

From the margins to the centre

Commercialisation of religion – threat or an opportunity in Pentecostalism?

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Abstract

Allan H. Anderson has done extensive research about Pentecostalism as a global phenomenon, his work is well situated in the phenomenology of religion which is regarded as a useful conceptual framework in Pentecostal research. The study is conducted in the form of a comparative literature study and draws from literature on the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in the work of Allan H. Anderson to have a critical understanding of the prosperity gospel and how it impacts current conversations on the commercialisation of religion in Pentecostalism. The World Council of Churches (WCC) regards the emergence of strong Pentecostal and charismatic movements from different localities as one of the most noteworthy characteristics of world Christianity today – calling it a shift to the centre of gravity of Christianity. Due to the influence of the commercialising of religion on Pentecostalism, this centre is threatened but it can also be an opportunity for mission and transformation. The study illustrates how the commercialising of religion has become a part of Christianity, how it has been clothed and shipped by missionaries from the European and North American context into the Two-Thirds world. The vision of the early church is to be holy, while the vision of the early Pentecostal movement is to restore New Testament Christianity that can assist Pentecostals today to have a balanced view of the commercialisation of religion that embraces both individual and social holiness that is faithful witnesses of the mission Dei and bring transformation in society.

Key words: Pentecostalism, global and local phenomenon, commercialisation of religion, holiness, faithful witness, change agents, transformation

1. Introduction

The World Council of Churches (WCC) regards the emergence of strong Pentecostal and charismatic movements from different localities as one of the most noteworthy characteristics of world Christianity today, calling it a shift from the centre of gravity of Christianity (WCC, 2013:51). For many years, Pentecostals were regarded as voices from the margins, but according to the Together Towards Life (TTL) document of the WCC, a new understanding is developing about contributions from those

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who were previously not regarded as from the centre or mainline. In his reflection on the ecumenical nature of Pentecostalism, Conradie (2018) observes that the TTL reflects the influence of Pentecostal themes on ecumenical mission themes. He states that “the modern ecumenical movement emerged primarily amongst so-called mainline churches while the modern Pentecostal movement emerged from the margins of ecclesial and political power”. This is in line with the WCC (2013:51) statement that ‘mission’ was understood in the past as a movement taking place from the centre to the margins, from the privileged to the marginalised, but now people from the margins are claiming their key role as agents of mission and affirming mission as transformation.

Van der Watt (2016) notes that there is a shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity from the West and the North to the South and the East, and some of the interesting faces of this majority Christianity includes are an immediate and direct application of biblical truths to people’s lives; an uncritical acceptance of miracles and a world of spirits; a focus on healing, prophecy and immediate relief of material needs; and the rise of neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Van der Watt (2016) further states that it is in this context that the ‘prosperity gospel’ is thriving and spreading like wildfire in sub-Saharan Africa. Pentecostals can perform a key role as change agents in the transformation of society, especially in local contexts. One of the things that can undermine this role of Pentecostals in society is the damaging effect of the practise of fake miracles and the commercialisation of religion.

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) conducted an investigation into the commercialisation of religion and abuse of people’s belief systems. In their report, they pointed out that some pastors from Pentecostal and charismatic churches instructed their members to eat grass and snakes, drink petrol, drive over them, and receive large amounts of money to guarantee a miracle and a blessing (Banda, 2017:5).

Magezi and Banda (2017:3) state that African Pentecostal prophets proclaim that when people heed God’s voice and make financial and material contributions to them, their suffering will end, and blessings will flow. The essence of this message is that when the prophet receives the money (seed), he will open the door that leads to God’s blessings, which is tantamount to abuse and the commercialisation of religion. Resane (2017:7) proposes a constructive theology of restoration, healing, and charismatic endowment for the sake of our pluralistic world, which includes the validation of the person and power of Jesus. The dangers of the gospel of health and wealth should be considered and therefore teachings on discipleship based on proper hermeneutics and correct theological training and biblical exposition should take centre stage in churches.

Banda (2017:7) argues that the CRL Rights Commission portrays in an unbalanced way the danger of religion to society. He points out that history has shown that ever since the arrival of Christianity in South Africa, religion has often played a harmful role in society, as displayed by the church's role in the creation of apartheid and dispossessing Black people of their land. "While there are indeed abusive churches, there are also many South African churches that function as fountains of human flourishing, promote the well-being of the poor, and protect the marginalised and the abused in society" (Banda, 2017:8).

