



Integration in the early black Pentecostal community: a basis for social action in a post-1994 South Africa

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Abstract

Early Pentecostalism in South Africa followed the pattern of the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, United States of America in uniting people in their diversity. In its early development, the South African Pentecostal movement united people who came from different cultural backgrounds, skin colour, races, ethnicity, language groups, economic backgrounds, and so forth. However, a few years after its establishment, the movement followed the pattern of racial segregation in the country and became disintegrated along racial lines. This article argues that the black Pentecostal community, including mixed-race, and Indians, remained integrated regardless of their diversity. This was achieved through the theory of integration in the Christian tradition, particularly in Pentecostalism. The black Pentecostal community is defined and unpacked in a South African context with the aim of demonstrating integration in this community. The aim of the article is to demonstrate that integration in the black Pentecostal community can serve as a starting point to address the remnants of racial segregation in South Africa. The force behind the unity in dealing with racial segregation in South Africa should be the same force that has to deal with the post-1994 challenges. Therefore, black people should unite to deal with the injustices of the past, socio-economic challenges, crime, and corruption in South Africa.

Keywords

Integration theory, Pentecostalism, blackness, social action, post-1994 South Africa

Introduction

Early Pentecostalism refers to the early development and establishment of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa. Early Pentecostalism in South Africa was a united movement learning from the Azusa Street Revival in the United States of America and the Pentecostal message of William Seymour of non-racialism. However, the movement soon succumbed to the political divisions in South Africa and became divided along racial lines. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the black Pentecostal community remained integrated amidst racial segregation in the country. This has been established by previous studies on the black Pentecostal movement in South Africa. What is new here is that this integration can become a source for social action, specifically in dealing with the challenges of a post-1994 South Africa, such as the injustices of the past, socio-economic challenges, crime, and corruption. The following will be the main section of this article: Firstly, the discussion on the early Pentecostalism in South Africa before the movement succumbed to the racial segregation tendencies. Secondly, the history of the black Pentecostal community in South Africa including the mixed-race and the Indians. Thirdly, integration in this community is discussed to demonstrate that black people have been united especially in the fight against apartheid in South Africa. The last section deals with how this integration can serve as a basis for social



action in post-1994 South Africa in dealing with the remnants of the apartheid system. By social action in this article, one refers to activities that society can take in confrontation of oppressive systems. The article uses literary analysis that evaluates data on the integration of the black Pentecostal community in South Africa. However, before delving into these main sections, the article discusses the theory of integration to apply it to the black Pentecostal community.

The Theory of Integration

Integration refers to the unifying factor as opposed to the promotion of the divisions that exist in the organisation. Scholars have used integration as a theory that is able to deal with the challenges of divisions and disintegration as they happen in a social organisation, including churches or church movements or denominations (see Rubinstein, Keller & Scherger, 2008:1; Harmer, 2008:1; cf Kgatle, 2020:3). Abrutyn and Lizardo (2016:19) explain integration as follows:

the modes and mechanisms by which social units and the social activities in and between them are coordinated into coherent patterns of social organisation and the potential of these mechanisms to stave off, or to accelerate, the inevitable disintegration of all patterns of social organisation.

This means that integration is relevant as a mode of social cohesion and social activity in an organisation such as the Pentecostal movement. And the theory has potential in the Pentecostal movement to address issues of divisions that existed in the movement in the past as well as in the present. Helbing (2012:111) explains that as integration in a social organisation rises, the forces that divide the organisation become exposed and can be dealt with to encourage unity. An integrated society can move beyond the challenges of divisions and create an environment where people from different backgrounds are able to live together in harmony.

