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Pentecostal practices in post-apartheid South Africa: A critical analysis of faith dynamics, identity construction and processes of social transformation

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Background: After the installation of democracy in South Africa in 1994, Pentecostals and Charismatics have experienced explosive growth and have become major theological forces in the country's faith development. Their proliferation has shaped religious identity, personal expressions of faith and moral values in the context of a rapidly changing post-apartheid society.

Objectives: Against this background, the current study interrogates selected Pentecostal practices in post-apartheid South Africa by questioning the processes of Christian faith, identity formation and social change. The objective is to create a theological-ethical interpretation of these practices against the policy of democratic governance.

Methods: The study uses a desktop methodology to examine existing literature about Pentecostalism in South Africa, which it analyses through thematic and theological-ethical interpretive methods.

Results: The analyses show that Pentecostalism is a dynamic religious movement that empowers individuals and communities and, at the same time, is part of the process of social and religious identity reconstruction. Nevertheless, some practices lead to theological and ethical concerns that deserve to be, and ought to be, rigorously critiqued.

Conclusion: Thus, Pentecostalism has become one of the salient forces of South African society, mediated spiritual renewal and social transformation in the region, at the same time triggering other ethical questions that require theological engagement.

Contribution: This article provides a theological-ethical assessment of the Pentecostal practices in post-apartheid South Africa and pleads for interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and social sciences.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; African Christianity; post-apartheid; South Africa; democracy; identity construction; social transformation; faith dynamics.

Introduction

In post-apartheid South Africa, Pentecostalism has emerged as a dominant religious movement that establishes spiritual beliefs and practices and public displays of religious devotion, which specifically manifest during times of social and economic transformation. The constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and the recognition of social diversity have provided a favourable atmosphere for the expansion of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches both in urban and rural areas. These churches come in many shapes and sizes, such as: (1) storefront churches, (2) megachurches, (3) broadcast ministries, and (4) digital platforms. All of these contribute greatly to the nature of religion and public spirituality of the modern day (Vondey 2020:523).

The Pentecostal churches develop their intense religious experiences by their unique ways of worship, their ways of healing, their prophetic activities and their doctrine of prosperity (Banda 2021:6). In many cases, Pentecostal churches help people to resolve their common life problems through their various ways of practices, which deal with economic problems, health emergency, family disruptions and social disconnection (White 2020:465). The believers achieve certain faith beliefs through their ongoing engagement in the Pentecostal religion practices, which help them in understanding their personal identity and belongingness to the community (Gukurume 2024:5). In this way, Pentecostalism appears not only to be a spiritual movement, but also an important social force in the democratic society of South Africa.

While the existing scholarship on South African Pentecostalism has generated valuable insights into the growth of the churches, leadership and prosperity theology, relatively little attention has been given to the role of Pentecostal practice in the formation of faith, the construction of identities and social participation in a democratic setting. While Pentecostalism in South Africa is diverse and internally complex, this article in no way presents an exhaustive account of South African Pentecostalism. Rather, it gives a theological impressionistic interpretation of selected Pentecostal practices to examine the dynamics of faith, constructions of identity and transformation in social areas through the view of a democratic context (Tsara & Mudimeli 2024:204). This article is structured as follows: (1) it situates Pentecostalism in the context of the democracy of South Africa, (2) the review of the current scholarship on South African Pentecostalism is provided, (3) it introduces the desktop methodology of the research study, which is a combination of various academic disciplines, (4) it examines selected practices of Pentecostals and how they contribute to the shaping of faith, identity, and the formation of a community, and (5) it presents a social analysis of the practices of community members, followed by concluding remarks.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

The research examines Pentecostal worship practices in post-apartheid South Africa through three fields of study: (1) practical theology, (2) the sociology of religion, and (3) theological ethics. The study uses faith dynamics, identity construction and social transformation as analytical tools to investigate the impact of Pentecostal spirituality on religious experience and community identity and social engagement within a democratic society.

