



Reclaiming the essence of Pentecostalism for revitalising faith formation in South African churches

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Background: Pentecostalism has significantly shaped the landscape of Christianity in South Africa. However, concerns have been raised that certain independent Pentecostal churches have strayed from the movement's original theological and missionary foundations that have, in some instances, resulted in theological compromise and exploitation.

Objectives: This article explores how reclaiming the historical and theological essence of Pentecostalism, particularly its emphasis on gifts of the Holy Spirit, restoration theology, experiential ethos, evangelism and inclusivity, can meaningfully contribute to faith formation in independent South African Pentecostal churches.

Method: This article incorporates a literature review that draws on both historical analysis and contemporary challenges to propose a framework for revitalising Pentecostal faith formation in ways that are both Spirit-led and contextually relevant.

Results: Some modern expressions have deviated from Pentecostal roots – resulting in theological compromise and the risk of exploitation – faith formation serves as a vital defence and pathway for renewal.

Conclusion: Pentecostalism's essence – was central to the transformative experiences of its early adherents. However, many independent South African Pentecostal churches have deviated from these foundational roots, resulting in theological compromise, a loss of doctrinal integrity and increased susceptibility to exploitation. By returning to its original essence, Pentecostalism can once again make a meaningful and transformative impact on the faith formation of believers, with the potential to renew both the church and broader society.

Contribution: This article argues that faith formation in independent contemporary independent South African Pentecostal churches can be strengthened by returning to the foundational principles of early Pentecostalism. As some modern expressions have deviated from these roots – resulting in theological compromise and the risk of exploitation – faith formation serves as a vital defence and pathway for renewal.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; deviated; theological foundations; faith formation; reclaiming; renewal.

Introduction

Although Christianity is declining in many parts of the world, it is increasing in South Africa, primarily through the growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic-type churches (Erasmus & Hendriks 2005:83; Forster 2024). Pentecostalism's pneumatic spirituality with a deep focus on personal experience and supernatural encounters is attractive in South Africa, which shares with the global South a worldview that is influenced by an ever-present spirit world (Nel 2019a:36). The Pentecostal emphasis on the Spirit and hermeneutics, which interprets the Bible through experiences (Nel 2023:14), produces its vibrant spirituality and experiential theology that has been a driver for spiritual revitalisation amid societal, economic and political challenges in South Africa (Kgatle 2022:1). However, in recent times, the movement has experienced challenges related to doctrinal integrity, theological compromise and the potential for exploitation through some of its practices (cf. Frahm-Arp 2018, 2019; Kgatle 2021; Ramantswana 2019; Resane 2024). Some of these challenges include the ecstatic practices that Pentecostals share with other religions (cf. MacArthur 2013:201; Mbewe 2013), modalism, which denies the Trinity (cf. Erickson 2013:650, 307; Theology 2025), and the little gods doctrine, among others (cf. Peters 2022). Consequently, this article is a theoretical examination of how Pentecostalism can reclaim its essence to develop deeper faith formation among believers. By examining the theological, historical and

socio-cultural dimensions of Pentecostalism, it proposes a renewed approach to faith formation in the South African Pentecostal context.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The essence of Pentecostalism can be identified through several major pillars: Gifts of the Holy Spirit, restoration theology, experiential ethos, evangelism and inclusivity.

Spirit baptism and the charismatic gifts

Central to Pentecostal theology is the baptism in the Holy Spirit, often evidenced by speaking in tongues and accompanied by other spiritual gifts, such as healing, prophecy and miracles (Anderson 2002:168; Kгатle 2021:iv). Pentecostals associate Spirit baptism with the miraculous experiences of the apostles and the early church, which they believe are normative for Christians today (Menziez 2015:36). While in some Christian traditions Spirit baptism is synonymous with the salvic experience (Stevanus et al. 2023:3), for Pentecostals, this is a distinct event that endows them with power to enact miracles of healing and deliverance while at the same time empowering them for effectual evangelism (Nel 2017:297).

