

The growth¹ of Pentecostalism and Christian umbrella organisations in Botswana

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Abstract

The article discusses the growth of Pentecostalism in Botswana and its role in the formation of inter- and intra-ecumenical bodies. Its role in the promotion of unity, dialogue and co-operation in the development of society and in the Pentecostal churches, other churches and other religious faiths is also highlighted. The article shows that this development has taken place over time and continues to manifest itself at various stages and in various settings, and that it continues to respond to new challenges posed by globalisation and the technological advances of the 21st century.

Introduction

The promotion of inter-² and intra-Christian³ relations is becoming global and is now affecting the growth of Pentecostal churches. There has been an

¹ The word "growth" is here used to refer to the development of structures promoting co-operation and unity within the Pentecostal movement in Botswana. The development of these organizational structures equips these churches to extend their influence and co-operation through dialogue across their borders and reach out to other churches and religious bodies in the interest of the common good of the society at large. See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (1998); David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish* (2002).

² The prefix "inter-" here means between or across. A good example is when ecumenical gatherings are organised by and between the Botswana Christian Council, the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana and Organization of African Independent Churches. On an annual basis, meetings for national prayers for rain and independence celebrations are organised by a committee made up of leaders from these bodies.

³ The prefix "intra-" is used here to mean inside or within. In the context of ecumenism it refers to a network that exists inside a single ecumenical body, such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana (EFB), an umbrella organisation for all evangelical Pentecostal and charismatic churches (see Togarasei, Mmolai & Nkomazana, *The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana: Responses & Challenges*, 2007:15 and 27). It therefore refers to the practice where EFB member churches conduct workshops, prayer meetings and training of leaders among themselves. The Botswana Christian Council member churches, among other things through their Bible college, called Kgolagano, train and equip their leaders among themselves.

increase in the formation of ecumenical bodies within the Pentecostal movement that foster unity and common ecumenical action. This development is affecting not only dialogue and cooperation between the different Pentecostal churches themselves but also the way they relate with other churches and religions. It has also increased the level of interaction between Pentecostal churches and other religious faiths. Through this development, old boundaries have been (and are being) crossed through inter- and intra-religious relations and dialogue, helping the church to stand together in order to transform and serve society.

This article sketches out Botswana's religious landscape from independence up to now from the perspective of interfaith relations, particularly the place of the Pentecostal movement in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

Botswana's religious landscape

In James Amanze's survey of 1994, about one-third of Botswana's population was identified as Christian, while about two-thirds were adherents of the traditional or indigenous religions. The survey also listed the existence of minority religions and traditions such as Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Bahai; numerically these traditions were (and still are) extremely small (Amanze 1994:xi). The 2001 Religious Freedom National Profile recorded that Christianity accounted for almost 60% of them and indigenous traditional religions for almost 40%. However, statistics have shown that there has been a rapid decline in the number of adherents of indigenous traditional religions. Although available figures differ, it may generally be argued, judging from the decline of indigenous traditional religions and other socio-religious factors, that by the end of 2007 about two-thirds of Botswana's population were Christian. It is within this setting of Christianity's gradual expansion and growth that Pentecostalism found the space to interact and co-exist with other Christian bodies and religions (Nkomazana 2001:341–344). However, to have an overall understanding of the dynamics of the relations between Pentecostal churches, other denominational churches and religions, we need to go back to the pre-independence period.

Christianity before independence

The first Christian churches in Botswana were mainline denominations such as the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa (UCCSA), the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Dutch Reformed Church and the Methodist Church, all of which were introduced by missionaries from Europe and America. These were branches and extensions of the European mother churches, which provided financial support, spiritual guidance and personnel. Because of the varied nature of Botswana's ethnic communities,

missionaries identified themselves with different ethnic groups and their chiefs, and this, to a large degree, gave rise to the phenomenon where churches were associated and developed along ethnic lines (Gulbrandsen 1993:44; Pauw 1960:117). These factors caused chiefs to be reluctant to accept missionaries from different denominations and permit them to operate and function within a single ethnic group, since they believed this would weaken ethnic solidarity and effectively endanger the chief's influence. The chiefs therefore opted to be joined and supported by a particular denomination so that ethnic solidarity could be strengthened; this practice, however, worked against freedom of worship and inter- and intra-religious relations (Nkomazana 2005:28; Nkomazana 1999:303–362; Maphanyane & Mokopakgosi 2001:345–356). Ethnic solidarity was, however, reinforced by the phenomenon of large populations concentrated in big towns and placed under highly centralised forms of government. While Pentecostal churches in the country have been proliferating, their pioneers were for many years persecuted, rejected and denied freedom of worship. This was largely due to associations between tribal leaders, colonial authorities and missionaries. The introduction of Pentecostalism during the colonial period was therefore marked by rejection and isolation, which resulted in mistrust and misunderstanding. African traditional religions, the missionary churches, colonial administrators and *dikgosi* (traditional leaders) united against the Pentecostal movement (Nkomazana 1998:44–57). By the turn of the twentieth century the missionary churches had successfully established territorial empires for themselves. These territorial empires were no-go areas for other missionary organisations, particularly the Pentecostals.⁴

