

# ‘Citizens of both Heaven and Earth’: Pentecostalism and Social Transformation in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya<sup>1</sup>

Ezra Chitando  
Henrietta Nyamnjoh  
Damaris Parsitau

## Abstract

As Pentecostalism enjoys unparalleled growth in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, greater attention has been paid to its problematic expressions by some scholars. Media images of the abuse of believers in different contexts have been widely circulated. These include sexual abuse by charismatic (male) prophets, financial scandals, as well as the degrading treatment of clients/members by forcing them to eat grass/snakes and other questionable acts. While conceding that these aspects are challenging, this article seeks to provide a more balanced perspective by highlighting the extent to which selected Pentecostal churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya have sought to contribute to social reconstruction in their respective countries. By examining the sermons and teachings on personal responsibility and having effective marriages by the Pentecostal leaders, the article contends that they mobilise their members and audiences to become agents of social transformation. The article highlights the potential role of Pentecostalism in social reconstruction in the selected countries.

**Keywords:** Social transformation, social restructuring, competition, personal development, marriage, religion as strategic resource

---

<sup>1</sup> This article emerged out of a multi-country study, ‘Propelled by the Spirit: Pentecostalism, Innovation and Competition in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe’, supported by the Nagel Institute.

## **Introduction**

Pentecostalism is one of the fastest growing types of religion in sub-Saharan Africa (see for example, Kalu 2008; Adogame 2011; Asamoah-Gyadu 2013 & Lindhardt 2015). Being a highly mobile form of religious expression, Pentecostalism has spread quickly in the region. In general, it is a highly confident and abrasive religion that seeks to sweep its competitors aside. In reality, however, Pentecostalism faces competition from the more established religions of the region. These include the ‘mainline churches’ (Catholic and Protestant), Islam and other ‘world religions’, as well as African Indigenous Religions. In some countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, younger systems of beliefs and practices, such as Rastafari, are active on the spiritual market in which Pentecostalism is a player (Chawane 2014; Sibanda 2012). In order to survive and thrive in such a heavily subscribed market, Pentecostalism has had to be creative. However, the quest to succeed has generated a lot of criticism against Pentecostalism in the region.

In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, the countries that we have selected for this article, Pentecostalism has been receiving negative media coverage. In particular, some (male) Pentecostal pastors have been reported in the local media as abusing women who approach them for healing and counselling. In other instances, Pentecostal pastors are accused of embezzling funds, forcing their followers to do humiliating acts such as eating grass and snakes, drinking petrol ‘believed to have been transformed into ‘apple juice’ or selling ‘anointed pens’ as well as undertaking other acts that are deemed controversial in the public sphere. Although Pentecostals are themselves quite adept at using the media (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015: 157), they have endured negative publicity. We acknowledge that the aspects raised in the critiques of Pentecostalism are quite relevant and require serious reflection, in the public interest.

However, in this article we seek to focus on the extent to which selected Pentecostal churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya are contributing towards social restructuring by encouraging their members and all citizens to challenge corruption, work hard and transform their families, communities and nations. While we focus on a selection of churches, we are aware that there are notable variations among Pentecostal churches in Africa, ranging from the ‘charismatic’ to the more socially conscious, and prophetic. In this regard, we use ‘Pentecostal churches’ in a fluid sense that are

interchangeable to denote at any one point one of the above churches that occasionally fashion their teachings beyond prophetic and prosperity gospel to reflect the socio-economic and political trends of the time or the calendrical events such as Valentine's day, Mother's day, Father's day and Women's day. Recognizing Chammah Kaunda's (2015) critique that many African Pentecostals struggle with political literacy, that is, understanding political dynamics in order to avoid naïve endorsements of dominant politicians, we realise the need for a more balanced review of the contribution of Pentecostal churches to social transformation in the selected African countries. To take such a stance, however, is not to suggest that the Pentecostal movement has suddenly become one massive force that will transform Africa's fortunes for the best. Rather it is to maintain that there is need to acknowledge some positive aspects and developments within the movement.

Due to space and methodological considerations, we utilise the South African case studies in greater detail, while bringing in data from the Zimbabwean and Kenyan contexts to amplify the points raised. The specific Pentecostal groups that we focus on are the Ark of the Glory Church (AG) and Christ Embassy (CE) (Cape Town, South Africa, though coming from Nigeria), the United Family International Church (UFIC) (Harare, Zimbabwe, and DR Congo respectively) and Jubilee Christian Church (JCC) (Nairobi, Kenya). Data for the article were gathered by the researchers in the three settings during fieldwork, March – July 2016. In addition, the researchers have been involved in studying Pentecostalism in diverse contexts over the past seven years. Alongside interviews and participant observation, we also got additional information from the churches' television programmes, videotapes, audiotapes, CDs and other electronic media (Parsitau & Mwaura 2010: 97). Space considerations prevent us from providing historical accounts of the emergence and growth of these churches.