Thus, for the Pentecostal, Spirit baptism is doctrinally significant, representing an empowerment for service and witness. For Pentecostals, there are several scriptural foundations for their belief, which include Acts 2, 10 and 19, where early Christians received the Holy Spirit with visible supernatural manifestations. Initial evidence of being baptised in the Holy Spirit is the ability to speak in tongues. Speaking in tongues was significant in the early Pentecostal meetings, which often drew poor and non-English-speaking working migrants. It indicated the inclusivity of worship of all believers in that the ability to speak in tongues meant that they could all worship God in a heavenly language that He and His angels understood. While the initial followers were restrained racially and socio-economically, their worship was free from these constraints and from the limitations of English prayer books and hymnals (Frahm-Arp 2019:7, citing Synan 1997). In addition, the gifts of the Spirit present in the lives of believers indicated that everyone was equal before God and all people, confirming the dissolution of all separating barriers, with the implication that every believer was empowered to preach and evangelise and to advance God's kingdom (Anderson 2004:5; Oosthuizen 1975:25). The presence and operation of the gifts of the Spirit meant that God was concerned about all aspects of their well-being, including freedom from all manifestations of evil, whether physical, social or spiritual (Anderson 2004:4), as these were provided for in the atonement (Nel 2014:302).

However, the overemphasis of certain gifts of the Spirit in some contemporary independent Pentecostal churches has created artificial barriers that divide believers into the haves and have-nots, consisting of 'super apostles and prophets' that are asserted to be extraordinarily gifted (cf. Kгатle 2021).

Although these church leaders claim that spiritual gifts are for all believers, they themselves are endowed with the more spectacular gifts of prophecy and healing that draw people to themselves rather than to Christ because they claim to have the power and authority to solve their problems (Kгатle 2021:51). These leaders exploit the desperate and destitute by promising to heal and prosper them for financial or other gain. In this regard, Spirit baptism no longer represents empowerment for service and witness for all believers but for self-gratification and elevation of the self-proclaimed apostles and prophets. In this way, they are misrepresenting the role of the Holy Spirit, who convicts people of sin, righteousness and judgement (Jn 16:8–11), draws people to Christ, functions in redemption, transformation and adoption into God's family (Jn 6:44; 3:5–8; Th 2 2:13; 1 Cor 12:13) and promotes Christ (Jn 16:14), rather than elevating individual people. Therefore, returning to the essence of Spirit baptism as understood by the early Pentecostals, where the Holy Spirit gives gifts according to his will to believers, means that God alone is elevated and glorified and no other person is worthy to receive the honour that is His alone.

Restorationist theology

Pentecostalism is often described as a restorationist movement, which attempts to recapture the power and purity of the apostolic church (Nel 2020:1). The apostolic or early church was founded on the teachings and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After His ascension, the apostles were pivotal in spreading the Gospel beyond Jerusalem and were instrumental in establishing the Christian church and doctrine (Biblehub 2023). Initially Pentecostals were not interested in establishing churches or organisations, as they saw themselves as part of the Holy Spirit's restoration of the early church and unification of Christians in the last days (Nel 2019a:3–4). It taught that people needed a personal experience with God and emphasised living a life of holiness, which came from divine encounters with the Holy Spirit. Their restorationist theology – understood as the return to the spiritual vitality and practices of the early church – engendered a sense of continuity with the apostolic church and also served as motivation in which believers were to expect the supernatural manifestations of healing, personal prophecy and tongues in their daily lives (Anderson 2004:5). Such miraculous occurrences were thought to be normative rather than exceptional. The Pentecostal idea of restoration is premised on several features: Spirit baptism and power, which is viewed as having significant eschatological meaning; the anticipation of biblical events such as those of Acts 2; the working of the Spirit to produce conversion, sanctification and infilling that results in moving experiences; a tension with traditional Christianity; and the expectation that the Church will be unified with God gathering His people from all denominations and walks of life (Nel 2019a:7).