When Pentecostals arrived in Botswana in the early 1940s, they found that other churches had already firmly established themselves with the support of the colonial and tribal authorities. This created a negative environment for religious dialogue and relations between the early Pentecostals and other religious bodies of the time. Although African traditional religions tended to be accommodating, chiefs who were to some extent part of their leadership, connived with the older missionary churches and colonial authorities to suppress Pentecostalism. As part of a survival strategy, Pentecostalism went underground and operated secretly for several years. The evangelistic approach of the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement did not help to ease the situation. Their radical and uncompromising style of preaching further hardened the hearts of the authorities, who were determined to eliminate the movement from the territories already under the control of different missionary churches. As a result of the sour relationship between the authorities and Pentecostalism, misunderstanding, misrepresentation,

⁴ In 1880, the Catholic Church missionaries were denied entry to the Ngwato territory by Khama III, who argued that Ngwato already had missionaries and that he did not want conflicts between two societies in his town.

mistrust and misconception arose and created a barrier to dialogue and relations between Pentecostals and the mainline churches (Sales 1971:79–90).

Pentecostalism, government constitution and dialogue

The second and probably the most critical phase of the development of Pentecostalism and its relations with other churches and religions was the introduction of Botswana's new Constitution at independence in 1966. Botswana's founding fathers fully understood the importance and implications of inter- and intra-religious relations and values of freedom in society. They believed that government had the responsibility to safeguard the basic civic virtues, rights and freedoms of the individual. This development helped the Pentecostals to come to the fore publicly and seek ways to engage in dialogue. The new Constitution specifically stipulated and protected the rights of all Botswana's citizens by underlining the necessity for religious freedom, expression and assembly.⁵ It therefore protected the right of each and everyone to adopt a religious belief of his or her choice. Individuals or groups were free to manifest their religious beliefs in worship, observance, practice or teaching as long as these did not interfere with the rights of other people. This development created a positive environment and new possibilities for the growth of Pentecostalism. It was at this stage that Pentecostal churches began to be involved in dialogue and cooperation among themselves and with other churches and religions. This development ushered in a new stage in the life of the Pentecostal movement that was characterised by widespread dialogue among people of different religious communities. Pentecostal churches began to create avenues through which to explain their own faith to others and to learn from others. This stage has seen an array of developments and engagements, both internally and externally, in the development of Pentecostalism.

Finally, it must be mentioned that, because of the spirit of the Constitution, there is no record of religious persecution or hostility towards minority or unapproved religions in Botswana.⁶ In fact, it should be noted that so-called "sects" or "cults" that may be deemed dangerous and harmful to Christian growth operate without stigmatisation or hindrance. At the same time, Botswana had no established religion, so there are no forced religious

⁵ Botswana Government (1966), *Constitution of Botswana*, Gaborone: Government (see chapter 2, sections 11, 12 & 13 on human rights). An electronic version of the Constitution can also be found at www.parliament.gov.bw/documents.

⁶ It should be added that there is no indication that any religious organisation has been denied registration with the exception of the Unification Church, which in 1984 was denied registration by the Ministry of Home Affairs but not suspended. See www.Cesnur.org/testi/irf/irf_Botswana99.html.

instructions and there is freedom to participate in religious ceremonies. Although sustained interfaith committees and services failed or were extremely weak before independence, relations between the country's religious communities improved and this contributed toward religious freedom and practice in 1966.⁷

Pentecostalism and the development of ecumenical bodies

One of the most important outcomes of inter- and intra-religious relations was witnessed soon after independence with the establishment of ecumenical organisations, which have played a leading role in creating fora for understanding, mutual respect and tolerance. This period was characterised by the belief among Christians that the best way to solve problems faced by churches in contemporary Botswana was by working together and cooperating closely. The process involved consultations with (and support for) one another in mission endeavours. It is beyond doubt that this spirit of cooperation has been the driving force behind the formation of umbrella organisations whose primary objective is to enhance the spirit of ecumenism among the different churches in Botswana (Amanze 1994:1–4).

Four major ecumenical organisations were founded with the aim of bringing cooperation and unity in addressing issues of national interest in the context of religion, politics and social issues. In the past, doctrinal differences had contributed towards divisions among and the persecution of Pentecostals and AICs by the older mission churches. This compelled church leaders to adopt a new approach through close cooperation in order to address issues of national and common interest (Amanze 1994:192, 221; Amanze 1997:216–219).

The Botswana Christian Council (BCC), which is the oldest of the umbrella organisations, was founded on 21 May 1966 through the combined effort of Anglicans, Methodists, the LMS (which formed the UCCSA) and the United Church of Scotland. They were later joined by several other historic or mainline churches such as Catholics,⁸ Lutherans, the Dutch Reformed and other church-related organisations, including the Botswana Bible Society and the Medical Society of Botswana. The establishment of the BCC was followed by the creation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Botswana (EFB) in February 1973 (Amanze 1994:32). The EFB is essentially an umbrella organisation for all the Pentecostal churches and other “Bible-

⁷ United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labour. Botswana: International Religious Freedom Report, 2007.

