

Article

Sangomas on the Pulpit: Syncretistic Practices of Some Pastors in Neo-Pentecostal Ministries in South Africa

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Abstract: This article builds on and contributes to work in the field of syncretism in some neo-Pentecostal ministries. While some studies have investigated the increasing syncretistic practices within certain neo-Pentecostal groups, there has been a lack of emphasis on the similarities and differences between sangomas who strictly follow African Indigenous Religion and sangomas who are spiritual leaders in certain ministries. In certain neo-Pentecostal ministries, sangomas have risen to leadership roles, even founding their congregations. The rapid growth or trend of sangomas on the pulpit is sometimes characterised by condemnation and hostility against “born-again” Christians. Sangomas, who are usually prophets or pastors, attempt to ascertain that the “born-again” have lost their identities because they believe in Western theologies. This article draws strongly on the concept of syncretism as the theoretical framework. Employing the evidence provided in the literature through a literary analysis, this article intends to examine and expose the current trends of syncretism. This article also uses a few cases of neo-Pentecostal ministers who have adopted sangomic practices in their pulpits. Some of the practices were observed by the authors through the participant observation method. Accordingly, it will further identify the failure of westernised Christianity, which was one of the stumbling blocks for Christianity to be integrated into the indigenous historical tradition.

Keywords: sangoma; syncretism; African traditional religion; neo-Pentecostal ministries



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1. Introduction

This article aims to assess syncretism phenomena, which appear to be more prevalent in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries that incorporate practices reminiscent of sangomas, particularly in the setting of “sangomas on the pulpit”. The spiritual leaders of some neo-Pentecostal ministries, known as sangomas, have various perspectives that oppose Western theologies, particularly those associated with “born-again” Christians. According to Wariboko (2017, p. 5), it is not possible to definitively categorise neo-Pentecostal ministries as belonging to either the Christian tradition or the Pentecostal ministries in Africa. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a subset of leaders within the neo-Pentecostal ministries had previously been affiliated with those who identify as “born-again” Christians in classic Pentecostal churches. Consequently, their theological perspectives are influenced by the doctrines and practices of Pentecostalism, even if they are different from other forms of the movement (White and Pondani 2022).

Within the traditional African religious worldview, the spiritual realm of African societies is distinguished by a dense assemblage of spiritual entities, encompassing spirits and the departed, who are perceived to exist in an altered state of being (Mbiti 1969). African societies hold a belief in a Supreme Being, seen as the one responsible for the creation of the cosmos and everything within it. Furthermore, Africans acknowledge the existence of several spiritual forces, which are attributed with special powers and often serve distinct functions. One of the spiritual entities that is commonly acknowledged

is the belief in ancestral spirits (*Amadlozi*). According to [Parrinder \(1962\)](#), researchers specialising in African Traditional Religion have categorised the belief system of Africans into four distinct types: the Supreme Being, the sky deity, the mother earth, and other divinities. According to [Mbiti \(1975, p. 36\)](#), it can be observed that various African societies acknowledged the existence of a divine entity through their respective cosmological beliefs.

The sangomas in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries attempt to challenge and dismantle the historical influence of early European missionary endeavours and the Western Christian ideas that were ineffective in achieving global reach. According to [Willoughby \(1970\)](#), the missionary blunder of failing to recognise the worth of African traditional practices and religious systems appears to have been the seed from which the intersectionality of African Indigenous Religion and Christianity grew. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that African Indigenous Religion has long been marginalised and stigmatised as primitive, malevolent, wicked, and lacking in virtue ([Okon 2013, p. 100](#)).

