

# Pentecostalism and Social Transformation in Southern Africa

## A Missiological Approach<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Pentecostalism, a rapidly growing religious movement in Southern Africa, has significantly influenced social transformation, mainly through the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) church. The late Archbishop Ezekiel Guti, a revered figure, dedicated his life to missionary work in Zimbabwe, establishing numerous churches across Southern Africa. Under his leadership, ZAOGA has been instrumental in fostering social transformation among its members through teachings and practices. This study, framed within the concept of *Missio Dei*, adopts a comprehensive research methodology. It gathers data from a wide range of published sources, including academic papers, books, and official church documents. In addition, the study incorporates participant observation, with researchers attending ZAOGA services and events to gain firsthand insights. This approach allows for a thorough exploration of the origin and historical background of ZAOGA, an in-depth analysis of its teachings and practices related to *Missio Dei*, and a comprehensive evaluation of its approach to social transformation. The study concludes by affirming that the church, guided by the vision of its founder, promotes holistic personal development through social transformation and sustainable development, aligning with the United Nations Vision 2030's goal of ending poverty.

**Keywords:** missiological approach; Pentecostalism; social transformation; Southern Africa; teachings and practices; ZAOGA

## 1. Introduction

The Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) is a dynamic and rapidly expanding movement within Christianity, emphasising a personal faith experience, baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophetic revelations, healing, and social transformation among its believers. One significant teaching that has emerged from

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specific sectors of Pentecostalism is the 'gospel of prosperity,' a concept that is both influential and highly contentious. This teaching suggests that faith, positive speech, and contributions to religious causes can increase material wealth. Ezekiel Guti argues that it is rooted in the Bible, citing scriptures that promise prosperity and health to those who faithfully tithe and offer seeds of faith. ZAOGA often cites passages from the Old and New Testaments that discuss blessings, wealth, and God's favour as evidence that God desires believers to prosper. In a YouTube sermon on 2 May 2018, Guti despised laziness, idleness, and being unwilling to use one's hands to earn a living. From this background, Guti encourages social transformation in ZAOGA for men and women by starting businesses using their home talents.

However, critics of the prosperity gospel, such as Maxwell (2004), Achunike (2004), Maxwell (2002), and Afolaya et al. (2018), raise theological and ethical concerns. They argue that this teaching misinterprets scripture, exploits vulnerable individuals, and focuses on material wealth at the expense of spiritual richness. These critics point out that Jesus and the apostles lived relatively humble lives and that the Bible contains warnings about the dangers of wealth. Furthermore, they argue that the prosperity gospel overlooks the Christian call to suffer with Christ and to serve others, particularly the poor and marginalised (YouTube 2 May 2018). Guti defined the prosperity gospel as having enough food and shelter, quoting from Timothy 6:8.

In Southern Africa, the prosperity gospel has found fertile ground, with churches preaching this message experiencing significant growth. Under the leadership of Archbishop Ezekiel Guti, ZAOGA is an example of a Pentecostal movement that has embraced aspects of the prosperity gospel. Guti's teaching on the gospel of prosperity is noted for its emphasis on faith's role in achieving personal and community wealth and success. This message resonates with many people in regions facing economic hardships, offering them hope and a sense of agency over their circumstances.

Ezekiel Guti, the founder of ZAOGA, is one of the prominent clergy members in Africa who has arguably significantly benefited from the gospel of prosperity, along with many other believers (Mwase, 2012). According to Melton and Baumann (2010:3189), Guti's "leadership style and expensive overseas trips and the lavish lifestyles of some of his more powerful pastors" validate a change in doctrine from the gospel of prosperity to that of spiritual purity and personal piety (Anderson, 2001:115). The prosperity gospel within Pentecostalism has attracted a significant following due to its promise of material wealth as a sign of divine favour, but it continues to be debated. The balance between faith's role in personal empowerment and the ethical considerations of prosperity theology remains a pertinent discussion within the broader Christian community, particularly in the context of

social transformation in Southern Africa. Pentecostalism has the largest following in Southern Africa compared to other religious sects.