In the responses on the commercialisation of religion, one can already detect that some scholars experience it as a threat and others as an opportunity to minister holistically in the African context. The aim of this paper is to illustrate how Anderson's phenomenological framework of Pentecostalism can assist us to have a view of the commercialisation of religion that takes critical notions into account, counter and correct any form of commercialisation of religion that dehumanises people and abuse their trust in God, and argues that Pentecostals can play key role in mission and transformation when incorporating the mission Dei and the marks of the church in their practises.

2. A phenomenological framework to study Pentecostalism

Allen H. Anderson has contributed to the study of Pentecostalism as a global phenomenon in world Christianity and provides certain features or characteristic of this phenomenon. One of the characteristics important for this conversation is his criticism of the commercialisation of religion through the spread of the prosperity gospel (Anderson, 2004a:234). Bueno (1999) suggests that a study of Pentecostal experiences should focus on the intersection of local and global processes, characterising each party as a complex collective with its own historicity first and secondly advocating a call for specificity to have the local actors or community's point of view and refocus social relationships. Anderson does this through his study of Pentecostalism as a phenomenon.

The phenomenology of religion can be useful as a framework to study Pentecostalism. Scholars recommend the use of phenomenological methodology for the scientific pursuit of knowledge of religions in the 20th Century (White, 2015:2). White (2015:1) uses Lester (1999) who describe the phenomenology of religion as a powerful epistemological approach to understand subjective experience, to gain insight into people's motivations and actions, cutting through taken for granted assumptions and conventional wisdom. Lester (1999:1) states that phenomenological research is effective to bring forward the individuals experience and perceptions, challenging normative and structural assumptions. The researcher becomes an interested and subjective actor in the research and is aware of his preconceived ideas and bias, thus refusing all claims of impartial objectivity. The researcher is

a member of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFMSA), a particular branch of Pentecostal Christianity that originates through the work of North American missionaries

3. Pentecostalism: A Two-Thirds World phenomenon

Anderson (1999:220) states that the worldwide expansion of the Pentecostal 'full gospel' in the 20th Century can be attributed to cultural factors. The Pentecostal emphasis on 'freedom in the Spirit' has rendered the movement inherently flexible in different cultural and social contexts (Anderson, 1999:221). Kgatle (2020:4) agrees that the 20th Century American Pentecostal movement became a form of Christianity that emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God in the ordinary lives of believers, and have grown beyond America into three streams, namely *classical Pentecostal denominations, charismatic movements within traditional churches, and African Initiated Churches or indigenous non-White churches*.

Pentecostal missionaries from local contexts preached a message that offers a solution for presently felt needs like sickness and the fear of evil spirits, and their 'full gospel' was acceptable to ordinary people. Nel (2019:1) agrees that most adherents of early Pentecostalism came from marginalised backgrounds. Addressing the ability of early Pentecostalism to adapt to local contexts, he illustrates how the marginalised and under-privileged whose human dignity and identity were undermined embraced South African Pentecostalism. Nel (2019:1) further states that "oppressed African people were neglected, misunderstood and deprived of anything but taken leadership by their 'White masters'; however, Pentecostalism adapted and fulfilled African religious aspirations". Unfortunately, the adaptation of Pentecostalism to local cultures meant also embracing the racial segregation and discriminatory policies in South Africa, leading to the separation of the AFMSA into four racially based sections of White, Black, Mixed-race, and Indian member churches (Kgatle, 2017:1).

Anderson (1999: 223) describes the religious creativity and spontaneous indigenous character of Third World Pentecostalism as outstanding features. Pentecostalism in most of the Third World is seen as an acculturated adaptation and not a foreign imposition. Sometimes theologians from the Two-Thirds world were criticised for their alleged shamanism or syncretism, but Anderson (1999:226) argues that their critics fail to see the parallels with ancient religions and cultures in their practices. The capitalist emphasise on prosperity and success or the 'American dream' that pervades Pentecostal activities all over the world is a typical example of how these critics ignore these influences in their own contexts.