The sangomas in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries have utilised the pulpit to respond to assertions regarding the dominance and superiority of Western Christianity. This article also focuses on the phenomenon of individuals pursuing spiritual healing from sangomas within neo-Pentecostal ministries rather than seeking guidance from sangomas in traditional religion. The pursuit of addressing westernised theology has prompted these churches to engage in syncretistic practices and criticise the Gospel by incorporating elements from African Indigenous Religion into their beliefs and practices. This study aims to investigate the underlying reasons for the syncretism or hybridization of African Indigenous Religion (AIR) and Christianity in South Africa. This will be achieved by unpacking syncretism as a theoretical framework. Neo-Pentecostalism, as one of the streams of Pentecostalism, will be discussed to provide background to neo-Pentecostal ministries. The link between Neo-Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion will be established to understand the syncretistic practices in neo-Pentecostal ministries. The concept of sangoma as practiced in African Traditional Religion will also be unpacked before providing some evidence of the sangoma on the pulpit. The purpose of this article is to highlight the syncretistic practices of some neo-Pentecostal pastors in neo-Pentecostal ministries.

2. Syncretism: A Theoretical Framework

This article employs syncretism as a theoretical framework to examine the beliefs and practices of sangomas who operate both on the Christian pulpit and in African Traditional Religions. According to [Schineller \(1992\)](#), the notion of syncretism is deemed unsuitable and should be replaced with the concept of inculturation. This is because syncretism implies the substitution of fundamental and essential aspects of the Gospel throughout the contextualization process, with religious elements derived from the host culture. According to [Schineller \(1992\)](#), syncretism can be described as the unwarranted amalgamation of belief systems and practices that are fundamentally incompatible or the blending of doctrinal aspects that are inherently contradictory. It also involves the intermingling of genuine concepts and realities of a revealed faith with other religious assertions. In this process, elements originating from an alternative religious tradition are assimilated without undergoing a rigorous evaluation through the lens of Christianity. According to [Schineller \(1992\)](#), syncretism can be conceptualised as a process that involves the rejection of Christ or Christian teachings. However, within the context of this paper, which takes a religious studies perspective, the term syncretism is not employed negatively. Instead, [Goosen \(2000\)](#) posits that syncretism can be understood in a positive light. This is like the word discrimination, which in contemporary society has acquired a negative connotation due to its association with unjust discrimination. However, individuals are often encouraged to exercise discrimination in their choices regarding food, beverages, beliefs, and other aspects of life. Some individuals have opted to employ the concept of discernment as a more favourable term in comparison to prejudice. The term “syncretism” in the context of religious studies or social sciences, particularly in the domains of phenomenology, comparative studies, or the

objective, scientific study of religion, pertains to the occurrence whereby the amalgamation of beliefs or practices is documented (Goosen 2000).

According to Lindenfeld (2014), the concept of syncretism within the Church can be comprehended through an analysis of Pope John Paul II's statements during his visit to a Native American audience in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1987:

The initial interaction between indigenous cultures and the European way of life proved to be a challenging and distressing experience for the native populations. I implore individuals of Native descent to actively engage in the preservation and perpetuation of their respective cultures, and languages, as well as the values and customs that have proven to be advantageous in previous generations and continue to serve as a robust framework for the forthcoming years. These entities provide advantages not alone to individuals, but also to the entirety of the human population.

It can be argued that African Indigenous Religion enables a person to follow both AIR and Christianity. It is acceptable to practice African Indigenous Religion and still be baptised, go to church, and partake in the sacraments of the Church. According to sangomas on the pulpit, such as Xaba and Gogo Shange, it is not required for the African people to adhere to a rigidly ordered and reasoned religious system for them to live normal lives. The primary emphasis of ATR is placed on what they practice, not what they claim to believe, which is their theology (Cox 2008; Manyeli and Machobane 2001). In this article, syncretism is used to unpack the tendency of some neo-Pentecostal pastors who often mix the practices of sangomas with Christian practices. However, before doing so, it is important to introduce Neo-Pentecostalism.

