

Zionist ‘syncretism’ in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa before the 1970s

A comparative analysis

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Abstract

Despite the attested relationship between Zionism and Pentecostalism, the similarities between the pre-1970s black Pentecostalism in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of South Africa and Zionism are only now getting exposed. Historically, scholarly opinion held that Zionism was syncretistic while seemingly ignorant about the similarly characterised black Pentecostalism within the AFM. Using comparative analysis of relevant literature, the researcher argues that syncretism existed in black Pentecostalism before the 1970s and tabulates (dis)similarities with Zionism before critically discussing their explanations. Invoking the historical appellation of ‘syncretism’ brings the pre-1970s black Pentecostalism to benefit from its revision to becoming a contextualisation of the gospel.

Key words: Apostolic Faith Mission, contextualisation, Pentecostalism, syncretism, Zionism

1. Introduction

The paper argues that ‘syncretism’ characterised black Pentecostalism in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM) well into the 1970s due to the exercise of agency within a common historico-theological and liturgical tradition, socio-economic condition and religio-cultural background with Zionism. The kind of syncretism that existed in this denomination was similar to that which characterised the African-founded-and-led Zionist Church movement. Hollenweger (1972) and Bond (1974) expressed the view of white Pentecostal leaders about Zionism as syncretistic and its inclusion under the Pentecostal canopy as ill-advised. In making the case for black Pentecostal syncretism, there is no intention to debate various views regarding the concept. Rather, the approach here is that of noting the historical depiction of Zionism as syncretistic as Sundkler (1961) and the above mentioned

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scholars did, and assuming this position, to argue for black Pentecostal syncretism on the basis of Mofokeng and Madise's (2019:5) argument that Zionist phenomena was a defining trait of the pre-1970s black Pentecostalism within the AFM. According to Mofokeng and Madise (2019), black Pentecostalism only became definitely evangelical in the 1970s, after a long-drawn process, which missionaries curated from 1929.

In support of the argument for black Pentecostal syncretism, the article presents and discusses evidence that compares between Zionism and black Pentecostalism. Furthermore, various explanations, especially regarding the origins of similarities between the two movements, are critically discussed in answer to the question: How may we account for the (dis)similarities between Zionism and pre-1970s black Pentecostalism within the AFM? To answer the above question, the paper adopts a thematic and comparative desktop approach to relevant data in the context of the Southern African history of missions. The significance of the question and the answer thereto lies in the understanding it seeks to provide regarding the Zionist-past of black Pentecostalism, which easily gets missed in studies concerned only with African Independent Churches (AICs) or Pentecostalism. Furthermore, it creates a context for later reflection on the implications of the transformation of black Pentecostalism in the light of acknowledged Zionist contextuality (Anderson, 2004:104). The discussion unfolds under the following headings: Syncretism and African Christianity; Zionist and black Pentecostal syncretisms; origins of black Pentecostal syncretism; and dissimilarities between black Pentecostalism and Zionism.

2. Syncretism and African Christianity

Although the above heading features "African Christianity", the term is being applied to the Christianity that emerged consequent to Euro-American missionary activities of the 19th and early 20th Centuries. Moreover, the term refers to the Christianity of the people of African descent whose pre-Christian African religio-cultural heritage has exercised some influence. Three major strands constituting African Christianity are mission, African-founded-and-led Ethiopian and Zionist-Apostolic, as well as African-founded-and-led Pentecostal-charismatic churches (Daneel, 1987:231; Ukah, 2007:2). The first two strands of African Christianity emerged in the context of intransigent belief in the universality of Euro-American theology in both Protestant and Catholic missions, which lasted for 150 years (from 1800 to 1950s), according to Paul Hiebert (1987:104). Under the canopy of universal Euro-American theology, the expectation went beyond the Christianisation of the African to Europeanisation (Bosch, 1991:448; Makofane, 2019:140; Nel, 2019:2; Tishken, 2009:7; Ukah, 2007:4), otherwise dubbed civilisation. Even the indigenisation policy of establishing self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting churches under

indigenous leadership, which, according to Anderson (2017:32) was hardly followed, was meant to leave the theology untouched (Bosch, 1991:448). This theological regime presided over the emerging African Christianity, often unenthusiastic in its assessment of the quality and intentions of the latter (Shaw et al., 2016:102).

Indigenisation as a missionary directed transfer of responsibility to indigenous leaders while retaining the theological core (Bosch, 1991:448-449), failed to placate African aspirations—as implied by the emergence of the Ethiopian churches and later, the Zionist churches. The Ethiopian church emerged as a critique of missionaries' slowness in transferring real power to indigenous leaders while the Zionist church critiqued rationalistic missionary theology (Nel, 2019:2; Tishken, 2009:5-6; Tishken & Heuser, 2015:154; Sundkler, 1961:63; Ukah, 2007:7-8). The rationalistic world in which Euro-American Christianity took form was unlike that which gave birth and nurtured Africans—the world in which spirit and matter were intertwined and in constant interaction (Anderson, 2017:35; Clark, 2001:81). As such, nothing short of self-theologising promised a genuine and effective African Christianity (Bosch, 1991:451-452; Makofane, 2019:141; Shaw et al., 2016:99, 101), and for Roland Allen, Alice Luce and Hodges (Anderson, 2017:30-31, 34), only the Spirit held a possibility for genuine localised Christianity. However, the apprehension of the Spirit by people nurtured in holistic culture and their charismatic hermeneutics seemed, to western eyes, like syncretism (Tishken, 2009:7), which, according to Vahakangas (2010:8), was considered an “illegitimate mingling of different religious systems”.