Many reasons keep attracting people to Pentecostalism. Some of the reasons include its call to modernity regarding liturgy and worship. ZAOGA uses modern instruments in their church services when conducting praise and worship and when pastors preach. Meyer (2010:113) notes, "Pentecostal churches use media technologies to spread the message and endorse the prosperity gospel." ZAOGA has quickly adjusted to the use of social media in most of its sermons, attracting many youths to join the church. According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:4), Pentecostal churches are known for their modern attitude, casual dress codes, internationalism, creative use of current media, and new worship styles. Pentecostalism is a more vibrant and energetic religion than other missionary churches; hence, most youths like to join this kind of religion. Moreover, these Pentecostal churches regularly develop from one charismatic visionary leader who is, in most cases, the church's founder. For instance, though ZAOGA has many branches worldwide, its leader remains Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti. Golo (2012:350) elucidates that:

The visionary leaders saw the mission of their calling mainly on teaching and working towards the socio-economic redemption, emotional, spiritual, and liberation of oppressed humanity to enjoy and manifest God's glorious grace and love, which also includes the blessing of prosperous and wealthy material life.

This study focuses on ZAOGA in South Africa, popularly known as Forward in Faith International Ministries (FIFIM). It originally started in Zimbabwe, where it is popularly known as ZAOGA. The names will be used interchangeably in this study. The study aims to interrogate Pentecostalism and social transformation using *missio Dei* as its theoretical framework. To discuss Pentecostalism and social transformation, the study first examines the origin and historical background of ZAOGA, the methodology by which the data for the research was gathered, and the church's teachings, beliefs, and practices. Moreover, the teachings and beliefs concerning social transformation are evaluated. Lastly, a general conclusion for the whole study is given, along with some recommendations.

## **2. Historical background of ZAOGA**

ZAOGA FIFM was established in 1960 by Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti in Bindura, Zimbabwe. He received his divine calling from God under a gum tree. Guti was highly educated and held multiple degrees from Northgate Graduate School and Zoe College, USA, including a doctorate and a degree in Christian education. Throughout his lifetime, he authored over 113 volumes on his teachings. Notably, Guti was

renowned for his gospel of prosperity, which, according to Mwase (2012: 17), “arguably brought fortune and a considerable amount of wealth to both believers and leading clergymen in Africa, among whom is Ezekiel Guti, the founder of ZAOGA.”

Following its establishment, the church experienced rapid growth and expanded to over 180 countries worldwide (Gwaze, 2019). In pursuit of its mission to bring salvation to all humanity, the ministry acquired worship centres in various nations, including Australia, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Europe, and America. Depending on the region of its establishment, the church is known by different names. For instance, it is recognised as *Assemblia De Deus Africana* (ADA) in Mozambique and other Portuguese-speaking countries and as *Forward in Faith Church International Incorporated* (FIFIM) in the United Kingdom (Moyo & Tarugarira, 2020:26). Guti established seven Bible colleges and *Africa Multi-Nation for Christ College* as part of his missionary work. He also founded several ministries, including the *Children’s Ministry*, the *Forward in Faith Children’s Home*, the *Africa Christian Business Fellowship*, the *Gracious Women’s Fellowship*, and the *Husband’s Agape International Fellowship*. Moreover, he played a pivotal role in founding the *Mbuya Dorcas Hospital* in Waterfalls, Harare, and the *Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University* in Bindura, Zimbabwe (Maxwell, 2006:74).

According to Melton and Baumann (2010:189), Ezekiel Guti’s leadership style, expensive trips overseas, and the lavish lifestyles of some of his more powerful pastors validate a change in emphasis from the gospel of prosperity to a doctrinal approach of spiritual purity and salvation, and personal godliness. Melton and Baumann (2010:189) also elucidate that “by 1999, ZAOGA had an estimated 600,000 affiliated members in Zimbabwe, which made it the third largest church after the Marange Apostles and the Roman Catholics.” According to Maxwell (2006:74), in 2010, ZAOGA itself claimed to be the largest church with more than two million members. Having quickly spread its wings beyond the borders of Zimbabwe, ZAOGA has remained “one of the fastest-growing transnational Pentecostal churches” (Chitando et al., 2017).

### **3. Missio Dei as a framework for the study**

*Missio dei* is a theological concept that refers to the idea that God’s mission is central to the identity and purpose of the church. It emphasises the church’s participation in God’s mission to the world (Arthur, 2013:1). The expansion of the church (*missions ecclesia*) is the main emphasis of missiology. The Kingdom, or “the *Missio Dei*,” is the centre of missiology, where God works in human society (Keum, 2013:112). He further postulates that:

It is widely held that the church’s growth will contribute to society’s improvement and that the notion of “mission from the margins” has now superseded “mission to the margins” in defining the mission (Keum, 2013:114).

