosperity (Frahm-Arp 2016). These three elements, the prophetic ministry, the message of prosperity and the gift of healing through deliverance, were taken to the extreme by NPCs who paraded the giftedness of one leader and turned that leader into a celebrity prophet, resulting in a celebrity cult (Kgatle 2021, pp. 135–56). Among such leaders, the following have become the flagship of NPCs because of their popularity in the public domain through social and electronic media coverage: Shepherd Bushiri of the Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) and Paseka Motsoeneng of Incredible Happenings. These NPC leaders and many others like them are self-proclaimed prophets who have no oversight institution to which they are accountable; as a result, all the persons mentioned above are involved in some controversial stories

that have attracted the media (Kgatle 2020a; Matshobane and Masango 2020). Firstly, it is essential to define syncretism and how it is used in this article.

3. Syncretism Defined

Syncretism comes from the Greek word 'synkretismos', and it originates from the tradition of the Island of Crete, where various quarreling groups, who under normal circumstances do not agree, joined forces together against a common enemy (Ezenweke and Kanu 2012; Gehman 2001). In the same manner as the example above, syncretism is defined as a combination of two contrasting ideas, finding synergy in pursuit of a common goal that ultimately blends the two to such an extent that something new emerges that originates from both, yet is different from them (Schreiter 1994; Gehman 2001).

In its simplistic definition, syncretism is the replacement of fundamental tenets of the gospel with the religious elements of the host culture (Ezenweke and Kanu 2012). Syncretism can be either critical or uncritical. Uncritical syncretism is the infusion of other beliefs into the Christian faith without any filtering, which affects the sanctity of the Christian faith (Chidili 1997). A biblical example of uncritical syncretism in the scripture is in 1 Samuel 28:7–9 (https://bible.com/bible/114/1sa.28.7-9, accessed on 19 August 2023) where Saul, the first king of Israel, requires a woman who was a wizard to bring up the spirit of Samuel from the dead. This act of communicating with the dead was a forbidden practice in Israel (Deuteronomy 18:10 https://bible.com/bible/114/deu.18.10, accessed on 19 August 2023); as a result, the very King Saul had ordered that such divination practices and those who practise them should be driven out of the land (1 Samuel 28:3 https://bible.com/bible/114/1sa.28.3, accessed on 19 August 2023). We see, however, king Saul operating in a syncretic manner by consulting a wizard who was a pagan practitioner. The pattern of uncritical syncretism is abundant in the scriptures concerning Israel and their worship of God. Israel was many times rebuked by the prophets for idolatry that was caused by uncritical syncretism with pagan religions (Ezekiel 16:28 https://bible.com/bible/114/ezk.16.28, accessed on 19 August 2023), Jeremiah 44:17 https://bible.com/bible/114/jer.44.17 accessed on 19 August 2023, Exodus 34:15–16 https://bible.com/bible/114/exo.34.15.16 accessed on 19 August 2023).

Uncritical syncretism results in enculturation, where a new culture is intentionally learned and practised to relate to those who practise it (Grusec and Hastings 2014). In some cases, uncritical syncretism can manifest through acculturation, a balancing act in the practices of two cultures, where the dominant culture prevails over the other. However, the minor is still practised (Grusec and Hastings 2014).

On the other hand, critical syncretism is the analysis of a prevailing culture and adopting elements that are accommodative of the gospel while discarding those that are not, and repackaging the gospel with nuances of the host culture (Ezenweke and Kanu 2012). This repackaging of the gospel is also known as inculturation or contextualisation in missiology (Bosch 2011). There are also biblical texts that provide an example of critical syncretism. One such text is in Acts 15, where the church council in Jerusalem had to decide whether the gentile Christians had to be circumcised for them to be accepted as faithful followers of Christ.

The decision made by the council of Jerusalem (in Acts 15) demonstrated a critical syncretism because they did not just expect the Gentiles to assimilate Christianity packaged into the Jewish culture of circumcision. Instead, they contextualised the gospel message to accommodate the Gentiles' non-circumcision culture. Critical syncretism is a strategic vehicle for the global spread of the gospel into various cultures, nations, and tribes; without it, it would have been impossible for the gospel to spread into all the nations of the world. A scriptural reference that confirms the latter is the mission of Paul, the apostle, in Athens, where the Greeks were worshipping so many gods that they had an inscription "to the unknown God" (Acts 17:23 https://bible.com/bible/114/act.17.23, accessed on 19 August 2023), just in case there is a god they missed in representing their worship.

Paul's understanding of the Athenian context enabled him to use critical syncretism by claiming that the God he presented was the same God the Athenians had already mentioned in one of their altars.

Therefore, there is no pure religion or practice of faith whose context has yet to be somehow influenced because every context has been shaped by a particular culture, which itself is syncretic (Frankfurter 2021). Based on this definition, therefore, the argument is not about syncretism in general, but about uncritical syncretism, which is demonstrated through practices of acculturation and, ultimately, enculturation, which compromises the fundamental belief of the Christian faith. This article argues that the practice of prophetic ministry in NPCs is uncritically syncretic and influenced by the practice of traditional healers in African Traditional Religion (ATR).

It is important at this stage to define what constitutes traditional healers, which are categorised into three or more categories: diviners, herbalists and faith healers. Troskie (1997), in empirical research, defines the concept of traditional healers and their categories as follows. Diviners are native doctors because of their ability to diagnose their clients by connecting with ancestral spirits, and receive direction or a prognosis from them using animal bones and other traditional artifacts for diagnoses. Herbalists are medicine people who know how to cure specific illnesses using specific herbs revealed through dreams, including those that can protect from witchcraft. However, they are not necessarily diviners, although they can easily become such because of their ability to connect with the spirit world. Faith healers are inclined towards the Christian faith, and therefore use the bible, prayer and the lighting of candles as their tools for diagnosis. They can also become diviners simultaneously, where the ancestral spirit can guide them (Truter 2007; Sodi et al. 2011; cf. Moyo 2022, p. 458; Mbiti 2015, p. 155). It is the latter statement that demonstrates the uncritical syncretic nature of NPCs. At this stage, the theoretical framework of Osmer will enable the study to unpack the complexity of syncretism in NPCs further.

4. Theoretical Framework

Osmer (2008) shares a story from his first congregation where he faced a conflict among members over the right location to place a swing set for children to play while the parents converse over coffee. The swing set was placed next to a covered picnic area where a barbecue for homecoming friends and family was held once a year. The covered picnic area was built by a bookkeeper of the church in honour of her deceased husband; as a result, she took offense when the new members of the church who had young children decided to place the swing set next to the 'sacred' area without asking for her permission. This information was not known to the newer and younger church members, including Osmer, as a new pastor of the church. When she quit her service as a longstanding bookkeeper and church member over a swing set, Osmer was bewildered and suspected something profound to the action. In his quest to find a solution, he developed the four core tasks of practical theological interpretation, which are descriptive–empirical, interpretive, normative and pragmatic tasks to understand "What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond?" (Osmer 2008, loc 90).

Osmer's (2008) theoretical framework of theological interpretation guides this article to describe uncritical syncretism in NPCs empirically and attempt to interpret it using various theories and then, to propose a normative way of good practice in theology and a pragmatic solution to resolve the problem.

The following case studies will help to highlight some of the uncritical syncretic practices of NPCs by "gathering information that helps us to discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts." (Osmer 2008, loc 90).

We start with prophet Shepherd Bushiri, a native of Malawi, born 20 February 1983. He founded a church called Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG), based in Pretoria, South Africa, as its headquarters. It has church branches in Malawi, Tanzania, Ghana and South Sudan (Walubengo 2022). The church started in 2010 in Malawi, but was formally registered in South Africa in 2012 (Mokoena 2020). He became a Christian early in his youth. Although

his family was impoverished, he attained a higher education from the Therapon University of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Various controversial practices concerning Bushiri's ministry are accessible in the public domain. However, this article focuses on his prophecy to Ms. Miya, one of the attendants of ECG who also happened to be an employee in one of Bushiri's businesses. Shepherd Bushiri made claims in the presence of a congregation of thousands of attendees, recorded on their television station, that Ms. Mpane, the wife of Ms. Miya's ex-husband, had bewitched them both to break them up (Mothombeni 2018; cf. Kgatle 2020b). Ms. Mpane challenged this so-called prophecy through the legal route, where she sued Bushiri R1000,000 and ZAR 500,000 respectively, for character defamation, which she claims harmed her business and affected her husband, who had to resign from work because of the damage the prophecy caused to his image and reputation at his workplace (Mothombeni 2018). This diagnosis of witchcraft is popular among traditional healers, and also causes enmity among family members in most cases. The following empirical research by Shange and Ross (2022) confirms this common diagnosis.

In the empirical research by Shange and Ross (2022), fourteen (14) traditional healers categorised as diviners, herbalists and faith healers were interviewed on their diagnostic methods when treating mental illness (Shange and Ross 2022). This qualitative research design was among male and female traditional healers aged 18 years and older who had been practising for over five years, particularly on mental health cases. The main criteria were the experience in the practice based on indigenous education more than Western education. A purposive snowball sampling was used to recruit the participants in the township of Dube in Soweto, Johannesburg. Five persons were between 18 and 29 years, another five were between 30 and 40 years, three were between 41 and 50 and one was between 51 and 65. Ten were males, eight were herbalists, five were diviners and one was a faith healer. The data collection method was interviews based on closed and open-ended questions. The closed questions were to collect the biographical details of the traditional healers, while the open questions were to elicit their views on how they understood mental illness. The research revealed that in the category of the causes of mental illness, among others, witchcraft was the first suspected cause that inflicted the illness. This witchcraft spell is because of jealousy, mainly from those close to the victim, like extended family members, friends, neighbours or work colleagues (Shange and Ross 2022, p. 509; Ramantswana and Sebetseli 2021). This diagnosis of witchcraft as a cause of misfortune is a common diagnosis when the causes of illness, misfortune or any other inexplicable phenomenon are unknown (Sodi et al. 2011, p. 103; cf. Mbiti 2015, pp. 157–65; Omenyo 2011). When comparing Bushiri's prophecy on the activities of witchcraft that are a cause of breaking a marriage and the empirical research findings from traditional healers who also suspect witchcraft as a cause of mental illness, the common diagnosis for both is witchcraft. This common diagnosis causes enmity among friends, neighbours, family and colleagues, as the case is with Bushiri's prophecy. Therefore, a clear uncritical syncretism exists between how NPC prophets conduct their prophetic diagnoses and how traditional healers make their diagnoses (cf. Cook 2009). This similarity in diagnosis connects NPCs and traditional healers in an uncritical syncretic relationship.

Another uncritical syncretism happens in how deliverance is administered among those who have come to seek help or a way of treatment to cure their sickness or whatever problem they present. Deliverance in its simplest form in the scriptures is understood as the casting out of demons, just as Jesus did it in his ministry (Luke 11:19 https://bible.com/bible/114/luk.11.19, accessed on 19 August 2023; Luke 13:32 https://bible.com/bible/114/luk.13.32, accessed on 19 August 2023; Mark 3:15 https://bible.com/bible/114/mrk.3.15, accessed on 19 August 2023). Deliverance, however, in African Pentecostalism, particularly charismatic Pentecostals and also NPCs, goes beyond casting out demons to breaking ties with generational curses, confronting witchcraft, praying for physical and emotional healing, which is presumably caused by demonic spirits, all in the name of spiritual warfare (Kgatle 2022; cf. Chitando 2009, p. 38; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, p. 24; see also Adogame 2012, p. 76).

An excellent example of uncritical syncretism in deliverance is demonstrated by Paseka Motsoeneng, a prophet of Incredible Happenings, an NPC church, who is also famous for his rather unconventional ways of conducting deliverance. Paseka Franz Motsoeneng, also known as 'Pastor Mboro'(a shortened slang name of 'prophet' in vernacular called moporofeta or mprofeti), is a South African citizen, born on 8 April 1968, a founder of Incredible Happenings Ministries (IHM) based in Katlehong. He is a televangelist and prophet. "Nothing much is known about his... educational background" (Smith 2022). He started his healing ministry in the late 1980s, praying for sanitary pads to cure sexual problems for both males and females (Ndlangisa 2017). In the early 1990s, after being inspired by the preaching of the father of Charismatic Pentecostalism in South Africa, Pastor Ray McCauley of Rhema Bible Church, he launched his congregation and named it Living Hope Family Church; he later renamed it City of Hope Church, only to finally change it into the current name of IHM (Ndlangisa 2017). His mother was a faith healer at St. Johns's Apostolic Faith mission, an African Indigenous church (AIC) with an affinity to African Traditional Religion, which the young Motsoeneng was exposed to in his youth (Ndlangisa 2017). He had a syncretic foundation of African Traditional Religion and Charismatic Pentecostalism in his religious formation. Among many other controversial stories in the public domain surrounding the ministry practices of Paseka Motsoeneng, two incidences are of interest to this study. In the first one, Motsoeneng conducted deliverance on a 17-year-old girl by putting his fingers in her genitals in the presence of a live audience and television crew, all this in the name of deliverance, which was a typical way he used to deliver females from certain demonic afflictions (Naik 2011). Another reported incidence is when one male congregant had an erectile dysfunction. He and his wife called Motsoeneng to their house to pray for them in the presence of a TV crew. He instructed them to lay hands on their private parts while he prayed for them. After the prayer, the men's problem was cured, and they immediately slept together, exercising their conjugal rights in a live recording. However, the TV station manager censored the material from being broadcast, which Motsoeneng contested but did not win (Malatji 2017).

Traditional healers also use unconventional methods to cure their clients of evil spirits. The cleansing ritual of bathing those who need cleansing from some alleged evil spirits is a common practice among traditional healers. Men and women come naked into the water basin with indigenous medicine (muthi) to cleanse them from all evil spirits as a form of deliverance (Shange and Ross 2022, pp. 512, 517; Sodi et al. 2011). The problem of infertility and erectile dysfunction has always been a matter that traditional healers have been known to cure through traditional medicines (Semenya and Potgieter 2014, pp. 7, 8). Therefore, we see a similarity again in deliverance between traditional healers and how NPC prophets operate. Both have the potential to bring shame to those who are being delivered due to the unconventional methods of deliverance or treatment. The difference in all these cases above is that the traditional healers are doing all of their work in the privacy of their working space. However, NPC prophets conduct their business in the congregation's presence, and with Live broadcasts posted on social media for the world to see, bringing further shame to their participants.

One more thing that connects the syncretic nature of NPC prophets with traditional healers is the similarity of style in their presentation. It is common knowledge that diviners seek an affirmative response from their clients, to agree with them while they are giving them their diagnosis by constantly requiring all who are in attendance to affirm when he/she says "Vumani Bo!" (translated: "Say Yes!"); their reply is "Siyavuma!" (translated: "We say Yes") (Vellem 2010; cf. Maithufi 2016). This same pattern of requiring affirmation is used by NPC prophets and demonstrated by the recipients of the prophecy, where after every statement that the NPC prophet makes in his diagnosis, he requires a response by asking "Is this true?"; then, the respondents reply "Yes prophet it is true!", as witnessed in their social media channels. This line of asking is conducted repeatedly after every statement made by the prophet, theatrically and emotionally, while the prophet continues to prophesy. Then, the prophet turns to the crowd who are witnesses of the prophecy to

ask them, Can I prophesy? Can I go deeper? Then, they reply, Prophesy! Go deeper, papa (our father)! (Kgatle 2022). This line of questioning is another case of similar operations in deliverance between faith healers and NPC prophets.

Furthermore, Ramabulana (2018) exposes the training that some of these prophets receive by sharing his testimony on how he was trained as a faith healer to produce miracles and prophecies, and to grow his church membership. Some training administered to the NPC prophets reveals some cultic practices that Kgatle discusses in detail (Kgatle 2021). Similarly, traditional healers undergo training from 6 months up to a year, and even years of rigorous training with various rituals and spiritual experiences, including encounters with snakes in the water (Sodi et al. 2011; Troskie 1997). The training of both has similar unconventional encounters.

There are also consultation fees for one-on-one sessions with the prophet for further diagnoses; this consultation comes at a cost that is paid upfront, which can be anything from ZAR 5000 and above (Mashaba 2015; cf. Tsekpoe 2019). It is also standard practice for traditional healers to charge a consultation fee that varies from ZAR 2000 to above, depending on the case presented (Troskie 1997, p. 34). The similarity of the two patterns shows how the uncritical syncretic NPC has imbibed the style of native doctors. The question is, what causes the NPC prophets to be uncritically syncretic? The answer to this question is the next focus of this paper.

5. Interpretation of the Syncretic Behaviour

The interpretive task draws on multidisciplinary theories "to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring" (Osmer 2008, loc 92). This article draws on the African perspective, also found in primal religions, where the spiritual realm is as natural as the material realm; as a result, the African perspective is preoccupied with the causes of misfortunes and who is behind them (Nel 2019, p. 3). In general, there is always a belief among Africans that behind every misfortune there is a mastermind who is using sorcery (Mbiti 2015, p. 166). Therefore, the AmaXhosa tribe in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa have a saying, "Ayihambi yodwa", meaning that something (evil) is behind what can be seen with the naked eye. NPC prophets, therefore, appeal to a greater audience of Africans because they claim to reveal who is behind the misfortunes, calling it a forensic prophecy, as indicated above, typically what traditional healers and diviners can also reveal (Kgatle 2019). It is these kinds of similarities and the ones mentioned above that make most people unable to differentiate between the NPCs and traditional healers, which indicates that NPCs have now become fully syncretical with traditional healers (Kgatle 2019, p. 2; cf. Nel 2019, pp. 3, 4; Mwandayi 2014, p. 238; Shoko and Chiwara 2013).

There is consensus among scholars in African Pentecostalism that the new phenomenon of NPC is uncritically syncretic with traditional healers in ATR. The position of this study aligns with the conclusion by scholars of African Pentecostalism, who perceive the prophetic praxis of NPCs as uncritically syncretic with ATR, with a slight variation that they are more aligned to faith healers (abathandazeli, if singular—umthadazeli or umprofethi) than to traditional healers. Faith healers are classified as a part of ATR, with similar operations as traditional healers. However, the difference is that they use the bible, lit candles and prayer as their tools for operation instead of bones and other traditional items, as with diviners (Sodi et al. 2011). Therefore, faith healers are a branch of ATR that has acculturated into Christianity. Taringa (2013) further develops this argument, stating that these NPC prophets operate similarly to traditional healers, and concludes that they are traditional healers who have disguised themselves as preachers of the gospel by wearing suits instead of traditional regalia.

Chimuka (2016), however, argues differently about NPC prophets; the conclusion reached by Taringa, including Shoko and Chiwara, who have a similar argument, is inconclusive if it is only based on similarities of operational methodology. He points out that if the above argument is valid, that NPC prophets are disguised as traditional healers,

what could be wrong when NPCs align themselves with African spirituality? What makes African spirituality to be perceived as satanic and void of the Holy Spirit? (Chimuka 2016).

In essence, what Chimukwa is asking is if there is anything wrong in being a Christian who operates in divination regardless of whether the practitioner is African, Western or Asian? All nations have an element of divination in their traditions; for an example, palmistry, fortune tellers, horoscopes and psychics arguably use some form of divination in the Western culture (Rhodes 2006). The answer to Chimukwa's question brings us to the third step in our theoretical framework, which is a normative position on how things ought to be concerning the syncretic nature of NPCs.

6. Normative Position on Syncretism

The normative task uses "theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our response and learning from good practice" (Osmer 2008, loc 92). In this article, biblical theology, expressed through scripture, serves as an ethical standard to guide our responses and follow good practice.

In Deuteronomy 18:9–14 https://bible.com/bible/114/deu.18.9-14 (accessed on 19 August 2023) the scripture states the following:

> "When you enter the land the Lord is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or their daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so."

The scriptures forbade any involvement with divination, mediums, sorcery or spiritists, which tend to defile the people (Leviticus 19:31 https://bible.com/bible/114/lev.19.31, accessed on 19 August 2023). Furthermore, in the New Testament (Acts 16:16 https://bible.com/bible/114/act.16.16, accessed on 19 August 2023), Paul the Apostle cast out a spirit of divination out of a girl who made money for her employees, and she no longer was able to operate in that spirit. This act of Paul indicates that the spirit of divination was not only forbidden for the people of God to be involved with, but it is evident that divination does not originate from God's Holy Spirit, but it is a familiar spirit that had to be cast out. Normatively, there must be a distinction between the Holy Spirit and familiar spirits, and these two cannot co-exist in mutual agreement; hence, Paul had to cast out the spirit of divination.

Inculturation in contextualisation will always be needed in advancing the gospel's message to different parts of the world, its cultures, and contexts. Contextualisation "is an effort to express the never changing word of God in ever changing modes of relevance" (Kato 1975). Furthermore, the incarnation was contextual, where God had to come from heaven and take the form of humans to reach them in their context without compromising his message and mandate (Bergmann and Vähäkangas 2021, p. 5). The language of presenting the gospel, including theological concepts, must be expressed in forms that will be relevant to the context of the recipients, without compromising the original meaning of the concepts. However, there is a thin line between inculturation (critical syncretism) and acculturation (uncritical syncretism), and caution must always be exercised in watching that those lines are not crossed. On the question of prophecy, scripture (1 Corinthians 14:3 https://bible.com/bible/114/1co.14.3, accessed on 19 August 2023) is clear that prophecy is meant to encourage, to edify and to comfort (cf. Kgatle 2020b). It is not meant to shame, ridicule or embarrass, as with the prophecies given by some NPC prophets. On charging consultation fees, scripture (Matthew10:8 https://bible.com/bible/114/mat.10.8, accessed on 19 August 2023) instructs those in the mission field and ministering to God's people

to do so without commercialising the gifts God has given them. On servanthood and one's disposition in ministry, the scripture presents the example of Jesus, who is a servant (Philippians 2:3–8 https://bible.com/bible/114/php.2.3-8, accessed on 19 August 2023) and leader who intentionally humbles himself before God, even if he is part of the Godhead; also, how, after serving, the attitude must not be pomp and hype, but humility (Luke 17:10 https://bible.com/bible/114/luk.17.10, accessed on 19 August 2023).

7. Pragmatic Position on Syncretism

The pragmatic task determines "strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable. . ." (Osmer 2008, loc 95). The practical strategy of this study is to guide NPCs away from their current position of uncritical syncretism through acculturation to the ideal position of critical syncretism through inculturation and contextualisation.

New Prophetic Churches' prophets must take a clear position in their religious affiliation, whether they follow Christianity or African Traditional Religion. However, they can never claim both positions, since they are diametrically different from each other based on the source of their authority—the Holy Spirit vs. familiar spirits. In its current form, NPCs are presented as Pentecostals and Charismatics, due to their style of worship and order of service; however, when the prophet starts operating, it takes discernment to recognise the shift from preacher to faith healer.

The congregants must be made aware when attending NPC church services that they are submitting themselves to the ministry of a faith healer who is operating under the influence of familiar spirits and not necessarily the Holy Spirit. Typically of some cults when they join the church, the actual nature of the ministry is not fully revealed, and all appears as normal as a Pentecostal and Charismatic Church (PCC); it is not until later, when one has already been deeply active in the church, that they discover they are involved in a cult.

8. Conclusions

In this article, syncretism was defined, and the conclusion was that no matter how we try to avoid it using terms like hybrid, mixture, inculturation or acculturation, it is still syncretism. There is a stigma around the term syncretism, but not all syncretism is negative; it depends on the type of syncretism implemented. Critical syncretism is a positive version because it contextualises the gospel message to communicate within the culture dynamics without losing the message's essence. The incarnation of Christ was contextual; therefore, it is a positive kind of syncretism where Christ had to be born in the earthly environment and learn all the ways of humanity. He was surrounded by sin and sinners, but he did not sin, yet he could communicate to sinners within a paradigm that they could understand. On the other hand, uncritical syncretism is imbibing the culture of one's surroundings, and allowing prescription to the culture about what ought to be done to a point where the culture takes over. This process is called acculturation, where a dominant culture overrules the minor cultural influence to a point where one can become enculturated entirely or absorbed into another. This enculturation is called an uncritical syncretism because it does not critique its encounters with its surroundings, but adopts whatever is presented as a different experience, hence affecting the essence of the original message. The latter has been the case with New Prophetic Churches, where their prophets have absorbed methods of African Traditional Religion and used them as bait to attract African Christians. These Christians seek solutions to life's challenges and questions, and may not want to ask a traditional healer if they can obtain the same service in an air-conditioned building in a church-like atmosphere. We have established that the operations of NPC prophets fit the profile of faith healers who also use the bible and prayer with lit candles to administer their calling. Based on the similarity of the results of their prophecies, some have proven to be divisive, especially among family and friends, since they focus on a witch hunt within the relational scope of the inquirer. Therefore, it stands to reason that the source of their operation is the same: the spirit of divination or a familiar spirit rather than the Holy Spirit.

The similarity of training that NPC prophets undergo is as rigorous as the training of traditional healers. This kind of training is not biblical, nor is it carried out in conventional ministry training institutions. However, it is cult-like based on the personal testimony of an x-NPC prophet who has undergone training and is now confessing these secrets after choosing to come out of this negative syncretism. Using Osmer's theoretical framework, the study used two case studies of Bushiri and Motsoeneng, both NPC prophets, to empirically describe and then interpret why such a phenomenon was happening, state what should be a normative practice, and propose practical ways of handling this negative syncretism. The conclusion is that the bible is very explicit about its negative position concerning diviners, no matter the cultural affiliation; therefore, on that basis, NPCs must decide on which identity they want to have, African Traditional Religion or Christianity, because they cannot be both.

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Reviving Premodern Africa? The Anointed Objects and the Magical Economy in Un(der)developed Africa

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Abstract: African neo-Pentecostal prophets (ANPPs) address the issue of economic powerlessness in un(der)developed regions of Africa by reviving elements of the premodern African magical economy. They use anointed objects, such as anointed water, for economic purposes, while African Traditional Religions (ATR) use magical charms in their economic life. Therefore, with their anointed objects, ANPPs revive the premodern ATR worldview of the economy. This research is guided by the following question: in what ways do ANPPs' anointed objects syncretise with the occult economy of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) in their responses to the prevailing economic powerlessness in African contexts? ANPPs perpetuate the magical economy practiced by premodern African societies who sought to alleviate their un(der)development by using magic to exert control over the spiritual world to acquire material wealth. Thus, ANPPs are challenged to adopt a scientifically informed response that empowers Africans to address structural elements that perpetuate un(der)development in contemporary Africa.

Keywords: Pentecostal prophets; syncretism; occult economy; magic; anointed objects; science; African traditional religion

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1. Introduction

There is a notable syncretic incorporation of the African magical perspective on material wealth in the practices and teachings of African neo-Pentecostal prophets (ANPPs). These teachings emphasise the importance of anointed objects, such as water, oil, stones, waistbands, wristbands, and portraits of the prophets in overcoming personal economic powerlessness. "Syncretism" can be defined as the "practice of combining different systems of beliefs into one religious movement" (Kgatle 2023a, p. 1). ANPPs combine elements from African Traditional Religion (ATR) in their use of anointed objects. While some common objects, such as oil and water, align with ATR practices, ANPPs extend their usage to include a wide array of objects, blessing them to confer spiritual power to bring wealth to the user. ANPPs are a variant of African Pentecostalism, setting themselves apart through their prophetic practice of one-on-one prophecy, the performance of miracles, the commercialisation of anointed items, and often adopting a monarchical leadership style (Gunda and Machingura 2013; Kgatle 2022, 2023b). A major distinguishing mark of ANPPs is the prominent role they play in people's search for material prosperity (Banda 2019, 2020a, 2022).

This article argues that ANPPs incorporate what Comaroff and Comaroff (1999, p. 279) describe as the "occult economy", meaning "the deployment of real or imagined magical means for material ends" to overcome economic powerlessness in Africa. By economic powerlessness is meant a condition characterised by limitations or the inability to engage with economic dynamics in a creative and sustainable manner, primarily due to the prevailing state of un(der)development.

The preference for the term "un(der)development" instead of "poverty", is motivated by the belief that Africa is economically powerless not because it has no resources to be

an economically powerful continent. Rather, Africa is economically powerless because, *among many other things,* it has undeveloped and underdeveloped systems of using its abundant economic systems to create prosperous economies for its people. Thus, by un(der)development is meant the "inability to use ... God-given resources" (Speckman 2007, p. xxiii) to build a meaningful economy that is different from traditional subsistence economies to sustainable economies. However, this critique of the African tendency to resort to spiritual solutions to address its un(der)development firmly acknowledges that a holistic solution to the continent's economic powerlessness must also vigorously address the geopolitical forces that continually contribute to Africa's impoverishment and current exploitation. Western colonial powers, and now Eastern economic powers like China, have and continue to actively undevelop and underdevelop Africa so that the continent remains a source of their raw materials and cheap human labour.

However, a serious problem continues to stunt Africa's pathway to meaningful economic development. This problem is that during Africa's ancient economic un(der)developed stages it relied on magical powers for economic survival, and now after being undeveloped and underdeveloped by exploitative and oppressive colonial geopolitical powers and the ineffective and corrupt governing systems of African leaders, ANPPs continue to prescribe the same magical approach to economic powerlessness through their anointed objects. In Africa, the state of economic powerlessness continues to be a fertile ground for the occult economy as indicated by the high emergence of spiritualists and prophets who provide spiritual and magical objects of attaining wealth. Economic powerlessness is an important factor in understanding the reliance on magic for economic purposes in Africa, because there is a notable correlation between the occult economy and economic un(der)development in Africa. This correlation leads people to "dwell too much on the role of spirits in controlling and shaping their lives" Biri and Manyonganise (2022, p. 6).

2. The Use of Anointed Objects to Overcome Economic Powerlessness

In the African context of un(der)development, anointed objects play a prominent role in addressing economic powerlessness. The ANPPs' anointed objects serve as instruments for breaking through formidable socioeconomic obstacles that obstruct individuals from achieving material prosperity. The intention of this section is to briefly describe the use of anointed objects among ANPPs. The intention is not a detailed description of the *practice* of anointed objects, but to substantiate its *principle* among ANPPs. Therefore, a detailed description of the points of contact in the practice of anointed objects is beyond this article.

The common objects used for anointed objects are water and oil, which are sometimes in containers branded with the prophets' name and portrait. This branding has led to questions about the commercialisation of religion. However, there is no limit to objects used by ANPPs for anointing purposes, as each prophet can use anything convenient and deemed fit to transmit God's power to the believer at the particular moment. Other objects that are known to have been used as anointed objects include armbands, wristbands, waistbands, and clothes, key holders, writing pens, and the portraits of the prophets, or anything that bears the prophet's name or insignia. Taru (2019, p. 118) describes how attendees to a prayer resort of a prophet in Zimbabwe collected pebbles, soil, and seeds from the prayer place which they believed "would act as a point of spiritual connection between their homes and the Prayer Resort". The prophets bless these objects and give or sell them to their followers.

The ANPPs unequivocally assert the power in their anointed objects to create wealth for their users. Many poor people give testimonies of the material successes they have achieved through the use of these anointed objects (Biri 2012, p. 7; Taru 2019, p. 135). That is, "Supernatural or magical powers are attributed to such objects" (Biri 2012, p. 7). The Zimbabwean prophet, Emmanuel Makandiwa, proclaims that anointed objects "unlock all the doors of impossibilities in one's life. It will lubricate your lives, and things will start moving smoothly" (Rupapa and Shumba 2014). In this statement, Makandiwa presents anointed

objects as necessary instruments for engaging a poor person's economic powerlessness. Walter Magaya (2015) articulated this use of anointed objects as follows:

> 'Anointing oil is a physical symbolism of God's healing and deliverance power. It is a point of contact in spiritual warfare and is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It protects from deadly dangers and traps, and it does the cleansing and purification. It is the anointing of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit which is a powerful tool in spiritual warfare. The anointing oil destroys or breaks the bondage, burden and oppression caused by the devil because the enemy's yoke connects and binds you with sin, poverty, disease and limitation. The anointing oil therefore breaks all the yokes the devil is using to steal the promise God made to us, that of having dominion over earth and being seated in the heavenly places.'

In short, Magaya is saying that anointed objects tip the economic ground in favour of the Christians by giving them the power to overcome all barriers standing in the way of their economic success.