## **Background and Context**

As we have noted above, Pentecostalism has become one of the most significant forms of religious expression in Africa. The region in which Pentecostalism has been experiencing remarkable growth is also the same region where major social and political changes have been taking place. For example, the HIV and AIDS epidemic has been causing serious social

upheaval, especially before the availability of life saving medication to most of the people living with HIV who require the medication. The same region also faces questions relating to politics and governance, development, addressing corruption and others. Although some publications have addressed Pentecostalism's engagement with politics (for example, Ranger 2008) and development (Freeman 2012), there are glaring gaps in examining how individual Pentecostal pastors and/or their ministries seek to mobilise their members and the larger society to embrace values and practices that lead to social transformation.

One of the most contentious issues relating to the rapid expansion of Pentecostalism in Africa relates to whether the movement serves any meaningful and transformative role in society. In his earlier work, Paul Gifford (1988) deployed a conspiracy theory and contended that the fast growing movement was a result of the Religious Right in the USA, and that it was sponsored to achieve definite political goals in the region. Writing some years later, but offering a similarly negative assessment, was Frans Verstraelen (1998) who argued that Pentecostal churches did not appear keen to become agents of social transformation. Perhaps these two scholars with very strong Catholic backgrounds wished to see the Pentecostal churches following the example of the Catholic Church of standing up for justice in different African countries. In this article, we argue that perhaps in response to such criticisms, or a result of becoming more established, some Pentecostal groups have taken the challenge to contribute towards social transformation seriously.

We are convinced that, like a double-edged sword, religion can cause both harm and good in society. Scholars such Scott Appleby (2000) and, Ter Haar and Bussitil (2005) have drawn attention to the capacity of religion to contribute towards both violence and peace/development. In this article, we have chosen to focus on the extent to which selected Pentecostal churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya have sought to be agents of social transformation. As Walsh and Kaufman (1999) have shown, religion has been deployed as a strategic resource to get citizens to be more actively involved in social and political programmes.

Agbiji and Swart (2015) have provided a very balanced and informative review of the role of African Traditional Religions, Christianity and Islam in social transformation. They contend that the famed African religiosity can serve as the basis for fighting negative practices such as poverty and corruption in Africa. However, they are convinced that religious leaders

have been complacent and complicit in the continent's struggle against poverty and corruption. They argue that most religious leaders have abdicated their prophetic role and have promoted fatalistic theologies that rob citizens of their agency. They reach the following conclusion:

Despite its negative exploitation by some of its practitioners and by some African leaders, religion is a positive force that is necessary for the moral, socio-political and economic transformation of African societies. Religion fulfils a crucial role through its provision of a frame of reference for the critical examination of existing social value systems. All religious traditions uphold moral values such as virtue, justice, the sanctity of human life, equality and human dignity. These moral values are reflected in the scriptures of the various literary religions – Christianity and Islam – and in the oral tradition of African Traditional Religion. Religious practitioners should therefore be self-critical and maintain a critical stance towards socio-political and economic institutions (Agbiji & Swart 2015: 15).

Through aggressive media campaigns, Pentecostal churches seek to mobilise Africans to reject poverty and embrace/work for prosperity. For example, in Kenya, JCC has a Media Ministry and runs monthly Church magazines, produces and sell CDS, DVDs, videos and music albums. The Church heavily uses billboards/posters/ hand bills, websites and is characterised by a heavy consumption of social media: twitter, face book, WhatsApp, Instagram and others. This pattern is replicated in South Africa by the AGGC and CE, and in Zimbabwe by the UFIC. In particular, they use the internet to empower their followers and others to be actively involved in social transformation. According to J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu:

The point is that the leadership of contemporary Pentecostals extensively uses modern media, and the internet has been embraced as a divinely inspired breakthrough in contemporary mission endeavors. It has become common for their leaders to sign off radio, television, or even actual church services and revival meetings with direct appeal to patrons, requesting them to stay connected through the internet. The usual catchphrase is, 'We are on the internet', followed by a reference to the internet address (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015: 158).

## **Pentecostalism and the Quest to Empower Responsible Citizens: Examples from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya**

The foregoing sections have drawn attention to the background and context in which Pentecostalism has experienced remarkable growth. In particular, the need for religion to be relevant to the daily struggles of their members and other citizens was underscored. One of the most devastating critiques of missionary Christianity is that it moulded members who were so preoccupied with heaven that they were of no earthly relevance. With its hyper-religiosity and overemphasis on prayer as the panacea for all ills, Pentecostalism faces a real risk of failing to equip its members with knowledge and skills to become agents of social transformation this side of heaven. In this section, we seek to highlight how selected Pentecostal churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya have sought to mould responsible citizens.