3. Neo-Pentecostalism in Context

Acquiring a thorough understanding of classical Pentecostalism is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of Neo-Pentecostalism. Kgatle (2016, p. 138) defines classical Pentecostalism as a religious movement that espouses the belief in redemption by confession. Classical Pentecostalism espouses the doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is thereafter accompanied by the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, with particular emphasis on the gift of glossolalia, sometimes referred to as speaking in tongues. Those who have had the baptism of the Holy Spirit are anticipated to live a life marked by sanctity. The rescued individual demonstrates a condition of patient expectancy, eagerly awaiting the second coming of Jesus. Therefore, the doctrine of classical Pentecostalism encompasses the entirety of the Gospel message. In contrast to classical Pentecostalism, Khanyile (2016) asserts that:

Neo-Pentecostalism places a strong emphasis on the veneration of extraordinary occurrences such as miracles, healing, and deliverance. Additionally, it greatly values the attainment of success and the execution of unconventional church rituals, which are frequently led by charismatic and popular spiritual leaders.

Neo-Pentecostals can be characterised as a contemporary iteration of the Pentecostal movement due to their trans-denominational nature, social relevance, departure from traditional norms, lack of rigid doctrine, and global outlook, distinguishing them from their classical Pentecostal predecessors. Neo-Pentecostalism represents a widely embraced manifestation of Christianity that caters to the dissatisfied populations of developing nations by offering psychological and physical assistance. The aforementioned mobility has a crucial role in facilitating the survival of individuals in both social and psychological domains. Neo-Pentecostalism offers individuals the opportunity to engage actively, receive assistance, experience emotional solace, and cultivate a sense of inclusion.

Neo-Pentecostalism can be understood as a revivalist movement that emerges within established confessional and orthodox Christian denominations. The members of the congregation frequently provide accounts of their previous experiences characterised by feelings of hunger, emptiness, powerlessness, lack of love, isolation, unfulfilled existence,

and spiritual stagnation, which they have since managed to overcome. The individuals claim to have encountered a personal connection with Jesus Christ, which was previously obscured from them by the teachings, rituals, and secular environment prevalent within religious institutions. The individuals are currently sharing their testimony about the experience of having a deep sense of salvation, a strong inclination towards prayer and praise, an unrestricted ability to share their faith and spread the message, freedom from sinful behaviour, the ability to live morally pure lives while serving Jesus, great joy from studying the Bible, an increased capacity to love, a desire for community with other Christians, and a state of unprecedented peace. This message was imparted to sangomas who departed from neo-Pentecostal congregations of “born-again” Christians with the intention of Africanising Christianity through their traditional beliefs. Hence, in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries, there is a trend of sangomas who have assumed pastoral roles to offer solutions to their followers using traditional means. The next section draws links between Neo-Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion.

4. Neo-Pentecostalism’s Links with ATR

Again, the objective of this study is to examine the phenomenon of seeking guidance from traditional healers during divine healing rituals and to compare it with the practices of sangomas in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries. The prevalence of traditional healing within the traditional African religious framework can be attributed to the belief held by many Africans that certain illnesses and ailments are connected to the realm of spirits. In most African cosmologies, there exists a strong association between sickness, diseases, and various calamities with causes that are considered beyond the realm of the physical senses. These origins include the perceived anger of divine beings, the neglected ancestral spirits, the presence of malicious spiritual entities, as well as the actions of witches, wizards, and sorcerers (Asante and Mazama 2009, p. 495). As a result, instead of pursuing Western medicine, individuals hold the belief that their ailments can be remedied by traditional medicine administered by a traditional healer. This idea contributes to the prevalence of seeking guidance and spiritual healing from traditional healers within the African cultural framework. Hence, some of the adherents in certain neo-Pentecostal ministries seek guidance from sangomas on the pulpit to achieve healing, deliverance, and prosperity (Kgatle 2023, p. 3).

Considering the association between ailments and afflictions in the spiritual realm, certain individuals of African descent exhibit a proclivity for seeking the guidance of traditional healers in pursuit of remedies, as opposed to relying on Western medical practices. According to Feierman and Janzen (1992, p. 374), the practice of initially seeking guidance from a traditional practitioner is based on the notion that they possess a greater ability to discern the underlying cause of an issue, particularly when they can direct the individual to a more authoritative or suitable traditional healer capable of addressing the problem. Hence, care seekers possess the capacity and willingness to seek guidance from individuals who present themselves as more authoritative than other spiritual leaders through several media channels. In the next section, this article unpacks the concept of sangoma in African Traditional Religion.