Similarly, South African prophet Hamilton Q Nala (2022b) asserted the power of his anointed by objects by declaring that "God said he will use my name to heal people". Nala (2022b) proceeded to declare the power of anointing carried by his own name by saying that if the water in the bottles branded with his name was emptied and replaced with water from the tape, it still has the power to heal, if the sticker with his name remains on the container.[1]

While the use of anointed objects can be evaluated from a perspective of the commercialisation and abuse of religion (Kgatle and Qiki 2023), in this article, it is evaluated from a syncretisation of the African occult economy in responding to the prevailing context of un(der)development. Various African scholars have pointed out that many poor and powerless citizens rely on the miraculous systems of the ANPPs to overcome economic powerlessness resulting from structural inequalities hindering them from attaining economic prosperity (Banda 2020b; Kgatle 2023b; Maluleke 2019). Many ANPPs such as Nala are aware of the colonial and political structural factors in African poverty, but still prescribe spiritualistic response to overcoming these structural elements.

The use of anointed objects among ANPPs has some resemblance with the African use of magic for economic purposes. The following section will describe the use of magical powers for economic purposes in traditional Africa.

3. Occultism in Overcoming African Economic Powerlessness

The use of occultism in Africa to overcome economic powerlessness is varied. An evaluation of the use of anointed objects among ANPPs must also be informed with ATR occult economy.

3.1. The Customary Use of Magic to Access Economic Power in Africa

There is wide usage of magic for economic purposes in many African communities. As an African customary practice, people routinely employ magical charms to safeguard their sources of economic well-being, including crop fields, animal enclosures, and business premises (Beaton 2020, p. 26) These charms serve the purposes of enhancing fertility, safeguarding against diseases and predators, and warding off the malevolent influence of witchcraft.

To provide a deeper illustration of this phenomenon, Humbe (2018, p. 270) elucidates a practice in Shona traditional religion referred to as *kuromba*, which describes the acquisition of charms "to protect his or her family from danger, to protect his property and livestock from intruders". According to Humbe (2018, p. 271), "In genuine African spirituality, *kuromba* is very positive and socially acceptable". This practice, known as *ukutshwama* Zimbabwean isiNdebele, involves fortifying one's economic potency with special magical charms. Nevertheless, while practices such as *ukutshwama* or *kuromba* are acceptable in African spirituality, the problem is that the matrix of magic in ATR is riddled with ambiguity, since good magic can also be harmful to other people. For example, some

individuals bolster themselves with stronger magical charms, inadvertently challenging and weakening the charms of others. Consequently, this dynamic can lead to spiritual conflicts among people.

One of the problems in the customary use of magic is that of fatalistic acceptance of poverty, as people accept that their economic conditions will never change until they acquire the right magic. Arising out of this is the belief that that people who have material things have acquired them through magical means including witchcraft. This fatalistic perspective also exists among ANPPs, as people are made to believe that they are poor because they lack the necessary spiritual conditions and the appropriate anointed objects that open doors to wealth and success.

3.2. Occultism in Overcoming Structural Inequality

Beyond the customary use of magic is a specialised and more powerful magic that is sometimes in the form of familiars. Wood (2008) describes these familiars as "wealth-giving beings". This involves concepts such as the Xhosa notion of *ukuthwala*, which, as explained by Wood (2008, p. 338), is the acquisition of a "dangerous, powerful procedure for long-term wealth, widely believed to involve the ownership of a wealth-giving being" (Wood 2008, p. 338). This is the use of creaturely beings such as snakes that are sent to gather money or strengthen one's business. Various traditional and contemporary African communities have their own versions of beings that bestow wealth and magical charms designed to generate prosperity. These encompass a range of African versions of *ukuthwala*, which include the West African *Mami Wata*, the Zimbabwean *Chikwambo*, and the Malawian *Njoka.* Among the Shona people, there is the belief in an agrarian form of magic called *divisi*, which is employed to enhance one's harvest. Included in this is the use of human sacrifices, such as the killing of aperson to convert them into a wealth-bringing zombie. Unlike in the African customary use of magic, within which it is accepted that magic is central to human existence, the use of familiars belongs to the world of witchcraft. However, as will be explained below, ANPPs import the notion of familiars in some of their anointed objects which creates a perspective that there are evil and good familiars. The good familiars being the ones acquired from ANPPs.

Of importance to this article is that with the advent of the colonial money-based economy, occultism in the form of wealth-giving beings is related to African powerlessness in the segregated and foreign economy of Africa. Although the belief in wealth-giving beings existed in ancient pre-colonial African communities, in colonial times, wealth-giving beings took on a semblance of engaging colonial economic structural inequalities and the new money-based economy. Notably, Niehaus (2001, p. 56) demonstrates that in South Africa, beliefs in wealth-bringing beings (such as the human-like creature called *tikoloshe* and the mermaid-like creature called *Mamlambo*) emerged and spread to most of Africa from migrant labourers in the mines. To some extent, this was caused by the need to confront the unequal economic order they found themselves under, which they were powerless to participate in.

Wood (2008, p. 345) reinforces the viewpoint of anthropologist Barbara Frank, who contends that the belief in the potential for individual wealth through *Mami Wata* became more prevalent in West Africa as Western capitalist practices led to noticeable economic disparities between black and white people. There, people engaged in the occult in search of hidden sources of power that influence the course of human life. This is exemplified in the life of the Khotso Senthutsa, a South African Sotho medicine man renowned for his knowledge of "medicines for money and good luck, including the full-scale wealth-bestowing *ukuthwala* procedure, in order to exert some measure of control over their lives" (Wood 2008, p. 341).

Wood's statement raises important contextual issues regarding the emergence and expansion of the occult economy in most of modern black Africa. Specifically, it highlights how economic powerlessness resulting from racial segregation compelled black communi-

ties to turn to the occult economy in search of supernatural power to help them overcome unjust structural barriers. With reference to Khotso, Wood (2008, p. 341) remarks that

> 'Comparably, Khotso himself, an individual from remote, impoverished rural origins and a black inhabitant of a country under oppressive white minority rule, turned to the supernatural as a means of manipulating circumstances, and attaining power and wealth which would otherwise have been beyond his reach.'

In Wood's portrayal of Khotso, economic powerlessness stemming from the racialised economy compelled him to seek supernatural means to combat a system beyond his control. Racial segregation effectively placed material wealth out of the reach of black people, and turning to occult powers emerged as the sole recourse to lay claim to what had been systematically denied to them. Further elaborating on the contextual aspects of the emergence and growth of Khotso's medicines for miraculously accumulating wealth, Wood (2008, p. 341) adds

> 'Moreover, it should be borne in mind that Khotso's clientele came not only from economically embattled southern African communities. A substantial number of middleclass entrepreneurs, both white and black, visited Khotso, seeking to shape the economic trends in their own lives, rather than be at the mercy of market related forces beyond their control.'

In essence, it was to overcome oppressive socioeconomic structures and unfavourable market conditions that people turned to the occult economy. Occultism thrives on the "reassuring promise that even the harshest of economic circumstances c[an] suddenly be overturned" (Wood 2008, p. 341).

Moreover, specific aspects of African occultic interests in the magical power of accumulating wealth share resemblances with the pursuit of uncovering the secrets behind the economic success of white individuals. This resemblance may provide an explanation for the features of a white woman found on familiars such as Mamlambo. Wood (2008, p. 343) explains that during her fieldwork conducted in 2001 and 2002, some African individuals mentioned that Mamlambo could be obtained from Indian or white shopkeepers in Durban or Johannesburg. The obtaining of Mamlambo from Indian and white businesspeople indicates that the contemporary African belief in wealth-bringing has drawn some of its important elements from other religions and cultures, revealing that contemporary African beliefs in wealth-bringing beings have incorporated some Indian and European elements.

Wood (2008, p. 342) refers to Monica Wilson's (1936, p. 287) early observation that some Africans attributed the prosperity and privileged position of Indian and white people to their access to relatively strong magic. The African belief that Indian and white people were rich because they had access to stronger wealth-generating magic can explain the origins of some aspects of Mamlambo from the white-owned mines as a means of harnessing the mystical power believed to underlie the economic power of white people. Wood (2008, p. 344) further highlights that Mamlambo arose "in part from a sense of disconnection to a traditional, communal way of life; inequalities and imbalances in the socio-economic order; and the lure of western materialism".

Wood's observation suggests that certain components of the modern African occult economy have their roots in the economic powerlessness experienced by Africans. In response to their economic limitations and marginalisation, Africans sought to access the mystical powers they believed enabled white people to achieve wealth. This pursuit led to the development of elements within the contemporary African occult economy.

In certain aspects, the adoption of Christianity by Africans can also be associated with a quest for economic empowerment. In defeating Africans with their superior military technology, establishing businesses, and having money, white people not only portrayed themselves as possessing a more powerful God than that of Africans, but also a wealthy God who held the keys to the vaults of material wealth. The existence of such is indicated by Sister Josephine Bullen, a Roman Catholic nun who worked as a missionary at Empandeni Mission near Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, shortly after the British colonialists had conquered

and subdued the Ndebele and Shona people. In her diary entry dated 7 May 1900, Sister Bullen recorded the following:

> 'Some natives were heard talking about God the other day: He was stingy when He made them for he gave them no clothes and did not teach them how to make them. He gave them not money and did not tell them how to earn it. But He was generous when He made the white people for they have everything and can do everything'. (Bullen 2008, p. 56)

Sister Bullen's diary entry indicates how some Africans felt about their economic powerlessness and economic limitations when they compared themselves to white people, and how they thought God had disproportionately distributed economic power to the people in the world. As Sister Bullen noted, some Africans harboured a strong belief that God had given great economic power to white people and less to Africans. This sentiment stemmed from visible disparities; while Africans had very little, white people possessed the knowledge and power to manufacture goods and obtain money. This observation not only helps clarify how economic and existential concerns may have influenced the early adoption of Christianity among Africans, but also provides insight into the presence of Western influences within the contemporary African occult economy, such as the inclusion of features like the white woman on Mamlambo, and snakes that 'vomit' money for their owners. However, the underlying factor in all this is African economic powerlessness wrought by both un(der)development and historical colonial marginalisation.

It can be argued that ANPPs, through their anointed objects, respond to African economic powerlessness and limitations. The ANPPs' anointed objects follow the same pattern in ATR of giving economic power to Africans.

3.3. Occultism and the African Premodern Magical Approach to Economic Reality

A significant problem in occultism is the view of economic reality in spiritual terms that overlooks and undermines the scientific and technological factors of the economic life. This section does not ignore or underplay the systematic un(der)development of Africa by Western colonialism and other geopolitical forces such as China. Rather, this assessment is limited to the African magical approach to economic reality. Besides, as already noted above, there is a strong African belief that oppressed people can overcome their unjust economic structures by magical means. In both the customary use of magic and the use of wealth-bringing magical powers the economy is treated as a spiritual reality which primarily requires knowledge of magical powers to change it. However, to say Africans relied on magic for economic life, is not saying premodern Africans did not know about economic development, but that their worldview of development relied more on magic than other factors.

The use of magical charms became a prominent strategy adopted by premodern societies to manage their economic life during their scientifically and technologically un(der)veloped pre-scientific and primitive stages (Ngong 2010, p. 90). Wood (2008, pp. 340–41) quotes Isidore Okpewho (1983, pp. 179–80), who observes that in traditional African life, "magic therefore exists [. . .] as a means of asserting the human will in a world which poses severe dangers to human existence". Prior to the development of scientific technologies, premodern societies grappled with their economic powerlessness by focusing their attention on the hidden knowledge required to master the spiritual world, ensuring the fertility of the land and timely arrival of rainfall, thereby guaranteeing prosperous harvests.

Occultism was the natural way of approaching economic life during the un(der)developed, premodern era, characterised by non-literacy and a lack of scientific understanding. In Europe, occultism waned with developments in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). People began to focus on the development of technologies to construct and efficiently manage their economic lives, rather than seeking esoteric knowledge to control fertility gods and rain deities for bountiful harvests and overall life security and manageability (Ngong 2012, pp. 158–59). This does not mean

people in the West no longer practice occultism, but that it has ceased to be the major element of the worldview of economic life.

There is a notable direct correlation between the occult economy and economic un(der)development in Africa, as described in the Marxist view of religion as the opium of the poor. A state of un(der)development is fertile ground for religiosity because economic powerlessness forces people to turn to God in search of the power to manage their poverty. In the absence of well-developed scientific and industrial skills to navigate their existence, individuals often turn to spiritual powers to master the spiritual realm, in the hope of obtaining the material necessities they require. In Africa, this state of un(der)development is exemplified by the fact that since its initial interactions with the Western world, Africa has predominantly been viewed as a source of raw materials and cheap economic labour, rather than a source of scientific and technological knowledge. As Ngong (2010, p. 91) points out, "Africa has become more a consumer of knowledge than a producer of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge".

Describing this condition of un(der)development, Kroesbergen (2019, p. 22) notes that "[f]or many people in Africa, everything in life is determined by the spirit world". In alignment with this perspective, Lazarus (2019, p. 6) asserts that in ATR, "all aspects of life, wealth, health, death, and happiness have their roots in the spiritual realm, the authorities therein consisting of a Supreme Being, lesser divinities, ancestors, and spirits". This means that "all aspects of life are reflective of the spiritual world and determined by it, the spiritual world is, therefore, the base of society, upon which sits the superstructure, comprised of all aspects of life such as material wealth" (Lazarus 2019, p. 6). Consequently, "if a person wants to get something done, he or she should try to influence the spirit world" (Kroesbergen 2019, p. 22).

As outlined by Ngong (2010, p. 90), building on Kwasi Wiredu's elaboration, this non-scientific approach to life can be described as "superstitious", in the sense of a "rationally unsupported belief in entities of any sort". There is no rational basis for believing that one can only attain wealth by influencing the spiritual world, especially when there is ample evidence of non-religious people who possess substantial wealth. Therefore, while it is true that the prevalence of occultism in Africa may be driven by greed and the desire for wealth (Niehaus 2001, p. 56), this view should be considered in the context of un(der)development as a mitigating factor.

The ANPPs' endorsement of anointed objects for economic purposes is deeply rooted in a historical reliance on magical instruments in Africa. Biri (2012, 2021) contends that ANPPs embrace the African worldview of relying on magic for economic purposes. She further points out that in the ANPP churches,

> 'Most members [. . .] believe the oil offers protection from evil forces and opens doors for their prosperity. The pressure for holy oil for protection is testimony of a strong awareness of spiritual forces that can negate progress in life. The use of the anointed oil supplements prayers offered and is very popular because it resonates with protective mechanisms or charms in the traditional religion and culture'. (Biri 2021, p. 26)

This statement suggests that through their use of anointed objects, ANPPs employ practices that resonate with many Africans who have a firm ATR background.

4. Anointed Objects' Continuation of Premodern Responses to Un(der)development in Modern Africa

Considering the discussion above, in what ways do ANPPs' anointed objects syncretise the ATR occult economy in their responses to African contexts of economic powerlessness? This question will be answered by only focusing on the extent to which the ANPPs' anointed objects uphold and continue the narrow view of economic reality that characterised premodern societies' responses to un(der)development. Indeed, some aspects of discontinuity may be noted in the ANPPs such as the transferring of faith from ancestors to Jesus Christ. It is argued that ANPPs, however, do not challenge the premodern

view of wealth as a testimony of the power of a person's magic, but affirm it with their anointed objects.

By premodern is described the pre-scientific cosmology of the world as ruled by spirits which prompted people to see the answer to their economic wellbeing as gaining control over other these spirits through magical charms. ANPPs only challenge the source and nature of the magic, which they replace with their anointed objects. The ANPPs' lack of challenging the ATR magical worldview of life is asserted by Ngong (2010, p. 36) as follows:

> If in the past they consulted traditional diviners, now they consult Pentecostal pastors for the same things. The only difference now is the person to whom they go for consultation or the One who protects them. The overall spiritual cosmology remains the same. The fear of malevolent spirits continues unabated.

In other words, in the African context of occult economy where there is a high reliance on magic, ANPPs do not function in counter-cultural ways. They affirm the occult economy but give it a Christian structure. The unfortunate thing is that:

> [. . .] much of the contemporary African Christianity, especially as seen in the proliferation of Pentecostalism, has not reconstructed the African imagination as far as the spiritualised cosmology is concerned; it has rather perpetrated the traditional cosmology. (Ngong 2010, p. 36)

This observation is buttressed by Biri (2012, p. 7) who points out that while the followers of ANPPs venerate the anointed objects for their role in the attainment of health and wealth, these objects "are equivalent to a charm or amulet, as a means of protection or fetish". She further asserts that in the anointed objects the ANPPs re-define the traditional icons, which means that people are attracted to the anointed objects "because they are familiar with the symbolism of the icons and seem to understand and interpret them from their traditional Shona (African) perspective" (Biri 2012, p. 7). Therefore, the problem is that ANPPs do not provide a new way of imagining and approaching economic life in Africa.

A significant aspect of the continuity of ATR in the ANPPs' anointed objects lies in the premodern African notion that people are unable to generate material wealth through their own human efforts, and therefore require the aid of the magical powers and wealth-bringing beings to attain prosperity. In un(der)developed premodern Africa, material wealth gained magical and spiritual characteristics by being something that people were incapable of producing with their own human efforts, without the assistance of the spiritual realm. This does not mean that premodern African people did not attain material prosperity, or that they did not create anything new or develop viable systems of acquiring and maintaining material wealth. Rather, what is meant is that their main view and approach to material wealth was essentially magical and spiritual. That is, the power and ingenuity to amass wealth and maintain it were viewed as something of spiritual origin and magical power, and not of mere human power (Bhebhe 2013, p. 55). In premodern communities, skilled people such as hunters, farmers, and artisans radiated a mystical aura because their skills were viewed as spiritually acquired and sustained. Hence, the anointed objects of ANPPs maintain the mystical view of material wealth held by ATR.

However, it must be affirmatively stated that the assertion of this article that ANPPs thrive on reviving premodern Africa does not mean that they are anti-progressive traditionalist elements. The opposite is true, for ANPPs are vistas of modern social and economic progress who reject traditional cultures for their backwardness and promotion of poverty in Africa. ANPPs play a leading role in challenging their members to embrace modernity. Biri (2018, p. 84) asserts the modern nature of ANPPs, saying "it is clear that Pentecostals devise methods of enabling believers to acquire wealth, even if it entails borrowing the methods from the secular world". The irony is that the ANPPs promote modernity by retrieving a premodern African magical worldview. In this worldview, affluence and prosperity are not attributed to hard work, but to those who are perceived as masters of magic, individuals who have successfully deciphered the hidden code granting access to the celestial world wherein material blessings are believed to be found. By means of anointed objects, ANPPs

uphold and disseminate the belief that wealth exists beyond the scope of human control, and individuals desiring material prosperity must obtain access to specific codes capable of unlocking the celestial realm housing material possessions. As an example, the imagination and language used to describe miracle money (money that is mysteriously deposited in a believer's bank account) resembles that of wealth-giving familiars like snakes who mysteriously bring money and wealth to their owners.

Moreover, anointed objects perpetuate the premodern approach to addressing poverty and economic powerlessness by relying on spiritual and magical methods rather than fostering the human capacity to generate wealth. This magical approach does not tackle the issue of inadequate human capability to create wealth, nor does it address the socio-economic structures, unjust political systems, and inadequate schooling and education systems that hinder the empowerment and development of disadvantaged individuals, preventing their meaningful participation in economic activities. In the prophetic churches, the challenges of poverty, exploitation, and oppression are not confronted because of their spiritualistic approach, which centralise strategic prayers and warfare (Biri and Manyonganise 2022, p. 6).

As Van Rooy (1999, pp. 242–43) also indicates, the magical view of economic life promotes a culture of excuse for failure and even fatalism, because instead of examining one's methods of approaching material wealth, the blame is passed to the spiritual factors believed to control material wealth. Fatalism is promoted by projecting the idea that the poor are poor because they deserve it, since they do not have the magic needed to acquire material wealth (Van Rooy 1999, p. 243). The prevailing structural inequalities that hinder the poor from developing this needed human capacity are ignored, while blame is passed on the poor for their poverty (Kgatle 2023b).

The foregoing position is made notwithstanding Taru's (2020, p. 292) analysis that the prophetic churches are "incubators for nurturing small businesses owned by members". Taru's analysis emphasises that ANPPs do provide courses and seminars on entrepreneurship for their members, where people are taught basic business skills and encouraged to start their own ventures instead of relying on employment. While it is accurate that many Pentecostals who preach the Prosperity Gospel also encourage their members to become entrepreneurs (Frahm-Arp 2018; Togarasei 2014), the issue lies in the prevailing perspective on material wealth, which remains predominantly spiritual. This perspective ultimately fosters a sense of fatalistic resignation among the impoverished, as they believe they deserve poverty due to their perceived lack of the necessary spiritual conditions for wealth acquisition.

Additionally, numerous ANPPs undermine and sometimes even contradict the principles of human development they promote. They do so by teaching concepts like "miracle money", which is the belief that God can miraculously deposit money into the bank accounts of faithful Christians. For instance, South Africa's prophet, Hamilton Nala (2022a), undermines many of his teachings on the importance of entrepreneurship with statements such as

> 'You have a divine force that forces poverty out of your life and forces wealth into your life. You have supernatural positive force that forces money into your account.'

The problem with Nala's statement is that it perpetuates the "the magical allure of making money from nothing" (Andrews 1997), which is prominent in societies that believe in wealth-bringing magical charms. From a magical perspective, the magical allure of making money from nothing is heightened by the feeling that human effort does not produce better and quicker material gains than anointed objects. Essentially, the ANPPs affirm and perpetuate the view of wealth as a product of wealth-giving spiritual powers instead of human work. Thus, the anointed objects of the ANPPs perpetuate a spiritualistic and magical view of material wealth that deals with African economic powerlessness caused by un(der)development by investing in more powerful magic instead of seeking human development.

ANPPs perpetuate the ATR concept of limited cosmic good, wherein the wealthy are often suspected of obtaining their riches by manipulating the life force of others. This also extends the belief that the affluent possess greater spiritual strength or have employed more potent forms of witchcraft than others. The elements of social structures and human effort are undermined. The utilisation of anointed objects within ANPPs sustains the age-old thirst for potent magical powers. Despite being described as holy items, these objects still promote the premodern tradition of depending on occultic powers for human survival.

Critically, the use of anointed objects takes Africa back to premodern primitivism by hindering the development of contemporary scientific approaches addressing African economic powerlessness. As pointed out by Ngong (2010, p. 13),

> 'Central to Pentecostal pneumatology is a rejection of modern scientific rationality and an embrace of the premodern worldview. Embracing the premodern cosmology in an Africa that is largely premodern does not help the continent to effectively engage the modern world.'

In this perspective, instead of seeking guidance from modern developmental experts who are informed by technology and science, the poor are advised to adopt a premodern approach that relies on traditional healers. The prophets replace the *inyangas*, and the same magical worldview remains intact. The one-on-one consultations offered by ANPPs closely resemble the consultations conducted by traditional spiritual practitioners specialising in activities related to wealth acquisition (Kgatle 2023a). The problem is that ANPPs do not challenge or transform the ATR occultic view of material wealth, but they embrace it, uphold it, and propagate it through their teachings on anointed obstacles and prophetic one-on-one consultations with people seeking the spiritual power to amass wealth.

5. The Value of Scientific Rationality in Discontinuing the Premodern Occultic Approach to Material Wealth in Africa

Ngong (2010, p. 130) appreciates African Pentecostalism for its emphasis on prosperity, highlighting its commitment to a God who performs miracles in today's contemporary world where faith in God is waning. He accepts that Pentecostalism has played a vital role in reviving faith in God in the West, where scientific rationality has led to the rejection of God. However, Ngong calls for the need to realise that "the rise of scientific rationality [that] led to the development of technologies that enhance the wellbeing of people" (Ngong 2010, p. 130). Ngong's point is that it is scientific rationality, and not magical rationality, that improved people's quality of life. Indeed, in his call for the abandonment of the premodern worldview in favour of scientific rationality, Ngong (2010, p. 152) acknowledges that modern science has also significantly contributed to many atrocities and destructive events in the modern era. Examples include the sophisticated weaponry used in the First and Second World Wars and the Holocaust, as well as the substantial contribution of modern technologies to environmental degradation and global warming. However, despite some of the destructive contributions from modern science, a scientific approach to material wealth is more progressive than a premodern primitivistic approach rooted in a superstitious view of the world. Therefore, in line with Ngong's calling, this article challenges ANPPs to discontinue their premodern primitivistic approach to material well-being that relies on anointed objects.

By calling for scientific rational responses to African un(der)development, the call is not to adopt western rationalism that neglects faith., for "rationalism does not need to be antithetical faith" (Ngong 2010, p. 35). Furthermore, the call for scientific rationality is not a call for western capitalism, for sound scientific rationality can foster just economic societies where there are equal opportunities for human beings.

Conversely, the scientific and rational approach that needs to be embraced challenges Christians to align their critical thinking with their being in the image of God, which functions as the basis for God's command to people to be fruitful, subdue the earth, and rule over it (Gen 1:26–28; 2:15) (Banda 2022, pp. 7–8). A detailed exegesis of Genesis 1:26–28 and 2:15 is beyond the focus of this article.

Furthermore, this article is limited to challenging ANPPs to reconsider their uncritical embrace of the ATR occult economy. Therefore, the task of crafting detailed vision of an African scientific rational approach to development is left to a different study. How-ever, while theologians can provide a theological framework for a scientific approach to development, it should be interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary by incorporating professional technical experts, development practitioners, industrialists, economists and scientists. Even if they have undergone professional training in economics and development, pastors and theologians must realise their limitations and the need to involve other disciplines in their interventions to economic problems in Africa.

Indeed, some people have interpreted the Genesis passage as a licence for greed and selfishness in consuming the earth's resources, resulting in uncontrolled overpopulation and unequal access to and unjust distribution of the earth's resources among all the people in the world. However, a sound reading of the passage indicates that human beings fulfil the functions of filling the earth and subduing and ruling over it in their capacity as bearers of the image of God. Essentially, the people act on behalf of God as his stewards. Hoekema (1986, p. 79) points out God's command to human beings who bear his image to fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over it was a command "to develop a God-glorifying culture". This development of a God-glorifying culture is a responsibility to exercise creative rule over God's creation that involves critical thinking and work instead of magical manipulation. Banda (2022, p. 7) notes that although the Bible does not specifically describe the nature of the image of God in human beings, if to be human is to be in the image of God, it is then helpful to think of the image along the lines of God's communicable attributes such as personality or selfhood, which incorporate intelligence, will and emotions. The communicable attribute of intelligence suggests that like God, human beings are creative and critical thinking beings. Therefore, scientific rationality is part and parcel of being in the image of God, which human beings must use in ruling over the earth. In his reflection on Genesis 1:26–28, Wright (2006, p. 224) points out that since it is the essence of our human nature to rule over the earth, this therefore means that we "were created to be workers, like God, the worker". This working nature of being in the image of God does not require magic or the use of wealth-bringing witchcraft familiars, but scientific critical and creative thinking. In "ruling over, ordering, classifying, reshaping, developing, and unfolding the potential which we have been given" (Lindsley 2013), we require the use of scientific creative skills. It can therefore be argued that God expects human beings to deal with their un(der)development by developing appropriate scientific and rational systems that bear sustainable economic systems.

South Africa's leading proponent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), Marwala (2020, p. 202), encourages Africa to abandon its unscientific approach [read: superstitious approach] to life that diverges from rational thinking, emphasising the importance of employing information and logic to reach efficient conclusions. Instead of a magical approach to material wealth, ANPPs need to prioritise "mak[ing] decisions based on evidence using scientific principles" (Marwala 2020, p. 202). For Marwala (2020, p. 202), moving from unscientific thinking to scientific thinking "is vital" if Africa is "to tackle the intractable problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality".

The call for ANPPs to abandon their premodern magical approach to material wealth, reliant on anointed objects, in favour of an approach rooted in scientific principles is underpinned by the recognition that "scientific and technological rationalities are not outside the reign of God, even if some proponents of these forms of rationality sometimes reject God" (Ngong 2010, p. 130). In other words, a scientific and rational approach to material wealth is theologically valid, even though some scientists may assert the autonomy of human beings and deny the existence of God. The premodern approach must be discontinued, because it stifles human creative imagination by encouraging human beings to inordinately seek divine intervention without critically engaging their situation (Ngong 2010, pp. 128–30).

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this article attempted to evaluate the syncretic incorporation of the African magical view of material wealth in the ANPPs' teaching that people need anointed objects, such as anointed oil and water, to attain material prosperity. It is acknowledged that ANPPs play a significant role in empowering their members and even Christians outside their churches with a robust spiritual framework for engaging with the context of un(der)development in which they live. Anointed objects are a significant way through which ANPPs empower and challenge Africans to overcome their context of un(der)development. However, despite the positive role the ANPPs play by being agents of modernisation, the use of anointed objects is more commonly framed by the ATR worldview of magic. The centrality of the belief in the power of anointed objects as points of contact with God's power and the continuous seeking of more powerful prophets for better and efficient anointed objects all resonates well with the use of magic in ATR and the unconventional use of the dreaded wealth-giving familiars. Thus, this article argues that ANPPs' use of anointed objects is a revival of premodern Africa, in which magic played a central role in the people's accumulation of wealth. Instead of reviving the premodern ATR magic-based response to poverty, ANPPs are challenged to adopt a more biblically informed response to un(der)development that focuses on empowering people with critical and creative power. Biblical passages such as Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15 strongly suggest the need for people to develop their God-given human creative power to build sustainable economic systems. A case can be made that while God does indeed perform miracles, and met people's needs in miraculous ways (such as the endless provision of flour and oil to the widow of Zarephath, the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand), he expects people to develop scientifically and logically sound economic interventions in addressing their un(der)development. The article challenged ANPPs to discontinue upholding the premodern uncritical ATR worldview of material wealth, which relies on wealth-bringing beings and magical charms. Instead of a magical worldview of material wealth, ANPPs should adopt a scientific approach that is in line with God's command to humanity to rule over the world. It is argued that God does not expect humanity to deal with its economic powerlessness through magical charms, but through God-given critical thinking.

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Note

1 Incidentally, Nala (2022b) added that selling faith products was means of income and that helped stop him from depending on the church for his income. This statement left Nala open to the charge that he had commercialized the religion.

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Article

Juan Sepulveda and the Understanding of the Syncretic Characteristics of Latin American Pentecostalism: The Case of Classical Pentecostalism in Guatemala

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Abstract: This article presents the case of Guatemalan Pentecostalism as a highly relevant expression of Latin American Pentecostalism that helps to clarify the debate about the syncretic nature of Pentecostalism. We use the Guatemalan case to test the thesis of Juan Sepúlveda, a Chilean Pentecostal historian and theologian, who explains the success of Latin American Pentecostalism in light of its syncretic character. His argument about the syncretic character of Pentecostalism is based on the Chilean case. Paying attention to its historical development, we present Guatemalan Pentecostal theology in relation to traditional Mayan culture and religion and in relation to popular Catholicism and traditional Latin American Protestantism. Specific attention is paid to the espoused theology of Pentecostal pastors as they provide an account of indigenous Pentecostals' lived faith. Finally, we answer the question: Does Juan Sepulveda's approach (still) provide an adequate framework for the theological assessment of possible syncretic characteristics of (Latin American) Pentecostalism? The Guatemalan case indicates ways to improve certain limitations of Sepúlveda's approach, such as its static understanding of culture and its exclusion of the theological understanding of syncretism.

Keywords: syncretism; Latin American Pentecostalism; Pentecostalism; Latin American; Juan Sepulveda; Guatemala

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1. Introduction

Researching syncretic characteristics of Pentecostalism is a delicate enterprise. Despite many scholarly attempts to relativize the concept of syncretism, many Pentecostals worldwide (still) alarmingly associate it with idolatry. In this article, we focus on Latin American Pentecostalism and the perspective of the Chilean theologian, Juan Sepulveda, on its relationship to its cultural context. Sepulveda was one of the first, and probably the most influential, Pentecostal theologians from the continent to argue in favor of a proper cultural contextual understanding of Pentecostalism, in his case Chilean Pentecostalism. He, with the help of the theology of Paul Tillich, formulated a general 'Pentecostal principle' in relation to cultural embeddedness. Here, we first critically assess Sepulveda's approach by examining its theological core and its consequences in relation to understanding the syncretic characteristics of (Latin American) Pentecostalism. Subsequently, we will present another Latin American case, Guatemalan Pentecostalism, to see if Sepulveda's approach is helpful for understanding its relationship with traditional Maya culture. In the final section, we draw conclusions and answer the central question of our article: Does Juan Sepulveda's approach (still) provide an adequate framework for the theological assessment of possible syncretic characteristics of (Latin American) Pentecostalism?