In this article, the Theory of Integration is used for two purposes, firstly to demonstrate the integration of the black Pentecostal community in early Pentecostalism. This will be achieved by defining black Pentecostal community, outlining what constitutes blackness in Pentecostalism and illustrating the integration. Secondly to recommend that integration is important as it could serve as a basis for the social action against various social ills plaguing society in a post-1994 South Africa. As much as the black people united to fight apartheid, they cannot fail to unite the blacks in dealing with current challenges in the 21st century. In addition, integration here is used in contrast to the disintegration theory that was used in support of or to perpetuate racial segregation in South Africa. Integration becomes a theory that helps to illustrate that black people have an ability to work together in the spirit of Ubuntu as opposed to individualism. In simple terms, as integration is practised within the organisation, there will be a discontinuation of the divisions that exist in the same organisation or the church. Similarly, when leaders encourage disintegration, the values of integration cease to function in the organisation, particularly a church movement such as Pentecostalism.

Early Pentecostalism in South Africa

The Anglo Boer war of 1899-1902, and the disposition of many black people in South Africa prepared a way for the spiritual revival or a spiritual awakening in South Africa. Poewe (1988:144) explains that "It was 1902, the Anglo-Boer war had just ended, only to be followed by a year of severe drought and, in 1905, by the Zulu Rebellion over taxation. In 1903, many South African Blacks still lived in very unsettled and uprooted conditions in Refugee Camps even though the war was over."

It was these conditions that caused a group of Zionists to gather and pray for a revival. It is for this reason that it is believed and argued that black people had already formed themselves into



some form of a Pentecostal revival in the Zionist movement even prior the coming of John G Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch (see Kgatle, 2021). And more correct to say that Early Pentecostalism and the forming stages of the Pentecostal movement in the first quarter of the 20th century gained momentum with the coming of these American missionaries in 1908 (Anderson, 2005a). Rather than to say that they are the founders of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa. Hence, even with the departure of the American missionaries in 1913, the Pentecostal movement in South Africa continues to grow to this date.

Pentecostalism started as a movement that united the people of South Africa, regardless of their diversity. Pentecostals came together regardless of their social status, education level, position in society, and so forth, to worship together (Kgatle & Mofokeng, 2019). The emphasis in these early stages was to unite the people through the fundamental teachings of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. People united also through the message of divine healing and the performance of other miracles. With this message of the Pentecostal gospel, people did not focus much on the colour of their skin, ethnicity, and other differences. They did not put as much emphasis on the material as on the spiritual aspects. Praying and worshipping together through the work of the Holy Spirit became the source of the unity of the people of God, regardless of their differences. This is the same unity that existed at the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, United States of America as people came from different parts of the world to worship together in unity. This is more evident in the links of early Pentecostal missionaries in South Africa with the early Pentecostals in the United States of America (Hollenweger, 1984; Cf Oosthuizen, 1987:11; cf. Roy, 2000:121). There is, therefore, a similarity between the unity that existed in the Bree Street Revival in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the 1906 Azusa Street Revival, Los Angeles, which was essentially part of a historic series of revival meetings that materialised in Los Angeles, California from 1906 until 1915 (Campbell, 2010). Both served the purpose of uniting people for the common purpose of worship.

However, after a few years, and with the departure of the American missionaries, the Pentecostal movement in South Africa moved towards racial segregation (Paul, 2006:78; cf Kgatle, 2017). Kgatle (2016: 331) says, “When the missionaries left the country to return to their homelands, the church was set on a course of racial separation in compliance with the racial ideology of the country.” In other words, the political divisions in the country resulted in ecclesial divisions within the Pentecostal movement as Pentecostal leaders at that time embraced such politics. The Pentecostal movement, specifically the classical Pentecostal churches such as Apostolic Faith Mission, Full Gospel, and Assemblies of God succumbed to the racial segregation of the country. Resane (2017:167) points out that churches such as the Assemblies of God developed racial tendencies by dividing the church between black and white. Hobe (2016 cf Resane, 2018) adds that the Full Gospel Church also implemented the evil racial segregation policies in the church that separated people against their races. Similarly, the Apostolic Faith Mission made it a policy that black pastors cannot lead on their own but need to be supervised by white pastors and a white executive committee. And they made it policy that blacks cannot become members, only the adherents of the churches. Furthermore, the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa decided to have separate baptisms for black people and white people. According to Anderson (2013), these churches slowly moved away from the unity in diversity message toward dividing people according to their races and other differences. Saayman (1993:94) concurs that “this incipient racist element in the beginnings of Pentecostalism in South Africa is confirmed by the early decision taken by white Pentecostals, in conjunction with white missionaries, to have racially separated baptisms”.