5. A Sangoma in ATR

In African Traditional Religion (ATR), sangomas consider the belief in ancestors to be of utmost importance. They view it as a key element of traditional African philosophy and a vital basis for religious rituals in Africa (Stinton 2004, pp. 133–34). In ATR, sangomas function as intermediaries between the living and the dead and are known as the “people’s priests”. There are several methods through which the recognition of the deceased’s existence is articulated. The continent of Africa is not the sole geographical region where many cultures engage in the religious custom of venerating and worshipping their ancestors (Bae 2004, p. 1). In most countries where the concept of ancestral reverence is prevalent, the collective memory of the society serves as a repository for the chronicles of individuals

who have traversed the realm of existence. They have transitioned into the classification of ancestors, commonly referred to as deceased individuals who continue to hold significance in the lives of the living. The notion of ancestral engagement in daily existence transcends mere narrative or folklore. This lifestyle is adopted by a substantial number of individuals residing in various regions around the globe. Ancestors can be defined concisely and often as deceased individuals who influence their living descendants. The identity of these individuals is expounded upon as transcendental entities that symbolise the religious, ethical, and institutional principles of their community. Their dwelling and sphere of influence extend from the material to the spiritual realm.

While there are variations in the manifestation of this phenomenon across many ethnic groups in Africa, Nyamiti (1984), as stated in Stinton (2004, p. 134), highlights certain shared characteristics of ancestral beliefs. There are some recurring patterns in the customs associated with the worship of ancestral spirits throughout many cultures, suggesting that the worship of ancestral spirits fundamentally revolves around the interplay between the living and the deceased. The idea discussed here holds inherent significance within the cosmology of several cultures, including Korea, Japan, and Africa, hence influencing their ceremonial practices. In each of these circumstances, there exists a core belief that the departed will obtain benefits because of the actions carried out by their surviving descendants. The observed phenomenon may be characterised as a symbiotic association since it is widely postulated that the act of venerating ancestors by their living descendants results in reciprocal benefits in the form of protection and blessings.

The synergy is predicated upon the fundamental ideas about mortality and existence beyond death. In the worldview of sangomas, death is not regarded as an impediment to the interaction between the living and the deceased. Ancestors, from a hierarchical perspective, are seen to be subordinate to God and serve as intermediaries between God and humanity. According to Mbiti (1989, p. 84), even religious practitioners such as doctors (*Izinyanga*) carry out their duties using ancestral mediation. According to Stinton (2004, p. 135), the act of worshipping God is practiced by both ancestors and their subsequent generations. Ancestors, in their role as intermediaries between the divine and human beings, cannot facilitate the process of redemption. Sangomas believe that ancestor spirits possess an innate metaphysical power, leading them to seek guidance from these spirits. This perspective is rooted in the dynamistic and animistic worldview prevalent in African cultures. The spirits of ancestors are not just characterised as impersonal forces governing a sacred realm. Ancestors maintain a close connection with their descendants. Occasionally, individuals may seek guidance from their ancestors on personal matters. The act of worshipping and venerating ancestors is often characterised by ambiguity. Ancestors are both revered and feared in equal measure. They possess the ability to give both blessings of good fortune and inflict damage and tragedy on individuals who fail to recognise their existence. A doctor's (*inyanga*) role may overlap with that of an isangoma in ATR and typically requires a broad understanding of medicinal herbs.

In the cultural contexts of Japan, Korea, and several African countries, there is a belief system wherein it is postulated that deceased individuals engage in interaction and communication with their remaining family members. In African culture, it is widely believed that departed family members are incorporated into a collective ancestor group, whereby they possess the capacity to exert influence on the lives of their descendants, either positively or negatively. Curiously, the precise geographical whereabouts of the forefathers remain uncertain. The precise location of their habitation remains ambiguous since scholarly sources have not definitively established whether they are perceived to reside under the earth's surface, in the celestial realm, beyond the visible horizon, or inside the confines of their homestead or erected shrines (Nxumalo 1981, pp. 66–67; Amanze 2003, p. 44; Chidester 1992, p. 11; Mbiti 1971, p. 133). Nonetheless, according to Hammond-Tooke (1955, pp. 16–22), sangomas in ATR have a special bond with the living dead, who are responsible for calling sangomas to their profession. Sangomas are sacred specialists who

are customarily consulted in their hut by anyone in need of assistance. The cases of some neo-Pentecostal pastors who engage in sangomic practices are unpacked in the next section.

