

CHAPTER 3

PENTECOSTAL PASTORS' INVOLVEMENT IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, it is suggested that the Christian churches have occupied a primary role in black communities (Levin, 1986 & Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). They are recognised as pivotal figures in the communities, involved with issues such as community development, political concerns and community mental health. Further more, pastors as church leaders are significant in the black community in that they are consulted for a variety of psychological issues, some of which are consistent with their ministerial and religious training for example, comforting the bereaved and advising those with physical illness (Taylor, Ellison, Chatters, Levin, & Lincoln, 2000). However they are also expected to address personal crises including alcohol and other forms of substance abuse, depression, marital and family conflict, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, legal problems and serious mental health problems (Kloos & Moore, 1995).

3.2 Role of religion

Religion has a major influence in the lives of those who believe in it (Thomas, Quinn, Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994). Historically we can think of numerous examples where religion may have had a major impact upon the life of communities. The Pilgrims, for example are a well-known case where religious elements of their life seem to have had a definite and major impact on how and where they lived their lives. In the Medieval Ages we can also see numerous examples that appear to reflect the impact of religion on everyday life from the influence of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic

Church on everyday morality and feudal codes to the Inquisition in Spain (Shafranske, 1996).

However we live in a more secular world than did the people of the earlier eras, used in the above examples. A characteristic of secular world is the division of tasks with the result that the degree to which religion is interrelated to other elements of life is less pronounced. And therefore, the impact of religion on behaviour becomes even more a critical question in a secular setting.

Religious Systems exhibit a number of basic features as alluded by Kiernan (1995;p15):

Religion is a mode of transcending everyday experience, a way of rising above the routine ways, a way of communicating with an order of being at a remove from the limitations of space and time.

By transcending experience, religion explains anomalies and dilemmas out of experience, which are resistant to rational and empirical resolution. In other words, it provides a problem-solving mechanism or technique and it gives wisdom.

It hedges the transcendent with notions of right and wrong, reward and punishment, and to produce a code of conduct, which regulates an ordered existence. In other words, religion, sets guidelines for moral behaviour and personal conduct, this can include rearing of children and keeping the family together (Taylor, Thornton & Chatters 1987).

Religion exists in definite social context of organised human relations and interactions. Therefore, there is mutual influence between the social and religious spheres, the one bolsters the other and change in one will have repercussions for the other.

Religion has its roots in nature since it draws on symbols that are natural things, whether inanimate, animal or human impressed with social and mystical meanings. These meanings are then released in collective rituals to achieve effects on the religious level often of a therapeutic nature.

3.3 Christian religion

Even while other major world religions have also played an important role in shaping this country, Christianity has become the dominant world religious tradition. According to De Gruchy (1995) approximately 77% of the total population of South Africa regard themselves as members of one of the many Christian denominations, with black people comprising the vast majority of church membership.

Spirituality and religion play an important role in the lives of many South Africans. Most South Africans have been reared with the belief in God or a higher power. Christianity has been integrally related to the social and political development of South Africa from the beginning of the colonial period (De Gruchy, 1995).

According to Anderson and Pillay (1997) and Taylor *et al.* (1987), historically the expression of spirituality in the black church stemmed partly from the prejudiced Africans' need to develop their own places of worship and to maintain a strong sense of community. This came about because up until 1991, South African law divided the population into four major racial categories: Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Asians.

The black Christian spirituality is based on themes of deliverance and freedom, which differs from Western notions of freedom as the individual's free choice or his freedom from the actions or beliefs of others (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998).

To a Black South African Christian, freedom means both spiritual deliverance into God's kingdom and worldly deliverance from the realities of racial oppression.

At the height of apartheid rule, the church acted as an anchoring institution in the community, it served simultaneously as a place for spiritual worship, an educational centre, sometimes a locale for organizing political activities, a bank, a party hall and a benevolent society (Olson, Reis, Murphy & Gehm, 1988; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). Since it is one of few institutions owned and operated by blacks, the churches were often and still are the centre of activity in black communities.

