



Negotiating the sacred: A pneumatological hermeneutic of syncretism in African Pentecostalism

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines syncretism in African Pentecostalism using a decolonial pneumatological lens. African Pentecostalism, Charismatics, and neo-Pentecostal movements pursue a distinct pneumatological spirituality, rooted in both indigenous cosmologies and global Pentecostal theology. This article employed qualitative desktop research and used syncretism as a conceptual framework. The findings reveal a departure from Western critiques which frame syncretic practices as theological compromise. Thus, African Pentecostal syncretism uses a Spirit-led negotiation between indigenous cosmology and global Pentecostal theology. The study concludes that syncretism in African Pentecostalism is a decolonial negotiation, not theological compromise. A pneumatological hermeneutic validates hybrid practices, providing a platform for prayers and deliverance against ancestral influences. The article recommends a pneumatological hermeneutic that validates hybrid spiritual practices as legitimate expressions of faith that are tailored to reclaim African agency and militate against Eurocentric ideas of pure Christianity. This study contributes to reconceptualises syncretism as a decolonial practice in African Pentecostalism.

Keywords: African Indigenous Spirituality, African Pentecostalism, Syncretism, Pneumatology.

INTRODUCTION

Pentecostalism, particularly African Pentecostalism and spirituality, is an intricate concept to delineate. African Pentecostalism is diverse and difficult to explicitly define.¹ Broadly, African Pentecostalism encompasses various movements such as classical Pentecostal denominations, African Initiated Churches (AICs), and newer prophetic movements, which dynamically engage with indigenous spiritualities. Different denominations within African Pentecostalism prioritise different aspects. The remarkable expansion of the African Pentecostal movement and its various manifestations and schisms represent the fastest-growing form of Christianity today. The rapid rise of African Pentecostalism across Africa and within African Christianity over the past fifty years is so significant that it is often called the New African Reformation of the 20th century. There has been a prediction for the exponential growth of African Pentecostalism; in 2002,

¹ Nomatter Sande, "Mental Health and African Pentecostalism: Unpacking the Two Sides of the Coin.," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 11, no. 9 (2025): 452.

approximately 11% of the African population had converted to Pentecostalism. In 2014, Allan Anderson predicted a significant development within Pentecostal Christianity.² As of 2023, Pew Research indicates that Pentecostals and Charismatics make up 36% of sub-Saharan Africa's population, with Nigeria alone having over 80 million followers, a 400% growth since 2000.³ This phenomenon is not exclusive to Africa. Syncretic negotiations between indigenous cosmologies and global faiths are evident in Latin American Pentecostalism, such as the combination of Nahuatl rituals with charismatic healing in Mexican *curanderismo*, and in Southeast Asia, exemplified by the Filipino *Simbahan ng mga Anak ni Kristo*, which incorporates folk anito veneration into its worship.⁴

Existing literature show that there is a gradual shift from the emergence and expansion of the Pentecostal movement to its effects and contributions to development, the economy, and well-being. Equally important is the need to confront syncretism as a living theological dilemma. This article addresses the syncretism that arises from the spiritual African desire to connect with God, a gap this article intends to fill. Besides the syncretism issues, this article proposes a pneumatological hermeneutic that offers a decolonial paradigm relevant to various contexts, challenging Eurocentric dichotomies of "pure" versus "hybrid" faith globally, as echoed by Marzal and critically framed within decolonial theory by Mignolo.⁵ Further, the pneumatological hermeneutics draws from Amos Young's theology of the Spirit's cross-cultural presence guided by Nimi Warikobo's ethical imagination.

The paper advances that syncretism in African Pentecostalism should be understood as a decolonial negotiation rather than a decolonial corruption. In this study, "pneumatological hermeneutic" is defined as a Spirit-led interpretive framework that discerns continuities (for instance, healing as both spiritual and medical) and discontinuities (for example, divination) between indigenous worldviews and Christian faith. The paper first conceptualises syncretism, followed by an explanation of the methodology used for this article. The African indigenous spiritual worldview is provided as a basis for Pentecostal pneumatology, followed by an overview of the African Pentecostal spirituality dispositions. Recommendations for pneumatological hermeneutics are provided.

METHODOLOGY

This study analysed sermons from selected African Pentecostal churches throughout Africa, particularly from prominent African Pentecostal leaders, including but not limited to Nigeria's Enoch Adeboye (RCCG), Zimbabwe's Emmanuel Makandiwa (UFIC), and Ghana's Mensa Otabil (ICGC). The timeframe was from 2018 to 2023, and 15 selective sermons were analysed. The sources were mainly YouTube and church archives.

Sermons were selected using purposive sampling focusing on (a) international Pentecostal leaders, (b) availability of videos and (c) information about spiritual warfare and deliverance. Sermons provide a valuable repository of theological contemplation for research, yielding insights into doctrinal interpretations, pastoral applications, and contemporary religious thought. They offer insight into communicating and comprehending theological concepts within faith communities.⁶ The discussion centred on spiritual agency, liberation, and ancestral rites and themes in sermons, which were employed to substantiate assertions on syncretism. Furthermore, peer-reviewed studies, theological writings, and historical documents concerning African Pentecostalism and syncretism were examined. Recent works, such as those of Tagwirei and Youvan, offer pertinent insights.⁷ Their arguments were situated within established frameworks, such as Mbiti's

² Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³ Pew Research Center, *Religion in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC : Pew Research Center, 2023).

⁴ Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Baker Academic, 2005).

⁵ Walter D Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Duke University Press, 2020).

⁶ David Shin, "Applying Biblical Principles Towards a Model of Theological Dialogue at the Hillside O'Malley Church," 2020.

⁷ Kimion Tagwirei, "Weeding Syncretism from Pentecostal Wheat in Zimbabwe," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 105, no. 1 (2024): 1–21; D Youvan, "Converging Divinities: An Exploration of Syncretism Across World Religions," ResearchGate, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379893536_Converging_Divinities_An_Exploration_of_Syncretism_Across_World_Religions.

examination of African religion and Meyer's ethnographic studies of Pentecostal media.⁸ The study focused on peer-reviewed sources while justly incorporating recent works to maintain rigour and relevancy.