⁸ It is very interesting that while the Catholic Church worldwide is not a member of the World Council of Churches, in Botswana it is not just a member of the BCC but its Reverend Joseph S. Matsheng has been its President (see Amanze, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa*, 1999, page 217).

believing” evangelical Christian organisations and churches in Botswana. Most of these churches present themselves as evangelicals who subscribe to a “born again” type of message and Pentecostal theology and practice (Amanze 1994:87). Another significant group that emerged during this period was the Organization of African Initiated Churches (OAICs), which brings together African Independent Churches⁹ (Amanze 1994:221; Amanze 1994:42–43). The fourth umbrella organisation was called the Ministers’ Fraternal (MF), an important ecumenical forum for all Christian ministers in Botswana. The MF is responsible for organising fellowship fora where ministers can share ideas and learn and act together on national issues. This forum brings together ministers and leaders from mainline churches, Pentecostal churches, AICs and others. Only the Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Guta Ra Mwari have refused to become members of the fellowship.¹⁰ Given this diversity, the MF is strategically placed to address national issues. It also became the relevant body responsible for organising joint national worship services intended to transcend denominational differences and boundaries (Amanze 1994:192; Amanze 1994:26).

The goals of the different dialogues represented by MF are modest but significant and have resulted in mutual learning, sharing and understanding of faith, the identification of areas of doctrine and church life that need fuller exploration, and a search for ways to cooperate in various fields. The BCC, the EFB, the OAIC and the MF have stood together and presented a united voice on critical issues such as human rights, land and abortion. The four organisations have organised joint conferences and workshops on various issues. During 2005 and 2006, the leadership of the three umbrella bodies participated in conferences and workshops that were organised by the BCC to discuss the national Vision 2016 pillar of “Building a Moral and Tolerant Society” and subsequently forwarded their contribution to the Vision 2016 Council. The broad ecumenical composition of the MF is a remarkable achievement because it brings together leaders from Pentecostal and mainline churches as well as from African Independent Churches. The aim of this ecumenical body was to develop a more united Christian witness in Botswana. It also aims at streamlining the efforts of different churches in carrying out national responsibilities. It views itself as a fellowship of churches and Christian organisations that seek to encourage ecumenism and promote democracy, peace and justice through healing, reconciliation, economic development and empowerment of the disadvantaged, as well as through reflection on theological issues.

⁹ African Independent Churches are sometimes referred to as African Initiated Churches or African Indigenous churches.

¹⁰ Guta Ra Mwari is a new religious movement located in Botswana and Zimbabwe. It was established in Botswana in 1974. See James Amanze, *Botswana Handbook of Churches*, 1994 pages 122–124.

The formation of these umbrella organisations has helped different religions and denominations cross religious boundaries to meet and mix with people of other beliefs. The old religious order of mistrust, competition and conflict among the churches before the early 1960s was challenged to give way to a new religious order based on mutual cooperation, respect, understanding and a sense of common identity among Christians, despite their many fundamental differences. There is now a more conducive environment for those who desire to see more interaction between people of different faiths. The former National President of the EFB, Pastor Johannes Mentz Kgwarapi of the Apostolic Faith Mission, played a crucial role in encouraging Pentecostalism's involvement in interfaith encounters, which he deemed beneficial for the nation, the broader Christian family, people of faith everywhere and even people who may claim no particular religious faith.

The most significant efforts for justice and peace in Botswana have always begun with religions working together towards achieving certain ecumenical objectives. However, even today, not all Pentecostals agree with this position. The most radical ones are against the existence of the EFB as it is a mainly Pentecostal ecumenical organisation, whose objective is to unite all Pentecostals and provide a forum for dialogue. Some divisions have occurred due to sharp theological differences while others arose as churches and religions came to encounter one another for the first time. The leader of the Goodnews Ministries, Apostle DD. Monnakgosi, for instance, is against all ecumenical or inter-religious gatherings. He has criticised other Pentecostals for compromising, especially with regard to dialogue and relations with the BCC, the OAIC and other religious faiths. As a result, Goodnews Ministries has withdrawn its membership of the EFB, despite the Apostle's general understanding that sectarian strife is incompatible with the spirit of Pentecostalism.¹¹

Through the EFB, Pentecostals have engaged the BCC¹² on a number of issues. Meetings between the EFB and the BCC began in the 1990s, and the two organisations were later joined by the OAIC. This was seen as an opportunity for discovery, encounter and exchange. Central to this was the search for unity, which was seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, who is believed to be breaking down artificial barriers between the Pentecostals, the BCC and the OAIC. These organisations have carried out joint projects for networking and interfaith dialogue. Pentecostal churches, through the EFB, work with a variety of interfaith organisations to promote better under-

¹¹ Personal conversation with Apostle D.D. Monnakgosi of Goodnews Fellowship Church, Mogoditshane, March 2007; Also see Gregory Kelebonye, *Labyrinth or Thoroughfare: an analysis of Goodnews Ministries*, 1999, page 44.

¹² The mother body of all the churches generally referred to as mainline or missionary churches. The organisation encompasses the Roman Catholic Church and all the Protestant churches with the exception of the Pentecostals. It has been in existence for many years.

standing of different faith traditions and to cooperate in areas of common interest (Nkomazana 2011:2–21). The meeting between the three organisations is seen to be very important because it has dispelled misconceptions of one another.