In mainline missionary circles, syncretism was understood as violating the theological core articulated in the West (Bosch, 1991:452; Shaw et al., 2016:106). Additionally, within Pentecostal missions, syncretism was seen as reproduction of spiritual phenomena and forms familiar to African culture (Bond, 1974:14; Hollenweger, 1972:171). The African-founded churches that emerged from missionary controlled Pentecostal denominations continued their 'syncretism'. These African churches attracted some Africans in missionary founded Protestant churches who either left their churches or took double membership (Kgatle & Mofokeng, 2019:5; Madise, 2005:78; Mashabela, 2017:8; Zwane, 1999:4). The appearance of African Pentecostal-charismatic churches in the 1970s continued to deepen engagement with the African religio-cultural world and further attracting adherents from mainline churches. In the same period, there was some recognition in the academy and missionary circles that newly missionised peoples needed to go beyond the “three-selves indigenisation model”, to include self-theologising (Bosch, 1991:451; Shaw et al., 2016:97, 106)—a forced recognition as liberationist theologies had already arisen a decade earlier. Despite relaxation of attitudes in some missiological circles, concern around syncretism remained, especially among evangelicals (An-

derson, 2017:33; Shaw et al., 2016:98, 106). During this period, churches like the AFM were in the midst of a revival that hardened the attitude of black Pentecostals against Zionism (Bond, 1974:14; Sewapa, 2016:5-6)—which, as Mofokeng and Madise (2019:6) point out, was ironically their background and heritage.

The evangelical retention of sensitivity around syncretism, although misplaced in blanketly assigning a whole movement (Zionist) to the label, may have been prescient considering negative developments in neo-Pentecostalism, which have raised public and scholarly alarm in recent years. The negative developments have been traced to either the influence of the American derived prosperity gospel (Niemandt, 2017:205; Resane, 2021:97) or the increasing inroads of African traditional spirituality because both are materialistic. While it is known that the first generation of prosperity preachers in Africa studied in America and had Americans as role models (Niemandt, 2017:215), Degbe (as cited in Mofokeng, 2021:36), argues that the second generation chose the local African traditionalists as their models instead. Anderson (2002:167, 170) described the movement led by these American influenced prosperity preachers of the 1970s-1980s revival as a contextualisation of the gospel albeit in a different socio-economic and political milieu compared to the Zionist churches. Accordingly, signs exist that those claimed to be influenced by traditionalists may have further contextualised the movement to ever increasing popularity of sangoma-like services—with claims of gospel ministers and traditionalists mutually empowering each other (Mofokeng, 2021:30; Ramabulana, 2018:69-70).

The above sketch of developments within African Christianity justifies the retention of concerns about syncretism because, unless limited in some way, contextualisation disables critique of the above-mentioned developments—a point Bosch (1991:427) makes and considers to result in “relativism”, which is an unwelcome development. Bauer (2005:22-23) and Hiebert (1987:109) provide this limitation by conceptualising contextualisation as under-contextualisation or non-contextualisation, over-contextualisation, and critical contextualisation—all echoed in what Magezi (2017:2) calls “predominant views ... proposed by theological scholars” to address the tension African Christians experienced for living between an “unacceptable” traditional spiritual heritage and an inadequate newly acquired Christian faith. Bauer (2005:23, 28) assigns the syncretistic label to both “under” and “over” contextualisation with Meyer (2016:261) assigning the term to “over-contextualisation”. Both Bauer (2005:29) and Meyer (2016:264-265) advocate for middle of the road, critical contextualisation. While concerns about syncretism easily coincide with descriptions of over-contextualisation, that is, identification with the recipient culture to the point of nullifying the gospel through reliance on traditional powers (Bauer, 2005:23; Magezi, 2017:3), the under-contextualisation associated with mission Christianity is hardly in view when syncretism is invoked (Bauer,

2005:24; Meyer, 2016:261). Yet, Hiebert (1987:104-105) points at the missionary identification of the Christian faith with western culture and almost successful attempts to implant this westernised Christianity among the indigenous populations of the world. A possible reason for general ignorance of the applicability of syncretism to mission Christianity could be that the formulation of what was syncretistic assumed the correctness of missionary Christianity (Bauer, 2005:24). In mentioning the above classifications of contextualisation, there is no intention to apply any of these terms to either Zionism or black Pentecostalism as that may detract from the aim of this article.

The outcry of scholars of Pentecostalism (Shingange, 2021:119) against certain teachings and practices of the movement considered to be occultic, abusive, and financially destructive, testifies to the existence of a concept of values and norms in doctrine and practice that must apply to the movement of the Spirit among Africans. A pertinent question facing these scholars and others, is about the possibility of understanding the emic perspective to avoid repeating the misunderstanding and mislabelling that assigned Zionism to the syncretistic dustbin. Understanding the emic perspective should not be an end in itself but fostering a dialogic environment in which to share perspectives towards strengthening African Christian Theology and ethical ministry should be aimed at (West, 1993:8-10). Relating to this quest, Gerald West's Contextual Bible Study (CBS) process touches on the relevant aspects of such an engagement and proposals like his may be beneficial towards a non-syncretistic African Christianity. Elements of CBS include a formally trained Bible reader (theologian), ordinary Christians without such training, and the context (West, 2003: ix-xi). CBS aims at empowering ordinary Christians through availing critical resources of the academy in the coformulation of solutions informed by the Christian faith. With minor adaptations where necessary—possibly relating to the commitments West (1993:12) mentions as important,³ this process may help African Christians whose quest is a theology devoid of colonial vestiges and also avoids the loss of that which makes it distinctly Christian. Besides CBS, which does require adaptation, Bauer (2005:28-29) puts forward a four-step process, initially proposed by Paul Hiebert (1987:109-110). According to this process, newly missionised people can be assisted to evaluate aspects of their culture and be released to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to respond according to the biblical principles imparted by an accompanying missionary or pastor. Despite the absence of all the

³ Gerald West's (1993:12) four commitments for CBS participants may be summarised as "commitment to critical reading of the Bible in community with those from different contexts, using the perspective of the poor and oppressed to attain individual and social transformation". Possible adaptation may be to substitute "the poor and oppressed" with "African Christians" and redefine the goal to be the incarnation of Christ within an Africanising milieu.

above-mentioned processes, it is commendable that African Christians such as the Zionists, and arguably black Pentecostals, achieved what missiologists like Daneel (1987) and others who worked among them (Zionists) recognised as critical contextualisation, leading to the disuse of the negatively charged term of “syncretism”.

