


Prophecy, Pentecostals and South Africa's socio-economic inequality



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Background: The article dissected white South African classical Pentecostals' concept of prophecy in the context of widespread poverty and the resulting socio-economic inequality that characterises their society. As a rule, most white Pentecostals do not respond to the challenges of inequality and disparities by getting involved in assemblies in former apartheid-segregated 'black' communities that are characterised by widespread poverty. The legacy of apartheid's separate neighbourhoods is still intact, implying that racial distinctions determine, to a great extent, who lives where. In addition to preaching practices, the congregational prophecies that occur among them also do not reflect these dire circumstances that characterise a majority of South Africans and play no role in arousing their social conscience.

Objectives: The article aims to define Pentecostal prophecy against the context of South African socio-economic inequality.

Method: A qualitative conversation with 43 white Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM) pastors at the level of regional and national conferences during 2024 provides a view of white Pentecostals regarding the church's handling of social inequality.

Results: Most white Pentecostals in South Africa (SA) are aware of the social inequality that mars the separateness between formerly white and black neighbourhoods. However, the awareness has not infiltrated their spirituality to the extent that it is reflected in the prophetic practice.

Conclusion: Most white South African Pentecostals still live in neighbourhoods separated from the squalid conditions of many black townships and ignore the structural, political, economic, and social issues that cause poverty. They interpret their prophetic task to exclude consideration of social ethics and structural challenges. What is needed is an urgent reconsideration of prophecy and its relevance for current socio-economic challenges.

Contribution: The article was presented to awaken and stir up the consciences of white Pentecostals for the dire economic circumstances of most South Africans threatened by unemployment and poverty.

Keywords: prophecy; classical Pentecostalism; continuationism; socio-political engagement; socio-economic inequality; disparities; social justice.

Introduction

Social value

The article discusses white South African classical Pentecostals' concept of prophecy within the context of widely recurring poverty and socio-economic inequality that characterises and threatens the stability of their society. As a rule, they do not all respond to the challenges of inequality and disparities by getting involved in assemblies in former apartheid-segregated 'black' communities that are characterised by widespread poverty. In addition, congregational prophecy that occurs among them also does not reflect these dire circumstances that represent most South Africans. It seemingly plays no role in arousing their social conscience.

Classical Pentecostalism originated at the beginning of the 20th century in several places like the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, emphasising speaking in tongues as (one of) the initial signs of Spirit baptism and implying the continuation of the Spirit's revelation that Pentecostals argue characterised the early church, *versus* various forms of cessationism that describe most Protestants, implying that the divine revelation terminated when the last book of the New Testament was written. Global Pentecostalism has been proliferating, although the figures indicating growth are notoriously tricky to interpret. Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing's figures are frequently quoted; they estimated in 2020 that Pentecostalism had some 644 million adherents, forming a quarter of the

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world's Christians. They predict that the figure might rise to over a billion by 2050 at current growth rates. Compared to the 1970 number of 58 million, the growth is remarkable (Zurlo, Johnson & Crossing 2020:16).

Since its inception, Pentecostalism has been a grassroots movement reaching primarily the disadvantaged and underprivileged (Anderson 2020:129). That this is still the case can be demonstrated by the vast majority of Pentecostals, around 80%, in Latin America, Africa and Asia, who are poor (Anderson 2020:129).

However, white Pentecostals' predilection for evangelising the disadvantaged, including the poor, which characterised the movement, did not necessarily address political issues such as the othering and oppressing of the marginalised or societal and political structures contributing to poverty. Their movement in South Africa (SA) was born of radical social discontent in the context of the poverty crisis that faced white people forced to abandon their farms and find work in the mines; when it became institutionalised, it gradually withdrew from the social struggle (Anderson 1979:222, 229). Over time, they often associated with conservative politics, especially when, in their quest to become acceptable to society since the 1930s and 1940s, they brought their hermeneutics in line with those of the Evangelicals. As a result, many believers' sentiments shifted to support right-wing politics, losing touch entirely with their humble origins and changing into the righteous spiritual ideology of an affluent middle-class oppressing black people (Cox 1996:264–75, 281–87, 297). In the process, the character of the movement shifted from being 'apolitical' and 'otherworldly' to supporting reactionary and controversial policies like their uncritical support for Israel's demand to occupy parts of the country in Palestinian possession, homophobic attacks on people with different sexual orientations and opposition to abortion and the interreligious dialogue. While the rapid growth of Pentecostalism in the developing world means development opportunities in these communities, most white South African Pentecostals hinder societal development (Clarke 2015:156–75).

