The Naming of Independent Churches in the 21st Century: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Charismatic Churches in South Africa

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Abstract

South Africa is a democratic country, wherein every individual has the right to belong to any religious community. Churches in the Bible were not given specific names, but the church's location was used to refer to that church. Mainline churches named their churches using doctrinal convictions, and some used the names of their founders. However, leaders of charismatic churches in South Africa are more creative in naming churches, using names that communicate what the church stands for or a name depicting an expected contribution of the church to the community in which it is based. This article discusses the naming patterns and practices of three church categories as representative examples: the early church (in the Bible), mainline churches, and charismatic churches in South Africa. Using content analysis as a qualitative approach, data were gathered by analysing content from sources such as the Bible, the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms, and content posted on Facebook and YouTube, while critical discourse analysis and text analysis constituted the analytical framework. The study found that there has been a major shift in the naming practices of churches in the three categories.

Keywords: charismatic churches; church names, name trends; South African churches

Introduction

According to Borkfelt (2011, 116), the process of naming is one of the most basic actions of language. In addition, Mashiri, Chabata, and Chitando (2013, 163) argue that the practice of naming in Africa is mostly viewed as reflecting the socio-cultural and philosophical realities of African societies. Zungu (2017, 226) alludes that church names are not just for identification purposes but also to provide direction to members. She further argues that there has been a significant increase in churches in South Africa

lately, pushing church leaders to be more creative when naming their churches. For charismatic church planters, the name of a church reflects their deep spiritual values and not only what the name means to those outside their church. (Zungu 2017, 220) further asserts that some church planters claim that the name they chose for their churches came directly from God through a dream or a vision.

When defining a church, Shekhar (2017) explains that it is a group of people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. It may also mean the place where such believers gather for worship. The church is alternatively called the body of Christ. Grudem (1994, 853) agrees that although there may be traces of the church in the Old Testament before the arrival of Jesus, the term "church" is mostly used after the death and ascension of Jesus. In the same vein. Schnabel (2004, 320) concurs that the term "church" is attributed to multiple meanings in the Christian community, from describing a building used for religious gatherings to people's local congregation or denomination. In this article, the researcher uses the term "church" to mean the organisation or body of believers.

Shekhar (2017) further elaborates that the root word of "church" originates from the Greek language and is, according to MacGregor (1978): "The Greek word ecclesia [Latin *Ekklesia*] which was used in the regular secular discourse of any assembly, chiefly of an assembly of self-governing citizens." It is used in the Septuagint of the assembly of Israel, i.e., the people of the covenant contradistinguished from foreigners. It is first used in a Christian sense in Acts 5:11. Malphurs (2007, 115) expounds that it is important to have a definition of church that is consistent with the teachings of the Bible, not only for clear communication but also to help pastors better understand the meaning of the term "church."

Scholz (2009, 94) adds that "the Church" (capitalised), by definition, is the universal body of people who are referred to as believers in Christ the Lord. He notes that the reason why "the Church" is associated with the Lord Jesus or is said to be of the Lord Jesus is because of what is recorded in the Bible (Matthew 16:18), where Jesus said: "I will build my Church." This verse referred to his followers as "the Church" and not churches. Therefore, "the Church" and "church" should not be misunderstood in the article. Scholz (2009, 94) further alludes that "the Church" (as quoted in Matthew) refers to all believers, but church/churches, as referred to in the article, refers to the denomination, organisation, or religious movement that propagates certain doctrines. Hamon (2003) elucidates that if the word church is spelt with a capital letter "C" it does not refer to a denomination or religious organisation but refers to the universal body of

believers. In contrast, in cases where the word is spelt with lowercase "c" it refers in general to denominations or religious organisations.[1]

Maluleke (2003, 179) asserts that African Independent Churches are also known as African Indigenous Churches (AIC). They are churches that do not depend on any mother body and do not affiliate with any church regulatory body. Many churches are grouped in this church tradition in South Africa. Concerning the 1996 South African Census, Hendriks and Erasmus (2002, 21) note the diversity and number of these churches: "StatsSA Religion: Summary Code List contains at least 4 500 names found in the form of a census. They usually consist of a small independent community. AIC represents a significant part of South African society." Hendriks and Erasmus (2002, 22) state that the 1996 South African Census showed that 42.9% of all Black Christians living in South Africa belonged to AICs.