Faith dynamics

Pentecostal believers use their everyday experiences to develop their understanding of faith, which they practise through faith dynamics. Pentecostal believers experience the Holy Spirit through their direct experiences, which they demonstrate through prophecy, healing, prayer, testimony and deliverance and expressive worship (Ma 2017:229). Faith exists as a doctrinal belief that further transforms into a religious experience that defines a person's spiritual identity and their actions towards dealing with social issues like poverty, illness and uncertainty (White 2020:468).

Identity construction

The sociological study of religious belief systems defines identity construction as the social mechanisms that religious groups use to create both individual and group identity. In Pentecostal communities, conversion narratives and worship practices, together with dress codes and religious language, create 'born-again' identities that people use to define their membership in the community (Gukurume 2024:7). The religious practices establish social cohesion while creating ethical standards, but they also generate conflicts between the unique religious practices and the need to connect with the wider society.

Social transformation

Social transformation occurs when religious beliefs and practices change how people behave, establish moral standards and conduct social activities. Pentecostal churches operate social transformation processes through their activities, which include spiritual renewal and moral development, their programmes that fight poverty, their counselling services and their community outreach initiatives (Banda 2024:6). The Pentecostal movement teaches personal responsibility, which critics have discovered to be its main focus while it neglects to address systemic social and economic issues (Sanders 2020:435).

Theological-ethical framework

The research employs a Reformed tradition-based theological-ethical framework as its primary method to examine Pentecostal practices. Three guiding principles are used to assess Pentecostal practice in terms of biblical fidelity, respect for the dignity of the human person and corporate responsibility. The study examines whether Pentecostals still adhere to proper methods of interpreting the Bible. The study explores how the Pentecostals relate to other members of their community without compromising their protection and rights. The study assesses how Pentecostal congregations contribute to social justice and their duty as a community to participate in democratic processes.

Research objectives and research question

This article takes a critical and analytical approach to examine Pentecostal practices in post-apartheid South Africa, exploring the transformation of post-apartheid religious practices.

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine key Pentecostal practices in post-apartheid South Africa and their theological implications.
- To analyse how Pentecostal practices shape religious identity in post-apartheid society.
- To assess the role of Pentecostal churches in processes of social transformation.

Research methods and design

The study employs a desktop research design which follows a systematic literature review process. It examines Pentecostalism in post-apartheid South Africa using existing scholarly literature without conducting primary empirical fieldwork. The research method enables the integration of theological, sociological and policy viewpoints about Pentecostal rituals with their historical and social contexts (Topolewski, Górnikiewicz & Stawarz 2023:282; Tsara & Mudimeli 2024:205).

Researchers gathered data from academic databases and digital repositories, which contained peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, doctoral theses, policy reports about Pentecostalism, African Christianity, identity formation and social transformation. The researchers used search terms that included Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, Pentecostal practices, post-apartheid South Africa, faith dynamics, identity construction and social transformation.

The inclusion criteria prioritised peer-reviewed and academically credible sources published in English with direct relevance to Pentecostal practices in South Africa. Most studies with no academic bias that lacked any challenging analysis had already been rejected to ensure academic research. The process of tracking forward and backward citations enabled researchers to discover important academic works. The research utilised selected grey literature sources, including theses and policy documents, according to specific methodological requirements (Guerin, Janta & Van Gorp 2018:2096).

The study employs thematic analysis as its primary analytical method. The research team conducted systematic literature reviews to code information, which they used to compare results until they discovered multiple patterns and themes that showed how Pentecostal faith practices affected identity formation, leadership structures and social transformation. These themes were then synthesised to construct an integrated interpretation of Pentecostalism in South Africa.

The thematic findings were interpreted using a theological–ethical framework informed by the reformed tradition. The framework evaluates Pentecostal practices through three basic principles, which include biblical fidelity, human dignity and communal responsibility. The system establishes a methodical approach to examine both theological studies and social scientific research, which allows for an equal evaluation of Pentecostal practices that exist within the democratic framework of South African society.