However, before turning to Sepulveda's work, we need to be more specific about syncretism in relation to Pentecostalism. Anthropologically, the globalization of Pentecostalism is related to indigenization and homogenization. Following Joel Robbins, the first refers to its ability to adapt to contexts, while the second refers to the replication of

Pentecostal doctrines, rituals, etc. (Robbins 2004, pp. 117–18). This does not mean that indigenization is unrelated to doctrines, rituals, or the like. Robbins himself gave many examples of how indigenization among the Urapmin includes rituals and is directedly related to doctrinal issues (See for example (Robbins 2017, pp. 29–52)). We link what is called indigenization to discussion about syncretism in Religious Studies. According to Kurt Rudolph, Gerardus van der Leeuw's use of syncretism was very influential for the modern conceptualization of syncretism. Van der Leeuw's approach is mainly historical, and from his perspective all religions are syncretic: "Every historical religion is not one, but several; of course, not in the way that it could be the sum of its different forms, but rather in that the different forms have grown together into this form". Van der Leeuw mainly understands syncretism as a "transposition", that is "a change in the meaning of a manifestation in the dynamics of religions, whereby the form remains the same" (Rudolph 2016, second page part 2). Rudolph underscores a new development in Hendrik Kraemer's elaboration of syncretism. Kraemer argues that the "'unconscious', historically conditioned syncretism of all world religions is to be distinguished from those consciously open to the amalgamating syncretism of 'paganism'" (Rudolph 2016). According to Rudolph, Kraemer "revived the old theological usage of syncretism in the service of apologetics" (Rudolph 2016). Although much more should be said about this discussion and its further development, the distinction between a historical perspective and a more specifically theologically informed understanding of syncretism offers an important lens for the study of Sepulveda's perspective and the broader debate on syncretism and Pentecostalism.

2. Sepulveda's Understanding of the Syncretic Nature of (Latin American) Pentecostalism

Juan Sepulveda is a Chilean Pentecostal theologian. Since the 1990s, he has substantially contributed to the study of Pentecostalism with articles and books, mainly in English and Spanish. His PhD thesis presents his most elaborated case studies concerning syncretism in Latin American Pentecostalism. These case studies of Pentecostal engagement with the Mapuche (in the central south-eastern part of Chile and Argentina) and the Aymara (in the northern part of the country) provide opportunities to discuss how Pentecostal missions relate to mainline Protestant ideas about syncretism, as reflected in the work of the traditional protestant missions in Latin America. He argues convincingly that "anti-syncretism has been a central motivation for the presence of Evangelical Christianity in Latin America" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 347). The Evangelical mission was, and sometimes still is, justified by the understanding of popular Roman Catholicism in Latin America as deeply syncretic: "In affirmative terms, this motivation expresses itself in the calling to present to the Latin American people the 'pure' Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 348).[1] However, according to Sepulveda's analysis, the evangelical justification of such missions hides its own syncretistic character. Here, Sepulveda refers to unarticulated presuppositions of (mainly) North American cultural values such as rationality, education, and democracy, which are implied in this evangelical understanding of the Gospel (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 349). Sepulveda also mentions the theological influence of the theology of Karl Barth, for example through Kraemer, on this idea of 'purity' (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, pp. 355, 361).[2]

According to Sepulveda, the Pentecostal missions to the Aymara and the Mapuche show that this idea does not dominate the Pentecostal engagements with those communities. For example, in the Aymara case, understanding of the Bible does not appear to be dominated by the idea of (Western) rationality. Instead, it underlines the role of the local community in the acceptance of the pastor and therefore the understanding of the gospel. Sepulveda argues that the first steps of Pentecostalism in Chile show that the Pentecostals transmitted the Christian faith in the *mestizo* popular culture in such a way that it was "made almost unrecognizable for missionary Protestantism. A new form of syncretism had been born... and further changes occurred when it reached the heart of the ethnic minorities" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 364).

In further elaboration of his perspective, Sepulveda argues that syncretism is part of human existence, and it is therefore crucial to learn how to live with it. As Rudolph, he distinguishes between a descriptive understanding of syncretism in the history of religion and a theological understanding which is in the twentieth century and is especially expressed by two Dutch Protestant theologians influenced by Karl Barth, the already mentioned Hendrik Kraemer and Visser't Hooft (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 374). Sepulveda presents a critical evaluation of this theological understanding. He rejects the 'narrow' definition of syncretism as a "deliberate and illegitimate mingling of religious belief or practices" put forward by Kraemer and Visser't Hooft as a typical "idealistic approach of Religion as its development was totally unrelated to the wider historical and cultural processes" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, pp. 384–85). Sepulveda suggests a different understanding of syncretism, from a cultural perspective in which the human being is understood as a meaning maker. What he calls the syncretic process is the building of a new identity in a specific socio-historical crossroad situation. This is not merely a religious endeavor, he argues, "but involves the whole of culture" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 389). Sepulveda pleads for a theological (and thus normative) evaluation "once a concrete case of syncretistic process had been analyzed as objectively as possible". However, such an evaluation cannot be made from an absolute standpoint because God has his own way "to speak to each human community fully in its own particularity. Also, "because we have received the Gospel through a long-lasting process of translation, that is through the many steps of a long syncretistic process. Therefore, there are no absolute criteria for evaluation". He defends the use of the term syncretism because it "makes us aware of the cultural condition of our own presuppositions" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, pp. 395–96).

The theological core of this understanding of syncretism is based on Sepulveda's understanding of the Incarnation: "Incarnation is the biggest syncretistic event ever" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, pp. 389, 395). Here, Erasmus' understanding of 'syncretic' as the ability to adopt many roles appears foundational: "Erasmus, therefore, discovered the 'uniqueness' of the Christian faith, as it were, in the fact that the ineffable nature of God the father is revealed, but at the same time hidden, in the particularity of the roles by Christ" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 415). Therefore, according to Sepulveda, the claim of absoluteness of 'the way' of Jesus, and, consequently, any (cultural) form of Christian faith, lacks firm ground because the presence of God always stays hidden. "The language of Incarnation, however, allows for the disruption of the supposedly 'natural' development of things; it allows for the possibility of God's intervention in history, of change, of the unexpected, of transformation" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 420). However, this implies that there is no complete apprehension of "'the thing in itself' (...) Revelation does not overcome our being *naturaliter syncretista*, our syncretic condition" (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 428). Sepulveda's understanding of the Incarnation motif appears to be dominated by the ideas of revelation and knowledge. He focuses on the negation of the unmediated access to God and argues that we are in a constant process of interpretation and discernment. According to Sepulveda, this means that the New-testamentary 'Christocentrism' is the key to a Theocentric theology of creation and the pneumatologically understanding of God's work in creation and the world's religions (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, pp. 421–29).

This understanding of a human being as *naturaliter* syncretical is used by Sepulveda to resist the claims of (knowledge of) absolute truth in theology and the Christian faith, especially those from Western Christianity. Sepulveda presents his resistance as typical of a Pentecostal approach in his article about what he calls the Pentecostal Principle. In this text, he is in search for "the profoundest meaning" of "modern Pentecostalism" (Sepulveda 2003, pp. 13–28). Analogously to Tillich's Protestant principle, formulated as a rejection of the absolutization of any institutional or political mediation of Christian faith, Sepulveda argues for the rejection of any cultural absolutization of the Christian faith as the Pentecostal principle (Sepulveda 2003, p. 14).[3] In the development of his argument, Sepulveda put this hypothesis to the test with a study on the origins of Chilean Pentecostalism. However, Sepulveda's test appears to be a complex one. The key players in Sepulveda's historical

reconstruction are North American Methodist missionaries, and the main agent in the beginnings of Chilean Pentecostalism, William Hoover, was not someone who facilitated the indigenization of the church. Additionally, the most prominent explanation for the change in the North American missionary engagement that contributed substantially to the birth of Chilean Pentecostalism is rooted in the changing social reality of the Methodist Church in the United States of America (Sepulveda 2003, pp. 22, 25). Notwithstanding this historical situation, Sepulveda argues that the practices of the revival that brought the Chilean Pentecostal churches into being support his claim that the North American cultural clothing of the gospel was clearly rejected by this initiating movement of churches. This opened the door to including more elements from popular Chilean culture in these churches, as is testified by the missions among the Aymara and the Mapuche mentioned above. Therefore, the Pentecostal practices show the rupture away from the dominance of the principles of Anglo-Saxon missions and from the absolutization of the North American cultural dominance in Chilean Protestantism (Sepulveda 2003, pp. 25–28).

Assessment of Sepulveda's Approach

Sepulveda would be the first to admit that his understanding of syncretism should be assessed from its contextual situation. We mention some of these contextual influences without denying the originality of Sepulveda's work. We start with his PhD thesis at the faculty of Theology at the University of Birmingham where Sepulveda obtained his doctorate. The understanding of Intercultural Theology and its background in German theology and philosophy, as developed by his supervisor Ustorf and Pentecostal Studies pioneer Hollenweger, marks this understanding of syncretism. As Werner Ustorf himself argues (Ustorf 2011), their understanding of Intercultural theology is a Western project, and it has its roots in typical Western, sometimes even German debates (See also (Benno van den Toren 2015)). In Sepulveda's case, this is evidenced by the priority given to anthropology and culture in the understanding of syncretism. Hollenweger's emphasis on the origins of Pentecostalism as the revelation of its theological core is directly taken up in Sepulveda's article on the Pentecostal principal. The necessity of mediation, which Sepulveda maintains, is linked with the typical European or Western modern epistemological conviction of the impossibility of direct access to the source of knowledge. On the other side, Sepulveda also connects naturally to Latin American liberation theology, with a similar background in European epistemological theories and the prioritization of the social reality. The way the priority is given to the anthropological in Sepulveda's thesis makes it clear that the theological is built upon a social scientific understanding of culture and human beings as the meaning maker. The dominance of Western theories also comes to the fore in the role that the case studies play in his entire dissertation. The interesting studies of Pentecostal engagement with the Aymara and Mapuche people make it clear how what Sepulveda sees as syncretism works out in these indigenous Pentecostalisms. However, these case studies do not contribute to the chapters about the conceptualization and the theological understanding of syncretism. Therefore, understanding indigenous Pentecostalism is dependent on the hermeneutical and normative frameworks from the West.

Sepulveda found the theological understanding of syncretism, as "helping the Gospel to become flesh for the Greek, for the Roman, and so on", in Erasmus' understanding of the transmission of the Gospel (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 423). From this perspective, Sepulveda builds a second layer on the first layer of the above-mentioned understandings from modern Western epistemology and the priority of social sciences, e.g., anthropology. Theology comes in when the dominance of cultural perspective is accepted, which of course implies that knowledge of God itself is culturally mediated. Syncretism is made essential to human beings as a consequence of its foundational understanding of humans as meaning makers. However, the foundational idea of (cultural) mediation is theological in itself. Denying all 'direct access' to God, and making mediation a (creational) necessity, seems more typical for a Thomist or Kantian approach than for a typical Protestant or Pentecostal one. In traditional Protestantism Scripture is certainly a privileged place to hear God's

voice. This is confirmed and strengthened in Pentecostalism, where the Spirit is not only heard but also felt in the body and experienced in Spirit baptism, divine healing, and so on. It seems that Sepulveda's rejection of absolute claims about truth and God, by making cultural mediation foundational, results in a conflict with the characteristic 'directness' of communication with God as lived by many Pentecostals. Sepulveda's preference for traditions, etc., seems at odds with the strong emphasis on experiences by Pentecostals. The next section on Guatemalan classical Pentecostalism, and the theological perspective of the lived faith of indigenous Pentecostals by some of their pastors, should clarify if Sepulveda's approach is helpful for a theological understanding of it.

3. The Case of Guatemalan Pentecostalism

The beginnings of Latin American Pentecostalism are associated with the revivals in Chile and Argentina in 1909 and in Brazil in 1910. Its exponential growth has attracted the interest of scholars who have proposed reasons for its success. In the emerging field of Pentecostal Studies, sociologist Emilio Willems, attending to the Brazilian case, was one of the first to pay attention to Latin American Pentecostalism. Willems focused on the transition and adaptation from rural to urban and modern life (Willems 1967). Christian Lalive d'Epinay painted Pentecostalism as a refuge for the masses that allows them to live in a new society and thus overcome a state of social anomie (Lalive d'Epinay 1969). In the early nineties, David Martin argued that Pentecostalism functions as an entry strategy for neoliberal economies in Latin America (Martin 1990). Theologically, Walter Hollenweger, who dedicated much of his career to the study of global Pentecostalism in Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, is the most outstanding pioneer. He concluded that Pentecostalism expresses its theology through orality, songs, dances, and emotions and that its growth is closely related to the influence of traditional African religion in Pentecostalism (Hollenweger 1972; Hollenweger 1997, p. 1).[4] With cultural and religious perspectives, Sepúlveda continues in the line of Hollenweger and argues that Pentecostalism in Chile took advantage of the cultural mix of indigenous peoples (Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 192). In short, for more general perspectives on Latin America, Pentecostal studies have paid attention to the cases of Chile, Brazil, and Mexico. Alongside this broad spectrum, the study of Guatemalan Pentecostalism can contribute to the understanding of Latin American Pentecostalism.

3.1. Arrival of Christianity in Guatemala

With the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese in Latin America, Catholicism established itself as the hegemonic religion of the conquerors and the conquered. The conquerors not only brought a new religion but also a new language and culture. Put briefly, it was a new way of living. In Guatemala, Catholicism maintained a monopoly on the 'religious market' (Chestnut 2003, pp. 55–85; Chestnut 2010, pp. 91–103) during the colonial era (1524–1824). However, the establishment of Catholicism did not mean the eradication of indigenous culture and religion but rather the adaptation of traditional religion with catholic wrapping. In the words of Pentecostal scholar Nestor Medina, a "mixture of symbols and practices containing indigenous Mayan and Western European Christian religious elements" (Medina 2017, p. 2).

According to Andrea Althoff, the colonial Catholic Church was not interested in converting the indigenous people. A real understanding of the Catholic faith and the transformation of the lives of the indigenous people was not essential. What was essential was the establishment of its spiritual and economic monopoly in favor of the rich Spanish and non-indigenous people at the expense of the indigenous (Althoff 2014, p. 56). However, Althoff's harsh and general judgement does not consider the alternative approaches of missionaries like Bartolomé de las Casas. Nevertheless, specifically in Guatemala, the scarcity of Catholic services in indigenous communities led to a popular Mayan Catholicism that combined Catholic teachings with popular indigenous religiosity. McCleary and Pesina show how the so-called *cofradías*, religious brotherhoods instituted to maintain Catholic rituals and buildings, also played a fundamental role in the preservation, revival, and

expansion of the Mayan-Catholic religion through the planning and financial support of the festivities of the patron saint and the main Christian celebrations. An example of this is the worship of Maximón or San Simón, a festival celebrated on the Day of the Dead (el Día de los Muertos) and Mayan celebrations.[5] In summary, the cofradías have fostered and maintained a mixed popular religion (McCleary and Pesina 2011, p. 1; Althoff 2014, p. 327).

The hegemony of Catholicism in Guatemala was severely affected by the arrival of Protestant missions. In 1873, the Congress of the Republic issued a decree that allowed religious freedom. This policy, along with others established by the liberal government of General Justo Rufino Barrios, sought to open the country to international investment and the arrival of European and North American immigrants. By promoting religious freedom, immigrants could practice their faith, build temples, establish social projects, and thus contribute to the country's modernization (Dary 2019, p. 87). Barrios was convinced that the Catholic Church was guilty of the economic and cultural tardiness that Guatemala was suffering. To achieve progress, breaking the hegemony of Catholicism was mandatory (Martin 1990, p. 91). However, Barrios also wanted to gain control over the indigenous communities of the west (Garrard-Burnett 1989, pp. 127–42). Barrios promoted the arrival of the Presbyterian Church (1882), and this mission was later followed by the Central American mission (1896), the Nazarenes (1901), the Society of Friends or Quakers (1902), and the Primitive Methodists (1921) (Zapata 1982, p. 101; Garrard-Burnett 2009, pp. 37, 50; Medina 2017, p. 2). However, although the institutional and social power of the Roman Catholic Church was affected by the entry of Protestantism, its hegemony in Guatemalan society is, for a substantial part, still in place until today.[6]

3.2. Rise of Pentecostalism

On 15 November 1916, missionaries Charles Furman and Thomas Pullin arrived in Guatemala under the sponsorship of the United Free Gospel and Missionary Society of Pennsylvania. They joined Alberto Hines and his wife, independent Pentecostal missionaries who went to Guatemala in 1910 (Garrard-Burnett 2009, p. 67; Zapata 1982, p. 126). Due to a missionary agreement to distribute geographic space for missions and maintain respect between Protestant missions, potential Pentecostal missionaries could not establish churches in the east of the country, only in the west: the indigenous and mountainous region of the country. The traditional Protestant missions focused on the upper-middle-class Ladino society, while the Pentecostal missionaries dedicated themselves to the indigenous people of the west who were socially and culturally marginalized, poor, and working class (Garrard-Burnett 2009, pp. 55, 67–69). Pentecostalism therefore established a new Christian engagement with Maya tradition in the country. In 1921, during a vacation and promotional trip in the United States, Furman stopped being a missionary of the Missionary Society due to financial problems. He returned to Guatemala as a missionary of the Primitive Methodist Church (Zapata 1982, pp. 101, 126).

A proper Pentecostal revival took place on Wednesday, 13 April 1932 when the Methodist church of Totonicapán, a city in the west led by Charles Furman, lived the typical Pentecostal experience called 'Baptism in the Spirit' accompanied by bodily signs such as speaking in tongues, dances, tears, groans, healings, and more (Zapata 1982, pp. 126–27; Garrard-Burnett 2009, p. 69). Virginia Garrard-Burnett recognized Furman's role in the revival by introducing Pentecostal practices to Methodist meetings, specifically speaking in tongues and faith healing (Garrard-Burnett 2009, p. 69). Marcos Son, a witness to the revival, described that the people in Totonicapán, accustomed to quietness, were shaken by the supernatural phenomena that accompanied the Holy Spirit on his descent that night; the believers danced and spoke in tongues, glorifying God (Marcos Son Turnil n.d., p. 20; Zapata 1982, p. 127).

The revival spread throughout the villages and towns in the western region, resulting in the establishment of several churches. Between 1921 and 1935, Furman and Pullin established seventeen churches, of which seven had indigenous pastors. Including indigenous people in pastoral work was novel since none of the other Protestant churches

allowed indigenous people to occupy that leadership position (Garrard-Burnett 2009, p. 71). Despite the growth of the Methodist churches led by Furman and Pullin, the experience of Spirit baptism and its bodily signs did not please the Primitive Methodist mission in the United States. The mission required Furman to sign an agreement to stop preaching Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. Instead of signing, Furman resigned from the Methodist mission in September 1934 (Garrard-Burnett 2009, p. 69). A month later, Furman joined a small American Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God of Cleveland, TN. Shortly after his resignation, fourteen Methodist congregations that had experienced the Holy Spirit revival joined the Church of God (Zapata 1982, p. 127). These were the beginnings of the Full Gospel Church of God of Guatemala, the first Pentecostal denomination in the country. With the rise of Guatemalan Pentecostalism, and the arrival of the Church of God, more Pentecostal denominations came to the country. Currently, the Church of God and the Assemblies of God are the largest classical Pentecostal denominations in the country. They have established biblical and theological education seminars for their ministers, social aid centers such as orphanages, and other social programs. Pentecostalism in Guatemala emerged in peripheral and indigenous contexts that required tenacity in a suffering, demoralized, and economically and politically underdeveloped society (Wilson 1998, p. 145).

It is also worth mentioning that along with the classical Pentecostal denominations such as the Church of God and Assemblies of God, Guatemalan Pentecostalism also includes the (1) Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement (CCR) that emerged in 1973 as the result of charismatic retreats led by Father Harold Cohen in Guatemala City (Thorsen 2016, p. 215). The CCR achieved official approval in 1986 but with caveats due to its fundamentalist reading of the Bible and the display of excessive emotions (Thorsen 2016, pp. 215–17). And (2) the neo-Pentecostal churches, which emerged in 1959 following the division of established Protestant churches and the sponsorship of neo-Pentecostal agencies from the United States (Althoff 2014, pp. 279–95; Zapata 1982, p. 160). Finally, the research on religion in Latin America conducted by Pew has demonstrated that Guatemala is one of the Latin American countries with the highest rate of Christians (Pew Research Center 2014). According to *Prensa Libre,* a well-known national newspaper, the population is 45% Catholic and 42% Evangelical, specifically Protestant Christians, mainly Pentecostals (Dary 2019, p. 86; Thorsen 2016, p. 217). Pentecostalism, in its three waves, is strong in many churches and believers.

3.3. Practices and Beliefs of Indigenous Guatemalan Pentecostals

When explaining the popularity of Pentecostalism among the indigenous population in Guatemala, Garrard-Burnett offers two reasons: autonomy in leadership and worship. Such autonomy was not only reflected in indigenous pastors, but each congregation could define its methods of worship, music, and, to a certain extent, its theology as long as it seemed to remain within the dictates of the Spirit (Garrard-Burnett 2009, pp. 72–73). This autonomy confirmed that cultural adaptation was encouraged within the first Pentecostal churches. Anthropologist Claudia Dary also considers "syncretism and cultural parallelism" to be reasons for the growth of Guatemalan Pentecostalism. For Dary, the emotional expression of Pentecostal services is similar to that of popular Catholicism. She quotes Richard Waldrop, a missionary for the Church of God in Guatemala, saying that Pentecostal worship meets physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. It is no coincidence that Pentecostalism is strong among the indigenous communities in the west of the country (Dary 2019, p. 90). We now focus on some practices and beliefs of indigenous Pentecostals.

In order to deepen knowledge of what Dary calls syncretism, we turn to some of the interviews from our large-scale research among indigenous Pentecostals from western Guatemala (Monroy-Soto 2021).[7] Since we are specifically interested in the espoused theology (Cameron et al. 2010, pp. 53–56) of Pentecostal churches, we focus on three pastors as they provide an account of indigenous Pentecostals' lived faith. We bring them into the discussion to help clarify the theological aspect of Sepulveda's approach. Do they

perceive so-called syncretic practices and how do they evaluate them? The following is a report of three semi-structured interviews with three *Mayan K'iche* (young pastors) of the Church of God who work in the west of the country among indigenous Pentecostal churches and communities. Their names are Denilson Hernández, Emerson Elias, and Elías Ajanel. Denilson is a coordinator of the Department of Mission and Evangelism in the region of Quetzaltenango. He oversees local church planting efforts. Emerson is a pastor in a local church in a village called El Rodeo near the city of Quetzaltenango. Elías is an assistant pastor in two local K'iche churches and is planting a church in the Ixil community in the region of Quiché.[8]

Concerning the practices of indigenous Pentecostals, Denilson says that in Cajolá, a community composed of the *Mam* ethnic group, it is customary to find bags with water placed at the doors of houses. He explains that believers do it to "prevent evil spirits from entering their homes". Although the church in Cajolá has taught that it is mandatory to stop this practice, Pentecostal believers argue that quitting the practice would strip away their own indigenous identity. Denilson explains that the Pentecostal believers of Cajolá maintain this practice at home while attending Pentecostal services to worship God. Emerson, pastor of a local church consisting of Ladinos and Maya K'iches, mentions the practice of placing flowers on the altar. While believers argue that the flowers are to make the temple beautiful, he sees it as a "practice with indigenous roots mixed with Catholicism". The use of flowers would have passed from indigenous Mayan religions to popular Catholicism and would then have found a place in indigenous Pentecostalism. This makes sense since, as stated above, Protestantism has been scarce in the indigenous western region. Rebeca Son, a witness to the Pentecostal revival in Totonicapán, says that "the Pentecostal believers of indigenous race came from the Catholicism that dominated the region" (Monroy-Soto 2021, p. 86).

Denilson also mentioned the services that Pentecostal believers conduct in the mountains. A well-known mountain is the *burned hill*, where Pentecostals conduct worship services. When Denilson asked why they worship God on the hill, they responded: "We have encountered God on the hill through healings and liberations". This response refers to a real encounter with God through their experience in nature. They buy flowers and then climb the mountain to give them as an offering to thank God. Denilson finds a parallel with the Mayan religion. Mayan priests also climb other mountains, such as the mountain and lake called *Xicabal*, and carry flowers to worship the gods of water and nature. Denilson states, "While the Mayan ancestors worship the gods using flowers, in the same way, the Pentecostals climbed the mountains carrying flowers to worship God". For Denilson, this reflects the indigenous belief that divinity dwells in nature. The use of flowers is also present among the Ixil ethnic group. Elías describes Ixil believers praying with a bunch of flowers in their hands "because they believe that flowers have power". They also have the custom of praying for healing while sprinkling flower petals on the sick. In this case, flowers are a concrete means to make God's healing power present through contact with the flowers. Elías expresses some astonishment (or uneasiness?) when explaining that Pentecostal believers usually fast for three days. They fast for the first two days in the evangelical Pentecostal temple, but then spend the third in the Catholic temple. When asked why they fast in the Catholic temple on the third day, Elías responded: "They say that the Catholic temple is the house of God; it has power because God is there". Elías identifies this as syncretism. According to him, these mixed practices and beliefs make discipleship with new converts complicated, and it slows down the evangelizing mission.

Concerning beliefs, for Denilson the believers of Cajolá are aware of the existence of the spiritual world and affirm it by placing a bag of water at the doors of their houses. Emerson says that both in the church which he pastors in San Carlos Sija and in the church of Olintepeque, where he was converted to Pentecostalism, Pentecostal believers encourage respect and value for nature. This make sense since most of them "are farmers and also because nature provides wood for the fire". This reflects the Mayan belief that God (gods) gives nature to human beings for their benefit (Morales 2010, p. 289). Elías mentions

the personal struggles that the Ixiles have in Quiché. According to him, the Ixiles "have personal fights with the devil to cast him out of their lives, their homes, and even the streets". In doing this, they affirm their belief in the spiritual and in its intervention in the material world. Elías goes beyond description to offer a critical evaluation. To Elías, indigenous Pentecostalism in Quiché is "syncretic and ecumenical because, in addition to the heritage of the Mayan religion, they organize prayer groups among Pentecostals, Catholics, and charismatics".

This makes it clear that Guatemalan Pentecostalism has roots in a mixture of the traditional Mayan religion and popular Catholicism. The pastors' espoused theology reflects three crucial elements. In the first place, at a cultural level the pastors accept the (indigenous) culture of the people involved. They understand the typical forms and expressions, such as the use of water, flowers, and mountain cults, as being intimately linked to the indigenous Pentecostals' cultural identity. While Denilson and Emerson do not offer an explicit theological evaluation, they do take seriously the views of indigenous Pentecostals who claim, for example, that God is on the mountain. They do not see these practices and beliefs as a danger or threat but rather as a cultural expression of the fact that God is present. This implies a Christianization of these practices to worship the Christian God. Therefore, this cultural acceptance results, secondly, in a favorable theological judgment. The pastors recognize the genuineness of indigenous Pentecostals' cultural practices and beliefs since the former do not criticize the latter's perception of God in nature as pantheistic or animistic. Instead, the pastors recognize that indigenous Pentecostals have real encounters with God through their practices and beliefs. Therefore, they do not understand believers' experiences as only or merely cultural but also, and mainly, as theological. Although this second step is not very explicit, it is a crucial element of their espoused theology. Its importance comes to the fore when it is compared to Sepulveda's presentation of the missionary perspective that rejects indigenous culture. The pastors' perspective shows they link culture and theology by the way they handle this issue. The espoused theology also bears a third and critical element. Elías expresses a less affirmative judgment when he criticizes the cultural expression of indigenous Pentecostals as syncretic. He perceives their practices and beliefs as obstacles to growing in Christian faith (discipleship). This implies that he recognizes indigenous believers as Pentecostal Christians and accepts their entrance as sisters and brothers in the community of faith. However, it is important to notice that Elías' criticism is provoked by the use of the Roman Catholic church and the claim that this is the house of God. Elías' criticism shows the typical evangelical uneasiness with what is seen as the syncretic dimension of Roman Catholicism and his desire for the change in Pentecostal believers through discipleship. This links to Robbins' opinion that transformation and cultural change are proper to the way Christian faith is appropriated, specifically in Pentecostalism (Robbins 2017). We therefore conclude that the pastors offer some important keys to understanding the way in which they deal with cultural and theological questions related to the indigenous Pentecostals. Their espoused theology shows acceptance of cultural identity and their theological appreciation of it without denying the importance of cultural transformation.

4. Conclusions

The above allows us to enter into dialogue with Sepúlveda's approach on the cultural and theological. First, concerning culture, Sepúlveda rejects the idea of the existence of a pure gospel, indicating that all 'incarnations' of the gospel are cultural. In the article about the Pentecostal principle, it becomes clear that from Sepulveda's perspective the pure culture option for Latin American Pentecostalism is specifically represented by the perspective of Northern American protestant mission. However, in the Guatemalan case another cultural reality appears to be dominant: that of popular Roman Catholicism. This helps us understand that Sepulveda's focus concerning culture is dominated by the Northern American missionary 'gaze'. The espoused theology of the Guatemalan pastors show that this gaze is not decisive (anymore?) for their theological evaluation of the indigenous

Pentecostals, even when these pastors are part of the classical Pentecostal Church of God denomination, with strong roots in Cleveland Tennessee. Strangely enough, popular Roman Catholicism does not play a major role in Sepulveda's cultural analysis. However, given the religious context in most Latin American situations the idea of Latin American Creole Pentecostalism should not be limited to the indigenous aspect; it should include the popular Catholic element as well. Therefore, when exploring contextual theology in Latin America, it is mandatory to consider both the indigenous and the Catholic and their complex interconnections (See for example Rösing (2006)). Opening up Sepulveda's somewhat closed horizon of protestant missions not only implies that Latin American Pentecostalism should be seen as part of a broader inner Christian ecumenical discussion, but also helps us acknowledge that once the idea of a pure culture has been left behind, there is still a cultural question to be answered. Recognizing the cultural characteristics of every representation of the Christian faith is just the beginning of a quest to relate to what Sepulveda would call the different culturally mediated forms of Christian faith.

Anthropologist Joel Robbins can be of help here. When discussing the relationship between Christian conversion and cultural change, Robbins (2017) explains the change in the understanding of the concept of culture from a modern to a postmodern understanding of culture. The first is focused on the continuing character, that which endures through time, while the postmodern approach understands culture as subject to changes.[9] Robbins presents a version of culture that emphasizes the cultural values that organize other elements and shape the lives of those who belong to that culture. Using the case of the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea, Robbins argues that while Christian conversion implies radical cultural change, it is also true that previous traditional elements still persist in the Urapmin experience. This leads him to propose that Christianity is a secondary culture since it comes into tension with the previous culture of its converts. This establishes a duplex cultural formation that explains the coexistence of Christian values with traditional ones (Robbins 2017, pp. 47–49).[10] Conversion means changing values, ideas, forms, and content. This explains, for example, why the Guatemalan Pentecostal pastors recognize the indigenous believers as genuine Pentecostals not only from a cultural but also from a theological perspective. Understanding their espoused theology from a fluid understanding of culture provides the opportunity to see how they make a link with theology. This is in contrast to the more classical idea of culture espoused by Sepúlveda.

This brings us to our second point. Sepúlveda separates the cultural from the theological, making the first foundational for the other. Although his incarnational hermeneutics is a theological legitimization of the priority of the cultural, this does not make the cultural theological. The point of departure is the human being as the meaning maker. The result of this priority is that theology is reduced to a cultural activity of meaning making. This principal decision clarifies why Sepulveda cannot make sense of the idea of 'direct' contact between God and the human being, a reality to which Pentecostal testimonies abundantly refer. The priority of the cultural is an obstacle to understanding the divine initiative and human receptivity. It is interesting to see how this is contrasted in the espoused theology of the pastors. The recognition and acceptance of the cultural identity of the indigenous Pentecostals is exactly based on the fact that they participate in a shared experience of God in the church. Being part of the community and sharing in worship in which their testimonies about their experiences of God (in healing, in praise, and tongues) are received appears to be foundational. These sisters and brothers are accepted as members including their cultural identity. This context of shared faith and life in the Spirit also provides justification for the theological decision that their indigenous cultural forms are not against but in service of this faith. Precisely because of this theologically informed cultural acceptance, there is also the expectation of growth in sanctification. The critical assessment of pastor Elías is completely in line with acceptance of the proper cultural identity and its theological function. Also, here it is the work of God, in this case of ongoing transformation, which inspires the expression. As Robbins makes clear, the acceptance of cultural diversity does not contradict the longing for transformation, which is traditionally linked with disciple-

ship. Instead of making a (static understanding of) culture of the foundation for theological meaning, the theological reality of life in the Spirit unites both cultural identity and the deep desire to grow in faith and to be transformed.