In summary, African Christianity arose as a critique of the slow pace in realising the indigenous church envisioned by Henry Venn and the intransigence of western theology, which in its marriage to enlightenment values denigrated African culture. The theological departures associated with Zionism, especially, attracted negative assessment from the missionary enterprise and the academy encapsulated in the term, “syncretism” (Shaw et al., 2016:102). However, the reappraisals by some in the academy shifted the negative connotations attached to the concept of syncretism, and eventually led to its abandonment in favour of “contextualisation”, which was understood as translation of the gospel into the indigenous cultural milieu. Recent concerns about perceived indignities and criminal behaviour perpetrated in the name of the gospel questions the effectiveness of contextualisation thesis as an explanatory tool and raises interest in revisiting the concept of syncretism in its negative connotations. Notwithstanding the above, the subject of Zionist and black Pentecostal syncretisms following hereafter is located in the positive context, which derives from scholars adopting an emic perspective regarding Zionist syncretism (Berner, 2001:503-505).

3. Zionist and Black Pentecostal Syncretisms

This section is about the discussion of Zionist and black Pentecostal syncretisms, as well as tabulating phenomenological similarities of the two. In both the discussion of Zionist and black Pentecostal syncretisms, the intention is to identify scholars who regarded each as syncretistic and their application of the concept of syncretism, as well as outline the phenomena which, according to these scholars (and leaders), signified syncretism. But first, brief definitions of the concepts “black Pentecostalism” and “Zionism”.

Black Pentecostalism

Traditionally, the term “Pentecostalism” referred to the movement resulting from an American Holiness preacher, Charles Parham, whose doctrinal innovation on the evidence of baptism in Holy Spirit came to the world’s attention through the ministry of another Holiness preacher, William Seymour in 1906 (Burger & Nel, 2008:16). The association of Pentecostalism with north American roots has been challenged through insistence on multiple centres of origin and the diversities associated therewith (Anderson, 2004:171); leading to Anderson (2004:10); Ome-nyo (2014:133); and Ukah (2007:9) to suggest the use of “Pentecostalism” to

cover the expressions of this global phenomenon. However, for the purpose of this study, it is unnecessary to use the term "Pentecostalism" inclusively as reference is specifically made to the South African movement resulting from the ministry of American missionaries who had been influenced by the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles (Omenyo, 2014:137). Hopefully, the narrow application of the term does not detract from the inclusivist approach operating at the assumptive level where the Pentecostalism of the white missionaries is considered fundamentally the same as Zionism among Africans (Anderson, 2004:108). The modifier 'black' refers to this spiritual phenomenon among the African people under Pentecostal missionary leadership.

Zionism

Whereas it is customary to use the term "Zionism" in relation to the African Christian movement that left missionary-led Pentecostalism between 1910 and 1925, in this article, the term includes the so-called Apostolic type churches that left the AFM in the 1930s and 1940s. This is the same sense applied by Sundkler (1961:54).

3.1 The Syncretism of Zionism

In considering the syncretism of Zionism, Bond (1974); Clark (2019); Hollenweger (1972); Larbi (2002); and Sundkler (1961), are helpful. Hollenweger (1972) expressed the view of leaders of Pentecostal denominations he consulted in preparation of his book, *The Pentecostals*. The rest expressed their own view of the status occupied by Zionism within the Christian landscape.

In Bengt Sundkler's (1961) ground-breaking study of the AICs among the Zulu's, he classed Zionism further away from the mission-founded churches than the Ethiopian churches (1961:54). He referred to Zionism as "theologically ... syncretistic" with possibilities of facilitating a move back into traditionalism (1961:55). Clark (2019:20) joined Sundkler in this explicit labelling of Zionism. He mentioned a "plethora of syncretistic Christian groups" whose leadership is by "bishops, priests or prophets"—an invocation of Anderson's (2000:49) description of Zionist leadership. Although Bond (1974:14), in his article on *The Pentecostalism in the Pentecostal churches*, did not use the term "syncretism" to describe Zionism, he nevertheless implied it through the phrases, "garbled form of Christianity" and "tribal religion masquerading as Christianity". Bond's sentiments related closely to the views of Francois Möller Snr, of the AFM, and August Kast, a missionary of the Assemblies of God (AOG), who both ascribed the charismatic power in Zionism to spirits of ancestors (Hollenweger, 1972:171). Daneel (1987:232, 246) mentions scholars like Beyerhaus (1969); Martin (1964); and Oosthuizen (1968), all who held the same view about the charismatic power in Zionism. Writing at the

beginning of the 21st Century, Kingsley Larbi (2002) argued for separation of AICs, especially the Zionists, from Pentecostals, in opposition to Allan Anderson who proposed the latter's inclusion under the Pentecostal canopy. In his argument, Larbi (2002:150) insinuated the syncretism of Zionists when he wrote:

Attempts to dump these two groups using the role the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts play in these churches as the common denominator conceal certain crucial factors, considering that spirit possession, speaking in tongues, prophecies and other supernatural manifestations attributable to the spirit world are not limited to evangelical Christianity. They are significant features of the African Traditional Religion and other faiths.

In the above quotation, Larbi (2002:150) expressed a similar sentiment to Bond (1974:14) regarding the possible source of charismatic phenomena in Zionism. The above ascription of syncretism to Zionism represented an etic perspective.

