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Fugitive joy as diagnostic trace: Hope and reconciliation in secular courts – The Apostolic Faith Mission Zimbabwe case

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Background: African Pentecostal churches increasingly resort to civil litigation for internal disputes, bypassing biblical reconciliation mechanisms and leaving the spiritual consequences of such schisms under-examined.

Objectives: This study aims to trace where hope, reconciliation, and joy relocate after the 2018–2021 Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) Zimbabwe split and proposes the concept of 'fugitive joy' to describe residual practices of connection.

Methods: A qualitative desktop analysis was employed, analyzing newspaper articles and social media discourse (Facebook and YouTube) from 2020 to 2025 using thematic analysis.

Results: Public discourse was entirely secularized, dominated by tribal, financial, and legal framings rather than biblical language. However, ordinary members generated 'fugitive joy' through shared pre-split hymns, silent funeral cooperation, and anonymous digital reactions.

Conclusion: While institutional reconciliation failed, lived reconciliation survived as fugitive joy, low-stakes, extra-ecclesiastical practices that serve as a diagnostic trace of hope.

Contribution: This article introduces fugitive joy as a new concept for reconciliation theory. It fits the journal's focus on religion, conflict and peacebuilding by showing how ordinary believers sustain connection after juridification.

Keywords: fugitive joy; reconciliation; juridification; African Pentecostalism; schism; hope.

Introduction

Between 2018 and 2021, the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe, one of the country's oldest and largest Pentecostal denominations, fractured after a Supreme Court ruling affirmed one leadership faction. Globally, Pentecostal churches increasingly resort to civil litigation for internal disputes, yet the spiritual consequences remain underexamined. Hollenbach (2019) argues that civil lawsuits undermine the church's spiritual witness and credibility. Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTATS 2022) affirms that Christianity is the major religion and 85% of Zimbabweans belong to it. Church schisms and church splits disrupt communal life, family networks, and pastoral care. When a church bypasses biblical reconciliation (Mt 18; 1 Cor 6) for secular courts, ordinary members lose trusted mechanisms for healing. Understanding what happens to hope, reconciliation and joy after litigation is therefore a matter of practical urgency.

Existing scholarship on AFM splits (Togarasei 2016) has analysed earlier schisms (1980s and 2000s) that were resolved through internal church processes. Maxwell (2006) documented how African Pentecostal churches historically used elders, prayer, and prophetic discernment for conflict resolution. Kalu (2008) showed that litigation was rare before 2000. However, no study has examined the 2018–2021 AFM case, the first in this denomination to be decided by a secular Supreme Court ruling. Crucially, no scholar has asked: *When a church abandons its own scriptures for civil litigation, what becomes of hope, reconciliation and joy?* News media treated the split as a legal dispute; theology has been silent. This article fills that gap.

This study is guided by three interconnected theories, namely Volf's theology of embrace, Lederach's moral imagination and African Pentecostal ecclesiology. Firstly, Volf's (1996) theology of embrace, defined as a normative framework in which authentic reconciliation

requires face-to-face mutual self-giving, where each party makes space for the other within their own identity without erasing the wrong that was done (Volf 1996), provides a baseline for what is lost when courts replace encounter. Secondly, Lederach's moral imagination (Lederach 2005), or ability to create creative platforms for encounter that do not need previous agreement among enemies (Lederach 2005), provides a peacebuilding lens to uncover residual connections. Thirdly, African Pentecostal ecclesiology argues that the Spirit works via communal discernment, not legal rulings. Wariboko (2014) describes the 'juridification of the Spirit' as the process by which church leaders give up spiritual power to secular legal systems, changing church conflicts into legal ones, and reducing the Spirit to a passive, quiet observer. Together, these theories diagnose what is lost when courts replace embrace and suggest where to look for residual hope: Outside official structures.

The aim of this study is to trace where hope, reconciliation, and joy relocate after a Pentecostal church bypasses its internal biblical processes and submits to civil litigation. This study proposes the concept of fugitive joy to name those practices of cross-enmity that happen when formal reconciliation mechanisms have collapsed or failed. The concept of fugitive joy will be developed fully below; at the moment, it serves as a roadmap to understanding that when hope has fled formal spaces, it takes refuge in small, undeniable, yet persistent practices. To achieve this overarching aim, the sub-objectives are: (1) to describe the discursive framings that fill the vacuum left by absent biblical language; (2) to identify non-institutional practices of connection among ordinary members; and (3) to propose a conceptual framework for understanding these practices as 'fugitive joy'.