Following the demise of apartheid in 1994, post-apartheid South Africa (SA) enshrined in its constitution the freedom of worship (SA constitution, 15.1). The same freedom of worship is guaranteed in the national constitutions of Zimbabwe and Kenya. However, due to historical reasons, in practice mainline Catholic and Protestant forms of religious expression tend to dominate, although these countries acknowledge religious pluralism on paper. In all these countries, for example, African Traditional Religions struggle for official recognition (Chitando, Chiwara & Shoko 2013), while Pentecostalism and Islam in Kenya continue to fight for space (Parsitau 2008).

However, the freedom of religion espoused in the constitutions of the three African countries has resulted in the proliferation of new religious movements, especially Pentecostal churches. In South Africa the end of apartheid gave hope to the black masses: the end of poverty, improvements in standard of living and hope of a complete overhaul of inequality and wealth redistribution. Although there have been significant gains, such transformation has not taken place at a meaningful pace as many would have liked; with the majority of the population still unable to redress their financial situation. There is high unemployment, poverty and increased number of people in squatter camps (Bhorat & Kanbur 2006). Zimbabwe and Kenya have also experienced massive social inequalities, with ruling elites achieving significant economic advancement, while the majority of the citizens wallow in poverty. In such contexts, the danger is real that functionalist approaches to religion can dominate; namely, citizens resorting to religion as a means to an end. In such

instances, religion becomes a clutch that members of churches and other citizens utilize in an effort to cope with serious socio-economic and political problems (Chitando, Gunda & Kugler 2013).

Similarly, a high rate of violence, disease (HIV/AIDS and TB) alcohol/drug abuse, divorce and teenage pregnancies and xenophobia (Deacon *et al.* 2009; Crush 2008; Landau 2012), indicates a continued social deterioration. Pentecostal pastors have capitalised on this in their sermons to enhance personal development as a prelude to a wider social change in the society among Christians and the larger society. Following the prevailing social misery and a sense of neglect by the governments, some Pentecostal preachers have taken up the role of ‘voices for the voiceless’. By the same token, others have sought to empower by offering seminars on business management and ways of income generation, as well as provide minimal soft loans as start-ups. This is done by appealing to congregants with designated cultural capital to offer such training. In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, Pentecostal preachers have sought to energise their audiences to be assertive, challenge corruption and set their countries on trajectories of growth and development. Although they are cautious in tackling political elites, and are sometimes seen as colluding with them, their teachings on personal empowerment and engendering the commitment towards personal and Africa’s growth remains significant.

### ***Personal Empowerment for National Dynamism: Technologies of the Self***

Against this backdrop, and drawing on sermons and teachings of the AGLC and CE in Cape Town, South Africa, Pentecostal preachers in these churches see their role within the framework of winning souls, as well as enlisting the help of theological sermons/teachings to win the battles to shape the direction of social change and personal development of Christians (Robbins 2010) and create their own self-empowering communities (Barreiro 2010). Armed with a sense of spirituality and communitarianism, therefore, preachers see their roles to be messianic and believe that they are fulfilling a prophetic mission of God to transform the country, win souls and create a re-awakening and social change amongst Christians. Conversely, Christians, especially immigrants are attracted to these churches and their teachings as a result of the basic 3Rs that

have been sought in the church in contrast to the wider receptive society which has classed them at the margins. Hirschman (2004) identifies three Rs for understanding the motives of immigrant involvement in a religious community - refuge, respect, and resources. This therefore engenders a win-win situation for both immigrants and the church whose agenda is to grow the church with Christians who have 'offered their lives to Christ' in exchange for spiritual and social development through the scriptures. Underpinning these, Christians who have often been relegated to the margins, have found a new sense of humanity through the 3Rs. Involvement in a religious community provides both sanctuary and self-esteem for the immigrant. While R – resource is often associated with Weber's elaboration of the latent economic consequences associated with religion (Connor 2009), resource, nevertheless, stretches beyond the economic and includes the social benefits associated with involvement in a religious community (Zhou *et al.* 2002). How do Pentecostal churches in these countries seek to mould Christians to be both spiritual and good citizens whose daily lives emulate the teachings of Jesus? In Zimbabwe, for instance, the UFIC challenges its members to stand apart in terms of rendering quality service to fellow citizens. In Kenya, the JCC's vision is, '... to teach, train and equip the body of Christ with the word of faith so that the believers can live a victorious life'<sup>2</sup>.