The negativity that the Zionist church movement received from the mission churches was deepened by the perceived theological, liturgical and cultural departures (Nel, 2019:2). Aided by their spirit-centred epistemology, Zionists went further than the Ethiopians in their dialoguing with African traditional religio-cultural world. The dialogic space occupied by the Zionists came to be characterised by unique beliefs and phenomena informed by their reading of the Bible—especially the Old Testament, and their African background (Isichei, 2004:197; Kgatle & Mofokeng, 2019:7; Poewe, 1988:149; Tishken & Heuser, 2015:156). For Daneel (1987:231-235), in Zionism, there was imaginative adaptation and substitution of traditional methods for the advancement of the Christian gospel. The well-known Zionist sacramentalism seen in the use of symbolic objects, substances, and practices such as the staff (known as *izikhali* in Zulu, literally translated as a weapon), woollen strings and ropes, elements like consecrated water, tea (in the case of Zion Christian Church) (Daneel, 1987:241; Sewapa, 2016:49); and practices like wearing special garments, removal of shoes at holy places (Poewe, 1988:149); wearing their hair and beards long (Anderson, 2000:48); as well as visiting sacred spaces such as mountains and pilgrimages to the head-quarters where the founding minister resided (Sewapa, 2016:49), finds explanation in Sundkler (1961:181) as expression of African ritualism.

3.2 The Syncretism of Black Pentecostalism

Unlike Zionism, the subject of black Pentecostal syncretism has received little attention from missiologists. However, considerations of the pre-1970s history of developments in the black AFM, some claim syncretism is possible through inferences from De Wet (1989); Hwata (2005); Maxwell (2006); Burger and Nel (2008); and Khathide (2010). Mofokeng and Madise (2019) increased the possibility of making such a claim through their argument that black Pentecostalism in the AFM was Zionistic.

As argued above, the mentioned scholars never ventured a view about the syncretism of the black AFM. Therefore, the concept of "syncretism", never sufficed in relation to this denomination. However, one arrives at conceptualising black Pentecostal syncretism through a process that first notes the clarity with which Zionism was considered to be syncretistic or feared to be progressing towards such; Secondly, by noting how missionary leaders of the AFM, for an example, were occupied with Zionist "evils" within the structures they presided upon (Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:8). The phenomena which De Wet (1989:87-88, 106-107, 112) discussed in relation to the tumultuous years in the black AFM easily lend themselves to the application of the concept "syncretism" as applied to Zionism. Maxwell (2006:52), in his description of the Zionist prophets in Zimbabwe, alluded to their appearance, which was similar to that of AFM evangelists of earlier years. Hwata's (2005:102) use of "human infiltrations" and "anomalies" to describe some practices and expressions of black Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and South Africa before the 1970s, serves as an approximate invocation of syncretism. In the same way, Khathide's (2010:44) use of "Zionistic" in describing the form of black Pentecostalism in Natal in the 1950s invokes the idea of syncretism. Burger and Nel (2008) follow Khathide's (2010) usage from the first edition of his book published in 1993.

Considerations of black Pentecostal syncretism require keeping in mind "objectionable" beliefs, practices, and phenomena associated with the Zionist churches. Admittedly, the point of view that labelled Zionism syncretistic expressed the dominant western Christian view which existed across various mission founded church organisations and academia (Daneel, 1987:75).

In the records of the AFM, the first time an objection was raised against practices which Anderson (2000:46-49) considered to be hallmarks of Zionism was in 1929 (Burger & Nel, 2008:243; Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:3). From 1943, this objection transformed into a full confrontation between missionary leadership and black clergy in the conferences. The confrontation revolved around differences regarding liturgical expression and the conduct of the healing ministry. The use of special garments and paraphernalia such as sashes, clerical collars, wooden crosses also appear in the record (Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:3). Furthermore, the role of blessed water, drum-beating, dancing, and charms, in the healing ministry also appears. Besides these, Burger and Nel (2008:243-249) mentioned polygamy, traditional initiation, and observance of funerary rites feared to be related to the ancestral cult.

3.3 Tabulation of Zionist and Black Pentecostal Phenomenological Similarities

In his dissertation on *The cultural reorientation of black Pentecostalism in the AFM*, Mofokeng (2018:61) presented a table in which he compared Zionist and black Pentecostal phenomena. The information populating the Zionist column is

derived from literature solely concerned with descriptions of Zionism, and likewise, the information in the black Pentecostal column as reproduced below.

	Zionism	Black Pentecostalism (1908 – 1960s)
Theological parentage	Dowie and the AFM	Dowie and the AFM
Cultural orientation	African traditional	African traditional, tombstone unveilings, feasts of condolences
Biblical orientation	Old Testament; Spirit-centred—dreams; vision and prophecy	Old Testament; Spirit-centred
Soteriology	Baptismal regeneration	Baptismal regeneration
Educational status	Low to no education	Low to no education
Socio-economic status	Poor	Poor
Appearance (Uniform)	Blue, white and green colours; Dustcoats, collars, sashes, surplices and crosses	Blue, white colours, Waistcoats, collars, sashes, surplices and crosses
Appearance (Facial)	Long hair, long beard	Long hair, long beard
Baptism	Adult triple immersion in a river	Adult triple immersion in a river/dam
Taboos	Abstinence from pork, alcohol, smoking	Abstinence from pork, alcohol, smoking
Healing (attitude)	No doctor or medicine	No doctor or medicine
Healing (Means)	Laying hands, holy water, ash, cords, prophetic staff	Laying hands, holy water, dancing around the sick

Evidently, the two movements presented similar phenomena as shown above, and, if one was syncretistic, then the other too. Hence, the next section will focus on explanations of the origins of Pentecostal syncretism within the AFM.

4. Origins of Black Pentecostal Syncretism

Different scholars have provided varying explanations to the problem of Zionist deviations from the movement's Pentecostal roots. The term "deviation" comes laden with bias against Zionism in favour of Pentecostalism as a standard. Even then, it is not black Pentecostalism that is put forward as a standard but missionary inclined version of the movement, which historically only began to take shape with great difficulty in the 1950s. From Mofokeng and Madise (2019:8-9), one notes that missionary-led ministerial education played a role in inculcating anti-Zionist values and practices. This anti-Zionist curriculum was continued into the 1960s through a special teaching vehicle called the Spiritual Conference. Also, the recalcitrant

ministers received threats against their statuses in the denomination. Both these developments took place in the 1950s.