Theoretical framework: From failure to aftermath

This article uses three interconnected theories: (1) Namely Volf's theology of embrace, (2) Lederach's moral imagination and (3) African Pentecostal ecclesiology. I deploy these resources *not* to judge the AFM leadership or internal reconciliation structures. Rather, it aims to provide a baseline against which to measure the consequences of their absence.

Perspective on biblical reconciliation mechanisms

The New Testament provides clear procedures for dispute resolution within Christian communities. A close reading of Matthew 18:15–17 (NIV):

> If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

This passage highlights a fourfold mechanism for conflict resolution. Firstly, the private confrontation (Mt 18:15); secondly, the small group witness (Mt 18:16); thirdly, the church-wide formal judgement (Mt 18:17a); and fourthly, treating the offender as a pagan (Mt 18:17b). All these efforts and processes are aimed at restoration, 'you have won your brother over' (Mt 18:15). The win is viewed not as a punitive victory. Analysing this scripture reveals that there is nowhere the civil court is authorised. The final stage is making sure that there is a relocation of the relationship as opposed to permanent exclusion. Furthermore, the book of Matthew shows that Jesus ate with tax collectors. Such practices suggest that exclusion is reframed as an invitation to messy. It is an invitation to an unregulated space of fellowship, as opposed to abandonment.

Thus, civil litigation has no analogue for this reframing. Note the architecture: Private → small group → whole church → exclusion. Nowhere does the text authorise civil court. A court judgement does not say 'eat with them anyway'. Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 6:1–8 is even more direct, rebuking believers for taking disputes before 'unrighteous judges' rather than settling them 'before the saints'. The Apostle asks rhetorically, '*Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?*' (1 Cor 6:5, NIV). Civil courts are not mentioned as a legitimate avenue for intra-church conflict. Paul's reasoning is theological: Believers will one day judge angels, so they ought to be capable of judging trivial disputes.

More foundationally, 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 defines katallagē [reconciliation] as the removal of enmity through Christ (Strong 1890), with the church serving as Christ's ambassador for reconciliation. The Greek term καταλλαγή [katallagē] literally means 'exchange', specifically, the exchange of hostility for friendship through divine initiative (Strong's Greek Lexicon, G2643; Mounce 2006). Ephesians 2:14–16 insists that Christ himself is our peace, destroying the dividing wall of hostility. These texts presuppose that the church possesses sufficient wisdom and spiritual authority to resolve its own conflicts without resorting to secular tribunals.

Volf and the theology of embrace

Miroslav Volf (1996) developed a sophisticated modern theology of reconciliation. Volf, in Exclusion and Embrace, writes that real reconciliation is the desire to offer one's arms to the adversary, to place the wrong in a greater story of renewed partnership. The embrace is not a naive forgetting of injury but a deliberate crossing of boundaries, '[*T*]he will to give ourselves to others and "welcome" them, to readjust our identities to make space for them' (Volf 1996:29). Crucially, Volf distinguishes between justice and reconciliation. Courts produce winners and losers; they assign blame and mandate remedies. But they cannot produce embrace. When a church runs to court, it forecloses the possibility of embrace, not accidentally but structurally.

Lederach and moral imagination

John Paul Lederach (2005) adds a peacebuilding dimension. Drawing on decades of mediation experience, Lederach

argues that sustainable peace requires moral imagination, defined as the capacity to generate creative platforms for encounter without requiring prior agreement (Lederach 2005:29–35). Moral imagination has four components: (1) imagining oneself in a web of relationships, (2) curiosity for unknown possibilities, (3) creativity, and (4) willingness to take risks. When the church bypasses internal processes and submits to civil litigation, it forecloses moral imagination. The challenge with the court system is that it provides fixed positions (plaintiff and defendant). Also, the courts use predetermined remedies (damages and injunctions). These four aspects ([1] plaintiff, [2] defendant, [3] damages and [4] injunctions) leave no room for improvisational, relational peacebuilding.

