



Hermeneutical practices amongst African Neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa: A critical review

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ABSTRACT

African Pentecostalism is a diverse movement, that has become popular within African Christianity. However, in more recent years there have been concerning developments in some neo-Pentecostal practices, where stories of snake-eating, petrol-drinking and Doom-spraying are prevalent. A critical consideration is what motivates and makes possible such practices? The researcher set out to answer this question by conducting a critical review through a literature study about hermeneutical practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa and compared this to the classical form of Pentecostalism. The comparison between classic and neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics shows that although there is a commonality between the two, there are differences that set them apart. African Pentecostalism is rooted in the hermeneutical discussion of the centrality of the Holy Spirit in reading the Bible, the eschatological lens, and the faith community as normative for the interpretation of the Bible. However, hermeneutical abuses carried out by some of these self-titled prophets, and the misuse of authority is rampant within African neo-Pentecostalism. The research aims to provide guidance and corrective measures for doctrine and practice on how this situation can be remedied. It concludes by suggesting a potential exegetical method when interpreting Scripture to ensure Biblical thinking, and hermeneutical guidelines to elevate against hermeneutical religious abuses. The researcher desires to raise awareness and educate the African Pentecostal community about the richness of Christianity within its cultural context, but at the same time to promote Biblical thinking and practice that would lessen, if not eradicate hermeneutical religious abuses.

KEY TERMS

The key terms and concepts which undergird this research project are *Pentecostalism*, *neo-Pentecostalism*, *Southern African neo-Pentecostal churches*, *hermeneutics* and *abuse*.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1 Title

A critical review of hermeneutical practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa

1.2 Background and problem statement/rationale

The percentage of Christians living in Africa has gradually increased over the years according to the statistics provided by Keener and Carroll (2013:4). They argue that the percentage of Christians in Africa, Asia and Latin America is expected to increase from 63.2 percent in 2010 to nearly 70 percent by the year 2025. Christianity which was once considered 'a white man's religion' is now claimed as a religion for Africans as well. Several aspects of theology have evolved with the shift in the centre of Christianity to the South (Jacobsen, 2015:12). The Pentecostal movement in particular is a worldwide trend with a large following that is birthed from three waves. The first wave is known as classical Pentecostalism, beginning in the early twentieth century. Next is the charismatic movement that since the sixties of the previous century served as a renewal movement within some established main-line churches. Thereafter, the charismatic renewal movements that since the eighties of the previous century changed the religious landscape with independent neo-Pentecostal churches (Botha, 2007:297). Pentecostalism had overtaken Orthodox churches as the second largest denomination of Christians as early as four decades ago (Synan, 1975:25). Protestants were the largest, followed by the Roman Catholics. According to Mashau (2013:10), the impact of Pentecostalism in Africa is massive and has become one of the leading movements of Christianity on the continent. Moreover, Mashau points out that a study of Christian faith in Africa showed it to be more receptive to such movements.

The African Reformation of the twentieth century is described as the Pentecostalisation of African Christianity (Nel, 2019:16), and this has changed African Christendom to a certain extent, including the way theological perspectives are viewed. Over the past few years, the world has become more aware of African neo-Pentecostalism for its teachings and practices that has set the movement apart from when it originally started. The neo-Pentecostalist movement impacted both individuals and the Pentecostal movement as a whole and brought about a variety of changes. Parsitau (2014: 27) describes the causes of this transformation, as well as how it affected lives and the Pentecostal movement. This study defines and explains Pentecostalism in general, but it is vital to focus on more recent and contemporary prophetic Pentecostalism particularly in the sub-Saharan Africa.

Thus, neo-Pentecostals in this research refers to the newer contemporary faith, healing and prosperity movement that emerged from the 1980s to date. Therefore, churches such as Grace Bible Church in Soweto cannot be discussed at the same length as churches like the Enlightened Christian Gathering of Shepherd Bushiri.

It has become necessary that careful research be done within an African context to better understand the reasons and motives behind such practices and to investigate whether these practices may lead to hermeneutical harmful practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches. Examples of such practices in South Africa include robbing vulnerable believers of their savings, forcing people to eat and drink harmful substances as signs of their 'faith' and even 'resurrecting' a man from the dead (Mhlungu, 2016; Mouser, 2019). In his article "And they shall make you eat grass like oxen", Resane (2017) addresses this pressing issue that South Africa faces due to some unconventional practices in some neo-charismatic churches that require some theological scrutiny and reflection. According to Resane (2017:1-17), practices of people eating grass, rats, snakes, drinking petrol etc. cannot be acceptable since these practices are being used merely to impress people with dangerous approaches to gospel doctrine. This context directed the investigative study of this dissertation and seeks to make a valuable contribution by reflecting and making recommendations in correcting the theology and practices of neo-Pentecostalism.

1.3 Preliminary literature study

To accurately understand and evaluate African neo-Pentecostalist hermeneutics, the subject needs to be placed in historical context. Pentecostalism focuses on spiritual renewal and aims towards the manifestation of the spiritual gifts which started in the early twentieth century (Bartos, 2015:20). By looking at the historical background and how Pentecostalism was formed, one is able to better define a Pentecostal hermeneutics and evaluate this against the practices of neo-Pentecostalism. Considering this, the dissertation hypothesised that there are certain practices that are taking place amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa that may be based on a hermeneutical perspective which ultimately leads to hermeneutical religious abuses. Hence, this study addresses the hermeneutical practices amongst African Neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa.