6. Cases of Some Neo-Pentecostal Pastors as Sangomas on the Pulpit

In this article, the term “sangomas on the pulpit” is employed to imply that spiritual leaders in certain neo-Pentecostal ministries utilise ancestral spirits to assist the congregation. For instance, one of the members of the Enqabeni Ministries, Amaqhawe, under the leadership of Doctor X, appears to express astonishment over the skepticism of Africans towards ancestral powers and traditional healing practices while yet embracing these powers within a religious context. The critic accuses Mnguni and other pastors of misusing traditional privileges by attributing them to a divine source such as Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. The commentator’s perspective can be identified as that of a traditionalist, as he asserts having witnessed a phenomenon that Mnguni regarded as a miraculous act performed by a ‘local traditional healer’. The inclusion of phrases such as “we as Africans” and “our ancestors and native healers” places him in a position that diverges from the beliefs held by the majority of Pentecostals, both classical and neo-Pentecostal, who tend to reject the veneration of ancestors and any associated practices. Prophet Dr. BS Xaba (referred to as Dr. X) incorporates the invocation of the God of African monarchs and ancestors in his healing ministry, simultaneously expressing skepticism towards the reliance on the usage of Jesus’ name. While Xaba and Prophet Dr. Samuel Radebe’s ministry structure may bear a resemblance to Neo-Pentecostalism, their primary emphasis appears to be centred on the revival and rejuvenation of African Traditional Religion. Within the realm of Doctor X’s services, it is observable that certain individuals adorn themselves with blue and white Zion-Apostolic attire, but others opt for the reddish Nguni fabric, which is commonly linked to traditional healing practitioners. The individual engages in the practice of burning traditional incense and invoking ancestral spirits and *uMvelinqangi* to seek healing and liberation. Another notable figure is prophet Sibusiso Mokoena, who in the past has asserted that he has been carrying on his father’s healing legacy and that he inherited the gift from his ancestors. The aforementioned spiritual leaders believe that the “customs and traditional ceremonies introduce, keep one connected and rooted to one’s ancestors. When one is known by their ancestors then they receive protection from the evil spirits and misfortunes” (Mkabile and Swartz 2022, p. 269).

One may easily mistake the sangomas on the pulpit church service setup for neo-Pentecostal ones. The prophet Magejageja (2023) may also be considered a prototypical illustration of the intersectionality that exists between Neo-Pentecostalism and African Indigenous Religion. Magejageja (2023) posits that there exists a collaborative relationship between God and Idlozi, wherein during his prayers for the infirm, he beseeches the ancestral spirits and invokes the forebears of the ailing individual to facilitate the process of restoration. Occasionally, he engages in further prayers aimed at purifying the ancestral spirits of the care-seeker and invoking their purification to appear as benevolent ancestors. According to Prophet Magejageja (2023), there is a belief system wherein certain individuals acknowledge the coexistence of ancestral spirits and a Supreme Being, perceiving them as influential entities that had significant importance during their lifetimes. On the other hand, some individuals strictly adhered to traditional beliefs and practices, abstaining from church attendance and any overt displays of worship towards God, instead focusing their reverence on ancestral spirits. The predominant argument put up by the majority of sangoma prophets is the assertion that the living must acquire the ability to harmonise the desires of deceased ancestors who only adhered to traditional beliefs and those who embraced Christianity or any other belief system. Moreover, it is widely held that ancestral spirits are capable of inhabiting the physical form of the living and exerting influence over their actions to fulfil their desires. The African indigenous religious belief system posits that sickness is predominantly attributed to the deterioration of familial and kinship connections, as well as an individual’s rapport with their ancestral spirits. Therefore, it is said that neglecting the needs of ancestral spirits who lived according to traditional

beliefs can result in adverse consequences for their descendants on earth. According to [Magejageja \(2023\)](#) and other traditionalists, such as Doctor Khehlezi, it is believed that individuals who choose not to engage in the veneration or worship of ancestral spirits may have negative consequences, including a shortened lifespan. This is attributed to the displeasure of the ancestors, who are believed to have certain expectations that must be fulfilled by their descendants.

