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Invigorating Interfaith Consciousness for the Common Good: Reimagining the Role of African Religion and Pentecostalism in Contemporary South Africa

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Abstract: Contemporary South Africa reflects complex, diverse, and evolving religious realities. Changes continue to manifest at the confluence of encounters between various religions and rapid changes in social institutions that affect, in one way or another, various religions in the nation. These realities are typically embedded in sociocultural contexts and give clarity and meaning to religious experiences. In the post-apartheid era, the spirit of openness toward religious tolerance often dwindles when it comes to interactions between African religion and Pentecostalism. When people understand why followers of other religions believe and practice their rituals and sacraments, this knowledge may help dispel mis- and disinformation and thereby construct inter-religious common ground. Using an extensive review of the relevant literature, this article investigates some of the factors that may limit harmony between African religion and Pentecostalism in South Africa. After providing some definitions and historical context, we discuss the power and legacy of anti-apartheid interfaith solidarity. We also explore ongoing factors hindering interfaith engagements between African religion and Pentecostalism in South Africa. We then explore opportunities for interfaith dialogue in South Africa. Utilizing Walter Hollenweger's Pentecostal intercultural theology, we argue that expressive liturgy for biodiversity and sustainability, communal participation for reconciliation, and experiential spirituality focused on land care could provide a potential 'fourth' approach to interfaith dialogue for African religion and Pentecostalism in South Africa. This includes underappreciated albeit profitable interrelationships between Indigenous knowledge, traditional spirituality, and sustainable development. We also acknowledge some limitations and opportunities for future research. Finally, we offer a succinct concluding synthesis that recapitulates the paper's main points. This article aims to invigorate interfaith consciousness through meaningful thematization of pertinent issues, including the articulation and application of relevant intercultural theology.

Keywords: South Africa; African religion; Pentecostalism; interfaith engagements; sustainable development



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1. Introduction: Issues and Interrelationships Impinging on Interfaith Consciousness

As in many post-colonial nations in Africa, Christianity is the dominant religion of South Africa (Meiring and Meiring 2015). Pentecostal churches have particularly seen exponential growth over the last two decades (Burchardt 2017). Melissa Hackman (2018, p. 17) argues that "Pentecostalism is . . . a large part of postapartheid life for many South Africans." However, changes continue to manifest at the confluence of encounters between various religions and rapid changes in social institutions that affect, in one way or another, various religious traditions in the nation. These realities are typically embedded in sociocultural contexts and give clarity and meaning to religious experiences.

In the post-apartheid era, the spirit of broad-minded acceptance sometimes wanes when it comes to interfaith engagements between African religion and Pentecostalism. However, when people understand the tenets, rituals, and sacraments of other religions, this knowledge may help dispel mis- and disinformation and thereby construct inter-religious common ground (Freeman 2017; Kaunda 2016). Using an extensive review of the relevant literature, this article investigates selected factors that limit interfaith dialogue between African religion and Pentecostalism in South Africa. Using Walter Hollenweger's Pentecostal intercultural theology as our framework approach, we argue that expressive liturgy for biodiversity and sustainability, communal participation for reconciliation, and experiential spirituality focused on land care, are essential components of a meaningful 'fourth' approach to conceptualize and practice interfaith dialogue in South Africa. This article aims to invigorate interfaith consciousness through purposeful thematization of pertinent issues, including the articulation and application of relevant intercultural theology.

This article is organized as follows. To set the stage, we first discuss pertinent concepts and definitions, which we follow with a contextualization of African religion and Christianity in South Africa. Set against this background, we note South Africa's experiences with anti-apartheid interfaith solidarity and then interrogate the divide between African religion and Pentecostalism. Next, we introduce the concept of intercultural theology, which entails discussion of three essential aspects: (i) expressive liturgy for biodiversity and sustainability; (ii) communal participation for reconciliation; and (iii) experiential spirituality and land-care practices. We then acknowledge some paper limitations and discuss opportunities for future research. Finally, we offer a succinct concluding synthesis, recapitulating the paper's main points and future prospects.

2. Definitions

To avoid colonial connotations related to African 'traditional religions', we use the dynamic and singular terminology of 'African religion' within the South African context only (Steyn 2003). In this terminological use, African religion shall refer to the system of beliefs and practices that are integrated into the culture and worldviews of African peoples, in South Africa, regarding their perception of God (Mbiti 2015). Many African migrants to South Africa were originally Bantu-speaking people. They are the ancestors of the present-day 'Nguni people', namely the Zulu and Xhosa. Bantu-speaking people passed on African religion from one generation to another through oral history, folklore, stories, myths, and legends (Igwebuike 2020).