Scientific value

The movement's growth implies its impact on social engagement can be valuable. As a rule, however, Pentecostals do not advocate the reform of social structures by challenging government policies to realise an alternative social reality. But they can become agents of social transformation by their contribution to addressing widespread poverty and human rights violations and impacting the social welfare of their communities, supported by their sober lifestyle and the belief that everyone is created in the image of God and enjoys the same rights.

As a democratised community, all members may interpret Scripture themselves, minister and practise the *charismata*, and can contribute to the improvement of their societies because they comprise the charismatic priesthood and prophethood (Miller & Yamamori 2007:4, 32–33, 59). For instance, Mathew Clarke (2015:173) argues that global

Pentecostalism has theological dimensions that serve as a motivation to get involved in society and its development, such as the belief in divine immanence, illustrated by God's answer to prayers and involvement in worldly affairs, in believers' power to be involved in God's mission for the world when they are being 'Spirit-filled' and in sacrificial service because each believer is a priest and prophet.

How can Pentecostals assist in changing unequal societies? In SA, many white Pentecostals during apartheid supported the Nationalist government's apartheid policies that discriminated against and oppressed black people to the benefit of white people. Black people were viewed as functional to serve their needs. At the same time, most African Pentecostals sympathised with the liberation movements' attempts to realise freedom and justice, although in most instances, they limited their participation to passive resistance (Kerry 2015:859). Since 1994, the socio-economic inequality that resulted from apartheid policies has been perpetuated by slow growth in the economy. Although the African National Congress' democratisation of the country was successful, most black people still find themselves in dire circumstances, with only a tiny black elite who benefited from the country's liberation from white rule.

Traditionally, Pentecostals have been limiting their attention to preaching the (Pentecostal) gospel to the lost, ignoring matters of politics. Although this gradually changed, they have not always been comfortable with social involvement. They are still prioritising evangelism, arguing that evangelising the lost and socially developing the underprivileged are mutually exclusive strategies, ignoring social issues like race, class, or gender equality. They presupposed that born-again, Spirit-filled believers would constitute good citizens of the country, contributing to moral standards through their holy lifestyle.

As a result, white Pentecostals tended to be conservative in their theological views, reflecting the discrimination and defence of existing societal structures that prevail in society. Their otherworldly spirituality and emphasis on evangelisation avoided involvement in the 'world' with its politics and struggles for justice. Their gospel spiritualises and individualises social problems, frowning on any political participation by adherents and concentrating on charitable activities rather than direct political engagement (Petersen 1996:231).

Especially Pentecostals in the Global South, where the movement attracts many marginalised and working-class people, can get involved with advocating social justice because it is impossible to proclaim the gospel fully without denouncing injustices committed by the powerful (Milanovic 2000:11). A challenge in SA is the separateness between the middle-class, predominantly white neighbourhoods and black townships and squatter camps usually existing at the fringes of towns and cities.

Conceptual framework

What Pentecostalism needs is profound theological deliberations about the nature and moral mission of the

church in the world as a condition for designing a social ethic that will direct and inspire believers to become the change their society needs by promoting social justice, integrating programmes of evangelism and social concern to fulfil their mission (Dempster 1987:129). Both evangelism and social action are the work of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, Pentecostals view their ministry as reaching the holistic person, including the individual's body (through divine healing) and soul (through salvation). Now, their holistic ministry needs to surpass their individualist perspective and secure their involvement in social issues and politics. It implies they will no longer view political structures as elements of the 'evil world' (Anderson 1979:222, 229).

Prophecy played a vital role in the Pentecostal movement since its inception, based on Acts 2's account of the outpouring of the Spirit, fulfilling Joel's prophecy that 'your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ...' (vv. 17–18). Pentecostals 'feel the Spirit's anointing' and prophecy. Seldom, if ever, do these prophecies go further than to encourage believers in their journey of faith or warn them about sins or catastrophes that await them. Informal inquiry among several groups of white pastors of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa agreed that prophecies, as a rule, do not address critical issues of social justice.

Aim and objectives

The article's research looks critically at Pentecostal congregational prophecy. It is compared to what the Bible teaches about prophecy, what it consists of, what its purpose(s) are, and how its utility in a specific context can be applied to the South African socio-economic situation.