The authors have also observed that individuals known as sangomas or traditional healers, such as gogo Shange, Khehlezi, Xaba, and others, maintain the belief that neglecting the veneration of ancestors in favour of attending church services has occasionally led to the affliction of illness among the offspring who have opted to exclusively worship Jesus Christ. In addition, gogo Shange argues that persons who self-identify as “born-again” Christians have undergone severe destruction in their lives caused by ancestral spirits, to the point that they have been obliged to become sangomas in compliance with the desires of their ancestral spirits. The congregants in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries receive instruction from the sangomas on the pulpit regarding the necessity of attending to the needs of both ancestors who were traditionalists and those who were Christians to achieve a harmonious life equilibrium. The assertion put up by sangomas during their sermons is that it is necessary to provide due homage or devotion to the ancestors who adhered to traditional beliefs while also catering to the needs of those ancestors who embraced Christianity by actively participating in church activities.

Furthermore, through observation, it is noteworthy to mention that most of the sangomas on the pulpit, who are mostly from the Zulu community, perceive Christianity as an exogenous religious belief system. The Zulu people possess a perception wherein they perceive Christianity as an external and distinct cultural entity. The historical circumstance of Christianity’s initial introduction to the region by European individuals of Caucasian descent, who subsequently founded mission stations that operated independently from Zulu communities, has resulted in a discernible foreign influence. The Zulu individuals who embraced Christianity underwent a process of adopting new Christian names distinct from their traditional Zulu names. Furthermore, how the Church conducts mass differs significantly from their customary religious ceremonies. Additionally, the education and health systems they encountered deviated from their traditional counterparts. In their discourse, the sangomas on the pulpit highlight the imperative of harmonising traditional and Christian lifestyles, as well as the need for the de-Westernisation of Christianity in Southern Africa.

7. Sangomas on the Pulpit: Objections to the “Born-Agains”

The sangomas on the pulpit correctly note that the attitude of European missionaries towards African cultures was marked by a lack of acceptance of diversity and a comprehensive disapproval of African cultures. In the most negative portrayal of this rejection, African cultures were stigmatised as embodiments of malevolence and symbolic representations of malevolent forces. Therefore, it was expected that any devout adherent would distance himself from these foreboding cultural beliefs and practices. Sangomas on the pulpit often employ historical revisionism by using colonialism and Western Christianity as a recurring motif whenever the practice of ancestral worship is criticised by “born-again” Christians. The old tribal structural makeup of traditional leaders and healers was omitted from the new worldview that was enforced by missionaries in many cases ([Stewart and Shaw 2005](#)). Missionaries called on new converts to reject their traditional religion and cultural norms as a means of implementing their new worldview. Researchers observe that the consistent theme conveyed by sangomas throughout their sermons is often aimed at individuals who identify as “born-again”, who in turn claim to adhere to the Bible and consider it to be the ultimate source of authority. Sangomas express disapproval towards African Christians, namely those who identify as “born-again” African Christians, for their failure to venerate their ancestors, an activity they perceive as an essentially African cultural tradition. The sangomas on the pulpit refute the message delivered by Apostle Makanansi from Charis

Missionary Church, who made it clear that he does not mix Christianity with traditional African religion. He asserted that he is solely used by the Holy Spirit in his deliverance, prophecy, and other ministries.