A few clarifying comments about the term 'Pentecostalism' also seem in order, as this descriptor can carry diverse connotations. For the purposes of this paper, in South Africa, Pentecostalism will be taken to encompass classical Pentecostalism, which teaches speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) as the initial evidence of Spirit baptism; African Independent Pentecostalism, which combines classical Pentecostalism with African cultural practice; New Pentecostalism or Neo-Pentecostalism, which emphasizes spiritual gifts and the word of faith; and prophetic Pentecostalism or New Prophetic Churches, which focus on prosperity and personal prophecy, among others (Kgatle and Banda 2022).

Another differentiation is in so-called African Initiated Churches (AICs), namely churches founded by Africans, in Africa and without direct links to missionary "God-fathers" (Pobee and Ositelu 1998, p. 55). AICs, such as the Zion Christian Church, make up around 45% of the population in South Africa (Öhlmann et al. 2020, p. 11). While not considered Pentecostal, the Zion Christian Church does teach spiritual gifts (*charismata*) (Bvuma 2022). With millions of members, this church plays an important role in shaping the attitudes, values, and ethics of its membership (Frost et al. 2016, p. 1).

3. Contextualizing African Religion and Christianity in South Africa

African religion can be traced back to at least ca. 1500 BCE (Luyaluka 2017), expressing devotion through myths, folktales, songs, dances, liturgies, and proverbs (Awolalu 1976). There is also evidence of Christian communities in Northern Africa from 180 CE

(Wilhite 2017) and Eastern Africa from the sixth century CE (Castiglia 2022). Therefore, both religions can genuinely claim Indigeneity. In fact, Lamin Sanneh posits that Africans responded to Christianity in societies where “indigenous religion was strongest, not weakest, suggesting a degree of compatibility with Christianity” (Sanneh 2003, p. 18). This counters claims that Christianity was or is incompatible with African religion.

However, many 19th- and 20th-century Christian missionaries taught that an experience of God was only possible through Jesus Christ (Nxumalo 1980). The legitimacy of African religion blurred, even though there is evidence that it guided personal experience of God and preserved the cultural norms of ancestors (Awolalu 1979).

Missionaries often represented Christianity as superior and ‘civilized’ (Moscicke 2017; Gathogo 2008; Mills 1995). Some even perceived African religion with acrimony as a form of paganism (Wallace 2015). As Christianity reveres Christ as the ultimate sacrifice to bring God and human beings together (Baker 2016), Christians typically distanced themselves from rituals, such as animal sacrifices, performed in some African religion (Masondo 2018; Nel 2015). Pentecostals taught that life is a constant battle with the ‘evil spirits’ of African religion (Morton 2017). Several scholars argue that prejudice perpetrated against African religion compelled most Africans to adopt Christianity as a by-product of European colonization (Sarpong 2006; Falola 2002; Magesa 1997). This was partly why—often (un)knowingly—European Christian missionaries were able to promote colonial interests (Ferguson 2003; Pobe 1979).

According to Chingota (1998, p. 147), some missionaries adopted a policy of “religious vandalism”, which included the suppression of African customs and belief systems. African religion was not freely expressed publicly (Mndende 2006). However, Christian converts were urged to denounce African traditional religion as idolatry, superstitious beliefs, and necromancy (Sanou 2013). Hence, some felt ashamed of their African religion, secretly practising African religious rituals while publicly professing Christianity (Masondo 2011; Ntombana 2015; Oduro et al. 2008).

Under apartheid colonialism (1948–1994), South Africa was incorrectly declared a mono-religious state as most of the population were considered to be ‘Christians’. African religion was forbidden, and Africans were forcibly segregated from white communities (Laloo 1998). Apartheid theology rationalized and justified the superiority of white Christians over Africans (De Witte 2010). African religion was not taught at schools (Mestry 2007), despite Christian biblical teaching in missionary and some public schools (Labode 2021). Therefore, many people see African religion as a worldview orientation primarily espoused by illiterates from/in rural communities and practised under trees and in bushes (De Lacy and Shackleton 2017).

Systemic segregation and discrimination in South Africa harboured in-group versus out-group religious dynamics (Dawes and Finchilescu 2002; Singh-Pillay and Collings 2004). In-group and out-group segregation can create and/or sustain discriminatory attitudes among citizens of different religious affiliations (Dobratz 2001; Duriez and Hutsebaut 2000; Jackson and Hunsberger 1999). Bettencourt et al. (2019) claim that in-group and out-group thinking can perpetuate divisions between members of different religions because it tends to limit opportunities for individual members of different religions to experience intergroup contact or interaction. In-group versus out-group discrimination in South Africa was “an insidiously divisive force” hindering interfaith engagements (Slabbert 2001, p. 131). It also fuelled cultural divisions between Africans in South Africa that, in turn, heightened antagonism between the religions (Southall 2016).