Following Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework, which consists of six phases, this study explored patterns and linkages during thematic analysis and focused on comprehending the patterns associated with rebranding Indigenous rituals as Spirit-led activities.⁹ It meticulously examined how power dynamics, including the authority of church leadership and the socio-economic standing of members, influence the understanding and practice of syncretism. It also acknowledged the potential constraints of exclusively depending on sermon analysis, theological texts, and historical data.

This methodology may inadequately encompass the subtleties of personal beliefs and behaviours, as well as the socio-economic elements that shape the manifestation of syncretism. Also, the researchers acknowledge their positionality as both scholars ministering within African Pentecostal church traditions. This positionality helped to access materials and use a balanced interpretive framework. Biases were mitigated by discussing and peer debriefing. The study uses secondary sources and did not require institutional ethical clearance.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Syncretism

This paper uses syncretism as a conceptual framework. Syncretism is used as a lens to understand African Pentecostalism. We argue that syncretism is not a neutral descriptor but a colonial construct. This position is critical to this study because it helps advance a decolonial re-reading of African Pentecostal practices. Syncretism, originally a non-theological term, is more suitable to describe the fusion of diverse religious groups and traditions. Droogers characterises syncretism as a dynamic process in which religious traditions negotiate power and identity, illustrated by the amalgamation of indigenous culture and Pentecostal deliverance practices. According to Sande, "the African diaspora deliverance practices should be understood from a cultural background".¹⁰ This fusion frequently occurs when cultures and religious systems engage, intersect, or converge through the simple process of evolving beliefs within a mixed society.¹¹ If Youvan's argument is accurate, then syncretism, the amalgamation of various religious and cultural traditions, exemplifies human belief systems' dynamic and fluid characteristics.

Historically, Western Christianity in Europe employed the term syncretism specifically about African traditional religions or non-Christian faiths. Given that the notion of syncretism did not stem from Christian theology, it is crucial to elucidate its historical development to tackle specific issues associated with syncretism and the Christianisation of Africa.¹² Contemporary decolonial studies reconceptualise syncretism as a struggle against Eurocentric theological dominance. Moya contends that African Pentecostal 'reverse syncretism', such as the appropriation of ancestral libation as communion rites, subverts colonial dichotomies of 'pure' versus 'syncretic' Christianity, as compared with Asamoah-Gyadu.¹³ Reverse syncretism, a concept introduced by Moya,¹⁴ helps this paper to intentionally reclaim and reinterpret indigenous practices within African Pentecostalism to challenge colonial structures. In contrast to passive mixing, reverse syncretism is an intentional act, giving the possibility to reposition African cosmologies as legitimate venues for spiritual engagement.

⁸ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heineman, 1969); Birgit Meyer, "Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana" (California: University of California Press, 2015).

⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

¹⁰ Nomatter Sande, "African Diaspora Pentecostals Deliverance Practices and the Lived Reality in the United Kingdom," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 5, no. 16 (2024): 3057–66.

¹¹ Youvan, "Converging Divinities: An Exploration of Syncretism Across World Religions."

¹² Joshua Awienagua Gariba and Bernard Kwame Assenyoh, "Syncretism and Inculturation.: The Encounter Between Christian Theology and Ghanaian Religious Culture," *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 13, no. 1 (2023): 5–22.

¹³ J Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

¹⁴ L. Moya, *Decolonizing Pentecostalism: Reverse Syncretism in African Christianity* (Nairobi: African Theological Press, 2022).

From a secular academic perspective, the term syncretism is derived from the Greek word *syncretismos*, signifying unification. The term was employed on the island of Crete to denote their collective solidarity in confronting a shared adversary, despite their divergent interests. Furthermore, the phrase described “the behaviour of the Cretans, who, despite frequently engaging in disputes and conflicts among themselves, reconciled their differences and united in the face of external threats”.¹⁵ The New Dictionary of Theology and several dictionaries and encyclopaedias of religion and theology generally credit the initial usage of the term syncretism to the Greek historian Plutarch (50 AD—120 AD). Leopold and Jansen contend that the term's usage disclosed its connotation as affirmative and ethnic.¹⁶ The cultural awareness was maintained even in proverbs that cautioned individuals against division and urged them to be together or syncretic for communal survival.

Consequently, the initial interpretation of syncretism was not solely affirmative or ethnic; the phrase functioned as a survival tactic to foster harmony and concord despite disparities. Interpreted positively for millennia, syncretism was regarded as the driving force behind all religions and cultures. Christianity, as a historical religion, has endured due to its ability to incorporate other elements, hence broadening its influence.¹⁷

The integration of deities and customs has been a persistent motif throughout history. The term syncretism has changed throughout the years, leading to its contemporary interpretation derived from “*synkerannumi*,” signifying the amalgamation of incompatible elements.¹⁸ Theologians of the modern Protestant Reformation characterised the betrayers and dissenters of reformed orthodoxy as syncretic during the 16th and 17th centuries. Kraemer accurately employed syncretism to differentiate non-Christian religions from Christianity.¹⁹ Non-Christian faiths possessed an inherent syncretic philosophy. In contrast to Christianity, there was an unauthorised amalgamation of many religious practices.²⁰

AFRICAN INDIGENOUS SPIRITUAL WORLD

Instead of bringing exhaustive ethnography, we used selective indigenous pneumatological patterns that create cognitive affinity with African Pentecostal spirituality. This approach helps us to explain why syncretic negotiation occurs. The expressions of African Pentecostal pneumatology strongly align with the perspectives of African traditional religion. The African Indigenous spiritual realm is replete with intriguing phenomena, rendering its rituals and beliefs deserving of examination to comprehend their worldview. Their conviction arises from the imperative of communicating with the deceased, who are thought to reside in the spiritual realm, under spiritual possession. This elucidates the significance of ancestral spirits and the extent of their influence on individuals.

Bojuwoye asserts that ancestor spirits are considered deceased relatives in the spiritual realm.²¹ Conversely, Murphree asserts that the spirit of the deceased transforms and evolves into an ancestor.²² The concept of worrying spirits is a prevalent phenomenon across the African continent. Mbiti articulated that distinct categories of spirits exist, namely, entities created by God and those formerly living beings and now deceased.²³ Ancestral spirits are classified as belonging to the final group. Amanze elucidates that ancestor spirits safeguard the surviving households from perils, including illness, deprivation, famine, and witchcraft.²⁴ Nonetheless, there are repercussions for not adhering to conventional ethical standards.