1.3.1 Development of the three waves and its hermeneutical implications

The focus of this literature study is to consider the historical background of the three Pentecostal waves and how the movement has developed since the 1970s in shaping a Pentecostal hermeneutics in contrast to African neo-Pentecostal development. This was then evaluated against the practices of the hermeneutics of neo-Pentecostalism that can be related to some kinds of practices taking place in African churches and its repercussions.

This early history, as recounted in Synan (1997), outlines that the First Wave is referred to as 'Classical Pentecostalism' and claims its origin in the 'holiness movement' with its emphasis on the doctrine of sanctification of the nineteenth century. This movement began in the Methodist tradition and John Wesley became known as "the strenuous founder of Methodism and was also the spiritual and intellectual father of the modern movements and of Pentecostalism" (Synan, 1997:1-2). The 'holiness movement' encouraged a desire for personal sanctification as a new period within the faith of the Christian's life. Once a person came to salvation, the Methodists believed that the goal was for one to attain growth in holiness and ultimately complete sanctification. Evangelical Christians at that time were living in the aftermath of the supernatural events that happened during the revival meetings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There was a great hunger for spiritual revival to continue and for almost thirty years (1867 - 1894) large gatherings called 'crusades' or 'revivals' of sanctification were held in the USA. This prepared the birth of classical Pentecostalism (Synan, 1997:27).

A new concept called *baptism with the Spirit* was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century to replace traditional ideas such as 'death to sin', 'circumcision of the heart', and 'total surrender' (Synan, 1997:51). *Baptism with the Spirit* brought about a new dimension of spirituality as outlined in Bartos's research. He informs that speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, prophesying, and healing of the sick were understood as phenomenon of supernatural and miraculous powers that drove the movement. It became evident that the Pentecostal movement affirmed the centrality of baptism in the power of the Spirit. This baptism was regarded as 'baptism of fire' and it was distinguished from water baptism. What was fundamental, however, was living a Spirit-filled and empowered life, that led to spiritual revival and a personal experience with God.

The 'holiness movement' used the term *baptism with the Spirit* in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit which originated from the birth of the church in Acts 2 (Archer, 2004:39). Wesleyan Holiness and Pentecostalism affirmed the divinely inspired nature of Scripture from a modern perspective, as well as the significance of having a personal encounter with God in order to affirm its supernatural origin. In this sense, the Holiness tradition and the Pentecostals therefore found encouragement in both the recorded Word of God and in their personal experiences with the Holy Spirit (Archer, 2004:40).

Theological training was not typically a requirement for ministers within the Pentecostal movement but what mattered was the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help ministers interpret the gospel message. It was not seen as necessary to pursue formal education; the Bible was read at face value and the people accepted it as true (Eybers, König & Stoop, 1978:174). Nel (1993:12) provides a reason for this belief: "the supposition was that the believer's study of the Bible combined with the equipment with the spiritual gifts, such as prophecy, words of wisdom and knowledge as well as interpretation of tongues is adequate for the ministry".

D.W. Myland (as cited in Cox, 1995:67), was a great influence to the Pentecostal movement. He discusses some key elements about the movement's teachings and mentions how God took a great interest in the poor and downtrodden by sending the latter rain to demonstrate his love and concern. God's great love was poured out upon everyone, no matter the cultural or social background. It is through such acts of grace and kindness that God is glorified. God's plan is progressive in revealing his purpose through a personal encounter with the Spirit, demonstrated through miraculous signs and wonders. This gave the movement momentum and eventually gave way to the second wave known as the 'charismatic renewal' that took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

A difference was evident from Pentecostalism as many of the distinctive teachings were recognised and accepted among believers within the leading Protestant denominations. Members of the Charismatic movement chose to remain in their original denominations, however, accepting the popular teachings of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the healing revivals that took place (Mathole, 2005: 177).

There is no complete agreement that exists among charismatics regarding the main Pentecostal distinctive, namely, subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit and *glossolalia* as evidence for it. Grudem's (2015:11) comments are useful because they indicate that charismatics have largely abstained from composing their own denominations, opting instead to contribute to existing Protestant and Roman Catholic churches as forces for revival. McKim (1996:44) defines this movement as a trend that crosses denominational barriers and that "emphasises the charismatic gifts of the Spirit, particularly speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), words of wisdom, knowledge, healings, prophecy, and the interpretation of tongues". Some of the revivalists of that time who emphasised these gifts included William Branham, Oral Roberts and A Allen; as a result of their emphasis on spiritual gifts, Pentecostal practices and teachings have become increasingly well-known and accepted (Synan, 1975:1-2).

The Pentecostal movement became popular, and other mainstream churches embraced the movement by sharing their Pentecostal experiences. In February 1967, at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) originated during a college retreat. Prayer had been offered for God to grant them the experience of the baptism in the Spirit. Their prayers were answered when the students had an experience of God that was recognised as the *baptism in the Spirit*. This weekend's events soon spread across the campus and around the globe. The focus on spiritual renewal was now placed on conversion and an experience of the Holy Spirit through baptism (Mansfield, 2016:4).

The CCR was encouraged, provided it was rooted in the Church teaching. The charismatic phenomenon was welcomed by many churches and there was less resistance towards this phenomenon than toward the Pentecostal movement (Chesnut, 2003:55). Churches accepted the

movement into the life of their congregations because it represented a sign of hope. The CCR centred on a personal experience with God and encountering the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It placed the spotlight on reviving the grace of *baptism in the Spirit* and experiencing a greater infilling. This became an exhilarating mandate and mission for every Christian to encounter; however, not all churches have seen this movement as favourable. "On the one hand, the charismatic movement caused concerns among the traditional churches, but on the other hand it forced these churches to rethink the dynamics of the spiritual life" (Bartos, 2015:34). The main criticism was about excessive abuse of spiritual experiences and perceived injustice to the authority of Scripture as compared to more classical teachings (Nel, 2014:291). The movement, however, bypassed fundamental doctrinal differences within Christendom. While some churches resisted the new charismatic wave, most accepted its principles (Bartos, 2015:32-34).