We conclude by answering our central question: Does Juan Sepulveda's approach (still) provide an adequate framework for the theological assessment of the possible syncretic characteristics of (Latin American) Pentecostalism? We think Sepúlveda's approach is still valuable because of its recognition of culture as a fundamental element for understanding the syncretic character of Latin American Pentecostalism. Syncretism, in the sense of making use of non-Christian culture in the expression and transmission of Christian faith, is indeed inevitable and already broadly present in the Bible, for example. However, his conception of culture needs to be corrected by a more fluid and less rigid understanding that recognizes the constant change in cultural forms and values, often based on intercultural exchanges. The theoretical underpinning of Sepulveda's approach is biased by epistemological and conceptual principles of classical Western modern thought. Sepulveda's understanding falls especially short in making culture the foundation of theology. It requires recognition of the foundational importance of theology for the understanding of the proper role of God in culture without necessarily the claim of a pure culture. Here, one of the tasks of pneumatology comes to the fore. Therefore, syncretism is not only an inevitable characteristic of faith but also a point of departure for transformation. The critical perspective of many theological approaches should therefore be welcomed, not because it presupposes a 'pure culture' but because it helps us to understand culture transformational as part of the eschatological dynamics.

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Notes

1. We may add that the mission of Catholic Charismatic Renovation (CCR) is sometimes motivated by a similar idea about popular Roman Catholicism. See Klaas Bom, "I feel the presence of God in my tears" (Bom 2015).
2. (Juan Sepulveda Gonzalez 1996, p. 355). More specifically on the authority of the Bible and its cultural understanding, see p. 361. 'Evangelico', translated as 'Evangelical' is a popular term in Latin America to refer to all kind of non-Roman Catholic, mainly protestant churches and Christians.
3. Absolutization is understood both in its (German) idealistic and its (Classical philosophical) ontological meaning.
4. From now we refer to (Hollenweger 1997) as *The Pentecostals*.
5. Maximón or Saint Simon is a pagan saint who can curse people, give wealth, and resolve conflicts. For more information see the work of James Rodríguez on http://www.mimundo-fotorreportajes.org/search?q=san+sim%C3%B3n (accessed on 18 October 2023).
6. We identify its influence in national and local celebrations; Roman-Catholic celebrations are still dominant on the calendar.
7. These interviews form part of our broader research among the indigenous Pentecostals of Guatemala that has been conducted since 2021 and are part of Jonan Monroy's PhD research. See (Monroy-Soto 2021).
8. We use real names since the interviewees agreed to have their names published.
9. See a different but related perspective in Schreiter (1997), who distinguishes between static and dynamic understandings of culture.
10. (Robbins 2017, pp. 47–49). The idea of Christianity as a secondary religion is elaborated and related to theological authors like Kwame Bediako in (Bom and van den Toren 2010).

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Syncretism Narrative and the Use of Material Objects within Some Neo-Pentecostal Circles in Contemporary South Africa

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Abstract: African Pentecostal Christianity presents interconnectedness with African cultures, spiritualities, and religiosity in many ways. Among many other practices that demonstrate this interconnectedness is the use of material objects common within some African Pentecostal Christian spaces, African cultures, spiritualities, and religions. The advent of neo-Pentecostalism in South Africa has brought some controversies in the use of material objects within the broader African Pentecostalism. This has led to the outright demonization and to the conclusion that this practice was fundamentally syncretistic. This article investigated the syncretism narrative given the use of material objects within some neo-Pentecostal spaces in contemporary South Africa. It scrutinized the syncretism narrative and problematized it as the continuation of the missionary-colonial project that demonized African religious and cultural practices. It was argued that this constitutes coloniality that uses a "cultural bomb" that seeks to eradicate African customs, cultures, religions, and practices including the use of material objects. The study was conducted through the desktop research methodology focusing on secondary literature on African Pentecostalism, African neo-Pentecostalism, and syncretism. The findings indicated that the syncretism narrative is often applied to African Pentecostalism and seldom used with other Christian traditions, especially those of Western descent. Again, when the term is used, non-syncretistic elements are often not acknowledged. Thus, the need to transform the current narrative was highlighted.

Keywords: syncretism; African Pentecostalism; African neo-Pentecostalism; material objects

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1. Introduction

There are numerous ways in which African Pentecostal Christianity is tied to African cultures, spiritualities, and religiosity. Mbiti's (1990, p. 1) assertion that in Africa, traditional religion permeates every aspect of life provides lenses to understand why it is not desirable to separate religious from cultural practices. The use of material objects is part of African cultural practices and one of many common practices that show how African Pentecostal Christianity is intertwined with African spiritualities and religions. According to Biri (2020, p. 16), this interconnection is what gives indigenous religions and cultures their vitality and resilience in the face of outside pressure. This is often carried out by the "re-appropriation of traditional symbols in the Christian faith" (p. 16). African Pentecostalism and later African neo-Pentecostalism have been marked by the increased use of material objects. This practice is often accompanied by the belief that these materials contain religious powers to heal the sick and release material blessings (Kgatle 2023a, p. 5). However, in South Africa, the populist use of material objects within neo-Pentecostal Christianity has brought some controversies. This has led others to outrightly demonize the practice and conclude that it is fundamentally syncretistic not only in South Africa but also in other African Christian spaces (Nnamani 2015, p. 343). Therefore, the syncretism narrative continues to find grounds for declaring every use of material objects by Africans as syncretistic without acknowledging the non-syncretistic use. This narrative constitutes coloniality that manifests in what Wa Thiong'o (1981, p. 3) calls the "cultural bomb" that seeks to

eradicate African customs, cultures, languages, religions, and practices including the use of material objects.

This article investigated and problematized the syncretism narrative given the use of material objects within some neo-Pentecostal churches in South Africa. It further problematized the narrative by arguing that the missionary-colonial enterprise used a "cultural bomb" to demonize and regard as syncretistic all the African religious and cultural practices. The study was conducted through desktop research methodology focusing on secondary literature on African Pentecostalism, African neo-Pentecostalism, decoloniality, and syncretism. Therefore, relevant data were collected and analyzed from existing data sources, including journal articles, books, online data sources, and academic theses. The data search included the following terms: syncretism, material objects, African Pentecostalism, neo-Pentecostalism, and decoloniality. The following terms were excluded from the data search: idolatry, Christianity, and African traditional religions. The findings indicated that the syncretism narrative is often applied to African Pentecostal use of material objects and seldom used with other Christian traditions, especially those of Western descent. Again, there are also demonizing tendencies when the term is used concerning African Pentecostalism.

2. The Syncretism Narrative and the Use of "Cultural Bomb"

Here, the phrase "syncretism narrative" refers to academic writings, formal and informal discussions, and discourses concerning the purported blending of Christianity with African traditional religions, spiritualities, practices, and cultures. Banda (2018, 2019, 2020), Benyah (2020), Mofokeng (2021), Thinane (2023), and Kgatle (2023a), are among many other African Pentecostal scholars who have made significant contributions to the syncretism discourses and debates within the Southern African Pentecostal settings. Notably, although most of the scholars engaged in this discourse originated from African Pentecostal scholarship, their discourses on syncretistic aspects of African Pentecostalism often associate the use of material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism with outright syncretism. Most of the time, the usage of tangible items in these settings is categorically described as syncretistic without emphasizing the non-syncretistic applications. Additionally, there are differences when discussing the same subject regarding other Christian churches originating from the West. Thus, this tendency is tantamount to coloniality that uses Wa Thiong'o's (1981, p. 3) concept of "cultural bomb".

The "cultural bomb" manifests in the intersectionality of the Christianization, civilization, westernization, and colonization projects. This happened when the missionaries who came to Africa combined Christianization with the colonial civilization agenda. This collegial relationship between the missionaries and the colonizers is referred to by (Shingange 2023, p. 108) as the "Missionary-colonial interconnection". The same interconnection continues to support the legacies of colonialism by using the "cultural bomb" (Wa Thiong'o 1981, p. 3) that seeks to destroy African cultures, practices, religions, and the use of material objects in African Christianity, in particular African Pentecostal Christianity. Wa Thiongo further asserts that this "cultural bomb" makes Africans "see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves, for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all 'those forces which would stop their springs of life".

Therefore, the "cultural bomb" was used and continues to be used to destroy the African Pentecostal Christian belief in their cultural practices and material objects. Thus, this bomb continues the missionary-colonial project by supporting the imbalances in the use of the syncretism narrative between African Pentecostalism and other Christian traditions that originate from the West. Therefore, the current manifestation of the syncretism narrative within the South African context is problematic; therefore, it calls for the decolonization of the norm. However, it is important to first look at the use of material objects during

biblical times to foreground the argument that the syncretism narrative in this context serves as the "cultural bomb".

3. Material Objects during Biblical Times

According to Biwul (2021, p. 2), careful readers of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures meet multiple occurrences on the use of material items such as oil. Amongst many other biblical examples on the use of material objects during biblical times is that of Moses when commanded by God to stretch his rod over the Red Sea, and the water divided allowing the children of Israel to walk on the dry ground (Exodus 14:15–31). Again, Moses was commanded by God to point the same rod to the rock when the Israelites needed water in the wilderness (Exodus 17:6). Therefore, the rod of Moses was a material object that was used to perform a miracle. Also, in another instance, the people of Jericho complained that the well generated bitter water; therefore, the Prophet Elijah used salt to treat it (2 Kings:19). In the same vein, the salt that Elijah used was a material substance that cured the bitter water. Furthermore, Filipova shows how the Old Testament (OT) gives instances on the use of material objects by maintaining that since their passing roughly 4000 years ago, Jews have continuously honored the graves of the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as King David, Joseph, Rachel, and the prophets Haggai, Malachi, and Samuel (p. 4). Filipova's reference to Jews carries the connotation that she refers to Jews associated with the Abrahamic faith; thus, Messianic Jews are also included in the assertion.

In this regard, the graves, and the remains of those who are deemed to have pleased God carry material symbolism and can, thus, be declared material objects within the Christian faith. For instance, in the OT, a dead person was raised to life when his body encountered the sacred bones of the Prophet Elisha (2 Kings 13:20–21) (p. 4).

Similarly, there are also several examples on the use of material objects in the New Testament (NT). Jesus told the blind man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam after he spat on the ground and created mud that he put in his eyes (John 9:6–7). The blind man received his sight after the mud that Jesus used which was a material substance that was applied to his eyes (John 9:6–7). Also, in Acts 19:11–12, a description of how God endowed handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul's body with healing ability is presented. Succinctly put, Filipova (n.d., p. 5) states that these handkerchiefs and aprons were material objects that God used to heal the sick. Again, James 5:14 states that those who are sick should call the elders of the church, who in turn should pray for them and anoint them with (material substance) oil.

These passages of scripture show how material objects were used to demonstrate the power of God during biblical times. In most of these occurrences, literature is silent about accusations of syncretistic tendencies. Greenspahn (2004, p. 489) observed that even biblical authors were not concerned about syncretism. Therefore, the use of material objects was sometimes associated with idolatry and did not fundamentally constitute syncretism (p. 486). However, this does not suggest that syncretism did not exist during biblical times, again, it also does not suggest that the tendency cannot be found within Christian circles and African neo-Pentecostalism. However, this only demonstrates that non-syncretistic elements are traceable in the use of material objects even during biblical times. This leads us to the discussion about the use of material objects within Christian circles.

4. The Use of Material Objects within Christian Circles

The use of material objects has been part of Christian practices for ages. For instance, Kalalo and Sutjiadi (2022, p. 248) observed that the use of anointing oil is very common and has even become a commodity that is traded in Christian churches. Again, Goodgame (2023, p. 678) presents a clear picture of how religious objects were used and are still used within Christian spaces:

> I noticed the stairs leading into the crypt and went down. Here everything was dark. It was a small, stone chamber with a domed ceiling illuminated by a single dim light on the far wall. Save for the tomb it was empty, the floor covered in

> wood shavings. In one corner, I could see a Tanaka of olive oil (16L tin) and several large plastic Coke bottles, also full of oil. In the center of the room was a marble tomb, raised in Orthodox fashion with a cross and an icon of the saint engraved in the cladding (p. 678).

It is noteworthy, given the citation above, that literature is often silent regarding the link of this practice with syncretism whenever religious objects were used within these spaces. Limor (2017, p. 3) explains how material objects form part of Christian histography and how they are still held in high regard by modern tourists to the holy land (Jerusalem). This happens through the ancient and long-standing tradition of Christian pilgrims of gathering "specimens" they stumbled across along the road and bringing them home. Most of these specimens were found in locations where certain biblical or revered historical events had taken place and left traces on the landscape (p. 3).

Furthermore, some of these objects were believed to be carrying miraculous traits (p. 3). Thus, attaching miraculous or healing powers to material objects is not distinctively an African neo-Pentecostal phenomenon. However, this suggests that the tendency was and is still a common practice within other Christian contexts. Although Christians have often been associated with detestation of material objects as "Early Christians inherited the Second Commandment: "Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not adore them nor serve them (Exodus 20:4–5)" (Bynum 2013, p. 5); Bynum's observation presents a different narrative when opening:

> But despite their detestation of statues of the pagan gods, Christians also inherited Roman iconographic traditions such as doves, lambs, fish, and shepherds that seemed appropriate to signify the peace of the afterlife, God's concern for humankind, and so forth. After a flare-up of attacks on images in the eastern church between the sixth and eighth centuries, images were accorded acceptance by the Christian Church because of two basic arguments: first, that Christ, because he is both God and human, can be depicted in his human form, and second (as theorized by John of Damascus and Thomas Aquinas, among others) that images point to the divine but do not instantiate it (p. 5).

Therefore, it can be concluded from the citation above that the use of material objects was and is still part of the Christian practice. However, Bynum's view is that these images and material objects only serve as pointers to the divine and are not meant to replace divinity. Indeed, this assertion does not dispute the use of material objects by Christians; however, it explains their usage within these spaces. Thinane (2023, p. 7) presented a similar view when asserting that in most historic Christian faiths, including Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and others, the baptismal water is first blessed or sanctified by a priest using the sign of the cross before the actual baptism. Thinane further maintained that holy water is used for many sacramental purposes, such as blessing people, blessing items, and occasionally even exorcism, in addition to its important function in baptism (p. 7). Thus, water and the sign of the cross used during baptism as Thinane opined become indisputably "material objects". Thus, the practice of using religious objects within Christian spaces is indisputable. Therefore, the next section will look at this practice within the African Pentecostal spaces.

5. The Use of Material Objects within African Pentecostalism

Although the 1906 Azusa Street Revival is often epitomized as the foundation of contemporary Pentecostalism and African Pentecostalism, respectively, the movement developed over time in Africa to the point where the gospel was ultimately reinterpreted, indigenized, enculturated, and contextualized in terms of African worldviews marked by mystical causalities and African religions (Nel 2020, p. 2). Succinctly put, the gospel gradually developed a distinctive African expression that is based on African holistic spirituality. Anderson (2005) distinguished between three main sub-traditions of African Pentecostalism, namely, African Indigenous Churches (AICs), Classical Pentecostalism,

and Charismatic Churches (p. 67). Furthermore, he admitted that African Pentecostalism includes the subset of neo-Pentecostalism (p. 76). The use of religious material is common within the IAC, Charismatic, and neo-Pentecostal spaces. Classical Pentecostalism also uses religious material; however, this practice is often carried out overtly.

Benyah (2020, p. 636) asserts that "the use and circulation of these material objects resonate with traditional religious cultures". Thus, this practice cannot be separated from its African cultural connectivity. Nevertheless, the use of material objects within the cohort of African Pentecostal Christianity was previously solely associated with the Apostolic, Zionist, and AICs (Banda 2019, p. 1; Mofokeng 2021, p. 80–88). According to Banda (2018, p. 59) in African Independent Churches, material objects include a range of vibrant church clothing embroidered with symbols like the cross and stars, strings around the body, weapons like shepherd's hooks and rods, holy water, and several other items. These objects are used within these spaces with a view of embracing the unique expression of the manifestation of Christianity in Africa. Thus, the use of material objects within this context carries the African nuances of the gospel and African spirituality. According to Masufku (2021, p. 4), this spirituality takes inspiration from African cosmology, which opposes a dualistic view of the world that has a propensity to separate the spiritual from the social. Given Masuku's assertion, tendencies that regard African Pentecostal practices in a dualistic approach have no origins in African spiritualities and religions.

Chetty (2009, p. 11) noted that traditional African material practices and the use of symbolic and material objects in healing are typically frowned upon by Pentecostal congregations. This is common within some Classical Pentecostal churches which have roots in Western Pentecostal movements. However, the AICs and the newly emerging African neo-Pentecostal churches maintain a different position regarding the use of material objects. They hold a different position from Classical Pentecostalism in that they overtly use religious materials such as anointed water, anointed oil, and other material objects (Kgatle 2022a, p. 4). Regrettably, their position has often been regarded as fundamentally syncretistic, something that Nnamani (2015, p. 343) referred to as "irresponsible syncretism". Indeed, this view is often used against the use of material objects within South African neo-Pentecostalism without the consideration of non-syncretistic elements (p. 343). In the same vein, the use of material objects within South African neo-Pentecostalism has brought unique dynamics that deserve serious attention.

6. Material Objects within the South African Neo-Pentecostalism

Kgatle (2017, p. 1) defines neo-Pentecostalism in South Africa as "Churches that have transcended denominational lines. Furthermore, these churches glorify success, deliverance, healing, and odd church shows, many of which are led by powerful and captivating spiritual figures". According to Banda (2023, p. 1), these prominent spiritual figures include amongst others, Shepherd Bushiri from Malawi, Emmanuel Makandiwa from Zimbabwe, HQ Nala, and Paseka Motsoeneng from South Africa. These pastors have often attracted controversy through questionable ministerial practices such as the selling of anointed objects like anointed oil, waistbands, and armbands, and the demand for large sums of money to prophesy and bless people (p. 1). On the other hand, their desire for divine power has led to the covert and overt abuse in the use of material objects (Mashau and Kgatle (2019, p. 3). This is often carried out to achieve monetary success, health, and wellness under the disguise of displaying the power of God by using material objects (Banda 2019, p. 4). Thus, the so-called anointed items such as oil, water, and diverse items that are supposedly blessed by these prophets and often referred to as "Women" and "Men of God" are used to attain health and wealth within South Africa and other African neo-Pentecostal contexts (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; Banda 2019, p. 1).

This narrative has gradually developed to the point where some neo-Pentecostal pastors seek objects from cultic movements even *Sangomas* (indigenous healers) to boost their ministries and increase church membership. Makhado (2017) explains how he traveled from South Africa to Nigeria to consult a cultic movement that gave him material objects to

make his church membership in Soshanguve north of Tshwane in South Africa grow. Again, Alamu and Dopamu's (2020, p. 154) observations in Nigeria mirror the South African neo-Pentecostal context where the material objects used include amongst others, blessed oil, mantles, bangles, holy water, staffs, candles, and handkerchiefs, and are believed to possess miraculous powers for healing, deliverance, security, and victory over Satan. This was also observed by Kgatle (2019, p. 4) when opining that "The churches also sell spiritual materials, such as olive oil, as well as souvenirs, such as magazines, books, stickers, pamphlets, key-holders, handkerchiefs, video and audio discs/cassettes, T-shirts and scarves". Against this backdrop, material objects are part of African neo-Pentecostalism as they are also part of Christianity and biblical times.

Whilst the (ab) use of material objects is a serious challenge within the South African neo-Pentecostalism, the generalized syncretism narrative is another serious challenge that needs to be addressed. This narrative demonizes every use of material objects within African Pentecostalism and African neo-Pentecostalism by outrightly regarding the practice as syncretistic. In contrast to Kgatle (2023a, p. 7) who asserted that "New prophetic churches also have non-syncretistic practices", some critics of syncretism within African neo-Pentecostalism do not acknowledge that not every use of material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism is syncretistic. Therefore, the blanket approach that denies the existence of non-syncretistic use of material objects within South African neo-Pentecostalism is problematic. Again, this denial is similar to Rodrigues's (2021, p. 138) observation that "In the context of the European maritime expansion and the construction of colonial empires based on slavery, the practice and beliefs of African religions were demonized and then brutally criminalized". Indeed, this is a "cultural bomb" wielded against African practices by the missionary-colonial project, as it was the case in the context of African slaves in Brazil, where Christians and colonizers worked together in the demonization of African practices (p. 138). Therefore, the missionary-colonial project needs to be uprooted.

7. The Missionary-Colonial Project

The missionary-colonial project entails the relationship between missionaries and colonialists in the subjugation agenda of Africa (Shingange 2023). The missionary-colonial project premised its views of African practices on the notion of dualism that juxtaposed spirit with matter, right with wrong, and sacred with secular, etc. Thus, the African use of material objects which was part of African cultures and religions was projected as demonic and as a symbol of darkness by the African Christianization project (Nweke 2022, p. 277). This is similar to what Comaroff and Comaroff (1988, p. 22) referred to when asserting that "As bearers of the light, therefore, the Christians had to persuade those long accustomed to darkness to 'open their eyes' and let 'brightness illumine their hearts". It is my view that if African material objects were regarded by the missionary-colonial enterprise as objects of darkness, it meant that Africans were expected to open their eyes to let the light brought by missionaries shine into their hearts. This was supposed to happen when Africans abandoned their cultural practices when they accepted the Christian faith and civilization.

Accordingly, Africans were compelled to discard their cultures, customs, rituals, and the use of material objects as they came to the light of the gospel as presented by Western missionaries. Thus, the "cultural bomb" (Wa Thiong'o 1981, p. 3) was used to destroy the African use of material objects. Kebede (2004, p. 36) opined that the more missionaries relegated African religions and customs by treating them as superstition and witchcraft, the more they thought that the place of Christianity was becoming stronger. Therefore, the use of material objects within African Christianity and later African Pentecostalism was always viewed with suspicions. In essence, it is the dualistic view of the world, the desire to bring those in darkness to light, and the use of the "cultural bomb" that became the tools used to cast suspicions about the African use of material objects. Consequently, material objects within African Pentecostalism were and continue to be viewed through the lenses that separate the good from the bad, the holy from the unholy, and the syncretistic (African

neo-Pentecostal use of material objects) from the non-syncretistic (Western Christianity use of material objects).

Thus, Kgatle (2023a, p. 7) asserts that "non-syncretistic practices within Pentecostalism should be considered so that syncretism is not discussed in isolation from inconsistent practices". Succinctly put, it should be taken into cognizance when addressing syncretism within South African neo-Pentecostalism that the use of material objects within these spaces is not inherently syncretistic. The reality is that there are also some non-syncretistic elements in the use of material objects within this context. Although the attempt to separate syncretistic and non-syncretistic is sometimes helpful, it becomes problematic when it only deems every African Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal use of material objects as syncretistic and places them on the darker end of the continuum. This happens without being cognizant that it is in the process of contextualization, assimilation, indigenization, and Africanization of the gospel that African neo-Pentecostal Christianity presents its uniqueness. Therefore, the challenge in the use of material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism needs to be identified and addressed accordingly.

8. Identifying the Challenge

It is crucial in the attempt to identify the challenge in the use of material objects within South African neo-Pentecostalism to first bring the notion of syncretism into the correct perspective. Hunter (2020, p. 1) defined syncretism as the "blending of material-cultural belief systems or other cultural systems into a single practice". Hunter's definition is important because it presents a general understanding of the term that can also help in contextualizing the use of the term "syncretism" in the use of material objects within neo-Pentecostalism in South Africa. Again, Mwiti et al. (2015) also present a working definition that can also help in understanding the misuse of the syncretism narrative within South African neo-Pentecostalism. According to Mwiti et al. (2015, p. 42), "Syncretism in Christianity occurs when basic elements of the gospel are replaced by religious elements from the host culture. Therefore, it is imperative in the discussion about the use of material objects within South African neo-Pentecostalism to determine whether this act aims at replacing the basic elements of Christianity or not. Again, it should also be asked if this use of material objects constitutes the belief in more than one view to create a new doctrine or new worldview.

Wariboko (2017) provides lenses through which the questions raised above could be approached. Wariboko argues that it is imperative to seek an understanding of how African Pentecostalism constitutes itself about its sensibilities (p. 1), and how it bears witness to its form of religiosity as a spirituality that is continually affected by African traditional religions, economic exigencies, and political developments in Africa, and by traditions, doctrines, and the gospel message of Christianity (p. 1). Wariboko's argument serves as a barometer guiding against overgeneralization and the outsider's attempt to define African Pentecostalism as though African Pentecostals were *tabula rasa*, meaning that Africans were devoid of abilities to define their practices, experiences, and existence. It is imperative from the onset to scrutinize the notion of the inculturation of the gospel in the light of the syncretization. Therefore, the demonization and the outright regard for the use of material objects within the South African neo-Pentecostal spaces as syncretistic are double lenses used to destroy the inculturation of the gospel in Africa.

Again, these two lenses have perpetually avoided Wariboko's barometers by failing to ask how African Pentecostalism bears witness to its form of religiosity and spirituality. The outright syncretization of every use of material objects within African Pentecostalism is often based on generalizations. However, there are certain practices in the use of material objects within this context that need scrutiny as they have brought ambiguity in the presentation of the gospel.

8.1. Practices Complicating the Gospel

There are several uses of material objects within the contemporary South African neo-Pentecostalism that complicate the gospel. These practices present a challenge because they make it difficult to discern between cultish activities and the legitimate usage of African sacred items. This is similar to Sande's (2017, p. 50) generalized assertion that African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and Pentecostalism have a dialectical and confusing relationship. It is this alleged confusing relationship that happens in some neo-Pentecostal circles that complicates the gospel; thus, calling for the distinction to be made between non-syncretistic and syncretistic elements in the use of material objects within South African Pentecostalism. This confusion further raises the question of whether the narrative represents the assimilation of African spiritualities into Christianity or the merging of African material belief systems into African Pentecostalism.

Consequently, the same narrative has drawn criticism, sparking debates among theologians, researchers, and the Christian communities (Banda 2020, p. 1). Therefore, a balance should be sought by separating the non-syncretistic use of material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism and the syncretism narrative that uses "cultural bomb" (Wa Thiong'o 1981, p. 3) to destroy everything African. The syncretistic use of material objects can be easily detected as Thinane (2023, p. 3) opined that overt syncretism entails processes in which "Syncretistic practices, or the intermingling of material beliefs as it were, occurs in an explicit or blatantly recognizable fashion". Thus, some neo-Pentecostal pastors in South Africa display overt syncretism when they blend Christian doctrine with African practices and rituals that stand in opposition to Christianity, abuse the use of material objects, or cause harm to society. As a result, a few examples can shed some light as an illustration on the syncretistic usage of material items within South African neo-Pentecostalism.

8.2. The Consultation with Sangomas

Galvin et al. (2023) describe a phenomenon wherein *sangomas* (Indigenous healers) perform faith healing by fusing Christian prophetic practice and African indigenous healing. This is an example of combining more than one material practice in a particular act. Again, syncretistic elements can be traced in a similar environment in which South African neo-Pentecostal pastors blend Christianity with *sangomas'* consultation.

The *sangomas* base their practices on African spiritualities and religiosities, something that according to Grillo (2012, p. 113) is marked by the movement of objects and persons in space during ritual actions and the use of specific material forms (such as art and iconography). These material forms have a significant impact on the transmission of complex concepts within ATRs. This suggests that African spiritualities and religiosity maintain that material objects have the potential to reveal secret information and alter undesirable circumstances. Considering this, Grillo further asserted that art and material objects are the main channels for the dissemination of African material ideas. Sculpture, masks, iconography, equipment used in divination, priestly regalia, as well as charms and amulets that provide protection, all serve to symbolize, channel, or transform spiritual energy or creatures (p. 118). Therefore, it is the elements of power and protection that make material objects a critical aspect of African spiritualities and religiosity. As a result, these practices become syncretistic when neo-Pentecostal pastors integrate these elements into the Christian faith.

8.3. The Sacralizing of Material Objects

According to Banda (2020, p. 2), a major issue is that neo-Pentecostal apostles and prophets sacralize their anointed objects. They perform this without acknowledging the theological inconsistency of linking God's omnipotence and desire to freely heal and restore all troubled people to things like water and oil contained in tiny bottles bearing the names of the apostles and prophets. Thus, the challenge in this regard is not syncretism, but it is the tendency to sacralize material objects. This poses a serious challenge to the gospel because it moves people's faith away from Christ and leads to the objectification of religion.

Kgatle (2022b, p. 6) defines the objectification of religion as "the reduction of material faith to the use of objects to access healing, deliverance, and so forth". In particular, when religion is objectified, it is reduced to the material, concrete, and palpable aspects of what has traditionally been regarded as spiritual and abstract. To cure and deliver people, material object users use various items that they believe to be imbued with the anointing rather than relying solely on God. As a result, rather than placing their trust in God, the consumers and followers of these material leaders wind up establishing a demand for these material products (p. 6).

8.4. The Commercialization of Material Objects

According to Kgatle and Mofokeng (2019, p. 5), the enduring challenge that even the South African government has recognized through the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Cultural, Material, and Linguistic Communities (CRL Commission) is that the gospel in South Africa is being commercialized through the selling of holy water, anointing oil, church uniforms, and appointments with clergy. Considering this, Banda (2020, p. 2) criticized the concept of paying for anointed objects by arguing that it conflicts with the actions of biblical prophets like Elisha, who turned down Naaman's offer of gifts after curing him, and Jesus the savior, who freely cured anyone he met.

According to Kgatle and Thinane (2023, p. 8), in the New Prophetic Churches, access to the healing process is contingent upon the purchase of a specific product by the churches' adherents. Instead of placing one's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as is the case in traditional Pentecostal churches, this links faith healing to a particular product. Thus, the use of material products in this regard shifts one's faith from Jesus Christ to total dependence on the products (p. 8). Additionally, Kgatle and Thinane maintain that the use of healing products fosters a relationship between believers and their pastors or prophets in which the faith of believers is placed in the person who distributes the products (p. 8). It is again the shift from trusting the Lord Jesus Christ to dependence on the pastor or prophet that is problematic. Thus, rather than outrightly demonizing and regarding this as inherently syncretistic, these elements amongst others need to be clarified, defined, and presented as wrong ways of using material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism.

9. Charting the Way Forward

There is a need to dismantle the "cultural bomb". This can happen through decolonizing the use of material objects within African Pentecostalism and African neo-Pentecostalism. The starting point would be to problematize the missionary-colonial idea that converting to Christianity entails abandoning African traditional customs, symbols, and the use of material objects without determining whether they are syncretistic or not. The narrative needs to be challenged because it is the same idea that keeps (mis) representing African cultures and practices by unduly regarding them as syncretistic. Therefore, it is critical to be objective when addressing the use of material objects either within African Pentecostalism or in particular within African neo-Pentecostalism, because without this objectivity, there is a danger of repeating with neo-Pentecostalism what Kgatla (2023) calls the "othering" of the AICs by the colonial-missionary enterprise who uncritically viewed the AICs as "sects", "nativists", "messianic", and "syncretic" (p. 5). Thus, the haste to simplistically label every use of material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism as syncretistic should be challenged to its core.

It is also critical to ask the following question when addressing syncretism in the use of material objects within African Pentecostalism: Why are syncretistic lenses also not applied in the use of material objects within other Christian spaces that have roots in Western forms of Christianity? This refers to the use of material objects like water, oil, wine, and bread for holy communion and other substances as discussed in this article. Nwosu (2021, p. 4) attempted to respond to this question when asserting that "the shock of external influence on the ways of life of the people contributed significantly to the present-day problem of syncretism in Africa, if at all, syncretism is a problem". It becomes apparent

that the Western missionaries hastily labeled as syncretistic any African practice they did not understand or approve of. In the same vein, even some of the African Pentecostal scholars have adopted the same narrative. This happened without an attempt to separate the syncretistic from the non-syncretistic elements in the use of material objects within African Pentecostal contexts.

Thus, the use of material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism should not be outrightly dismissed as syncretistic. In the same vein, Kgatle (2023b) opined that despite their challenges, such as commercialization and other abuses anointed products become a point of contact in Pentecostal spirituality of experience. Therefore, biblical passages of scripture such as James 5:14–16 that promote the use of oil when elders pray for the sick should be used as the basis to justify this move. Indeed, such scriptural references should serve as examples on the non-syncretistic use of material objects within Christian circles. However, negative abuses of material objects should also be exposed and discouraged.