Research methods and design

Study design

The purpose was to gauge the present practice of prophecy among white classic Pentecostals in the context of South Africa's inequality.

Setting

To realise the aim, an informal qualitative engagement with 43 white Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM) pastors at the level of regional and national conferences during 2024 provided a view of white Pentecostals regarding the church's handling of socio-economic inequality.

Study population and sampling strategy

The research was limited to white Pentecostal pastors in an informal setting and was stopped when it became clear that there was a unanimous view among the pastors.

Intervention

Its finding was that prophecies relating to South Africa's socio-economic inequality were unknown in the AFM.

Data collection

In informal conversations, pastors were asked about their experiences with congregational prophecy and its contents.

Data analysis

Conversations were taped with the consent of the involved pastors and then transcribed for easy use.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the North-West University Theology Research Ethics Committee (TREC) (No. NWU-00899-24-A6).

Prophecy in the Bible

Israelite prophecy functioned *contra* the surrounding nations' practices of divination, augury, sorcery, and consulting of spirits, ghosts, and the dead, leading to the Deuteronomic prohibition to participate in any such rituals. In fact, these practices were given as the reason why YHWH would drive the nations from the country (Dt 18:9–12). In contrast, Israel was encouraged to remain completely loyal to YHWH (v. 13). In addition, YHWH promises the people that prophets like Moses from among the Israelites will be raised up (v. 15): 'I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command' (v. 18). Israel should listen intently to the prophets' message because it originated with YHWH, while they should kill false prophets who speak in the name of other gods or presume to speak in YHWH's name anything that is not authorised by God (v. 20). To recognise God's message, the test to conduct is the prophecy's realisation (vv. 21–22). In some cases, prophecies required reinterpretation to remain relevant; an example is in the discrepancy between Daniel 12:11 and verse 12. To conclude, prophets served as mouthpieces of God, called to faithfully relay the divine message they received from God.

Deuteronomy attempts to explain the origin of the office of prophets as the response to the divine glory revealed (Dt 5: 23–28), asking God to use a mediator, a prophet (Dt 18:16–18).

The Old Testament testifies to false prophets misleading Israel. For instance, Ezekiel 13 relates the message the prophet received against Israel's prophets who prophesied out of their imagination and followed their spirit without having heard or seen¹ the divine word. They are like jackals among ruins, Ezekiel explains (v. 4), not standing in the breaches or repairing the wall of the house of Israel. YHWH's hand will be against them (v. 9).

Hebrew prophets' messages sound like ancient Near Eastern prophets like the letters from the 18th-century Mari written during the reigns of Yasmach-Addu (c. 1792–1775) and Zimri-Lim (c. 1774–1760) and the 7th-century

1. Sometimes, prophets are called 'seers', as in 1 Chronicles 9:22; 21:9; 25:5; 26:28; 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 16:7, 10; 19:2; 29:25, 30; 33:19–19; 35:15; Isaiah 29:10; 30:19; Amos 7:12.

annals of Assyrian kings Esarhaddon (680–669) and Assurbanipal (668–627) (Lundbom 2016). They differ in announcing more judgment, even harsh judgment, on Israel's monarchs, leading citizens and residents of the Northern and Southern kingdoms. Their context was Israel's covenant with YHWH, with the Mosaic law requiring exclusive loyalty to God. They used poetical rhetorical language like tropes, humour, drama, and symbolic action; in some cases, they became the symbol of their message. Their message was relevant to the Jewish experience in the face of international threats to their security, their eventual exile, and difficult circumstances that defined their return to the promised land.

In the intertestamental period, many Jews believed the Spirit and/or spirit of prophecy had departed from Israel (Greene 2012:733). By the time of Malachi, prophecy was a rare occurrence (Keener 2001:22). Many also believed that in the future, God would pour out the divine Spirit on all of Israel and restore the spirit of prophecy (Jl 3:28–29), within the context of eschatological signs such as portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood, and fire and columns of smoke, the sun turning to darkness and the moon to blood, announcing Israel's deliverance from all enemies.