Emphasizing personal freedom and collective accountability, Pentecostal preachers/Christians confront the destructive forces of power, repression and accumulated wealth with a message of servanthood, liberation and community sharing, while others have drawn on their spiritual resources to understand and cope with their challenges. Christians are challenged not to sacrifice their moral and Christian values for earthly reward. In particular, leaders of Pentecostal churches challenge Africans to own up and take personal responsibility for whatever happens in their lives. A form-critical analysis of the sermons in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya shows that although there is reference to ancestral curses as threatening the prosperity of individuals and families, there an emphasis of individuals taking charge of their lives through embracing agency. Pentecostal church leaders are keen to have Africans re-write the African story by being accountable and taking responsibility for their actions, in-actions and mis-actions. Reflecting on the story of Samson in Judges 13-16, Quayesi-Amakye writes:

---

<sup>2</sup> JCC Vision Statement, articulated by Kathy Kuina, Nairobi, 19/07/2016.



The African continent is blessed with enormous human and material resources. Unfortunately, like Samson most Africans, if not all, have become blind to the realities around them. Pitifully, instead of acknowledging their self-induced negligence, many Africans delight in playing the blame game that always sees the West as the culprit. It is true that the West has a role in the persistent impoverishing of the African continent. But the fact still remains that like Samson this has been possible because Africans have chosen to make sport of themselves (2011: 169).

In Zimbabwe, the UFIC preaches a message of personal responsibility and maximising on the opportunities that God has given to Africans. Building on the theme that ‘Africa is too rich to be poor’, Emmanuel Makandiwa, the founder, has charged that while Africa has a definite place in God’s plan of salvation, Africans are not aware of the resources that they sit on. In a sermon on ‘Judgement Night 4’, an annual event that attracts thousands of participants from within Southern Africa and beyond, Makandiwa challenged Africans to rewrite their narrative:

We have everything that we need in Africa, but look at you...so poor  
If Africa was to be taken away from its citizens, you would be amazed  
at what it would become!  
As Africans we are good at complaining, not at fighting!<sup>3</sup>

Through their sermons and the ‘authority vested in them by God’, they conscientize the Christians and the larger society. Conscientization is not a new phenomenon, but could be traced back to the campaigns and works of Freiré Paulo in Brazil from the 1960s, which helped the church confront manifestly unjust social structures; one that has been taken up by Pentecostal pastors. For this to be achieved, Pentecostal preachers create a ‘free social space and communities in which religious piety can be fused with aspirations for a better life’ (Self 1992; Barrreiro 2011) to empower and animate their followers who are usually the lower middle class or underprivileged, and form the bulk of their Christians. In other words, the objectives of the preachers are twofold – to use theology to give rationale to the church’s mission of repentance and

---

<sup>3</sup> Sermon by Emmanuel Makandiwa, Mt. Hampden, 26/09/2016.

casting ones' problem(s) to Jesus and to awaken or conscientize the masses, equipping them with tools for reflection about the realities of their lives thereby making them true ambassadors of Jesus. In some instances, it is undertaking some of the social services that governments are unable to carry, such as education and outreach programmes. However, this section will focus on concientization for personal development.

Personal development is regarded as integral to the struggle for national development. It is envisaged that individuals who are confident and aware of their dignity and worth will contribute towards the transformation of their families and nations. Across the three countries, the verse, 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2: 9) was a favourite for many preachers and it found resonance in the audiences. It expresses the Pentecostal notion of having been taken from 'nobodiness' to 'somebodiness', and the notion of God as the one who lifts beggars from the dungeons and seats them with princes (Psalms 113: 8). Writing on the preaching in selected Pentecostal churches in Kenya, Parsitau makes the following observation:

The sermons and messages normally revolve around the theme of self-worth and positive engagement with life. Thus, there is a lot of spiritual inspiration and motivational talks in these churches. This kind of teaching holds potential to empower the disempowered. In these churches they are taught that their lives have meaning, value and agency (Parsitau 2014: 188).

The political and economic systems of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya are dominated by rapacious elites who do not hesitate to show off their wealth. Those wielding political power in particular fly off to global capitals, spewing the rhetoric of 'Africa rising' at a time when many of their citizens are, in fact, sinking. The presidents of these African countries can afford to undertake countless trips outside their respective countries at a time when their citizens are demanding that they demonstrate greater love, care and concern for them. Most citizens feel (and, indeed, are) excluded from the political and economic systems of their countries. Pentecostal preachers reassure them that while they may not feature in the plans of the politicians, God knows each one of them personally. If politicians only visit them in their constituencies to look for votes towards elections, God knows the citizens by name, having known each one of them before having formed them in their mothers' wombs (Jeremiah 1:5).