For the early Pentecostals, the restoration of the church meant that they not only expected the supernatural manifestations of the Spirit as described in Scripture, but they were also empowered to live sanctified lives modelled

by the first believers. A central characteristic of the early church was community that was both religiously and socially engaged (Knoetze & Prince 2023:2). Believers met daily, shared bread and were given over to spiritual disciplines of Scriptural reading and teaching, worship and prayer (Alikin 2010:31). As a consequence, the notion of community was central in early Pentecostal practice, where regular, sometimes daily, revival meetings¹ were held. These meetings functioned externally as a means of evangelism and internally as a place where believers lived out and practised their faith. The early Pentecostals were given over to the practice of spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation and fasting, and believers, filled with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, participated in all aspects of the public liturgy, practising their spiritual gifts, praying and sharing their testimonies (Nel 2023:3). They felt that they embodied the essence of the early church by emphasising holiness, self-denial and the rejection of material gain (cf. Martin 2008:14; Maxwell 2006:9), which enabled them to better address the spiritual and physical needs of people around them, unlike the conventional church of the day that was unable to meet these pressing needs (Oosthuizen 1975:25).

Experiential ethos

Early Pentecostals functioned with a worldview that emphasised a living and growing relationship with Jesus through continuous encounters with his Spirit (Nel 2019b:4). Spirit baptism was foundational to their experiential faith and personal experience with God through the Holy Spirit (Anderson 2002:168), which was primarily used to base their theology (Archer 2009:140–156) and interpret the Bible (Dela Cruz 2010:105). In contemporary Pentecostalism there remains the emphasis on experience, which is viewed as a sign of a supernatural encounter with God and which can place experience and extra-biblical revelation above the Bible (Enyinnaya 2008:146). The emphasis on experience can be used to judge the validity of one's beliefs, and the said beliefs can be denied as false in the absence of tangible experiences (Nel 2016:6). Therefore, the danger is that people may manufacture experiences to justify their beliefs (Jaichandran & Madhav 2003:55). The reliance of experience and extra-biblical revelation can also expose people to heretical teachings and abuse (Nel 2015:2, 2017:290, 300), especially when relying on any revelation outside of the norms of Scripture. Nevertheless, Pentecostals believe that the Spirit is able to illumine the Word (Land 1993:28) and empower and guide them in their Christian walk (Nel 2015:2). They affirm that the Holy Spirit is able to repeat and bring to remembrance what is found in Scripture but also to direct the church in those areas not covered by Jesus' teachings (Nel 2015:2). Even so, Pentecostals should be careful in formulating what they perceive to be *fresh* or *new* revelations (Nel 2015:2, referencing Robeck 2006:40; italics

1. Regular meetings remain important for many contemporary Pentecostal churches, and they foster their sense of family and community. In my current PhD study of Pentecostal churches, and particularly in the smaller ones, congregants attend meetings several times a week. These include a combination of Sunday morning and evening services; women's prayer meeting on Mondays; Tuesday prayer meeting; Wednesday cell meeting; Thursday Bible study; Friday youth meeting; and Saturday worship/band practice.

present), and their experiences and revelations are to be judged in the context of Scripture.

For Pentecostals Scripture is understood within the context of the ongoing revelation of God by his Spirit (Nel 2017:290), who is able to speak to the church through Scripture and in numerous other ways (Moore 2000:12). As a result, Pentecostalism has an 'oral theology' that is not merely rooted in formal creeds but which Hollenweger (1997:54) describes as being rooted in testimony, storytelling and lived encounter with spontaneous worship as key components of the early movement. Their worship was often marked by emotional expression, physical healing and prophetic utterances, which were all seen as signs of God's active presence. Testimonies were a central component of the early Pentecostal liturgy. As a result, a large segment of the early Pentecostal services was dedicated to public testimonies, consisting of believers' enthusiastic witnessing about their encounters with Christ (Nel 2019b:5).