The following explanations will be discussed in this section: That early missionaries failed to train and organise their African converts; That these converts adopted sacramentalist approach evidenced by special garments and use of various elements such as holy water, and so on, influenced by their African traditional religious beliefs and practices; That those African Pentecostals remaining in white-led AFM became infiltrated by Zionists and there was mutual exchange between the two groups; That their common theological and historical links in the teachings and organisations of John Alexander Dowie's Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion (CCACZ)—a church which the bulk of its congregational infrastructure was assumed by the AFM at formation in 1908, made it easy for mutual influencing of the two movements; Lastly, that the membership of both movements derived from a common socio-economic class and religio-cultural experience.

4.1 Missionary Failure to Educate and Organise

John Bond, who was the chairman of the Assemblies of God (AOG) from 1967 to 1987 (Watt, 2001:62), speculated about the origins of the Zionist groups and linked them to “early Pentecostal missionaries” whom he blamed for failure to train and properly organise their African converts (Bond, 1974:14). The result of this failure, according to Bond, was the Zionist groups practicing a “garbled form of Christianity”. However, the reasons Bond identified as applicable to the Zionist movement appeared in Christiaan de Wet's (1989) doctoral study focusing on the black AFM. De Wet (1989:123-125) put them in the context of the missionary challenges at the close of the second decade of the 20th Century and stretching into the fourth decade. A glaring challenge, according to De Wet (1989:124), was the “vast distances missionaries had to cover” and lack of means to do so. The AFM expected overseers to give basic training to black ministry workers, despite the former lacking training themselves (De Wet, 1989:130). The “geographic spread of the work, its rapid growth and lack of good transportation” for the missionaries, meant that blacks received insufficient training as it was difficult for missionaries to reach the far-flung areas (De Wet, 1989:124). This led to a situation described by De Wet (1989:125) in the following manner; “black workers were on their own—preaching what they thought was right and doing what they thought best”. One could be mistaken for thinking that the above described Zionists, but it portrayed the situation in the AFM, among black Pentecostals. If Zionists had developed a “garbled form of Christianity” due to training and organisational oversight having been neglected by missionaries as Bond (1974:14) asserted, by the same argument black Pentecostals “developed a garbled form of Christianity”.

4.2 Liturgical Copyism

Pieter Le Roux, who had founded South Africa's first black Zionist Church in Wakkerstroom in 1902 and later became the first South African president of the AFM in 1913, referred to liturgical adaptations among black Pentecostals as "romanisms" (Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:3; Ngada & Mofokeng, 2001:13). By this, Le Roux meant the sacramental turn in the ministry approach and practices of black Pentecostals and Zionists. He was invoking the centuries-old animosity directed against the Roman Catholic Church whose practices were considered pagan. Le Roux was not the only one to suggest that Zionists evolved away from Zion-AFM practices by copying from other church traditions. Makhubu (1988:86) suggested the influence of the Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Presbyterians—especially regarding special garments. A further suggestion pointed at John Alexander Dowie's High Priestly garments which he began to wear from 1905 (Sundkler, 1976:48; Wacker, 1985:496), and the white flowing gowns of the Johannesburg Zion Church choir (Oosthuizen, 1987:29).

It is important to note that the copyist argument appears in contexts concerned with Zionism and not black Pentecostalism. However, the argument made in this paper that the two movements mirrored each other in their beliefs and associated phenomena helps to apply this explanation to black Pentecostalism. On the other hand, this explanation meets with objection from within the Zionist movement as evident in Ngada and Mofokeng (2001). The objection grounds the Zionist/black Pentecostal peculiarities in the inspiration of the Spirit, and the reading of the Old Testament—with African traditional religio-cultural milieu as a lens.

4.3 Zionist Infiltration

The idea of Zionist infiltration of black Pentecostalism comes from Anderson (2000); Hwata (2005); and Khathide (2010). In his dissertation on *The phases of Pentecostalism in the AFM*, Hwata (2005:144-145) discussed the replacement of the earlier pneumacentric paradigm by a Christocentric one in the AFM in Zimbabwe and South Africa. He characterised the pneumacentric paradigm with an orientation towards the Old Testament and African traditional culture. Hwata (2005:102, 112) blamed the practices he deemed undesirable, such as emotionalism, on Zionists and Apostolics infiltrating the AFM. A similar sentiment came from Anderson (2000:63) who told of the use of holy water and uniform within the United Apostolic Faith Church in South Africa. He attributed these practices to "Zionist influences from outside" this missionary Pentecostal church. A similar echo is detectable in Khathide's (2010:44) description of the black AFM in the 1950s' Natal as having "Zionistic tendencies". The implications to be drawn from the seeming

agreement on the influence of Zionists over black Pentecostals portrays the latter as lacking in conviction about their beliefs. Consequently, they became the playground for Zionists and white Pentecostals. Remembering that Pentecostalism was not only preceded by Zionism, but, that the latter transmuted into the former by adding both the doctrine and practice of Spirit baptism evidenced by glossolalia is important to counter the idea of infiltration.