The continuation of these racial policies in these churches caused many black people to leave them and to establish their own non-racial churches. In classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, some pastors left to start their own Zionist churches given the alignment towards racist decisions by the church (Kgatle, 2017). These are the cessations such as Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion of Daniel Nkonyane



in 1910 (see Anderson, 2008), Zion Apostolic Church of Elias Mahlangu, in 1917, (see Anderson, 1999:288), and Zion Apostolic Faith Mission of Edward Motaung, in 1921. The latter is the one who influenced Engenas Lekganyane, who started the Zion Christian Church in Zion City, Moriah, Polokwane, in the Limpopo province of South Africa (Anderson, 1992:41; cf Kgatle 2021). According to Poewe (1988:148), this black generation of pastors and leaders could not stay in the classical Pentecostal churches because they feared that they would be discriminated against because they are black. It was difficult to serve God under the racist executive council that did not want to allow black people to lead and to be part of the church as members. It was difficult for black leaders because many of them knew that they are gifted and spiritually equipped to run churches on their own. However, the white section of these churches wanted to ensure that white people remain superior, and that black people are secondary and inferior in the same church. The political tendencies of white supremacy took over the Pentecostal church (Kgatle 2017). In addition, they moved away from the classical Pentecostal churches because their newly established Zionist churches aligned with their African culture and tradition.

There were black people who could not stand the oppression by white people in early Pentecostalism and opted to start their own churches. However, other black people remained in these churches to push for unity in the church even with resistance from the white section of the church. Black people continued to work together regardless of the oppression and unfair treatment they were experiencing in these early stages of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa (Kgatle 2017). These are the black people that endured the hardships imposed on them by the white leadership of Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. They remained united, even though many of them could not become leaders or presiding pastors but only adherents who were overseen by the white executive. Therefore, there was already a sign of moving towards unity even in the early developmental stage of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa. The black people in the Pentecostal churches wanted to maintain the non-racialism that existed at the Azusa Street Revival and in the early stages of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa (Kgatle 2017). Because, in its origin, the Pentecostal movement is not divisive, but brings all people of different backgrounds together for the purpose of worship. Therefore, in becoming united the black people were returning to the founding principles of non-racialism that were seen in the early development of the movement in the United States and in South Africa. This will be discussed in detail under the section that deals with integration in the black Pentecostal community. But, before the discussions on integration, the article answers the question, what constitutes the black Pentecostal community?

Black Pentecostal community in early Pentecostalism

The black Pentecostal community refers to the black members of the classical Pentecostal churches in South Africa. These are the black people in their different ethnicities such as the Sotho, Nguni, and so forth. Clark (2006:135) says that the “Black church consisted of many different components, ordered primarily by language and region”. This community is understood out of the racial divisions that existed at that time in distinguishing people of European descent from the black South Africans. In addition, it is understood in terms of the struggles of the black people and their blackness (Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:2). Therefore, the black Pentecostal community in South Africa must be understood both from the racial connotations and from the struggles of black church members in classical Pentecostal churches. Saayman (1993:40) holds that the black Pentecostal community in South Africa is also understood in terms of practising religion, with the understanding of the African religion cultural context. Lovett (1975), in Anderson (1992:27), adds that “black Pentecostalism emerged out of the context of the brokenness of black existence. Their holistic view of religion had its roots in African religion”. MacRobert (1988:9), in Chetty (2009), concurs that black Pentecostalism “cannot be fully understood without some consideration of their African origins and the conditions of slavery under which a black understanding of Christianity was formed”. Therefore, according to Anderson (1992:27), we have in “Black Pentecostalism an adaptive remoulding of African religious practices in a decidedly Christian context”.