It was not long after that, in 1985, that Pentecostalism embarked on a new phase called the 'third wave'. The term was used by Peter Wagner and became known as 'neo-Pentecostalism' (Philippe, 2013). Peter Wagner together with John Wimber expressed the 'third wave' through the formation of churches and denomination-like organisations with the participation of the Vineyard churches (Hocken, 2009:75). Baptism in the Holy Spirit embodied itself at that time not only as speaking in tongues and prophesying but also within new dimensions, such as 'liberation of the spirit'. Thereafter, under the leadership of John Arnott, Toronto's Airport Vineyard Church witnessed the emergence of a new phenomenon in 1994 called "Toronto blessing" (Malina, 2019). Here holy laughter, rolling on the floor, prophecies and the scheduled healings as manifestation of liberation in the Spirit became specific for the church. This was regarded as a spiritual awakening phenomenon and the 'Toronto blessing' spread to other countries (Poloma, 2003:59). It eventually became known as the 'Signs and Wonders Movement' which was also connected to Wagner, Wimber and others who were apart of the awakening phenomenon (Hyatt, 2000:197).

Another revival movement was recorded in 1995 in Brownsville, Florida under John Kilpatrick. A new vocabulary was introduced to Pentecostalism during the Power Evangelism, including terms such as 'rest in the Spirit', 'slain in the Spirit', 'release service', and 'spiritual warfare'. A charismatic meeting occurred in combination with ministering through the gift of healing, which became almost mandatory (Hyatt, 2000:197). Many Christians desired spiritual power, material blessings and physical healing. In these meetings, the divine presence was invoked, or the role of reason was diminished by the deliberate appeal to the sacramental mindset. A unique trait of the third wave teaching is the rejection of Spirit baptism as a 'second blessing' after salvation (Bartos, 2015). Consequently, experiences called 'fillings' and signs and wonders came to accompany gospel presentations. Hyatt (2000:199) further mentions that it became evident that the third wavers also concerned themselves with healing and the Christian response to demonic activity. After some time, Wagner and Wimber began to see the direction in which the movement was going, and they began to fear that there may be a contradiction between the Biblical signs of revival and the

uncontrollable signs, such as tremors, spiritual ecstasies, and animalistic sounds, of the new movement. However, it was too late as the movement had already spread at a rapid pace (Bartos, 2015:32-34). The movement rapidly grew, and people were lured in as the wave took prominence and has since developed over time as we see the effects to this day.

1.3.2 The fourth wave

A fourth wave of Pentecostalism is introduced, which is different from the first three waves. According to Kgatle (2021) while the first three waves of Pentecostalism flourished under the apartheid system of South Africa, the fourth wave emerged under the democratic dispensation of 1994. This category is referred to as prophetic Pentecostalism, which encompasses the New Prophetic Churches and is perhaps the most controversial in the movement (Kgatle 2019). Omenyo and Atiemo (2006) described these churches as neo-prophetic churches that are a mixture of African Independent Churches, the Classical Pentecostal Churches and Charismatic groups. In general, these churches adhere to a worldview that is rooted in African spirituality and their major characteristics include the use of prophecy, healing, deliverance and exorcism (Omenyo and Arthur, 2013). As a result of their prophetic proclamations and revelations, as well as their highly charismatic founders, these churches command a large following. These are churches like the Enlightened Christian Gathering of the controversial Prophet Shepherd Bushiri, Alleluia ministries of Pastor Alph Lukau and incredible happenings of Pastor Paseka Motsoeneng (Kgatle 2019).

In terms of their theology, neo-prophetic ministries typically display a literalist interpretation of the Bible, a strong focus on spiritual matters and a desire for success and fulfilment in life (Omenyo and Arthur, 2013). Their theology also emphasises concepts such as anointing, guidance, prophecy and revelation (Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2013). Gifford (2004) further adds that in such ministries, the prophet occupies a central role. While neo-prophetic churches believe in the African worldview and cosmology of ancestral spirits, demons, and deities, they reject African traditional religious practices (Omenyo and Arthur 2013). It is acknowledged by Kgatle (2021:21-41) that some theological scholars have difficulty trying to understand the fourth wave because of its strange context and unusual practices. In this study, the term African neo-Pentecostal churches is used in reference to indigenous independent charismatic and neo-prophetic churches.

1.3.3 Development of Pentecostal hermeneutics

During the first 40 years of its existence, early Pentecostals did not have a common desire towards any theological training because the Bible was regarded as sufficient to provide all that one needed to know. Eventually, this began to change as a partnership with Evangelicals was formed, which

allowed them to adopt Evangelical ways of understanding the Bible (Nel, 2016). As scholars note, the Pentecostal movement has been uniquely formed by its own hermeneutics having a rich history of beliefs that has developed over time. Pentecostal hermeneutics were shaped in conjunction with the endeavour of theological training (Archer, 1996; Letson, 2007). Since the 1970s, new developments in the movement led to the establishment of theological institutions and seminaries where Pentecostal theology was studied and candidates for the ministry trained. As a result of this theological endeavours, the movement revisited its hermeneutics. A Pentecostal hermeneutics can be uniquely understood because the movement as such is diverse and includes different views of how the Bible is interpreted, as well as bringing into factor the influence of diverse local and cultural applications. The movement has a high view of the Bible as a holy book with supernatural power, because it is the means through which the gospel is preached.