Pentecostalism energises believers to contribute towards social transformation by appreciating their strategic position in society.

Focusing on the inequalities in South Africa the preacher at Christ Embassy, Cape Town implores those in positions of power to ‘cease to do evil and learn to do right, pursue justice and champion the course of the oppressed’. He draws on the book of Isaiah 1:1, 10–20, and calls on Christians not to be blind to the injustices against the weak and marginalised in society just as in Isaiah’s day which was a time of deep injustice and Israel’s religion was blind to the injustices. Similarly, he also calls on Christians to be tolerant towards migrants and desist from xenophobic attacks against them given their marginal position in society. Just as Isaiah availed himself to proclaim righteousness, the preacher said, so too as those who through their positions, and Christians at large can make meaningful change in society by following Isaiah’s example. As Camroux (2004: 243) opines, ‘no real social change is possible unless men and women come to share that experience’.

Another significant area where the Pentecostal churches under study seek to make a difference in terms of social reconstruction is the institution of marriage, which we discuss briefly in the next section.

### ***‘Marriage is not easy, but wedding is easy’***

Following an increase in single-parenthood, high rates of divorce and unfaithfulness, these churches have directed their sermons to speak to this social ‘cancer’ that is tearing down the fabric of the society and the nuclear family, resulting in what is regarded as uncontrolled youth that are engaged in crime and self-destruction. However, there is an idealisation and preoccupation with the notion of a neat and well defined notion of the family. The idea is that there is a father, mother and ‘lovely’ children. In South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe, Pentecostal churches place emphasis on marriage as the one strategic institution that needs to be protected if communities and nations are to thrive. Often, this has resulted in the denial of sexual diversity and silencing of homosexuals in Africa (see for example, Van Klinken & Chitando 2016).

Using their sermons, one theme that is echoed among the different churches that we studied is that of personal development through faithfulness/love. Whereas CE focuses on these themes within the framework of its regular Sunday preaching, AGLC chose to follow dedicated days of the

calendars of the month, such as Mother's Day (08 May 2016) and Father's Day (19 June 2016). The UFIC and JCC use regular Sunday preaching and sessions for couples and for the singles to impart teachings on marriage.

The above heading captures the theme of love, faithfulness and responsibility – what it takes to be a mother or the head of a family (father) in a marital relationship preached on 08 May, 2016 and 19, June 2016 being Mother's Day and Father's Day respectively in South Africa in AGLC. The sermons on these dates address the themes of divorce and unfaithfulness and bringing up children in a Christian way to emphasise the role of the family as the pillars of the church and nation building. Using the metaphor of a garden, on Mother's Day, the preacher alluded to couples as being each other's garden that must be taken care of; developed and nurtured to produce good yields. Also, the yields are the children entrusted to them by God and who should be brought up according to God's teachings. Drawing from Colossians 3: 8-19, Pastor Isaiah<sup>4</sup> underscored that 'marriage is based on Agape love and physical relationship. Divorce is a wound and a child is more psychologically affected when there is divorce than death because death is natural while divorce is not'<sup>5</sup>.

The pastor noted that in contemporary South Africa 'the man and the woman have separate agendas, resulting in too many divorces because we follow our desires and not that of God. Too often we see a culture when a woman is between the ages of 26-30 years old, they just want a child because they feel they can raise a child alone'<sup>6</sup>. However, 'Colossians 3: 8-19 tells us that couples must work in reciprocity and their relationship should be founded on love. Love equals faithfulness and faithfulness is the key to marriage, and true love is proven 20-30 years down'<sup>7</sup>. Both the UFIC and JCC use the founders as examples of complementarity in marriage. They use the 'glamour founding couples' to emphasise the possibility of husbands and wives working together to have viable marriages. While in practice this might gloss over tension in marriage, there is an effort to present effective marriages as possible.

Focusing on some of the women in the Bible, Pastor Isaiah of the AGLC, restated the theme of responsibility, love and the power of a mother over her family. Citing three of the women – Rebecca, Eve and Sarah – from

---

<sup>4</sup> All names used for AGLC and CE are pseudonyms.

<sup>5</sup> Sermon by Prophet Isaiah, AGLC, Cape Town: 08/05/2016 (Mother's Day).