The History of the Church in South Africa

According to Roy (2020), the arrival of Christianity in South Africa is associated with the Dutch period of 1652 to 1800, when Roman Catholic naval explorers and missionaries from Portugal arrived to proclaim Christianity in South Africa. The Dutch Reformed Church was the only church permitted at the time. The church originated from the Netherlands and was inspired by the teachings of John Calvin. The Dutch Reformed Church was a denomination of the Dutch Royal Family before it merged with the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The name suggests that the church was for reformed people, which means that their theology was reformed due to the Protestant Reformation following John Calvin's theology (Roy 2020).

Roy (2020) further explains that the British were in control at the end of the Dutch period, leading to the emergence of mainline or mainstream churches. Mainline or mainstream churches include the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, derived from the general meaning of the term "English or of the English nation" but it also means established episcopal, which means a church led by Bishops (Siaki 2002, 34). The name Methodist Church of Southern Africa is derived from the methodical manner they lived as Christians as taught by John Wesley (Madise and Taunyane 2012, 5). The name Evangelical Presbyterian Church of South Africa means that those from a Protestant movement regarded themselves as modified Calvinists (Halala et al. 2015). The name Roman Catholic Church denotes its universal nature, and the name also means that members should remain close to their bishops, to name a few.

Anderson (2004) adds that this era was followed by the emergence of the Pentecostal movement and the charismatic movement, which won over many Black South Africans

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1   According to the Chicago Manual of Style guidelines, we only capitalise Church when it forms part of a proper noun denomination (Anglican Church; Methodist Church; Roman Catholic Church). General references to a church or churches are in lowercase. In this article, capitals are also used for "the Church" when referring to the universal body of believers, as per Hamon (2003).

instead of mainline churches, which mostly comprised the White community in those days. Churches such as the Assemblies of God led by Reverend Nicholas Bhengu and the Apostolic Faith Mission led by Reverend Richard Ngidi in South Africa have their roots in the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, California (Chandomba 2007; Roy 2017; Watt 1992). The Full Gospel Church, led by Reverend Job Chiliza, also originates from New York with a name denoting the teachings of Paul, who said he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ (Anderson 1992, 24; Niewoudt 1999, 15). The name of Bantu Christian Church, led by Bishop James Ngcanjini, denotes that it is the church of the people, although it is unclear whether it is just the people or the Black people. The name Zionist Christian Church, led by Engenas Lekganyane, means of Zion or from Zion and is one of the few African Initiated Churches together with the Nazareth Baptist Church led by Isaiah Shembe, whose name means "of Nazareth" or "the Nazarites" (Anderson 2000; 2004).

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this article were to investigate:

- The naming practices of charismatic churches in South Africa.
- Similarities in naming practices of the early church, charismatic churches and mainline churches.

Research Problem

Zungu (2017) points out that linked to the independence of charismatic churches in South Africa is that its leaders do not affiliate with any mother body and do not report to anyone. As such, those who plant and name a church are not required to have any degree or a permanent church building. As long as there is the belief that God called them and they have followers, they start a church and give it a name. Cole (2009, 8) indicates that names are important in the Bible because even the name of Jesus, regarded as the owner and founder of the church, was prophesied to Mary and Joseph (Matt 1:21–25). The naming patterns in the three categories of churches differ fundamentally. In the early church, there was only one church based in different locations. There was no other name used for the church besides "the church" followed by the location where the church was based, for instance, "the church in Corinth." When looking at mainline churches in the South African context, mostly of foreign origin, their names are based on teachings, practices, or founders' names. Most of these churches emerged due to various struggles in the universal church, which necessitated names being coined to demonstrate a particular struggle of that generation or group of believers. The flexibility of the constitution in allowing anyone to open and lead a church has led to the opening of numerous charismatic churches, which are mostly independent. They do not belong to any mother body, as it is with mainline churches. For instance, a mainline church such as the Anglican Church of Southern Africa has multiple parishes (branches) that affiliate with the main Anglican Church. The independence of charismatic churches leaves the responsibility to name the church to its founder.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), defined by Van Dijk (1995a) as a framework to analyse and understand utterances beyond their literal meanings. It is, in other words, reading between the lines. The sentence linguist Harris (1952) first mentioned "discourse analysis." He mentioned that discourse analysis is a method used to analyse connected speech or writing for continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limit of a simple sentence at a time. Kamalu and Osisanwo (2015) mention that in onomastics, names are given by the influence of those in power; such names may result from the wishes and plans of those in power. Discourse is also about expressing social power, position, status, dominance, culture, politics, and race (Van Dijk 1995b).