The EFB and relations among Pentecostal churches

Two developments have given rise to tangible Christian relations within Pentecostal churches. They are the formation of the EFB and the growth of the Pentecostal prayer movement across the nation, with the latter generally referred to as prayer networking and spiritual mapping. The EFB, which is the ecumenical body for all Botswana's Pentecostal churches, emphasises that the ultimate aim and purpose of interdenominational dialogue are to bring all Pentecostal believers to the realisation that they are children of the same God. As a means of achieving this aim, member churches are often invited to share a meal and holy communion. From these consultations, unity was perceived as the renewal of deeper fellowship among churches and not as a superimposed structure. The EFB aims to help Pentecostal churches move in the direction of an ecumenical spirit of unity and oneness. The idea of one super-denomination is downplayed and discouraged because of the strong emphasis on the oneness of the church. The major objective of the EFB is to represent Pentecostal churches and all para-church organisations that promote Pentecostal theology (Smith 1997:13, 25).

The EFB's objectives and structures

Soon after the EFB's formation on 7 February 1973, Pentecostal leaders from different churches met to start the organisation officially. The first individual church members totalled nine, but the number had grown to over 625 local churches and groups around the country by 2002.¹³ Among its objectives, as contained in the mission statement, are the following:

- To reach out and unite all sectors of the Evangelical and Pentecostal Christian Faith, and to network with all Christ-minded Christian bodies;
- To interact with social and political sectors of our society and influence them for Christ, and also to preach a gospel that is relevant to the socioeconomic needs of the country;

¹³ Interview with Sam Makgaola of the Assemblies of God, August 2006.; See www.efbotswana.org.

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- To translate a gospel of words and faith into a gospel of works and service to the people;
- To combat moral threats to the fabric of society;
- To reduce duplication and competition in the church of Christ; and
- To offer leadership in normal Christian activities, such as evangelism, church planting, discipleship, prayer, praise and worship, leadership development, and poverty alleviation through seminars, conferences, camps and other channels of communication.¹⁴

The EFB is made up of local committees under the leadership of the EFB National Executive, which manages the central office. Through this office, the EFB communicates issues of importance to all its member churches countrywide. The EFB adheres strictly to the events listed in its annual calendar, and among the most important events of the calendar year are the annual conference on AIDS and crusades. In fact, the EFB identifies issues of national concern such as AIDS, poverty and unemployment and addresses them during its conferences. It also organises crusades for the benefit of not only evangelical churches but the whole population (Christians and non-Christians). For example, current EFB projects include a proposed hospice that will provide counselling services and facilities for the terminally ill. It will, however, be working with the existing home-based care programme.

Efforts at promoting relations within Pentecostal churches

Pentecostal churches, under the auspices of the EFB, conduct all-night prayers partly aimed at promoting Christian unity. The Pentecostal movement has radically recast and revisited the need for united prayer on national issues. This is characterised by exuberant praise and the exercise of various gifts in the joint prayer services under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The united praise-and-worship teams formed by worship leaders and musicians from different Pentecostal churches present a truly ecumenical spirit and environment for the churches. The common language of prayer, praise and worship are the spiritual gifts, believed to be the source of Christian empowerment. The end result of corporate prayer, praise and worship is speaking in tongues, divine healing, miracles, prophetic utterances etc. All these are believed to be the gifts of the Spirit as described in 2 Corinthians 12:4–11, 27–31.¹⁵

¹⁴ Information was collected from the EFB offices in Gaborone, 2007; Also see www.efbotswana.org.

¹⁵ Personal observation, EFB Bontleng, All Night Prayer, Friday, 23 September 2005.

One of the significant developments in the area of intra-relations has to do with the establishment of women's Christian interdenominational organisations. Pentecostal women have been actively involved in developing ecumenical relations in Botswana. Three women ecumenical organisations may be given as examples. The first is the Pan-African Christian Women Alliance (PACWA), an interdenominational organisation formed in 1989 by a group of women from various churches including Pentecostal, Catholic, mainline Protestant and African Independent Churches. Pentecostal women played a leading role in the establishment and development of this fellowship, which promotes intra-religious relations between women from different churches through conferences. Its main objective is to empower women and to reach the "unreached" with the Gospel.¹⁶ The second example is the Women's Aglow Fellowship International (WAFI) in Botswana. This interdenominational organisation, which leans towards Pentecostalism, was established in Botswana in 1994 under the leadership of Jana Lackey. It brings together Pentecostal women from various churches into its leadership and fellowship and manages conferences on an annual basis. The focus of the fellowship is to empower women for spiritual growth and excellence in leadership.¹⁷ The third example is the Circle for Women Theologians, which was established in Botswana in 1998 by Musa Dube, a professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana. It aims to address issues of gender imbalances, rape, "passion killing",¹⁸ women liberation and abuse. The membership of this movement is mixed, being drawn from Methodists, Catholics, the Apostolic Faith Mission and Goodnews Ministries. Pentecostal women theologians are actively involved in this circle of fellowship.¹⁹

Para-church organisations with a strong Pentecostal influence, such as Scripture Union Botswana (SU), Prison Fellowship Botswana (PF) and

¹⁶ Interview with Mrs Tiny Molosiwa of Scripture Union Botswana, P. O. Box 444, Gaborone, March 2000. She is an Executive member of the organization. I also conversed with the late Dr Ntsatsi-Mogome, who taught adult education at the University of Botswana. She was also a very active member and preacher of PACWA.

¹⁷ I interviewed Mrs Jana Lackey, the founder of Women's Aglow Fellowship in March 2002 through email since I was in California at that time and needed the information. Also see their website www.Lovebotswana.org.