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 5.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5.

the examples, he underscores how as ‘mothers, women exert a powerful role in their families. God gave them a great influence to lead and not to mislead’. He maintained that ‘the most important structure is the house, and God wants you to set the house in order before the church. If the house is not in order, God will not agree with you’. He used the example of Rebecca (the wife of Isaac and mother of Esau and Jacob) in the Bible who went to the temple to consult God about the destiny of her children. He explicated that ‘every mother has the prophetic responsibility and insight to take care of their children. As a mother, use the potential that you have!’<sup>8</sup> In contrast, he used the stories of Eve and Sarah, the princess who misled their husbands. Eve disobeyed God and Sarah did not believe in God’s promise because she was impatient. He cautioned that when one is disobedient or impatient ‘you are no longer using reason but emotion, which can destroy the family’. This use of positive and negative examples of women illustrates gender ambivalence in Pentecostalism (Eriksen 2014).

Pursuing the theme of responsibility and love, on June 19, Father’s Day, gave Pastor Eleanor the opportunity to speak to the men of her congregation. Drawing on the book of Ephesian 5: 25-26 and 4-6, Pastor Eleanor noted that ‘being a father denotes responsibility. A man is a roof, umbrella, and provider because it is stated in the bible. A man is a man not to intimidate but to show love. He must be accessible to his wife and children and should be faithful in their marriage’<sup>9</sup>.

Complementing his wife, Pastor Eleanor, Pastor Isaiah denounced the idea of men following their desires, which often derails them and takes them farther away from God. Nonetheless, by being ‘doers and followers of the word’ helps them to focus. He does so eloquently by drawing examples from the books of Joshua 10: 1-10 and 14, Luke 5:5 and Luke 7. He called on Christians not to be afraid to follow the plan of God than rest their hopes on politicians who often fail them. It is time to ‘Switch To Other Person/Plan/Place’ (STOP) – God’s plan and a place He (God) wants them to be. ‘As a Christian, your life is 3D because that is the great plan of God, if you trust the right person, follow his plan and be at the right place, nobody can tell you that you are a failure because they need a spiritual glass to see through your life’<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> Sermon by Prophet Isaiah, Cape Town: 08/05/2016 (Mother’s Day).

<sup>9</sup> Sermon by Pastor Eleanor, Cape Town: 19/06/2016 (Father’s Day).

<sup>10</sup> Sermon by Prophet Isaiah, Cape Town: 19/06/2016 (Father’s Day).

## ***Discussion***

Prima facie, the selected themes from the churches under study do not seem to speak to each other. However, engaging these themes within the historical context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, and postcolonial struggles in Zimbabwe and Kenya, we argue that despite the giant strides by the governments to return to democracy, the countries are still plagued by high unemployment, poverty and a feeling of frustration amongst black Africans at the slow pace of socio-economic change and freedom. While there is political freedom, economic freedom is yet to be achieved, causing tensions that play out in the public sphere resulting in high violence, crime, xenophobia, inequality, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse in post-apartheid South Africa (Panday *et al.* 2009: 14; Landau & Ramjathan-Keogh 2005) and in independent Zimbabwe and Kenya. There is growing frustration in these countries that the political elites have not done enough to ensure that their citizens enjoy prosperity. Making a case further of the link between religion and politics Martin Luther King (cited in Camroux 2004: 243) forcefully asserted that:

Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men (sic) and is not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them, is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial.

The correlation between the choices of the themes of the sermons, therefore, speaks to these issues because as Christians and those with positions to effect change, the need of attunement to these sufferings motivate people to confront social injustice and work toward creating a better world (Porterfield 2005) that seeks to lift the vast majority of the population from the slums of Africa, not simply because one is obliged to do so, but because it is morally right in terms of the teachings of the religions – to champion the voices of the voiceless. As a result of poverty, many young girls have resorted to trading sex for money, while some men, unable to look after their children due to unemployment, tend to renege on their parental duties or become alcoholics, leading to wife abuse. Consequently, there is a significant rate of single mother-headed households or as a result of divorce.

Through recurrent themes of xenophobia, marginality, social exclusion and injustice, numerous Pentecostal churches have sought to create

awareness among her Christians of the need to stay focused and to re-align themselves to teachings of the scriptures as religion can motivate people on a very deep level to work towards a peaceful and just world. Citing the scripture of Jesus as a refugee, Nell (2009: 239) emphasizes the need for Pentecostals be attentive to the plight of others for ‘anyone who follows and believes in this Christ will treat refugees with the utmost respect and dignity, when they suffer their pain, bewilderment and uncertainty it must also touch our own lives. We are bound together in a common humanity’. The good news of freedom and liberation preached by Pentecostal churches in these countries, therefore, is to quell the meaninglessness that has taken over the lives of many citizens. It is believed that when Christians submit to the teachings of Jesus, there will be lower crime rates, parents would be responsible towards their children, and teenage girls would delay sex until marriage, as they are taught that their bodies are the temple of God (Parsitau 2009). Their lives should be examples for others around them to emulate. Perhaps it is in this respect that Camroux (2004: 344) maintains that ‘Christianity at its best has always been both a personal and a social religion – not one chosen to the exclusion of the other’. And if Christianity is to be a divine instrument in this time, neither politics nor spirituality is enough. Both must go together .