Pentecostals in the Third World proclaim a pragmatic gospel that seeks to tackle practical needs like sickness, poverty, unemployment, loneliness, and evil spirits. The

inherent flexibility of Pentecostalism makes it authentically indigenous because it can address the problems in the African context (Anderson, 1999:229). African Pentecostalism is built on an African primal worldview within which one can find certain ethical and moral values that promote the fullness of life (Kgatle, 2018:3). Pentecostals offered more effective ways to provide protection against sorcery and effective healing from sickness than existing churches and traditional rituals. Anderson (1999:230) states that Pentecostal churches offer healing, guidance, protection from evil and success, and prosperity as practical benefits. Resane (2017) argues that health in the African context is not just the absence of sickness, but also well-being in a holistic sense – and sickness is not primarily a result of physical symptoms, but also of deep spiritual causes.

Anderson (2004a:244) observes that more westernised, independent Pentecostal, charismatic or revival churches are becoming prominent in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the characteristics of these churches are that they have younger members more educated – an identity as a holy and separated community – and their primary purpose is to promote their cause to those outside. Anderson (2004a:244) states that “these churches saw themselves as the ‘born again’ people of God with a strong sense of belonging to the community of God’s people, those chosen from the world to witness to the new life they experienced in the power of the Spirit”. Frahm-Arp (2018) further describe the commonalities and differences among them as typical of a family; they are of a changing and fluid nature, openness to engage experiences of the Holy Spirit, are born again through claiming a conversion experience, have a dualistic worldview that distinguishes between good and evil, God and Satan, and are against ancestral veneration, demanding a break from their African heritage.

4. Commercialisation of religion in Africa: A threat or an opportunity?

Kgatle (2018:4) states that the gospel is commercialised in Africa, whereby congregants are expected to pay some amount for healing and for the blessings. These developments need proper analysis and intellectual engagement, which is the motivation behind the study. There are two distinct views of the commercialisation of religion, the one is a more positive appreciation of the “prosperity gospel” or the gospel of health and wealth, and the other a more negative perspective that regards it as a practise that only benefits a few and leads to the abuse of followers.

5. Prosperity gospel: An opportunity to transforms people

Frahm-Arp (2018:3) states that prosperity theology aims to help people improve their quality of life by teaching them improvement strategies. She identifies three kinds of prosperity theology, namely *abilities prosperity* (getting believers to exercise their own abilities); *progress prosperity* (shifting people’s attitudes to belief

that to prosper means to progress); and *miracle prosperity* (spiritual growth determines material wealth) (Frahm-Arp, 2018:4-5). The features of such a theology is an attitude of hope in a positive future, an entrepreneurial attitude of winning ways, embracing life improvement strategies to cope with life through strong prayers, consistent tithing or giving money to the church, and preacher-prophets with special powers to fight poverty.

Anderson (2000:85) asserts on the one hand that an accusation that new African churches that are more attractive to urban, educated, and younger generations, propagating a prosperity gospel, being regarded as the worst form of American capitalism, run the risk of generalising. They fail to appreciate the reconstruction and innovation introduced by the new African Pentecostals as they adapt to radically different contexts. Anderson (2015:4) explains that although he is not a fan of prosperity teaching, the existence of “prosperity gospel” in Africa provides hope for impoverished people. Kgatle (2020:6) is of the view that theologians should consider appreciating the prosperity gospel associated with contemporary Pentecostalism more positively, because there is evidence of churches that create more social capital for the well-being of their congregants and followers.

Research conducted by the Centre for Development Enterprise (CDE) finds that the success of some ‘prosperity churches’ to mobilise the energies of congregants for commercial and occupational success is one of the most controversial aspects of Pentecostalism (CDE, 2008:31). The research finds that Pentecostalism encourages a sense of agency with participants and conveys the message that as a person you are worthy, and that you can change and improve your life. Nel (2019:2) argues that the old identification of Pentecostalism with social depravity, attracting only poor, socially, and economically disinherited people is no longer applicable. The Pentecostal movement also draws people from other economic status. Anderson and Hollenweger see this moving up to the middle class as a positive move, but they also identify the danger of becoming adherents of the ‘prosperity gospel’. In the AFMSA, it meant the prevalence of class and racial segregation where the White members were more privileged than the Black, Mixed-race, and Indian members. Kgatle (2017:1) states that all the sections in the AFMSA were not equal in power and responsibilities, with the White section domineering and having monopoly as the minority group in the church.

6. Prosperity gospel: A threat to human dignity and transformation

The “prosperity gospel” and the commercialisation of religion might appear to be a recent phenomenon, but already in the middle ages, the Roman Catholic Church was accused of being too close to the moral standards of the world. Andrew

(2005:117) reports how the selling of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins was seen as a practice that corrupted the church, leading to criticism and rejection of the institutional holiness of the church by the reformers.