In Acts 2:17–18, Peter relates what occurred on the day of Pentecost to Joel's prophecy. Significantly, Joel 2 does not refer to *glossolalia* but only to prophecy, dreams, and vision, although Peter applied it to the disciples' xenolalia or xenoglossy.²

In conclusion, prophecy is essentially speaking (and acting) on God's behalf. Intrinsic to speaking for God is being called, sent, and equipped with prophetic commissioning. In the New Testament, the apostles (οἱ ἀπόστολοι) are 'those who are sent' (from ἀποστέλλειν) (Cross & Livingstone 1974), although it also refers to individual prophets (1 Cor 12:28; 14:1–40). Prophecy is also always response-seeking, depicting a possible future contingent upon the response given by the addressee(s) (Moberly 2011).

Classical Pentecostal concept and practice of prophecy

Pentecostals accept that their practice of prophecy continues the early church's response to the Spirit's work, explicating the divine word in specific situations, implying that God speaks extrabiblically to individuals through the Holy Spirit and imparts relevant divine messages of guidance, warning, and encouragement (Omenyo 2014:132). The Spirit's revelation did not end when the last book of the canon was finished. The concept of continuationism holds that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including prophecy, are still active today and are available to all believers, including speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*). Prophecy is another distinct feature, manifested and interpreted in various ways.

2. In contrast to Pentecostals' glossolalia, consisting of speaking unknown (heavenly) languages.

Fuchsia Pickett (1999:230) defines prophecy as 'a supernatural utterance or speaking forth an inspired message or revelation from God by an individual who is anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit'. In other words, it is an act of divine communication; God reveals the divine will and purpose via human vessels to a specific person or group of people. Stanley Horton agrees: 'Pentecostals believe that the prophetic gift, like the other gifts of the Spirit, continues in the church today' (Horton 1994:451). Prophecy edifies, encourages and comforts church members (1 Cor 14:3).

Likewise, Matthew S. Thompson emphasises that Pentecostal prophecy requires the believer's reliance on the Holy Spirit's direct inspiration and empowerment; the words do not flow from human intellect or reasoning:

'The prophetic word is immediate, direct, and supernatural...The prophet does not speak from his or her own human abilities or analysis, but only as the Holy Spirit enables and directs.' (Thompson 2017:97)

Pentecostals believe that prophecy originates from God and is not a product of their interpretation or invention.

From early times, Pentecostals emphasised that believers should always test prophecies before acting on them, praying for the 'discernment of spirits' (1 Cor 12:10). In concluding the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the author encourages believers not to quench the Spirit or despise the prophets' words but to test everything and hold fast to what is good (5:19–21). According to Pentecostals, it implies that early believers were instructed to evaluate prophecies in the light of the Bible and seek confirmation through prayer and spiritual guidance, asking whether the message aligns with the nature and character of God as revealed in the Bible.³

If prophecy represents continuous divine revelation to the church, would one not expect it to address the situation relevant to the church? It leads to the question of what current challenges are facing SA that would cause the Spirit to be concerned.

Current South African situation

South Africa faces several critical socio-economic challenges and disparities, with the trifecta of poverty, unemployment, and inequality casting a long shadow over South Africa's stagnant economy, characterised by one of the world's highest levels of income inequality. It is demonstrated with the wealthiest 10% of the population earning over 55% of the country's income. The top 20% of the population holds over 68% of income, compared to a median of 47% for similar emerging markets, according to the International Monetary Fund (2020). In contrast, the poorest 40% access just 7% of all income, compared to 16% for other emerging markets. At the end of 2022, 1% of South Africa's population accounted for 42.2% of the country's wealth, while 90% accounted for 19.1% (Stoddard 2023). The inequality is caused by racial disparities

3. This view does not necessarily consider that only the Old Testament was available at this stage, and early Christian believers only had access to it.

persisting from the apartheid era and the current government's inability to properly manage the country's economy.

The largest contributor to the overall income inequality came from the labour market at 74.2%, while on average, female workers earn approximately 30% less than male workers, and males are more likely to be employed. The earnings distributions also starkly depict the heavily racialised inequality in the labour market. Black people have the worst employment and earn the lowest wages, unlike white people, who earn the highest salaries (statssa 2020).

The country has also faced persistently high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. As of the first quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate stood at 32.6%, with youth unemployment exceeding 46% (statssa 2021). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated this issue, leading to further job losses and economic hardships.

As a result, a significant portion of the population lives in poverty; more than 55% of South Africans live below the national poverty line (World Bank Group 2020).⁴ As many as five million impoverished people rely on the informal sector for their livelihoods (Gumede 2012:35), working in precarious and unstable conditions, and living in squalid conditions in squatter camps and informal settlements.