Missio Dei and ZAOGA's teachings on salvation intersect in the sense that both emphasise the importance of sharing the gospel and participating in God's mission to save humanity. In this context, Missio Dei provides a broader theological framework for understanding the church's role in God's mission. In contrast, ZAOGA's teachings on salvation focus more specifically on the importance of evangelism and discipleship. The Missio Dei applies to the teachings of ZAOGA because they share common themes and emphasis.

The table below summarises the applicability of Missio Dei as a framework of this study for the teachings of ZAOGA and social transformation. From this table, we can see how ZAOGA can meet the Missio Dei concerns through its teachings and practices, as illustrated below.

In addition to the information in the table above, Bosch (2009:84), in his investigation into the concept of salvation, made it very clear that salvation consists of two things: being freed from all shackles and accepted into a brand-new life in Christ. Guti's teachings align with this holistic interpretation of Missio Dei, given the biblical evidence (2 Corinthians 5:17) that there is only new life in Jesus Christ and that the old things, such as sin, habits, conduct, behaviour, attitudes, and lifestyles, have passed away. This is because once one is converted and living in Christ, he consistently denounces living in the past. More research is necessary on this subject because salvation is essential to the modern study of Pentecostalism and social transformation. The word also connotes a metaphorical "freedom" from restrictions, bringing up ideas of deliverance from bonds, such as disease (Isaiah 38:20), trials (Jeremiah 30:7), or enemies (2 Samuel 3:18; Psalms 44:7). Wright (2012:1-6) postulates that "God's grand plan and purpose, which were derailed by sin and evil, include mission and evangelism. It seeks to redeem the entire world and create a new one."

Evangelism is a crucial component of Missio Dei, but the mission also encompasses demonstrating love, compassion, social justice, and sharing the message of faith. Evangelism plays a vital role in bringing about positive change in communities. At the heart of a comprehensive mission is a demonstration of God's grace. Believers have a responsibility to show God's love and generosity to those who are less fortunate. The Bible instructs believers to share material possessions with those in need to reflect God's love (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012; Barram, 2011; 1 John 3:17). The church must answer God's call to mission. In alignment with this, ZAOGA has established orphanages for the underprivileged and has provided care for the elderly and widows in their local communities.

#### **4. Methodology**

The analysis in this article is based on desktop research and participant observations. The researchers have extensive experience with and knowledge of the ZAOGA church and Pentecostalism. One of the researchers regularly attended prayer meet-

<b>missio Dei Concern</b>	<b>Applicability to The Teachings of ZAOGA</b>
God's mission	ZAOGA's emphasis on evangelism, discipleship, and church planting aligns with Missio Dei's focus on participating in God's mission to the world.
Church's purpose	Missio Dei's emphasis on God's purpose rooted in God's mission resonates with ZAOGA's teaching that the church exists to fulfill the Great Commission (Mathew 28:18; 20).
Contextualisation	ZAOGA'S adaptability to African cultural contexts mirrors Missio Dei's emphasis on contextualizing the gospel message to reach diverse people. This is evidenced by the establishment of many churches throughout the world.
Holistic ministry	ZAOGA's comprehensive approach to ministry, encompassing spiritual, social, and economic aspects, reflects Missio Dei's understanding of God's mission.
Empowerment	Missio Dei's focus on empowering believers for mission aligns with ZAOGA's emphasis on equipping and releasing people for ministry and service.
Community engagement	ZAOGA's community involvement and social responsibility initiatives resonate with Missio Dei's call to engage with the world and address human needs.

ings and worship services at one of the largest churches in Zimbabwe. Secondary material on ZAOGA's teachings and views towards social transformation and sustainable development in South and Southern Africa has also been used. Additionally, secondary data were obtained from websites belonging to churches and from published and unpublished sources.

## **5. Findings and discussion on the teachings of ZAOGA on social transformation**

This section is subdivided into various sections with the findings on the teaching of ZOGA on social transformation to its believers and the community. Some teachings include economic transformation, cultural transformation, and entrepreneurial skills. All these sub-themes are discussed below, along with other teachings.