4.4 Mutual Exchange Between Zionism and Pentecostalism

David Maxwell (1999:252), noting the similarities in the appearance of Zionist ministers and AFM evangelists in Zimbabwe in the early years of Pentecostalism in that country, advanced an argument of mutual exchange “of members and ideas” between Zionism and the AFM. However, the only plausible period in which there could be an exchange between Zionism and black Pentecostalism was before 1915. It must be remembered that the AFM was established through pentecostalising John Alexander Dowie’s South African Zion Church with the latter’s white congregations completely identifying with the Pentecostal revival. Black Zionists under Edgar Mahon refused to be pentecostalised and did not join the AFM. On the other hand, black Zionists under Pieter Le Roux, who led the Zion work among the Zulus in Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga Province), were pentecostalised but refused to abandon the epithet, “Zion” (Erasmus, 1996:33). This group continued working with the Le Roux’s without fully being subsumed under the AFM until 1915 when they rejected merging with Pentecostals (De Wet, 1989:34). By 1919, this group severed relations completely with the AFM. Although there continued to be individual Zionist ministers returning to the AFM after the Zionist departure, no evidence suggests they exercised the kind of influence that inclined black Pentecostals towards Zionism. Instead, the departures from the AFM between 1910-1925 and again from 1935-1946 constituted and swelled the ranks of Zionism.

4.5 The Historico-theological and Liturgical Link

Anderson (2000:80); Lapoorta (1996:168-169); and Moripe (1996:154) pointed to common historical and theological roots of Pentecostalism and black Zionism in John Alexander Dowie’s CCACZ. Mofokeng and Madise (2019:12) further argued for the existence of common liturgical innovations, especially in both black Pentecostalism and Zionism. Although Anderson (2004:108) argued that Zionism deviated from Pentecostalism liturgically, Mofokeng and Madise (2019:3-4) presented a counter-argument in which black Pentecostalism deviated from the common Zionist Pentecostal spirituality and practice. From their perspective, Zionism was more than an organisation. It existed within the AFM and continued even when some Zionists left the AFM to establish Black-led denominations. For Mofokeng

and Madise (2019:12), black Pentecostal deviation came about through the missionary curated process of evangelicalisation, resulting in evangelical Pentecostal orthopraxy.

4.6 The Socio-economic Condition

Among the explanations for the similarity of Zionism and black Pentecostalism is the role of the socio-economic situation of the adherents of these movements. Two interrelated conditions appear in the literature concerned with these movements—poverty and low to no literacy among the adherents (De Wet, 1989:44; Hwata, 2005:144-145; Isichei, 2004:202). The AFM's missionary strategy of preaching-based proselytism contributed to growing adherence to Zionist-Pentecostal faith without any socio-economic development (Burger & Nel, 2008:202). Added to the above was the “apartheid” spatial arrangements which located African settlements in rural reserves (Madise, 2001:123; Togarasei, 2005:350) and urban dormitory townships—distant from economic activity and government intentions for development. To quote Mofokeng (2018:78):

Zionism and early black Pentecostalism not only had [certain] features in common, but also drew members from the same pool of the socio-economically marginalised black communities who had received little or no education. This is important in the quest to explain the similarities of black Pentecostalism with Zionism.

The socio-economic deprivation characterising Zionist-Pentecostal believers necessitated particular responses. Molobi and Mahlobo (2008:46), as well as Makhubu (1988:86), mention the wearing of special garments as a way to hide poverty and assuage the anxiety about what to wear to church. Poverty and illiteracy afforded these Zionist-Pentecostal believers an opportunity to draw from their own cultural resources rather than those of white establishments. Madise (2001:123), in his discussion of AICs and healing, avers that the popularity of traditional healing among Africans was a response to the cost of medicine and the distances involved in getting to medical centres. By the same argument, the healing methods of Zionists (and Pentecostals) presented easy access, economically, geographically and culturally.

4.7 Religio-cultural Roots and mental framework

One of the explanations for the existence of Zionist phenomena within black Pentecostalism in the AFM is considerations of the religio-cultural roots and mental framework of both Zionism and black Pentecostalism (Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:4). This, together with the socio-economic condition of the adherents and the

historico-theological links between the two movements, promises a more plausible picture of the origin of their similarities.

Zionists and black Pentecostals were primarily African by virtue of the specific religio-cultural orientation and practices characteristic of the inhabitants of the continent over millennia. Unlike the converts to mainline missionary churches, most of whom had abandoned their membership of African-led village communities for Christian communities under missionary supervision at the beginning (De Haan, 2010:136), Zionists and black Pentecostals were drawn mainly from African traditional communities and their migrant brethren in the industrial centres who remained in contact with their rural communities. In the African cosmology, many traditional Africans subscribed to the spiritual and mundane (Clark, 2001:81; Ngada & Mofokeng, 2001:37), and the spirit pervaded both the animate and inanimate, with life lived in deference of the spirit reality. Any malady experienced, was considered to have a spiritual origin (Nel, 2019; Togarasei, 2005:371) and could only be resolved after the counsel of, or a ritual performed by, a spiritual functionary whose aim was restoration of balance (Thorpe, 1991:107). Adherence to instruction by spiritual functionaries, who also included elders, was critical to the functioning of an African society (Thorpe, 1991:106). The primacy given to the metaphysical realm turned materiality into an icon of the former (Nel, 2019:3), hence the use of inspired symbolic colours, substances, objects, and so on (Ngada & Mofokeng, 2001:42), and the reverent attitude displayed towards such.

The African religio-cultural world found deep resonance in the Zionist-Pentecostal gospel, with its concern for the body and its promise, including the exercise of spiritual power (Clark, 2001:82; Maxwell, 1999:248). Through the Zionist-Pentecostal gospel, Africans who would become Zionists and black Pentecostals came to participate in the religion of the industrialising society (Christianity) while retaining aspects of the African traditional religio-cultural perspectives and experience (Walls, 1996:91). The traditional religio-cultural lens helped them to discover a world familiar to theirs in many ways—in the Old Testament (Mbiti, 2004:221-223; Mojola, 2014:1; Sundkler, 1961:277). It was a world of taboos, sacrifices, powerful men and women, prophets, visions and dreams, spirits, miracles, and so on (Moripe, 1996:157; Poewe, 1988:149). The correspondences between the biblical world and the African traditional world inspired a Zionist-Pentecostal Christianity that made sense to many working-class Africans despite retaining the doctrines of their Zionist-Pentecostal AFM heritage. According to Daneel (1970:44) and Togarasei (2005:372), Zionists operated within the same framework as African traditionalists, drawing their healing methods from the same source (Mashabela, 2017:9), while, according to Sundkler (1961:55), combating traditionalists at the same time. Interestingly, although it is customary to see Zionists as those who took

the liberty to interpret their faith in terms of their culture and allowed it to inform further developments of the former (Togarasei, 2005:372), this also occurred among black Pentecostals who remained in the AFM. Understandably, both shared the same historico-theological background (Anderson, 2004:106-108; Lapoorta, 1996:168; Moripe, 1996: xiii), and also participated in the common African cultural milieu (Khathide, 2010:44; Togarasei, 2005:372).