The Bible is read with an end result in mind. Although the purpose of the Bible may be the measure to define faith and practice, their approach in understanding doctrine was based on their experiences with God through his Spirit and the Bible. Doctrine was therefore defined in terms of the Bible through a personal experience. A Pentecostal hermeneutics denies a variety of readings that seek to use Scripture in ways that run contrary to its implied design, such as irresponsible readings that seek to abuse the authority of Biblical texts instead of honouring them (Nel 2019:79-80).

The Bible was read instead through a charismatic lens, focusing on the supernatural and the eschatological presence of God (Archer, 1996:64). Pentecostals viewed the Bible as the inspired Word of God, which is useful to the believer, without making any distinction of some historical distance between the modern believer and the text. Early Pentecostals conducted and formulated their theology in an oral manner, as personal encounters with God mattered more than formal training. As noted previously, they were hostile towards any kind of formal theological training (Anderson, 1979). The reason for such hostility was the belief that the Spirit's leading was sufficient and no theological training was necessary (Letson, 2007:115). They supported this kind of thinking by what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 10:19-20, where he promises that the Holy Spirit will empower the believer by speaking through him.

The second coming of Jesus was also anticipated as imminent and believers felt that it was a waste of time attaining any theological training. They not only believed that formal theological education was unnecessary, but that it posed as a stumbling block by limiting believers who were filled with the Spirit. It was more profitable investing time and effort in spreading the teachings of Pentecost (Whitehouse, 1953:67) than in training. Scriptures were interpreted allegorically by stressing the direct meaning and personal application (Spittler, 1985:75). The aim of conducting preaching and teaching orally was to connect with the members and to offer them a solution for their needs (Byrd, 1993). It was not that Pentecostals were disadvantaged or lacked culture, but

rather, that they followed a Pentecostal hermeneutics and recognised the importance of that ethos. (Nel, 2019). Indeed, as is noted by Gerlach, Jesus is a good example of one who cared for the marginalised and poor, which has made a Pentecostal hermeneutics easy for African people to accept and follow. This is based on an understanding that as opposed to being a reaction to change, Pentecostalism was a catalyst for change (Gerlach, 1974:672).

As noted earlier, two vital elements were of great importance within Pentecostalism: Spirit-baptism and speaking in tongues as these are crucial evidence of transformation within the believer's life. Pentecostals believed that they were living in the time of the latter rain, where the Holy Spirit baptism was regarded as the process of the final steps in ushering in the kingdom of God. Speaking in tongues was evidence of a sanctified, 'clean heart', which was necessary for baptism in the Holy Spirit. Tongues were viewed as a supernatural gift of languages for the purpose of world evangelism, and they were regarded as the 'Biblical sign' of Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Missionaries were instructed not to study foreign languages because the Holy Spirit would gift them to be able to minister to the unreached world through a heavenly language (Synan, 1975:146). These beliefs were embraced by classical Pentecostal churches which helped shape its hermeneutical views.

As the Pentecostal movement spread, the members met and conducted their services in homes, while believers became actively involved in the worship service through preaching, prayer, singing, dancing and caring for the needs of others. The poor and disadvantaged individuals found a sense of belonging in the music and worship styles. There was also an opportunity for uneducated people to participate orally in the services (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015:75). The Bible was read and taken at face value as no formal theological training was required, but rather a total dependence on the Spirit for guidance and interpretation was emphasised (Eybers, König & Stoop, 1978:174). Various Biblical verses were used in support to justify the Pentecostal view of the Spirit's enablement for preaching and ministering. One verse is found in 2 Corinthians 3:6, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The Spirit is therefore elevated within the Godhead and given great prominence within Pentecostalism. This brought about a sense of unity with no restrictions, but believers were encouraged to be open to the 'moving' of the Holy Spirit. People who experienced the manifestation of the Spirit were often led to preach and testify of their faith. This led to many conversions and caused the movement to expand its teaching and in number (Burger, 1987:181). The emphasis of Pentecostalism stresses the believer's personal encounter with God and the awareness of the Spirit's indwelling to empower the believer in witness and worship (Sandidge, 1987:141). When a person has had a direct experience with God, they are in a relationship with him that has relevance to a specific situation in their lives, according to this hermeneutic (Nel, 2015:21).

At first, Pentecostalism was rejected and not easily accepted by other churches and from the 1940s, they sought ways in which that could be acknowledged and accepted. As a consequence, they became associated with the Evangelical segment of Protestantism. Despite their repudiation of Pentecostal theology, evangelical fundamentalists favoured the fundamentalist-dispensationalist hermeneutic with their interpretation of Scripture grounded in literalism and inerrancy (Nel, 2017:16). Due to their increased influence, Evangelicals gained an increased acceptance with the Pentecostals, while Pentecostals gained acceptance with other churches. In addition to starting Bible institutions, the movement also encouraged ministers to learn how to read the Bible according to the fundamentalist' literalist view. The belief was held that all the words of the Bible are distinctively inspired and therefore true.

After the Second World War, gradual changes took place within the Pentecostal movement; from less emphasis on the anointing of the Spirit to an acceptance that more concrete theological hermeneutics are needed within the movement (Menzies, 2013:129). However, believers were concerned that theological insight might fail to replace the Spirit's work, and as a result, ministers chose theological and Biblical sound institutions that were spiritually focused. (Nel, 2016).