## **6. The doctrine of talents**

Martin (1990:287) postulates that there are various ways in which Pentecostalism as a whole and ZAOGA promote the social transformation of the believer through

its beliefs and teachings. After a person is born again and accepts Christ as their saviour, in ZAOGA, they are welcomed into a community of the saved (Marshall, 1994:216).

The teachings of ZAOGA were mainly focused on eliminating poverty and expanding opportunities for its members. ZAOGA uses the doctrine of 'talents' to eradicate poverty among its members. This doctrine emphasises that women should find a project to generate income for the church and their families; under this project, they are encouraged to work with their hands. According to Martin (1990:206), "the doctrine of talents fosters what can be called 'penny capitalism,' the vending of cheap foodstuffs and clothes initially within the religious community but later outside it, to finance the expansion of that community." This doctrine of working talents was not new; it was pioneered by the leader of the Assemblies of God, Nicholas Bhengu of South Africa, in 1959 during his campaign of 'Back to God' in the township of Highfields (Mwase, 2012:45). This practice was perfected and strengthened by Priscilla Ngoma, one of the co-founders of ZAOGA. Her teachings centred on the idea that women should use their skills to make the church prosperous, benefiting them indirectly. Many women still cook peanuts, chips, cakes, and fat-cooks (a dough-like substance) and sell candies to contribute to the church's growth. Several indigenous women have succeeded as entrepreneurs, utilising chip fryers, popcorn makers, sewing, and knitting machines. This demonstrates the ZAOGA women's ability to sustain themselves in the event of abandonment by the male breadwinner or when living costs surge due to the devaluation of local currencies. Ezekiel Guti's talent development can be credited to his industrious mother, Dorcus, who adeptly maintained the family unit (Maxwell, 2006:95). This promotes gender equality in society, for women will not solely depend on men for income.

Following the talent showcase, women are urged to persist in their efforts to generate income for themselves. Although the concept gained traction in the 20th century, the principle of eliminating the Spirit of Poverty has much deeper historical origins. Many members are driven to combat poverty by initiating projects such as *mikando* (lending and borrowing money among a specific group of women with interest), launching poultry projects, and participating in the trade of small items like freezers and confectionery. According to this doctrine, no woman should go to bed without counting her finances. After toiling diligently, the women contribute their earnings to the church to assist those in need within their local communities. Some of the funds are allocated to orphanages to provide food and clothing. In line with this teaching of Guti (Barram, 2011:558-560; see also 1 John 3:17), the Bible emphasises that God instructs us to share our material possessions with those in need to demonstrate God's love.

## 7. Emphasis on spiritual empowerment

This study found that the ZAOGA beliefs and teachings motivate its members towards achieving salvation, which is the goal of missiology and life improvement. The belief in the ultimate power of the Holy Spirit empowers many people to do acts of faith, believing that everything they plan will come to pass. The same also happens to their economic life; those who think the Holy Spirit inspired them to start new businesses did it in utmost good faith and succeeded. Testimonies came from some women who worked talents. They testified that through using their hands in small businesses taught by the man of God, their lives were never the same. In 2023, when I attended a church service, I discussed with one woman who testified that:

*Through the work of talents in our church, many women managed to build their own homes and graduated from being lodgers to landlords. Others managed to buy movable properties for their homes. The gospel of talents improved many people's lives, and we continue to thank Baba Guti, who came up with such an initiative to eradicate poverty from our families and homes. Although many people criticize the work of talent as working for our leader at the expense of our progress, this is a lie because once one knows how to fish, it is difficult for that person to go fishing and come home empty-handed. Once you learn a business idea and know how to do business, you will live with your company for your whole life, but the working of talents for church projects will always end. Hence, the work of talents is suitable for personal transformation and sustainable development in the long run. (A discussion with a woman from ZAOGA on September 25, 2023).*

From a discussion we had with another woman in ZAOGA, she elucidates that, regardless of whether one is educated or not, one must venture into a business that brings other sources of income besides the primary salary received from formal employment. She further highlights that sleeping without counting money made from a small business is a sin. Money is money; it does not tell where it came from. The emphasis was on doing business, big or small.