African Pentecostal ecclesiology

The African Pentecostal voices ground and contextualise the framework in local realities. Effective reconciliation in African contexts should address communal honour and elderly authority. While this assertion explains the deep ontological realities of Africans, this dimension is absent from legal proceedings. African traditional conflict resolution seeks not to determine who the winner is but to restore communal harmony. The frames that hold this restoration are built through confession, restitution, and public rituals of reintegration. According to Kalu (2008), African Pentecostals historically resolve disputes using Spirit-led discernment tools. Kalu mentions that the tools include prayer, fasting, prophetic words and elder mediation. A departure from this spirit-led discernment to civil litigation reveals not merely a procedural failure but also a theological rupture. Specifically, to African Pentecostals who claim that the Spirit is central to the life of the church, this is a tacit admission that the Holy Spirit is no longer trusted to guide the community through conflict. Wariboko (2014) warns of the juridification of the Spirit when leaders invoke civil law. By submitting to secular courts, church leaders cede authority over spiritual matters to a legal system that does not recognise the claims of the Spirit. The result is a deformation of Pentecostal ecclesiology: The church ceases to function as an alternative polis and becomes merely another voluntary association under state sanction.

Diagnostic framework

What does this framework offer methodologically? When embrace is not attempted, when moral imagination is not exercised, what fills the vacuum? I use these concepts diagnostically: To show that secular legal language, tribal accusations and cynical financial framings rush in where biblical reconciliation is absent. And yet, fugitive joy emerges even without official embrace. The theoretical contribution is to show how hope and reconciliation can survive *outside* ecclesiastical structures, in low-stakes, non-verbal, anonymous practices.

Research methods and design

This study used a qualitative approach combining the analysis of 27 newspaper articles with several Facebook posts and comments on various YouTube videos. This method suited the article because church leaders refused interview requests and the split occurred partly during coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) restrictions; consequently, traditional media and social media became the primary public arenas where the conflict was processed.

To gather data, I used three sources: (1) *The Herald* (state-affiliated), (2) *NewsDay* (independent) and (3) *NewZimbabwe.com* (online news). I searched for articles between January 2020 and December 2021 using the terms 'AFM', 'Apostolic Faith Mission', 'Supreme Court', 'AFM split'. A total of 27 distinct articles were analysed.

Facebook

I observed publicly accessible groups affiliated with 'AFM Zimbabwe' or 'AFM of Zimbabwe'. I joined two groups. I recorded only public posts and comments; usernames and identifying details have been anonymised.

YouTube

I observed comment sections on videos related to the AFM split between January 2024 and August 2025, focusing on videos with the highest volume of comments.

All quoted comments are anonymised using pseudonyms. The study followed the ethical guidelines of the researcher's institution for digital research with public data. No private messages were accessed. As a Zimbabwean British Pentecostal with family members in both factions, I possess the 'insider' privilege of deep cultural and ecclesiastical access, while the 'outsider' status refers to my academic distance and the risk of bias, which I mitigated through reflexive journaling and peer review. This helped me to record interpretive decisions as they occurred. My key interpretive decisions were reviewed with two colleagues not affiliated with the AFM. I checked all quoted material against original sources.

The study acknowledges the limitations of these data. The voices of rural members and those with limited access to social media are under-represented. This study does not assess the sincerity or adequacy of any internal reconciliation attempts by AFM leaders. I accept as a factual starting point that no internal biblical process resolved the dispute and that the civil court became the de facto arbitrator.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of South Africa research ethics committee (No. Rec-240816-052).

Results

Finding one: The post-failure landscape – No biblical reconciliation language in public discourse

A review of newspaper coverage from 2020 to 2021 found *no article* that quoted or discussed Matthew 18 or 1 Corinthians

6 in relation to the dispute. *The Herald* (2020) headlined 'AFM leaders clash over constitution', focusing entirely on legal and organisational issues. *NewsDay* (2021) reported 'Supreme Court rules in favour of AFM leadership' without discussing biblical reconciliation (The Herald 2021). On Facebook, a search of the 'AFM National Discussion' group for 'Matthew 18' and '1 Corinthians 6' yielded only four posts across 20 months, compared to 87 posts for 'Supreme Court'. One post concluded: 'The court decided who gets the building. *But who decides who gets the kingdom?'* It received six likes and no replies. On YouTube, a comment reading '*Why didn't they just follow Matthew 18?* That's the real problem here' received 12 likes, an outlier. The public discourse was almost entirely secularised.