Historical and socio-political context of Pentecostalism in post-apartheid South Africa

The birth of democracy in South Africa in 1994 was a major change in the relationship between religion and public life because the new constitutional order affirmed the freedom of religion, belief and association (Kgatle & Hobe 2024:4). Prior to 1994, Pentecostalism in South Africa was present as a minor religious movement due to laws enacted under apartheid that limited its activities and followers of the faith practised in racially segregated churches but one without social or political influence. The Pentecostal community offered spiritual support to the oppressed, but its ability to be involved in public affairs as well as social issues was extremely limited. This constitutional environment opened room for religious movements to function openly and creatively in the public arena, and Pentecostal churches were able to extend their activities for social and civic life outside the private sphere of worship (Muir 2018:167). Within the above context, Pentecostalism became one of Christianity's fastest growing forms of expression, gaining prominence in urban and peri-urban communities, particularly (Kaunda 2015:113).

Under apartheid, many Pentecostal churches were politically disengaged or theologically individualistic and often focused on their own individual salvation and spiritual piety instead of structured action addressing such things as injustice and racial oppression (Kgatle & Hobe 2024:7). This disengagement was in part shaped by theological emphases which discouraged political involvement and spiritualised understandings of social problems (Muir 2018:169). In the democratic period, though, Pentecostalism has grown more public, entrepreneurial and socially visible and is a product of wider transformation on the political and religious scene in South Africa (Kgatle 2023:95). Churches have embraced modern communication technology, organisational models based on marketplaces and transnational networks linking South Africa Pentecostalism to international religious flows, especially those from North America and other parts of Africa (Kgatle 2022:5) (Kaunda 2015:118).

Persistent socio-economic challenges like unemployment, poverty, inequality, crime and poor service delivery have provided fertile ground for Pentecostal expansion in post-apartheid South Africa (Miti 2024:56). In the face of these conditions, Pentecostal churches frequently project themselves as places of hope, moral refit, cure and divine intervention, providing spiritual and pragmatic tools to a community faced with uncertainty and difficulty.

An important point in this context is that, in response to these conditions, Pentecostal churches have often heavily projected themselves as places of hope, moral refuge, a place of cure and divine intervention in line with their doctrine and offering spiritual and practical tools to a community confronted with uncertainty and difficulty. Their capacity to speak to spiritual and material ambitions for life in the language of the Bible and the idioms of African culture, and with the worldly aspirations of the new age, allows Pentecostal churches to speak to the needs of spiritual and material life in a way that strikes a profound chord in disparate communities within class and racial divides (Kaunda 2015:121). Consequently, Pentecostalism is one of the strong strands within religious belief and discourse in a post-apartheid South Africa (Kgatle 2023:34).

The study of Pentecostalism needs to be done through an inquiry that analyses how people practise their faith in their everyday life in their historical and social settings. The democratic system of government helped the Pentecostal churches to grow institutionally, but at the same time affected the way in which their members practised their religion. Accordingly, the next section focuses on an analysis of Pentecostal faith dynamics that makes use of experiential spiritual and theological practices believed to exist where believers interact with God while realising economic hardships within the South African democratic system.

Faith dynamics within Pentecostal practices

Pentecostal faith dynamics are characterised by a strong emphasis on personal religious experience, the presence of the active Holy Spirit and the anticipated supernatural intervention in the reached areas of everyday life in commonality all three characteristics being the key to Pentecostal spirituality (Petersen 1998:18). Central practices include utterances in tongues, prophecy, healing, deliverance and exuberant worship, which act as creational expressions of God's encounter and provide a sense of immediacy and intimacy in the believer's relationship with God (Ma 2017:229). In South Africa, adherents express these practices by participating in prayer vigils that last all night, attending large healing and deliverance services and attending prophetic consultations where they seek guidance from God about things such as employment, health and family matters. These practices reaffirm the belief that God is at work in the day-to-day battles and hopes of the faithful, and they create a faith which is experiential, as opposed to primarily confessional (White 2024:6).