Following the above discussion, the beliefs and teachings that encourage personal transformation, emphasised by ZAOGA, are an essential part of the sustainable development process. This is true of the Pentecostal belief that failure is not their portion; they move with Luke 1:37, which says, "for with God nothing is impossible," meaning nothing should fail; even a business plan should be possible. Myers (2015:116) also noted, "In Pentecostal teachings, success is equated to the defeat of the devil and demons that cause poverty and other failures in life." Contrary to this study, Mudimeli, Muthivhi and James (2023:200) are of the idea that "while there are certain elements of truth to the elements of material prosperity as a blessing, the prosperity gospel emphasises prosperity at the



expense of other essential values.” These scholars have seen the prosperity gospel as an agent that leads people to deviate from *Missio Dei*.

## **8. Teachings on compassion, love, and social justice**

After one becomes a member of the church, the church starts prioritising the social life of the believer by offering countless bible studies, prayer sessions, revivals, and evangelistic endeavours (Maxwell, 2006). The believer’s intelligence, hygiene, and improved quality of life demonstrate the outward manifestation of social transformation. A participant in the WhatsApp conversation suggested that new members of ZAOGA received material assistance from the church community as soon as they joined the church. The church fosters strong support networks through small-scale welfare systems within and between local assemblies and fellowship groups, as Mayer (1961:200-203) and Marshall (1994:224-25) noted. Additionally, ZAOGA assemblies serve as informal burial societies for their members, covering the expenses related to the passing of a loved one, including travel costs for the bereaved family, transportation of the deceased body, and the provision of food for the funeral.

The church emphasises Christian marriage and the nuclear family for those who wish to marry, thereby establishing material support for weddings. Church members are expected to contribute to wedding expenses and raise funds to ensure successful weddings for their fellow members. Furthermore, as Marshall (1994:230) explains, business owners within the church prioritize hiring fellow members as employees for their businesses. Those seeking employment or willing to help communicate their needs through the church’s social media groups, open to the entire congregation or specifically to women.

Upon experiencing a spiritual rebirth and accepting Christ as the saviour, individuals become members of a community of the redeemed (Marshall, 1994:216) and strive to uphold the inner purity necessary to receive authority from the Holy Spirit. A good ZAOGA member is well-versed in the Bible and can reflect on essential lessons like spiritual warfare, prayer, and healing. The new member is put into a fellowship cell group groomed to live according to the believer’s standards. Transformation is irresistible when one joins the church, mainly if it is a young male (Martin, 1990:221). A person is shunned for committing crimes like domestic violence and extramarital affairs. Both alcohol and tobacco use are considered sinful. Church punishment is applied to smokers, adulterers, drunkards, and spouse-beaters. Occasionally, those caught doing forbidden things in the church are shamefully brought up before the assembly.

## **9. Community engagement**

In 2008, despite the economic crisis in Zimbabwe, ZAOGA managed to build Mbuya Dorcas Hospital. In 2010, Guti announced the plan to build a university in Bindura,

and people worked to make it a reality. The university was completed and opened in 2012, named after the founder of Zimbabwe, Ezekiel Guti University (Biri, 2014). Togarashi (2016:23) described this as “the church entering the mainstream of churches in terms of providing social service to people.” As a result, the church is now contributing to sustainable development for the community, aligning with the goal of missiology. The hospital and the university will positively change the community and the nation.

## 10. Gospel of prosperity

ZAOGA engages in leadership training through seminars that equip individuals to become change agents, leading to socio-economic transformation through the gospel of prosperity. Köhrsen (2015:49) explains that prosperity theology aims to help people improve their lives by teaching them various improvement strategies. Guti’s prosperity gospel stressed that God had given dominion over the world to humankind, which is responsible for realising its dreams. He placed a strong emphasis on black pride and self-actualisation. Guti’s doctrine was reworked into the evolving Spirit of Poverty doctrine. In 1995, the Spirit of Poverty was expounded upon greatly during talents; it was also preached widely by the movement’s evangelists in crusades throughout the year and reproduced by pastors, elders, and deacons at ordinary church meetings. In his speeches, Guti clarifies that Africa needs to be independent and self-sufficient to disassociate itself from the moniker of the dark continent and pagan continent (Maxwell, 2006). Africa needs to stop relying on outside assistance.

In most of his sermons, Guti discouraged people from becoming what they study. He remarked:

If you study law, you become an attorney; if you study auto mechanics, you become a mechanic. The mistake in becoming what you study is that many people forget to mind their business. They spend their lives minding someone else’s business and making that person rich. (Sermon by Ezekiel at Deeper Life Conference in Harare, 2013).