¹⁵ A. Leopold and J. Jansen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁶ Leopold and Jansen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*.

¹⁷ Leopold and Jansen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*.

¹⁸ Leopold and Jansen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, 14.

¹⁹ Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938).

²⁰ Leopold and Jansen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*.

²¹ Olaniyi Bojuwoye, “Integrating Principles Underlying Ancestral Spirits Belief in Counseling and Psychotherapy,” *IFE Psychologia: An International Journal* 21, no. 1 (2013): 74–89.

²² Marshall W. Murphree, *Christianity and the Shona*, (Athlone Press, 1969).

²³ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

²⁴ James N Amanze, *African Traditional Religion in Malawi : The Case of the Bemba Cult* (Blantyre: Claim Publications, 2002).

A fundamental aspect of spiritual tradition is that it aids people in comprehending life transformations. Thus, ideas and actions are consistently shaped and informed. These consist of profound convictions, methodologies, and practices rooted in many African beliefs. Spiritual tradition pertains to two dimensions: the spiritual and the physical realms. The spiritual realm contains numerous locations or abodes for the ancestors and the divine.

Dickson and Ellingworth examine the phenomenon of spiritual possession as a prevalent occurrence among African populations.²⁵ This is seen as a fundamental method of communication with entities in both the spiritual and physical realms. The ancestors are seen as possessing direct dominion over all earthly matters and the capability to exert influence at will. This has caused humanity to rely on its forebears. Wilkenson asserts that spiritual possession is a conventional term that reflects the concept that an individual exhibits traits indicative of their spirit being overtaken by an ancestor.²⁶ This ancestor typically possesses the ability to convey significant messages to the clan, often manifested through prolonged illness of the person.

Mbiti contends that when an ancestor assumes control, the individual is not intimidated; so, it is not invariably necessary, and individuals evoke this through distinctive dances and various traditional musical instruments.²⁷ This results in the individual being overtaken by the ancestral spirit, with manifestations of possession varying, including instances of collapse, convulsions, and moaning sounds. In this context, particularly with spiritual dominion and illness, a witch doctor facilitates the ritual to obtain essential insights into the spirit and its demands. Mbiti asserted that the demands of the spirit could provide difficulties for the family. Consequently, the family will seek ways to ensure the spirit attains calm.²⁸

A deceased individual interred away from their birthplace is believed to necessitate appropriate burial procedures at their place of origin, as conveyed by the possessed individual. Conversely, Chidester asserts that the ceremony necessitates a traditional healer.²⁹ Moreover, the conventional healer or intermediary must possess the ability to communicate with the ancestors and convey the family's requirements. Should a sacrifice be necessary, it ought to be made at the discretion of the ancestor. The ritual sacrifice of the cow is significant, necessitating adherence to precise guidelines, including the symbolic representation of meat portions in the spiritual exercise. The communication between the living and the ancestors involves the execution of structured sacrifices and pleas.³⁰ The rites necessitate a cow and beer produced by elderly women, thereby summoning the spirit of the deceased to engage with the living, specifically the ancestor.

Another significant aspect to comprehend is that, during connection with the ancestor, the medium or spiritual leader typically enters a trance state. Ter Haar asserts that throughout this period, the medium depends on communications from the ancestors.³¹ This compels the family to convey the essential message to prevent inciting the ancestors' wrath, with the spiritual leader providing guidance. This argument underscores the significance of the ceremony's completion in Zulu culture, wherein the incineration of sacrificial animal bones symbolises a new beginning for the family.³² Conversely, the Shangaan family ceremony is conducted through dance and drumming, invoking the spirits of ancestors. During this ceremony, the spirit of the ancestor occupies an individual, and the family recognises the ancestor's presence. The individual will commence informing the family. An individual assisting the possessed person will don attire symbolising the individual, engage in dance, and perform songs. A song will convey the identity of the present ancestor to the family, who will then engage in dialogue with the ancestor. Recent ethnographies

²⁵ Kwesi Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 30.

²⁶ J Wilkenson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1992), 45.

²⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969.

²⁸ J.S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1991).

²⁹ David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa (Routledge Revivals)* (Routledge, 2014).

³⁰ Jim Kiernan, "African Traditional Religions in South Africa," In M. Prozesky & J. de Gruchy (Eds.), *Living faiths in South Africa* (pp. 15–27) (David Philip, 1995). 20.

³¹ Gerrie Haar, Ambrose Moyo, and S Nondo, *African Traditional Religions in Religious Education: A Resource Book with Special Reference to Zimbabwe*, (Utrecht University, 1992).

³² Chidester, *Religions of South Africa (Routledge Revivals)*.

(e.g., Meyer,) illustrate how modern Zulu ancestral rituals, such as *ukubuyisa* (calling back the dead), match Pentecostal altar calls for spiritual rejuvenation, demonstrating syncretic continuity.³³

Chidester provides a significant perspective on religious beliefs and practices, claiming that Africans worshipped ancestors.³⁴ However, this assertion has been contested by others who argue that Africans did not engage in ancestor worship but rather accorded similar respect to the living elderly. In contrast, Moila asserts that the tradition of sacrificing rites to ancestors has ancient origins; for instance, in Acts chapter 14, a cow was offered as a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas following a cure.³⁵ Moreover, the sacrificial event is more comprehensively understood across many African nations, ethnic groups, and familial units.

Chidester posited that ceremonial sacrifices to deities have existed historically, suggesting that such practices might be inferred across numerous customs. This is contingent upon the ceremony, including child naming, circumcision, and ancestor invocation.³⁶ Thus, regardless of the circumstances, the ritual, whether dedicated to ancestors or involving many deeds, is recognised as an endeavour indicative of worship. Mbiti asserted that Africans are profoundly religious, since religious commitment permeates every aspect of life to the extent that separation is unfeasible.³⁷ However, Mndende asserts that religiosity is intertwined with every culture and deeply embedded in lifestyle; hence, it cannot be examined in isolation as a distinct phenomenon.³⁸ Thus, families conduct ceremonies to offer sacrifices to their ancestors, a form of religion that venerates their forebears. Moreover, this may be regarded as a tribute to the ancestors or a means of resurrecting their memory; yet all activities conducted during the ceremony contribute to its classification as a religious event. The ritualistic slaughter of the cow, the pouring of traditional beer, and the dance are all focused on honouring the ancestors.