Anderson (2018) argues in his other book, *spirit filled world*, that black Pentecostals, although they have links with African religious context, are not always in continuity with African cultural practices. Hence, the need to study continuities in Pentecostalism on the one hand and discontinuities on the other.

The black Pentecostal community, at some point, was joined by the mixed-race and the Indian community, who in churches such as Apostolic Faith Mission, became part of the black section. The Indian and the mixed-race communities were very active in early Pentecostalism in churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission and others. In simple terms, all other ethnic groups in the classical Pentecostal churches came together to form one single group, except for white people. In the Apostolic Faith Mission, the black membership was separate from the white membership, which was basically, Afrikaner membership (Anderson, 2013:119). It must be pointed out that although at some point the Indians and the mixed-race joined the black community, the former were treated better in terms of discrimination, because the whites used to attend church with the Indians and the mixed-race. Kgatle (2017:4) explains, "Mixed-race people were segregated in the Apostolic Faith Mission but because of colour and many other similar cultural traits they were treated better compared to other sections, especially the black section." It is surprising that classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission separate these groupings because in townships and other urban areas they are always working together in unity.

Given the complexities of the black Pentecostal community itself, and the fact that they were later joined by the mixed-race and the Indians, it would be incorrect to think of the black Pentecostal community as a homogenous community. There is diversity among the black Pentecostal community caused by the language, ethnicity, and cultural groupings. Therefore, groups such as mixed-race and the Indians, the black people themselves are not homogenous. But, there exist different groups and dialects within the black community. For example, the Sotho have different languages such as Northern Sotho, Tswana, and Sesotho. In each of the above, there are still so many dialects according to the region where one was born. Thus, we should never perceive the black Pentecostal community as homogeneous, as if unity is obvious. It takes an intentional quest for these people to integrate with each other. Because as much as there can be an excuse of language between the blacks and the Afrikaners, for example, the same can exist between the Zulus and the Sotho. However, within the church settings and the Pentecostal movement, these groups are always in unity. Therefore, things such as language should never be used as a barrier when a church movement wants to move towards integration. The aim should be to learn from one another instead of always trying to divide each other. As a heterogenous community, unity is not given, it takes the intentional zeal to work together to achieve unity during diversity.

Integration in the early black Pentecostal community

The integration of the early black Pentecostal community is seen in the resistance against the divisions that existed in their churches. Anderson (2005b:10) explains that "Black Pentecostals in the classical Pentecostal denominations were less affected by the right-wing ideology of their white counterparts because of their own social exclusion". In other words, the paternalistic approach of the white division of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa caused the black people to adopt a resistance approach against racial segregation (Saayman, 1993). It is for this reason that scholars such as Hollenweger (1984) defined early Pentecostalism as the black movement that wanted to remove racial segregation on Pentecostal theology. Horn (1989:118) defines Pentecostalism as a black movement that became racially divided as the whites joined the movement. Hence, there was a black resistance against this form of racism, because the movement was not founded on racial segregation grounds. Scholars such as Poewe (1988:157) make an argument against the likes of Sundkler (1961), who holds that the impetus for "the



Black charismatic wave" came from whites such as Le Roux, Cooper and Dowie, among others. Rather, the impetus came from the Blacks”.

The integration of the early black Pentecostal community is also seen when this community moved towards unity during diversity. Anderson and Otwang (1993:144) explain that early “Pentecostals emphasised the freedom, the equality, the community and the dignity of each person in the sight of God. This included a tacit acceptance of black power, as black people were allowed to emerge as leaders of an integrated church movement”. Integration does not mean doing away with each other’s uniqueness. Any integration that seeks to undermine the contribution of other people’s uniqueness is not true integration. Integration does not mean that different groups that exist in the Pentecostal community give up their rights and their opinions. It means that people find common ground to work together even if they differ on opinions. There are many fundamental things or teachings that should form the basis for Pentecostals to come together, such as the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the coming of Christ, and so forth. This, even if believers can differ on several things because the common ground is strong and solid, then there should be integration. Furthermore, people integrate when they learn from each other. Hence, among black Pentecostals, there is a quest to learn from each other demonstrated by singing different songs in different languages but singing them together (Kgatle 2019). Today, an average black person in South Africa can speak more than three languages and can hear and write some of these languages. This is the same in church as believers are used to singing in different languages. It is for this reason that it was the black community that preached unity more than their white counterparts. Even in the later talks on unity in the early 1990s, it was Frank Chikane, who approached the likes of Isak Burger to move towards unity given the resistance of the white community.