4. Anti-Apartheid Interfaith Solidarity

Pursuing the end of apartheid was a common objective for many religious leaders of South Africa, so they created an environment where the power of interfaith solidarity was evident. In 1984, the World Council of Religion and Peace–South Africa (WCRP–SA) was formed, fast becoming a nonviolent interfaith movement that generated conversation among religious groups that resisted apartheid. During the same time, dominee and

academic Gerrie Lubbe (2015) oversaw the South African chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (now known as Religions for Peace), which he led from 1984 to 1994. By 1994, a multifaith coalition of religious groups had unanimously impelled the apartheid government to negotiate the formation of a new democratic state (Kurtz 2010).

Diverse religious leaders had successfully engaged the apartheid government through anti-apartheid movements (De Gruchy et al. 2005). Some of them even went as far as offering their place of worship as sanctuaries for anti-apartheid activists fleeing persecution (Ebrahim 2012). The formation of WCRP-SA, therefore, served as a significant catalyst that pulled South Africans of various faiths to willingly cross theological and racial lines to influence interfaith ethos even post-apartheid.

In May 1988, a special meeting was convened in Soweto to discuss the role of 'believers' in the struggle for justice and peace in South Africa (Esack 1997). The meeting was co-hosted by the WCRP-SA and the Institute of Contextual Theology. In that meeting, Albie Sachs, a prominent member of the African National Congress and a South African legal expert, raised the possibility of organizing a national conference of religious leaders to discuss the future of religion-state relations (Esack 1997). However, before the idea fully materialized in the form of a successful conference in 1990, namely the National Interfaith Conference on Religion-State Relations, various religious leaders came together for an interfaith peace march, in 1989, in Cape Town (Wren 1989). The march was a demonstration of the quality of leadership of religious leaders and their contribution towards the anti-apartheid struggle, and successfully brought together more than 35,000 South Africans from diverse religious backgrounds (Taliép et al. 2016).

The march, in turn, became a springboard for other peaceful marches across South Africa, as it was led by religious leaders representing a diversity of religious backgrounds and practices (Wren 1989). The march was considered the epitome of religious harmony in South Africa. Esack (1997) claims that without the kind of religious harmony that was seen in the 1989 interfaith peace march, the 1990 National Interfaith Conference on Religion-State Relations would not have been possible. That is why the principal objective of the interfaith conference was focused on the role that various religious communities could play in fostering harmony and ushering in a peaceful, democratic South Africa.

The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 brought about a new governing order (Henrico 2019). That same year, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) adopted a resolution on critical solidarity with the democratically elected government of the Republic of South Africa. This paved the way for the creation of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996, including Pentecostal representatives and many other faith communities (Graybill 2001). While SACC changed its approach to politics post-apartheid, it remains true to its commitment of serving the people of South Africa in matters of public interest (Klaasen and Solomons 2019).

Religious freedom and equality were guaranteed to all citizens under the 1996 Democratic Constitution of South Africa (Amoah and Bennett 2008; Van Heerden 2007). Denis (2006) argues that African religion finally gained more visibility. Although religious diversity may nurture division and conflict in any geographic space (Wani et al. 2015), South Africa has thankfully not experienced any significant internal strife post-1994 that may be linked to religion. This is partly because of the country's history of solidarity that existed between various religious groups during the struggle against apartheid (Lubbe 2015).

Continuing the momentum of interfaith dialogue, the World Council of Churches Central Committee (2002) stated:

"There is greater awareness of the interdependence of human life, and of the need to collaborate across religious barriers in dealing with the pressing problems of the world. All religious traditions, therefore, are challenged to contribute to the emergence of a global community that would live in mutual respect and peace. At stake is the credibility of religious traditions as forces that can bring justice, peace and healing to a broken world". (p. 3)

Encouraging interfaith dialogue in South Africa, Bishop Desmond Tutu (2013) added:

“We are made for complementarity. We are created for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence with our fellow human beings, with the rest of creation. I have gifts that you don’t have, and you have gifts that I don’t have. We are different to know our need of each other”. (p. 22)

In 2014, the National Church Leaders’ Consultation meeting encouraged further unity and interreligious dialogue across South Africa (Pillay 2017). Church theology condemning apartheid and accommodating religious differences began to emerge (Moodie 2020; McEwen and Steyn 2016). A call began to grow to reassess the damage done to African religion and reassert its rightful place in South Africa (Mokhoathi 2017; Mndende 2009). Researchers called, and continue to call, for far more interfaith dialogue and engagement (Mbaya 2021; Amanze 2020; Marumo 2016; Olademo 2008; Onuzulike 2008; Jebadu 2007). Having provided the context and previous interfaith engagement, we now focus on some continuing challenges for African religion and Pentecostal dialogue.