These practices create a type of faith that is more experiential and emotive and emphasises testimony and lived experience rather than a formal doctrine or ecclesial tradition (Petersen 1998:20). Faith is commonly described as a practical and transformative resource that helps believers to cope with adversity, build hope and strive for personal and material betterment in difficult socio-economic settings (White 2020:468). Testimonies of healing, financial breakthrough and moral restoration are a central feature of worship and communal life and play a key role in daily communal life, strengthening collective faith and hardening religious commitment through shared stories of divine intervention (Ma 2017:232).

At the same time, the strong emphasis on experience and supernatural causality can give rise to theological reductionism, especially when spiritual explanations overwhelm social, psychological or structural explanations (Pondani 2019:112). Complex social, psychological and economic issues risk being spiritualised, with inadequate focus on structural injustice or, in the case of systemic inequality, on issues of poverty and marginalisation (White 2020:472). This dynamism raises important questions about the relationship between religion, reason and social responsibility in Pentecostal theology, especially in terms of the need for critical reflection on the relationship between spiritual practices and larger issues of power, accountability and social transformation (White 2024:9).

The dynamics of faith discussed herein develop personal religious devotion and spiritual beliefs, which extend to social and community interactions of the believers. Pentecostal practices foster novel spiritual experiences that are productive in creating new ethical systems, personal identities and collective community relations. Consequently, the discussion no longer focuses on the dynamics of faith but rather on the study of the construction of identity in Pentecostal communities in post-apartheid South Africa. Faith dynamics exposes a Pentecostal belief system that utilises experience as their most basic religious authority and therefore makes it difficult to determine beliefs and hold oneself responsible while trying to develop religious knowledge in a democratic setting.

Identity making in Pentecostal communities

Pentecostalism has a strong significance in the formation of individual and collective identities in post-apartheid South Africa, where faith is often related to expressions of cultural and social belonging (White 2020:466). Conversion narratives typically entail a radical revision of the self, signalled by repentance, moral change, spiritual rebirth and renunciation of earlier lifestyles and highlight the sense of personal distinction to the faithful as well as ethical responsibility (Awoyemi 2025:42). Believers come to understand themselves as 'born-again' Christians who participate in a collective embodied moral and spiritual identity that shapes both their individual aspirations and their relational behaviours within their communities (Gukurume 2024:14).

At the collective level, Pentecostal churches are alternative communities offering a sense of belonging, social support and symbolic meaning (Akerlund & Smidsrod 2024:115). Identity construction is strengthened in collective practices of worship, dress codes, use of language, testimony and ritual participation, which, in turn, produce visible signs of collective identity and spiritual togetherness (White 2020:468). Within the cultural context of South Africa, there are certain markers, such as two clear dress codes, one where members must dress in either humble clothing or 'holy' clothing and participate in local music-based worship and the public sharing of testimonies about healing, financial success, moral development, etc. The use of Pentecostal lingo, such as 'born-again', 'anointed' or 'blessed', is used by people as a way of establishing their membership in the group, while showing off their religious beliefs. These practices foster solidarity among members and separation of the community from the whole society, thus maintaining community purpose and mutual accountability (Awoyemi 2025:45).

While Pentecostal identities can also be used to empower people who have faced marginalisation or social dislocation, they can also lead to exclusionism, especially when commitments to religious affiliation are figured to oppose secular or cultural norms (Gukurume 2024:7). In some cases, one's religious beliefs through their distinctive practices may lead to an advice for believers that they must disengage themselves from some cultural or civic practices as incompatible with their Christian beliefs leading to potential episodes of conflict between religious identity and broader societal integration (Akerlund & Smidsrod 2024:120). This tension points to the ambivalent role of Pentecostal as an identity forming in relation to social integration and a democratic participation of the faith communities work on finding a balance when integrating their spiritual distinctiveness and civic engagement (White 2020:472).

The construction of Pentecostal identity relies on the authority structures of church communities. Leaders set moral boundaries, defining spiritual experiences and valid ways of belief and religious practice. An examination of leadership and authority structures in South African Pentecostal churches constitutes a crucial part of my attempt to comprehend how Pentecostal identities are constructed, controlled and contested by different groups.