4.8 The Role of Agency

Mofokeng and Madise (2019:10) have argued that the Zionist-like Pentecostalism in the AFM was a product of African agency. It was rising up to the challenge of interpreting the gospel and expressing it according to African sensibilities—a process Ukah (2007:9) understood as “attempts to Africanise Christianity”. The exercise of agency that gave rise to Zionist spirituality and practices finds better explanation within the common historico-theological and liturgical context; common socio-economic conditions and religio-cultural roots of both Zionism and black Pentecostalism. Adherents of both movements credited the Holy Spirit in the origination of (some of the) innovations which missionaries labelled as deviations (Mofokeng, 2018:80-81; Ngada & Mofokeng, 2001:13). Poewe (1988:148) noted in these supposed deviations the contextualisation of the holiness ethic derived from the Wesleyan Holiness movement. Mbiti (2004:222) further noted the choice for the narrative Bible (Old Testament and the gospels), which has been instrumental in the inspiration and development of Zionist-Pentecostal spirituality. Isichei (2004:197) reported on the Church Missionary Society archdeacon in colonial Kenya, who, perceiving the similarities between African traditional culture and the Old Testament, wished to prevent African access to this part of the canon by opposing its translation into the vernacular. Another London Missionary Society missionary had already called, in the 19th Century, for decanonisation of the Old Testament on the basis of its closeness to African customs (Mojola, 2014:2-3). These two men had perceived that vernacular translations of Scripture facilitated African agency in appropriating Christianity (Mbiti, 2004:221-222; Mojola, 2014:1)—unfortunately, in exotic and problematic ways to the missionaries.

5. Dissimilarities Between Black Pentecostalism and Zionism

Despite the demonstrated similarities of black Pentecostalism and Zionism during the period under consideration, and the various explanations offered for these, the two movements had differences based on access to material resources, Bible and ministry training, then leadership structure, as well as ideological oversight. These are discussed below.

5.1 Material Resources

Burton (1934:84), writing about the Ethiopian groups that came under the umbrella of the AFM during John G. Lake's presidency, alleged that some of these groups left as soon as they received money. Without arguing for or against this allegation, the above statement implies the existence of a perception of some material benefit attached to being part of the AFM. Such a benefit was not perceptible in the first few decades of this denomination. However, from 1936, the new general secretary, David J. du Plessis, began to mobilise financial resources from congregations across the country to benefit missions (Burger & Nel, 2008:127-128). Therefore, black Pentecostals acquired sites and had church halls erected. This access to material resources helped differentiate black Pentecostals from Zionists who struggled to raise funds to purchase church sites and erect buildings (Maxwell, 2006:55). On account of this benefit, Burger and Nel (2008:232-233) considered the relationship of the white AFM to the black Pentecostals within the missionary structure to be a benevolent paternalism.

5.2 Bible and Ministry Training

Despite similar training challenges experienced by both Zionists and black Pentecostals, as mentioned earlier, training in the Bible and ministry contributed to their divergence. The Zionists that left the AFM between 1910 and 1920 had, besides whatever exposure they had to the Bible when some of them were members of mainline churches (Sundkler, 1961:122), been exposed to the inadequate ministry training of the AFM via the official magazine and conferences (Erasmus, 1996:3, 26). However, it is doubtful if the AFM magazine played any significant role in the training of ministers for the black church due to the languages used—English and Afrikaans. Even those who founded independent AFMs from the 1930s had been mentored for several years before their ordination as ministers. The caveat comes in the form of De Wet's (1989:124-125) assertion that the 'vastness of the territory' missionaries had to cover disabled their effective training of their African ministers.

The ministers that remained in the AFM benefited from Elias Letwaba's ministry training facility, Patmos Bible School, established in 1924 (Burger & Nel, 2008:387; Erasmus, 1996:46; Hwata, 2005:105; Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:9; Nel, 2014:112). Although registration and attendance at the school were never made a mandatory requirement for entry into the AFM ministry, in the ten years of its operation (Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:8), Gordon Lindsay claims that the school trained thousands of African Pentecostal ministers (De Wet, 1989:68-69)—undoubtedly an exaggeration. Several training facilities were established from the 1950s (Erasmus, 1996:65-70; Hwata, 2005:106), although offering inferior training in line with the philosophy behind the Bantu Education ACT of 1953. A special teaching platform named "the Spir-

itual Conference” was established from 1965, separated from the annual conference (Mofokeng, 2018:103). The reason behind mentioning the above developments is to indicate how ministry training within black Pentecostalism contributed to differences with Zionism. The latter battled to establish and run training facilities. The Saint John AFM of prophetess Christinah Nku, worked for a while with the Wilberforce College, the African Methodist Episcopal Church institution in Evaton (Molobi, 2006:2-3, 5; Molobi, 2008:6). Beyers Naude’s Christian Institute attempted to facilitate the training of AIC ministers in the 1970s (Molobi, 2006:8; Ngada & Mofokeng, 2001:19-20), and a body of Zionist churches approached the AFM with the request for assistance regarding training and administration in 1979 (Burger & Nel, 2008:247). The Zionist attempts at ministry training remained inconsistent, thus, affecting possibilities of somewhat sophisticated Bible reading which was afforded black Pentecostals.