5. Interrogating the Divide between African Religion and Pentecostalism

Despite positive historic ventures in interfaith dialogue between followers of African religion and some mainstream Christian groups, there continues to be a divide between African religion and Pentecostalism. Since the beginning of South African democracy, there has been a rapid increase in the number of Pentecostal denominations which accept that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit will present in the form of miracles, signs, and wonders (Asamoah-Gyadu 2019). Colonized Christianity, which often neglected Spirit empowerment, contrasted with flourishing African Pentecostalism that embraced certain African religious cosmology and practices (Kgatla 2023; Nel 2019; Banda 2019; Müller 2016; Kruger and Saayman 2016). Similar to leaders of African religion, Neo-Pentecostal preachers, such as HQ Nala and Paseka Motsoeneng, practice exorcism, prophecy, and anointing of objects (Banda 2023). Allan Anderson (2018) argues that a key reason for Pentecostalism’s wide appeal in South Africa is that it provides an acceptable alternative to supernatural divination that helps deepen people’s Christian commitment. Kgatla (2021a) explains:

“The manifestation of spirits in the context of the Holy Spirit should not be confused with the cultic tendencies as practised, for example, by the diviner . . . Pentecostals therefore do not worship the ancestors but are in confrontation with the ancestral powers and spirits through the power of the Holy Spirit”. (p. 5)

Despite the incorporation of African religious practices into Pentecostal liturgy, there remain obstacles to meaningful interfaith dialogue. Francis (2007) argues that there is a distinct divide between African religion and Pentecostalism because believers on both sides of the divide pursue different self-interests and goals as they practice their religion. Scholars such as Olomjobi (2017) and Adamo (2011) believe the divide is perpetuated by ideological, historical, and/or cultural differences regarding the worship of God, the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal churches also oppose animal sacrifices and veneration of ancestors (Wariboko 2017; Ngong 2012; Bae and Van der Merwe 2008).

On some occasions, African religion invokes the spirits of African ancestors as intermediaries to receive guidance from God (Okeke et al. 2017). The divide between African religion and Pentecostalism on the question of ancestors is also accentuated by the question of “what” and/or “who” may qualify to be invoked as an intermediary (ancestor) when seeking guidance from God (Van Dijk 2020). Prayer in African religion is sometimes seen to be incomplete without the pouring of libation to appease the ancestors. Some Pentecostals view this as worship of demons (Van Dijk 2020). Various other practices of African religion are also sometimes linked to evil powers such as witchcraft (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015; Onyinah 2011).

Furthermore, there are political and ideological reasons for the divide. In 2009, when the former president of the African National Congress, Jacob Zuma, became president of

South Africa, he branded himself with charismatic leadership, such as Ray McCauley of Rhema Bible Church, and many others. Soon, many Pentecostal and charismatic churches granted South African politicians the opportunity to address their congregations during Sunday worship (Frahm-Arp 2018). Churches became a publicity instrument for politicians to make Pentecostalism widely accepted, which was not similarly noted for African religion (Beyers 2015). Despite public affiliation with Pentecostalism, many South African politicians still secretly visited *sangomas*—clairvoyants who claim to have a supernatural ability to perceive future events (Thobane 2015)—to request charms to empower them to achieve political victories (Kleinhempel 2017). Political leaders were shy to identify themselves publicly with *sangomas*, thus promoting the notion that African religion was somehow evil or should be practised secretly.

Mndende (2013) claims there is a division between African religion and Pentecostalism regarding prosperity. Adherents of African religion typically believe that the role of ancestors is to look after the welfare of the living. In contrast, some Pentecostal leaders teach that invoking the spirits of ancestors may attract poverty into the life of a Christian (Kwateng-Yeboah 2019). Pentecostal preachers sometimes promise to improve the lives of their followers by delivering them from evil forces that hinder the material progress that they would enjoy through the power of the Holy Spirit (Van Wyk 2014). Such messages tend to be well received by the majority of South Africans who come from impoverished backgrounds and suffer from the legacy of apartheid colonialism (Kgatle 2021b). Conversely, even though African religion also professes to eschew evil (Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 2016), its message is not similarly well received.