¹⁸ A term coined by the media to refer to murders committed on young women by their male lovers, who themselves afterwards also take their lives by committing suicide. This has become a serious problem in recent years.

¹⁹ Interview with Professor Musa Dube (Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Botswana), 7 July 2014. Some of the leading members are Ms Malebogo Kgalemang and Rosinah Gabaitse, both biblical scholars in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Botswana). The three women have contributed immensely in creating awareness on gender issues. They continue to carry out research on various issues affecting women. Also Personal observation, Basadi Ba Mangole 2007 Conference, Bontleng Community Hall.

Hospital Christian Fellowship (HCF) have promoted ecumenicity. These organisations are trans-denominational and trans-confessional. Despite their strong Pentecostal leanings, they welcome membership from different churches regardless of doctrinal differences. They make efforts to participate openly in evangelistic services, ecumenical gatherings and meetings for Bible study and fellowship that are explicitly and insistently non-doctrinal and non-denominational.²⁰ These interdenominational organisations have specialised ministries. The SU, for instance, works with school-going children in primary, secondary and tertiary schools and with children from different churches. The SU is interested mainly in introducing children to the basic beliefs of Christianity, regardless of their affiliation and backgrounds. It sees as its main objective the equipping, empowering and training of children for effective service in their churches.

The ministries of PF and HCF are focused mainly on working with prisoners and the sick in hospitals. The PF works with volunteers from different churches such as Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran and different Pentecostal churches and members of AICs. PF volunteers do not represent the specific interests and doctrines of their various churches, but focus on common Christian interests²¹ (Amanze 1994:48). The PF carries on three major activities, namely:

1. In-prison ministry to recruit and train volunteers that lead regular Bible studies, seminars and special events.
2. After-care ministry, which is committed to transformational discipleship. While the in-prison ministry revolves around helping men and women rebuild their lives on the foundation of God's Word, the after-care ensures that when they leave prison, they are not abandoned, but continue to be encouraged to get established in the community.
3. Advocating for criminal justice so that people are not punished for what they have not done.

Pentecostals' relationship with non-Christian groups and religions

Can Pentecostalism co-exist with and adapt to non-Christian religions and groups? Most Pentecostals in Botswana openly reject the idea of accommodating civic groups and religions that do not subscribe to Christian/evangelical moral and religious values, considering this to be a compromise.

²⁰ Personal attendance at different activities of the SU, PF and HCF from 1982 to 2007.

²¹ Telephonic interview with Moffat Pitso, Executive Director, Prison Fellowship Botswana: September, 2011.

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However, there has been evidence of a gradual move towards cooperation over the years.

Relationship with non-religious civic groups

Pentecostal churches have often had to address national issues typically articulated by civic and human rights bodies. Stating the position of EFB on prostitution, homosexuality and abstinence before marriage, which aims to prevent the spread of HIV/Aids in 2007, the President of the EFB, Pastor BG Butale, differed with civil societies that supported legalising prostitution and homosexuality. He also spoke against the use of condoms as a method of fighting the spread of HIV/Aids. Pastor Butale pointed out that the EFB was of the view that the nation should not be forced to take decisions that will erode the very basic elements of the culture, nature and morals of the Batswana. He argued that:

... to suggest the legalization of prostitution as a means to curb the growing infection rate is counter-productive. Prostitution is immoral and socially wrong, and cannot, and should never be, condoned. We cannot fight off an attack (HIV and AIDS) by encouraging and accepting a destructive route (prostitution) leading to nowhere but decay of our culture and nature. It is not an option. We should never, as a people, a government, give our daughters, and sons, the liberty to destroy the moral fibers of our nation just because we believe that it is a way to solve the problem at hand. In any case, prostitution by definition denotes the spread of disease and not otherwise.

The same applies to issues of homosexuality. To say the best way to counter the spread of HIV in prisons is to issue male prisoners with condoms is a direct way of encouraging men to engage in immoral acts of homosexuality.²²

Despite this argument, there have been efforts made by Pentecostals to learn from and cooperate with civic groups in addressing national issues. Through the EFB, Pentecostal churches dialogue with the BCC, OAICs, civic groups, governmental departments and non-governmental societies on national issues such as health, HIV, education, youth, family life and human rights.

²² This EFB position paper was published in the *Sunday Standard* newspaper, 21 October 2007; also see it at www.cfbotswana.org.

Relationship with African traditional religions

African traditional religions (ATRs) are accommodating to Pentecostals and other faiths. ATRs influence the thinking of many people who belong to other religious faiths, including Pentecostals. This being the case, the need to dialogue with adherents of ATRs is imperative. Pentecostals, however, regard those who do not profess belief in Christ as heathens. Their understanding is that those who follow ATRs do not know God, and that they are steeped in the worship of idols. As a result, Pentecostals generally contend that it is impossible for them to dialogue with adherents of ATRs. Foremost in their minds is the conviction that ATRs are thoroughly evil. This attitude is exemplified in the evangelical revival of 18th-century England, particularly the Methodist revivals of John Wesley, Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. It imbued in the minds of the missionaries an unprecedented zeal that moulded them into Christian soldiers whose primary objective was to proclaim the saving acts of Christ (Kent, 2002). Paganism was considered the devil on the cross, which was to be defeated and destroyed once and for all. Alec R Vidler, for instance, described the main motive of missions as follows:

The main motive of missions in the nineteenth century was the evangelical one, common to Protestants and Roman Catholics, of rescuing as many of the heathen as possible from the everlasting damnation which otherwise awaited them. The grand object was to save as many souls as possible for eternal life in the next world. The simple view that everything in non-Christian religions and cultures was evil dominated the missionary outlook for a long time, though individuals were of course more humane than their creeds (Vidler 1961:152).