Pentecostals who were courageous enough to go into the academy since the 1970s continued to align themselves with Evangelicals. Although Pentecostals eventually agreed with historical criticism methods, studying at Evangelical universities allowed them to maintain their connection to Scripture. (Fee, 2002:3). As a result, importance was placed on the historical contexts of Biblical narratives, particularly emphasising on how close the text was to the original and having different meanings and relevance to the times. Many Pentecostals agree that Scripture's authority came not from inerrancy but from the community's personal commitment with God and its doctrine. Instead of relying on inherited doctrines, they interpreted the Bible from their public encounter with God (Nel, 2017:285).

Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasises the Lukan narratives with prominence on the book of Acts and the Holy Spirit as the focal point (Menzies, 2013:121). According to Stott (1976:15), the turn from Paul to Luke implies a change within Pentecostal exegesis and hermeneutics from didactic to narrative texts used to define Pentecostals' theology. Stott considers this as a major mishap because in his opinion, narrative texts do not lend themselves easily to forming theological conclusions as compared to academic texts. However, in the books of Acts, Pentecostals aim to accomplish a specific purpose, by allowing the Holy Spirit to do the interpretation (Stott, 1976:23). and to see what charismatic experiences God intends for them. In the New Testament, baptism with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is seen as an experience available to all believers. It also signifies being filled with power and evidenced by the accompanying sign of 'speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance' (Acts 2:4). Even the events and blessings described in the Old Testament are viewed as promises made to them as well. Although Scripture could be considered the norm for faith and practice amongst Pentecostals, the authority of Scripture was by

no means grounded on the foundation of inerrancy or any other doctrine, but rather the basis was about an experience of a personal encounter with God through the Holy Spirit's empowerment (Ellington, 1996). Land (1993:100) asserts that among Pentecostals, the Bible was considered an inspiration by the Spirit capable of illuminating and changing a believer's life.

Moore (1987) suggests that a Pentecostal hermeneutical approach can be explained in terms of four aspects. He states that the Bible should not be viewed as the object of interpretation because the Holy Spirit is active in communicating with believers in ways that are beyond human understanding. It is the Spirit who manifests truths through the believer in ways that cannot often be explained. Secondly, the believer needs to be in a right relationship with God to experience ongoing specific encounters. It is therefore vital for Pentecostals to have both knowledge and a practical experience with God. Thirdly, as part of Pentecostal hermeneutics, all believers have the right to be priests and prophets in approaching the Bible and in living communally. The Bible is available to every believer and can interpret what is read and witness to the truth of their personal encounters with God. Lastly, the church community plays a significant role in dealing with the Bible through the guidance of the Spirit. This is important since Pentecostal Bible reading practices can be subjective (Archer, 2009:12). Archer (1996:78-79) suggests that to mitigate the danger, Pentecostal hermeneutics should permit for three interrelated components, i.e., the community of faith, the activity of the Spirit and Scripture; which need to be coherent with each other. Hermeneutics determine how God's Word connects to the life of the local church through the interpretation of the Holy Spirit that takes place in the congregation.

It is evident that Pentecostal hermeneutics take place on different levels and the aim of studying the Bible would be to know God. Autry (1993:33) agrees that we can determine the biblical author's initial intentions by reading the Bible in context and using proper exegetical methods to determine what they were trying to convey. What is important for Pentecostals is to read the Bible in a way that will lead to an explanation of how a portion of Scripture can be put into practice. In the Pentecostal tradition, Bible readers take on an important role when examining Scripture, as there are numerous levels of meaning in the Bible and differing interpretations of one passage are accepted. Carroll (1993:186-187) argues that different interpretations of one passage are possible with different approaches to its interpretation. Additionally, readers may interact with the text differently according to their personal experience. Pentecostal readers, for instance, interpret Scripture by referencing their personal encounter with God as part of their core beliefs (Johns, 1995:75).

1.3.4 Socio-economic context of Pentecostal hermeneutics

Gelach and Hine (1968:23) indicate that as opposed to the first Pentecostal wave, the neo-Pentecostal wave reaches out to people of all economic levels, including those in middle and upper

middle class who are not suffering from any poverty. In South Africa for instance, such churches have become appealing to many young people from mainline churches. They attract the youth through enthusiasm by creating a platform for becoming involved in church activities such as worship ministry, which includes contemporary music and dance influenced by the manifestation of the Spirit. These young people are not just attracted by having a sense of belonging, but they are persuaded by the theology of the movement. This calls for a critical discussion in examining the motives of the kind of hermeneutical practices amongst neo-Pentecostals and to test the hypothesis.

An evaluation of Pentecostal hermeneutics leads to an understanding of the potential of abuse of Scriptures among neo-Pentecostals. This is the concern the researcher investigated, consisting of a hermeneutical evaluation of African neo-Pentecostalist practices to establish the end result.

1.3.5 Evaluation of African neo-Pentecostalist practices

Christian practices and doctrines in Africa are complex in history, structure and doctrine (Mashau, 2013:11). There are numerous denominations of Christianity in Africa, but those of Pentecostal descent have experienced the fastest growth (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007:128). It is useful to look at the historical context as to how Pentecostalism was brought to Africa. Soon after the Azusa Street revival, the Pentecostal movement spread to Africa and had a major influence on the sub-Saharan African people by offering to them a religion that is relatable to their culture and needs. In 1908, South Africa became one of the first African countries to receive Pentecostalism, and a major influence was due to the *Apostolic Faith* newspaper mostly edited by William Seymour, founder of the Azusa Street Mission. Soon thereafter, evangelistic work was carried out and resulted in the establishment of Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God, Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, the Full Gospel church and the Pentecostal Zionist Movement (Anderson, 2005:15). In the early 1990s, according to Lindhardt (2015:12), there was an influx of Nigerian, Kenyan and Ghanaian preachers that did evangelistic work in Southern Africa amongst the rural people and preached sermons that were relatable to their needs such as poverty, witchcraft and the promise of a 'better' life. Anderson (1979) explains that African Pentecostalism focuses on helping their members to live a 'Spirit-filled' life as the aim of these ministries is centred on making God personal and more meaningful to everyday situations. Its hermeneutical teachings promise to better the lives of believers spiritually, physically, financially, emotionally and even academically.