Public testimonies served as powerful, personal accounts of God's supernatural intervention (Kgatle 2024:2) and often recounted miraculous healings, answered prayer, or spiritual transformations. They provided encouragement and inspired faith because if God could do it for one, He could also do it for someone else. Testimonies served to build the community by connecting individuals over shared experiences and were useful for holding people accountable. Thus, in Pentecostal tradition, public testimonies provided a transformative experience, allowing them to reflect on God's grace and share it with others. Transformation occurred through the work of the Holy Spirit and spirit-filled experiences (Nel 2019b:59) both at the individual and communal levels (Kgatle 2024:4). The experience of testimony had the power to bring about change to the person testifying and to their listeners (Kgatle 2024:5) by building faith in the hearts of the listeners and by encouraging sinners to come to the One who saves, heals and delivers all people who call on Him. Insights from the current PhD study have demonstrated that with increasing numbers the role of public testimonies and spontaneous worship has diminished in many independent Pentecostal services. It is not practical to have public testimonies from multiple people, and churches have become fastidious in the times and liturgical order of worship, leaving little room for these informal practices. The absence of public testimonies and spontaneous worship deprives the assembly of the potential transformative experience that these may bring.

Evangelism

From the onset, the Pentecostal movement was premised on evangelism, and the early Pentecostals believed Spirit baptism empowered believers to fulfil the Great Commission. Spirit baptism was seen as the restoration of the Church, and it was a sign that the end of the age had come (Nel 2018). Consequently, the first Pentecostals interpreted Spirit baptism as preparation for and the expectation of Christ's imminent return (Oosthuizen 1975:68). They interpreted the

outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 2:28–32 as the last and final days before the great judgement (Nel 2014:303). Therefore, in anticipation of His Second Coming, the early Pentecostals were motivated to live pure and holy lives in accordance with 1 John 3:3, 'And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure'. So, Spirit baptism was viewed as a sign of Christ's imminent return, but it was also understood as a gracious gift that enabled them to live lives of holiness that glorified God and prepared them for the great judgement.

The expectation of the imminent Second Coming also spurred their global mission (Nel 2015:4), which they expected would hasten Christ's return (Nel 2015:4 citing Taylor 2006:70), as Christ could not come back before the Gospel was preached in the entire world (Mt 24:14). Faupel (1996:21) states that the initial purpose of their global mission was about hastening Christ's return while not being too concerned with converting people to Christ. Nevertheless, early Pentecostal missions were responsible for taking the message across the world (Anderson 2004:180). Speaking in other tongues that accompanied Spirit baptism was consequently a significant aspect of early Pentecostal missions. They felt that the supernatural impartation of power gave them the ability to speak in an unknown existing language that was needed to evangelise all the world without having to laboriously learn the languages required to reach the lost (Nel 2018, referencing Synan 1997). Although this proved to be an inaccurate interpretation of tongues, which required the early Pentecostals to relook at what the New Testament taught about the gift (Nel 2018), it is important to remember the global extension that followed early Pentecostalism. The desire for personal holiness and to see souls saved prompted their urgency. Unfortunately, some independent South African Pentecostal churches have lost this missionary zeal and desire for personal holiness and emphasise personal success and wealth accumulation in this world (Nel 2014:305).