As a result of this attitude, the early Pentecostals wanted to supplant all they could of ATRs. While ancestral spirits form a very important part of the religious thought of most Africans, Pentecostals are opposed to any form of relations with ancestral spirits. Ancestral veneration was completely unacceptable to Pentecostal churches. Therefore, the present tenacity and resilience of the African traditional ritual and spirituality pose a challenge to Pentecostalism. The elimination of its practices has been a theme of Pentecostal churches as it were of the early missionaries (Moffat, Mackenzie, etc). Pentecostal churches categorically reject divination and *bongaka* (traditional medicine) as practices associated with the worship of *badimo* (ancestral spirits) (Nkomazana 2009:152–154; Nkomazana 2000:49–50; Akiiki & Kealotswe 1995:9–10).

The ecumenical bodies of ATRs, the Dingaka Tsa Setso Association and the Dingaka Association²³ are generally marginalised and excluded from most fora that bring together ecumenical bodies such as the BCC, the EFB and OAICs. This is also true for other non-Christian bodies, such as the Botswana Muslim Association and the Hindu Association. In addition to the tendency to exclude these umbrella bodies from most fora, there is little recognition given to its qualified experts and leaders. The EFB and its individual Pentecostal churches are generally against the idea of inviting leaders of ATRs and other religious groups to fora handling national issues such as prayers for rain and independence celebrations. Ironically, religious pluralism is unavoidable as it cuts across ethnic and family lines. There are people belonging to different faiths in the same family, village and town. They meet at family meetings, birthday parties, marriage celebrations, funeral celebrations and village meetings. They work side by side in the same offices, schools and factories. There is a need for dialogue among these people who find themselves in such circumstances.

Relationship with Islam

Pentecostals in Botswana have historically avoided preaching messages or disseminating evangelistic information that would provoke people of other religions such as Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. They have advocated friendship evangelism, which stresses the necessity of respecting people of other faiths. However, the practice by the Botswana Meat Commission to slaughter and process meat the *halaal* way at the abattoir sparked a heated debate between Christians and Muslims and nearly led to a mass protest (Mmegi, 7 November 2008). The Pentecostals conducted national prayers against this development, advising that the government should respect the religious feelings of the majority of the populace who were against *halaal* slaughtering, while they made efforts to accommodate the minority Muslim population. Debating the issue, GABZ FM (7 February 2014) pointed out that Christians were not happy with *halaal* products in retail shops. The discussion highlighted that the Christian population was worried by the advent of *halaal* products in retail shops and that they were forced to consume food sacrificed to idols. On the one hand, Christians were concerned by the government's reluctance to control the situation. On the other hand, Muslims saw no problem with Christians eating *halaal* products. The EFB chairperson, Pastor Matlhaope, argued that *halaal* practices could harm the Christian religion. This is one of the reasons why interactions between Pentecostals and Islam in Botswana have not been very successful (Haron 2006:200–217; Nkomazana & Lanner 2007:279–295; 322–339).

²³ These are associations for traditional doctors in Botswana.

Programmes and projects that have promoted dialogue

Inter-religious programmes

In the early 1980s, ecumenical interfaith dialogue between adherents of different religions involved services for prayers for rain and the celebration of the country's independence on 30 September. In one of these huge interfaith services, which was organised by the Gaborone Ministers' Fraternal for the purpose of praying for rain and held at the National Stadium, a Muslim was asked to pray and he prayed in Arabic (personal observation, National Stadium, September 1984). Pentecostals, such as Pastor William Simon Scheffers, the then chairperson of the MF, were not very happy with the idea but agreed to be part of the service. This was repeated during the independence celebration service that was held in front of Parliament. Although the Pentecostals were against the idea, theologians at the University of Botswana insisted on an intrafaith service, arguing that it was in the spirit of the Constitution of Botswana.²⁴

The membership of the three umbrella bodies also participate annually in combined church services during the Botswana Independence Day Celebration on 30 September. This event brings together different churches, members of the foreign diplomatic service, government officials, members of parliament, ministers, and the state president to a church service organised and run by the MF, a body that embraces all pastors and ministers from different Christian churches and organisations. At this church service, the focus is usually on national issues. At the independence celebration of 30 September 2007, Reverend Mosweu Simane of the UCCSA called on the nation to turn to God and thank him for the protection and guidance he had given to the nation during difficult times, marked by the HIV/Aids pandemic, drought, cattle lung diseases, unemployment, passion killings and other problems.²⁵

Every year the EFB together with other churches and umbrella organisations commemorates World AIDS Day by having different churches and organisations coming together for joint prayer services at places such as clinics, schools and prisons in different parts of the country. Organisations such as the BCC, the Botswana Christian AIDS Intervention Programme (BOCAIP), Kgolagano College and the EFB all have interests in promoting such inter- and intra-religious partnerships where they are able to work together in the interests of the needy and the promotion of unity. BOCAIP

²⁴ Personal interviews with William Simon Scheffers, Apostolic Faith Mission, African Mall Church and Mr K. Monyai, University of Botswana, UB Theology and Religious Studies lecturer, 1982.