10. Conclusions

This article made the case that there are several interconnections between African Pentecostal Christianity, African spiritualities, and religions. The use of material objects, which is prevalent in several African Pentecostal Christian spaces as well as African cultures, spiritualities, and religions, is just one of many such activities that highlight this interconnectedness. The article further argued that within the larger African Pentecostalism, the emergence of neo-Pentecostalism in South Africa has raised certain debates about the use of material objects. As a result, the practice was categorically demonized, and it was determined that it was essentially syncretistic. Therefore, the article investigated and problematized the syncretism narrative given the use of material objects within some neo-Pentecostal churches in South Africa. Thus, it scrutinized the outright syncretism narrative. It then problematized the narrative and argued that it continues the missionary-colonial project that demonized African cultural and material practices. It further argued that the narrative constitutes a “cultural bomb” that seeks to eradicate African customs, cultures, religions, and practices including the use of material objects. Therefore, the use of material objects within African neo-Pentecostalism should not be outrightly dismissed as syncretistic; however, biblical passages of scripture such as James 5:14–16 that promote the use of oil when elders pray for the sick should be used as the basis to justify this move and serve as examples on the non-syncretistic use of material objects within Christian circles.

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Reconsidering Syncretism and Contextualization: The *sangoma-Prophet* Phenomenon in South African Neo-Prophetic Pentecostalism

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Abstract: The emergence of African Christianity from missionary tutelage towards the close of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century raised concerns of syncretism that only eased with arguments of contextualisation in the 1970s. The arguments some missiologists in Southern Africa made, especially about the older Spirit churches (Zion and Apostolic churches) as indigenising agents, almost retired the concept of syncretism in relation to these churches in favour of recognising them as being responsive to their context—hence, agents of contextualisation. The advent of the neo-prophetic movement requires a reconsideration of both the concepts of syncretism and contextualisation of the Christian faith, especially in light of the alleged interaction of some in this movement with ancestral spirits. The article concerns itself with the question: why does the advent of neo-prophetism require a conceptual reconsideration of syncretism and contextualisation and to what end? The search for an answer to this question adopts a qualitative desktop research approach. The study seeks to understand the reasons for the traditional healing (sangoma) prophet phenomenon requiring a reconsideration of the mentioned concepts.

Keywords: African christianity; African spirituality; contextualisation; mission-initiated churches; neo-prophetism; syncretism

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1. Introduction

A recent major development in the religious scene is the advent of neo-prophetism in South Africa and beyond (Kgatle and Anderson 2021), which Kgatle (2021, p. 2) labels as the fourth wave of Pentecostalism. Scholars have addressed this development from several perspectives including ethical and Christological. From an ethical perspective, Dube (2021, pp. 139–41), Kisungu (2021, pp. 58–60), and Shingange (2021, pp. 118–22) are some of the scholars that have raised concerns about falsehood, abusiveness, physical endangerment, financial predation, etcetera, characterizing some ministries within neo-prophetism. Frahm-Arp (2021, pp. 158–59) and Shingange (2022, p. 101), on the other hand, have highlighted the movement's Christological challenges in which these new prophets seem to have assumed Christ's mediation role while continuing to proclaim him as Lord and Saviour. In most descriptions of the prophets' modus operandi, candles, oils, water, and other objects appear as tangible means of transferring spiritual power to effect diverse outcomes (Resane 2021, p. 96). The inclusion of the abovementioned objects and exercise of diagnostic prophecy in the healing and miracle-producing repertoire of neo-prophetism together with weakened Christology, which Mngadi (2022, p. 19) considers almost non-existent, are not lost to Mofokeng (2021a, pp. 41–42), Shingange (2022, p. 108), and others who note similarities with older African Independent Churches (AICs) and, beyond that, with African Traditional Religions (ATR) in which indigenous healers including *sangomas* in South Africa are specialists. Similarities between neo-prophetism and ATR practices are not much of a concern as they understandably arise out of a conscious choice to operate within the African worldview traceable to the emergence of AICs since 1884 when Nehemia Tile

established his Thembu National Church (Roy 2017, p. 105). What raises concern are the implications of Mokhoathi's (2021, p. 2) findings from a study involving ten adult males and females, all participants in African Christianity, which he considers to be a product of syncretism. According to Mokhoathi (2021, pp. 4–5), some of the participants with nominal mainline church membership, who additionally act as indigenous healers, "perceived no incompatibility between belief in Christ and their ancestral mediation practice". Only those committed to their Christian faith on one side and those with "rigorist" adherence to African tradition on another maintained the view of incompatibility between the two religious systems (Mokhoathi 2021, p. 10). Admittedly, Mokhoathi's research does not feature neo-prophetism. However, it exposes the reality of persons and communities who claim allegiance to Christ while concurrently possessing charismatic abilities sourced from ancestral and nature spirits. A confirmation of the same comes through Apostle Makhado Ramabulana, a South African participant in neo-prophetism and a self-confessed former false prophet, who admits to having been initiated into the occult and initiating other prophets and *sangomas* (Ramabulana 2018). Further confirmation comes from Resane (2021, p. 96), who, writing in the context of the commercialization of the gospel by neo-prophetic ministers, asserts that "[I]t is becoming common for the commercialist preachers to pour libations on the ground as a way of enhancing church growth".

This background serves as a basis to argue that the advent of neo-prophetism requires a reconsideration of the concepts of "syncretism" and "contextualisation" in a quest to pronounce God's "yes" and "no" to aspects of ATR. The article concerns itself with the question: why is it necessary to pronounce God's "yes" and "no" to aspects of ATR and why reconsider the concepts of syncretism and contextualisation?

2. Definitions

The following concepts need clarifying: African Christianity, syncretism, and contextualisation. Their clarification will follow the order in which they appear. The first one is African Christianity, which I define in a similar fashion to Kgatle and Mofokeng (2019) as well as Ukah (2007, p. 2) as "encompassing the beliefs and practices of the Christian faith held and engaged in by believers whose immediate religio-cultural background is characterized by worldviews peculiar to African indigenous cultures". Such believers span church organizations inclusive of Western missions, and AICs in their Ethiopian, Zionist, Apostolic, and old, new, as well as prophetic, Pentecostal types.

The second concept is that of syncretism. Defined from its Greek roots, *synkretismos*, which alludes to the historical coming together of warring parties on Crete island to face a common enemy, the concept of syncretism expresses a negative evaluation of a specific interaction of the gospel and the culture of its recipients, considered a marriage of convenience under duress (Ezenweke and Kanu 2012, p. 73).

The third concept, contextualisation, here refers to a process of transformation of the Christian faith from structures and forms of expression grounded in missionary culture to those of recipient cultures (Chai 2015, p. 5). As such, contextualisation is necessary. However, as a paradigm of relating to expressions of the Christian faith in ways that discourage negative pronouncements, fostering a relativist attitude, contextualisation threatens the viability of Christian witnesses. This is the sense in which its reconsideration is raised.

3. Methodology and Methods

The study uses a qualitative desktop research approach on relevant secondary source material in the form of books and articles mostly available online. The relevance of the literature was ascertained based on its direct engagement with key elements pertinent to the research problem, namely, neo-prophetic Pentecostalism, the African indigenous healing tradition of *sangomaism*, as well as the concepts of contextualization and syncretism (Booth et al. 2016, p. 66). The modifier, "desktop", contrasts the research concerned with both laboratory-based and fieldwork-based research types while the qualitative aspect

refers to its concern with text instead of numbers. The gathered literature was subjected to multiple readings and data from each source were allocated to themes that coalesced into four main divisions (Booth et al. 2016, p. 93). The divisions are arranged and discussed as follows: modern missionary Christianity and syncretism, a reappraisal of modern syncretic Christianity, reconceptualizing syncretistic Christianity as contextualisation, and challenging the inadequacy of contextualisation. The research assumes a South African perspective although interacting with relevant data from other geographies on the African continent, especially West Africa.

4. Modern Missionary Christianity and Syncretism

The coming together of missionary societies into the General Missionary Conference since 1904 and the formation of the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) in 1936, which ultimately became the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in 1960, meant an increasing distance from concerns to disciple African Christians in particular ways to concerns with socio-political issues, mostly to do with racial politics (Roy 2017, pp. 148, 150–62). It appears as if the operative belief was that Africans associated with missionary Christianity held to orthodox theological formulations, and true to rationalist tendencies in this stream, such assent was adequate to absolve the African adherents. The Africans within missionary Christianity exposed the inadequacy of such an approach by retaining and actively seeking the comfort of ancestral spiritism for their daily concerns (Anderson 1993, p. 30; Manala 2006, p. 50; Mulutsi 2020, p. 41). In continuing to patronize the ancestral cult, these African believers mended the brokenness fostered by a dualist approach to personal and social life (Anderson 1987, p. 82; Clark 2001, p. 81).

The intellectualization of faith that characterizes missionary Christianity associated with the mainline churches has led classical Pentecostals, who themselves are part of missionary Christianity, and neo-Pentecostals to suspect the former's Christian claims. The suspicion arises out of the observations of both classical and neo-Pentecostals, collectively labelled evangelical Pentecostals (Mathole 2005, p. 184). Furthermore, scholarly testimony confirms that many African Christians in missionary-initiated churches (MICs) continue customary practices, some of which involve the ancestral cult (see Baer 2001; Degbe 2014, pp. 261–63; Denis 2004, p. 181; Manala 2006, p. 50; Mofokeng 2015, pp. 112–16; Mulutsi 2020, pp. 41, 43). This observation contrasts sharply with one of the defining characteristics of evangelical Pentecostalism—the explicit opposition to the ancestral cult and associated rituals (Anderson 1993, pp. 30–31; Clark 2001, pp. 91, 95; Degbe 2014, p. 263; Larbi 2002, p. 148). In its opposition to this cult, evangelical Pentecostalism does not consider itself any less African (Anderson 1993, p. 31; Clark 2001, p. 98). Added to its self-perception are the observations of scholars such as Amanze (2008, p. 4) and Clark (2001, p. 85) that evangelical Pentecostalism, whether in its classical or neo-Pentecostal forms, expresses an African religious genius in its orality, lively body movements, sensitivity to pneumatic realities, consideration of the spirit realm as a source for ailments and misfortune as well as remedies, and so on. Anderson (2000, p. 373) ascribes these same traits to pneumatic AICs, upon which he argued for their consideration as African Pentecostals.

5. Reappraising Modern Syncretic Christianity

Historically, the syncretism of missionary Christianity hardly came to mind such that the term "syncretism" attached itself to, as well as invoked, developments within African Christianity beyond the control of missionaries. The Ethiopian[1] part of African Christianity, although acknowledged to be closest to missionary Christianity in theology, liturgy, and organization, elicited concern for being sympathetic to African customs (Daneel 1987, p. 217). The main concern with Ethiopianism lay in the direction of its politics, which both the governments of the South African colonies and the missionaries considered to be antagonistic to the colonial project by aspiring for Black nationalism within and across colonial boundaries (Mogashoa 2009, p. 181). In addition to and beyond Ethiopianism was Zionism, an African charismatic movement emerging out of, and associated with,

classical Pentecostalism, although denounced by the latter (Bond 1974, p. 14; Kgatle and Anderson 2021, p. 4).[2] From missionary Christianity's perspective, with its theologically trained ministry and pneumatologically cessationist stance (Amanze 2008, p. 5), Zionism had the misfortune of an already suspect parentage in classical Pentecostalism. The Dutch Reformed Church, which had experienced a pietistic and Pentecostal-like revival in the second half of the nineteenth century, distanced itself from charismatism at the beginning of the twentieth century (Burger and Nel 2008, p. 26; Motshetshane 2015, pp. 17, 54). These charismatics became part of the early Pentecostal movement.

Early classical Pentecostalism's disenchantment with formal education, both public and for ministry, as well as its openness to conversion that did not require catechizing through the schools, attracted many illiterate and semi-illiterate people, further complicating how missionary Christianity perceived classical Pentecostalism and subsequently Zionism—an anti-civilizing mission (Maxwell 1999, pp. 254–55; Nel 2016, pp. 2–3). Although classical Pentecostalism worked itself to some level of respectability, thus overcoming, to a large degree, the perceptions of itself as a sect (Nel 2017, pp. 58–59), Zionism remained suspect even to classical Pentecostals (Bond 1974, p. 14; Kgatle and Anderson 2021, p. 4). Moreover, the rise of neo-Pentecostalism within the mainline church sector during the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the emergence of nondenominational neo-Pentecostalism, starting with Rhema in 1979 and further manifested in the neo-prophetic and Apostolic church groups in the 2010s, has adversely impacted the perception of this Spirit movement by mission-initiated Christianity. This negative sentiment is particularly pronounced due to the association of non-denominational neo-Pentecostalism and the neo-prophetic and Apostolic church groups with the prosperity message (Anderson 1987, p. 74; Frahm-Arp 2018, p. 7; Mathole 2005, pp. 180–81, 206). A consideration of various scholarly observations and arguments on the prosperity message leads to a conclusion that its proliferation, especially in Africa, relates to the contextual concerns many Africans experience daily, something that MICs have not prioritized and to which they lack a theological response (Manala 2004, p. 1502; Tsekpoe 2019, p. 282). Some of these concerns include "sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, evil spirits and sorcery" (Anderson 2000, p. 376). MICs' failure to respond to the above concerns traces back to the influence of Euro-American enlightenment with its individualist approaches to life and dualism in its conceptions of the world (Manala 2004, p. 1503). Hence, the only Christian traditions to attract and penetrate the African worldview are those that eschewed the enlightenment influence in favour of a world in which community is possible, with that community seen to extend beyond materiality (Beyers and Mphahlele 2009, p. 3). The classical Pentecostals, the Zionists, the Charismatics, and the new prophets had and continue to have a transcendent vision of community, in agreement with both the Bible and African perspectives from which to tackle the felt needs of the African person (Kgatle and Anderson 2021, p. 4). The ongoing response to these felt needs occurs despite reservations, especially from the classical and neo-Pentecostal side, grounded in typical evangelical soteriology and modern cultural forms of expression of the faith, including objects used to mediate divine power (Kgatle and Anderson 2021, p. 4).

Missionary Christianity's appropriation of the orthodox label while excluding African Christianity outside of missionary control results from the former's conscious and systematic theologizing (Ukah 2007, p. 4). The consequence of this is visible in the conceptual and evaluative control this brand of Christianity wields against other forms, especially in postcolonial societies. Understandably, missionary Christianity has the pride of place as a facilitator if not an originator of other forms of Christianity that are chronologically younger and institutionally weak (Mbago 2020, pp. 2–3). It is from this perspective that concepts like "mainline churches" were synonymous with missionary Christianity despite its allusion to the peripheral placement of non-missionary Christianity (Mulutsi 2020, p. 41). Scholars like Park (2014, p. 12) have begun to be sensitive against this implication, pointing at the numerical growth of non-missionary Christianity versus the declining numbers of missionary Christianity (Goodhew 2000, p. 358). The issue they raise, by implication, is the future appropriation of the term "mainline" by the formerly and allegedly heterodox if

not syncretistic "sects". The future mainstreaming of non-missionary Christianity is not without researchers and theologians indigenous to the movement who contribute an emic perspective to articulating issues this movement is about, including its identity.

The recently emergent phenomenon of African neo-prophetism struggles to find sympathy among the scholarly observers of Christian religious developments. The lack of sympathy derives in part from the absence of interlocutors from within this developing stream. Consequently, the African neo-prophetic phenomenon is being studied by scholars with prior commitments like me. This observation raises an interesting question about the conceptualization of neo-prophetism as "cultic" or "occultic" and sheer religious commercialism (Kgatle 2021, pp. 7, 24, 73). How would an internal interlocutor describe and explain the traits so judged? Until somebody internal to neo-prophetism arises or a sympathetic study is conducted that seeks to understand the worldview and theology of the movement, this question shall remain. In the meantime, Resane (2022, p. 55) points to neo-prophetism as conflicting with the religion of the Reformation, especially evangelicalism. He identifies and discusses six areas of conflict, which include ritualism, commercial miracles, extra-biblical prophecies, *sangoma*-like formularies, the "deliverance techniques [and attendant] physical manifestations", and "the prosperity gospel" (Resane 2022, pp. 56–59). The identified areas of conflict are not solely applicable to the cessationist strain of evangelicalism. They apply to evangelical Pentecostalism too despite its participation in the reality of the Spirit together with all churches so categorised (Kgatle and Anderson 2021, p. 5; Kgatle and Mofokeng 2019, p. 3).

The discussion in the above paragraphs demonstrates the predicament of modern African Christianity, which has attracted concern from its inception. The existence of the concern and the label resulting from it are important as they influence perceptions, attitudes, and approaches in the context of ecumenical relations. However, it is not only the existence of the concern and the label arising therefrom. Rather, it is what occasions the concern and its attendant labelling too. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the concern revolved around the political aspirations of African clergy, followed by the faith–culture conversation that unfolded in African-led spaces from the beginning of the twentieth century (Mogashoa 2009, p. 188; Park 2014, p. 12). While some viewed this faith–culture conversation in African-led Christianity as either the displacement of Christ or his accommodation in an otherwise ancestral office, including confusion of the Holy Spirit with ancestral and other spirits, others deemed it necessary that Christ should incarnate within the African milieu as an ancestor (Anderson 1993, pp. 30, 36; Beyers and Mphahlele 2009, p. 3). The present concern arises from a near complete engrafting of the fundamentals of the religion of the Reformation onto an African stem—potentially a semblance of a decolonised Christianity. Characteristic of this whole development is the predominance of the etic perspective. One of the main concerns from the outside of neo-prophetism is whether Christ enjoys pride of place and a role concomitant with biblical revelation in the theology and practice of the movement or not, to which Kgatle et al. (2022, p. 1) suggest that pneumatic AICs deemed it necessary to augment the biblical Christ with tangibles to render him effective. Another concern involves the identification and source of spiritual power manifest in the movement. Both these concerns are theological instead of pragmatic, for at the pragmatic level, there cannot be a denial of serious attempts to meet the needs of the African person as felt and formulated by the African self.

6. Reconceptualizing Syncretic Christianity as Contextualisation

Syncretism as a concept invoked against African Christianity outside missionary control almost fell into disuse, especially among theologians and missiologists from the 1970s. Two main reasons were that missiologists like Daneel (1987) studied these churches in interaction with the emic perspectives of their believers and not polemically. Secondly, the rise of black theology in the 1970s and African theology centred on the socio-political and cultural experience of (poor) Africans as an important informant to theology, thus further adding to the reinterpreting of African achievements with Christianity (Mofokeng 2021b,

p. 77). Consequently, syncretism as a concept came to be seen as not only negative but a mistaken conceptualization of what had transpired with African Christianity outside of missionary control (Oduro et al. 2008). However, the processes within African Christianity still required labelling. Contextualisation became the new label appended to African Christianity. It explained the "African" in the Christianity of Africans, ranging from experiments with culture to experiments with the socio-political context. The difference between the two experiments was that the former was believer driven while the latter was clergy/scholar driven, therefore more synthetic.

The shift from considerations of syncretism when addressing African Christian experiments with culture to considerations of these experiments as contextualisation occurred mostly among scholars and scholar-activists who began working with AICs and hosting workshops where AIC's emic perspectives were registered. Thus, the Christian Institute of Southern Africa (CISA) and the South African Council of Churches' (SACC) Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) worked with some AICs around theological capacitation (Conradie and du Toit 2015, p. 463; Walshe 1977, p. 468). Out of these engagements, especially under the aegis of ICT, the voice of the AICs emerged in the publication of Bishop Ngada's *Speaking for Ourselves,* and several other publications have since appeared (Ngada and Mofokeng 2001, p. ix). As for experiments with the socio-political context, which were clergy and scholar driven, there is not much evidence of them becoming effectively influential on the ground except for statements like the Belhar Confession and the Evangelical Witness in South Africa, which took on an institutional form in the formation of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa in 1994 and The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa, respectively (Adonis 2017, p. 360; Balcomb 2004, p. 30).

The conceptual replacement of syncretism with contextualisation when speaking of African church-driven experiments with culture, including the turn towards engagement with the socio-political reality, increasingly became normative, at least among scholars. This reconceptualization notwithstanding, Kgatle and Anderson (2021, p. 4) note the refusal of African Pentecostals in both mission-founded churches and those belonging to independent ministries to give their counterparts in Zion churches any Christian standing. They blame this attitude on white Pentecostal missionaries (Kgatle and Anderson 2021, p. 4), who, as cultural outsiders, according to Stanley (2007), were bound to interpret the faith–culture experiments among African believers differently. Therefore, the ongoing missionary activity among the Zion churches, premised on the latter's perceived "lack of soundness in knowledge of God and the Bible", invokes concern when seen from a positive appraisal of faith–culture experiments in the AIC sector (Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa 2013). Allan Anderson is one of the missiologists who appraises the faith–culture experiments positively and has, consequently, played a critical role in influencing young Pentecostal researchers through the inclusive conceptualization of churches in which the role of the Spirit is paramount (Kgatle and Mofokeng 2019, p. 3). Among these Spirit churches can be found the new prophets whom Kgatle (2021, p. v) classifies as representing the fourth Pentecostal wave.

7. Neo-Prophetism, *Sangomas*, and Contextualisation

Although contextualisation has held sway as an argument for a less adversarial treatment of African indigenous Christianity since the popularization of this concept in the 1970s, there is an increase in research that highlights the resurgence of syncretism or raises concern with the contextualisation paradigm, which is considered responsible for syncretism as a phenomenon. For example, Mulutsi (2020, pp. 65–79, 86) argues against Christian "syncretism with ATR", for which he holds "independent exorcists" responsible for a deliberate act of deviation from the Pentecostal–Charismatic "rejection of syncretism". Central to the Pentecostal–Charismatic rejection of syncretism as a phenomenon lies the quest to protect the supremacy and adequacy of Christ both doctrinally and materially (Ndhlovu 2020, pp. 137–43). The role of contextualisation as a paradigm through which to appraise instances of gospel–culture interactions attached to specific believing communities

threatens to silence any protest against the perceived erosion of clear biblical distinctions in favour of an amorphous Christianity that lacks doctrinal acuity, persuasive moral vision, and an energizing sense of mission.

The resuscitation of the concept of syncretism no longer attaches it solely to the old Zionists and AICs. Rather, the concept is now invoked in the context of neo-prophetic Christianity that gained popularity towards the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Mulutsi's (2020, p. 67) "independent exorcists" belong to the neo-prophetic movement, which Magezi and Banda (2017) and Tsekpoe (2019), among other scholars, have evaluated from different perspectives, but within the context of theology, and noted its challenges. One of the treatments of this type of Christianity considered its Christology (Kgatle 2022), a subject central to considerations of orthodoxy, which, if misconstrued, endangers human salvation. Magezi and Banda (2017, p. 2) raise this very point in their consideration of the position neo-prophetic ministers occupy in the lives of their followers. These authors see these prophets assuming the mediatorial role of Christ, thereby endangering the salvation of their followers (Magezi and Banda 2017, pp. 5–6). Magezi and Banda's (2017) observations are echoed by Kgatle et al. (2022, p. 1) who note the "shifts in the Christologies" of neo-prophetism which they link to the "freedom of perceiving Jesus according to one's context". The mention of Christology here is to suggest syncretism at the level of doctrine or its contextualisation. Another treatment of this type of Christianity considers cultural forms and approaches which involve the mediation of healing, exorcism, and divine provision for life's needs. While evangelical Pentecostalism limits itself to means such as prayer accompanied by the laying of hands, neo-prophetism includes in its healing and deliverance repertoire the use of oil, water, and burning candles (Kgatle 2022, p. 1; Nyamnjoh 2018, p. 41). All these are used by indigenous healers too. That itself says nothing as earlier scholars of AICs such as Sundkler (1961, p. 55), Daneel (1987, pp. 233, 235), and Togarasei (2005, p. 372) already explained the use of African traditional objects in the healing repertoire of AICs as merely formal while the Holy Spirit was the underlying source of power. Although the same logic could apply to the neo-prophetic adoption of the same healing means, Kgatle (2021, p. 67), drawing from Ramabulana's (2018) autobiographic testimony of dabbling into the occult, claims there is widespread occultic involvement of the neo-prophetic clergy, facilitated by indigenous healers. In addition to Ramabulana's admission to being initiated into the occult, a prominent Ghanaian traditional priest, Nana Kwaku Bonsam, claimed to have initiated one thousand six hundred pastors and prophets across the African continent, with another West African, initially operating from Zambia before relocating to South Africa, popularly called Seer 1, claiming to initiate prophets into traditional power preceding the arrival of Christianity (Mofokeng 2021a, p. 30).

The above claims of the involvement of neo-prophetism not just with the broad African tradition but specifically with the spiritual functionaries of this tradition to the extent of participating in the initiation rituals confuses the confessed allegiance to Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. In the resulting confusion, Degbe (2014, p. 264) opines a conceptual merging of the Holy Spirit and ancestral spirits especially, which becomes a christening of the latter to operate in neo-prophetic spaces. It resuscitates the concerns of syncretism that Bond (1974, p. 14) directed against the older pneumatic AICs in which he attributed the power operating in these churches to traditional spirits and not the Holy Spirit. The similarities between the older pneumatic AICs and the neo-prophetic movement include a much closer interaction with African traditional culture and the use of physical objects to mediate spiritual power (Kgatle and Mofokeng 2019, p. 5). These movements diverge at the welcome operation of ATR initiates as prophets in neo-prophetism (Ramabulana 2018). Although an objection can be raised against the idea that neo-prophetism welcomes ATR initiates based on Frahm-Arp's (2021, pp. 154, 158–59) assertion that the attitude of the prophets in her study was "diametrically opposed" to ancestors and their veneration, she observes a Christology truncated by her prophetic subject's assumption of Christ's mediating role. Shingange (2022, p. 101) observes the

same and accuses neo-prophetic ministers of insincere proclamation of the Lordship and Saviourship of Christ while "they overtly demonstrate that they themselves have taken the place of Christ".

To the degree that it is acceptable to consider *sangomas* as guardians and purveyors of African "traditionalist" culture, to that same degree, they are important in the re-Africanization of a detribalised populace. Although the meaning and goal of re-Africanization of the detribalised populace are subjects of debate, in the context of the challenges of daily living, the cries for African solutions to African problems, increasingly punted in some political contexts, invokes the centrality of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) to which *sangomas* are a critical stakeholder (Kgope 2023, p. 95). Mainstreaming IKS, potentially laudable from the decoloniality school as a reversing of "epistemicide", pits missionary Christianity, broadly, as a participant in the alleged epistemicide (Galvin et al. 2023, p. 2). Therefore, the claimed interaction of neo-prophetism and *sangomaism* suggests a radical epistemic shift with implications for all forms of Christianity in South Africa.

The epistemic shift in the foundations of Christianity among Africans exhibits the schizophrenic tendencies of classical Pentecostalism seeking to eradicate spiritism and witchcraft while simultaneously holding their fear before adherents (Kgatle 2020, p. 7). The noted fear at the centre of African traditional experience, resulting from the African's constant struggle against spiritual malaise driven by all kinds of spirit entities, is the need for spiritual protection and power, and the lack of efficacy of the Euro-American enlightenment version of Christianity has resulted in a form of Christian adherence that, although orthodox, especially in the MICs, requires augmenting with African traditional solutions (Mulutsi 2020, p. 48; Togarasei 2005, p. 373). This situation is worsened by neo-prophetic dabbling in African indigenous spiritism and adherence to a contextualist paradigm that frowns on any attempt at maintaining boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable beliefs and practices. Some of those beliefs and practices worth pronouncing God's "yes" to include the reinstatement of scripture in its authority to guide faith and action (Kisungu 2021, p. 65; Ndhlovu 2020, p. 137); rediscovery of Christ's adequacy to save and deliver from fear through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Ndhlovu 2020, pp. 142–43; Tsekpoe 2019, p. 288); and regaining agency as God's stewards on earth (Banda 2022). For anyone who considers the above situation detrimental to the continuance of the Protestant reformational legacy, a reconsideration of the concept of syncretism becomes necessary.

The conceptual reconsideration of contextualisation away from being a paradigm of understanding neo-prophetism to being again a needful process to seed the gospel into African cultures and subcultures is important. Only then shall the reconsideration of syncretism as a concept be seen as a necessary invocation of boundaries and a passing of judgment in favour of the maintenance of such. A reconsidered concept of syncretism facilitates decrying the perceived transgression of orthodoxies and/or orthopraxis associated with specific believing or ideological communities. The maintenance of such orthodoxies and orthopraxis then becomes an exercise in group discipline to produce group coherence. Therefore, syncretism, once understood, becomes a definitional tool, which, in a pluralistic and assimilative world, will contribute a boundedness that results in a creative tension between assimilative and distinctive forces. Admittedly, the awareness of the communal grounding of both orthodoxy and orthopraxis as well as invoking syncretism implies communal raptures, which in a healthier environment invite recognition of the underlying bone-of-contention by all participants and how their differences may be an attempt to pronounce God's "yes" and/or "no". The recognition of attempts to pronounce God's "yes" and/or "no" becomes an invitation to ongoing theological engagement and discernment with potential benefit to the "old" and "new" communities, both of which represent different responses in a changing context (Kgatle 2021, p. vi). Failure to engage threatens the hardening of attitudes with potential complications for the church's missional task, regardless of who constitutes the church—old or young communities rebelling against the older communities.

8. Conclusions

The question of interest this article engaged with was about the reasons for the reconsideration of the concepts of syncretism and contextualisation in relation to the claimed symbiosis of neo-prophetism and the African spiritual healing tradition represented by sangomas. The discussion took a historico-thematic structure. Hence, the themes of syncretism in modern missionary Christianity, a reappraisal of syncretistic (African) Christianity, a reconceptualization of syncretism as contextualisation, and neo-prophetism, sangomas, and contextualisation.

Syncretism as a concept invoked against African Christianity outside of missionary control almost fell into disuse, especially among theologians and missiologists who from the 1970s began to consider African Christian experiments with culture positively as contextualisation of the faith into the socio-political and religio-cultural milieu of African life. However, the advent of neo-prophetism with its much-publicized scandals and an even more pronounced integration into ATR has galvanized academic outcry. Of special concern to this study was the reduction and confusion of the Holy Spirit and ancestral spirits, which, if the claims are true and the situation is allowed to develop further, leaves Africans in the stranglehold of fear and without any chance of resolving it. Hence, a reconsideration of the concept of syncretism to re-establishes boundaries and pass a judgement in favour of the maintenance of such is enjoined. It means a declaration of intention to pronounce God's "yes" and/or "no" whenever the situation demands. From the above, a few reasons may be advanced for reconsideration of the concepts of syncretism and contextualisation considering the claimed relationship between neo-prophetism and sangomas. The first reason is the rising interest in the research of syncretism as this special edition itself testifies. The second reason is the seeming frustration with the inadequacy of contextualisation as a paradigm of understanding the interactions between ATR and neo-prophetism, especially the influence of ATR spirituality in the latter. The third and last reason may be a desire to hold on to a defined Christian identity, in continuity with the past of the church, without repudiating the necessary discontinuities considering the African situation. Without a defined identity, there cannot be discipline, and the possibility of clear intra- and interreligious engagement is rendered null.

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Notes

1. By Ethiopian is here meant the African-founded churches that sprang up in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the end of the second decade of the twentieth century (Roy 2017, pp. 71–72). These churches emerged from the mainline missionary movement and remained closely related theologically and organisationally. Their central slogan was inspired by Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia shall lift her hands to God" (Roy 2017, p. 71).
2. Chronologically, the Zionist movement predates Pentecostalism as some of the early Pentecostals came out of John Alexander Dowie's Zion Church (Mofokeng and Madise 2019, pp. 2–3). However, in the South African context, and in common usage, Zionism is an African charismatic Christian movement, deeply engaged with African indigenous culture. This movement held to the teachings of JA Dowie and Pentecostal Spirit baptism.

