


# Syncretism and indigenisation in the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa

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**Background:** Syncretism is a complex subject that represents the combination of more than two religious belief systems with fundamental differences.

**Objectives:** This article aimed to contrast the syncretistic views on the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches by arguing that cultural adaptation and the prosperity message in these churches represent indigenisation rather than syncretism.

**Method:** This article used the literature review in qualitative research to identify the sources that locate cultural adaptation and prosperity message in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches within the concept of syncretism to identify the research gaps on the indigenisation of the gospel.

**Results:** The article found that the indigenisation of the gospel is an important theoretical framework in contrasting the syncretistic views in the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the South African context.

**Conclusion:** Cultural adaptation and prosperity message do not always represent syncretistic views of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, if syncretism is understood as a combination of two or more religious belief systems.

**Contribution:** Indigenisation of the gospel is important for the study and understanding of African Pentecostalism, as it assists in arguing against the syncretistic views on the cultural adaptation and prosperity message in the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the South African context.

**Keywords:** indigenisation; syncretism; newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches; culture; African Pentecostalism; prosperity.

## Introduction

The Pentecostal movement, in its various strands, continues to grow in the Global South, with Africa playing a major role in this growth. While the early 20th century was dominated by the growth of the classical Pentecostal churches, the last quarter of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have been dominated by the emergence of newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The number of Pentecostals in Africa, including both classical Pentecostal churches and newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, exceeds 200 million and contributes more than 30% of the worldwide total of approximately 644 million (Wariboko & Oliverio 2020:327). Therefore, the contribution of African Pentecostalism to global Pentecostalism in particular and world Christianity in general remains unquestionable. However, the challenge is that amid this phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in Africa, the syncretistic elements continue to be highlighted in scholarship, thus undermining its impact on world Christianity. In arguing against the syncretistic views on the movement, this article works within the indigenisation of the gospel as a relevant theoretical framework to demonstrate that the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches have found ways to use the indigenous knowledge system, which should be separated from syncretism. Although indigenisation can result in syncretism, this article argues that this should be highlighted rather than generalised, as many newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches have been able to indigenise without syncretising.

To achieve the objectives of the study, this article introduces the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa to distinguish them from the classical Pentecostal churches. The article uses the data collection method of a literature review in qualitative research to identify the sources that have located the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches within syncretism. The indigenisation

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of the gospel will be introduced and applied to the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches to demonstrate how these churches have found ways to blend the gospel with the indigenous knowledge system but at the same time are able to avoid syncretism that comes with indigenisation. Therefore, the blending of the gospel with the indigenous knowledge system should not be confused with syncretism.

The article begins with an introduction and follows this with discussing newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa. Next, the definition of syncretism is presented. Syncretistic views on the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, indigenisation in the context of newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches and contrasting syncretism in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are discussed before concluding the study.

### Newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa

African Pentecostalism consists of the classical Pentecostal churches that were founded by Western missionaries in various African countries, including South Africa (eds. Chitando, Togarasei & Maseno-Ouma 2024; Nel 2019; Resane 2022; White 2020). The classical Pentecostal churches are also known as the missionary Pentecostal churches, given their foundation or link to the missionaries. In South Africa, the three major denominations belonging to classical Pentecostalism are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Full Gospel and the Assemblies of God. To make a distinction between the classical Pentecostal churches and Pentecostal churches founded by African leaders, Anderson (2002a, 2002b) uses the category 'newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches'. In the South African context, churches such as Grace Bible Church, Hope Restoration Ministries and Rhema Bible Church can be considered as newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Frahm-Arp (2010) researched the role of women in the Grace Bible Church as a newer Pentecostal and charismatic church. These churches in other contexts, such as Ghana and Nigeria, are highlighted in the works of Asamoah-Gyadu (2004) and Ukah (2003), respectively. Anderson (2005:68) defines newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches and other Pentecostal ministries as 'a movement emerging in the 1970s and becoming a most significant expression of Christianity on the continent, especially in Africa's cities'. For Anderson, it would be difficult to understand the growth of Pentecostalism in the 21st century without having a deeper understanding of this sub-tradition of the movement. The other important link that Anderson (2005) makes is the connection between newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches and the African Independent Churches (AICs) and with classical Pentecostal churches. Indeed, there are some resemblances between the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches and the AICs, particularly in the contextualisation of the gospel for its relevance in local cultural contexts.