Mbiti elucidates that a fundamental aspect of African culture's religious beliefs and rituals is the recognition of ancestors as living entities.³⁹ Nevertheless, they are deceased and have a prime position among the spirits and humanity, akin to God and individuals. Africans exhibit profound religiosity in all facets of their everyday existence; nonetheless, this devotion reveals little about the nature of God. Nevertheless, it primarily pertains to their ceremonial and ritualistic beliefs and activities. Moreover, Africans typically do not scrutinise the veracity of God. Africans lack a historical revelatory understanding of God or are unwilling to adopt that stance. Their perception is that God is distant while their forefathers are proximate, yet they feel their forebears are close to God. Africans believe that during rituals of sacrifice and prayer, ancestors listen and provide assistance. This resulted in recognising that Africans engage in and adhere to ancestral veneration. Nigerian Pentecostal pastors, such as Enoch Adeboye (RCCG), categorically characterise ancestor veneration as 'demonic covenants,' promoting 'Spirit-led disinheritance' via deliverance prayers.⁴⁰ This repudiation of ancestor veneration in certain factions of Pentecostalism underscores the persistent conflict between the acceptance of indigenous customs and the commitment to a more conservative understanding of Christian theology. It also illustrates the intricate socio-political milieu in which African Pentecostalism functions. In numerous African nations, Pentecostal churches have emerged as pivotal entities in delivering social services and promoting political reform, frequently compensating for the deficiencies of ineffectual or corrupt governments. The intertwining of religious membership with resource access and political influence further complicates the dynamics of syncretism. The denunciation of ancestor veneration can thus be perceived as a theological position and a tactic for consolidating authority and forging a unique identity within a competitive religious milieu.

³³ Meyer, "Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana."

³⁴ Chidester, *Religions of South Africa* (Routledge Revivals).

³⁵ Moeahabo Phillip Moila, *Toward an Anthropologically Informed Theology: The Kingdom of God Theology, Christian Presence, and Conflict in Pedi Society* (South Africa) (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1987).

³⁶ Chidester, *Religions of South Africa* (Routledge Revivals).

³⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

³⁸ Nokuzola Mndende, "Spiritual Reality in South Africa," *Secular Spirituality as a Contextual Critique of Religion*, 2006, 153–73.

³⁹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

⁴⁰ Richard Burgess, "Nigeria's Christian Revolution," *The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2021), 45.

This differs from Ghana's Mensa Otabil, who reinterprets ancestral dignity as the 'cloud of witnesses' (Heb. 12:1), illustrating adaptive syncretism.⁴¹ Meyer's analysis of Ghanaian Pentecostal cinema illustrates how 'Nollywood' storylines portray spiritual warfare, integrating traditional witchcraft motifs with Pauline armour images (Eph. 6:10–18).⁴² This media-driven syncretism attracts 200 million viewers weekly, influencing popular pneumatology.

PNEUMATOLOGICAL DISPOSITIONS IN AFRICAN PENTECOSTALISM

This section analyses how African Pentecostal leaders either reproduce or resist colonial anti-syncretism discourse, revealing syncretism as a site of theological contestation. The African origins and reverence for its traditions have been the primary factors driving the remarkable advancement of African Pentecostals on the continent.⁴³ Asamoah-Gyadu indicates that this was reinvigorated by the significant impact of William James Seymour, an African-American, and the 1906 Azusa Street revival.⁴⁴ This established Pentecostalism as a globally acknowledged movement initiated by a black individual. The impact of W. J. Seymour's black spirituality must be acknowledged. Cox notes the proximity of empathy between Pentecostal spirituality and original devoutness concerning W. J. Seymour's spirituality.⁴⁵ Ojo challenges Nigerian 'Prosperity Pentecostalism' for facilitating 'reverse syncretism,' wherein local wealth rituals (e.g., Yoruba *àṣẹ*) are reinterpreted as 'Seed Faith' theology.⁴⁶ This commodification threatens to diminish the Spirit to a transactional entity, deviating from Seymour's egalitarian pneumatology. Moreover, elucidating how the dynamics of exploitation inherent in conventional societal beliefs are reemerging through a novel approach, publicly endorsed by Christianity. However, this ethos, an unforeseen amalgamation of indigenous African elements, had already integrated into Protestant Christian worship; for example, trances, ecstasies, visions, dreams, healing, and deliverance, persisting with the same biblical practices. Furthermore, Anderson asserts that African Americans did not perceive these initial rituals merely as inheritances but rather adapted and transformed them for spiritual purposes in diverse contexts.⁴⁷

Critics contend that the transactional nature of prosperity theology threatens to diminish the Spirit to a "divine ATM" worldwide, exemplified by the "seed faith" initiatives of Korean megachurches⁴⁸ and the monetisation of "prayer cloths" by U.S. televangelists.⁴⁹ The pneumatological hermeneutic may reconceptualise prosperity rituals as communal solidarity; for instance, Ghanaian *àṣẹ* can be redefined as "collective anointing for socio-economic uplift", linking prosperity theology with indigenous principles of reciprocity.⁵⁰

A practical approach to comprehending African Pentecostal spiritual ideas and practices is to examine their development. This situation highlights that African Traditions have been viewed negatively as malevolent and threatening, leading to discouraging perspectives regarding the potential for any positive outcomes from African nations. In this context, Gunda asserted that spiritual holiness is a contentious concept, characterised by irreconcilable divisions within which the Christian faith is emerging, particularly the belief in the imposition of hands through the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ Furthermore, there are accusations that these African Pentecostal spiritual churches employ pagan forces, specifically those from African Traditional

⁴¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*.

⁴² B Meyer, *Pentecostalism and Media in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁴³ W. J. Hollenweger, "The Pentecostal Elites and the Pentecostal Poor: A Missed Dialogue?," in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, ed. K. Poewe (University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 200–214.

⁴⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*.

⁴⁵ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (Hachette+ ORM, 2009).

⁴⁶ M. A. Ojo, "Reverse Syncretism in Nigerian Prosperity Gospel," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 31, no. 2 (2022): 89–107.

⁴⁷ Jeffrey E Anderson, *Conjure in African American Society* (LSU Press, 2005).