Addressing the issues of marriage, love and infidelity, Christians are called upon to put their own lives in order before using up their energy on more collective solutions (Williams 2007: 186). Pentecostalism thus offers the appeal of sobriety, family focus and increased self-worth. This is because Pentecostal churches have come to realise that the moral fabric of any society rests with a stable family and when the family structures begin to crumble, by extension the society also faces a similar decay.

The messages by Pentecostal preachers, therefore, have sought to address the crises/needs of their members, while building on distinct possible interpretations using the narratives of South Africa’s apartheid legacy and the aspirations of many citizens in Zimbabwe and Kenya. Pentecostalism envisages that as individuals and families are transformed, so will the nations be led to ‘righteousness and prosperity’. In the Pentecostal scheme of things, the ‘wickedness’ of individuals must be overcome before they can work for the greater social good. Corruption and bad governance can be overcome when vibrant, God-fearing families emerge, Pentecostalism suggests. These ideas have moved from Pentecostalism and have permeated mainline churches in Ghana (Omenyo 2002), Kenya (Parsitau 2007) and other African countries.

## **Conclusion**

In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, dynamic Pentecostal churches that seek to mobilise their members and the larger society to contribute towards social transformation have emerged. This is done by calling upon Christians to exercise a higher level of spirituality that surpasses all forms of intolerance and injustices, but that that is imbued with ‘tenderness of conscience’ (Nell 2009). In this article, we have examined the context in which such churches have emerged. We drew attention to the notable challenges that have characterised post-apartheid South Africa, and independent Zimbabwe and Kenya. We highlighted how political elites have decided to ‘eat on behalf’ of the majority of their citizens. In contexts characterised by anxiety and feelings of marginalisation, Pentecostal churches that preach the dignity of individuals and functional families have emerged, and through their teachings seek to provide ‘normative orientation and a sense of self-worth’ (Portes & Rumbaut 2006:301) in the face of uncertain circumstances, especially when deviating from the teachings of the ‘word’. These Pentecostal churches remind their members and other clients that they are ‘citizens of both heaven and earth’ and must contribute towards the transformation of their families, churches and countries.

**Acknowledgment:** This research is part of a Templeton funded project on Christianity and social change in Contemporary Africa through Calvin College.

## **References**

- Adogame, A. (ed.) 2011. *Who is Afraid of the Holy Ghost? Pentecostalism and Globalization in Africa and Beyond*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Agbiji, O.M. & I. Swart. 2015. Religion and Social Transformation in Africa: A Critical and Appreciative Perspective. *Scriptura* 114,1: 1-20.
- Appleby, R.S. 2000. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J.K. 2013. *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J.K. 2015. ‘We are on the Internet’: Contemporary Pentecostalism in Africa and the New Culture of Online Religion. In Hackett,



- R.I., J. Soares & B.F. Soares (eds.): *New Media and Religious Transformations in Africa*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Barreiro, A. 2010. *Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Evangelization of the Poor*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.
- Bhorat, H. & R. Kanbu. 2006. Introduction: Poverty and Wellbeing in Post-apartheid South Africa. In Bhorat, H. & R. Kanbu (eds): *Poverty and Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town, HSRC Press.
- Camroux, M. 2004. Religion and Politics. *The Expository Times* 342-344.
- Chawane, M.H. 2014. The Rastafarian Movement in South Africa: A Religion or Way of Life? *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27,2: 214-237.
- Chitando, E., A. Chiwara & T. Shoko. 2013. Religious Pluralism in a 'Christian Nation': Examining Religion in Zimbabwe's Constitution. *Southern Africa Peace Review Journal* 2,2: 140-159.
- Chitando, E., M.R. Gunda & J. Kügler (eds.). 2013. *Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe*. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.
- Connor, P. 2009. International Migration and Religious Participation: The Mediating Impact of Individual and Contextual Effects. *Sociological Forum* 24,4: 779-803.
- Crush, J. (ed.) 2008. *The Perfect Storm: The Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa*. Southern African Migration Project.
- Deacon, H., L. Uys & R. Mohlanhlane 2009. HIV and Stigma in South Africa. In Rohleder, P., L. Swartz, S. Kalichman & L. Simbayi (eds.): *HIV/AIDS in South Africa 25 Years On: Psychosocial Perspectives*. New York: Springer.
- Eriksen, A. 2014. Sarah's Sinfulness: Egalitarianism, Denied Difference and Gender in Pentecostalism. *Current Anthropology* 55, Supplement 10: 262-270.
- Freeman, D. (ed.) 2012. *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gifford, P. 1988. *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*. Harare: Baobab.
- Hirschman, C. 2004. The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States. *International Migration Review* 28: 1206-1234.
- Kalu, O. 2008. *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaunda, C. 2015. Pentecostal Pastors as Public Intellectuals? An African Hermeneutic for Public Engagement. In Moyo, H. (ed.): *Pastoral Care in*