There has also been some tragic exploitation and manipulation of Pentecostal congregants by corrupt leaders who attempt to either inculcate or villainize African religion (Mumo 2018). Kgatle (2020, p. 136) argues that prophecy in New Prophetic Churches is very similar to divination in African religion, with people paying a fee to receive a personal prophecy or openly “naming and shaming” witches in public forums. Kgatle (2022) adds that newer non-denominational Pentecostal churches seek to incorporate African religion, sometimes to the detriment of fundamental tenets of Christian doctrine.

Another hindrance to meaningful interfaith dialogue is posed by certain Neo-Pentecostal churches that tend to be suspicious of or even hostile towards family members and those who engage in African religious practices (Mavhungu 2000). One of the ways Neo-Pentecostalism deals with spiritual uncertainties is by strongly emphasizing the need to navigate life with faith and the commanding power of the Holy Spirit for personal protection against misfortune, crime, poverty, illness, death, affliction, and the powers of witchcraft. Sometimes, Neo-Pentecostal Christians wage ‘spiritual warfare’ against ‘evil’ family members who are suspected of practising witchcraft (Burchardt 2018).

Furthermore, the shift from classical Pentecostalism to Neo-Pentecostalism in South Africa encourages the rise of prophets, such as Shepherd Bushiri, who is considered a ‘household name’ of Neo-Pentecostal prophecy (Kgatle 2019a, 2019b). Such assertions of spiritual gifting are underpinned by the growth of his Enlightened Christian Gathering (ECG) in Pretoria. Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) claims that one of the reasons for the rapid growth of ECG was the church’s ability to harness the power of television and social media. The viewership of the prophetic channels on various social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, has amounted to more than eighteen million viewers per service (Kangwa 2016). By contrast, African religion does not tend to make use of social media platforms for promotional purposes (Togarasei 2015).

Regarding prophecy, Daneel (1993) holds that the source of the power of Neo-Pentecostal prophets is the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the source of the power of *sangomas* and *inyangas*, which is from ancestral spirits through divination (p. 150). However, Abioje (2010) claims that the act of prophesying in Neo-Pentecostal milieus is no different from the act of performing divination in African religion. Chimuka (2016) adds that just as Neo-Pentecostal prophets claim to speak mysteries under the influence of the Holy Spirit, diviners in African religion, such as *inyangas* (traditional healers typically specializing in herbalism)

or *sangomas*, also claim to speak mysteries under the influence of ancestral spirits (Cumes 2013; Van Binsbergen 2005). Even so, Bergene (2016) believes that Neo-Pentecostal prophets are progressively replacing *sangomas* as more and more people seek them for guidance. Again, this demonstrates that there are some aspects of lingering polarization between African religion and Pentecostalism.

Despite attempts to emphasize commonalities—such as comparing ancestral spirits in African religion to the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism; or linking magic and divination in African religion to prophecy and healing in Pentecostalism; or associating dreams in African religion to personal revelation in Pentecostalism—Kgatle (2019a, 2019b) maintains that very little progress has been made to narrow the divide between the two. Although violent conflicts between African religious and Pentecostal groups are rare, so are efforts to engage positively. While many Pentecostal leaders selectively incorporate some African religious practices, there is little evidence of meaningful interreligious engagement. In the next section, we propose a possible way to advance interfaith dialogue between those from African religion and Pentecostal belief systems.

6. Intercultural Theology: A ‘Fourth’ Approach

Francis-Vincent Anthony (2003) has conceptualized churches of African origin as embodying a religio-cultural identity of a ‘third’ kind. He posits that these churches of African origin:

“seem to be shaping a third religious identity . . . In this endeavour the Christian identity and the African identity are neither totally rejected nor entirely embraced. Instead, an attempt is made to accommodate or synthesize elements of Westernized Christianity and African culture in the kerygmatic-cognitive, liturgical-expressive, koinoniac-structural, and diaconal-material sectors of their ecclesial-societal life. In this way, beliefs and values, symbolism and rituals, structures and roles of a third kind are being forged by the Churches of African Origin”. (p. 32)

Building on Anthony’s work, we propose an intercultural theology of a kind that seems suited to contemporary African religious expressions of faith and spirituality. Such intercultural theology draws inspiration from the multiple-worlds concept of the post-World War II era. To develop our conceptual approach, we briefly revisit the evolution of the multiple-worlds model.

The three-worlds idea was first articulated in 1952 by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy (1986). He posited that the people of the ‘Third World’ (*tiers monde*) were similarly oppressed to people living at the bottom of the social pyramid in pre-revolutionary France, the so-called ‘Third Estate’ (*tiers état*) and therefore had to fight for their rights (Sauvy 1952). In the Cold War era, a model of ‘three’ politico-ideological worlds made terminological sense: The concept of ‘First World’ was applied to capitalist countries aligned with the United States, primarily North America and Europe; the term ‘Second World’ referred to communist countries aligned with the Soviet Union, primarily Eastern Europe and Asia; the idea of ‘third world’ referred to developing countries that sought to forge their own (‘third’) path to development (Palieraki 2023). In the context of the African continent, the term ‘Third World’ typically referred to non-aligned African countries that were former colonies and had gained independence after World War II (Haslam et al. 2012).