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Article

Exploring Cultural Hybridity Branded by Convergence and Syncretism in the Characteristic Features of the Pentecostal Charismatic Churches in Zimbabwe: Implications for Spiritual and Material Well-Being

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Abstract: When applied to Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, the concept of cultural hybridity provides a framework for understanding how global religious movements can adapt to and incorporate local cultural elements. This process results in a unique form of religious expression characterised by convergence and syncretism, reflecting cultural and religious identity's dynamic and fluid nature. This hybridity in religious practice is a testament to the ongoing, interactive cultural exchange and adaptation process. This article delves into the intricate cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation and syncretic tendencies within the characteristic features of New Religious Movements (NRMs) in Harare, Zimbabwe, illuminating their multifaceted role in addressing spiritual and material needs. Through a comprehensive exploration of selected NRMs that emerged from the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, including Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries and Grace Oasis Ministries, this article unravels the central role of prophets and pastors in shaping the fundamental ethos of these religious entities. A striking and thought-provoking parallel emerges between the hallmark features of these NRMs and the tenets of African Traditional Religion and many other religious traditions. This parallel extends to practices such as exorcism, worship, healing, and deliverance, thus manifesting a profound form of religious expression informed by cultural hybridity, convergence, syncretism, and glocalisation. While there are ambiguities around scholarly debates on the definition of these terms, the article delves deep into the intricate religious elements embedded within the NRMs' characteristic features, such as hymns, modes of worship, healing rituals, and deliverance ceremonies. These elements are tangible manifestations of their unique position at the crossroads of diverse belief systems. The cultural hybridity, convergence, syncretism, and glocalisation tendencies within NRMs offer gateways to invaluable networks, fostering social cohesion and the sharing of critical information. Consequently, these characteristics have become instrumental in the holistic development of individuals and communities within the vibrant religious landscape of Harare. Thus, this article provides profound insights into the nuanced dynamics of NRMs in Zimbabwe, shedding light on their various dimensions. It contributes substantially to our comprehension of the intricate interplay between spirituality, material prosperity, and the rich tapestry of religious traditions in Harare and the broader context of religious studies.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; cultural hybridity; convergence; syncretism; glocalisation; new religious movements; African Traditional Religion; Zimbabwe

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1. Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of global religious practices, the phenomenon of Pentecostalism, characterised by its emotive and expressive form of Christianity, intertwines interestingly with the concepts of cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism. This blend is particularly notable in Harare, Zimbabwe. Pentecostal–Charismatic

churches, hereby referred to as New Religious Movements (though not all Pentecostal–Charismatic churches are NRMs), rooted in the Christian tradition, exhibit unique features which reflect a significant intersection between spirituality and material well-being, which is crucial for understanding the broader implications of religious movements in contemporary society. Considering that there is an overlap and no clear typology of NRMs in Zimbabwe, the term NRMs in this article will refer to Prophetic Healing and Deliverance (PHD) Ministries and Grace Oasis Ministries (GOM), which have emerged from the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe.

This article presents three main arguments. The first argument highlights that the distinct features of the selected New Religious Movements (NRMs) exhibit cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism. These features significantly contribute to the fulfilment of spiritual and material needs, with prophets or pastors playing a pivotal role in defining the core ethos of these religious groups. These NRMs represent a fusion of Christian elements with aspects of African Traditional Religion (ATR), particularly in practices such as exorcism, worship, healing, and deliverance. The second argument draws a parallel between the characteristics of the chosen NRMs and the tenets of ATR and other religious beliefs. This parallelism is seen in practices that demonstrate religious expression shaped by cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism. Moreover, the religious aspects within the NRMs' characteristics are concrete examples of their unique positioning at the intersection of various belief systems. The third argument posits that the cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism in the NRMs provide pathways to invaluable networks. These networks play a crucial role in enhancing social cohesion and facilitating the exchange of essential information, contributing to the comprehensive development of individuals and communities within the religious milieu of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Therefore, this article illustrates a complex interplay between spirituality, material prosperity, and the rich diversity of religious traditions in Harare, which holds broader implications for religious studies. By examining these NRMs, the article aims to shed light on the controversial and divergent hypotheses surrounding cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and religious syncretism, particularly in the context of NRMs. The findings reveal that NRMs' richness rests in their ability to take root and translate their ideas in diverse environments, contributing to community development and individual empowerment and reshaping Harare's religious and socio-economic landscape.

2. History of Pentecostalism and NRMs in Zimbabwe

Pentecostalism, which has roots in America, significantly evolved and adapted as it spread to Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, intertwining with various waves of Christianity and reflecting a unique blend of religious elements. This transformation led to a distinctive form of faith practice marked by phases of development, each characterised by different focuses and teachings. From its origins in America, Pentecostalism was shaped initially by missionary evangelism and classical Pentecostalism (Meyer 2007). This laid the foundation for what later became known as the 'Third Wave' Pentecostalism, noted for its emphasis on the 'gospel of prosperity'. The movement gained momentum during the healing revivals of the 1950s in the USA, led by influential evangelists such as Essek William Kenyon, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, and Oral Roberts (Cornelio and Medina 2020). These figures championed the prosperity gospel, advocating that divine favour is manifested through wealth and health. This gospel, intertwined with the New Religious Right Movement in the USA during the 1970s, shifted in its socio-political agenda as it spread to Africa.

Bowler (2013) and Swoboda (2015) noted that the prosperity gospel comprises faith, wealth, health, and victory. It teaches that Christ's suffering and death have met all human needs, allowing believers to share in his victory (Cornelio and Medina 2020). However, critics argue that this doctrine diverts focus from African structural issues to individual faith and material blessings (Gifford 1991). Contemporary Pentecostalism in Africa focuses on African Pentecostalism, 'Third Wave' Pentecostalism or Neo-Pentecostal churches or New

Religious Movements, which represent a unique fusion of Christianity and African cultural elements, characterised by modernity, relaxed norms, internationalism, and innovative worship methods (Togarasei 2011; Gifford 2015; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015). This form of Christianity is often centred around charismatic leaders who embody the church's vision.

In Zimbabwe, Pentecostalism was initially facilitated by the Apostolic Faith Mission, forming various Pentecostal churches, each highlighting the gospel of prosperity (Chitando 2013; Matikiti 2017; Mapuranga 2013; Mumford 2012). Post-independence, the socio-economic situation fostered the growth of Neo-Pentecostal churches or NRMs inspired by financial contributions to prophets or pastors who claim to be God's representatives. Influenced by American counterparts, Neo-Pentecostalism particularly resonated with the youth through its modern worship styles. The transformation of these movements from small fellowships to large denominations involved leadership changes and increased emphasis on status symbols.

The 1980s were pivotal for the growth of NRMs in Zimbabwe, with many churches emerging under the leadership of Zimbabwean and Nigerian founders. These leaders often trained under prominent West African preachers known for performing miracles, such as T.B Joshua and Pastor Chris Oyakhilome (Vengeyi 2013). This period saw a blend of miraculous healing and prosperity gospel, resonating with the African socio-economic and political contexts. Post-2008, a new dimension of Pentecostalism emerged in Zimbabwe, characterised by the rise of young Pentecostal prophets (Gukurume 2021). This development is linked to the 'spirit type' prophets of Apostolic, Zionist, and charismatic African Independent Churches (AICs) from the 1930s. Gunda (2012) and Zimunya and Gwara (2013) argue that the new wave of prophets promoted a gospel of prosperity coupled with miracles, appealing to a society grappling with hyperinflation, economic crisis, and hopelessness.

The 2008 period also witnessed the rise of prophets such as Emmanuel Makandiwa (United Family International Church), Uebert Angel (Spirit Embassy), Passion Java of Kingdom Embassy, Adventure Mutepfa of Revival Centre World Ministry and Oliver Chipunza of Apostolic Flame Ministries of Zimbabwe (Vengeyi 2013, p. 28). Within this article, the focus will be on Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries of Walter Magaya and Grace Oasis Ministries of Pastor Tinashe. These new churches arose during 2012 and 2015, respectively, a period often characterised as the lowest point in the Zimbabwean crisis (Chitando et al. 2015, p. 2). To date, Zimbabweans are battling with such economic crises, worsened by the political crises. However, Pentecostalism's journey from America to Zimbabwe represents an evolution from evangelical roots to a more syncretic, prosperity-oriented movement within the African context. This evolution mirrors the adaptability of Pentecostalism to diverse cultural and socio-economic environments. As a central tenet, the prosperity gospel underscores the intricate relationship between faith, material success, and individual effort in shaping the religious landscape of contemporary Africa. In Zimbabwe, the rise of NRMs reflects both a response to and a reflection of the nation's socio-cultural dynamics, offering solace and hope amidst economic and political challenges.

3. African Traditional Religion (ATR)

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is a diverse and complex spiritual system deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of various African societies (Humbe 2020; Falola 2022). It is not a unified religion but a broad spectrum of indigenous beliefs and practices that vary significantly across African ethnic groups and regions (Van Rooyen 2019). Its main features include polytheism and Ancestor worship. It is believed that ATR involves belief in multiple deities, often associated with natural elements and phenomena. Ancestor worship is also central, with ancestors being revered and believed to influence the living world (Ushe 2022; Ephirim-Donkor 2021). It is also pertinent to note that ATR is transmitted mainly through oral tradition, encompassing myths, proverbs, and folktales that convey moral and ethical teachings, cosmology, and history. There are also rituals, including offerings, sacrifices, and festivals, which are vital in ATR for maintaining harmony between

the spiritual and physical realms (Alifa 2023). These ceremonies often mark significant life events, and seasonal cycles witnessed in communities, with a strong emphasis on ATR. ATR teaches that practices and beliefs are intertwined with communal life, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals within their community and with the natural world (Humbe 2020). Shamanism and traditional healing are crucial in ATR, mediating between the spiritual and physical worlds. Shamans and traditional healers are often responsible for healing, spiritual guidance, and maintaining the community's well-being (Jakobsen 2020; Mullinder 2023).

Interestingly, ATR promotes living in harmony with nature, often attributing sacred qualities to natural sites and elements, reflecting a deep respect for the environment. It also provides a framework of moral and ethical values, emphasising virtues such as respect, community responsibility, and living in harmony with others and the environment. What is clear is that ATR's adaptability and resilience are evident in its ability to coexist and syncretize with other religious systems, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of African spiritual practices.

4. Cultural Hybridity, Convergence, Syncretism and Glocalisation

Scholarly debates on syncretism, hybridity, and convergence within African Pentecostalism are complex and multifaceted. Each term encapsulates different aspects of how religious practices and beliefs interact with local cultures. The complexity and ambiguity around the debates of the definitions of these terms also present challenges related to understanding the religious practices and how they constitute syncretic or hybridised practices among Pentecostal–Charismatic Churches. Syncretism is a specific type of cultural blending. It traditionally refers to combining different religious beliefs or practices (Pandian 2006; Greenfield and Droogers 2001). However, syncretism can involve fusing diverse cultural elements in a broader cultural context. This fusion results in a new form that bears traces of its original components but is distinct. Ogbona and Agaba (2021) argue that syncretism in religious studies refers to blending different religious beliefs and practices. Within African Pentecostalism, this often involves incorporating elements of traditional African religions into Christian practices.

Regarding cultural hybridity (discussed below), syncretism can be seen as a more profound, integrative blending process. It is also about creating something new that cannot be easily disentangled into its original parts. For example, many modern cultures practice religious or cultural rituals that have evolved over centuries, incorporating elements from various sources to create practices unique to their current cultural context. A considerable debate among scholars about the implications of syncretism shows that syncretism represents a loss of the 'purity' of religious traditions, potentially diluting Christian theology with non-Christian elements (Clarke 2022; Gbode 2021; Ndhlovu 2020). Other scholars view it as a natural and inevitable cultural and religious interaction process which can enrich and deepen the religious experience. Within African Pentecostalism, syncretism is often observed in incorporating beliefs in spirits, ancestors, and traditional healing practices into the Christian faith. Scholars debate whether this represents a pragmatic adaptation of Christianity to local contexts or a compromise of Christian doctrinal purity. Hence, there is ambiguity in the scholarly definition of syncretism, which also presents challenges when it comes to understanding if the religious practices (to be discussed in Section 7) constitutes syncretic tendencies within NRMs.

In cultural studies, the concept of hybridity refers to creating new cultural forms by combining elements from different cultures. In religious contexts, this can mean blending religious practices with local cultural norms (Ackermann 2012). Ackermann (2012) argues that cultural hybridity refers to blending elements from different cultures. This blending can occur in various forms—through art, literature, language, customs, and other cultural practices. It is a process that often happens when different cultures come into contact with each other, whether through migration, colonisation, globalisation, or digital connectivity. In Ackermann's context, cultural hybridity might be viewed as a dynamic and ongoing

process, not just a simple mixing of two distinct cultures to create a third, 'hybrid' culture, but a more complex interaction in which cultural elements are continuously exchanged, transformed, and renegotiated. This concept challenges traditional notions of culture as fixed or pure, instead highlighting the fluid and evolving nature of cultural identities (Bhandari 2021). However, the debate around hybridity often centres on its implications for cultural identity and authenticity. Some scholars see hybridity as a positive force, arguing that it leads to greater cultural diversity and adaptability. Others worry it may erode traditional cultures and identities (Lee 2022; Mohiuddin 2023). Concerning African Pentecostalism, cultural hybridity can be seen in how both global Pentecostalism and local African cultural contexts influence worship styles, theological interpretations, and church governance. This has led to unique forms of Pentecostalism that are distinctly African, though the complexities around cultural hybridity play a role in our understanding of hybridised practices among NRMs.

Convergence in the context of cultural hybridity refers to combining different cultural and religious elements to form a cohesive whole (Pieterse 2019). It is often associated with the processes of globalisation and transnational movements and linked to the effects of globalisation and technological advances, which have accelerated the process of cultural exchange and interaction. It focuses on how disparate cultural practices, ideas, or symbols can merge to create new forms of expression or cultural norms (Cleveland et al. 2022). In cultural studies, convergence might be observed in global media, in which different cultural products (films, music, television shows) incorporate elements from various cultures, making them more universally appealing or accessible. Scholars debate the extent to which convergence in religious practices represents a form of cultural homogenisation versus a form of cultural diversification. Some argue that convergence leads to a loss of local cultural specificities, while others see it as a process that enriches religious practices by offering diverse perspectives (Holton 2000; Cleveland et al. 2022). This clearly shows that the definition of convergence needs to be more precise. In African Pentecostalism, convergence is evident in how global Pentecostal practices are adapted to local contexts. This includes the adoption of global Pentecostal doctrines while maintaining distinctive African religious and cultural elements.

Ackermann's discussion of cultural hybridity and the concepts of convergence and syncretism highlights cultures' dynamic and ever-changing nature. These concepts challenge static views of cultural identity, showing how cultural exchange and interaction are central to the development of societies. They emphasise that cultures are not isolated or unchanging but are continually influenced and reshaped by their interactions with other cultures, leading to new forms of cultural expression and identity. There is a central theme in the debate on how these processes (syncretism, hybridity and convergence) impact cultural identity. African Pentecostalism is a clear example of how global religious movements interact with local cultures, leading to new forms of religious identity that are neither entirely African traditional nor entirely Western Pentecostal. In addition to the theme of cultural identity, there is theological purity versus cultural relevance. There is a tension between maintaining theological purity and adapting to cultural relevance. This tension is particularly pronounced in discussions around syncretism. However, the debate around syncretism, hybridity, and convergence within African Pentecostalism highlights the complex ways global religious movements interact with local cultures. These interactions result in unique forms of religious expression that challenge traditional notions of religious and cultural purity, raising essential questions about identity, authenticity, and the nature of religious practice in a globalised world.

Joel Robbins (1998, 2004, 2017), an anthropologist known for his work on cultural change, particularly in the context of Christianity among indigenous populations, provided a relevant perspective on the concept of 'glocalisation' in religious traditions. 'Glocalisation' is a term that refers to the way global phenomena are reinterpreted and adapted in local contexts, leading to unique, localised expressions of globally recognised phenomena, including religious practices (Robbins 2017; Roudometof 2016). Robbins' work, especially

his studies on the Urapmin community in Papua New Guinea and their conversion to Charismatic Christianity, offers valuable insights into this process. Robbins argued that while there is a significant shift in religious practices, certain aspects of cultural identity and traditional beliefs continue to influence the Urapmin community's interpretation and practice of Christianity. In addition, he noted the notions of syncretism and hybridisation, touching upon how indigenous communities blend elements of their traditional religious practices with Christianity. This syncretism is not just a simple combination but a complex and dynamic process, leading to a unique form of Christianity that is deeply influenced by the local cultural milieu. More so, a significant focus of Robbins' research is on conversion, particularly how the Urapmin people understand and negotiate their Christian identity while retaining aspects of their indigenous identity. He delves into how conversion impacts social structures, moral systems, and individual identities within the community. Joel Robbins' anthropological work provides a nuanced understanding of glocalisation within religious traditions. His studies demonstrate that transforming religious practices in local contexts is not a one-way process of global imposition but a complex interplay of global and local influences, in which local communities actively shape their religious and cultural landscapes. This perspective challenges simplistic notions of cultural imperialism and highlights the dynamic nature of cultural and religious change.

When applied to Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, Ackermann's concept of cultural hybridity provides a framework for understanding how global religious movements can adapt to and incorporate local cultural elements. This process results in a unique form of religious expression characterised by convergence and syncretism, reflecting cultural and religious identity's dynamic and fluid nature. This hybridity in religious practice is a testament to the ongoing, interactive cultural exchange and adaptation process.

5. Materials and Methods

The study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretic aspects of NRMs in Harare, Zimbabwe, from January 2020 to December 2022. Within the qualitative methodology, the study used an ethnographic approach to collect data through interviews, focus-group discussions (FGDs) and observations. More so, data collection was rooted in a snowball sampling approach initiated by a leader from one of the selected churches. The leader facilitated introductions to other congregants, thereby expanding the research network. The respondent pool included members from Prophetic Healing and Deliverance (PHD) Ministries, with an estimated congregation size between 900,000 and 1 million, and Grace Oasis Ministries (GOM), comprising about 500 followers. Both ministries consented to use their real names in the study, while pseudonyms were employed for individual research participants to ensure confidentiality.

The primary data collection process involved in-depth interviews with eighteen respondents, encompassing four ministers, four church elders, three gatekeepers, three staff members, and four ministry members. Over three years, the researcher conducted eight non-participant observations and three focus-group discussions to understand the subject matter comprehensively. Additionally, four research campaigns were executed, wherein baseline data were collected from selected interviewees through structured interviews. These interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, informed by the researcher's extensive background in studying NRMs in Zimbabwe. This long-term understanding of the selected NRMs significantly contributed to the depth and richness of the analysis. Moreover, the findings were further enriched by a thorough review of secondary literature, including published articles, books, and information from the official websites of the involved churches. The focus and scope of the research were explicitly tailored to the selected NRMs in Zimbabwe, offering a detailed and contextual understanding of their practices within the framework of Pentecostalism. This methodological approach allows

for the replication and extension of the study by other researchers interested in the dynamic interplay between religious traditions and modern faith practices in Zimbabwe and beyond.

6. Unique Features of the NRMs in Zimbabwe

The characteristic features of the NRMs in Zimbabwe are similar to those of the African context. The young and famous prophets, who pay more attention to miraculous wealth and healing, have enticed many poor, young, urban middle-class, elite, and educated Zimbabweans who experience severe economic challenges (Togarasei 2011, p. 341; Mangezi and Manzanga 2016). Prophets claim to perform 'extraordinary' miracles which contradict nature. Between 2010 and 2013, Zimbabwe witnessed a range of 'miracle money' in which money was believed to fill the pockets, wallets, and hands of believers with gold nuggets. Prophets also claim to heal cancer, HIV, and AIDS, and raise the dead. These prophets have been known for performing other miracles such as instant weight loss, complete regrowth of teeth that have fallen out, miracle babies, refuelling cars without going to the service station, and making predictions of events that will happen in the near or distant future. Such miracles are closely linked to the one claimed by TB Joshua of Synagogue Church of All Nations, pastor Victor Kusi Boateng of Ghana, and Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy (Vengeyi 2013, p. 30). Healing and deliverance also feature prominently in the NRMs' worship and naming of some churches. Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries and Grace Oasis Ministries are of interest in this study.

Another unique feature of NRMs in Zimbabwe is what Cornelio and Medina (2020, p. 65) call the prosperity ethic, popularly known as the gospel of prosperity. This new prosperity ethic is backed by a religious belief in individual work ethic that promises financial returns. It has two features, which involve sacralising self-help and celebrating consumption. Furthermore, it is individualistic as opposed to a collective effort. It sacralises work ethic with the conviction that God wants to bless his people so they can be wealthy and successful while ensuring financial growth and freedom from debt (Cornelio and Medina 2020). What is unique about this phenomenon is that the old prosperity gospel is miracle-oriented, providing a message of hope for the poor and preaching breakthroughs by giving a positive confession while asking believers to simply believe, profess, and give money to the prophets or pastors, thereby witnessing miraculous blessings (Mangena and Mhizha 2014, p. 138). Such an old prosperity gospel is still common within the Zimbabwean NRMs. However, Cornelio and Medina (2020, p. 70) see the new prosperity ethic as teaching believers to adopt practical skills related to investment, financial, management and religious innovations that address economic insecurities and build on personal aspirations for spiritual growth and material success.

The prosperity ethic is an unapologetic enjoyment of the good life here and now while responding to the situation of an emerging middle class with emphasis on self-help and consumption to benefit from the economy using biblical and Christian principles (Cornelio and Medina 2020, p. 71). The above-proposed prosperity ethic, which seems to be unique within the NRMs in Zimbabwe, and the well-known prosperity gospel seem to share the difference in content. The old or familiar prosperity gospel seems to rely heavily on the promise of a financial miracle, which is activated through the power of confession and giving, and the prosperity ethic emphasises financial growth through self-help and other practical tips about investment and resource management. As a result of these emphases, the old prosperity gospel and the new prosperity ethic have attracted different audiences. The former is a message of hope for the poor. The latter works for the aspirational middle class (Togarasei 2011, p. 341; Mangezi and Manzanga 2016; Mangena and Mhizha 2014), though I believe this phenomenon targets the poor and middle class in Zimbabwe.

7. Characteristic Features of NRMs and Tenets of ATR

Gukurume (2021, p. 28) argues that NRMs attend to spiritual and material needs. In Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, cultural hybridity, convergence, syncretism, and glocalisation are reflected in how the selected NRMs adapt and integrate local cultural

elements with Christian practices. In addition, these concepts are vividly manifested in various aspects of church life and practice, such as worship style, theological interpretation, alleged miracles, use of media, announcements and testimonies, and churchpreneurs, sowing the seed and community engagement as demonstrated below. This section covers the article's first argument that the selected NRMs' characteristic features exhibit cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretic tendencies. It highlights how the selected NRMs' characteristic features are critical in their operations and socio-economic aspects. It also covers the second argument, which states that there is a parallel between the characteristics of the selected NRMs and the tenets of ATR and other religious beliefs.

7.1. Hymns

The praise and worship activities that percolate around hymns and their meanings are integral to the NRMs. There are cultural hybridity-blending elements and glocalisation between the features of NRMs and ATR in the context of hymns and worship practices that are fascinating and multifaceted. These elements reflect a dynamic interplay between traditional African spirituality and contemporary religious expressions. Both PHD and GOM tend to have similar hymns, which can be explained by the fact that the latter was born from the former. These hymns include '*Makomborero hobho, tambira Jehovah*', which means that blessings are abundant and that one has to dance for the Lord. At GOM, songs are sung in Shona, Ndebele, and English. An imitation of the Nigerian accent in some songs has been noted, thereby demonstrating reinterpretation and adaptation of global phenomena into a local context, leading to a unique localised expression of music as noted by Robbins (2017) and the famous song, 'Jesus, You Love Me Too Much', which was sung at both GOM and the PHD Ministries. Such glocalisation elements continue to influence some NRMs in Zimbabwe. The use of multiple languages (Shona, Ndebele, and English) and even the imitation of Nigerian accents in songs highlight the adaptability and inclusivity of NRMs and the influence of cultural identity and traditional beliefs. This linguistic diversity mirrors ATR's flexibility and capacity to encompass various cultural elements within its practices. Such a characteristic feature of NRMs and its inclusivity played a role in addressing the spiritual needs of PHD Ministries and GOM followers.

Kalu (2008, p. 15) argues that hymns in NRMs are so electric in their doctrinal emphases that their music sounds as if it is being performed at a disco or club. The energetic and entertaining nature of NRMs' worship services atmosphere resonates with ATR's emphasis on vibrant spirituality. This engaging style of worship caters to the emotional and spiritual needs of the congregation, similar to how ATR practices engage and involve community members. Ackermann (2012) argues that hybridity influences worship styles, theological interpretation, and church governance. The worship style of the selected NRMs showed a blending of religious practices and cultural norms being continuously exchanged, transformed, and renegotiated. Following an analysis of the complete services of worship at the PHD Ministries and GOM, it was noted that the believers sang praise and worship songs that were modern and entertaining, some similar to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) type of dance called 'ndombolo dance', showcasing the merging of cultural practices which created a new form of religious expression, as noted by Cleveland et al. (2022). Togarasei (2010, p. 356) has also noted that the DRC's famous *ndombolo* or *kwasa-kwasa* dance is incorporated into worship. It was pertinent to note that the NRMs' use of hymns and music that blend traditional African rhythms with modern styles is a primary example of cultural hybridity, syncretism, glocalisation, and convergence.

The incorporation of 'ndombolo' and 'kwasa-kwasa' dances from the DRC into worship services exemplifies how African cultural elements are seamlessly integrated into contemporary religious practices. This mix of traditional dance with modern, secular styles resonates with the youthful congregation, reflecting a harmonious blending of the old and the new or different religious practices (Ogbona and Agaba 2021). More so, the NRMs' ability to 'read the signs of the time' and incorporate secular-youth-type dances into their ministries reflects ATR's adaptability and responsiveness to its adherents' changing needs

and contexts, as noted by Robbins (2017). This aspect highlights religious practices' ongoing evolution and relevance in addressing the contemporary spiritual landscape.

Within the above context, it was noted that the NRMs read the signs of the time and offered the secular-youth type of dance they adopted into their ministries. Horton (1971, p. 86), writing about African conversion, made a related point that songs and prayers within the NRMs 'correctly specify and take account of the various visible and invisible forces at work in any given situation'. This is true based on Sharpe's (2003, p. 110) concept of 'religious syncretism'. The worship of the selected NRMs coincided with traditional African cosmology. In other words, the NRMs' worship practices align with African traditional cosmology, suggesting that they are not merely adopting ATR practices superficially but integrating ATR's underlying worldview and spiritual understanding into their worship. The NRMs' worship has always been a vibrant type of spirituality that stimulated the faith of the believers, which surprised the researcher as an observer. What is clear, however, is that the worship practices of NRMs in the context of hymns and music exhibit a rich tapestry of syncretic and convergence elements, blending ATR's spirituality, communal involvement, and adaptability with contemporary religious expressions. This cultural hybridity preserves traditional African elements and revitalises, transforms and renegotiates them (Ackermann 2012), making them relevant and appealing to modern congregations. Cultural hybridity within the selected NRMs blends traditional African music, dance, and attire with Christian worship styles. This has created a unique worship experience resonating with the local populace addressing their spiritual needs. More so, NRMs worship practices demonstrate a fusion of different expressions, creating a distinctive form of worship that is neither purely African traditional nor entirely Western Christian.

7.2. Prayer and Raising of Hands

Raising hands during prayer and singing has been noted as one of the characteristic features of the NRMs, which also suggests an interplay of global and local influences and the creation of new cultural forms between NRMs and ATR in the embodied and communal nature of worship, as well as a focus on addressing everyday challenges through spiritual means. The singer in the selected NRMs encouraged people to raise their hands at the end of each song, and a 'thank you, Jesus' was always expressed. Pastors would shout, 'Clap hands for Jesus' (Hollenweger 1992, pp. 7–17). Loudspeakers and cameras were prominently featured during preaching, praise, and worship. NRMs' prayer activities are emotional, enthusiastic, and entertaining, with every member actively participating in the liturgy (Mukwakwami 2010, p. 11; Anderson 2001, p. 171; Hollenweger 2004, pp. 125–37). What is evident is that the enthusiastic and inclusive nature of prayer activities in NRMs, in which every member participates actively, resonates with ATR's communal approach to worship. In ATR, community involvement is crucial, and spiritual practices are often a collective activity (Humbe 2020). Similarly, NRMs emphasise communal engagement and collective spiritual experiences during prayer (Herzog et al. 2020). More so, incorporating loudspeakers and cameras in NRMs' services represents a modern adaptation of traditional practices in the local context, leading to a unique localised expression as noted by Robbins (2017). This use of technology to enhance worship reveals how NRMs, like ATR, evolve and adapt to contemporary contexts while maintaining core spiritual practices.

It was observed that the worshippers within the selected NRMs recited prayers as if they were reciting poems, and some believers would jump up and down, throwing themselves down and shouting for God's help. The fervent and passionate nature of prayers witnessed within the selected NRMs involving shouting and intense expressions shares similarities with ATR's emphasis on conviction and intensity in spiritual practices. This combination of different religious elements formed a cohesive whole, strengthening the connection with the divine and ensuring prayers were heard, a concept prevalent in ATR and NRMs. In addition, the practice of raising hands, clapping, jumping, and shouting during prayers and worship in NRMs reflects hybridity and glocalisation with ATR's embodied and emotional forms of worship (Adewole 2023; Buertey 2023).

In many ATR practices, physical expressions such as dancing, clapping, and bodily movements are integral to connecting with the spiritual realm (Mtshali 2020). This physicality in worship, embraced by NRMs, aligns with ATR's emphasis on expressing spirituality through the body. However, is is difficult to determine if these practices constitute syncretic or hybridised practices among NRMs due to an ambiguity around the scholarly debates on the definition of hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism. More so, the prayers are based on convincing God to intervene in specific everyday problems, including social and economic challenges. The focus of NRMs' prayers on everyday social and economic challenges mirrors ATR's practical approach to spirituality. In ATR, spiritual practices are often directed towards seeking guidance, protection, and intervention in daily life issues. Campbell (2020) argues that churches continue this tradition by encouraging prayers that directly address their congregants' immediate needs and concerns. Prayer and shouting seem to be encouraged to ensure God hears one's requests.

7.3. Alleged Miracles

The portrayal of alleged miracles in NRMs and their connection to ATR reflects the blending of religious practices with local cultural norms (Ackermann 2012). It also reflects a combination of different cultural and religious elements to form a cohesive whole (Pieterse 2019) that emphasises spiritual healing and practical solutions to life's challenges. It was observed that in the back of the PHD Ministries offices, there was a place where so many wheelchairs, crutches, and walking sticks that belonged to those who were allegedly healed were displayed as testimonies of healing, which mirrors ATR's focus on physical and spiritual healing. The display of such equipment mirrors the merging of cultural symbols and practices, creating a new form of expression. In ATR, healing rituals are common; traditional healers use a combination of spiritual and herbal remedies to treat ailments (Mothibe and Sibanda 2019; Ozioma and Nwamaka Chinwe 2019). Similarly, Kgatle and Thinane (2023) believe that new prophetic churches emphasise miraculous healings, aligning with the traditional belief in supernatural interventions for health problems. Such cultural and religious exchange and interaction elements show the adaptation of NRMs practices to the local context.

Stories of people who suffered from a back problem, those who had their leg amputated, and several other ailments were ostentatiously displayed on the walls. They highlighted people's lives before and after the alleged deliverance. This type of deliverance suggested being rescued, liberated, or set free from captivity, evil, or danger through healing and deliverance, which promoted quality health and peace of mind. This was similar to what Asamoah-Gyadu (2007, p. 398) observed in NRMs in Ghana. Considering the above, testimonies and stories about people's lives before and after deliverance in NRMs are reminiscent of ATR's oral tradition. Day (2021) argues that storytelling is vital for preserving history, teachings, and testimonies of spiritual experiences. Similar to ATR, NRMs adapt this practice to showcase stories of healing and transformation, providing a modern context to this traditional practice. This demonstrated the understanding of cultural hybridity, which brings different cultures together, continuously exchanging, transforming, and renegotiating to ensure value and meaning within NRMs.

Upon visiting the PHD Ministries carrying out interviews and observations, no single incident of the physical healing of those walking with crutches or walking sticks was witnessed. Stories of healing are used as advertisements to lure new followers. One of the believers, highlighting how they joined the PHD Ministries, argued, 'I joined the PHD Ministries after I heard of the miracles which the prophet performs. On the first day I joined, I felt at home where other believers linked me with those close to my house.' Using healing stories as advertisements in NRMs is a modern adaptation of ATR's practice of building credibility through testimonies of effective spiritual interventions. In ATR, the reputation of healers often spreads through word-of-mouth testimonies about their successes, a concept mirrored in NRMs' use of miracle stories to attract new followers. The principle of advertising healing and miracle stories demonstrates an aspect of global

phenomena being reinterpreted and adapted to the local context, leading to unique localised expressions. There was evidence of global and local influences between NRMs and ATR, where congregants shaped their religious practices. At the same time, the prophets played a role in shaping these NRMs' fundamental ethos and addressing the believers' spiritual and material needs.