Despite challenges of tribalism and xenophobia at times, Black people through the spirit of Ubuntu have a way of converging and working together rather than separating people. One thing that unites black people in general and black Pentecostals is the ability to embrace the spirit of Ubuntu. This spirit is built on the fundamental approach of coexisting with each other as it is known as, “I am because you are”. From this approach, black Pentecostals have also learnt to coexist with each other, which is not the case in euro-centric contexts. In that context, people want to make it as individuals whereas, Ubuntu does not speak of the individual, but the collective. There the black Pentecostal community has integrated on the same principle of integrating different groups in the same church. It is through Ubuntu that black Pentecostals were able to perceive the government and Pentecostal churches at that time as disintegrative. Because of the Ubuntu approach, one cannot speak of the different sections existing in the same church. But most white people, including those in South Africa, still perceive life in terms of individualism and their surroundings based on western notions. Hence, for many years the white people rejected the message of unity because they could not worship or serve God together with the black men and women. They did this even when the blacks through the likes of Frank Chikane insisted on unity in diversity.

Integration: a basis for social action in a post-1994 South Africa

The big question is, where is the integration of the early black Pentecostal community today? Where is the unity of black people today in the 21st century? If the early black Pentecostal community worked together until the racial tendencies in their churches vanished, they can do the same today to fight the remnants of these tendencies. The reality is that there are still some elements of racial segregation seen in many sectors of society that still require a unified confrontation by the black people today. South Africa remains divided between black and white although there have been many positive steps at acceptance of all in society; it is still divided between the rich and the poor. While most black people are ravaged by poverty, the minority whites are enjoying prosperity. This means that the work that was done by the black Pentecostal community or the black people, in general, is not complete to which Letta Mbuli’s, “Not yet Uhuru” attests. Mbuli’s song is a reminder that, although 1994 happened, the struggles of black



people are not yet over and therefore there is a need to continue with the struggle for the emancipation of most black people. This means that the integration of the black Pentecostal community is needed now as much as it was needed during institutionalised racism. This means that the voices that spoke against apartheid should become louder in post-1994 South Africa as many challenges still exist today that require the prophetic voice. Indeed, considering the many atrocities of the black people, we need to ask the question, “Where have all the prophets gone?”

Although there has been a commission for truth and reconciliation, there are still many black people, who have not yet seen justice in their lives. There is a need for justice for many victims of apartheid, whose family members were killed by police brutality. Where is justice for Enoch Mjijima and the people of Queenstown, who were protesting for their land? Where is justice for the families of the 250 black people of Sharpeville, who were massacred by the police? What about the Boipatong massacre and other brutal killings of the black people? Did their families receive justice? Most recently, where is justice for the families of the 34 miners, who were massacred by the police while protesting low wages in the mining industry, especially Lonmin mine. These kinds of injustices do not necessarily need courts to address them but require a positive political will to compensate the families of the people who fought for the freedom of many South Africans. When and where there is no political will, the unity of the black people that dismantled the oppressive forces of apartheid should rise again to destroy the remnants of apartheid. This kind of justice can come through the social action of the people of South Africa, because history has proven that where politics fail, the integration of the black communities, and other communities in the country, including Pentecostal communities, strives to destroy the many ills which are evident in society.