The Church may represent a means of coping with their adverse situations and rebelling against white domination. Many church affiliated blacks perceive that fellow church members are critical for providing informal social support. The church provides social support by meeting emergency needs, providing a network of friends for emotional and physical well being, and attending to families' special needs (Levin, 1986 & Taylor *et al.*, 1987). The churches provided a wide range of resources and opportunities that were inaccessible to black people from the mainstream institutions.

The church's worldview may greatly influence the manner in which black people perceive or even address their mental health issues. According to Constantine, Lewis, Conne & Sanchz (2000), the use of prayer in many African Americans is often cited as a means of coping with various life issues in particular. African American women have been found to use prayer in response to physical health as well as interpersonal, emotional and death problems. The experience of African-Americans is in many ways similar to that of black South Africans largely because they have both gone through situations of racial segregation and political struggle.

In the South African context, culture and religious denominations or groups may provide frameworks from which to practice specific beliefs, rituals and rites. Affiliation with particular spiritual or religious ideology is viewed as an important component of the psychological health of many Africans. These spiritual and religious issues may represent integral parts of many Africans' self-identity. Pattillo-McCoy (1998) further says that black Christianity is a part to black culture, where culture is a constitutive dimension of all human action

According to Smith (1994) culture consists of symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms and ceremonies, and informal cultural practices such as language, stories and rituals of daily life, it therefore motivates social support and social action. Research has also indicated that religious involvement is associated positively with life satisfaction, well-being and health (Taylor, *et al.*, 2000). Services offered by churches and their members provide a therapeutic haven that buffers the impact of psychological distress (Taylor *et al.*, 1987).

Economic considerations, cultural misunderstandings and perceived differences in life experiences may influence some black South Africans in their choice of support. For instance, those who are less affluent will tend to rely more on traditional mental health service providers as represented by the traditional doctors and pastors in other instances (Nefale, 2002). According to Taylor *et al.* (2000), treatment expense is recognized as a significant barrier in seeking aid from mainstream mental health service providers such as psychologists.

They may avoid seeking professional help because of fear and the perception that previously white dominated mental health settings are inherently oppressive or because they believe that their spiritual or religious issues will be ignored (Constantine *et al.* 2000). Some may avoid seeking psychotherapy because they do not define psychological distress in the same

way the mental health professionals do, therefore would not seek help from their services. Furthermore, there are still black people who do not know or understand what psychologists and psychiatrists do and therefore these professionals are not only unrecognised but also at times highly mistrusted (Olson *et al.*, 1988).

Chalfant *et al.* (1990) state that for many Christians, admitting a mental health problem is tantamount to admitting spiritual failure, thus people are more inclined to ask pastors to pray for them or to pursue personal reliance on God as a solution rather than seeking explicit help for a mental health problem.

All in all, given the significant historical role played by the church, it is not surprising that black people will consider the church accessible and attractive as compared to the more western mental health service delivery system.

3.4 Definition of Pentecostal

According to Anderson (1992), the term Pentecostal is taken from the Day of Pentecost experience of Acts 2:4 in the bible, when the believers in Jerusalem were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance'. Burger (1992) went on to say that the uniqueness of dynamics and power of the Pentecostal movement above all is centred in the Pentecostal experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal movement believes that glossalalia (gift of speaking in tongues) is the initial sign of being filled with the Spirit. Therefore Pentecostal in this study describes those African churches, which emphasise the centrality of Holy Spirit in faith and in practice.

3.5 Characteristics of Pentecostal churches

Black Pentecostals in South Africa, like Pentecostals throughout the world are noted for their exuberant, enthusiastic, experience-dominated Christianity.

It was found that Pentecostalism either directly or indirectly is one of the most vigorously and fastest growing religious movement in the world after the Catholic Church.

In Anderson's research of 1991, Pentecostals accounted for more than 40% of the South African black population (Anderson & Pillay, 1997). The Pentecostal message is popular especially in South Africa because it is spiritual, it emphasizes the role of divine healing particularly exorcism, and the receiving of the power of the Holy Spirit which seem to offer help to all of the life's problems and not just the spiritual ones.