Pentecostal leadership and authority

The leadership of Pentecostal churches in South Africa is mostly predicated on charismatic authority in which congregants give their leaders legitimate power upon the basis of their belief system in the leaders' spiritual competencies and vocations from God, as well as their ability to provide leadership and motivation to membership (Kgatle 2024:123). Pastors, prophets and apostles are seen as divinely appointed individuals whose spiritual authority is based on claims about the Holy Spirit, and not institutional qualifications (Markow & Akerlund 2023:530). The congregants view these leaders as their spiritual leaders, thereby creating a high level of trust between the congregants and their leaders, acting as their primary spiritual guides. This trust strengthens the unity of churches in ecclesiastics and leads to the continuity of church growth (Kgatle 2024:126).

The proliferation of Pentecostal churches is quickly linked to the practice of charismatic leadership, which allows for leader consolidating and leadership power while also building hardy ecclesial structures (Tagwirei 2023:2). The leadership framework establishes the church leaders as the spiritual teachers who use their preaching, prophecy and pastoral counselling qualities to form the moral standards and spread knowledge of theology to the flock (Markow & Akerlund 2023:533). Consequently, leadership is expanded to the spiritual growth in the faith and ethical behavioural conduct among God's people (Kgatle 2024:129).

While these patterns of leadership are characteristic of the Pentecostal cohort studied here, they are not all Pentecostal churches, as the classical Pentecostal denominations have different governance systems. The specific problems posed by neo-Pentecostal and prophetic movements have been well described in South Africa. Centralised decision making in Pentecostal leadership structures worries about theology and ethics, even when organisational efficiency has been developed. Weak mechanisms of accountability, combined with ways in which leadership practices are reiterated over time and violated against those foundational principles of ensuring responsible church governance, such as transparency of decision making, decision making on a common base and oversight of ethics (Nhumburudzi 2024:91).

South Africa's accountability shortcomings have led to public controversies about financial abuse, nepotism and the implied abuse of the congregants' trust. There are instances of, or reported cases of, fiscal impropriety and a type of authoritarian leadership that notes what may be persistently involved with accountability and ethical governmental leadership within some Pentecostal contexts (Kgatle 2023:45). Clergy have used the spiritual dependence of congregants to create an environment where members are forced to blindly follow their leadership, thus stifling the right of congregants to be critical of leadership.

Pentecostal churches face problems with accountability because of the doctrinal teachings of divine calling and prophetic authority, not institutional governance protocols. Charismatic leadership promotes trust and unity among the members; however, it also creates higher risks for ethical violations because of reduced checks and balances. Allegations of the conflict between spiritual authority and ethical accountability can be elaborated through accusations of sexual misconduct, misappropriation of resources and authoritarian imposition of moral norms (Markow & Akerlund 2023:538; Tagwirei 2023:12). Tending to these challenges requires the creation of accountability frameworks that include financial transparency, participatory governance and pastoral repeated supervision, together with the preservation of the spiritual authority that congregants ascribe to their leaders.

Pentecostal leadership not only shapes how faith life within the church is personified, but also styles the way faith communities relate themselves in social movement settings. Leaders make the links between spiritual beliefs and social action by preaching, moral teaching and participating in public life. The interplay between these elements raises questions about whether or not Pentecostal churches in post-apartheid South Africa alleviate the process of social transformation, or yet again constrain it. The following section, therefore, looks at the role of Pentecostalism in social change, in particular in relation to its practical interventions, its moral influence and its socio-economic consequences.