There is also a strong connection between the churches because of their foundation by African leaders, as opposed

to classical Pentecostal churches, which were started by Western missionaries, as highlighted precedingly. Anderson (2005) is also correct to point out the continuation of the message of Spirit baptism in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches as emanating from the classical Pentecostal churches. Some churches have emerged from the classical Pentecostal churches, which have deviated from the main tenets of the Pentecostal movement (eds. Kgatle, Nel & Banda 2021). However, this current study is not interested in such churches but rather the ones listed previously that have kept the Pentecostal characteristics. It is also debatable that a movement or church can leave the main tenets of the Pentecostal movement and remain Pentecostal. The connection with classical Pentecostalism also exists because of some of the leaders of newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches who served in the former, such as the leader of the Grace Bible Church, Mosa Sono, who served in the Apostolic Faith Mission. Resane (2021:66) points out that 'Sono grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church and was evangelically oriented by Youth Alive in Soweto'. However, Anderson (2005) points out:

Sono became involved with Pentecostals, joined the Apostolic Faith Mission, and a friend led him into the baptism in the Spirit. In 1980, he attended the Apostolic Faith Mission's Central Bible College in Soshanguve. Not finding the college exactly what he wanted, he left the following year to enrol at the Rhema Bible Training Centre of Ray McCauley in Randburg, where he completed a two-year diploma by the end of 1982. (p. 78)

Anderson (2005:78) further states that even after joining the Rhema Bible Training Centre, he continued to fellowship at the Apostolic Faith Mission and only left the church in 1982 to join the Rhema Bible Church. Therefore, it is correct to say that newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have elements of both AICs and the classical Pentecostal churches. It is also correct to say that the reference to the Holy Spirit is what connects all these various Pentecostal sub-traditions and other ministries. Thus, they become different waves of the same stream, with Spirit baptism becoming the connecting point.

Something unique, which is also highlighted by Anderson (2005), is that newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are started by young and vibrant leaders, some of whom have a good education from South African Universities. Anderson (2005:68) also links these churches with the campus ministries in universities as an inspiration for their foundation. It is for the same reason that, unlike AICs, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches do incorporate the use of media and other technological tools for the presentation of the gospel relevantly to the young audience and the black middle class. Adogame (2010:499) explains that the utilisation of media and technology has added to the visibility of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the African context. Adogame continues to say that it is 'their public visibility, mobility, and social relevance in local-global contexts that have attracted further interpretive and analytic approaches'. Ojo (2012) adds that

in the early 1970s, the Pentecostal and charismatic churches grew because they:

[P]romoted their new evangelism through literature, crusades, camp meetings, 'Fire or Holy Ghost or Power' conferences, 'Holy Ghost Nights', and healing and deliverance services. They also advertised on conspicuous signboards in the cities and utilized the media and emerging media technologies to promote themselves and enlist members. (p. 295)

Therefore, it is correct to point out that the use of media and technology in advertising the gospel made the Pentecostal and charismatic churches grow, and this is another reason why these churches continue to grow in the 21st century. But one must also add another characteristic of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which is breaking the racial class divisions that existed in the classical Pentecostal churches by appealing to all different races in the South African context. This is another factor for the expansion of these churches in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent. This is one reason mentioned by Anderson (2005:78) as to why Sono left the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, which was because they supported racial segregation.

The newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are also good in the area of healing and deliverance, which they also take from the AICs, with some of them practising the use of various healing objects. In this way, we see a continuation of the practices of healing and deliverance from AICs into the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Anderson (2005:69) explains that newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches 'have also all offered a personal encounter with God through the power of the Spirit, healing from sickness and deliverance from evil in all its manifestations'. This aspect of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches has been described by Adogame (2010:499) as the power dynamic of the movement in what is coined as 'Pentecostal power'. It is one factor that continues to draw so many people to these churches because of the demand for healing and deliverance among many Africans in different contexts.

Other than the concepts of healing and deliverance, these churches are also known for the continuation of the message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophecy. Although one must point out that in the 21st century, the emphasis on the prophetic office and prophetic titles has been seen more in new prophetic churches than in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches. In addition, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are good at responding to the social needs of their members, including confronting different social ills such as poverty, joblessness and inequalities. The preachers in these churches offer a message of hope to those who are disillusioned and have lost hope in life. Again, one must point out that this too is an important factor contributing to the growth and expansion of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent.

## A working definition of religious syncretism

Religious syncretism entails a particular religious group engaging in the combination of two or more religious belief systems in the expression of a particular religious phenomenon (Grillo, Van Klinken & Ndzovu 2019; Stewart 1999; Umoh 2013). Umoh (2013:32) explains, 'Syncretism normally refers to merging beliefs of two or more religious systems to develop a new one'. I would add that such a combination should come from the different religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism and traditional African religions. If not, the exercise of probing syncretism might be futile, as most religious groups naturally represent a mixture of different beliefs. Grillo et al. (2019:20) point out that to avoid this futility, this combination must be made of two distinct religious traditions, such as highlighted precedingly. Syncretism should be differentiated from the introduction of new doctrines. What Mwititi, Nderitu and Wambugu (2015) describe as the creation of a new doctrine or ideology or a religious view, it is not syncretism because it does not constitute a combination of more than two religious views. In fact, religion itself is not static and therefore tends to reproduce itself into newer forms and practices. In addition, some scholars such as Sundkler (1961:297) and Engelke (2010) have confused the application of the gospel into the local cultural context as mixing Christian beliefs with traditional African religions. While others, such as Marimbe (2024), have defined syncretism as the mixing of cultures, which, in my view, constitutes cultural syncretism and not religious syncretism. We also cannot define the mixing of religion and culture as syncretistic because religion is always interpreted and practised within the relevant cultural context; it does not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, in the quest to probe syncretism, we should be clear on what we mean by religious syncretism. Its original meaning is the combination of two or more religious groups in the practice of religion.

Stewart (1999) has helped make a distinction between negative syncretism and positive syncretism. In the negative sense, syncretism has been used to discourage the new religious movements that have tried to disentangle themselves from the Western forms of Christianity. Stewart (1999) explains that:

Syncretism became a term of abuse often applied to castigate colonial local churches that had burst out of the sphere of mission control and begun to indigenize Christianity instead of properly reproducing the European form of Christianity they had originally been offered. (p. 46)

This means that mainline Christian churches would label others syncretistic in the protection of their own doctrine and to safeguard their churches against emerging Christian churches. Hence, as aforementioned, they would even define the emergence of new doctrines as syncretistic. Therefore, in our quest to study syncretism, we should avoid the same abuse of judging the Christian movements, for example, in Africa, which are doing their best to indigenise the gospel.

When we do so according to Stewart (1999), we will be applying syncretism in the negative sense of the word. Using syncretism positively, according to Stewart (1999:45), Plutarch tried to do so in the first-century AD. Plutarch was discouraging the fusion of different religious beliefs in an uncritical way. This positive use of syncretism is consistent with the definitions provided by Stewart (1999), Umoh (2013) and Grillo et al. (2019). However, in this current study, the writer argues that in the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, indigenisation should not be confused with this positive use of syncretism, so as to avoid the negative use of syncretism, that is, the labelling of others as syncretistic to defend the Western forms of Christianity.