⁴⁸ J. H. Lee, "Prosperity Gospel and Korean Megachurches: A Critical Examination," *Journal of Asian and Asian American Theology* 22, 2020, 33–52.

⁴⁹ J. L. Walton, "Televangelism and the Commodification of Prayer: From Oral Roberts to the 'Prophets of Profit,'" *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 22 (2021): 1–15.

⁵⁰ M. P. K. Okyerefo, *The Public Face of African New Religious Movements in Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

⁵¹ Masiwa Ragies Gunda, "African 'Biblical' Christianity," *Multiplying in the Spirit, BiAS* 15 (2014): 145–60.

religions, to perform miracles and healings. Nonetheless, Meyer asserted that Pentecostal churches are fundamentally based on the operation of the Holy Spirit, which includes healing the afflicted, exorcising malevolent forces, prophesying, and performing miracles.⁵² Mwandayi asserts that the allegation of employing pagan powers persists, rendering the claims credible and validated.⁵³ Conversely, traditional churches have vehemently accused Pentecostal churches of deriving their authority from African Traditional religion. Meyer prompts an examination of the role of African Pentecostal churches.⁵⁴ If these churches acquire elements of African Traditional religion, then it is unnecessary to dispute the assertions. Biri contends that if this assertion holds, how can the same power operate against its annihilation?⁵⁵ It is imperative to acknowledge that these churches were established by a man of God, who possessed influence and garnered a substantial following due to his preaching, healing, and miraculous acts.⁵⁶ The authority of the Holy Spirit accomplished this.

The African continent is distinctly characterised by the remarkable viewpoint of the current spiritual realm and an ongoing apprehension of catastrophic devastation inflicted by malevolent spirits. Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa's UFIC in Zimbabwe integrates *mapfenya* (whispered prayers), akin to Shona kurova guva ancestral invocations, merging charismatic zeal with traditional spirituality.⁵⁷ This perspective appears to align with the biblical scriptures (Eph. 6:12 and Col. 2:15). The invocation of the malevolent spirit vividly illustrates the disparity. This results in Pentecostal pneumatology appealing to various Christians and non-Christians because of its emphasis on exorcism and deliverance programs. Pentecostals choose to define their ministry as deliverance rather than exorcism. Nel posits that one may evaluate African Pentecostals who emphasise deliverance or engage in unconventional behaviours.⁵⁸ The behaviours suggest that there are issues and enquiries regarding Africa to which Western Christians lack appropriate answers. Pentecostalism permits the anticipated recreation of former biblical events within congregations. Lataster asserts that the formulation of beliefs and practices about signs and miracles must persist in contemporary times.⁵⁹ Malobi contends that a distinctive feature of Pentecostal pneumatology is its endorsement of ancestral worship.⁶⁰

This was corroborated by Mwandayi who contends that at that period, prophets in Zimbabwe, such as Emmanuel Makandiwa and Urbert Angel, dominated the media with assertions of healing experiences.⁶¹ Mwandayi contends that there is no linkage between the miracle works performed by these pastors and traditional spiritualists.⁶² Taringa affirmed that pastors of the African Independent Church used elements of African Traditional religion in their therapeutic practices.⁶³ Additionally, Taringa referenced a prophetess of the Holy Apostolic who employed items for healing purposes.⁶⁴ In this context, Shoko and Chiwara contended that African Pentecostal pastors, such as Makandiwa, assert their utilisation by God's Spirit,

⁵² Birgit Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* (Springer, 2009).

⁵³ Canisius Mwandayi, *Death and After-Life Rituals in the Eyes of the Shona: Dialogue with Shona Customs in the Quest for Authentic Inculturation*, vol. 6 (University of Bamberg Press, 2011).

⁵⁴ Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*.

⁵⁵ K. Biri, "The Silent Echoing Voices," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 2012, 33.

⁵⁶ Biri, "The Silent Echoing Voices."

⁵⁷ Tapiwa Praise Mapuranga, Ezra Chitando, and Masiwa Ragies Gunda, "Studying the United Family International Church in Zimbabwe: The Case for Applying Multiple Approaches to the Study of Religion and Religious Phenomena," 2013. In Shona, the word "Mapfenya" is not a standard term for a "spirit." Rather, it translates generally to "turning something over," "uncovering," or "revealing." Spiritually, this usually refers to the act of a traditional healer (n'anga) using bones (hakata) or divination to uncover the hidden causes of an illness, misfortune, or curse.

⁵⁸ Marius Nel, "The African Background of Pentecostal Theology: A Critical Perspective," *In Die Skriflig* 53, no. 4 (2019): 1–8.

⁵⁹ Raphael Lataster, *There Was No Jesus, There Is No God: A Scholarly Examination of the Scientific, Historical, and Philosophical Evidence & Arguments for Monotheism* (Raphael C. Lataster, 2013).

⁶⁰ J. Malobi, *Ancestral Veneration* (Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae 112, 2005).

⁶¹ Mwandayi, *Death and After-Life Rituals in the Eyes of the Shona: Dialogue with Shona Customs in the Quest for Authentic Inculturation*.

⁶² Mwandayi, *Death and After-Life Rituals in the Eyes of the Shona: Dialogue with Shona Customs in the Quest for Authentic Inculturation*.

⁶³ Nisbert Taringa, "For with God Nothing Is Impossible," *Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe*, 2013, 203.

⁶⁴ Taringa, "For with God Nothing Is Impossible."

thereby sharing a comparable pneumatological stance with witchdoctors who operate under the influence of ancestral spirits, which are regarded as God's Spirit in African traditional belief.⁶⁵

Daneel's pivotal insertion emphasised the influences, characterising them predominantly as pneumatological: embracing ancient practices and rituals, engaging in prophetic activities, and addressing malevolent forces through medicinal practices, sorcery, healing, and deliverance.⁶⁶ Furthermore, their lectures on healing from ailments, liberation from demonic possession, and specifically acquiring strength from the Holy Spirit to assist believers in confronting malevolent spirits are embraced by numerous individuals. Given the many characteristics involved, it seems unnecessary to explore beyond the pneumatological factors, as evidenced in healings and deliverance across all aspects of life, to ascertain the essential purpose behind the appeal of Spirit-oriented ministries to African individuals. This demonstrated that faiths assisted various challenges, not solely spiritual ones.