Churches should influence African people to establish businesses cleanly without corruption (Guti, 1994:22:64). To keep up with *missio Dei*, Guti always emphasises living a pure life, free from sin. He has always questioned how the gospel could become good news to the poor if the people remain poor. The gospel can only become good news when money dwells in the spiritual pocket.

The ZAOGA church leaders give its members themes to move with at the beginning of every year. *For instance, a theme may be designed as the year of repos-*

*sessing our territories. This theme alone motivates members, and everyone will strive to work hard to fulfill their resolutions in the new year.*

These themes prescribed by a pastor encourage socio-economic transformation among the congregants. These themes have encouraged many members to work hard through the working of talents. They managed to graduate from senior lodgers to landlords; some moved from high-density to low-density suburbs. The themes enable members to possess territories in material things, including buying new cars and stands and sending their children to expensive schools. This conveys the idea of God being the one who takes beggars out of prisons and seats them with princes, as well as the Pentecostal notion of being taken from “nobodies” to “somebodies” (Psalms 113:8) (Chitando et al., 2017), thus promoting social transformation and sustainable development among the church members.

A discussion with many women from ZAOGA shows that the work of talents works as a broom that sweeps away poverty, and according to them, “talents was a school given to them by their father, Ezekiel Guti.” According to them, Guti describes the work of talents as a school designed to train women who are members of ZAOGA to be self-sufficient and to develop skills in doing business that will help generate income for their families (Guti, 2000). They encouraged one another to be proud of their hands and not to love sitting on them. This spirit of working hard is a panacea for all ZAOGA women. It is rare to see a woman from ZAOGA who looks down upon herself. Their transformation starts from how they dress until where they stay; they try to live a modern life free from poverty (Maxwell, 2006). That elimination of poverty does not end their personal life, but they also help others in need within their parameters. ZAOGA emphasises gender equality in its teachings, which can challenge patriarchal norms, promoting social transformation and women’s empowerment. This is witnessed by encouraging women to work talents and earn income for the church and their families.

## **11. Entrepreneurial training and microfinance initiatives**

This is witnessed through business training and various projects like *Mukando* (the landing and borrowing of money). The central features of ZAOGA are entrepreneurship and response to opportunity. This is evidenced by the fact that these churches have emanated from individual religious entrepreneurship found in the charismatic leaders of these churches. These entrepreneurial ideas spread from the leader to the church members. Entrepreneurship skills and training have developed as essential intervention features in the lives of ZAOGA members to eliminate poverty and serve society at large. This can be compared to one of *Missio Dei*’s goals: eradicate poverty and show acts of love, among others.

More so, the study found that by encouraging the work of talents that involve venturing into small businesses, as highlighted by some leaders interviewed, the

church helps its members to succeed in business. In his teachings, Guti claimed that it is only through prayers that closed doors are open. He stresses that talents are worked through worship, the only prayer for people to buy products from your business (Guti, 2015). He further postulates that it is only through working talents that women have the discipline to save money and work toward the development of the church and their families.

Moreover, ZAOGA prohibits its members from making credit purchases. A believer is required to purchase with cash or not at all. Members were forbidden by Ezekiel Guti's teachings from incurring debt. A debt is compared to a physical transgression that imprisons and seizes possession of the born-again. Instead, the believer learns how to labour for their money and manage and preserve it. Guti encouraged the members to live a debt-free life. If you have credit with someone, you are as good as one in prison; you cannot live a free life. Once one is born again, "one should be a completely free person" (Guti, 2000:23). This has been supported by Bosch (2009:84), in his investigation into the concept of salvation, he makes it very clear that salvation consists of two things: being freed from all shackles and accepted into a brand-new life in Christ.

## **12. Modernity and disregard for cultural practices**

The teachings and beliefs of Pentecostal churches, in general, and ZAOGA, in particular, encourage believers to transform from their old ways of doing things to new ways to develop a total person. The transformation was witnessed in all categories of life, including economic, social, physical, moral, and psychological. The complete rejection of tradition is the most significant activity that makes someone a new ZAOGA member. When someone joined the church, one was expected to reject and separate themselves from a deified set of customs and beliefs that were closely linked to non-Christian rural culture, which focused on ecology cults, witchcraft, and ancestor worship. Members of ZAOGA are not allowed to participate in or lend support to individuals who engage in family or group rituals. Rainmaking and first-fruits ceremonies, possession rituals, divination sessions, beer parties, and burial customs are all regarded as wasteful and associated with evil spirits (Maxwell, 2010).