²⁵ Personal attendance and observation every year on 30 September – the Botswana Day of independence.

was founded in 1996 by a group of religious leaders from different churches and ecumenical organisations. Its establishment was a response to the call for religious organisations, churches and other religions to help in responding to the problem of HIV/Aids by the former President of Botswana, Quiet KJ Masire (Amanze, Nkomazana & Kealotswe 2007:49). Kgolagano College is an ecumenical educational institution that offers theology and religious studies to people preparing themselves for church work or community service. It was formed as a joint venture by the UCCSA, the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church and the Dutch Reformed Church.²⁶

The Ditumelo Research Project

A group of theologians, philosophers and Bible scholars at the University of Botswana with Pentecostal, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant and independent-church traditions came together and established an HIV/Aids organisation called the Ditumelo Research Team. The response of the Pentecostal churches, Catholics, Muslims and other religious bodies to the initiative was substantial. This created an experience and an exposure that further convinced them and others to work together in fighting against HIV/Aids (Togarasei, et al. 2008:1–45). It has been resolved and agreed that the question is not about who wins, but how the spread is controlled and how the disease is stopped from killing children, men and women. The sole intention of the project was not to discredit any religious body, but to enhance cooperation and companionship in fighting the spread of the virus (Togarasei, Mmolai and Nkomazana (eds.) 2011).

The Ditumelo Research Project, which is based in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana, has as its objective the promotion of interfaith relations through research on HIV/Aids issues. The Ditumelo research dialogues and consultations have contributed a great deal towards promoting understanding of these issues among different religions and denominations. The research team has met with representatives from the Hindu Association, the Muslim Association, the Bahai Faith and different Christian umbrella or ecumenical organisations and denominations to foster inter-religious dialogue and collaborations on issues of HIV/Aids. On numerous occasions it met with the leaders of these religious organisations and participated in other large interdenominational fora organised by the BCC on strategies for combating HIV/Aids among the youth. From July 2005 to the present, the research team has conducted a series of workshops and seminars that brought together members of different religious groups – including Pentecostals, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, African indigenous

²⁶ Interview with James Amanze, Minister of the Anglican Church in Botswana, 15 September 2007.

churches, Congregationalists and African traditional religions (which were represented by the Dingaka Tsa Setso Association) – to discuss the 12 inquiry questions on the prevention of HIV/Aids. At these workshops, which were held in different places, such as Selibe-Phikwe, Francistown and Gaborone, representatives of these religions discussed various views on HIV/Aids and listened to each other's comments and concerns (Togarasei et al 2008:26–30).

This initial inter-religious phase was in preparation for a larger workshop with an intra-religious focus. The conclusion reached from the different activities and fora of the team was that all religions should insist on the moral standards presented by their scriptures as a contribution to moulding the society and fighting against HIV/Aids. This initiative would contribute to enhancing understanding and establishing respect among the different religions. The inter- and intra-religious research dialogues and relations agreed that the most important contribution to combating HIV transmission that can be made by different religious groups is the promotion of abstinence and faithfulness. Pentecostals, Catholics and Muslims were in the forefront in recommending this intervention strategy. The fora also agreed that religious bodies in Botswana must promote sensitivity and be more accommodating of people affected by HIV/Aids and speak against stigmatisation, discrimination and prejudice at all levels of human interactions. These interfaith and intra-faith relations have helped Pentecostals and other religious groups to develop programmes that counter discrimination against people living with HIV/Aids and that fully understand the severity of the pandemic. These programmes are to play a role in preventing the disease, taking into consideration cultural and gender issues.

The religious education syllabus

The development of the interfaith curriculum in Botswana schools is yet another significant example of religious tolerance and dialogue in line with the Constitution that promotes freedom of worship and association. The 1994 Commission on Education recommended a strong element of tolerance in religious education that adopted a multicultural approach (Omenyo and Anum, 2014:111–126)). The taskforce that developed the National Junior Certificate Syllabus was made up of members from the Catholic Church, Pentecostal churches, AICs, ATRs, the Bahai Faith, the UCCSA and the Botswana Muslim Association. The multifaith curriculum that was designed was constitutionally permissible, educationally sound and sensitive to the beliefs of students and parents of different religions. The curriculum stresses the importance of tolerance, respect and accommodation of other people's views and faiths. While the Pentecostals were outspoken against such a curriculum, once it became part of the school learning materials, they allowed their children to use the materials. Although the Muslims built their own

Muslim school to cater for their religious needs and teach a slightly different religious-education syllabus, other Muslim parents decided to keep their children in the government schools. The Bahai Faith, which has been central to these developments, insisted on the need to be sensitive to the requirements of the different faith groups. Their teachings expressed the crucial concepts of peace and unity and their beliefs promote the idea that all human beings occupy the same earth and all share the same basic claims by virtue of their humanity. Their conviction was that this humanity will inevitably triumph if people of different faiths work together and destroy the current divisions and barriers among people. They further teach that the reality of unity and peace has already been set in motion by God and that human beings must work together to allow his will to have full effect on the world (Nkomazana & Lanner 2007:279–295).