A significant aspect to consider is the Pentecostal movement originating from black churches established by American slaves; thus, a crucial point is its evolving responsiveness. Anderson asserts that several of the foundational indicators of Pentecostalism stem from religious self-expression and the incorporation of acquired African customs.⁶⁷ Moreover, it can be unequivocally asserted that Pentecostalism originated from the historical context of marginalised black communities, with its beliefs rooted in African religious traditions. Hollenweger and MacRobert assert that the Holy Spirit's possession of an individual elicits emotions characterised by motorised actions, which are distinctively African rather than Western.⁶⁸ The essence of African sustenance is the consistent clapping, participation in hymns, and proximity to the Lord during the service and baptisms. The essential aspect is the continuation of African traditional religious practices and the revelation of God's Spirit within Pentecostalism, which has previously been recognised. The advent of Pentecostalism in the West contributed a positive authenticity to Black Christianity in America through remarkable advancements. Nevertheless, it does not claim that the original Pentecostalism fully understood the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Pentecostalism was introduced in South Africa in 1908, establishing an African foundation that facilitated its dissemination across the continent. This corresponds with Bhabha's idea of hybridity, wherein syncretism constitutes a 'third space' that empowers African Pentecostals to challenge colonial theological dichotomies and regain spiritual autonomy.⁶⁹

Daneel indicates that numerous studies have examined the impact of the inception and development of Spirit-filled churches.⁷⁰ Anderson aimed to delineate the critical components of pneumatology, emphasising the greater significance of social, political, financial, and cultural factors,⁷¹ whereas Daneel contended that the primary challenge in understanding the emergence of Pentecostalism was fundamentally religious.⁷² In this context, Mbiti asserts that Pentecostal ministries seldom possess a meticulously formulated doctrine.⁷³ This necessitated a greater emphasis on pneumatology than that of Western ministries. Conversely, Pentecostal churches in Africa exert a distinct impact, particularly affecting theology in African Christianity, notably in the realm of pneumatology. Mbiti contends that African Pentecostal congregations ultimately embody a theology of manifestation.⁷⁴ Becken argues that the absence of an official doctrine in African Pentecostalism is inconsequential; they may possess some belief system.⁷⁵ He stated that a doctrine

⁶⁵ T. Shoko and J. Chiwara, "The Prophetic Figure," in *Prophets, Profits, and the Bible*, ed. T. Shoko (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013), 219–34.

⁶⁶ Marthinus L Daneel, "Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches/1 Background and Rise of the Major Movements," *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, 1971.

⁶⁷ Allan Anderson, "Deliverance and Exorcism in Majority World Pentecostalism," in *Deliverance and Exorcism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Paternoster, 2011), 101–19.

⁶⁸ Walter J Hollenweger and Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (Springer, 1988).

⁶⁹ Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2012).

⁷⁰ Daneel, "Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches/1 Background and Rise of the Major Movements."

⁷¹ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*.

⁷² Daneel, "Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches/1 Background and Rise of the Major Movements."

⁷³ J. S. Mbiti, "Christianity and African Religion," in *Facing the New Challenge: The Message of PACLA*, ed. M. Cassidy and L. Verlinden (Lusaka: Evangel, 1978), 272–83.

⁷⁴ Mbiti, "Christianity and African Religion."

⁷⁵ Hans-Jürgen Becken, "Relevant Theology for Africa: Report on a Consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Natal, September 12-21, 1972," *Paperbacks of the Missiological Institute at LTC*, 1973.

responds to the Bible and divine commandments. The African Independent pastors lay hands on the ill, and their congregants engaged in the formal worship service, affirming theological principles.

In summary, Pentecostalism emphasises the significance of encounter as a fundamental element of supernatural belief. Warrington posits that the principle embodies the individual's earnest aspiration for a tangible encounter with the Holy Spirit, who imparts revelations of Jesus through might and magnificence.⁷⁶ Pentecostalism posits that an encounter with Jesus Christ transforms an individual's lifestyle, particularly in the context of worship. The text delineates the fundamental principles of worship doctrine that pertain to the end times, specifically highlighting the trance-like state characteristic of Pentecostal worship and the relationships between believers and Jesus Christ. Alexander observes that, about divine existence and mysteries, the prominence of Pentecostals is evident via the manifestations of the power and presence of Jesus Christ, which elucidates the preparedness to comprehend Jesus as articulated by spiritual teaching.⁷⁷ Consequently, encountering the Lord is the paramount foundation for Pentecostal practices, wherein one discerns, senses, and experiences God.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

With the provided indigenous pneumatological background and a survey of contemporary Pentecostal expressions, in this section we analyse how syncretism functions as liberate negotiation rather than theological compromise. African Pentecostalism and the traps of syncretism are inevitable. The rapid growth of Pentecostalism in Africa has given rise to various forms, resulting in numerous challenges and dilemmas. Unlike traditional Pentecostals in the West, African Pentecostals are more vulnerable to syncretism. We discuss simultaneously two themes: first, the insatiable need for communion with God using contextualisation and inculturation and second, syncretism as epistemic resistance from a decolonial approach.

African Insatiable need for Spiritual fulfilment

The aspiration of African Pentecostals to engage with God is rooted in the traditional African religious perspective. Turaki asserts that the spiritual realm constitutes a fundamental spiritual necessity for individuals in traditional African faiths. The Earth constitutes a unity that connects the cosmic and spiritual realms.⁷⁸ The spiritual realm is enigmatic, and individuals do not entirely comprehend it. This leads to varied interpretations of God among various individuals.

For any theology to hold significance, it is essential to contextualise activities, exemplified by how African Pentecostals position themselves within the African milieu. The difficulty of contextualisation involves the amalgamation or attempted synthesis of disparate religions with distinct philosophical traditions. Greater contextualisation and the distinction between cultural syncretic behaviours and the real biblical teachings must be established. Academics have already identified the issue of cultural separation. The arrival of Western Christianity in Africa is culpable of integrating and elevating Western culture as an intrinsic component of Christianity. The Euro-Western culture significantly highlights the difficulties of syncretism. Mbiti asserts that the missionaries arrived in Africa with an established civilisation. African individuals were profoundly immersed in their own culture and traditions.⁷⁹ The amalgamation of Christian and African

⁷⁶ Keith Warrington, *The Message of the Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity Press, 2009).