Anderson regards the prosperity gospel as a travesty of the message of Christ because the only people who benefit from it are the preachers from poverty-ravaged countries, while their followers remain aspiring to this lifestyle, believing it will come in faith. Anderson (2020:125) observes that there is serious criticism of the prosperity gospel among certain sections of Pentecostalism and the Americanisation of global Christianity where the Bible is used to further American economic and political ends. Anderson (2015:10) states that:

The jet-setting, lavish, and sometimes morally lax lifestyles of some of Pentecostalism's most notorious representatives, and the wiles of those religious charlatans who present themselves as specialists with miraculous powers, claim fake healings, and prey on the weakness of unsuspecting and credulous followers betrays the ethos of Christ and his most effective first century disciples.

Hollenweger (1995:1024) remarks on the *commercialisation of religion* that religion has become consumer goods like anything else whereby the only criterion for customers is whether they think it works. He states that:

A number of Pentecostal theologians have discovered the dangers in this kind of religious salesmanship in this theology of success but too many colleagues with a decent academic education still ride on this wave on the impulse of charismatic renewal (1995:1024).

Hollenweger (1999:188) describes Pentecostalism as a respectable *middle-class denomination* in western and Third World countries, resulting in believers thinking that conversion is the key to solving all difficulties and that it can bring about a better lifestyle. He calls such a perspective – that Pentecostalism can solve all kinds of problems – a gross oversimplification. Pityana (2015:6) agrees that it is biblically incorrect to promise a life free from hardships on earth. He states that many believers know that in real-life they sometimes pray without cease but without a tangible result; that believers are also treated unjustly; that people suffer; poverty exists; and that many are diseases not cured, which is part of life and make us human. Pityana (2015:7) submits contrary to what prosperity cults believe that believing is not a commodity to be traded for benefit, profit or investment, but that we live with the balance of what is promised and the reality of the lack of its realisation in our lives, living in “in-between” times.

Hollenweger (1999:189) concludes that “it is not true that when one gets ‘right with God’ and is ‘born again’ that all problems are solved...some of the most cruel

things happening in the world are happening among ‘born again’ Christian capitalists”, even though others protest against it. They have this attitude because they must defend their newly acquired social and economic middleclass status, albeit Hollenweger. Hunter (2009) reports about the painful experience of torturing that Frank Chikane experienced by a White member of his church during the struggle against the oppressive apartheid system in South Africa. Kgatle (2015) confirms that Chikane was suspended from activities in the AFMSA because he disagreed and voiced his reservations about apartheid and worked to undermine it.

The prosperity gospel can become a threat to the human dignity of people and the transformation of society when it is done to benefit some at the disadvantage and abuse of others. Prosperity gospel theology can also be an opportunity as evident from churches within a Pentecostal charismatic evangelical family, which aims to improve believer’s quality of life holistically, instilling hope for the future, developing their abilities to cope with real challenges and remain involved, and committed to the mission of God in the world. The following section looks at the vision of the early church to be holy and of the early Pentecostals to restore New Testament Christianity, arguing that it may bring a more balanced perspective of the commercialisation of religion, mitigating the threats, and taking advantage of the opportunities it presents to serve the mission Dei.

7. The holiness of the Church – a command and a task

The two Christian creeds, namely the Apostle’s Creed, which was initially used as a baptismal formula by the early Christians, and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the outcome of debate and consensus by a diverse group of believers, left us with the four marks of the church, namely the belief in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Andrew (2005) argues that these four marks of the church can also be found in the Pentecostal movement, but they are just differently accentuated. The marks of the church can be used to discern the signs of the time and serve as a challenge to all churches that confess and embrace the true church (Andrew, 2005:70). Every generation should reformulate the vision of the early Christians in the light of their challenges. This section will focus on the mark of the holiness of the church.

8. Pentecostalism is rooted in holiness – individual and social

The origins of the Pentecostal movement can be traced back to some teachings of the Holiness movement and provides a foundation for a more holistic perspective of holiness that is both personal and social (Andrew, 2005:104, 105). Hollenweger (1997:329) observes that Pentecostalism is in a similar position than the early church of 100 A.D, which barely had a unifying confession of faith, but the Lord’s

prayer, a body of hymns, and an emerging corpus of canonical writings (the Gospels, Pauline epistles) served as a bond between different expressions of Christianity. Nel (2020:1) confirms this view that the early Pentecostal movement saw itself as a primitivist-restorationist movement of the Spirit that attempted to re-establish the early pre-Constantine church before the second coming of Christ. They viewed themselves as outsiders from political power and cultural life, believing that they can replicate the ethics and values of the early church in a present-day context. What was distinctive about them was their emphasis on holiness as separation from anything associated with the world. They valued highly holy living and faithful witnessing by the power of the Holy Spirit (Nel, 2020:3).