Van Dijk (2001) categorises CDA as an attempt to study the dominance, abuse of social power, inequality, and the way of communication in social and political settings. Different variables separate the speech's audience, e.g., they belong to different social classes. Van Dijk (2001) adds that most researchers include notions such as power, dominance, ideology, hegemony, gender, class, race, discrimination, reproduction, interests, institutions, social structure, and social order in their CDA vocabulary.

In his *Language and Power*, Fairclough (1989) identifies three elements of discourse, namely text, interaction, and context, and proposes a model for a critical analysis of a text, i.e., a procedure based on the description (of text), interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context. The text's description is to identify the standard features of a specific text, either vocabulary or grammar, available in the discourse type that the text draws.

Locke (2004) clarifies that the study of discourse processes and their dependence on society and background assumptions are, therefore, the concerns of the critical discourse procedure, which Fairclough calls "interpretation." Young and Harrison (2004) mention that interpretation is generated by combining what is in the text and "in" the interpreter. In a sense, he is a member of society and the resources he brings to the interpretation. Interpretation also includes interpreting situational context, considering the physical context's features, participants' properties, what has previously been said, and "representations of societal and institutional social orders." Interpretation of situational context has four dimensions, namely, "what is going on (activity, topic, purpose), who is involved, what relationships are involved, and what is the role of language in what is going on" (Fairclough 1989). Therefore, this theory is the most relevant in the study of naming churches in South Africa as a new phenomenon that came with the new dispensation after the adoption of the Constitution in 1996.

Literature Review

Although naming, in general, is a popular phenomenon in sociolinguistics, there are, however, only a few studies conducted on the naming of religious organisations or churches. Akoto and Ansah (2021) assert that, unlike other name kinds, church names

remain what they call "onomastic *terra incognita*," which means that it is unknown or unexplored territory. In one of the studies on church naming, Chitando (2005) views naming as a tool that allows one to have a sense of belonging and that to be human is to name and to be named. He further argues that popular church names at times distinguish themselves from independent churches and thus appear to be more organised. Zungu (2017), on the other hand, contends that in the past, church names were reflective of the church doctrines, but church names today are based more on their objective. She further argues that a new trend has focused on using church names as an advertising tool to attract new members to join the church. Chiluwa (2010) agrees with CDA used in the article that naming is a conscious communicative strategy used to disseminate people's attitudes and social and religious ideology. He further adds that naming in the charismatic Christian context performs a linguistic function such as experiential, reflective of the producers' experiences and perception of the real work.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach (Creswell 2007; Frankel, Devers, and Kelly 2000). The study sought to analyse, compare and interpret names in the Bible, the early churches in South Africa, and independent churches today. Data were obtained from the Constitution of the SACC, the Bible, and the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms. In contrast, additional material was obtained from social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube.

Church names are separated into three categories based on the epoch in which that church was founded, making it easy to identify differences. The analysis describes some of the church names to explain the formal features of either the vocabulary or sentence available in the text. Discourse values of the church names are investigated to see how the producer's experience of the social world is represented (Fairclough 1989).

Some church names are phrases and sentences; analysis seeks to explain the arrangement of grammatical items in the structure and how the proper name performs experiential, relational, or expressive roles. These roles generally explain the social function or the intention of the church name.

Discussion

Below is a discussion of selected church names under three categories as representative examples: the early church, mainline churches, and charismatic churches in South Africa.

Naming Patterns of the Early Church

Nwaomah (2012) posits that the church has its origin in the Old Testament, but it thrived in New Testament times. Hamon (2003) asserts that the Church, as we know it today, was born on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. According to the Bible (Luke 24:49), Jesus made a promise to his disciples that they should tarry in the city of Jerusalem until

they are endued with the power from upon high (meaning the power of the Holy Spirit). In Acts 2, Luke describes the fulfilment of the promise made by Jesus (in Luke 24:49) regarding the arrival of the Holy Spirit. The event was termed Pentecost, which was the day on which the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and caused them to speak in tongues.