### **Syncretistic views on the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches**

There have been critics of the Pentecostal movement, particularly the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which are perceived by scholars such as Cox (1996:256) as being in continuation with primal religions in the African context. In this way, Cox (1996) takes a position on the syncretistic view of Pentecostalism based on the connection between Christianity and primal religions in Africa. Pentecostalism indeed is growing in Africa as a result of the existence of the primal religions on the continent. Indeed, in linking African problems to the spiritual realm, Pentecostalism learns from the primal religions in Africa. However, Cox (1996) in his analysis fails to understand that both the Pentecostals and primal religions might link their problems and challenges to the spiritual realm, but this does not make them the same.

Anderson (2018) is helpful in the discussion of how Pentecostals are in discontinuity with the popular religions in Africa through the confrontation of the evil spirits, which are normally appeased in popular religions. It is for the same reason that Pentecostals engage in spiritual warfare to engage in a prayer that confronts the very evil spirits causing evil in the world. Elsewhere, Anderson (1999:229) has pointed out that Pentecostals have rejected various traditional African religious practices such as the use of charms and other ritual practices. Pentecostals do not worship the ancestors but engage in the ceremonies of unveiling tombstones to commemorate their loved ones. The newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches might be present at the tombstone but do not engage in the performance of various rituals that may result in the worship of ancestors (Kgatle & Mashau 2023). Therefore, by avoiding the rituals that have to do with ancestral worship, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches avoid moving towards syncretistic practices. In addition, Pentecostals in Africa, particularly churches such as Grace Bible Church, Hope Restoration Ministries and the Rhema Bible Church, have rejected other traditional and cultural practices such as polygamy, maintaining the practice of marriage between one husband and one wife. Although many Pentecostal and charismatic churches do encourage their members to take their male children for circumcision,

they do not encourage the practice of initiation, which has some traditional and cultural connotations, such as the burning of charms and singing of traditional songs. Therefore, it is correct to point out that Pentecostalism is aware of the primal religious practices, but it is not always in agreement with the same practices. Therefore, the discontinuity, as argued by Anderson (2018), is important in delivering the movement from the positive use of syncretism.

The newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches have been criticised as syncretistic through their cultural adaptation of the gospel in the local context. Since the majority of Western missionaries and thinkers wanted Africans to accept the gospel in Western forms, any rejection of such forms through the gospel in the African context was labelled syncretistic. For scholars such as Turner (1993:108), anything that has been Africanised or applied in the local cultural context is syncretistic, given the same thinking that seeks to reject cultural adaptation of the gospel. Therefore, any attempt to make the gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to the African culture is seen as being syncretistic, forgetting that even the Bible itself is written and interpreted within a specific cultural context.

According to Anderson (2000), the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not syncretistic but have:

[F]ound in their own context both culturally and biblically acceptable alternatives to and adaptations from the practices of their ancient religions, and they are seeking to provide answers to the needs inherent there. (p. 375)

In other words, what scholars such as Turner (1993) failed to acknowledge is the ability of Pentecostals to adapt and learn from the religious and cultural practices to provide relevant answers rather than to be consumed by the same religious and cultural practices. Therefore, culture is in no way making the gospel impure or corrupting the gospel but making it relevant to the local cultural context. As previously mentioned, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches do not accept any cultural practice but first assess the relevant ones that are consistent with the biblical message. It is, therefore, very unfortunate that the movement can be considered as syncretistic based on the cultural adaptations.

The newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches have also been criticised for preaching the gospel of prosperity, particularly when the latter is defined in the context of capitalism. Prosperity gospel is basically the preaching of a wealth and health message, which motivates the believers to give their offerings and plant seeds to receive more blessings. In other words, when the prosperity gospel is defined in the context of capitalism, it leads some scholars to arrive at the conclusion that anyone preaching prosperity is syncretistic. In this case, syncretism means mixing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the message of material or even financial success. Consequently, the message of prosperity is seen as being inconsistent with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, or as Nel (2023) puts it, a deviation from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Writing from a Zimbabwean perspective, Marimbe (2024:3) is quick to link newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in that country with American Pentecostalism and highlight their emphasis on the prosperity gospel, which he perceives as syncretistic. Tagwirei (2024:11) also writes from a Zimbabwean context and criticises the preachers in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches for being greedy and self-enriching in the name of the prosperity gospel. Umoh (2013) also writes about some Nigerian pastors who own private jets, which he opines they received through the preaching of the prosperity gospel. However, the critics of the prosperity gospel have also failed to see the other side of this gospel. Robbins (2004:137) notes that some Pentecostal and charismatic churches preach the prosperity that seeks to deliver their congregants from the harsh realities of poverty, as opposed to the prosperity that seeks the self-enrichment of the pastors. Given the harsh realities in South Africa and other countries on the continent, the message that seeks to deliver the people from poverty and inequalities cannot be seen in a negative sense. This means that before concluding syncretistic views, there is a need to consider both sides of the prosperity gospel. There is a prosperity message that aims at liberating Africans from poverty, which, in the view of the writer, is different from the capitalist, self-enriching and greedy forms of prosperity. Therefore, the preaching of prosperity is not always syncretistic and hence, the importance of understanding the indigenisation of this message as discussed next.

### **Indigenisation in the context of newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches**

In this article, indigenisation is not discussed generally but in the context of the gospel. According to Manyonganise (2024:4) and Kaunda (2024), the earlier calls by scholars such as Idowu (1965) and Mbiti (1969:271) for the indigenisation of the gospel were not calls for the mixing up of the religious beliefs but rather for the indigenous expressions of Christianity. These were calls later made by scholars such as Bediako (1992:252), Sanneh (2003) and Sanneh and Carpenter (eds. 2005), for Christianity to truly become indigenous and African. Indigenisation, therefore, in recent literature refers to making the gospel more appealing through the adaptation to the local culture and the local people (Endong & Kediehor 2024; Kanu 2022; eds. Majumdar, Baikady & Ashok 2023). Kanu (2022:37) explains that it is a process of 'making something more native so that it suits the local culture or people'. However, in the context of the gospel, it is important to state that this process does not aim at changing the core message of the gospel but to make it more appealing in local cultural contexts. Hence, it is contended here that the indigenisation of the gospel does not always lead to syncretism but to the inclusion of the indigenous communities. Majumdar et al. (eds. 2023:258) define indigenisation as 'those groups of people who have their own cultural practice, dress, style, food habits, and religious beliefs'. This means that the preaching of the gospel cannot be ignorant of the people's surroundings, or else it becomes

irrelevant. The argument made in this current study is that the process of appealing to people's surroundings and their context, particularly in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, does not immediately lead to syncretism. Endong and Kediehor (2024) explain that indigenisation:

[I]s the process by which indigenous perspectives, content, and knowledge are incorporated within an imported concept. In other words, it is a form of enculturation of Christianity which, in the African context, could otherwise be called Africanisation, or tropicalisation. (p. 119)

This means that the knowledge of the gospel is not changed but rather applied relevantly to the African context, which differs completely from syncretism, the mixing up of two or more religious beliefs. In this way, indigenisation refers to the indigenous expression of the gospel where there is an interaction between African culture and Christianity. It must be reiterated that indigenisation does not change the gospel message but seeks to bring balance between culture and the core values and beliefs in Christianity. It is only when the gospel is combined with the local traditional religious elements in the context of indigenisation that it leads to syncretism. However, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches do not mix up the gospel with the traditional religious practices but with the local cultural contexts.