Another element that illustrates the inequality is education, characterised by disparities in the quality and infrastructure of education (Mahlokane 2023).⁵ Schools in poorer communities often lack the required resources and infrastructure, with pupils in 3000 schools still relying on pit toilets (Aljazeera 2023). As a result, many children are deprived of the opportunity to acquire the same skills or education levels as others. They are not adequately equipped for the limited opportunities presented by the job market; only a fraction of young adults enters the labour force with adequate secondary and tertiary education levels (Davids 2021).

Healthcare access is another concern, with high rates of infectious diseases and limited access to quality healthcare, particularly in rural areas, demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic when existing weaknesses exacerbated health inequalities. South Africa also faces high crime levels, including violent crime, contributing to insecurity among its citizens. Protests about inadequate service delivery and frustrations with the widespread prevalence of poverty and unemployment leading to civil unrest have also been prevalent (Alexander 2010:25–40).

'The biggest ticking timebomb we have in this country is inequality', writes Busi Mavuso, CEO of Business Leadership

4. Approximately 55.5% (30.3 million people) of the population is living in poverty at the national upper poverty line (~ZAR 992) while a total of 13.8 million people (25%) is experiencing food poverty.

5. The South African portion of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2021 (PIRLS 2021) conducted by the University of Pretoria (UP) has found that 81% of South African Grade 4 learners are struggling to read for comprehension at age 10'.

South Africa, the most unequal society in the world with the highest Gini coefficient, the result of an unsustainable environment of two economies and one nation (Davids 2021). Where developed countries have an 80% middle-class population, South Africa's pyramid structure consists of 10% living in 'opulence', 35% ranked as middle class, and more than 50% living in abject poverty, excluding most citizens of decent livelihood.

The South African government has implemented various policies and programmes to address these socio-economic challenges, like social grants, job creation initiatives, and educational reforms. Still, the need remains for sustained efforts and inclusive policies to address inequality to promote economic growth and improve the living standards of all South Africans. The government instituted Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE), but it has become a blunt instrument because of the lack of monitoring and evaluation (Kasuto 2009). Persistent segregation remains a fundamental problem, with 24% of the population living as squatters in SA (United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-HABITAT] 2024).

In what way do white classical Pentecostals respond to the country's socio-economic conditions? Like people of other religious communities, they have diverse responses depending on individual beliefs, denominational teachings, and the specific context of each congregation. Some emphasise the power of prayer, relying on God's intervention in addressing societal challenges. They also pray for the government. Others become involved in faith-based initiatives of charity work and social outreaches, including providing food, clothing, and shelter to those in need, offering education and skills training programmes and supporting community development projects. However, in many instances, Pentecostals believe that personal salvation, holiness, and obedience to God's commandments leading to personal transformation will positively impact individuals and society. They argue that an integral part of life transformation brought by the Spirit promotes hard work, financial stewardship, and responsible citizenship that will eventually change people's socio-economic context. Allen Anderson (2020:129) emphasises that social concern is limited to their communities and excludes people living in other neighbourhoods.

Thibaut Dubarry (2021:1) argues that South African Pentecostalism intrinsically reveals itself as a material, secular, and egalitarian theocracy and constitutes, as a result, a communism of the market. Pentecostals sacralise the realm of capitalism and practise a religion of the capital and communism of the market, deeply rooted in the secular process and shaped by individualistic democratic ideals. As believers, they act as consumers using up salvation goods produced by entrepreneurs of faith who are the pastors of these churches. In the process, these churches reenchant (*Entzauberung* in the Weberian lexicology) their societies in a context of secularisation, worshipping and facilitating material success through individuals' involvement in community life

and communalising their interests and demands. However, absolute equality seems to be an impassable horizon faced with South Africa's unique challenges, and white Pentecostals do not address the issue. I submit that what is missing is prophetic voices of urgent warning, providing advice, and encouraging participation in the challenges facing the country, representing the divine voice to a nation in need.