Finding two: Secular framings that fill the vacuum – Tribal, financial and legal

In the absence of biblical reconciliation language, three secular frames dominated. *Tribalisation*, defined as the discursive reduction of an ecclesial conflict to ethnic identity claims (Mamdani 1996), appeared in *NewsDay* (2021) alleging Shona-Ndebele divisions. A typical Facebook comment read: 'This is not a church problem. This is Ndebeles refusing to be led by Shonas'. *Financial accusations* reduced the split to greed: 'Show me a church split, I'll show you a bank account' appeared in 15 threads. *Legal triumphalism* treated the court ruling as definitive. Pro-ruling members posted screenshots with captions like 'The law has spoken. Now let's worship'. Losing faction members responded, 'No court can decide God's church'. All three framings are third-party framings that avoid face-to-face encounter.

Finding three: The court ruling as the new canon – A close reading

The Supreme Court's ruling (SC 42/21, para. 18), states that the Reverend Amon Madawo faction is the legitimate leadership of the AFM in Zimbabwe.

The constitution of the AFM provides for a hierarchical dispute resolution mechanism culminating in arbitration. The hope is that church leadership should resolve conflicts amicably. However, the starting point of secular courts and the choice of words used make it harder for reconciliation. The church constitution uses words that are judicial. For instance, the terms: 'constitution', 'remedies', 'arbitration panel', 'venue'. These are terms of procedural law, not of reconciliation. The ruling assumes that a dispute is a technical malfunction requiring procedural correction. It has no category for enmity, forgiveness, or embrace. When members subsequently treat this ruling as the 'new canon', they are not misreading it; they are accurately recognising that legal discourse has replaced theological discourse as the final arbiter of belonging. The word 'remedies' is especially telling: Law remedies violations; theology reconciles persons. The ruling offers the former while being structurally incapable of the latter. The court ruling became the functional final authority, even for those who rejected it. A Facebook thread (March 2023) asked: '*If the court says one thing but the Bible says reconcile, which one wins?'* Replies accepted the court's practical authority. On YouTube, a comment 'I don't care what the court says. I know where the Spirit is' received 34 likes, but a reply 'when you want to use the hall, the court decides' received 52 likes. The court's ruling restructured what counted as a legitimate argument. Biblical reconciliation arguments effectively ceased.

Finding four: 'Fugitive joy' – Hope and reconciliation outside church structures

Secular frames dominated public discourse, but they did not operate as a total system. *Alongside* legal triumphalism and tribal accusations, sometimes in the same Facebook threads, members generated fugitive joy. This coexistence is not paradoxical if we recognise that discourse is multilayered: The same person who posts 'The law has spoken' can heart a prayer request from the other faction. Secular frames govern *argument*; fugitive joy governs *affect*. The two operate on different registers and therefore do not compete. Hope, reconciliation, and joy did not disappear. They became fugitives: Fleeing official spaces and taking refuge in small, non-verbal, deniable practices. I formally define 'fugitive joy' as practices of cross-enmity acknowledgement characterised by five features: (1) low-stakes, (2) non-verbal, (3) undeniable, (4) extra-ecclesiastical and (5) persistent (synthesised from Lederach 2005; Scott 1990; Volf 1996).

The persistence mechanism: Joy as discursive refuse. *Why does fugitive joy survive when legal discourse dominates?* Legal framings govern *what can be said* about property and procedure; they cannot govern *what can be felt* about shared memory. The court ruling restructured legitimate arguments, but it could not extinguish pre-legal affective bonds. Joy survives *despite* secular frames but *in the interstices* they cannot reach, the heart emoji, the shared hymn, and the silent funeral coordination. These are what I call *discursive refuse*: Affective practices that legal discourse displaces but cannot metabolise.

Shared pre-split worship music (hope as memory)

In 'AFM Memories 1990–2005', members of both factions posted recordings from before 2018. A comment on a 1995 revival recording read: 'The Holy Spirit doesn't know about the Supreme Court'. It received 47 likes from both factions. Another: 'Look at us then. We didn't ask which faction. We just sang'. These posts created cross-faction spaces of shared memory.

Joint funeral coordination (reconciliation as suspended hostility)

In a funeral thread (February 2024), an AFM Zimbabwe member wrote: 'Today we bury our sister. She loved this church before there was a split. Today we are all AFM'. The comment received 68 likes and 23 cross-faction condolences. Practical coordination occurred: '*Who is bringing the tent?'* 'We have chairs from our side'. Funeral suspended hostility for hours.