Pentecostalism seems to adapt to traditional African ways more easily than most other types of Christianity (Anderson, 1992). It gives solutions to basic human problems, especially healing from sickness and deliverance from a malevolent and capricious spirit world.

Above all it offers baptism of God's power, which would enable one to overcome the threatening world of unpredictable ancestors and spiteful sorcerers. The Pentecostals are very committed to their churches (as seen in Anderson's research in 1991, where about 94% of Pentecostal respondents said they attended church at least once a week). This could mean that there is an emphasis on 'fellowship' and on community sharing.

The Pentecostals have clearly defined ethical codes: they are opposed to polygamy, beer drinking and smoking tobacco, use of symbolic objects such as staffs, water, ropes and papers in healing practices. According to Taylor *et al.* (2000), these ethical codes are behaviours affecting health, therefore it

can be deduced that Pentecostal church is associated with aspects of well-being.

According to Shafranske (1996), church groups establish codes of conduct that regulate individual and social behaviour.

Such external regulation within the context of an insulated sect furnishes the group support to the management of psychological difficulties concerning control.

Church recruitment is done through evangelism. According to Anderson (1992) about over half of the Pentecostal church members joined after they were evangelised, and usually this will be expressed by saying 'I got saved' or 'I was born again'.

There are three different types of African Pentecostal churches in South Africa as identified by Anderson (1992). Firstly, the Pentecostal mission churches, that is those with their origins in predominantly white mission churches. They used to be dominated organisationally and financially by the 'white' churches in that particular denomination. These churches have until recently usually followed the Dutch reformed churches in South Africa by having separate White, Black, Indian and 'Coloured' churches.

Secondly, the Independent Pentecostal churches, they have exclusively black leadership and are independent of white control. These types of churches are of a more recent origin, having arisen during the eighties and some do not have church buildings, they meet in school classrooms, rented halls and cinemas, tents and temporary structures. Some of these churches have acquired church properties for services. They are mostly small however some of them are rapidly growing.

Lastly, Indigenous Pentecostal type churches are the biggest grouping of black churches in Southern Africa unlike the two categories already

mentioned above. As opposed to the Mission and Independent type Pentecostal churches, indigenous Pentecostals are still rooted in traditional beliefs such as ancestral beings or spirits and they believe that ancestral spirits mediate between God and people (Anderson & Pillay, 1997; Pretorius & Jaffer, 1997).

They believe that a person becomes a Christian through baptism, which is symbolised by immersion in water. The majority of these churches have both bishops and prophets as leaders and most of these churches wear uniforms. While all Pentecostals pray for the sick, the Indigenous Pentecostal type churches further make use of various symbolic objects like staffs, holy water, ropes, ashes and papers.

The researcher has chosen the two categories of Pentecostals; Pentecostal mission churches and Independent Pentecostal churches for this study and therefore Indigenous Pentecostal churches will not concern us further. This is primarily because there is minimal research done on Independent and mission Pentecostal churches as compared to Indigenous Pentecostal-type churches. There also appears to be vast differences, given the available literature, between the Indigenous Pentecostal churches and both the Independent and Mission Pentecostal churches (Anderson, 1992).

For instance, there is a strong Western influence in liturgy and leadership patterns in Independent and mission Pentecostal churches as compared to Indigenous Pentecostal churches (Anderson, 1992). As already mentioned, contrary to the Pentecostal mission churches and independent Pentecostal churches who are clearly opposed to traditional religious practices such as the practice of ritual killings for ancestors or venerating them in any way other than respect, and consulting diviners, which they see as incompatible with their understanding of Christianity. Indigenous Pentecostals are still rooted in traditional beliefs such as ancestral beings or spirits.

3.6 Pentecostal Liturgy and Ministry

Pentecostal ideal has been a liturgy of the freedom of the spirit reacting against cold formalisation, structured inflexibility of historical denominations for example mainline churches from which most came from.