Many African people did not find Western Christianity relevant to an African context. Supernatural powers and encounters were sought after, such as the power to conquer sickness and evil spirits. This is not an unfamiliar practice to African people who consulted traditional practitioners and communicated with ancestors (Spiritism). Pentecostalism therefore becomes a movement that is relatable to an African context; Jesus empowers believers through various giftings to partake in

spiritual warfare and combat every spiritual power that opposes believers. As one African perspective holds, religion is regarded as serving as a means of restoration when body, relationships, social networks, and spiritual connections are broken (Ukah, 2007:14). The words of Paul are of great significance to African Pentecostal Christians, denoting that they “wrestle ... not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). God and the Bible are regarded as antidotes or solutions to daily struggles such as poverty, famine, sickness and oppression. After all, it was Jesus who said; “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

In Southern Africa, these televangelists and mass crusaders continued to influence people by bringing messages of divine healing and prosperity during the Pentecostal revivals. Africa had become the perfect soil for Pentecostalism to flourish because cultural world view, religion and healing are inevitably connected. Asomoah-Gyadu (2005:240) explains that Africans do not exercise their faith without the influence of the Holy Spirit. Their worship encounters are perceived as an authentic encounter with God, resulting occasionally in the non-deliverance of the sermon because of the move of the Holy Spirit through worship amongst congregants, which is expressed in a spontaneous manner, resulting in miracles and conversions. African neo-Pentecostals encourage members to seek God by his Spirit and through the participation of music, song, prayers and sacramental acts of healing and exorcism. The aim is to remain open to the move of the Spirit and to be flexible in responding to God’s call, in whatever manner and means he might speak. Jesus promised to send the Spirit in Acts 1:8; to bring about transformation within the hearts of believers and we read about the fulfilment of this promise in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers who were gathering in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost. This event gave birth to the Church and has become a motivating factor for the Pentecostal movement and the various waves within in the movement.

The Holy Spirit remains the fundamental figure in demonstrating God’s power through miraculous acts, the Spirit is active in the distribution of gifting and equips believers with the necessary *charismata* to become ‘ministers,’ ‘pastors’ or ‘evangelists,’ by filling them with power and faith (Nel 2019:39-40). According to Banda (2019), African Pentecostalism places a great deal on the emphasis on pre-modern beliefs about resisting evil spirits, demons and witchcraft. Instead of pointing out that believers embody the temple where the Spirit dwells, African Pentecostal prophets encourage congregations to avoid consulting traditional spirit mediums and practitioners, but to turn to them for guidance. In essence, this suggest that the power of the Holy Spirit can only be received by the believer through the intercession and agency of the prophets. African Pentecostal prophets see the Holy Spirit as a powerful force rather than as a personal entity. The Holy Spirit

has no relevance to technological and scientific issues, and He is limited in His sanctifying power (Banda, 2019).

Members pledge allegiance to the *minister* even though they might be aware that the kind of teaching that they are receiving may not be Biblical. Often affirmation is received by a positive response from the congregants each time the 'man or woman of God' performs a miracle of healing and deliverance that brings glory to God. When *The Business Guide Africa* reported about Prophet Penuel Mnguni who ordered a woman to enter a deep freezer for at least thirty minutes, he convinced the people that the woman's experience was pleasant and that the refrigerator was very hot, although the fridge was on. When this was taken to social media, many people were in uproar against what they considered to be an indecent human act. However, many others came to Mnguni's defence, stating that it was the power of God at work (Najib, 2017). Loyalty to the leader is seen as important within the movement and this supersedes any questioning with regards to doctrine.

Words such as 'breakthrough, healing and deliverance' have become the new Christian jargon. The term 'born again' has taken on a new meaning, then just the phenomenon of gaining faith in Jesus Christ. For neo-Pentecostals 'born again' Christians are to live an abundant life in the here and now. The goal of this way of life includes spiritual superiority and a prosperity gospel, as well as a strong emphasis on the virtues of 'separation from the world' (Anderson, 2013:166). This process of 'separation from the world' is understood as a 'break' with the achievement of cultural past, social relationships, and faith practices (Van Dijk, 2009). Every practice that is done within the neo-Pentecostal movement is done within the parameters of its own hermeneutics.

Scripture is often used to support such practices, and an example of this is found in the longer ending of Mark 16:15-18; "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." Although famously used by neo-Pentecostalist to support their practices, Mark 16:8 is often considered to be the original end and the longer ending to be an addition. Mark 16:9-20 was a later extension and is not found in the original manuscripts. According to Guzik (2011), approximately 100 other ancient manuscripts, which had been translated into other languages by then, do not include this section. The two oldest Greek manuscripts, dating from 325 and 340 AD, do not contain this section. Mark 16:9-20 is marked with an asterisk in some ancient manuscripts to indicate that they were alterations to the original text. The verses have no teaching of implication that is not taught elsewhere.