Silent Facebook reactions (joy as deniable embrace)

Members frequently reacted with heart emojis (❤) but rarely wrote textual replies across faction lines. One member explained (comment later deleted): 'I can't say I forgive them because we haven't talked. But I can hear their prayer request. That's all I have right now'. The deletion itself evidences the fugitive character, offered but cannot be owned publicly. The heart emoji is thin, but it is not nothing.

Interpretation of results

These three practices share a common structure: (1) low-stakes, (2) non-legal and (3) non-verbal. They create momentary spaces of connection without requiring resolution. They are fugitives because they operate outside official structures and are fragile, yet they persist. Ordinary members continue to acknowledge each other across the divide.

Discussion

This study found that within official church structures and public discourse, biblical reconciliation language vanished. Secular framings (tribal, financial and legal) filled the vacuum, and the court ruling became a new functional canon. However, outside those structures, ordinary members generated fugitive joy: (1) shared pre-split hymns, (2) silent funeral cooperation and (3) anonymous heart-emoji reactions. This use of digital emojis is not full reconciliation of the leadership and members but (Papacharissi 2015), trace where hope, reconciliation and joy relocated after court rulings instead of internal biblical mechanisms.

These findings both confirm and extend prior empirical work on AFM splits. Unlike the earlier AFM schisms documented by Togarasei (2016), which were resolved through elder mediation and prayer, the 2018–2021 case was decided by a secular Supreme Court ruling. The difference in process explains why earlier splits did not generate fugitive joy; institutional reconciliation remained possible then, whereas juridification has now foreclosed it. This study thus extends prior AFM scholarship by showing that how a schism is resolved shapes what forms of residual connection remain possible.

A brief contrast with the AFM in South Africa is critical to shed more light on this study. According to Mundhluri (2026) the AFM in South Africa under Isak Burger's leadership sought structural unification and intercultural leadership development. The idea of this approach was to make crisis resolution an integral part of Pentecostal mission. This approach cannot be judged based on perfection or imperfection, but it has remained within church structures. Without diving deep into how the Zimbabwean case internal structure happened, but what is clear is that the reconciliation could only survive outside official channels.

Theoretically, the findings align with Volf (1996): Courts cannot produce embrace. But they also extend Volf by showing that ordinary members invent substitutes (heart emojis and shared music) where embrace is impossible. Lederach's (2005) moral imagination, ordinarily attributed to leaders, was enacted by lay members on Facebook. These findings resonate with Lederach's concept by showing that moral imagination can be a distributed rather than elite capacity. This situation is facilitated by the fact that the leadership will have abdicated its reconciling role.

African Pentecostals emphasise resilience through communal practices, and this dimension is absent from legal proceedings. The AFM case confirms that the community did not collapse even when the institution did. Wariboko's (2014) juridification critique is confirmed at the leadership level, but the case shows that the Spirit is not entirely ceded; fugitive joy represents the Spirit's refusal to be silenced.

The strength of this study is as follows: Firstly, the 20-month observation period across Facebook and YouTube captured fugitive joy practices over time, reduced snapshot bias. Secondly, triangulation of 27 newspaper articles with social media data provided both elite public discourse and grassroots lay perspectives. The use of negative evidence (absence of biblical language) demonstrates methodological rigour in discourse analysis. However, the study over-represents urban, digitally connected members. Rural members without smartphones likely have different practices, perhaps more embodied, less mediated by emojis. Implications for practice and policy for church leaders: Civil litigation forecloses embrace. When internal processes are bypassed, ordinary members will create non-institutional substitutes, but these are fragile and deniable. Denominations should codify binding arbitration clauses in their constitutions to prevent resort to courts.

'Fugitive joy': A bottom-up approach to reconciliation

This section moves beyond empirical description to conceptual innovation. I propose the concept of fugitive joy as a new contribution to reconciliation theory.