Pentecostal antipathy towards political involvement

One finds widespread antipathy towards political involvement among many Pentecostals because of their individualist theological stance that Christ came to save souls from eternal damnation. Many support a premillennial eschatology that predicts the imminent return of Christ, resulting in the termination of the current world (Anderson 1979:80). They use current world events to interpret the time they are living in with biblical predictions of a catastrophe that would terminate history (King 2011:117–119, 148–149). Their pessimistic worldview supports an escapism from a world they view as doomed to destruction. As a result, they are politically inactive and do not contribute to delivering meaningful development that benefits citizens.

Ejoke and Ani (2017:180) argue that the South African government needs strong support from outside authorities. Instead of antipathy, prophets' guidance should become Pentecostals' primary pastoral response to social challenges such as socio-economic inequality. 'Prophecy in Africa also often becomes an extremely effective form of pastoral therapy and counsel, mostly practised in private, a moral corrective and an indispensable facet of Christian ministry. It can become an expression of care and concern for the needy; and in countless cases, it actually brings relief' (Anderson 1996:180). Pentecostal prophecy is not only word-based but includes acts of healing, exorcism, and deliverance because it views God as the power that can overcome any power of destruction. Prophets can express their pneumatological soteriology in interventionist terms (Sakupapa 2016:120). Anderson (2007:305) remarks that an African religion that does not promise deliverance from evil or promote health and prosperity is a dysfunctional religion without any future because there is no clear-cut division between spiritual and secular. Pentecostal spirituality is traditionally pragmatic, practical, and this-worldly (Anderson 2007:315), implying the need to include the political on its agenda. The dream of the coming reign of God includes healing, wholeness, holiness, and harmony with a Christological prerogative for displaced and disenfranchised people. It implies that the local church should become a beacon of harmony, striving for equality between all people, and prophecies reflect God's intervention because of Pentecostals' interventionist view of divine causality.

The challenges of inequality should serve as a hermeneutical key to interpreting the Bible on the assumption that God wants to meet people's needs directly (Anderson 2001:223). Any attempt by the church to change society involves creating new ways of being in the world and new possibilities for socio-economic transformation (Kaunda 2016:8).

Pentecostals need prophetic politics informed by their spirituality and piety that engages the public sphere boldly and provides all kinds of counter-cultural and counter-conventional communities where equality is established between believers in the form of 'family', as a counter-history, counter-ethics, and counter-ontology to that of the myth of secularism (Yong 2010:228). As a result, Pentecostal communities will become alternative 'cities' that provide forms of socio-political and economic solidarity for people who otherwise find themselves on the margins of the *polis* as conventionally defined (Yong 2010:13). It will confront social and political causes of poverty in a determined manner (Kangwa 2016:544).

Conclusion

Now, most white Pentecostals' prophecies are concerned with individual concerns that ignore the bigger picture that characterises South African society. What they need is the awakening of their social conscience to provide a prophetic alternative to the world's conventions of corruption, patronage, and oligarchy that contribute to the poverty crisis. They should commit themselves to charitable works sensitive to larger socio-structural projects and tasks, even when it implies confrontation with the principalities and powers when necessary.

Most black African Pentecostals in the past mainly were apathetic towards social concerns. However, this changed, and they have awakened to their civic obligations, taking care of the underprivileged and disenfranchised (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:296). However, most white South African Pentecostals still live in neighbourhoods separated from the squalid conditions of many black townships and ignore the structural, political, economic, and social issues that cause poverty. They interpret their prophetic task to exclude consideration of social ethics and structural challenges.

Given the dire socio-economic circumstances that characterise SA, white Pentecostals who are more privileged cannot afford to ignore the suffering of the disenfranchised poor and enjoy their privilegedness because of the decades-long oppression of black people enshrined in apartheid laws that limited black people's mobility and labour potential.

Among contemporary Pentecostals, one finds leaders and communities who made the transition from exclusively focusing on spiritual needs to taking care of the holistic person and society. Examples of such efforts are the provision of healthcare and education where circumstances require it along with financial contribution to developing countries (Clarke 2015:70–72). Their hard work empowers upward social mobility for black people, and they have become involved in primary education, welfare centres, medical facilities, and faith-based entrepreneurship models that result in self-help small businesses (Anderson et al. 2018:225–37).

Research shows that Pentecostal churches, in some cases, are more effective in social and economic development than secular non-governmental organisations (NGOs) when they empower believers to address the poverty, human immunodeficiency

virus and/or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV and/or AIDS), unemployment, and violence that confront their communities (Burgess 2015:176–204; ed. Freeman 2012:26).

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Data availability

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