The promised miracles also include financial breakthroughs in the form of miracle money[1], financial breakthroughs, gaining employment, and success at work. Hence, some people joined NRMs with the promise of economic transformation, which for many does happen. Such a promise made sense to a dejected community in Zimbabwe. More so, the emphasis on deliverance from economic hardships and the promise of financial breakthroughs in NRMs parallels ATR's practical approach to spirituality. ATR often addresses everyday issues, including economic and social challenges, through spiritual means. NRMs continue this tradition by promising and celebrating economic transformations and improved well-being. Within the alleged miracles, cultural hybridity was noted within the emphasis on spiritual healing and miracles, where NRMs often incorporate beliefs and practices that resonate with traditional African views on spirituality and healing. In addition, blending traditional African concepts of healing and miracles with Christian beliefs is both a convergence of cultural ideas and a syncretic practice.

7.4. Use of Media

One of the unique features of NRMs is the savvy use of new and old media to attract new members and advertise their ministries to broader society. Ahn (2013, pp. 67–72) argued that media could transform the individual through salvation and personal growth. The study noted that media productions, such as radio and television, featured prominently. Cultural hybridity was noted in the use of modern media technologies to spread the gospel and attract new members, showcasing an integration of contemporary global practices with local church activities, while the convergence of modern technology with traditional religious messaging was witnessed. PHD Ministries, like other prominent churches, has opened a television channel and has a fully backed production team that creates content for the church. Mashau and Kgatle (2019, p. 3) argue that television plays a fundamental role in that believers are encouraged to attend services through watching television, to the extent that others are encouraged to receive their healing through touching the television screen and connecting to the man of God. Touching of the television screen represents a cultural hybrid blend and glocalisation of traditional belief in the power of spiritual connection with the use of modern technology. This practice mirrors ATR's emphasis on tangible interactions with the spiritual realm, now extended through technological means. Interestingly, NRMs' use of television, radio, and social media platforms for outreach and community engagement reflects a modern adaptation of ATR's traditional methods of community gathering and oral storytelling. While ATR relies on direct, interpersonal communication within the community, NRMs extend this concept through modern media, reaching a broader audience while maintaining the communal essence of message dissemination.

The content is also shared using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp as a means to attract new members. This fusion signifies how traditional religious concepts and beliefs are adapted to modern media formats, making them more accessible and relatable to contemporary audiences. Jiri, one of the participants discussing how she joined the PHD Ministries, shared:

I initially heard about the PHD Ministries and Prophet Walter Magaya's miracles through a friend in the township. Later on, I read a lot of comments about him on Facebook. I was impressed by the work the PHD Ministries was involved in. Soon after I joined, I was linked to the housing project I am currently contributing to, hoping I could one day own a house.

The platforms have provided another revenue stream for the ministries whilst providing jobs for young people who produce the content and run the media platforms of these ministries (Gifford 2004, p. 170). This approach to revenue generation and employment

opportunities reflects a pragmatic approach to religion, which aligns with ATR's focus on community well-being and practical solutions to societal issues, albeit adapted to a modern economic context.

Mapuranga (2013, p. 132), writing about religion, politics, and gender in Zimbabwe, argued that many people have also been influenced by the NRMs' use of bracelets and T-shirts with distinctive messages, photographs of leaders laminated on cars, and various branding methods, including television channels dedicated to these movements. The branded merchandise in NRMs above is reminiscent of ATR's use of symbols and artifacts in religious practices. However, NRMs have adapted this to modern branding techniques, creating visible symbols of faith and belonging that resonate in a contemporary societal context. Community members who joined such crusades display influential pictures and messages of their leaders sharing their experiences. The NRMs have created a media ecosystem that generates revenue from selling branded products. It is, however, evident that the use of media by NRMs showcases a syncretic blend and convergence with ATR, adapting traditional spiritual messages, community practices, and healing beliefs to modern communication technologies and methods. This adaptation ensures the relevance of these movements in the modern world and extends their reach and impact, blending the old with the new in innovative ways. This showcases the effects of globalisation and technological advancements, which have accelerated the process of cultural exchange and interactions, as noted by Cleveland et al. (2022).

7.5. Announcements and Testimonies

The overall observations showed that the time for announcements was at the end of each service. Testimonies of those healed or prospered in various ventures were provided. At the end of the testimonies, many congregants encouraged other congregants to remain connected to the prophet. One of the people giving testimonies told the congregants: 'Keep connected to the prophet, seed more, use anointing oil and holy water from the prophet.' The integration of announcements and testimonies in NRMs reflects syncretic elements with ATR, particularly in the use of storytelling, communal reinforcement of beliefs, and the emphasis on material prosperity as a sign of spiritual favour. Aderibigbe (2022) and Mahuika (2019) think ATR heavily relies on oral tradition and storytelling to transmit knowledge, values, and experiences. The use of personal testimonies, especially those relating to healing and prosperity, reflected a blend of African oral storytelling traditions with Christian testimonial practices. In addition, announcements and testimonies practice converge personal and cultural narratives with the broader narrative of the Christian faith.

In NRMs, oral tradition is continued by sharing testimonies during services. Similar to the oral narratives in ATR, these testimonies communicate personal experiences of healing and prosperity, reinforcing the power and efficacy of the religious practices and beliefs within the community. More so, the encouragement to stay connected to the prophet noted above, and the use of religious objects such as anointing oil and holy water parallels ATR's emphasis on the communal aspect of spirituality and the power of spiritual leaders and objects. Consequently, in ATR, community leaders, shamans, and healers play a pivotal role in guiding spiritual practices (Hitchcock 2023), a role that is mirrored in NRMs by the figure of the prophet.

Testimonies can be viewed as carefully choreographed stories encouraging other members to give more money to the ministry in the form of tithes and gifts. Focusing on prosperity and using testimonies to motivate congregants to contribute financially reflects both a syncretic blend of traditional beliefs and modern prosperity theology and merging of cultural practices to create a new form of expression. Adamo (2021) argued that material well-being is often seen as a sign of favour from the ancestors or deities in ATR. NRMs adopt this belief, portraying financial prosperity as a sign of divine favour and encouraging financial contributions to achieve it. It is also used to encourage new members to join the NRMs. Reverend Maka argued:

> There is a psychological impact on the poor person listening to the testimonies, which motivate the people to stay within the ministry, buying recommended religious objects with the hope that tomorrow will be their day of prosperity.

Observations during the study showed that prophets used the testimonies as a platform for alleged breakthroughs and the concept of seeding. The purpose of the testimonies was to show congregants that if one remains faithful to the prophet, one will be prosperous. The study observed a sense of the placebo effect[2] and the psychology of terrorism, which justifies and mandates certain behaviours, as noted by Borum (2011, p. 24). Hence, the use of testimonials to create a psychological impact and the observed placebo effect among congregants are modern interpretations of traditional beliefs in the power of faith and spirituality. In ATR, belief and faith are central to the effectiveness of spiritual practices, a concept adapted in NRMs to emphasise religious belief's psychological and emotional aspects. The element of global phenomena being reinterpreted and adapted in local context, leading to unique localised expressions as noted by Robbins (2017) was witnessed within the use of testimonies. The blend of NRMs and ATR also demonstrates the evolving nature of religious practices and beliefs, adapting traditional elements to contemporary religious contexts.

7.6. Churchpreneurs

The concept of 'churchpreneurship' in New Religious Movements (NRMs), as observed in Zimbabwe and other regions, exhibits convergence, glocalisation, cultural hybridity, and a specific type of cultural blending elements with African Traditional Religion (ATR), particularly in the commodification of spiritual practices and the focus on material prosperity. Observations between December 2019 and December 2020 showed that some pastors had been using their ministries to extract revenue from members through making merchandise of the gift of God, while some believers gave up the little they had with the hope that they would get it back a hundredfold. These leaders are now *churchpreneurs* who plant churches not because they want to save souls but to make money out of those who are vulnerable (Soboyejo 2016, p. 7). In Zimbabwe, with increased poverty and suffering, various entrepreneurial individuals have innovated biblical movements based on a specific gospel of prosperity as a means to amass wealth and social status (Mangena and Mhizha 2014). Churchpreneurship in the NRMs can influence the theological interpretation of the gospel of prosperity and blend religious practices with local cultural norms and elements renegotiated to meet the demands of prophets and pastors.

The study observed that after healing and deliverance, the PHD Ministries and GOM pastors would say, 'Give thanks to the Lord who has healed you. Give some money to the Lord; thank him for what he did for you.' This assertion suggests that *churchpreneurship* is characterised by sowing and seeding to the man of God. The emphasis on the 'gospel of prosperity' within NRMs aligns with certain aspects of ATR that relate to material wealth and success as signs of spiritual favour or ancestral blessings. However, in NRMs, this aspect is heavily commercialised, transforming spiritual blessings into a transactional relationship between the congregant and the spiritual leader, thereby demonstrating cultural elements being exchanged, transformed, and renegotiated, as noted in cultural hybridity and the reinterpretation and adaptation of the global phenomena into a unique localised expression.

Glocalisation was also noted in Jonathan Mbiriyamveka's article in *The Herald* of 27 July 2013, introducing the term 'gospreneurship' in Zimbabwe. He referred to the works of the NRMs as lucrative financial schemes. Thus, according to that article, 'gospreneurship' can mean the setting of the gospel mission as a platform for profiteering as in a business venture, which can be regarded as a 'latter-day, money-spinning family enterprise' (Marongwe and Maposa 2015, pp. 1–22). It was noted that some pastors became rich at some believers' expense. One of the participants argued: 'I am a typical example of those people who found themselves poorer after joining the PHD Ministries.' However, the PHD Ministries pastor and many other pastors have become rich while there is so much poverty in Zimbabwe. The

interplay of global and local influences in which local communities shape their religious practices benefited the prophets who play a role in shaping the fundamental ethos of NRMs.

Pastors have become rich by selling products such as anointing oil and holy water to believers desperate for a breakthrough. In South Africa, testimonies play a role within NRMs to the extent that the gospel of prosperity has become highly commercialised with the selling of handkerchiefs that make people successful, armbands, stickers for cars, anointing oil, prayer books, and holy water (Mashau and Kgatle 2019, p. 3). The selling of anointing oil, holy water, and other spiritual items by pastors in NRMs is akin to the traditional practices in ATR where spiritual healers might offer amulets, herbs, or talismans for protection, healing, or good fortune. However, in the context of NRMs, this practice has been adapted to a more commercialised form, reflecting a cultural hybridity of contemporary capitalist culture with religious practice. More so, convergence and syncretic blend of religious and economic systems, traditional spirituality, and modern capitalist practices within NRMs have replaced spiritual growth and moral sanctity, where preachers charge people for the cure of their ailments.

7.7. Sowing the Seed Preaching

Cultural hybridity within Sowing the Seed combines traditional African notions of reciprocal giving with Christian teachings on tithing and giving while converging the cultural practices of reciprocity with Christian doctrines of stewardship and prosperity. The concept of 'sowing the seed' preaching in New Religious Movements (NRMs) like the PHD Ministries and GOM, which emphasises giving to the church in expectation of abundant returns, presents a blend of traditional African religious beliefs and contemporary Christian prosperity theology. During the eight observation campaigns on the PHD Ministries and GOM and ten online sermons of the PHD Ministries on Yadah TV, it was noted that the pastors' preaching focused much on 'sowing the seed', a concept about giving to God and receiving back abundantly. When pastors preached, they would have a theme for the day. These themes included breaking the chains of the spirit of poverty, joy and prosperity, breakthrough, healing and deliverance, marriage, restoration, grace, competition, and various themes which were all linked to prosperity. The pastors made the following declarations such as 'I empower you through deliverance. Poverty is in mind, and I want you to move out of it' (Magaya, Sermon, 20 December 2017); 'Be Fruitful and Multiply. . .A right seed will feed a generation, change people, and create security for the unborn' (Magaya, Sermon, 31 December 2017); 'Being rich is not a sin. I can say I am a wealthy pastor in the spirit, and I want you to be rich like me' (Magaya, Sermon, 16 December 2018); 'Imagination is the more significant part of a miracle. Dream, imagine, and you can receive it. Hunt to give and never work for money but let money work for you. When you wake up every day, have the desire to succeed, rub off your past and you will see a change in your life' (Magaya, Sermon, 19 December 2018).

Other declarations were as follows: 'Compete with yourself every day. If you exercised 20 min yesterday, add 10 min today. If you were reading five books a month, add five more' (Magaya, Sermon, 19 December 2018); 'There is a war you must win for your success. I am seeing a great transition to prosperity' (Water Magaya Sermon accessed on 21 September 2018, https://youtu.be/LmWdWjBIvTE). 'When you give, you do not only give or receive money but what is behind the money. Pray when you give and pray when you receive' (Water Magaya Sermon accessed on 27 July 2018, https://youtu.be/7VSzJzgFBOo). 'When you are under attack by the spirit of poverty, it attacks what is in your pocket so that you end up saying I almost made it' (Water Magaya Sermon accessed on 16 October 2019 on https://youtu.be/lbaeZgnKUnE) 'There is joy and prosperity in the name of Jesus' (Manenji, Sermon, 21 December 2020); 'Meditation helps you to attract what you want, and you shall get it. Meditation is the key to prosperity' (Manenji, Sermon, 21 December 2021); 'When you want a breakthrough for money, healing, and a house, you need to have verses to memorise' (Manenji, Sermon, 23 December 2020); 'Two things show that there is love. It is giving and forgiving. God forgave and gave us a sign of love. When you love, then

be prepared to give something back. Give something back to God' (Manenji, Sermon, 23 December 2021).

The above quotations suggest that the PHD Ministries and GOM emphasised giving to the pastor so that God would abundantly reward or give back to believers. It is believed that God will multiply the money given and return it to the giver. The focus on financial giving as a spiritual act that leads to material rewards reflects a hybrid influence on theological interpretation of the gospel of prosperity and syncretic adaptation of ATR in particular or even other religious traditions where offerings and sacrifices are made to deities or ancestors in the hope of receiving blessings. However, in NRMs, this practice is heavily influenced by the prosperity gospel, which directly links financial contributions to divine favour and material wealth. Teaching on sowing the seed derives from 2 Corinthians 9:6–11, which teaches that 'whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will reap generously.' In their preaching, the PHD Ministries and GOM encouraged believers to sow or give generously to the Church to receive back abundantly. Using biblical passages such as 2 Corinthians 9:6–11 to reinforce the concept of giving and receiving aligns with Christian doctrines and other religious and non-religious traditions. However, it is interpreted in a way that mirrors many religious traditions and traditional African concepts of reciprocity and balance in the spiritual realm. In addition, a combination of different cultural and religious elements has been witnessed to form a cohesive whole (Pieterse 2019) which created a new form of religious expression of sowing the seed.

Prophet Walter Magaya emphasised that he was rich, and his believers would be rich like him if they also gave to the Church. This type of preaching confirms Coleman's (2011, pp. 23–45) and Togarasei's (2011, p. 341) writing about the prosperity gospel in the African context, arguing that pastors always urge followers to give to the Church or sow the seed generously, trusting that God will abundantly reward them for an act of faith. Such preaching in NRMs often involves empowering believers through faith, visualisation, and positive affirmations. This approach converges traditional African emphasis on the power of words and thoughts with modern Christian teachings on faith and prosperity.

8. Correlations within the Characteristic Features of NRMs

The above section showed that there needs to be more clarity around the scholarly debates on cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism, making it difficult to describe the religious and cultural practices constituting these concepts. However, the characteristic features of NRMs intertwine to form a unique religious expression that reflects cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism. NRMs often exhibit distinctive characteristics that set them apart from traditional religious practices. These characteristics, such as unique worship styles, a focus on alleged miracles, strategic use of media, reliance on personal announcements and testimonies, the rise of 'churchpreneurs', and the practice of 'sowing the seed', are not only interconnected but also crucial in defining the identity and appeal of these movements. The worship style in NRMs often breaks away from conventional liturgies, incorporating contemporary music, technology, and often emotive and charismatic expressions. This modernised and often experiential approach to worship is designed to resonate with a younger, more contemporary audience, fostering a sense of community and belonging that is both refreshing and relatable. The emphasis on alleged miracles, particularly those related to healing and financial prosperity, taps into followers' existential needs and hopes, often as a powerful tool for conversion and retention. More so, the savvy use of media, including social media platforms, television, and other digital channels, is another defining trait of NRMs. This helps disseminate their message to a broader audience and creates a brand-like appeal, which is essential in a media-saturated world. Similarly, personal announcements and testimonies, often shared during services or through media channels, authenticate the movement's claims, providing personal and emotive narratives that make sense to its followers.

The rise of 'churchpreneurs'—leaders who blend spiritual guidance with business acumen—is a distinct phenomenon within NRMs. These leaders often promote a prosperity

gospel, which blends religious doctrine with principles of wealth and success. This is particularly appealing to followers in economically challenging environments. This ties in with the concept of 'sowing the seed', in which followers are encouraged to make financial contributions with the expectation of divine financial returns. This practice not only fuels the economic engine of the movement but also reinforces the prosperity narrative. In short, these characteristics are not isolated elements but form a synergistic web that defines the operational and theological framework of New Religious Movements. They consciously adapt to contemporary culture and social dynamics to address their followers' spiritual, emotional, and material aspirations in an increasingly complex and globalised world. What is clear is that these elements demonstrate a dynamic blend of traditional beliefs and modern cultural influences, highlighting the NRMs' adaptive and syncretic nature in a globalised context.

9. Diverging Syncretic Elements between NRMs' Features and ATR

Syncretism in religious practices often involves blending and merging different traditions to form a new, hybrid religious identity. This syncretism reveals converging and diverging elements in the context of NRMs and ATR in Zimbabwe. A critical analysis of these divergences is essential to understanding NRMs' unique characteristics and impacts in Harare, Zimbabwe. Regarding material prosperity versus communal well-being, it was noted that ATR traditionally emphasises communal well-being and spiritual harmony within the community. The NRMs, however, heavily focus on individual material prosperity, particularly in the context of the prosperity gospel. This shift from community-centric to individual-centric prosperity marks a significant divergence, often leading to social stratification within the religious community. In addition, it was noted that in ATR, offerings and sacrifices are made to deities or ancestors, often as a form of respect, gratitude, or seeking guidance, without a direct expectation of material return. Conversely, NRMs adopt a more transactional approach to spirituality, where giving is often linked to expected material rewards. This transactional nature represents a shift from the traditional values of ATR, which focus more on spiritual balance and ethical conduct.

Observations from research showed that the seating arrangement at the PHD Ministries is hierarchical and is based on who has paid more to the ministry. For example, those who paid USD 350 to stay in the hotel belonging to Prophet Walter Magaya would sit close to him during services, followed by those who paid USD 100. Those who did not pay anything always sat far away from the pastor. One of the participants, Gari, argued: 'The seating arrangement within the PHD Ministries is simple. There is a place for the rich, not so rich and the ordinary believers who are the biggest population.' This seating arrangement, however, seems to suggest that congregants are not equal; some are more important than others. GOM, however, did not have a special seating arrangement, as all congregants were treated as equals, although the seating arrangement could change as the ministry grows. The seating arrangement at the PHD Ministries, suggested that the gospel of prosperity is instrumental to managing class relations. This confirms the writings of Wrenn (2019, p. 427) about the prosperity gospel and neoliberalism, arguing that capitalism holds precise class lines: for the upper class, it further justifies their place in the hierarchy; for the middle class, it affirms their aspirations and opens the perception of possibilities; and for the poor, the prosperity gospel gives hope.

The seating arrangement at the PHD Ministries showed a Janus face[3] in which secure networks and reciprocities were built amongst the rich and middle class. In contrast, the same networks and reciprocities between the rich and the poor, who could not associate and build social cohesion, were destroyed or eliminated. The seating arrangement caused exclusion and hindered economic progress among the believers. In this way, the rich became social capitalists, creating networks that excluded the ministry's poorer members. More so, the hierarchical seating arrangement observed in the PHD Ministries, where financial contributions determine proximity to the spiritual leader, presents a syncretic blend between contemporary capitalist structures and traditional African religious practices,

albeit in a way that diverges from the communal and egalitarian ethos typically found in African Traditional Religion (ATR). In other words, it was also noted that traditional ATR practices typically emphasise egalitarianism within spiritual gatherings. However, some NRMs' hierarchical seating arrangements and class-based treatment reflect a departure from these egalitarian principles. Based on financial contribution, this hierarchy contrasts with ATR's more inclusive and community-oriented approach.

Commercialising spiritual items such as anointing oil, holy water, and other religious merchandise in NRMs significantly diverges from ATR practices. While ATR involves the use of spiritual objects, the commodification and sale of these items in a capitalist manner is not traditionally aligned with ATR principles. In ATR, spiritual leaders or shamans are traditionally seen as guides and healers, who are deeply integrated into the community's life. In NRMs, the role of spiritual leaders can sometimes shift towards a more authoritarian or celebrity-like status, with a strong emphasis on their wealth and personal success, diverging from the traditional role envisioned in ATR.

NRMs targeting vulnerable individuals for financial gain diverges from ATR's communal and ethical principles. While traditional African spirituality emphasises community support and ethical integrity, some NRMs exploit these principles for personal gain, revealing a syncretic yet problematic aspect of these movements. The shift towards capitalistic approaches within NRMs, where spiritual growth and moral sanctity are overshadowed by financial transactions for spiritual services, indicates a syncretic blending of religious and economic systems. This blending, however, often strays from ATR's focus on spiritual integrity and communal well-being. In other words, the emergence of 'churchpreneurship' in NRMs showcases a syncretic mix of traditional African spiritual elements with modern capitalist practices. While this blend reflects the adaptive nature of religious practices, it raises ethical concerns regarding the commercialisation of spirituality and the potential exploitation of believers' faith and vulnerabilities.

10. Contribution of NRMs to Social Cohesion and Information Sharing

The third argument within this article postulates that the cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism in the NRMs provide pathways to invaluable networks. Despite the above divergences, NRMs in Harare have contributed to social cohesion and information sharing, positively impacting spiritual and material prosperity and holistic community development. The contribution of NRMs to social cohesion and information sharing in Harare, Zimbabwe, is multi-faceted. By addressing both spiritual and material needs, these movements have fostered new forms of social networks and communities, playing a crucial role in the holistic development of individuals and communities within a rapidly changing society.

10.1. History of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and Networks Created

Social cohesion and information sharing were witnessed even within the history and evolution of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, particularly its response to poverty and unemployment. The history of Pentecostalism offered a compelling insight into how religious movements can play a pivotal role in community formation and empowerment. For example, due to mining activities in South Africa, many migrants from Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia were hosted and were believed to have embraced Pentecostalism in South Africa. Upon returning home, it was believed that the migrants preached the same gospel in Zimbabwe (Maxwell 1998; Togarasei 2005; Sundkler and Steed 2000). However, the use of modern media within the NRMs facilitated widespread information and resource sharing. The strategic use of NRMs' social media, television, and radio broadcasts revolutionised information sharing in Harare. These platforms make it easier to spread spiritual teachings, health information, and economic opportunities. This contributes significantly to the education and empowerment of individuals and communities, particularly in areas in which access to information might otherwise be limited.

As part of a global phenomenon, Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has distinctive African characteristics, blending spiritual practices with local cultures and societal needs. More so, Pentecostalism's growth in Zimbabwe, notably through the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Assemblies of God (AOG), Family of God (FOG), and Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), highlights its adaptive and responsive nature to local contexts (Matikiti 2017, pp. 138–42; Gifford 1988, p. 2; Mumford 2012, p. 372; Bishau 2015, p. 5). These Pentecostal churches have been instrumental in addressing the spiritual, social, and economic challenges faced by their congregations, particularly in the face of poverty and unemployment. NRMs have been influential in creating new social networks and communities. At the same time, Maxwell (2006, p. 38) and Togarasei (2005, p. 2; 2016, p. 5) argue that Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe gave birth to several African Initiated or Instituted Churches (AICs) and the rise of other Pentecostal churches. Even though there has been an overlap, AICs which evolved before, after, and within classical Pentecostalism flourished within their focus on communality and the amalgamation of facets of Christianity with the culture of the local people (Hastings 1994, p. 118; Sundkler and Steed 2000, p. 816). More so, Pentecostalism's contribution to community formation was witnessed from the official recognition of AFM in 1943, leading to the proper coordination and administration of the church, activities, establishment of order, and discipline, which also led some members to leave the church voluntarily or by expulsion (Togarasei 2016, p. 5). The mass exodus of people from the AFM saw other people form apostolic churches, which became the AICs, developing theologies that differed from the AFM teaching.

Critical to Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe is its focus on communal empowerment and personal transformation, similar to how NRMs have established themselves as significant social institutions in Harare. Organising regular gatherings, social events, and group activities allows individuals to interact, share experiences, and support each other. This interaction fosters a sense of belonging and community. The Pentecostal churches emphasise the workings of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, miracles, healing, and prophecy (Anderson 2004, pp. 103–4; Togarasei 2005, p. 349; Chibango 2016, p. 71). This spiritual emphasis offers a sense of hope and empowerment, which is essential in communities grappling with economic hardships. However, in societies where traditional social structures may weaken, NRMs fill an essential gap, creating new forms of social capital and reinforcing communal bonds. In addition, NRMs provide spiritual and psychological support to their members, offering a sense of purpose, direction, and hope. Such support is invaluable in the context of economic hardship or social instability. It contributes to individual resilience and community solidarity, helping people navigate challenging times with a strengthened sense of self and community.

Pentecostal churches have also been active in community development and social services. For example, ZAOGA Forward in Faith has extended its reach beyond spiritual guidance, running schools, orphanages, hospitals, and even a university (Musoni 2013, p. 80). Gukurume (2021, p. 34) argues NRMs have influenced assisting families in meeting their basic needs, income-generating projects, educational support such as scholarship, and community infrastructural development. These initiatives demonstrate the NRMs' commitment to practical solutions to societal challenges. The holistic approach to community service demonstrates the movement's commitment to addressing not just the spiritual but also the material needs of the people. By addressing the people's material needs, NRMs' response is uniquely characterised by promoting entrepreneurship and self-reliance among its followers. The 'gospel of prosperity' preached within neo-Pentecostal churches or some of the NRMs motivates individuals to pursue economic success, often creating businesses and job opportunities. This approach provides a pathway out of poverty and instils a sense of agency and empowerment among the religion's followers. The inclusivity and appeal of Pentecostalism to a broad demographic, including the youth, play a significant role in community formation. By attracting young people and nurturing their aspirations for success, the NRMs are shaping a new generation of empowered individuals who are spiritually and economically equipped to contribute to their communities.

10.2. The Characteristic Features of NRMs and Networks Created

The characteristic features of New Religious Movements (NRMs), such as diverse hymns, dynamic praying styles, and the emphasis on miracles and media use, serve as prime examples of cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism within religious practices. These NRMs adeptly blend traditional religious elements with modern cultural influences, creating a unique religious expression that resonates with contemporary audiences. This synthesis includes incorporating charismatic worship styles and breaking traditional liturgies by integrating contemporary music and technology. Such an approach appeals to younger demographics and fosters a sense of community belonging. Within the selected NRMs, internal groups, such as choir and musical groups, created spaces for socialisation and social cohesion amongst the believers, where they started exchanging contacts and sharing ideas and business deals. In a focus-group discussion (FGD 1), Tim from GOM pointed out that 'through choir, I managed to create friends, and we have started small projects such as buying and selling non-perishables such as roasted corn and water around the ministry's property.' Another participant within the PHD Ministries, Jim, reported, 'Some of our youth who are within the choir are linked with professional gospel singers, and they sometimes perform as curtain-raisers at the musical shows.' Hence, social cohesion was created by youth who could network, collaborate, and interact with one another before, during, and after choir practice and ministries' services.

In the realm of NRMs, the occurrence of alleged miracles, particularly those related to healing and financial prosperity, addresses followers' existential needs and hopes. This aspect of NRMs is often a powerful tool for conversion and retention, tapping into deep-seated human desires and aspirations. The strategic use of media, notably social media platforms and digital channels, further exemplifies the glocalisation and convergence within these movements. This modern communication approach allows NRMs to extend their reach beyond traditional boundaries, making their message more accessible and appealing to a broader, global audience. The emergence of 'churchpreneurs' within NRMs, who combine spiritual guidance with business acumen, underscores the syncretic nature of these movements. They often promote a prosperity gospel, combining religious teachings with wealth and success principles. This is particularly appealing in economically challenging environments and aligns with 'sowing the seed', encouraging financial contributions with the promise of divine financial returns. Such practices not only support the economic sustainability of the movements but also reinforce the narrative of prosperity, which is a vital part of their appeal.

Interestingly, PHD Ministries and GOM encouraged entrepreneurial activities and economic empowerment among their members. By promoting ideas such as 'sowing the seed' and prosperity theology, these movements have motivated individuals to pursue economic goals, leading to material prosperity for some of the believers. The hierarchical structures of PHD Ministries and GOM, while reflecting a divergence from ATR's egalitarianism, also facilitated the formation of social capital among wealthier members. This networking led to business opportunities and economic collaborations, benefiting the involved individuals and, potentially, their wider communities. More so, the engagement of selected NRMs in community development projects and charity work exemplifies their contribution to the holistic development of communities. Consequently, NRMs often function as platforms for cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue, fostering understanding and tolerance among different groups. This aspect contributes to social cohesion by promoting respect for diversity and encouraging peaceful coexistence.

The syncretic and hybrid practices within NRMs create gateways to invaluable networks, fostering social cohesion and the sharing of critical information. Through these networks, NRMs facilitate the holistic development of individuals and communities, highlighting the intricate interplay between spirituality and material prosperity. Through their emphasis on spiritual empowerment, community service, entrepreneurial encouragement, and philanthropic activities, NRMs have played a significant role in community formation and empowerment. They offer a dynamic model of how religious movements can positively

impact both the spiritual and material aspects of life, contributing to communities' overall development and resilience. These initiatives address both spiritual needs and material necessities, thereby playing a crucial role in enhancing communities' overall well-being and cohesion. It was noted that the selected NRMs engaged in community development projects and charity work. These initiatives contribute to the holistic development of communities, addressing both spiritual needs and material necessities. In other words, NRMs in Harare have played a significant role in promoting social cohesion and information sharing. Their activities have not only catered to spiritual and psychological needs but have also facilitated economic empowerment, community development, and the fostering of new social networks. These contributions are especially vital in a rapidly changing society, in which traditional structures and norms are continually redefined.

11. Conclusions

In conclusion, this article has provided an insightful analysis of the interplay between cultural hybridity, convergence, glocalisation, and syncretism in New Religious Movements (NRMs) and their profound impact on both spiritual and material life in Harare, Zimbabwe. The exploration of NRMs, especially in their alignment with African Traditional Religion (ATR) tenets, reveals a rich tapestry of religious expression that is unique and complex. Prophets and pastors within these movements have been instrumental in shaping not just the spiritual ethos but also influencing the socio-economic practices of their followers. This influence extends to practices such as exorcism, worship, healing, and deliverance, underscoring a deep-rooted syncretism that blends traditional African spirituality with modern Christian beliefs. This fusion, however, presents both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, it raises questions about the authenticity of religious experiences and the potential for exploiting believers' faith, particularly in the context of prosperity theology. On the other hand, the positive aspects of these NRMs cannot be overlooked. They have played a significant role in fostering social cohesion and information sharing, contributing immensely to the holistic development of individuals and communities in Harare. This contribution is particularly evident in how these movements have become integral to spiritual and material prosperity in a vibrant and dynamic religious landscape.

The findings of this article highlight the richness of NRMs in terms of their ability to adapt and resonate within diverse environments. They have redefined the religious and socio-economic fabric of NRMs in Harare, offering a window into the complex interplay between spirituality, material prosperity, and religious traditions. This study opens new avenues for future research in religious studies, inviting a deeper exploration into the implications of religious practices in contemporary societies. In essence, this article serves as a critical reference point for understanding NRMs' multifaceted roles and impacts. It emphasises their capacity to root themselves and translate their ideas across various environments, reflecting the broader context of global religious practices. This investigation into NRMs enriches our understanding of religious dynamics in Harare, Zimbabwe, and contributes to the broader discourse on religion's role in modern society.

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Notes

[1] https://www.africaontheblog.org/miracle-money-gold-and-abortions-zimbabwes-wacky-prophets/ (accessed on: 12 October 2023).

[2] This means that what heals some people is not the medicine administered to them, but the faith in the person who administered the medicine.

[3] Janus was a Roman deity depicted with two faces, one looking forward and one looking backwards. The term Janus face, therefore, refers to two contrasting or different aspects or characteristics.