Inclusivity

Since its inception, Pentecostalism was notably inclusive. Most adherents of the early movement were the racially and economically disenfranchised and marginalised people of society (Archer 2009:198). Although it initially attracted the poor, it soon drew people from different spheres in society who were attracted to it because of its attention to people's religious yearnings and their need for spiritual growth, and how Pentecostals read and interpreted the Bible (Nel 2019b:2). As a result, revivals such as those of Azusa Street in Los Angeles and Bree Street in Johannesburg attracted people across national, gender, class and economic lines (Anderson 2007:3; Kgatle 2022:3). The phenomenon of multicultural congregations [was then and still] is unusual (Naidoo 2017:2) but this was seen as an indication that the movement was born of the Spirit, who dissolved all separating barriers, baptising and gifting all different types of people. Early Pentecostal services could thus be described as radically inclusive, where everyone participated, including the

unemployed, poor and illiterate, by way of oral agreement with the message, ministering to those who responded to the altar call, liturgical dance, prayer for the sick, prayer and song (Hollenweger 1997:201). The early Pentecostals were intentionally inclusive, which, according to Naidoo (2017:3), requires focus on building relationships, deep connections, interactions, mutual gifting, respect and willingness to learn from each other. The notion of inclusivity within Pentecostalism is also evident in how religious authority is represented. Religious authority for them does not exist solely through religious bureaucracy but exists in the person with spiritual gifts. Therefore, they place relatively low value on theological education or official ordination, which results in opportunities for laypeople and women to serve as preachers, evangelists and healers (Moon 2020), which signifies the dissolution of all separating barriers and bears witness to the operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all people. By encouraging involvement in church ministries and leadership, Pentecostal churches have inspired a sense of belonging among their members (Andrew, Schoeman & Botes 2024:23). Their theology emphasises equality between members by providing the opportunity for all to participate in worship as equals, allowing everyone to live out his or her ministry, and providing emotional support from like-minded people (Nel 2019b:2). They believe in the priesthood and prophethood of all believers, leading to interracial, unsegregated and gender-inclusive involvement of anyone in public ministry and worship with the Holy Spirit bearing witness through signs and wonders that validate the gospel message (Nel 2019b:4).

Independent South African Pentecostal churches still largely demonstrate the inclusivity that characterised the early movement; however, there are continuing separations between clergy and laity and between the super spiritual 'apostles and prophets' and ordinary laypeople, often characterised by financial motives.

Faith formation in Pentecostal theology

Faith formation in Pentecostalism is a relatively new and understudied concept in South Africa (Cameron 2021:iii). By considering the embedded essence of early Pentecostal spirituality, contemporary Pentecostal churches can be equipped to cultivate deep, personal faith formation through their various spiritual disciplines. Reflection on the early movement matters because early Pentecostalism emphasised individual holiness and intimacy with the Holy Spirit, which resulted in internal transformation and fuelled outward ministry.

Faith formation, also described as discipleship, entails becoming increasingly Christlike through the continuous transformative work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian (Willard 2000:256). It involves learning to replicate the life of Christ by following, obeying and participating in God's mission (Wright 2010:94). It cannot occur in a vacuum;

it involves living in a relationship with the Triune God and other people (Knoetze 2017:2) to establish the character of Christ in a person (Weber 2014:82) through the influence of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (Folmsbee 2007:39). It is a lifelong process of learning how to live a life that glorifies God through observation and sound theological instruction (Folmsbee 2007:39). Therefore, scriptural knowledge and application of biblical truths are essential components of maturing in one's faith. However, mere knowledge may do little to transform the life of a believer (Folmsbee 2007:39), as transformation occurs through the Holy Spirit's working (Knoetze 2015:7) to enliven the written Word and to vitalise spiritual acts of prayer, meditation, fasting, study, service and worship (Vanhoozer 2015:169–170).

Despite the paucity of research on this topic, a cursory view of faith formation in the Pentecostal tradition sees it as deeply relational and primarily Spirit-driven. Pentecostal spirituality involves experiences to inform a person's faith formation. By incorporating biblical instruction with experiences that are rooted in the Spirit results in faith that is truly transformative. Unlike other Christian traditions that may prioritise catechesis and creeds, Pentecostal faith emphasises formative experiences that are embodied in practices such as worship, testimony, deliverance and healing. Oral and narrative theology are also necessary components of faith formation that rely on stories and testimonies to build faith. In addition, the enduring Pentecostal emphasis on community that occurs in meeting regularly allows people to learn from and observe mature believers living out their faith and are therefore important formative experiences.