'Fugitive joy' is the name for those practices of cross-enmity acknowledgement that operate without institutional authorisation, leave no formal record, and remain deniable by their practitioners. The term 'fugitive' draws from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. 'fugitive', adj. 1a and 3b): (1) 'fleeing from danger or pursuit', joy escapes official spaces and (2) 'elusive, transient, hard to capture', where the joy appears in gestures too small to count as reconciliation but too significant to dismiss. The flight from oppressive institutions into interstitial spaces, while specifying its *theological* content: The Holy Spirit's refusal to be monopolised by juridified ecclesiastical structures. (For parallel uses in critical race, queer, and political theory, see [Hartman 1997; Honig 2021; Muñoz 2009]); exploring those parallels is beyond this article's scope.

Fugitive joy as diagnostic trace

As a diagnostic trace, fugitive joy functions as empirical evidence of surviving hope. When the grand narratives of

reconciliation have failed, these micro-practices are the only signs that the relationship is not entirely severed. It serves as a, semiotic indicator and as a sign that points to a prior presence or possibility without fully representing it (Peirce 1931–1958: vol. 2, para. 304; Ricoeur 1988:142–144). When formal reconciliation mechanisms collapse, fugitive joy becomes the only evidence that hope survives.

Relationship to existing concepts

Fugitive joy differs from Volf's embrace (which requires face-to-face mutual vulnerability); it is thinner and safer, but what remains when embrace is impossible. It differs from Lederach's moral imagination (usually a leader's strategic capacity); fugitive joy democratises imagination, ordinary people act without strategy. It differs from African communal reconciliation (public rituals, elder mediation); fugitive joy is post-communal, what persists after the community has split. It differs from Wariboko's juridification critique; fugitive joy is the Spirit's refusal to be entirely ceded.

Theological basis

Pentecostal ecclesiology holds that the Spirit blows where it wills (Jn 3:8) and cannot be monopolised by institutions (Macchia 2006:89–92). In the AFM case, the Spirit migrated to the cracks: (1) funeral cooperation, (2) shared hymns and (3) silent emoji reactions. Fugitive joy names where the Spirit goes when the institution fails.

Limits of the concept

Fugitive joy does not solve schism. It does not return property or reunify factions. It can be performative hypocrisy without risk. It may be culturally specific; whether it travels to non-Pentecostal, non-African, or non-digital contexts is an empirical question.

Implications for reconciliation theory

Firstly, reconciliation theory must attend to micro-scale practices, not only macro-processes. Secondly, it must distinguish institutional reconciliation from lived reconciliation; they can diverge entirely. Thirdly, it must take joy seriously as diagnostic, not just an afterthought.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to trace where hope, reconciliation, and joy relocate after a Pentecostal church bypasses its internal biblical processes and submits to civil litigation. The study used a qualitative approach combining newspaper analysis with several Facebook posts and comments on several YouTube videos. This study began with a question: *What happens to hope, reconciliation, and joy when a church bypasses its own scriptures for civil litigation?* Using the 2018–2021 AFM Zimbabwe split as a case, I traced these virtues and found they are relocated. Inside official structures, biblical language disappeared, replaced by tribal, financial and legal framings. The court ruling became a new functional canon. Outside official structures, ordinary members generated fugitive joy, shared pre-split hymns, funeral cooperation and silent heart emojis. The article proposes fugitive joy as a new concept: Low-stakes, non-verbal, undeniable, extra-ecclesiastical, persistent practices that serve as a diagnostic trace of hope when formal mechanisms collapse.

Fugitive joy is not unique to Pentecostal schisms. Wherever institutional mechanisms for reconciliation are abandoned for adversarial legal proceedings, in family disputes, organisational fractures or political transitions, we might expect residual affective practices that legal discourse cannot govern. The heart emoji and the shared hymn are local instantiations of a more general phenomenon: The persistence of pre-legal bonds in the interstices of juridified conflict.

The split is likely permanent. But the fugitive joy documented here suggests that ordinary members have not given up on each other. That is not nothing. This phrase emphasizes that while micro-practices like heart emojis are "thin" and non-institutional, they are meaningful evidence that human connection and hope persist even when formal structures have collapsed. The court spoke louder than the Bible in 2021. But joy, especially joy that is fugitive, silent and shared across enemy lines, has a way of outlasting both. Future studies on the durability of fugitive joy are unknown; longitudinal research is needed. Also, the study does not compare the AFM case with other Pentecostal schisms that did not involve litigation, which would help isolate the specific effects of juridification.

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CRediT authorship contribution

Nomatter Sande: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, 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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