Both the mission and the independent Pentecostals have a strong western influence, in liturgy and in leadership patterns. Some of the leading and popular American evangelists such as Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn and Kenneth Hagin are promoted in book, audio and cassette form.

According to Anderson (1992), the Rhema Bible Church in the leadership of Ray McCauley appear to have had the greatest influence on these churches especially since some of the leaders have attended his Rhema Bible Training Centre. The leadership and membership in these churches tends to be young, charismatic and relatively well educated though not necessarily in theology.

Pentecostalism because of its emphasis on spiritual experience and its remarkable ability to adapt to any cultural background in the world has been incarnated in a uniquely African expression of Christianity. Within the movement there is recognition that certain individuals are endowed with qualities of ministry (charisma) that set them apart from the larger body of believers. According to Smith (1994), this ministry may be at and for a given moment only, the person who prophesies at a worship service is a minister at that moment or it may be marked by a particular vocation, a 'call' to full-time ministry, understood in the light of pastorals or as evangelists or as missionaries. However, as stated earlier, this research is going to be limited to only pastors. The criteria of validity for whatever office someone holds or whatever ministry he or she fulfils in the Pentecostal movement is understood to be charismatic. In other words the origin, the ability and content of the ministry must be discernable and God-given.

3.7 Role of Pentecostal pastors

Pastors are very influential and their attitudes are likely to rub off on their followers. They can profoundly shape the thinking and behaviour of their members. Shafranske (1996) also highlighted that it is the groups of people that the individual is closely affiliated to, that most influence his worldviews. When cohesiveness is strong, participants work to sustain the commitment of their fellow members, to protect them from threat and to ensure the safety of shared resources.

According to Galanter in Shafranske (1996) charismatic leader's influence within the church group establishes the validation of the beliefs within the sect often within the exclusive control of the leader. The leader often has the ability to inspire hope or fear combined with a dynamic presence and is an important aspect of the leader's authority and influence in the formation and maintenance of the charismatic group.

For example, De Grunchy (1995) reported that black church leaders of both the mission and the Ethiopian churches (Ethiopian is a classificatory term which covers all churches, and their subsequent offshoots, that broke away from mission control chiefly on grounds of racial disparity) played a major role in protesting against the racial discrimination that was built into and flowed from the constitution of the Union, during the early 1900's in South Africa. This link between Christianity and black leaders found further expression when the South African Native Congress was inaugurated in 1912, to be later renamed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923 (De Grunchy, 1995 & Oosthuizen, 1999).

The principles adopted by the Congress affirmed the liberal Christian values as taught in missionary schools.

The South African government census in 1911 revealed that more than a quarter of the black population was Christian (De Grunchy, 1995). As this

number included the majority of those who had received a Western style missionary-based education, this would then mean that much of the black political leadership at that time was Christian. Therefore, it can be said that considerable psychological influence is located in the person of the charismatic leader.

The pastors are sometimes the first and only people that individuals encounter when in need. Pastors often function as gatekeepers to mental health services (Taylor *et al.*, 2000). They are typically approached directly by clients and rarely is contact mediated by formal or informal referrals. As a consequence, pastors' positions are important ones with respect to the mental health and referral of their congregants. Professional psychologists on the other hand are approached after an initial consultation with a referral source.

Taylor *et al.* (2000) reminds us that dealing with mental health problems was the domain of religious leaders and communities for many centuries prior to the advent of modern psychology and spiritual resources for healing are still deemed important by many people even mental health professionals.

3.8 Conclusion

From this chapter, it is clear that the religious institutions occupy a position of trust and respect in the black community. The Pentecostal pastors play an important role in delivering mental health services to the black community. Therefore, understanding Pentecostal pastor's perception of psychological distress will in turn provide information about the quality and type of mental health services provided by the Pentecostal pastors and their ability to identify mental health problems.

It is important for the social sciences to know where they should place their priorities. To know that if the church sees itself as having a role in improving people and improving the world through its members, what would their

contribution be? According to Shafranske (1996), knowing the degree to which and how religion is related to the various aspects of human life is deemed to be critical beginning points.