The South African context

Many independent South African Pentecostal churches have diverted from early Pentecostal mission roots, which emphasised holiness and Spirit empowerment. Their emergence has sometimes led to:

Prosperity Preaching: The message of the prosperity gospel links faith with financial success but neglects the core tenets of sacrifice, service, holiness and self-denial that characterised early Pentecostalism. It promises supernatural pathways to health and material wealth as spiritual rights to be possessed and enjoyed by all true believers right now (Martin 2008:14; Maxwell 2006:9). This teaching often preys on the poor and marginalised, who are exploited because of their desperate circumstances (Magezi & Banda 2017:2), and others accuse its practices of being cultic (Frahm-Arp 2019; Kgatle 2021).

Exploitative Leadership: Many of the independent South African Pentecostal Churches have charismatic but unaccountable leaders who operate as if they are above accusation and accountability. They position themselves in the same authority as biblical characters and give the impression that they have the same power and can perform the same acts as those recorded in Scripture (Kgatle 2021:47). They tend to draw people to themselves rather than to

Christ, and they manipulate people to perform dangerous acts to prove their faith. Widely reported incidences of congregants who were instructed to drink petrol (Meyer 2014), eat grass (News24 2024) or snakes (Raborife 2015), or have insecticide sprayed on them (Makana 2017) are just a few of the dangerous acts that congregants in some of these new Pentecostal churches endure.

Loss of Transformative Faith Experiences: In many of the independent Pentecostal churches in the current PhD study, transformative experiences such as public testimonies and spontaneous Spirit-led worship no longer occupy a central role. The fastidious liturgical order and time limits prevent people from sharing their testimonies publicly or prevent them from bringing a hymn or psalm in which the entire congregation can participate in unified worship of God. Very often their worship, conducted by professional bands and productions, elicits emotionalism that is not derived from divine encounter with the Spirit but is induced by an atmosphere that uses dimmed lights, smoke, sentimental music, etc. Worship, therefore, is no longer authentic but an orchestrated show, which deprives people of a genuine and transformative encounter with God, especially when emotional experiences are prioritised over sustained spiritual engagement.

Reclaiming the essence of Pentecostalism: A theological and practical proposal

For independent South African Pentecostal churches to reclaim Pentecostalism's essence requires both theological reassessment and practical reformation. This article proposes renewed emphasis on Spirit-led faith formation and evangelism.

Holistic biblical teaching

Their pneumatic spirituality means that Pentecostals emphasise the Holy Spirit and spiritual experiences. The challenge with experiences is that they may be manipulated to justify people's religious beliefs, and relying on them and on extra-biblical revelation may expose people to heretical teachings and abuse. Therefore, Pentecostals must be careful to formulate their experiences and revelations in the context of Scripture. Wholistic biblical instruction that teaches the Word of God in its fullness will cause people to mature into the stature of Christ (Groome 1980:49–51; Root & Dean 2011:71). However, faith formation is not only about knowing the Word, but it also involves adhering to it. Therefore, the Holy Spirit functions to illumine the Word and cause believers to walk in the truth and revelation of the Word. In the absence of sound biblical instruction, people are in danger of being abused and exploited, and, therefore, churches must insist that their leaders are biblically trained and hold a high view of Scripture. Daily personal devotion and Scriptural study must also be encouraged so that the believer may be able to adequately handle the truth and to refute all false claims and teachings.