Pentecostalism and social transformation

Pentecostal churches demonstrate their social presence through their public activities and their hidden social impacts that create important social effects. Pentecostal churches operate social ministries that work to solve urgent social problems through their programmes, which focus on helping people who live in poverty and need counselling and educational assistance and community-building efforts. The Rhema Ministries and the El Shaddai Pentecostal Church in Johannesburg conduct community development programmes through their microfinance, vocational training and school support services, which they offer to underprivileged areas of the city (Kgatle 2023:52; Tsara & Mudimeli 2024:212). The Spirit of Faith Ministries in KwaZulu-Natal demonstrates how Pentecostal churches can work with civil society to address structural inequalities through its partnership with local non-governmental organisations, which improves healthcare and educational infrastructure access. The ministries implement practical

solutions through their programmes, which provide food for people in need and offer pastoral counselling services to families who face crises and run youth mentorship programmes together with skills training activities, which serve to help those who belong to disadvantaged groups (Tsara & Mudimeli 2024:205). Pentecostal churches serve as community support systems that help people who need guidance and assistance when government services become overwhelmed or dysfunctional (Tsara & Mudimeli 2024:210).

Pentecostalism functions as a social change tool because it determines how people behave through its religious teachings and moral principles. The core element of Pentecostal spirituality exists in its teaching that believers must undergo a personal conversion process, which leads to their moral transformation and disciplined life to attain their holy mission. The Pentecostal community teaches its members to maintain sobriety and take responsibility for their actions while developing self-control, which leads to better family relationships and neighbourhood stability (Banda 2024:6). The practice of moral regulation establishes stability in communities that face substance abuse and domestic violence and criminal behaviour because people demonstrate their spiritual regeneration through their ethical conduct (Banda 2024:8).

Pentecostal methods for social transformation face their own challenges because they fail to deal with existing structural and economic inequality. The strong focus on personal faith, effort and spiritual alignment creates an individualised framework that people use to understand social change. People usually view poverty and marginalisation as personal challenges that develop into spiritual problems instead of seeing them as results of unjust political and economic systems (Sanders 2020:435). The theological framework discourages people from examining systemic injustice through the lens of their faith, while it reduces the effectiveness of group efforts that aim to achieve structural change.

Pentecostal discourse unintentionally supports neoliberal principles, which value self-reliance and entrepreneurial success while individual progress takes precedence over shared community responsibilities and changes to institutional systems. Pentecostal teachings, which emphasise prosperity and discipline together with personal achievement, cause people to support economic systems that fail to recognise structural exclusion and inequality (Anim 2024:50). Personal empowerment approaches create motivation for people to achieve their goals, yet they diminish the value of social solidarity and public accountability, which people need to achieve their justice objectives.

However, certain Pentecostal churches incorporate communal social responsibility into their church operations, which contradicts the belief that faith exists as an individual matter. The Pentecostal movement in Soweto and Durban demonstrates its ability to empower individuals through its programmes, which include cooperative saving schemes, community advocacy workshops and collective health campaigns (Banda 2024:12; Kgatle 2023:55).

Theological and ethical critiques

The academic community and ecclesiastical authorities must be involved in an ongoing ethical and theological evaluation of Pentecostalism because of its appearance as a major religious movement. Banda (2021:3) stated that the rush of neo-Pentecostal movements in South Africa has created serious theological issues, especially as it relates to doctrinal integrity and accountability. According to Banda, teachings of prosperity lead to distorted theology because material wealth is portrayed as an automatic result of faith, which leads to a new Christian belief system where transactional faith is put above biblical discipleship (Banda 2021:5).

According to Vondey (2020:527), Pentecostal theology is generally developed based on the selective reading of scriptures, where individual verses of scriptures are read in isolation rather than in the context of the overall teaching of scriptures. Consequently, this process leads to a limited perspective on salvation in materialistic terms, and hence the reductionist approach weakens theological engagement with key Christian teachings (Vondey 2020:530). The research synthesises previous critiques with a reformed theological–ethical framework that focuses on three fundamental principles, biblical fidelity, human dignity and communal responsibility. The methodology approaches Pentecostalism through three dimensions spiritual practices and moral accountability, coupled with socio-economic justice. By putting in place the covenantal responsibility, stewardship and the love of neighbour, it enables a constructive type of criticism that evaluates both spiritual vitality and ethical requirements and thereby gives a total view of Pentecostal ministry in South Africa.