The difference between the early Pentecostals and the early Christians was that the latter was a Jewish sect operating as a minority in the Roman Empire, and their withdrawal from political and economic issues of society was because they were hated and persecuted, focusing mainly on their missiological task of winning the lost for Christ. Nel (2020:5) argues for the involvement of Pentecostals in the socio-economic and political issues in society on the basis of their primitivist-restorationist urge to be like the early church that had compassion and high ethical standards – read and interpret the Bible through the Spirit so that they can practise ethical standards – and lastly, engage society with the ‘full gospel’ in mind where Jesus is Saviour, Sanctifier, Baptiser and King.

Pentecostals are sometimes accused of having an only personal view of holiness, that tends to be ‘other worldly’ but holiness for Pentecostals is both a personal and social affair (Anderson, 2020:123). Nel (2020:1) notes that Pentecostals are notorious for their lack of interest and participation in community development issues. He bases his argument on a particular view of holiness shared with holiness movements that preceded them regarding it as separation from any association with the evil and fallenness of the world (Nel, 2020:4).

In the past, Pentecostals were accused of an otherworldly spirituality that avoids involvement in worldly issues like politics and the struggle for liberation and justice; proclaiming a gospel that either spiritualises or individualises social problems; either accepted present oppressive conditions or promotes a ‘prosperity gospel’ that makes material gain a spiritual virtue; and being opposed to political involvement but operating social services. Today Pentecostals are more involved in social issues like race, class, and gender equality while others keep on reflecting the discrimination that prevails in wider society.

Anderson (2020:126) provides some examples of ways in which Pentecostals moved from being ‘otherworldly’ and ‘a-political’ to being in support of reactionary politics or, in stronger terms, supportive of being representatives of colonialism and obstacles to liberation, which is not true everywhere. Therefore, a biblical and

historical basis for holiness is needed to have a more holistic perspective of holiness that is both personal and social.

Biblical insights make it clear that holiness is a status received from God, but it requires of the church to be holy because God is holy. The holiness of the church can only be found in *God* who is the Holy One of Israel that is revealed in *Jesus Christ*, the image of the invisible God, who is present in power and grace through the *Holy Spirit*. The church can have holiness only through the relationship that it has with Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The relationship of the church and Jesus Christ is like a marriage where Christ is the groom and the church is the bride. The church is set apart by God and prepared for the Son and while it is waiting for His coming, it should be ready to be pure and blameless, forsaking all others. These biblical metaphors indicate that the church is to be faithful unto death to the only Lord and Saviour it always had. The church has its own sphere of power, interest, and influence that are given to it as the Body of Christ. The holiness of the church is a fruit of the Spirit and the main characteristic of that fruit is love that requires of the church to be faithful (Andrew, 2005:113).

There are two threats to the holiness of the church, namely secularisation (danger from the outside) and sacralisation or self-glorification (danger from the inside). Barth (1971) describes secularisation as a process whereby the influence of the church is limited to the point where it is removed from society. It can lead the church into the temptation to give up the biblical values that are the foundation of its morality in order to preserve its relationship in the world in the name of relevancy.

He further states that sacralisation implies that the church has become so holy that the members and structures are seen as holy within themselves. The result is that the members and structures become conceited and above censure so that a sense of superiority is developed towards members and structures of other churches. Such a church does not glorify God as the giver of its holiness but glories in its own efforts and successes. These two threats have become very prevalent in the history of the Christian church. Pentecostals moved between these two views, careful to become so much involved in the world that they become too worldly, and otherwise become so worldly that they even sanction practices that are politically correct, but lead to injustice and discrimination for others (Anderson, 2020:124).

The concept of holiness has changed at various times in history. Andrew (2005:115) draws on the work of Martin Marty who states that holiness in the early church period was signified as 'martyrdom' and later it came to mean "the isolation of the body from the world". However, there is one word that has kept its meaning, and this is faithfulness. The faithfulness of the church is seen in the struggle for control between the secular and spiritual rulers; when the Catholic Church was accused of being too close to the world during the Dark Ages; the outcry of the

Reformers came that the church should go back to the Scriptures; and during the Modern period, holiness was no longer forced but voluntary.