The three-worlds model is now considered out of date. Moreover, the term ‘Third World’ is now widely perceived as pejorative because it tacitly implies that countries associated with this term are somehow inferior to ‘First World’ and ‘Second World’ countries. For this reason, preference is now given to terms like ‘developing countries’, ‘nations of the majority world’, or ‘low- and middle-income countries’, among others. Some scholars further purport that “it is more appropriate to conceptualize four worlds” (Hopper 2012, p. 28). The three-worlds model organizes countries according to their economic and ideological alignment and fails to account for sociocultural or theological identities. For example, Manuel and Posluns (2018) conceptualized a “Fourth World consisting of indige-

nous peoples, like the Indians of the Americas, the Lapps of northern Scandinavia, the Canadian Inuit and the Aborigines of Australia that are subsumed by majority cultures in the countries in which they live" (cited in Hopper 2012, p. 28). Hence, Manuel and Posluns (2018) argue that a 'fourth' model is needed to advance Indigenous interests, adding that such a "Fourth World" is not a "final destination" but "the right to travel freely, not only on our road but in our own vehicles" (p. 217). Accordingly, a 'fourth' model can be useful to trace, comprehend, and sustain the struggle for marginalized communities to thrive politically, culturally, and spiritually.

Building on these conceptualizations, our article proposes a kind of 'fourth' intercultural theology that aims to reimagine and reinvigorate African religion for the common good. The perceived need for such a 'fourth' kind of intercultural theology is nurtured by the authors' conviction that it is an unequivocal duty of contemporary humanity to honour and respect African religion en route to imagining and creating a world that may be equitably and enduringly shared and cherished. This entails recognizing, esteeming, protecting, and nurturing the spiritual practices and perspectives on place, culture, language, worldview, and identity. This paper considers African religion in the light of such a 'fourth' kind of intercultural theology.

Our focus is on possible ways to enhance interfaith engagements between African religion and Pentecostal communities. This affirms the stance of Pentecostal theologian, Kärkkäinen (2003), who views the religious 'other' as an opportunity to grow. Kärkkäinen (2003) states, "while salvation is ontologically founded on the person of Christ, its benefits have been made universally available by the revelation of God" (p. 25). In the following section, we utilize Walter Hollenweger's Pentecostal intercultural theology, which he describes as "responsible syncretism" that combines "story and analysis, dream and critical interpretations, for theological articulation" (cited in Anderson 2021, p. 39). Hollenweger's Pentecostal intercultural theology incorporates three main areas: expressive liturgy (storytelling and vibrant worship); communal participation (relationships and reconciliation); and experiential spirituality (visions, dreams, healing, and deliverance). Although Hollenweger was not specifically addressing interreligious engagement, we argue that this provides a potential 'fourth' approach that may helpfully underpin interfaith dialogue between African religion and Pentecostalism in South Africa.

6.1. Expressive Liturgy for Biodiversity and Sustainability

Engaging in interfaith dialogue through expressive liturgy makes sense in the context of biodiversity and sustainability concerns (Leal Filho et al. 2022a, 2022b; McMillen et al. 2017). Religious teachings that are oral, spontaneous, enthusiastic, flexible, and empowering are common to both African religion and Pentecostalism in South Africa (Webster 2022; Kgatle 2020). Mbiti (2015, p. ix) states that African religion "is wrapped up in the oral traditions and cultures of the people." Pentecostalism likewise transmits religious and moral values through storytelling and "testimonies of change" (dos Santos 2019, p. 378). Anderson (2021) explains that Hollenweger "saw the experience of the Spirit as a catalyst for the emergence of a new society where there is justice for all and hope for a desperately abused world" (p. 47). In 2009, the SACC developed a treatise entitled *Climate Change: A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa* (Conradie 2022). However, it did not expressly encourage African religion and Pentecostal interfaith dialogue on the issue. Given that climate change literacy in South Africa is still less than 30%, it is encouraging that some Pentecostal churches are providing teaching on nature and the environment (Kabongo and Stork 2022).