The second challenge of post-1994 South Africa is the socio-economic challenge. Even though there is democracy in South Africa, there are still challenges such as unemployment, poverty and inequality. This has caused many black people to start questioning the very same democracy they fought for because they still suffer even after attaining political freedom. Unemployment in South Africa is currently at 39%, which means that there are so many South Africans who are depending on grants for survival (Wakefield, Yu & Swanepoel 2022). Of this percentage the majority is black people, who happen to be young people including graduates from universities and colleges. The challenges of unemployment have led many to live in poverty below the bread line, while those who are working are faced with inequalities in the workplace in what is known as income inequality. These triple challenges call for the integration of the black Pentecostal community to begin to think of solutions that will move most black people out of the poverty and unemployment rates. It calls for black people to unite against income inequality that is a result of the same racial segregation that they fought in pre-1994 South Africa. These inequalities were caused by the dispositions of many black people during apartheid, the Bantu education offered to black people, and the fact that many of them were not allowed to take professional jobs. If inequality is the consequence of apartheid, it deserves the same confrontation in the same way that apartheid was confronted by black people.

The second challenge in post-1994 South Africa is crime that has become violent and attacks the most vulnerable in communities such as children and women (Mamabolo, Lekgau & Maluleke 2022). Integration in the black Pentecostal community should translate into serious action against the challenges of crime including gender-based violence and violence against children in South Africa. It is evident that police alone cannot win on the issue of crime in a South African context, but with the support of the black Pentecostal community, the battle against crime can be won in South Africa. If apartheid was the biggest crime against humanity and was fought and brought down, this means that other crimes happening today in South Africa can be fought and dismantled. The challenge is that in post-1994 South Africa, society including the black Pentecostal community, has left everything to the government to bring a solution to societal problems. While the government is not an answer to all the problems in society, the black people through integration are able to fight these many challenges confronting society



today. Therefore, the Theory of Integration should serve as a starting point for the black people in South Africa to rise against the many crimes against humanity in the same way they rose against the crime of apartheid.

Integration in the black Pentecostal community should help deal with the challenge of corruption in South Africa where public funds are diverted to enrich the few politically connected individuals by becoming a radical prophetic voice to politicians. Corruption is the thief that takes away from the poor and, since the African National Congress took over the government in 1994, corruption has become a stumbling-block in the implementation of the very good policies that are supposed to take people out of poverty, unemployment, and inequalities. This has made the government run in cycles in the last 30 years; whereby, instead of taking steps forward in fighting challenges in post-1994, corruption takes them backward. As it has been reported, the Gupta family, who had done business in South Africa for many years, had captured the Zuma administration, controlling the appointments of ministers in the cabinet and other strategic positions (see Fredericks & de Jager 2022). Moreover, state capture also meant the control of state companies such as Eskom, South African Airways and Denel, among others. These tendencies are continuing even in the Ramaphosa administration, where ministers and other state officials are caught in corrupt activities. There have also been allegations of corrupt activities by the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa. The big question remains, where is the black Pentecostal community when these issues continue to confront the gains of democratic South Africa.

Conclusion

Pentecostalism began as a non-racial movement but soon moved towards disunity that saw the division of the church into black, white, Indian, and mixed races. However, the black people including the Indians and mixed races in South Africa still came together in what has been theorised here as the integration of the black Pentecostal community. The integration of the black Pentecostal community in South Africa has been studied here to show that the black people were together in the fight against racial segregation and were moving in sync towards unity in diversity.

The Theory of integration is relevant in post-1994 South Africa, as a basis for social action against current challenges. In other words, the black Pentecostal community should unite in the fight against the remnants of racial segregation. These are challenges such as injustice whereby most black people are yet to see justice, given the many injustices of the past. Integration is recommended here against socio-economic challenges such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment. The black people, as much as they united against the crimes of apartheid, should also unite against the crimes of the post-1994 including gender-based violence. Lastly, integration can serve as a basis to fight corruption that is taking from the very poor people that are supposed to be the beneficiaries of liberation. Therefore, the integration of the black Pentecostal community is relevant in post-1994 South Africa as much as it was useful during racial segregation. Failure to implement integration theory in the black Pentecostal community might lead to the persistence of the post-1994 challenges in South Africa with dire consequences.

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