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Article

'When Faith Is Not Enough': Encounters between African Indigenous Religious Practices and Prophetic Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: African Pentecostalism remains the fastest growing form of Christianity on the African continent. Scholarship on Zimbabwean Pentecostalism has noted how the emergence of New Pentecostal Movements (NPMs), specifically Prophetic Pentecostalism (PP), has increased this growth. Apart from other attracting factors, such as the Holy Spirit, claims of faith healing, deliverance and prophecy, among others, African Pentecostalism is known for its emphasis on faith as a major anchor of any Pentecostal Christian. Hebrews 11, with its emphasis on faith, is, therefore, a central scripture in this Christian tradition. However, the emergence of NPMs at the height of the Zimbabwean crisis from the year 2008 to the present, has challenged Zimbabwean Pentecostal Christians from their sole dependency on faith. The crisis called for much more than faith could stand on its own. Hence, NPMs responded to this need by infusing indigenous religious practices with biblical ones as a way of strengthening believers through the crisis. Prophetic Pentecostal Movements (PPMs) in Zimbabwe introduced touchable objects such as anointed towels, handkerchiefs, wrist bands, stickers, oils and even condoms. While this appears to be sophisticated syncretism, a critical analysis of the practices shows how steeped they are in the African indigenous religious worldview. This article, therefore, seeks to examine the religious encounters between indigenous African religious practices and Pentecostal practices as practiced in the NPMs in Zimbabwe. The focus of this paper is to establish the resilience of indigenous religious practices within a Christian tradition that claims to have totally broken from the past. It further argues that the fast growth of PPMs depends on the 'Christianization' of indigenous religious practices, which are presented to believers as 'purely biblical'. This is largely a desktop research project in which secondary sources were used as sources of data.

Keywords: African Pentecostalism; African Traditional Religion(s); Christianity; New Pentecostal Movements; Prophetic Pentecostalism

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1. Introduction

African Pentecostalism remains the fastest growing form of Christianity on the African continent. Many scholars have engaged in discourses on Pentecostalism on the African continent (see Kalu 2008; Asamoah-Gyadu 2012; Biri 2012, 2020; Chitando et al. 2013; Chitando 2021; Manyonganise 2016, 2020, 2021). Its history has been well-documented from a variety of vantage points. Scholarship focusing on Pentecostalism on the continent have put them into various categories. For example, Yong (2005, p. 18) has three categories, namely, the Classical Pentecostal Movement, the Charismatic Renewal Movement (arising from mainline Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches) and the Neo-Charismatic Movements. On the other hand, Togarasei (2018) classifies them into two main categories, namely, Classical and Modern Pentecostal Churches. This study takes note of the various typologies making up Pentecostalism both globally and specifically in Africa, while moving

further to focus on Zimbabwe. Togarasei (2018) provides the history of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, which this article will not repeat. The focus of this study is on New Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe.

Scholarship on Zimbabwean Pentecostalism has noted that the emergence of New Pentecostal Movements (NPMs), specifically Prophetic Pentecostalism, has increased this growth. Manyonganise (2016, p. 269) notes that the emergence of PPMs in Zimbabwe received a euphoric response. It is important to note that even the new Pentecostal Churches have been differently named. While Manyonganise (2016) calls them Prophetic Pentecostal Movements, Kgatle (2021) refers to them as New Prophetic Churches in his examination of the cultism that is pervasive within the churches, and Biri (2021) calls them Newer Pentecostal Churches. The movements can also be referred to as New Pentecostal Movements. These terms may at times be used interchangeably in this article. Apart from other attracting factors, such as the Holy Spirit, claims of faith healing and deliverance, among others, as shall be shown later, African Pentecostalism is known for its emphasis on faith as a major anchor of any Pentecostal Christian. However, PPMs have also made prophecy central to their theology. Other scholars like Shoko and Chiwara (2013) and Mwandayi (2013) have situated many of the practices and beliefs of PPMs in African Indigenous Religion(s). This article, therefore, seeks to examine the religious encounters between indigenous African religious practices and Pentecostal practices as practiced in Prophetic Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. Examples are drawn from Emmanuel Makandiwa's United Family International Church and Walter Magaya's Prophetic Healing Deliverance Ministries, as they are currently the most prominent PPMs in Zimbabwe. This is largely a desktop research project, in which secondary sources were used as sources of data. In the next section, I proceed to theorize syncretism.

2. Theorizing Syncretism

Theorizing syncretism is no easy task. However, I am convinced that it is necessary to theorize the term before presenting how it is manifesting itself within NPMs in Zimbabwe. The term itself is a contested one, but one that is used to label other people's religions. Werbner (1994, p. 201) argues that syncretism is a social action that is continually contested. However, when it functions across cultures or traditions, it adopts, replicates, or creates religious belief and practices. For him "syncretism is full of controversies some of which emanate from the very concept itself, others about what is pronounced to be the diabolical sin of mixing religious traditions, still others about the authenticity of reconciling religious differences" (Werbner 1994, p. 201). Leopold and Jensen (2014, p. 4) are of the view that syncretism represents elements of struggle in the transmission of religion. In their analysis, "the causes as well as the effects of historical processes that lead to syncretistic formations vary a great deal depending on the historical, cultural, political and social climates". For them, "the use of syncretism in the more theological (mostly Christian) sense has often been used to appoint and control what has been thought of as illegitimate correlations between competing religious movements, traditions or discourses" (2014, p. 8).

Scholarship has alluded to the fact that the labelling of religions as syncretistic is political. Werbner (1994, p. 201) argues that the politics of syncretism is a politics of interpretation and reinterpretation. When I was preparing to write this article, I inquired on possible references to consult with two eminent scholars on religion studies. David Maxwell, who has written widely on African Pentecostalism, with a specific focus on Zimbabwe, responded via email and said this about syncretism: "The key point is that it is a form of religious politics-a term of disapprobation. So, the point is to see who is accusing who of being syncretistic and why? It is about religious boundary maintenance" (Email message, 25 September 2023).

The other scholar, Ezra Chitando, quipped: "is there a religion that is not syncretistic?" (General discussion, 19 September 2023). In concurrence with Chitando, Leopold and Jensen (2014, p. 5) argue that the history of religion confirms that every religion is, in essence, syncretistic. In the same vein, Stewart (2014, p. 275) avers that there are no pure

religious traditions, which, for him, defeats the argument that "syncretism necessarily assumes the existence of ideal pure traditions in contrast to which other traditions are mixed, or syncretic". Stewart further argues that

> The syncretic-ness of all religions may be an unexceptional fact, but pointing this out socially often amounts to an expression of power differentiation and social control. It is a term that has historically been applied to someone else's body of religious practice. The bearers of a given tradition rarely acknowledge that it might be syncretic.

An analysis of Stewart's view brings out two key critical issues. First, that the one labelling another's religion as syncretistic should wield some power over the labelled. Second, that an insider of any religion may never agree that their religion is syncretistic. Hence, only outsiders can label a religion to be syncretistic. In this case, the term carries with it overtones of othering. Hence, Stewart questions the authority of those who label a particular religion to be syncretistic.

While some syncretistic practices are visible, others are very subtle. From Leopold and Jensen's point of view, the majority of syncretistic formations go unnoticed, as they appear as the natural results of interaction (Leopold and Jensen 2014, p. 4). What is important to notice is the function of such syncretistic practices. Stewart (2014, p. 275) opines that syncretism plays a role in directing the invention of traditions or the aggressive dismissal of neighboring traditions. Werbner locates its function within the politics of cultural difference and social identity. In other words, while adopting a foreign religion, some cultural groups may accommodate their own religious beliefs and practices as a way of safeguarding their socio-cultural identity. It is also possible for some religious groups to copy other religions' beliefs and practices. Leopold and Jensen (2014, p. 4) note that new religious movements may incorporate 'borrowed' elements from other religions or secular sources as a way of legitimizing new contemporary values, often disguised as old religious teachings, as a means to contest conventional values. In the Western world, Morazzini (2015) notes that globalization and human migration have fueled syncretistic tendencies.

Within Africa, Stewart (2014) notes that syncretism has become a term of abuse, mostly used to castigate local colonial churches that had burst out from the sphere of mission control and begun to indigenize Christianity. In this case, the use of the term took on a negative sense. Yet these churches sought to fight the cultural imperialism of missionary Christianity and to recover indigenous cultures and values in their traditional religions and cultures denigrated by Christianization and westernization (Leopold and Jensen 2014). Sundkler (1961, p. 55) viewed Zionism in South Africa as a 'nativistic-syncretistic' interpretation of Christianity. Sundkler is credited for his study on Bantu prophets (1948), which illuminated African religiosity and the syncretic merger of African and Western Christianity. Zehner (2009) analyzed the pejorative use of the term 'syncretism'. From his point of view, the term is made judgmental by the assumption that when one religion is either blended, hybridized or contextualized with another, it then represents a deviation from cultural or religious templates that would have been 'pure' were it not for these developments. Zehner (2009) further argues that though engagement with context risks a degree of syncretism, this is necessary because it is only through this that conversions become locally and meaningfully grounded.

Theologians such as John Mbiti and Emmanuel Idowu called for the indigenization of Christianity, while Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako clamored for the translation of the Christian faith so that it would become more contextual. In a nutshell, they were arguing for the Africanization of the Christian faith while Christianizing African forms of belief. In fact, Africans questioned the demonization of African religious practices, yet adopting Western ones. Their questions were valid. For example, why would Western religious forms be regarded as Christian, while at the same time rejecting African religious forms? Did this mean that Western religious forms were synonymous with biblical Christianity? If so, why would African religious forms not also be regarded as biblical Christianity? Such questions aimed at decolonizing the Christian faith so that it could be understood through African

idioms. Idowu (1965), for example, called for the church in Nigeria (and throughout Africa) to be indigenized so that the expressions of Christianity would be performed through indigenous forms. In this case, there was no need for African Christians to sing foreign songs when in church or to dress like Europeans. He argued that African drums should be used in churches in order to make Christianity more authentically African. Mbiti (1969, p. 271), like Idowu, advocated for an indigenous African Christianity because, for him, it "holds the greatest potentialities of meeting the dilemmas and challenges of modern Africa". For Bediako (1992, p. 252), it is important for Christianity to be authentically African because it meets people in their context and communities, and transforms them within and from that setting. Commenting on the above theologians, Tarus and Lowery (2017, p. 313) opine that they "defended the need for Christians to thoroughly contextualize their faith, and insisted that the gospel was by its very nature both universal and particular it was intended to be 'translated' into each context in which it found itself". The birth of African theology, therefore, needs to be understood as a quest to make Christianity more relevant to African Christians. In order to do this, certain aspects of African Traditional Religion(s) were incorporated into churches. The emergence of African Indigenous Churches (AICs) gave impetus to this quest. They challenged the hegemony of Western Christianity by appropriating indigenous religious practices into their church rituals. Mbiti (1969, p. 268) postulated that traditional beliefs and practices would continue to thrive, even in towns and cities, for generations to come. He argued "any appeal made to traditional values and practices is ultimately a religious appeal. So long as people appreciate and even idolize the traditional present and past, this religiosity whether recognized as such or not will continue to enjoy a comfortable and privileged place in the emotions of African people". Mbiti's analysis is crucial for this paper because it assists us in understanding the prevalence of African indigenous religious beliefs and practices within PPMs in Zimbabwe. He raises a key point, which is discussed below. For example, that the introduction of a new religion does not mean the abandonment of the old. This is noted by Falconer (2018, p. 104) when he argues that "although society changes and religious beliefs and practices are transformed to suit new lifestyles, many Africans are not entirely detached from their traditional culture and worldview". Hence, Mbiti's argument is that the Christian faith is translatable, not only into different languages, but also into different cultural forms. For him, not Africanizing Christianity would lead to the dechristianization of Africa, because the religion would have remained foreign to Africans. It is not surprising, therefore, that within most Christian traditions (Pentecostalism included), in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, aspects of African Indigenous Religion(s) are prevalent, either visibly or latent. This is what scholarship has termed 'syncretism'. Hollewerger (n.d.) opines that it cannot be questioned that all the different forms of Pentecostalism are syncretic. The section below theorizes syncretism in African Pentecostalism.

3. African Pentecostalism and Syncretism: Christianity Encounters ATR(s)

The issue of Pentecostalism and its syncretistic relationship with African Indigenous Religion(s) is not clearly defined (Falconer 2018, p. 104). In Falconer's analysis, this matter is complex, particularly when all of the expressions of belief are so diverse. However, the prevalence of syncretism in African Pentecostalism cannot go unnoticed. According to Anderson (2018, p. 190), when Pentecostalism entered Africa, it was inevitable that it would interact and form a dialogue with the old religion. Anderson noticed that thisinteraction shows both continuity and discontinuity, as some aspects of African Indigenous Religion(s) are embraced while others are thrown away. Anderson (2001) notes that many observers regard as 'syncretistic' many forms of African Pentecostalism that have developed a pneumatology, with a presumed link to the pre-Christian past. Hence, by definition, African Pentecostalism is seen as referring to the distinctive modes of being Pentecostal that have come about as a result of processing and assimilating some African religious and cultural values, including the significance of the dead (Nel 2019, n.p). In his study of Iringa, Tanzania, Lindhardt (2017, p. 36) established that expressions of Pentecostal-Charismatic

Christianity have taken shape through an intimate and complex entanglement with African Indigenous Religion(s). In his opinion, African Pentecostalism has to adapt to African Indigenous Religions. Nel (2019) opines that African Pentecostalism accepts that African Indigenous Religion(s) provide a certain contact point or meeting place for communicating the gospel, and that African religiosity provides a religious groundwork, vocabulary, insights, aspirations and direction for the Christian gospel. Kalu (2008, p. 170) engages with a "cultural discourse that reconstructs the Pentecostal movement's response to the system of meanings embodied in the symbols and worldviews of indigenous African religions and cultures". He argues that [African] Pentecostalism has grown because it has resonated with indigenous worldviews and has responded contextually to questions that are raised within the interior of the worldviews. Kalu (2009, p. 71) further observes that "there is an identifiable African Pentecostalism because Africans responded to the gospel from within a charismatic indigenous worldview". In his analysis, Christianity acquired a different character as a result of African Pentecostalism, because it was now expressed in the idiom of the African world. Kalu's view is that African religions and cultures have contributed a specific flavor to African Pentecostalism. Hence, for him, the "conversation partners in shaping Pentecostal ideology and praxis are the indigenous religions and cultures among others" (Kalu 2008, p. 170). I, therefore, concur with Omenyo (2014, p. 132) when he says that African Pentecostalism oozes a certain Africanness. As a result of this, Nel (2019, n.p) argues that "in assimilating some elements of primal spirituality, African Pentecostalism can be suspected of syncretism that sacrifices the integrity of its proclamation of the gospel". However, Kalu (2008, p. 174) avers that the concept of syncretism seeks to respond to the persistent problem of Christ and culture. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Nel (2019) views the blending of some African indigenous religious practices with Christianity negatively. He does not clearly show, though, how the integrity of the way African Pentecostalism proclaims the gospel is sacrificed. His views were also shared by Kato (1975) when he spoke about syncretism becoming popular in third world countries, mainly due to the persistent urge for cultural revolution specifically in Africa, but with external influences from communist and Arab worlds. For him, this would energize the 'challenging' force of syncretism. Viewing syncretism as 'challenging' defeats the struggle for contextualizing the biblical message. In an era where the discourse on decoloniality is taking center stage, it is important for scholarship to desist from perpetuating negative descriptions of African Indigenous Religion(s). In the context of this study, I discuss syncretism in New Pentecostal Movements using an appreciative lens, requiring that religious movements deal with challenges emanating from the African worldview through a process of enculturation. For Lindhardt (2017, p. 36), through such a process, [African] Pentecostalism interacts, entangles, blends and borrows from African Indigenous Religion(s). Thus, Nwosu (2021, p. 12) is of the view that syncretism signifies equal and mutual borrowing. In his analysis, syncretism is a possible platform of collaborative working for justice and peace. Biri (2020) explains the resilience of indigenous beliefs and practices among the Shona people and argues that these have found expression among Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches. In the next section, I discuss syncretism in New Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe.

4. Prophetic Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and Syncretism: When Faith Is Not Enough?

Pentecostalism in general is known for its emphasis on faith. Hebrews 11 is a key text for this Christian tradition. All the other aspects center on faith. Healing, deliverance and prosperity are all anchored on faith. According to Heb 11:1, faith is believing in what one hopes for and the evidence of those things that are not visible. Members of classical and Neo-Pentecostal churches are encouraged to believe in order for them to receive. As a way of breaking away from the past, they were discouraged from focusing on people or things as solutions to their troubles, but to trust in God. For a long time, members in these churches professed their faith in a God who heals, delivers and provides for their needs. In fact, they were taught that God answers prayers said with faith. Testimonies were given

indicating that the God of the Pentecostal believer was at work as long as the believer had faith. It would appear that such pronouncements are useful when a nation's economy is in good shape. Once the economy stumbles, evidence from Zimbabwe shows that faith alone may not be enough. Sande (2021) argues that it is one thing for Pentecostal leaders to claim to be able to heal and deliver people, and another to follow through in times of need. Zimbabwe provides a good case study of how the dynamics within African Pentecostalism had to change in order to suit the demands of the socio-political situation. The emergence of PPMs in Zimbabwe needs to be understood within this context.

Prophetic Pentecostalism arose in Zimbabwe during the crisis years. Within South Africa, Matshobane notes that these churches emerged within a context of high unemployment rates. This can also be said of PPMs in East, Central and West Africa. It needs to be understood that by nature, Africans are notoriously religious (Mbiti 1969). As a result, they seek for answers for any of life's challenges from their religious worldview. In Zimbabwe, the Prophetic Pentecostal Movements (PPMs) emerged in a context of economic and political challenges. The Zimbabwean environment was characterized by hyperinflation, unemployment and political violence. Most scholars writing on Zimbabwean Pentecostalism have attributed the emergence of Prophetic Pentecostalism to the deteriorating economy. In a context where hope was rapidly fading away, these churches provided spaces for people to hope again by promising that things would become better in the future. Chitando (2021) argues that African Pentecostalism has thrived in Zimbabwe because of its ability to conform itself to the needs of the people in a variety of ways during the difficult times of the modern state. In Manyonganise's (2016, p. 269) opinion, PPMs were able to do this by moving from being 'other-worldly' to 'this worldly' as they endeavored to deal with poverty, violence and unemployment as well as other social pressures. In her analysis, the emergence of PPMs in Zimbabwe needs to be "understood as an attempt to offer people a way out of the cage of among other things the socio-economic and political uncertainties". As a result, the emergence of PPMs at the height of the Zimbabwean crisis from the year 2008 to the present, has challenged Zimbabwean Pentecostal Christians' sole dependency on faith. The crisis called for much more than faith could stand on its own. Hence, NPMs responded to this need by infusing some of the indigenous religious practices with biblical ones as a way of strengthening believers as they journeyed through the crisis.

From the onset, Prophetic Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe sought to move people away from their sole dependency on an abstract God by providing a leading visible figure who would assume some sacredness, just like in ATR(s) where sacred practitioners provided a rallying point in times of crisis or calamity. Such figures provided a link between the living and the ancestors. While earlier forms of Pentecostalism had leaders with titles such as 'pastors', 'teachers' and 'evangelists', founders of Prophetic Pentecostal Movements have the boldness of claiming titles like 'prophet' or 'seer', thereby sacralizing their persona (Biri 2021, p. 26). In order to authenticate their 'prophetic calling', these leaders have embarked on making prophecies (ranging from prophesying about one's cellphone number, home addresses and identity document numbers, to mention but a few). Claims of healing and deliverance miracles have been abundant, but a few have been authenticated. Throughout the years, these 'prophets' have been laughed off, yet communities hold them in high esteem. The reason is that they have so many affinities with indigenous sacred practitioners. As seer or prophet, just like the indigenous sacred practitioner, they claim that they are able to communicate with the spirit world to diagnose the problems facing members of their churches. Asamoah-Gyadu (2012) notes that in African Pentecostal Churches, the process of diagnosis has been associated with the work of prophets. Kgatle (2023) avers that problem diagnosis is one of the PPMs' practices that has made it popular. In ATR(s), it has always been the duty of a traditional diviner to diagnose people's problems and/or, at times, prescribe remedies in the form of medicines or rituals to be performed. The belief in witchcraft and sorcery is very strong in PPMs. While classical and Neo-Pentecostal movements emphasized the need to offer prayers for protection, Biri and Manyonganise (2022) note a new theology of retribution in PPMs where they send back the witchcraft

curse to the sender. Chitando (2021, p. 14) explains that this practice is informed by the indigenous worldview where the traditional healer can cause those who intend to harm others to endure the pain they intended to cause. In a Christian tradition that teaches forgiveness, Biri and Manyonganise (2022) question whether this is not reverse witchcraft.

Prophetic Pentecostal Movements (PPMs) in Zimbabwe introduced touchable objects or artefacts. Kgatle (2023) opines that these objects are prescriptions for those consulting the prophets in these movements. Manyonganise (2021, p. 94) notes that

> In UFIC and PHD, the selling of branded merchandise is very common. Among these are stickers, wristbands, posters and other paraphernalia. Both churches make use of branded 'annointing' oil. In fact, the annonting oil bottles have photographs of [the founders].

While this appears to be sophisticated syncretism, a critical analysis of the practices show how steeped they are in the African indigenous religious worldview. Biri (2021, p. 27) argues

> . . .wristbands and other forms of inscription that are a mark of identity, a new identity that have acquired by denouncing the past. Therefore, the two churches reinvent the traditional symbols and give them new meaning within the Christian set-up in order to attract clientele. This is a mark of genius by the two young leaders because most believers are familiar with the artefacts that they get from the traditional sacred practitioners, particularly the n'anga. UFIC and PHD give new meanings to their artefacts, but the appropriation of these traditional symbols defies the myth of making a complete break from the past as the Pentecostal ideology seeks to maintain. Hence, this is the revitalization of the indigenous beliefs and practices within the Pentecostal matrix.

Shoko and Chiwara (2013) equate such artefacts with the traditional sacred practitioner's charms. Manyonganise (2021, p. 95) indicates that believers in UFIC and PHD, as in other PPMs in Zimbabwe, attribute mythical powers to these artefacts, which they believe provide protection from harm caused by enemies and evil powers. From the believers' point of view, the prophets' 'anointing' resides in the artefacts. The same view is shared on the sacred practitioners' charms, which are thought to carry powers that protect people from harm, particularly from witchcraft and sorcery.

Scholarship focusing on African Pentecostalism has noted the emergence of new doctrines and ritual practices in Prophetic Pentecostalism. For example, the doctrine on fatherhood is very strong in these churches. It is a phenomenon that had not been witnessed in previous forms of Pentecostalism in the region in general and Zimbabwe in particular. At its onset, most prophets in southern Africa had spiritual fathers from West Africa. Questions may be raised pertaining to why this was/is the case. Chitando et al. (2013) tried to explain this in terms of young masculinities submitting themselves to mature or older masculinities, while Biri and Manyonganise (2022), focusing on witchcraft and the 'back to sender' phenomenon, explained the link between self-proclaimed prophets in southern Africa and their West African spiritual fathers as emanating from the knowledge of West Africa as the 'center' of ritual performances, some of which are rooted in African Indigenous Religions and are meant to give these 'prophets' power to make them famous through the performance of miracles. Dube (2017) locates the concept of 'fatherhood', which he calls 'spiritual parenting', within the African religious worldview. He argues that we need to understand this concept as providing alternative 'fatherhood' spaces, thereby implicitly reinventing traditional hegemonic models under the pretext of Christian spiritualities. In his analysis, the spiritual parent ensures spiritual protection of the 'child', a similar role played by the traditional father. In the same vein, when analyzing UFIC, Biri (2021) is of the view that its founder, Emmanuel Makandiwa, is cast as the father of the unified family, which, to a large extent, has enabled members in his church to break away from their birth families and assume a new identity in this new family. While Biri's analysis may be true, she may have failed to see beyond Makandiwa's love for family. For example, in most of his teachings, he has called on members of his church to cherish their families of birth,

particularly their biological parents and guardians who raised them. In order to buttress this point, he has ensured that his parents and in-laws, who are members in his church, are well-looked after as an example to his congregants. His siblings constitute the group of those who are called to ministry and play a significant role in his church. This has led critics to point out that he is building a dynasty similar to traditional modes of kingship and kinship.

The concept of guesthouses is also a new trend which exhibit African Pentecostal borrowings from ATR(s). In Zimbabwe, prophets like Emmanuel Makandiwa (UFIC) and Walter Magaya (PHD) have established guesthouses where people pay to meet the prophet one-on-one. Earlier forms of Pentecostalism prayed for the sick for free and the pastors would visit the sick in their homes. Prophetic Pentecostalism has departed from this practice. It is the sick who now visit the prophet at the guesthouses, but for a 'fee'. Such practices have been criticized for being selective as the poor cannot afford the boarding fees demanded at these guesthouses. Hence, the practice is seen as elitist, that is, catering only for the well-to-do in society. Manyonganise (2020) criticized the concept for not only extorting money from the unsuspecting public, but also for commoditizing spiritual or faith healing, thereby excluding the poor and vulnerable. Her tools of analysis were rooted in the understanding that faith healing in Pentecostal churches should be free. A question that quickly comes to mind is: why should faith healing be free in Pentecostal churches when other religions charge for their services? A critical analysis of this practice shows its prevalence in ATR(s). Manyonganise (2020) argues that the introduction of guesthouses by the founders of UFIC and PHD is not a novel development, since even African indigenous health practitioners had/have the tendency of establishing their own healing centers. Among the Shona, such centers are referred to as '*banya*' (healing house) and these were usually places constructed away from homesteads. It therefore becomes clear that the PPMs have just modernized the practice. Biri (2012, p. 42) acknowledges the ability of African Pentecostalism to innovate indigenous religious practices by resacralizing, reinterpreting and redefining them.

In southern Africa in general and Zimbabwe specifically, Prophetic Pentecostal Movements have also brought in another new trend, that is, the concept of seeding. This, too, is a practice rooted in ATR(s). For example, when approaching a traditional diviner, herbalist or healer in ATR(s), it was/is expected that one had/has to carry some form of payment or appreciation gift so that a blessing can be pronounced upon them. The general belief is that once this indigenous practitioner is appeased, they are bound to do all they can to ensure that good fortune comes the way of the person approaching them. This forms the basis of the PPMs' prosperity gospel, which resonates very well with African indigenous rituals of prosperity. Gadsby (2022, p. 126) notes that ATR(s) are replete with rituals that convey the belief that personal prosperity is a sign of the approval of the spirit world. While giving for blessings has always been part of the Pentecostal doctrine, the PPMs have taken it to another level. Citing 1 Samuel 9, these prophets have claimed that anyone in need of their help should not approach them empty-handed. At times, the well-to-do in these churches are given prophecies to the effect that God has commanded them to give a certain amount of money to the prophets in order for them to make 'breakthroughs' in their lives. This has also led to the creation of tiers within the churches whereby spiritual partners are put into classes depending on how much they pay per month to support 'the work of God'. Those who pay are provided with seats close to the prophet, which is deemed 'close to the anointing'. Hence, they are referred to as Very Very Important Persons (VVIPs). What this implies is that one's relationship with God is transactional. Hence, while a lack of giving and tithing were given as reasons for lack of financial breakthroughs in earlier forms of Pentecostalism, Prophetic Pentecostalism has placed the persona of the prophet at the center of one being blessed or cursed. It is common, therefore, to hear followers of prophets in Zimbabwe saying '*nyasha dzemuporofita dzive nemi*' (the grace of the prophet be with you). God suddenly becomes the God of the prophet. As they pray, church members can be heard saying 'the God of Prophet so and so'. As such, we can argue that the figure

of the prophet in these churches is slowly replacing that of Jesus Christ. In fact, a new hierarchy is slowly coming into place where the prophet is deemed to be an intermediary between believers and Jesus, yet other forms of Pentecostalism hold the belief that anyone can freely access the throne of God. Kgatle (2023) notes that in PPMs, the prophet is more important than the participation of all believers. In order to maintain the figure of the prophet as mysterious, access to the prophet is not easy and they are always surrounded by bodyguards. Shoko and Chiwara compares this to traditional sacred practitioners who had their own assistants who would ensure that one is either granted or denied access to appear in the presence of the diviner, healer or herbalist. In PPMs, it is this inaccessibility that leads followers to part with hard-earned cash to go for one-on-one meetings with the prophet at the established guesthouses. While this may reflect as 'purely' Christian, it has its roots within ATR(s) where the sacred practitioners is deemed to be the intermediary between the living and the ancestors. Manyonganise (2021) describes this as rebranding Pentecostalism, and Chitando (2021) also views PPMs as rebranding ATR(s). Gadsby (2022, p. 125) notes that the multifarious rebranding of ATR(s) has been key to the success of UFIC and PHD, and the leader of each has transformed the traditions strikingly successfully.

5. African Pentecostalism and the Resilience of ATR(s): Towards a Decolonization of Religion in Africa

The discussion above shows the resilience of indigenous religious practices within a Christian tradition that claims to have totally broken from the past. Therefore, the fast growth of PPMs depends on the 'Christianization' of indigenous religious practices, which are presented to believers as 'purely biblical'. The reference to 'biblical' needs further interrogation. Manyonganise (2023), while acknowledging the centrality of the written Bible in Africa, also makes reference to the 'bible of culture'. Both are bibles, but emerging from different contexts. The latter is critical in indigenizing Pentecostalism in Africa. Kgatle (2023) views this as contributing to the decolonization discourse in Africa. He argues that the indigenization of the Pentecostal movement is relevant to the decolonization of the Western expression of Christianity. In his analysis, the indigenized and contextualized gospel in Africa means that Africans are given an opportunity to drink from their own wells. In this case, the syncretic nature of PPMs needs to be viewed positively as a way of trying to understand Christianity using indigenous resources that are useful for meaning-making in both Pentecostal and African spiritualities. Chitando (2021, p. 9) argues that African Pentecostalism must be prepared to engage with ATR(s). If African scholarship is to make a meaningful contribution to the decolonization discourse, they need not rely on theories invented elsewhere to analyze the cultural encounters between African Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion(s). Relying on analyses by scholars such as Sundkler would only result in syncretism being viewed negatively. Mokhoathi (2019) casts aspersions on the detached approaches that Western scholars have used in the interrogation and evaluation of the African religious heritage. It is critical, therefore, for African scholars to have the courage to develop their own tools of analysis that challenge such views and justify the necessity of such cultural encounters. This is useful in decolonizing religion on the African continent, as it makes Christianity a truly African religion. Kgatle and Mofokeng (2019) call for the affirmation of the Africanness and the Christianness of the African Pentecostal community as significant components in nurturing a critical hermeneutic of experience. African scholarship on religion must, therefore, query the continued labelling of African indigenous religious beliefs and practices as evil in need of being thrown into the dustbins of history. The resilience of such practices attests to the fact that they are alive and thriving in the hearts of Africans. In this case, PPMs in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular can be viewed as a useful resource for the decolonization process.

6. Conclusions

The intention of this chapter was to examine the encounters between Prophetic Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion(s) in Zimbabwe. Such encounters were shown

to be located within the discourse on syncretism. In order to situate the subject under discussion in its proper context, a theorization of syncretism was undertaken, highlighting its positive aspects as well as the challenges associated with the term. This article then went on to examine syncretism in African Pentecostalism in general before it engaged with the cultural encounters between PPMs and ATR(s) in Zimbabwe. An engagement with scholarship on African Pentecostalism showed that whenever two religions meet, there is bound to be borrowing, blending and reinterpretation. Having understood this, I, therefore, argued for a positive evaluation of the term and process of syncretism. An examination of cultural encounters between PPMs and ATR(s) in Zimbabwe lead us to the following conclusions. First, we can conclude that lending and borrowing at the confluence of cultural encounters cannot be avoided. Hence, instead of viewing these as negative, it is important to appreciate them. Second, practices and beliefs in PPMs in Zimbabwe show that they have adopted and adapted quite a number of African indigenous practices and beliefs within their own theology. Third, a decolonialized discourse requires that religion plays a significant role not only in its own decolonization, but in the decolonization of other aspects of society. For example, Christianity, which colluded with colonial powers, needs to atone itself of this label by engaging meaningfully in the decolonization process. What this implies is that it cannot continue to demonize ATR(s), but should encourage the appropriation of positive aspects of the religion not only in PPMs, but other Christian traditions as well. This has largely been a desktop research project; future research on the subject requires that empirical data be presented in order to show the attitudes of members of PPMs in Zimbabwe towards the appropriation of African religious beliefs, practices and symbols within their Pentecostal practices.

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