Recent research reflects a relatively harmonious interrelationship between traditional spirituality and transmitting knowledge for sustainable subsistence (Nelson and Shilling 2018; Granderson 2017). Moreover, scholars have repeatedly drawn attention to the underappreciated potential of local knowledge and spirituality to support sustainable development outcomes (Nelson and Shilling 2018; Nelson 2020; Fischer et al. 2022). Crucially, scholars have advocated for so-called reversals of learning whereby local communities,

which are sometimes denigrated simply as being poor, rather “teach the profligate and so-called ‘developed’ rich about the interwoven nature of frugality, modesty, contentedness, spirituality and sustainability” (Luetz et al. 2019, p. 132). Hence, there is a compelling rationale to harness the benefits of local knowledge through so-called reversals of learning and thereby leverage worldview understandings in support of sustainability and conservation practice (Athayde et al. 2017; Nelson and Shilling 2018; Nunn and Luetz 2021; Nalau et al. 2018).

Sadly, the potential of Indigenous worldview orientations to inform sustainable development continues to be widely dismissed according to the technocratic and monetary norms and standards of today’s international economic system (Luetz and Walid 2019; Stein 2019; Telleria 2017). Given that native communities have sustainably subsisted for thousands of years suggests that it is high time to (re)discover sustainability and ecological conservation from their perspectives (Ellis et al. 2021; Leal Filho et al. 2021a, 2021b, 2022b; Schramm et al. 2020). More specifically, many traditional societies have a nature-immersive and ecocentric view of the world, wherein their environment tends to be appreciated or revered as sacred and ‘en-spirited’. Such a cosmology can moderate the contemporary and quasi-ubiquitous anthropocentric view of the western world wherein nature is overwhelmingly conceived as existing exclusively or predominantly for the sake and benefit of humans (Luetz and Leo 2021; Walshe and Nunn 2012; Schlehe 2010). Appropriating expressive and vibrant liturgy in both African religion and Pentecostalism could tap into alternative values and thereby potentially access and transmit vital local knowledge for sustainability.

6.2. Communal Participation for Reconciliation

Both African religion and Pentecostalism involve maximum communal participation to shape spiritual identity and life activities, so this could also be used as a way to bring about reconciliation between communities (Müller 2018). Idowu (1973, 1996) asserts that African religion came into existence because African ancestors recognized the dwelling power of God in everything that God created for their wellbeing. This helped them to have the knowledge that enabled them to advance various customs that safeguard the relationship between community members. Similarly, Christianity acknowledges the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that allows people to live in harmony together (Van de Beek 2013). Dubarry (2021) observes that in South Africa, Pentecostal communities “bring mutual support, emotional release, and help them to create a sense of commonality” (p. 12). Hollenweger (1972) calls these communities “islands of humanity.” Even migrants in South Africa reportedly experience a “spiritual kinship” in Pentecostal community, described as a safe “umbrella” (Chimbidzikai 2021, p. 166).

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa enabled various religious communities to come together, both practically and virtually, in a spirit of reconciliation (Bvuma 2022). Addressing the nation on 26 May 2020, President Ramaphosa acknowledged the major role of religious communities in providing care, counselling, health clinics, food, and housing for those in need, especially during lockdown periods. These engagements with the state were supported by a wide range of religious communities that operated across faiths (Mpofu 2020). Video of an interfaith prayer meeting outside a Cape Town hospital went viral in January 2021 (Dean 2021). Interfaith solidarity was present in the middle of a devastating global pandemic and reminded many of the constructive roles that religion can play in supporting human relations, especially when the focus can be shifted onto humanitarian concerns that may point beyond religious divides. As hospital visits were being restricted, the ability to transcend religious differences and collaborate in a time of difficulty inspired powerful and captivating contributions toward interfaith harmony in contemporary South Africa (Chitando 2022).

6.3. Experiential Spirituality and Land Care

The final component of this ‘fourth’ approach is experiential spirituality, which provides the opportunity to focus on land care. Indigenous deferential esteem of land as being imbued with sanctity can contrast sharply with anthropocentric worldviews linked to conservative evangelicalism, which some of the literature reports as reflecting tendencies of ecological domination, utilitarianism, extractivism, and environmental exploitation (Luetz and Leo 2021; Scoffham 2019; Arbuckle and Konisky 2015; Hoffman and Sandelands 2005). However, there is also research that reflects more nuanced perspectives on the responsible stewardship of the earth, sometimes termed ‘creation care’ in the literature (Edvardsson Björnberg and Karlsson 2022; Buxton et al. 2021; Griffiths 2021; Luetz et al. 2018).