Create opportunities for transformative faith experiences

Pentecostal churches need to give more attention to and provide opportunities for transformative faith experiences. These may include spontaneous worship and public testimonies. Such experiences edify and build the individual as well as the entire Church body present. When people are allowed to share in one another's experiences, it ultimately prioritises God by causing believers to reflect on and be mindful of the things of God. It transforms their faith and allows them to look beyond themselves and their personal circumstances and to focus on God and His goodness. It can produce unity as they all glorify God in their worship, and by reflecting on God, the things of the world become less attractive and less important in comparison to His glory and grace. Such experiences teach people that God is faithful and able to meet their needs.

Emphasise community and holiness

An essence of early Pentecostalism was living a life of holiness that was made possible through personal experience with God characterised by divine encounters with the Holy Spirit. The early Pentecostals understood holiness as a gradual process of becoming increasingly like Christ. It meant a continual dying to the flesh and living for God. As such, the community of faith was important because it was where they learnt to live out and practise their faith. Contemporary churches need to emphasise holiness against the degrading morality that pervades modern society. They should prioritise sound biblical instruction to repel and replace heretical and unprofitable teachings that relate to certain aspects of the prosperity gospel (cf. Frahm-Arp 2019), modalism, which denies the Trinity (cf. Theology 2025), and performing certain dangerous acts as a way of accessing God (Maluleke 2014). The church needs to become again the place where believers live out and practise their faith and not a place for abuse and exploitation. Sound biblical instruction in conjunction with the Spirit transforms the believer and equips them to withstand untruths and causes them to live holy lives. The preaching of the early Pentecostals drove them to anticipate His return and to live lives that reflected His holiness. People should therefore be reminded that Christ will return, but will He find faith when He comes again?

Create opportunities for ministry

Ministry in the church occurs at the individual and the communal levels, having both an internal (individual-church) and an external (church-world) focus (Bosch 2011:121). Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:26 was for believers to each bring a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation so that the entire Body would be strengthened and encouraged through everyone's participation and involvement. In a similar manner, the first Pentecostals prioritised meeting regularly, where Spirit-filled believers participated in all aspects of the

public liturgy using their spiritual gifts, praying and sharing their testimonies. In the same way, Pentecostal churches should encourage their members to use their gifts and talents to edify the body (internal focus) and reach out to and evangelise the world (external focus) by putting into practice what they have learnt (Knoetze & Prince 2023:6). People who are involved in church ministries have a sense of belonging, which strengthens them and the greater church community.

Prioritise evangelism

Evangelism focuses externally by bringing the Gospel to the world. It involves participating in God's mission of salvation for the world. When believers neglect the mandate of the Great Commission (Mt 28:16–20), it stunts their faith formation. In other words, one's faith remains undeveloped when the focus is purely internal and does not recognise the needs of the outside world. Therefore, Nel (2015:1) and Whitmore (2018:474) assert that Christian maturity occurs through discipleship and discipling others. For the early Pentecostals, evangelism was a key priority based on their belief of Christ's imminent return. This galvanised their efforts for people's salvation. By prioritising evangelism, the contemporary church will stimulate the faith formation of believers who share in God's concern for the lost and who want themselves to decrease and for Christ to increase (Jn 3:30).

Conclusion

Pentecostalism's essence, formed by a combination of theological beliefs and practices, was responsible for the transformative experiences of the early adherents. The movement arose with the vision to restore the contemporary church to its apostolic roots and was born from a spiritual hunger for divine encounter. Many independent South African Pentecostal churches have deviated from the roots of Pentecostalism, resulting in theological compromise, loss of doctrinal integrity and the potential for exploitation. By returning to the original essence of Pentecostalism, characterised by Spirit baptism, restorationist character, experiential ethos, evangelism and inclusivity, independent South African Pentecostal churches can make a meaningful and transformative impact on believers' faith that has the potential to change the church and society.

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CRedit authorship contribution

Ronele M. Prince: contributed to the conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, writing (original draft) and resources of this article. Johannes J. Knoetze: contributed to the conceptualisation, visualisation, writing (review and editing) and supervision of the article.

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Disclaimer

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