According to Luke (in Acts 2:44–47), a picture is given of the early church—alternatively referred to in this article as the primitive church—following the Day of Pentecost and events which took place that day (Ayuch 2018). Among others, the Church in those times was regarded as one big body of believers who were often together, sharing their food and possessions. Acts (2:42) describes how steadfast they were in the teachings of Jesus, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers, which shows the unity in this particular body of believers, the Church.

It is important to note that the Church, in this case, was still referred to as "the Church," which meant that Luke, Paul, Timothy and other Apostles who wrote in the New Testament viewed the Church as a universal body of believers without any denominations. It is evident, according to the Bible, that several believers in different cities were still referred to as "the Church." According to Luke (in Acts, chapters 11–21), reference is made to "the Church" in Antioch (an ancient Greet City which is present-day Antakya, Turkey); "the Church" in Thessalonica (modern-day Greece); "the Church" in Berea (modern-day northern Greece); "the Church" in Corinth; and "the Church" in Ephesus; to name a few. From the New Testament, it is also noted that Paul wrote several letters to several churches he called or referred to as "the Church" as he called them in his books, further using the preposition in and the proper noun referring to the location of the church in question. A few examples are the letters to the Church in Corinth, the Church in Galatia, the Church in Ephesus, the Church in Philippi, the Church in Colossae, and the Church in Thessalonica.

When explaining the history of "the Church," Hamon (2003) observes that the early church dates back to between AD 30 and AD 100, which means that the early church existed for about 70 years. Even during this period, "the Church" would still be regarded as one universal body of believers in Jesus Christ and not according to different doctrines and beliefs. Thus, even the churches in this period had only one way of calling the church "the Church." It is important to note that none of the churches mentioned above or anywhere in the Bible was referred to by a different name either than "the Church" and would read as "the Church in …." This is in line with what is stated above that "the Church" was regarded as one universal body, and even if there were believers in different regions, they were rather grouped according to their cities and regions and referred to as such.

The Church in the New Testament was regarded as one body of believers who followed the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and later of his disciples, the apostles. Different doctrinal stances did not mean that there should be a different name or groupings while

there is one God and one founder of "the Church"—Jesus. The question asked by Paul in a letter he wrote to Corinthians (3:4) is interesting in demonstrating the unity of believers. He said:

> For, while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

There were disagreements in the Church in the New Testament wherein people felt that they preferred the leaders at the time. However, the names of Paul and Apollos and their contribution to Christianity were of no worth and, as such, would not necessitate them planting and forming different churches with their names. Paul further explained that when it comes to the work of God, they are mere messengers or vessels, God being the centre. Even after such encounters, the Church remained "the Church" by name and did not change or split.

Therefore, it may be deduced that the Church's name was given by Jesus, who is the founder thereof. As previously stated, Jesus in Matthew (16:18) made a promise that he would build his Church: "I will build my Church," making him the founder of the Church. The level of influence apostles such as Paul had, did not result in them using their names or other names for the Church because they understood it to be of the Lord Jesus. Even other apostles, such as Peter, who lived with Jesus, did not see that as a qualification to name his church but rather continued using "the Church" to refer to the gathering of his people. It shows the kind of respect the Apostles had towards Jesus and that they believed that "the Church" is the only name to refer to his people, irrespective of which city they were in, because they were united by Jesus' teachings.

The Roman Catholic Church

Names in this category result from what happened during the establishment and rule of the Catholic Church, which later led to the Protestant reformation that resulted in new names and naming patterns being established. Names were based on identity, which, for instance, had to do with why the church was formed. The naming of churches such as the Catholic Church was based on the dominion the leaders had on the people; hence, the name meant "The Universal Church." Based on this, it is evident that naming churches in this epoch was a process done by those in powerful positions, who named the church to demonstrate dominion over those of lower status, in this case, the followers (Dwyer 1988).

Hamon (2003) posits that the naming of the Catholic Church by Saint Ignatius of Antioch was not only about bestowing a name to a group of people, but it symbolised dominion and power. The naming was also about establishing a system wherein selected individuals called bishops, priests, and deacons were at the forefront. The naming of the Catholic Church was also centred on the demonstration of power because, unlike the churches in the Bible, the name "Roman Catholic" was and is used even when that

church is situated outside Rome—such as a Roman Catholic Church in southern Africa, a name that has no relationship to the members, who are South Africans. Nowhere in the Bible is a location-based church name used to refer to a church in a different location because then the church's name was about the people since its name had to have something about the people, which in this case was the location in which those people resided. Therefore, the inconsistency in this epoch was that church naming was centred around the system, the clergy, and the control they had on people, and not the people themselves (Kahl 2005).