Indigenous spirituality commonly correlates with environmentally sympathetic “land-care practices of reverential reciprocity” (Nelson 2020, para. 10). This may be underpinned by the affective closeness and connectedness of many traditional societies to their land, which is conducive to fostering environmentally sustainable lifestyles (Hinds and Sparks 2008). Environmental land-care and climate-change adaptation practices are typically informed or even inspired by people’s worldviews, so it makes sense to consider scientific knowledge and Indigenous spirituality in tandem (Berto et al. 2018; Fair 2018; Nunn et al. 2016; Luetz and Leo 2021). Holistic strategies that integrate science and faith tend to be more inclusive, practical, and enduring (Luetz and Nunn 2020, 2021; Gupta and Agrawal 2017).

There is a solid evidence base that traditional spirituality and affective connection to nature can sustainably underpin local conservation efforts and can therefore benefit the domains of research, policy, and practice (Yunkaporta 2019; Gupta and Agrawal 2017; Nunn et al. 2016). Hence, this discourse argues in favour of holistic and inclusive interfaith approaches that conjoin and integrate elements of both spirituality and scientific inputs (Makondo and Thomas 2018). Integrated strategies that rest on sound science and are at the same time spiritually and socio-culturally attuned are well-placed to facilitate ecologically sustainable outcomes (Balehegn et al. 2019; Chisadza et al. 2015; Luetz et al. 2020).

Our analysis points to fertile opportunities for more interfaith initiatives, interrogations, and engagements. Contemporary development policy and practice may create consilience by engaging science and spirituality in tandem, thus making environmental protection and biodiversity conservation more effective and sustainable. Inviting African religious cosmology just might be what is now needed to foster global sustainability and invigorate interfaith consciousness for the planetary common good (Leal Filho et al. 2021a, 2022b; Luetz et al. 2019).

In synthesis, the concepts and approaches discussed in Section 6 are useful for advancing the field of interfaith dialogue. Theorizing a ‘fourth’ intercultural theological approach builds the field of interfaith engagement while at the same time pointing to practice-oriented perspectives. As such, there are clear conceptual and practical benefits for both academics focusing on conceptual field-building and practitioners working at the grassroots of interfaith engagements.

7. Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

This research is subject to some limitations. Given that this paper was methodologically focused on literary analysis implies a range of opportunities for further in-depth empirical inquiry. More specifically, and as noted elsewhere in the literature, “it would be interesting to examine areas of syncretism between Indigenous spirituality and major world religions” (Adeleke and Luetz 2023, p. 24). For instance, future research could investigate how African religion may be nurtured, preserved, and/or esteemed, even when beliefs have acquiesced to introduced religious traditions, as exemplified in the Pacific (Hausia Havea et al. 2018). Further work also needs to be done regarding interfaith dialogue between African religion and other Christian groups beyond Pentecostalism. Relevant knowledge generation in this area could strengthen strategies that target leveraging African religion in South Africa for effective and sustainable local land-care and climate-change adaptation practices.

8. Conclusions

The interrelationships between African religion and Pentecostalism are sensitive and must be handled with care. Presently, there are no good reasons to avoid or sidestep this important interfaith topic of abiding significance. On the contrary, interfaith engagement remains an area of promising theory and practice that may be better explored and more carefully mapped out if various misconceptions that create a divide between African religion and Pentecostalism are to be effectively dispelled and possible conflict minimized. This aspiration includes the nurturing of a pertinent Pentecostal intercultural theology that is suited to African religious orientations.

This article aims to invigorate scholarly discourse and debate through more thematization of pertinent issues. It advocates for renewed conversation and interfaith dialogue among the various religious groups in South Africa. Moreover, it proposes that religious groups should not only come together when there is a challenge, as was exemplified by interreligious initiatives and collaborations during the COVID-19 pandemic, but that interfaith dialogue should be normalized and mainstreamed across South Africa's religious landscape. Relevant interfaith programs may educate South African citizens to better understand the diverse belief systems of various religions. When people understand why followers of other religions believe and practice their rituals and sacraments, this knowledge may help dispel mis- and disinformation and thereby construct inter-religious common ground. As such, the mutual exchange of religious ideas and information can enhance mutual respect and become the bedrock for peaceful interracial and interreligious coexistence.

Pentecostal theologians and laypeople, who are members of the majority religion in South Africa, may take the initiative and engage in genuine interfaith conversations with followers of African religion. A promising avenue may be for Pentecostals to interrogate and learn from the worldviews of African religious societies about environmentally sympathetic land care, development, and sustainability practices. The emphasis should be, among other things, on fostering genuine interreligious tolerance and respect while at the same time upholding the principles of religious plurality in South Africa. This is fitting because every human being has the inalienable right—and duty—to express, respect, recognize, and esteem in all other humans “the irreducible, glorious dignity of difference” (Sacks 2009, p. 42).

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