Other passages that are used to support the teachings and practices of neo-Pentecostalist are also considered. It is with concern that such research is needed to be conducted amongst the neo-Pentecostalist movement within Southern African churches to consider certain peculiar practices which are rapidly becoming a norm. Moreover, these teachings and practices continue to shape

the contemporary African church in a certain light, causing public opinion to turn against the Christian religion as such. Consequently, this dissertation presents a critical review about the hermeneutical practices amongst African Neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa, and to propose recommendations to the field of neo-Pentecostalist hermeneutics that relate to the outcomes that were identified.

Neo-Pentecostals desired 'greater' spiritual enlightenment and adopted into their hermeneutics teachings practices such as combating demonic forces, speaking 'into the atmosphere', speaking life rather than death, commanding and claiming, taking authority and having the ability to be the master of one's own destiny. Such teachings are publicised widely through books, healing crusades, social media and television. In this regard, Asamoah-Gyadu (2015:75) asserts that Africa's supernaturalistic and primal worldview can be accredited for the overwhelming growth of the Pentecostal movement. This seems also to be the reason why African hermeneutical practices are easily accepted amongst neo-Pentecostals in Southern Africa. With this in mind, the researcher evaluated the development of Pentecostal hermeneutics since the 1970s and then compared and investigated it with a description of hermeneutics that inform practices in neo-Pentecostalism.

Pentecostal-Charismatic churches have gained increasing popularity throughout Africa (Meyer, 2007:5), and moved from an outskirts position to becoming a force to be reckoned with, within African Christianity and sub-Saharan African societies (Lindhardt, 2015:1). Pentecostal churches had in some cases gained converts from groups that only practiced traditional indigenous religions, although a significant number of first-generation converts were already Christians, before becoming born-again Pentecostals (Lindhardt, 2015:1). Part of the reason for converts to Pentecostalism was because of its hermeneutical practices which have become relatable to an African context. The movement whose reading of the Bible was once characterised by historical-grammatical exegesis, an emphasis on the experiential, the significance of the community of faith and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The aim of this research is to explore the hermeneutical practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches that are characterised by manipulation, and to consider the implications on Southern African churches if such behaviour continues to get out of hand.

1.3.6 Practices in neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa

Over the recent years, we have become aware of some alarming practices amongst the African neo-Pentecostal churches and the direction that the movement is heading to. Below are a few examples of the kind of practices taking place within some of the neo-Pentecostal megachurches within Southern Africa.

An article in *The Citizen* lists five unconventional 'miracles' performed by certain ministers from various neo-Pentecostal churches. In the article, NemaKonde (2015:4) writes extensively by exposing what these practices entail, ranging from people behaving like animals to eating uncommon things, and all these acts are done as part of a demonstration of the power and glory of God. One particular pastor led women from his congregation on to the beach and ordered them to strip naked, so he could kiss their buttocks. The validation of such odd behaviour was supposedly supported by Scripture; the aim was for the pastor to help these women attract godly marriages as ordained by God in Genesis 2:24 ("Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh").

Another minister known as Reverend Njohi from Propeller Redemption Church informed his congregation that to draw closer to God, they should not put on any underwear. According to the pastor, undergarments are 'ungodly', and people need to be free in the body and spirit so that Jesus Christ could enter their lives. *The Citizen* reporter NemaKonde (2015:4) comments that Reverend Njohi personally inspects the female congregants to make sure that they do not have any underwear on. He strongly warned his congregation of the grave consequences should they decide to disobey his instruction. The move of the Spirit and the pursuit of living a holy life may drive these demands, rather than fear alone. Any disobedience to the 'man of God' would be considered a direct rebellion against the Lord.

The third act, described in the article, is by a young pastor from Pretoria who made the members of his church undress while he sat on top of them and prayed for them. It was reported that the congregation should not resist the power and 'fire' of the Holy Spirit as heat filled their bodies. The pastor explained that what they are experiencing was not a strange thing, but a similar account of what happened on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit rested like tongues of fire on the believers who gathered in the upper room (Acts 2:3). Although at face value these practices seem to have sexual connotations, ministers claim that their instructions are Biblical and 'Spirit led' in helping believers encounter God.

These so-called self-proclaimed prophets also assert to possess the power to make things edible. NemaKonde's article goes on to explain that one pastor claimed to turn petrol into pineapple juice, and the reason was to "take their faith to another level to connect with God." Grass was turned into a meal that would fill both physical and spiritual hunger; and the key motivating passage of Scripture was found in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." He recounts that the Pentecostal pastor typically refers to God by the name *Jehovah Jireh*, who is able to provide for all needs, even satisfying those who are hungry. However, this was not the end of the 'miraculous acts' that self-named prophet Lesego demonstrated; congregants were supposed to witness that fire was turned into ice. This represented the "freshness" brought to one's life by the demonstrating power of the Holy Spirit. The founder of the church, pastor Lesego, said: "If I say, the fire is ice, the fire listens to me and

what will come out will be ice. The fire must obey and listen” (Nemakonde, 2015:4). Ministers like pastor Lesego are unapologetic for their behaviour and hold firmly to selective passages of Scripture like 1 Thessalonians 5:19 that states, “the Holy Spirit should not be quenched.”

The last example given by *The Citizen* is of a self-proclaimed prophet, Penuel Mnguni, the leader of End Times Disciples Ministries in Soshanguve, north of Pretoria. A snake supposedly became a bar of chocolate that he served to the congregation. According to the report, Prophet Mnguni informed the people that he has “the authority to change everything into anything and it will obey because of our authority.” The same prophet demonstrated the power of the Spirit at work when he claimed to turn a congregant into a horse, so he could ride on his back (Nemakonde, 2015:4).