⁷⁷ Kimberly Ervin Alexander, "'Singing Heavenly Music': R. Hollis Gause's Theology of Worship and Pentecostal Experience," *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Worship*, 2016, 201–20.

⁷⁸ Yusufu Turaki, "African Traditional Religious Systems as Basis of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare. Lausanne Movement," 2000.

⁷⁹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books., 1989).

customs and cultures led to acculturation, resulting in a hybrid culture. A subtle distinction between syncretism and contextualisation complicates the evaluation of syncretic behaviours.⁸⁰

In place of acculturation, an alternative perspective is termed inculturation. Inculturation is broadly defined as:

The embodiment of Christian life and the Christian message within a specific cultural context, whereby this experience is articulated through culturally relevant elements and evolves into a principle that invigorates, guides, and unifies the culture, thereby transforming it to achieve “a new creation.”⁸¹

Focusing solely on the supremacy of the Holy Spirit among African Pentecostals prompts numerous enquiries regarding the relationship between Christianity and other non-Christian faiths that acknowledge the Spirit. Amos Yong, the Chinese American Pentecostal, contends that the daily experiences of the Spirit among Pentecostals and charismatics demonstrate undeniable similarities across global religious traditions.⁸² He argues that the existence of cultural, linguistic, and theological disparities renders some degree of syncretism unavoidable. When the gospel is introduced to other nations and traditions, cultural adaptations inevitably influence its purity, resulting in syncretism.⁸³

Juan Sepúlveda, the Chilean Pentecostal, distinctly acknowledges that the desire to maintain the integrity of the gospel message has consistently outweighed the desire to inculturate it.⁸⁴ The meaning of the gospel message is incomprehensible without the interplay of our cultural perspectives. Some degree of syncretism is unavoidable in the process. Adapting Pentecostalism to a pneumatic culture is more readily accomplished in Africa, where a pneumatological worldview prevails, and healing and supernatural manifestations are perceived as 'normal' occurrences. African Pentecostalism, in its various forms and manifestations, is inherently 'syncretistic,' akin to Christianity globally.⁸⁵

Numerous syncretic tendencies and behaviours are evident in several African-initiated churches, incorporating symbols and rituals derived from African religious traditions with Western Christian cultures. African Pentecostal-initiated churches have incorporated numerous Indigenous traditional religious traditions into their worship, resulting in their characterisation as an Africanised form of Christianity and allegations of syncretism.⁸⁶

Material objects are integral to African cultural practices and exemplify the interconnection between African Pentecostal Christianity and indigenous spiritualities and religions. New syncretic practices have emerged, typically with local significance, as African Pentecostals advocate for a pragmatic gospel aimed at addressing practical and contextual issues such as poverty, illness, malevolent spirits, witchcraft, and unemployment.⁸⁷

For instance, Zimbabwe's United Family International Church (UFIC), under the leadership of Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, integrates *mapfenya* (whispered prayers) into deliverance rituals, a technique historically associated with Shona ancestral invocation (*kurova guva*). During healing rituals, attendees chant Psalms while dispersing herbal powders, merging biblical power with indigenous medical meaning. This reflects Meyer's finding of Nigerian Pentecostals employing anointed oils like traditional charm practices.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ Tagwirei, “Weeding Syncretism from Pentecostal Wheat in Zimbabwe.”

⁸¹ Peter Schineller, “Inculturation: A Difficult and Delicate Task,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 3 (1996): 109–12.

⁸² Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

⁸³ Allan Anderson, “The Gospel and Culture in Pentecostal Mission in the Third World,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 27, no. 2 (1999): 220–30.

⁸⁴ Juan Sepúlveda, “To Overcome the Fear of Syncretism: A Latin American Perspective,” *Studies In The Intercultural History Of Christianity*, 1997, 157–68.

⁸⁵ Sepúlveda, “To Overcome the Fear of Syncretism: A Latin American Perspective.”

⁸⁶ Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century*.

⁸⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*.

⁸⁸ Meyer, “Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana.”

Such instances demonstrate that syncretism functions as a practical negotiation rather than a theological concession.⁸⁹

Syncretism as Epistemic Resistance: A Decolonial Approach

Decolonial scholars such as Mignolo characterise syncretism as epistemic resistance, wherein African Pentecostals assert spiritual agency in opposition to colonial impositions of 'pure' Christianity.⁹⁰ Quijano's thesis of 'coloniality of power' further contextualises reverse syncretism (e.g., ancestral libations redefined as communion rites) as a rebellion of Eurocentric religious dominance.⁹¹ Although syncretism has been criticised as a colonial derogatory term,⁹² its redefinition as a dynamic negotiation of spiritual agency is essential today. For instance, Droogers corresponds with the pragmatic interaction of African Pentecostalism with indigenous cosmologies.⁹³ The rebranding of ancestors as communion ceremonies, Asamoah-Gyadu, illustrates that syncretism functions not as a theological compromise but as a practical interpretation of continuity and transgression.⁹⁴

This study goes beyond the criticism of syncretism as a decolonial term to redefine it as a dynamic negotiant of spiritual agency which is essential today. From a constructive versus a destructive syncretism perspective, Chammah Kaunda distinguishes constructive syncretism, where the ideologies of Indigenous practices are intentionally biblically reinterpreted to provide a sound Pentecostalism.⁹⁵ Further, Chammah provides examples such as ancestral libations, a means of communion with the cloud of witnesses. On the other hand, destructive syncretism is viewed as diluting theological integrity; for instance, there is no uncritical adoption of divination. A solution proposed by Asamoah-Gyadu is that African Pentecostalism negotiate this tension by selectively integrating cultural idioms while rejecting incompatible elements.

Accordingly, this approach enables grassroots groups to implement the decolonisation of spiritual hybridity in practice. Initial implementations of this paradigm are observable in Ghana's Perez Chapel, where grassroots Bible study groups reconceptualise *àṣẹ* (Yoruba life-force) as 'Spiritual anointing'.⁹⁶ Such projects illustrate how pneumatological hermeneutics enable communities to decolonise hybrid behaviours while preserving indigenous origins.⁹⁷ Recording these localised changes enhances the framework's pastoral significance. It also enhances participatory action research to record localised modifications of the pneumatological hermeneutic. Partnering with communities such as Perez Chapel in Ghana to jointly develop interpretations of *àṣẹ* could democratise theological production and elevate disadvantaged voices in decolonial discourse.