The process of the indigenisation of the gospel seeks to achieve a reality where Christian worship is done within the context of the local people and their culture. This is what, in essence, so many Pentecostal and charismatic churches have achieved over the years in making the Pentecostal worship so appealing to the local people, using language and culture that appeal to them rather than adopting the Western forms of worship. Therefore, indigenisation takes seriously the activities that help believers to conduct worship in a way that is welcoming to the indigenous communities, which explains the rationale for the growth and expansion of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches. These kinds of activities are not in any way aimed at attacking the core message of Christianity but rather at making the gospel relevant to the local cultural contexts. In the process of indigenisation, according to Félix-Jäger (2022:48), the indigenous communities are empowered as their own culture is part of the preaching of the gospel and Pentecostal worship; hence, they are attracted to the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. The argument is that this model makes the gospel comprehensible in the local cultural contexts but does not change its core message. Therefore, preachers in the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches aim at presenting the gospel in a way that does not represent Western culture but rather the local cultural contexts in Africa. This helps in making the gospel acceptable to the local people, which they also wish to share with other Africans. In the presence of culture and other indigenous knowledge systems, the people can still hear the message of the gospel in the sermons, songs and testimonies. Therefore, the indigenisation of the gospel is relevant for cultural adaptation and maintaining the core message of the gospel

of Jesus Christ. The model is relevant in arguing against syncretism because there is no deviation from the message of the gospel. Therefore, labelling newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches syncretistic only based on making the presentation of the gospel more appealing to Africans is to use syncretism negatively, as argued by Stewart (1999).

The indigenisation process also involves the participation of the indigenous leaders in the propagation of the gospel. Resane (2021) explains that most newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are under the leadership of the local indigenous pastors who appeal to the indigenous constituency. Whereas in early classical Pentecostalism, leadership was taken by white missionaries overseeing the work of black churches. The leadership by white missionaries, some of whom did not understand the local cultural context, compromised the growth of early Pentecostalism in South Africa.

In the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, when African leaders founded these churches, they were able to grow because of the understanding they had of the local cultural contexts. The argument here is that this understanding cannot be defined in the context of syncretism but rather as an endeavour to make the gospel appeal to Africans. The indigenous leadership, too, does not immediately lead to syncretism, except that the leader engages in traditional religious beliefs in the name of indigenisation. The leaders in the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, such as Archbishop Mosa Sono, Pastor Simphiwe Mathebula and the late Pastor Ray McCauley, are leaders who were properly trained with a proper theological foundation; hence, they can deal with any syncretistic elements in their churches. But, saying this, the writer is not ignorant of other emerging Pentecostal churches where leaders engage in syncretistic practices, but these should not be used to make generalisations on the broader Pentecostal movement.

### **Contrasting syncretism in newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches**

The newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not in continuation with the primal religions, as suggested by scholars such as Cox (1996), but have actually found ways in which the gospel can reach the African people through the preaching of culturally relevant messages. Inasmuch as this culturally relevant message is consistent with the biblical message, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches cannot be viewed or perceived as syncretistic. Indeed, newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches do connect with primal religions about the spiritual realm as being the source or cause of evil. However, there is also a need to demonstrate that Pentecostal and charismatic churches do differ from the primal religions in how the evil spirits in the spiritual realm are addressed in dealing with the daily challenges that Africans face (Anderson 1999, 2018). While the primal religions appease the spirits in the spiritual realm, the Pentecostal and charismatic churches confront these spirits through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the indigenisation of the gospel, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not too concerned with making the gospel pure but rather in making it culturally relevant to the local people in Africa. Pentecostals are concerned with making the gospel their own, which is what Meyer (1994:45) calls 'appropriation'. There is no other way in which Africans can clearly understand the gospel if not through the cultural adaptation, or as Meyer puts it, 'appropriation' brought about by the indigenisation of the gospel. The Christianity that is truly applied to the indigenous people using the indigenous knowledge system becomes relevant to the local cultural contexts, and this should be separated from syncretism. We also need to be cognisant of the fact that Pentecostals do not wish to replace the gospel with culture in the process of indigenisation but rather to make the very same gospel relevant to the local cultural contexts. Hence, the argument here is that the indigenous expressions through the links with primal religions and cultural adaptations of the gospel do not necessarily result in syncretistic elements. Because, as Robbins (2003:223) puts it, Pentecostals can adapt to culture without making the gospel totally about cultural practices. It is this kind of balance brought about by the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches that move to grow and expand in the African continent. Anderson (1999) puts it in this way:

Pentecostals attain an authentically indigenous character that enables them to offer answers to some of the fundamental questions asked in their own context. A sympathetic approach to local culture and the retention of certain cultural practices are undoubtedly major reasons for their attraction, especially for those millions overwhelmed by urbanisation with its transition from a personal rural society to an impersonal urban one. (p. 229)

This sympathetic approach, as highlighted by Anderson (1999), is the same factor that makes millions of adherents follow the Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa. Consequently, Pentecostalism becomes a movement that represents the true form of African Christianity in a continent where the Western forms of Christianity have dominated for many years. Similarly, through these newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, the Christian movement has been enlarged within the context of the Global South, with an impact in the Global North. Hence, newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa are making an important contribution to global Pentecostalism and world Christianity. Therefore, the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches have become the model where there is a disentanglement from the Western forms of Christianity. They have become models of African Christianity with important contributions to world Christianity.

The newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches do not always preach prosperity in the quest to exploit the congregants but rather to develop the people of Africa. So many Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa do not have links with American Pentecostalism; hence, Kalu (2008) argues that the majority do not even know the Azusa Street Revival.

Consequently, these churches do not approach the prosperity gospel in a similar way as the popular American preachers do. Newer Pentecostal and Charismatic churches such as Hope Restoration Ministries of Pastor Simphiwe Mathebula in Kempton Park are involved in the building of schools and sometimes even the building of houses in townships such as Tembisa. The same is done in West Africa, where newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Nigeria and Church of Pentecost in Ghana are engaged in the building of schools, universities and clinics. This demonstrates that newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa are not always syncretistic in preaching the prosperity gospel. The same gospel is used for social transformation in the building of institutions of learning and personal development, where the Pentecostal church in Africa is filling the gaps where the government is failing. We should therefore be very careful not to generalise and use the blanket approach when it comes to the manipulation of the prosperity gospel message. We are saying that one is not ignorant of some Pentecostals in Africa who have hijacked the prosperity message to enrich themselves. Equally, the writer is not ignorant of some of the Pentecostal leaders, for example, who act as chiefs over their people and make their followers become subjects to the chief who provides and protects them. But the point made here is that it's not all Pentecostals in Africa who are engaged in the exploitation of their followers for self-enrichment. Therefore, the indigenisation of the gospel is relevant for identifying the indigenous application of the prosperity gospel in different local cultural contexts in Africa. The cases where there is an overuse of the indigenisation process that leads to syncretism should be identified and discussed accordingly to avoid generalisations. The sub-categories of Pentecostalism that engage in syncretistic practices in the broader Pentecostal movement should be singled out to generalise that the Pentecostal movement is engaged in syncretistic practices.

## Conclusion

This article explored the concept of syncretism within the context of the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches in the broader Pentecostal movement in the African continent. Indeed, these churches, which were started by African leaders in the last quarter of the 20th century, should be differentiated from the classical Pentecostal churches, which were started by Western missionaries. However, the various religious practices in these churches should not always be perceived as syncretistic. This article worked within the context of the indigenisation of the gospel to argue that newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches do use the indigenous knowledge systems. But the blending of the religious practices with the indigenous knowledge system does not always represent syncretism. Therefore, there is a need to acknowledge the indigenous knowledge system in the presentation of the gospel of Christ and in arguing against syncretistic views on the Pentecostal movement. This acknowledgement is important in the study and understanding of the phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal movement in the African continent. Therefore, this study

makes an important contribution to African Pentecostalism and world Christianity through an acknowledgement of the indigenisation of the gospel in contrast to syncretism. The article is important in highlighting the attraction to these churches and their phenomenal growth, even amid them being labelled syncretistic. By dissociating the newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, we will be able to clearly see the contribution these churches make to both African Christianity and world Christianity. Future studies can look at specific practices to discuss when they become syncretistic or not.

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## CRedit authorship contribution

Mookgo S. Kgatle is the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from University of South Africa, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee (No. 2019-CHS-90343018-Dept).

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

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