- a Globalised World: African and European Perspectives*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.
- Landau, L. 2012. *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Landau, L., K. Ramjathan-Keogh & S. Gayatri. 2005. *Xenophobia in South Africa and Problems Related to It*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. (Forced Migration Working Paper Series No.13. Forced Migration Studies Programme.)
- Lindhardt, M. (ed.). 2015. *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*. Leiden: Brill.
- Nell, Ian 2009. The Tears of Xenophobia: Preaching and Violence from a South African Perspective. *Practical Theology in South Africa* 24,2:229-247.
- Omenyo, C. 2002. *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of the Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum.
- Parsitau, D.S. 2007. 'From the Periphery to the Centre': The Pentecostalization of Mainline Christianity in Kenya. *Missionalia* Special Issue on African Pentecostalism, 35,3: 85-111.
- Parsitau, D.S. 2008. God vs. Allah: Islam, Christianity and the Contest for Public Space in Kenya. *International Sociological Association (ISA) E-bulletin* 3,10: 3-43.
- Parsitau, D.S. 2009. 'Keep Holy distance and abstain till He comes': Interrogating a Pentecostal Church Discourses and Engagements with HIV/AIDS and the Youth in Kenya. *Africa Today* 56,1: 44-64.
- Parsitau, D.S. 2014. *The Civic and Public Roles of Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Kenya, 1970-2010*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, School of Humanities and Social Science, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Parsitau, D.S. & P. Mwaura 2010. God in the City: Pentecostalism as an Urban Phenomenon in Kenya. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36,2: 95-112.
- Panday, S., M. Makiwane, C. Ranchod & T. Letsoalo 2009. *Teenage Pregnancy in South Africa - With a Specific Focus on School-going Learners*. Child, Youth, Family and Social Development. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, Human Sciences Research Council.
- Porterfield, A. 2005. *Healing in the History of Christianity*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

- Portes, A. & R.G. Rumbaut 2006. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley, CA: University California Press
- Quayesi-Amakye, J. 2011. Spirituality and Social Transformation: The Samson Syndrome and National Progress – Judges 13-16. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 30,2: 165-176.
- Ranger, T.O. (ed.) 2008. *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robbins, J. 2010. Anthropology, Pentecostalism, and the New Paul: Conversion, Event, and Social Transformation. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109,4: 633-652.
- Ter Haar, G. & J. Bussutil (eds.) 2005. *Bridge or Barrier? Religion, Violence and Visions for Peace*. Leiden: Brill.
- Self, E.C. 1992. Conscientization, Conversion, and Convergence: Reflections on Base Communities and Emerging Pentecostalism in Latin America. *The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 14,1: 59-72.
- Sibanda, F. 2012. The Impact of Rastafari Ecological Ethic in Zimbabwe: A Contemporary Discourse. *Journal of Pan African Studies* 5,3: 59-76.
- Van Klinken, A. & E. Chitando (eds.) 2016. *Public Religion and the Politics of Homosexuality in Africa*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Verstraelen, F.J. 1998. *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Responses: Contemporary Aspects of Christianity in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Walsh, T.G. & F. Kaufman (eds.) 1999. *Religion and Social Transformation in Southern Africa*. St Paul, Minn.: Paragon House.
- Williams, P.J. 2007. The Sound of Tambourines: The Politics of Pentecostal Growth in El Salvador. In Smith, L.C. (ed.): *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact and Faith of Latin American*. Leiden: Brill.
- Zhou, M., C.L. Bankston III & R.Y. Kim. 2002. Rebuilding Spiritual Lives in the New Land: Religious Practices among Southeast Asian Refugees in the United States. In Min, P.G. & J.H. Kim (eds.): *Religion in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Ezra Chitando  
Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy  
University of Zimbabwe  
Harare  
chitsa21@yahoo.com

*Pentecostalism and Social Transformation*

Henrietta Nyamnjoh  
African Centre for Cities  
University of Cape Town  
henrietta.nyamnjoh@uct.ac.za

Damaris Parsitau  
Department of History, Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Egerton University  
Kenya  
dparsitau@yahoo.com