The Criticism extends to the institutionalisation of spirituality, as prophecy, healing, and deliverance are converted into religious commodities in the market. Vondey (2023:5) notes that the Pentecostal institutions have now been developed in competitive religious marketplaces as their spiritual practices have become commercialised, resulting in worship and ministry practices driven by consumer demands rather than theological convictions. These developments turn Christian ministry into an economic exchange, undermining its essential functions of pastoral care, church community and missionary outreach.

Individuals who suffer from poverty, illness and social insecurity are the most vulnerable, and their treatment is the most severe ethical challenge. Mahlangu (2026:8) believes that South African neo-Pentecostal churches use syncretistic religious practices during pastoral counselling that create deceptive hope that drives congregants to contribute financially beyond their financial means in the hope of

compensation from God. These practices raise serious theological–ethical concerns as they undermine human dignity as well as pastoral responsibility and concern for social justice in the church (Mahlangu 2026:9).

Pentecostal practices require a sense of redirection, which states that a productive theological response calls for the church to abide by the biblical teachings, communal needs and social justice endeavours. Vondey (2020:533) argues that a complete understanding of salvation is attained by ethical leadership, which is the interconnection between spiritual growth and maintaining human dignity and communal progress. This approach shows how Pentecostal works using theology and ethical responsibility to solve its issues in current world deficiencies.

The formulation of a positive response to Pentecostal practices requires the working out of ethical standards governing religious practices alongside systems to manage organisational responsibility and enact social justice through the operations of the ministry and in inclusive organisational leadership. Ecclesiastical organisations should put in place processes that facilitate financial transparency, complemented by pastoral education and mentorship programmes that enable their members to develop spiritually as they serve their communities (Banda 2024:12). The research shows that South African churches utilise programmes that reflect the fusion of the Pentecostal religious faith and institutional involvement in their spiritual development programmes, vocational training and health programmes at Rhema Ministries and Spirit of Faith Ministries (Kgatle 2023:52).

Researchers need to ask questions about the ways in which religious beliefs contribute to individual achievement in order to devise assessment techniques that would be able to measure progress. This process requires showing how salvation is useful for both individual existence and the development of the community. Education bridges the gap between spiritual gifts and personal breakthroughs, thus working also for individual and communal progress, as these gifts provide for personal competencies and collective social resiliency. Through these means, Pentecostal spirituality can be ethically transformed and theologically developed without losing or departing from the essential elements of emotional experience and spiritual energy.

Critiques of Pentecostalism, be they theological or ethical, aim not to shake the vitality of spirituality but to enhance the witness of the Pentecostal community before the public. Banda (2021:10) shows that Pentecostals gain credibility through positive critique because their religion exhibits the potential to respond to social problems. The study of Pentecostalism in the context of post-apartheid South Africa must develop an integrative framework that links religious practices, identity development, leadership systems and community involvement in order to support theological research, ecclesiastical and social transformation (Banda 2021:12).

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Conclusion

This article examined selected Pentecostal practices in post-apartheid South Africa by analysing their role in shaping faith dynamics, identity construction, leadership structures and processes of social transformation. The study argued that Pentecostalism has become a significant religious and social force within democratic South Africa, offering spiritual empowerment, moral orientation and communal belonging to many believers.

However, the results indicated that Pentecostal expressions such as prophecy, healing, deliverance and expressive worship lead to the development of experiential spirituality and religious identities. In contrast, however, it was shown that certain leadership styles, the doctrine of prosperity and the absence of accountability systems pose theological and ethical questions, particularly those concerning human dignity and social justice.

Applying a theological–ethical approach grounded in biblical orthodoxy, human dignity and communal ethics to the ongoing discourse on African Pentecostalism, the paper seeks to incorporate theological deliberations into sociological inquiries. It further shows that Pentecostalism remains a controversial yet transforming religion in the emerging democratic environment in South Africa. However, this research recognises its limitations as a literary work and recommends further studies in the field that incorporate qualitative and quantitative approaches to the phenomenon of Pentecostalism.

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CRediT authorship contribution

Ntsieni Mawedzha: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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