The rejection of tradition by ZAOGA and Pentecostals is notable in multiple respects. Initially, as Van Dijk (1992) noted, but for the sake of this conversation, it absolves the believer of certain traditional ritual obligations, permitting total transformation. Several ZAOGA members talked about how they began as 'house girls' or 'garden boys' and worked up to consumer goods and white-collar positions. The founder of ZAOGA, Ezekiel Guti, taught that social transformation is necessary to be born again.

Although most Pentecostal churches reject the notions of spirit possession and ancestor reverence (Marshall, 1994; Maxwell, 1997; Meyer, 1992; van Dijk, 1992), ZAOGA advocates for a radical departure from custom, including not only the realm of spirits, but also the entire traditional culture. Believers were despised for performing social customs related to life transitions, protection against disease, infertility, and disaster, or the efficient administration of agriculture entirely. Instead, they were taught to depend on God for safety and all their needs in life. Maxwell (2010:56) also highlights that to succeed and fully transform into a believer, one must entirely disassociate from ancestral spirits.

Mwase (2012:43) emphasises that Guti believed the forefathers lived lives marked by violence, intoxication, polygamy, ancestor worship, witchcraft, waste, and poverty. Ezekiel Guti clarified in his teachings that their inability to accumulate wealth was their lived experience. He stated that malevolent ancestral spirits perpetuate suffering from generation to generation. Similarly, proponents of ZAOGA's Spirit of Poverty theology draw from the insights of earlier Pentecostal missionaries on African religion and culture (Maxwell, 1997; Burke, 1996:52-56). The movement's teachings can be traced to its predecessors in the Apostolic Faith Mission (Maxwell, 1998). However, ZAOGA's preachers and evangelists denounce tradition based on personal experiences. In line with *Missio Dei*, ZAOGA's teachings advocate for a complete separation between the saved and the unsaved. Once a person has attained salvation, those who have not yet been saved should witness and seek salvation. Unlike other Protestant traditions, Pentecostalism emphasises eschatology, sanctification, Spirit baptism, supernatural healing, and redemption (Kgatle, 2022).

### **13. Conclusion**

Pentecostalism is a rapidly growing religious movement in Southern Africa, which has significantly impacted social transformation, mainly through ZAOGA. The church's approach to social transformation, grounded in the belief that God is actively involved in the world, challenges the conventional dichotomy between spiritual and social engagement. It underscores the intrinsic link between faith and action, suggesting that tangible changes in the lives of individuals and communities inevitably accompany true spiritual revival. Moreover, ZAOGA's strategic use of modern media and technology to disseminate its message and engage with a broader audience, particularly the youth, signifies the church's adaptability and role in shaping a modern African Pentecostal identity. This adaptability, coupled with strong visionary leadership, has been instrumental in the church's exponential growth and its enduring influence on the socio-cultural landscape of Southern Africa.

The influence of Pentecostalism on social change in Southern Africa, as evidenced by the practices and beliefs of ZAOGA, illustrates the dynamic relationship

between religion and society. It underscores the potential for faith-based organisations to make meaningful contributions to social development objectives, such as poverty reduction, education, and healthcare, in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. This research reveals that Pentecostalism in Southern Africa is not merely a religious movement but a potent force for driving social change through faith, hope, and love. Further studies could explore the adaptability of ZAOGA's approach in different contexts and its long-term viability in addressing the region's evolving challenges. Numerous accounts attest to the transformative effects of affiliating with the church. Pentecostal congregations can contribute progressively to sustainable development and social transformation in Southern Africa. The primary contention of this research is that through its teachings, ZAOGA has effectively pursued the *Mission Dei*, particularly in its efforts to eradicate poverty through the utilisation of individual talents and to bring about social transformation and sustainable development in the lives of many. Its teachings inspire members to contribute to the betterment of the less fortunate and educate them on improving their lives through diligent work, thus fostering the church's growth. The study suggests that other sectors of society, including politicians, should collaborate earnestly with the church to bring about genuine societal transformation and sustainable development.

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