Naming Patterns of Churches in South Africa

One would wonder about the relationship between Saints such as David, Michael, Peter, and John from the Bible since the Anglican Church of Southern Africa uses those names to name its parish communities, for example, Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal. Other churches are named based on what they stand for, what they profess, and based on their doctrine. Examples of these churches are: Christ Revealed Tabernacle, which means that the church aims to reveal Christ; Grace Bible Church, which means that the church is Bible-based by the grace of God; and Kingdom People, which means that the church develops and is made up of kingdom people.

The study further revealed that churches are named based on a Bible passage or by inspiration from Bible stories or events. Examples are: Christ is the Way Ministries, based on John 14:6, which says: "I am the way, truth, and life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me"; Bread of Life Church, based on John (6:35), which says: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger"; and Rock of Ages Family Church, based on Jeremiah 18:2, which says: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words."

However, some churches have names specific to a certain racial group, such as Bantu Christian Church, which suggests that the church is for "*Bantu*," which means Black African people in the South African context. On the other hand, some churches, such as African Gospel Church, African Catholic Church, African Renaissance, English Reformed Church, Invloed Kerk, and Afrikaans Protestant Church, have racial connotations. The researcher believes that it would not be easy for an isiZulu speaker to join a church called Invloed Kerk, the same way it would not be easy for an English speaker to join Bantu Christian Church. The language used in naming such churches suggests that only people of certain skin colour, racial group or origin may be part of the church—unlike the Church in the early church, where the Church (a universal body of believers) was both for Jews and Gentiles.

Another group of names used by charismatic churches is characterised by motivation and promises of a better future. Zungu (2017, 216) posits that church leaders use motivational names for their churches because of the expectations of new converts, who are mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds and are desperately looking for miracles. These converts also enjoy and prefer motivational sermons, which speak directly to their

problems. Such churches use names and slogans to instil hope in these new converts and give them a sense of belonging. Zungu (2017, 216) cites that the problem with using motivational names for churches is when the promise depicted in the church name does not materialise for some people.

Wagner (1990, 119) warns that those tasked with the responsibility to plant and name churches should not run away from using the word "church" when naming their churches. South African charismatic churches also use "ministry," "tabernacle" and "centre" to refer to churches, such as Shekinah Glory Ministries International, Living Oracles Tabernacle, and Bethesda Worship Centre. It is also interesting how some churches use "International" in the name of their church. The word "international" at the end of the church name suggests that the church operates internationally or has an international audience. The researcher, however, investigated certain church websites and watched YouTube videos of churches that use the word "international" and interestingly found that in some cases, they only speak an African language such as isiXhosa, which means its audience is only among the Xhosa people. The church only has a branch in one city in South Africa, but "international" is used in its name.

These findings are supported by the theoretical framework that underpins this study because, as stated by Van Dijk (2001), CDA studies the dominance, abuse of social power, inequality, and communication in social and political settings. As per the CDA mentioned above, the naming of churches lies with the leaders of such churches, and in most cases, the general membership of the church has no or little contribution to the name of the church to which they belong. However, members may at some point be schooled on the doctrine of the church, which may lead to the re-naming of the church (Zungu 2017). It may still be difficult for them to identify with the naming patterns since they do not have the same experiences as those who named the church, and the name of the church would have no significance to its members.

Conclusion

This article has explored names and naming patterns in three epochs: the early church, mainline churches, and charismatic churches. The article further demonstrated that names and naming patterns indeed evolve based on different experiences. Lastly, the article showed that naming patterns tell a lot about events and beliefs of individuals. There was no need to have different church names in the era of the early church because "the Church" was viewed as one body of believers across the world. People's different struggles and occurrences led to the emergence of different naming patterns, such as names post the Protestant period. Today, the naming of churches is dynamic in that names originate from expectations, biblical passages, visions, names of people, intentions, worship and praise names, personal experiences and prophetic names. Today, the church is seen as a symbol of identity representing feelings and beliefs and a sense of belonging to different people from different walks of life. Moreover, the study showed that in the 21st century, church names have much to do with self, identity and personal dignity. The naming of churches in the South African context is centred around

the church leaders, members, followers and those who may identify with the church. According to Conner (1982), the early church was centred around Jesus; hence, there were not multiple names used for the Church.

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