In an interview with Ukhozi FM, Prophet [Magejageja \(2023\)](#) criticised “born-again” Christians for failing to recognise that Jesus Christ was a Jew who followed Jewish traditions and that African Christians should do the same. As a Jewish man, Jesus was known as a person who:

- Wears tzitzit (Matthew 9:20; Luke 8:44).
- Circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21).
- Attends synagogue on Shabbat because it was his custom (Luke 4:16).
- Employs methods of interpretation that Pharisees and later rabbis would find legitimate (Matthew 12:1–13; Luke 13:10–17; John 7:21–24).
- Teaches that he came to confirm the Torah (Matthew 5:17).
- Affirms Israel’s dietary laws (Matthew 23:24).
- Is the Messiah and a descendant of David (Matthew 11:17; Luke 1:32–33; Acts 13:23; Romans 13:2; 2 Timothy 2:8).
- Affirms the Shema and says that loving God and one’s neighbour is the substance of the Torah (Mark 12:29–31; Matthew 22:37–40).
- Celebrates Jewish traditions (Mark 7:1–2 and 14:12–26; Luke 4:16–20; Matthew 3:13–17 and 23:24; John 7:14–15).
- Argues for the resurrection of the dead (Matthew 22:23–32; Luke 27–38).
- Instructs obedience to the purity laws (Matthew 8:4; Luke 5:14).
- Has a Jewish burial (Luke 23:50–56).

[Magejageja \(2023\)](#) argues that if Jesus followed Jewish rites, then “born-again” Christians should also participate in ancestral worship or veneration. He states that some people who self-identify as “born-again” Christians refrain from participating in customary family rituals or eating food that is offered as a sacrifice to ancestral spirits. Nevertheless, they are inclined to purchase and consume food from Hindu establishments and from individuals who adhere to diverse religious customs. He perceives this as a violation of their sense of self and their own kinship. According to Becken’s work in 1993, African Christianity for sangomas on the pulpit, like Xaba, Magejageja, and others, agrees with Serote’s view that a “Christian in Africa must have a Christian ancestry. By formulating a Christian theology that resonates with the African perception of ancestors, these theologians possess a strong belief that their perspectives would enhance global Christianity”.

According to certain sangomas, such as Xaba and Magejageja, the act of having faith in Jesus Christ and calling his name in prayer is considered superfluous and perhaps strange within the context of African Traditional Religion. Due to this rationale, sangomas who are in positions of religious authority think that African Christians who have embraced Christianity should not isolate themselves from their ancestors but rather should actively seek their assistance through prayer. These sangomas argue that persons who have converted to classical Pentecostalism may forsake their family traditions and may face difficulties in demonstrating God’s love by aiding family members who hold different religious convictions. Nonetheless, the message conveyed from the pulpit by both “born-again” Christians and sangomas emphasises the need for religious tolerance and the recognition that uniformity does not imply conformity. Apostle Muziwezigwili Nxumalo, a devout Christian, and traditionalist prophet Dr. BS Xaba both advocate for the importance of familial love and the promotion of family unity among black South Africans, irrespective of their belief systems.

8. Syncretistic Practices of Some Neo-Pentecostal Pastors

Some of the sangomas on the pulpit mentioned in this article were formerly members of neo-Pentecostal ministries and eventually came to believe that they needed to train to become traditional healers. There are similarities between traditional healers and prophet healers that South Africans consult in some of the neo-Pentecostal or new prophetic

churches. According to Crawford and Lipsedge (2004, p. 143), such a payment is dependent on the period of treatment sought by the patient and whether it is diagnostic or prescriptive. Payment is usually expected before the consultation, as failure to pay after treatment might have significant implications. Most prophets in neo-Pentecostal congregations, such as prophet Ndwandwe, Sibusiso Mokoena, and apostle Moosa Mohlala, collect consulting fees. Prophets in neo-Pentecostal ministries do not consult for free but instead demand a fee when congregants and others seek treatment from them. When a care-seeker inquired about intervention for his sick sister, Ndwandwe requested a consultation fee of ZAR 1500. The costs associated with treating such a patient differ depending on the prophet. If a patient who has already seen a traditional healer returns to see the prophet healer, they will be charged a price in the prophetic chamber, which is comparable to the traditional room (Kgatle 2023). As a result, a one-on-one meeting with the prophet is prohibitively expensive for members of this sort of African church. This highlights the significant difficulty of the commercialization and commodification of the Gospel since extravagant fees are required to access prayer for healing. The needed monetary payment for a sick person is compatible with the aforementioned African traditional religious practices.