For instance, asking UFIC members in Zimbabwe regarding their perspectives on *mapfenya* prayers may elucidate how congregants understand the relationship between biblical authority and ancestral symbols. Likewise, focus groups with Ghanaian Pentecostals redefining *àṣẹ* as "spiritual anointing"⁹⁸ may illuminate grassroots theological innovation.⁹⁹

⁸⁹ Likewise, Brazil's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD) engages in "spiritual warfare" against Afro-Brazilian *orixás*, reframing Candomblé-derived rituals as "biblical exorcism" (Birman, 2018). This reflects the deliverance rituals of Nigerian Pentecostalism, while IURD's mass media initiatives (such as broadcast Libertação sessions) enhance the socio-political significance of syncretism in postcolonial identity building. Such instances illustrate the hermeneutic's flexibility of hermeneutics across many media and cultural contexts.

⁹⁰ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*.

⁹¹ Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–32.

⁹² Moya, *Decolonizing Pentecostalism: Reverse Syncretism in African Christianity*.

⁹³ A. Droogers, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2020).

⁹⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*.

⁹⁵ C. J. Chammah Kaunda, "Constructive and Destructive Syncretism in African Pentecostalism," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 28, no. 1 (2019): 45–62.

⁹⁶ Okyerefo, *The Public Face of African New Religious Movements in Diaspora*.

⁹⁷ Hybrid rituals such as Rwandan Pentecostals integrating *gacaca* communal tribunals into trauma therapy services (Nussbaum, 2018). Public health: South African Pentecostals utilising anointed water with ARV therapies (Dube, 2020). Interfaith dialogue: Senegalese Sufi-Pentecostal discussions on *baraka* as divine blessing (Soares, 2016).]

⁹⁸ Okyerefo, *The Public Face of African New Religious Movements in Diaspora*.

⁹⁹ A comparative ethnography of Zimbabwean *mapfenya* prayers and Indonesian Pentecostal adaptations of *kebatinan* mysticism (Hoon, 2022). Likewise, examining media-induced syncretism in Nigerian "Nollywood" versus Indian "Hollywood" Pentecostal films.

TOWARD A PNEUMATOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC

Yong's pneumatological imagination framework asserts the Spirit's presence across all cultures (Acts 17:28), enabling African Pentecostals to identify 'continuities' (e.g., healing as both spiritual and biological) while dismissing 'discontinuities' (e.g., divination).¹⁰⁰ This interpretation transcends syncretism discussions¹⁰¹ by prioritising the agency of the Spirit over cultural dichotomies.¹⁰² These analogies highlight the hermeneutic's capacity to integrate global Pentecostal experiences with indigenous cosmologies within a decolonial framework.

Yong's pneumatological imagination, grounded in the universality of the Spirit (Acts 17:28), offers a decolonial perspective for reinterpreting syncretism.¹⁰³ This paradigm corresponds with Wariboko's ethical imagination, emphasising African action in theological discourse.¹⁰⁴ They collectively contest Eurocentric dichotomies by validating the Spirit's role in indigenous cosmologies. For example, Ghanaian Pentecostals reconceptualising ancestral libations as 'communion with the cloud of witnesses', Asamoah-Gyadu illustrate this hermeneutic: (1) recognise cultural practices (libations), (2) identify continuities (communion as relational spirituality), and (3) dismiss discontinuities (ancestral deification). This technique affirms African spirituality while upholding Christocentric integrity, challenging colonial hierarchies of 'pure' versus 'syncretic' devotion.¹⁰⁵

Yong's pneumatological imagination asserts that the Holy Spirit's global presence (Acts 17:28) facilitates the discerning of "continuities" (shared spiritual ideals) and "discontinuities" (irreconcilable practices) between Christianity and indigenous traditions.¹⁰⁶ This concept legitimises healing rituals among African Pentecostals that combine biological and spiritual care, while dismissing practices such as divination that contradict Christocentric commitment.¹⁰⁷ According to Nel, the issue of Spirit-led hermeneutics is prioritising the use of African oral traditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion, it is recommended that the church use a four-step discernment process: Hermeneutical Protocols

- Mapping – this is where the church identifies indigenous practice
- Testing- the need to evaluate against Christocentric criteria using 1 John 3: 1-3
- Reappropriating- reframing the practice using a pneumatological lens and avoiding ancestral worship
- Catechesis- develop appropriate theological teaching materials.

Theological Education

- Theological institutions across Africa should develop modules about "Decolonial Pneumatology.
- The Module should include topics about the history of syncretism as a colonial construct; practical case studies of constructive syncretism and fieldwork to document local hybrid practices.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that syncretism is neither avoidable nor necessarily deleterious within African Pentecostalism. There should be an intentional reinterpretation of the concept of syncretism using pneumatological hermeneutics. African Pentecostal syncretism should recognise the presence of the Spirit across cultures. To a greater extent, the pneumatological hermeneutic recontextualises African

¹⁰⁰ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

¹⁰¹ Nimi Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit*, vol. 5 (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012).

¹⁰² Korean Pentecostals adapt Confucian ancestor rites (jesa) as "memorial services honouring Christian forebears" (Kim, 2019). Haitian Vodouisant Pentecostals see lwa spirits as "angelic intermediaries" (McAlister, 2018).]

¹⁰³ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

¹⁰⁴ Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit*.

¹⁰⁵ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*.

¹⁰⁶ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

¹⁰⁷ Mookgo S Kgatle, "Peculiarities in the Pentecostal Tradition: Disciplinary and Decolonial Perspectives in a South African Context," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 1–9.

Pentecostalism as a decolonial theology. It embraces hybridity as a form of decolonial theological agency. This reframing has three implications beyond the African contexts: first, it is a departure from global Pentecostalism to abandon Eurocentric purity discourses; second, it is a resource for other world Christian traditions to negotiate indigenous cosmologies, and third, it repositions syncretism as a constructive category for interreligious dialogue. Future studies should encompass detailed interviews and focus groups to further comprehend African Pentecostals' thoroughly lived experiences as they navigate the intersection of Pentecostalism and indigenous culture. Subsequent studies should integrate ethnographic methodologies, including comprehensive interviews with African Pentecostal attendees and leaders. These ethnographic studies should be able to test this syncretic hermeneutic.

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