The Holiness Movement that is regarded as the forerunner of the Pentecostal Movement originated in response to the threats against the holiness of the church. The emphasis on sanctification as a second work of grace was intended to bring the church back to the responsibility laid on every member to live up to the biblical standards of holiness. It was also a reaction to the emphasis placed on the institutionalisation of holiness in the ministry and structures of the church. Many of the terms that became vocabulary of the Pentecostal Movement originated from the leaders of the Holiness Movement.

As a grassroots community, churches are in the best position to become involved with the moral formation of individuals and communities. The idea of partnership as a model to create structures that interact as separate entities, but contribute to the character of the whole is deeply stimulating if applied to the relationship between the church and society. The Lordship of Christ demands from us to be obedient to Him until death in every area of our lives where holiness is required and we live a life in service to the command: be holy because “I, the Lord, am holy”.

God meets us as a church in the world and we must remember that God loves this world, despite its sin and alienating forces that undermine that love. God’s love for us is described by Berkhof (1986:125) as a Holy Love that hates sin; a love that judges us, offers reconciliation. The church should at all times proclaim the ‘agape’ love of God that meets us as injured love, making us aware of our estrangement in order to induce us to surrender to his love and to live a life of faithful discipleship.

Any form of Pentecostalism that focuses on the charismatic gifts without any regard for holiness and faithfulness to the fullness of the gospel does not function in line with the holiness roots of Pentecostalism found in the Bible, and its historical development in the church. Anderson’s critique that some Pentecostal leaders live lavish lifestyles, but are beyond critique in their personal and social lives should be taken seriously. Through the investigation of the CRL Rights Commission, it becomes clear how many atrocities and abuse take place in the name of God by these Pentecostal prophets and pastors, which is an indictment of what true holiness is supposed to be. The claims of sexual abuse, rape, corruption, bribery, and money laundering are serious offences, some of which are now before the courts of law. We need the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit to cleanse the rot of greed and hubris that have become part of Pentecostalism. Koopman (2015:431) notes that the confession of the holiness of the church might strengthen us to have more virtuous citizens in society.

The commercialisation of religion is as old as the history of Christianity and can be both a threat and an opportunity for Pentecostals who believe that a gospel of prosperity can enlarge the abilities of believers, leads to progress in their personal

and socio-economic lives, and make room for God to intervene in a miraculous way in the now and the future. The African traditional worldview, religion, and culture enable Pentecostal believers to embrace the holistic nature of existence over against a dualistic view of the individual and the communal. Holistic well-being includes religious blessing for the individual and the community and is closer to God's dealing with Israel as a people and Paul's view that salvation is not for a certain group but for the whole creation (Richardson, 1998:39). An African perspective has no room for departments of life but see life as a whole. Richardson points out; "the holism of traditional African thought militates against the isolation of morality as a topic separable from the whole life of the community". Agbiji and Swart (2015:18) state that religion is so entrenched in the socio-political lives of Africans that it is unimaginable for it not to have a vital role in the transformation of the continent.

African Pentecostalism can find in the true meaning of holiness what it means to be singled out by God and yet enjoy life together as a people of God. When dealing with challenges like the abuses and atrocities committed against good and believing people for self-enrichment, personal and social holiness will determine the level of faithfulness to God as change agents, serving the mission of God to transform our world. The Spirit enlightens the moral and ethical awareness of believers to become change agents in their societies when they read the Bible (Nel, 2020:8). African Pentecostalism offers a typical example of the enormous hope that extends from religion to society, and in that way the religious person becomes a source of social capital (Agbiji & Swart, 2015:24).

9. Conclusion

Allan H. Anderson provides a phenomenological framework to understand the global and local contexts that shaped Pentecostalism to become a global phenomenon, moving from the margins to the centre of world Christianity. This paper argues that the commercialisation of religion can be both a threat and an opportunity for Pentecostals in Africa – dismantling the threat it poses through the abuse of people's human dignity and the faith of believers in God – and takes advantage of the possibilities it presents to capacitate believers to become change agents in the transformation of society. The mark of holiness that forms part of the vision of the early church and the urge among the early Pentecostals to restore New Testament Christianity in the current age can assist Pentecostals today when serving the mission Dei at a personal and societal level – God's mission in the world.

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