5.3 Leadership Structure

As the black AFM was a missionary entity, controlled by white AFM Pentecostals, it accordingly inherited a complex constitution and structure from the mother-church (Anderson, 2000:41). However, from inception to 1961, its constitution differed with that of the mother-church as Frank Dugmore, the mission superintendent between 1916 and 1923, had structured the black section in accordance with the Methodist Church—a church he originally was a member of (Burger & Nel, 2008:221; De Wet, 1989:116-117). The structure was overseen by the superintendent who worked together with district overseers. Beneath the overseers were ministers in charge of congregations. These worked together with evangelists, local preachers, and class leaders. Ministry responsibilities differed according to one’s rank in this structure.

The difference between Zionism and black Pentecostalism existed at the top tier of leadership. The Zionists operated a charismatic episcopal system centred on the founder and his/her family (Anderson, 2000:48-49; Moripe, 1996:157; Sundkler, 1961:104, 109)—a demonstration of an inclination towards African monarchic and dynastic leadership model (Isichei, 1995:314; Kgatle & Mofokeng, 2019:3; Sundkler, 1961:117). However, the Reformed Apostolic Faith Mission was an exception as it has a bureaucratic structure led by a president (Moripe, 1994:68-70). Contrary to the Zionists, the structures of the black AFM were determined and presided over by white leaders and were not specifically ecclesiastical as the AFM had registered under company law in 1913 (Burger & Nel, 2008:182). The AFM subjected its top leadership to elections—with the appointment of the superintendent vested in the white Executive Council. Practically, the Native Conference elected the superintendent, who was then endorsed by the white Executive Council. The reason there never was any conflict with the choice of the Native Conference may be found in their choice of the superintendent often being already a member of the executive of the white AFM.

Besides the above, white missionaries served as district overseers. In their absence, the chairman of the white district would assume oversight of the black district. (This situation only changed in the 1980s.) Therefore, black ministers could only serve as elders, evangelists, local preachers and class leaders—with women participating in the last two categories, especially the last one (De Wet, 1989:87). On the other hand, Zionist ministers operated within a familiar leadership environment constituted by the general orientation towards the African traditional religious-cultural worldview and practices (Sundkler, 1961:109).

5.4 Ideological Oversight

Besides different leadership structures, black Pentecostalism in the AFM and Zionism operated from different ideological standpoints. The ecclesiastic context of black Pentecostalism was characterised by white domination and black resistance informed by the country's socio-politics. Before 1917, the national leadership overseeing black Pentecostalism was racially mixed albeit with Africans as assistants. From 1917 to 1961, black Pentecostals were subjected to an all-white missionary leadership, which was taking executive decisions over black Pentecostals in the denomination (Burger & Nel, 2008:236; Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:5). Black leaders were brought back into executive structures from 1962 and by the 1970s, some of them began serving as assistants of missionary district overseers (Mofokeng, 2018:81). Zionists, on the other hand, despite the national socio-political context defined by white domination, carved and operated within an ecclesiastic space defined by Africanism. In this way, Zionists offered an affirming experience of Christianity unperturbed by missionary concerns (Anderson, 2004:107; Makofane, 2019:139-140). However, their endeavour to render the gospel sensible to the Africans grounded in traditional cosmology, received a negative evaluation from white Pentecostal denominational leaders. These leaders were protecting their Black followers from the influence of Zionists, whom they considered extremists and separatists (Hollenweger, 1972:171). Therefore, the difference in experience of leadership and the influence exercised by such meant that black Pentecostals existed within an environment which compromised their ability to actualise their leadership and theological sensibilities (De Wet, 1989:311-312; Mofokeng & Madise, 2019:12). Eventually, black Pentecostalism in the AFM mirrored the evangelical posture the missionaries had been working at since 1929 when they first objected to Zionism within the denomination.

6. Conclusion

From its inception, missionaries who were driven by a desire to reproduce a Christianity familiar to western sensibility frowned upon modern African Christianity. Their frustration was with the resistant African worldview and holistic spirituality, which, though diminished in those churches they presided upon, nevertheless existed. This

worldview found greater expression in the forms of Christianity independent of missionary establishment, especially Zionism. More than any other form of African Christianity, Zionism received condemnation as syncretistic until the 1970s when some missiologists reappraised the movement and argued that it represented a contextualisation of the Christian faith in Africa. In this article, evidence was presented that the pre-1970s black Pentecostalism within the AFM was similarly syncretistic. The term “syncretism” was not subjected to conceptual analysis. Rather, its negative usage in the literature of the period was assumed. The argued syncretism of black Pentecostalism lays a claim to it having been a contextualisation of Christianity too, albeit with differences emanating from its existence in a context dominated by white denominational leadership discussed in the penultimate section of this article. The importance of ascribing contextuality to black Pentecostalism in its pre-1970s iteration lies in the positivity attached to contextuality. This positivity may facilitate further research interest to not only understand the pre-evangelical black Pentecostalism in denominations such as the AFM, but also to learn its underlying principles as it represented agency, innovation, and drive that spread the movement far and wide.

An exploration of various explanations, several of which were initially applied to Zionism, were discussed and expanded on, pursuant to the main claim of the article that black Pentecostalism was syncretistic like Zionism. The syncretism of black Pentecostalism and Zionism was found to have been grounded in the common historico-theological and liturgical heritage in John Alexander Dowie’s Zion Church and the AFM which succeeded it in South Africa; the common socio-economic condition and African religio-cultural roots of their adherents; and the distance from white supervision—which in the case of black Pentecostals, the missionaries began to close in the early 1940s through policy changes, and later mandatory theological training of Black ministers. The effects of that distance lingered for several decades. In both Zionism and black Pentecostalism, African agency was the bedrock of the resultant spirituality. However, the eradication of the Zionist-Pentecostalism in the AFM was tantamount to shunning that which missiologists came to consider as contextualisation—an act that raises the spectre of reversing the contextual gains Zionism represents and questions about the contextuality of evangelised black Pentecostalism.

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