The religious-education syllabus for senior schools has taken a very long time to be completed because the Catholic Church and the UCCSA objected to the heavy content of other religious faiths in the syllabus. They appealed to the Minister of Education and subsequently came up with their own version of the syllabus. Efforts are being made to reconcile the two and present something that will be acceptable to both parties.²⁷ Despite all the challenges the multifaith curriculum has faced so far, the project contributed towards high religious tolerance. In fact, there is no other subject school curriculum that has promoted such religious tolerance as the religious-education curriculum has done. Religious education has made deliberate decisions and efforts to accommodate all the religions in Botswana.

Vision 2016

Another important national project that has brought Pentecostals to a conference table with other religions is the National Vision 2016, which is a project of the government of Botswana. It aims, among other things, to help the country to rediscover a collective identity based upon shared values and respect for ethnic or cultural differences, differing views and religious beliefs. Religious groups have been given the responsibility to work on a pillar called “Building a Moral and Tolerant Nation”.²⁸ Members of the task force were drawn from among Pentecostals (represented by the EFB), the Bahai Faith, ATRs, the Botswana Christian Council, the Catholic Church, OAICs and other ecumenical organisations. The workshops and conferences contributed to the promotion of morality and tolerance.

²⁷ Boitumelo Gaseitsewe, Education Officer, Ministry of Education; Obed Kealotswe, Senior Lecturer: Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Botswana/Minister of the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa.

²⁸ “Building a Moral and Tolerant Nation” in *Vision 2016: Towards Prosperity For All*, 1996:56.

Interfaith and intrafaith workshops

Over the past few years, the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana has been running a series of interfaith dialogue workshops, seminars and conferences, which have contributed towards creating a conducive environment for good relations between adherents of different religions. The Marriage and Family Life in Botswana Today symposium, held on 18 November 1995, was the first in a series of these dialogues. Various papers were presented by followers of different religions in Botswana, and people professing different religious faiths actively participated in the discussions and debates. Among the leading contributors were the Pentecostals,²⁹ who were represented by such well-known leaders as Reverend John Philip of the Independent Assembly of Botswana, which is one of the oldest Pentecostal churches in the country. Pentecostals and other leaders of the different churches and religions in Botswana spoke with one voice, saying that marriage and family life in Botswana was going through a period of crisis as a result of social, economic, political and religious pressures, and suggested possible remedies to the problem. The presenters of these different papers at the symposium not only reflected on the presence of different religions in Botswana, but also acknowledged the richness of the various religious traditions. The topic was approached from the perspective of interfaith dialogue with the recognition that every religion can contribute towards enriching marriage and family life and the total development of the people of Botswana as they strive to realise the dreams of nationhood (Amanze et al, 1995).

Closely related to the above issue is the question of interfaith marriages. Most Pentecostal churches will not generally entertain the idea of marrying couples unless both are from the same faith group. As ecumenical and interfaith organisations continue to grow, the number of interfaith marriages also continues to rise, for example between Pentecostals, Catholics, Anglicans, Congregationalists and adherents of African traditional religions. In some cases, Pentecostal ministers even agree to officiate over marriages for people of other faiths whose leaders and churches refuse to do so. While this has a potential for creating conflict and misunderstandings between different churches and other religions, it has provided a platform for religious leaders to talk about these challenges. The Botswana Bible Society annually conducts a very important programme that has contributed to inter- and intra-religious relations. During the Bible Society Week there is a programme for exchanging pulpits across different churches nationally. The EFB, the BCC, OAICs and their member churches have not only embraced

²⁹ James Amanze, Swami Saradananda, Shikh Hategekinana Hassan, Lally Warren, and Obed Kealotswe in Amanze, 1996.

this effort but also encouraged their followers to participate fully in the programme. The spider web built from the visits of different ministers has become dense and complicated, an indication of the strength of the relationship that exists between the churches.³⁰

Conclusion

This article has examined the significance and contribution of inter- and intra-religious relations and dialogue in the context of Pentecostalism in Botswana. It did so by looking at the involvement of Pentecostal churches with other church groups, such as mainline churches, African Independent Churches and other non-Christian religious groups, including African traditional religions, Islam, Hinduism, the Bahai faith and Buddhism. The article has specifically presented examples where the Pentecostals in cooperation with other religious groups have constructively initiated or supported religious dialogue, spoken out against injustice, or worked together to address social, political and economic challenges affecting the nation. The EFB, an umbrella body of Pentecostal and charismatic churches, has grown in its relationships with other churches and religions. It has demonstrated maturity in areas of tolerance, respect for other religious organisations and dialogue with ecumenical organisations such as the BCC and OAICs. As demonstrated above, the EFB has been involved in developing new HIV/Aids programmes and in dealing with issues of women, education and health.

In view of the apparently inevitable interaction with ecumenical bodies, there is a need for Pentecostal churches to come up with better ways of cooperating. They have to intensify their efforts and increase their influence and significance and continue to grow in maturity. For greater impact, umbrella organisations must strive for greater interdenominational initiatives aimed at greater cooperation, dialogue, mutual respect and tolerance. They must strategically make efforts to heal the wounds of church divisions inherited from the past in order to establish a common understanding in a number of doctrinal issues that have continued to divide Christians in Botswana. These bodies need to equip churches to work together to address a number of critical ecumenical issues, such as evangelism, poverty, the youth, women, health, theological training, lay leadership training, globalisation and the HIV/Aids pandemic.

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