Second, if the same patient sees a traditional healer, they receive a specific concoction of herbs and take part in a ceremony. According to Dagher and Ross (2004, p. 465), the herbal mixture helps to safeguard the patient by addressing any potential evil spirits that may be present. The same patient, if they meet with prophets in neo-Pentecostal or new prophetic churches, is prescribed particular sacred objects, such as bracelets, anointed/holy water, holy salt, prophetic photographs, and so forth. The anointing oil and holy healing water, along with other prophetic items, are highly popular due to their reputed exceptional abilities in assisting believers inside these churches to overcome their daily challenges. According to Quayesi-Amakye (2015, p. 167), anointing oil is thought to have both preventive and promoting effects for believers in Ghana, as well as neutralising diabolical deeds. Neo-Pentecostal ministries in South Africa, such as the Changing Lives Healing Ministries of Sibusiso Mokoena, recommend a holy water known as “holy healing water”, which they say can heal and help individuals cope with problems. Deke (2015, p. 17) posits that the usage of various prophetic products in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries has caused misunderstanding among the Christian Church, leading to people drawing a correlation between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. Even though other Christian traditions, such as Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox Church, utilise sacred products, prices are well regulated so that consumers do not have to pay exorbitant rates to access such products. They are not centred around a particular personality, as is the case in some neo-Pentecostal or new prophetic churches.

Prophets such as Sibusiso Mokoena in the neo-Pentecostal ministries place a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s healing power. When he prophesies on individuals, he frequently uses the phrase “The Holy Spirit says. . .” (“*uMoya oNgcwele uthi. . .*”). Spiritual leaders in some of the neo-Pentecostal ministries, including Mohlala, Mokoena, Bushiri, Ndwandwe, and others, assert that they can reveal congregants’ addresses and other private information by channelling the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the prophet Makandiwa posited that they minister under the influence of the Holy Spirit and not under the influence of familiar or ancestral spirits. According to Anderson (2018, p. 8), this kind of ministry is of the Holy Spirit and is not to be confused with “pagan” practice. The signs of God’s presence related to people’s religious contexts are given by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, according to the interlocutors, it is necessary to distinguish between the ancestral spirits that work in African Traditional Religions and the Holy Spirit’s manifestation in neo-Pentecostal or new prophetic churches. In some neo-Pentecostal ministries, there are prophets that we classify as sangomas. These prophets believe that they are vessels for ancestral spirits rather than being guided by the Holy Spirit, which is not aligned with their traditional viewpoint.

9. Conclusions

In this article, the occurrence of sangomas on the pulpit was explored through the theory of syncretism between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. The sangomas on the pulpit in some neo-Pentecostal ministries and African Traditional Religions exhibit notable characteristics that delineate primitive spirituality. Consequently, prosperity theology has included and modified certain beliefs and practices that fulfil the spiritual requirements of Africans' traditional culture. In both traditions, the prophet or diviner has a role in facilitating the resolution of conflicts with malevolent powers and resentful ancestors, which are the root causes of individual hardships and destitution. The sangomic prophets in specific neo-Pentecostal congregations propagate the notion that Neo-Pentecostalism is intricately linked to the African dualist enchanted worldview. The sangomas on the pulpit believe that people must count on their ancestors to provide them with health and riches. The message presented from the pulpit by sangomas is that when a person has a good relationship with their ancestors, they will shield them from catastrophe. In certain neo-Pentecostal or New Prophetic Churches, sangomas maintain the concept that Africans cannot reject their departed ancestors. They claim that a Christian message that fails to respect their forebears would look foreign and insignificant to Africans. Their theology is determined by their actual practices rather than their stated beliefs. They conform to what is pragmatic according to their own traditional beliefs and the beliefs of their ancestors.

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