The reporter Dlamini of *Times Live* (2018) investigated an account of a well-known prophet, Lethebo or better known as the ‘*Prophet of Doom*’ who made headlines when he used the multi-insect spray Doom at a supposed night of prayer in November 2017, in the Limpopo province (in Mookgopong). Lethebo sprayed the toxic pesticide on his congregants, claiming that the spray had healing power to deliver people from illnesses. From the photos that have been uploaded on social media, many elderly people were targeted. These members come to church with the hope and expectation to receive a supernatural blessing and healing from God through the prophet; therefore, they seemingly do not find it uncommon being sprayed with a toxic pesticide like Doom or drinking Jik. The pattern of each event seems to be similar – the purpose is supposed to give God the glory for working through the prophets and pastors in bringing about supernatural healing and deliverance to the ill and oppressed.

Yet, the South African public and authorities found it offensive, disrespectful and risky, spraying Doom in people’s faces and claiming it to be part of the work of God. This act caused an outcry and led a group of protesters and journalists to gather outside the offices of the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) commission to hand a memorandum of demands against false prophets to the commission’s chairperson. The prophet was sternly warned of his actions and was told that if he continues, he would be prosecuted (this story is discussed further in chapter 2).

In a more recent stunt on 24 February 2019, a well-known pastor amongst the neo-Pentecostal circles, Alph Lukau, leader of Alleluia Ministries International in Johannesburg claimed that he performed a miracle by raising a dead man by the name of Eliot to life. A YouTube video of the church service shows how this ‘miracle’ took place. In an extensive article (Mouser, 2019); *Pastor in South Africa Claims He Raised a Man from the Dead*, a detailed account is given of what transpired the Sunday morning when the miracle took place. The church as always was full to its capacity with devoted followers praying, singing and dancing as they do each week with the hope and expectation that miracles will take place. It was around two in the afternoon, when a hearse arrived outside the church carrying a corpse that was supposedly about to be taken to Zimbabwe. A woman who appeared to be one of the leaders in the church interrupted the service by frantically alerting pastor Lukau that there was the body of a dead person outside the church.

Upon arrival, Pastor Lukau met the family of the deceased and spoke to the landlord of the place where the dead man lived, who was very emotional. She told the Pastor that, "He got sick. He got sicker and sicker and then he started coughing a lot Friday. Then we took him to the hospital. And then the doctor said cause he's got no papers, they can't help him, until we send him to surgery doctor. That is where he died in my hands" (as reported in Mouser, 2019, emphasis in original). The Pastor confirmed that the man was deceased, and according to the man's brother the corpse had been laying at the mortuary since the time of his passing. Thereafter, the pastor bent over the dead body and repeated Jesus' name several times. The pastor proceeded to call out to the man by name and commanded him to rise! Immediately, the man sat up with his mouth wide open as the people stood astonished, cheering and praising God for what they had just witnessed (Mouser, 2019).

Mouser states in the write-up that this apparent 'miracle' caused a lot of controversy; while members of Alleluia Ministries International were fully convinced that this really took place, people on social media were less convinced. On Twitter, various participants in the debate pointed out problems with the alleged miracle; for one, the 'body' was sweating when the coffin was opened; others said that it was obvious that the man was breathing before being resurrected. Another took a screenshot of the video and pointed out what appeared to be a cell phone in the man's pocket.

Lukau has been the subject of controversy in the past, although apparently, he was never investigated by the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) until now. "There are no such things as miracles. They are made up to try and get money from the hopelessness of our people," said the CRL Rights Commission as reported by the BBC (Mouser, 2019).

These are a few examples of the practices and interpretive reasoning that take place amongst African neo-Pentecostals churches in Southern Africa. A great concern has been raised by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) about this interpretive laxity, which had originally led to the establishment of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission). The establishment of this institution was passed in Parliament *inter alia* with the purpose to investigate false pastors and self-proclaimed prophets who prey on the superstitious beliefs of the congregation by enriching themselves illegally (Nel, 2019:27).

Ministers and leaders belonging to these churches strongly believe that their practices are biblically sound and accountable and that they have every right to continue. Many members belonging to the neo-Pentecostal movement are committed and faithful to the church, and this is evidenced in their loyalty to the prophet, attendance, participation and financial assistance. They find it difficult to understand why anyone would not believe in the existence of God and his power at work in the daily happenings of each individual. For them, the Christian life is one of faith and experiences with the living God who is not a figment of the imagination.

The evidence of God at work can clearly be seen in various aspects such as the gift of speaking in tongues, healing of the sick and deliverance of the demonically possessed and oppressed. God is all powerful to transform every area of a person's life and he demonstrates his power and presence through 'signs and wonders'. For this reason, Neo-Pentecostals believe that there is overwhelming evidence from the Scripture that support their practices and there is nothing illicit in what is done. They argue that nothing should be regarded as impossible when pertaining to the supernatural; that religion should not be considered in light of logic and science. God supersedes these elements and most importantly he has entrusted the task to ordinary human beings in demonstrating his power. Considering what has been discussed thus far, a critical review is essential in considering hermeneutical practices amongst African Neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa.

1.4 Research problem

"Rather than just attacking the users of snakes and oil," it is time to reconsider the important debate on the way neo-Pentecostal and similar churches interpret the Bible to justify some of their practices (Nel 2019:26). It is vital to consider its hermeneutics to determine what the outcome of these practices are and to make recommendations that will try and alleviate any possible problems. Keener (2016:43) expresses a similar concern on the subject that apart from scholars' safeguards and attention to historical context, certain charismatic interpretation of the Bible is undisciplined and badly in need of correction. It is with this in mind that the researcher described the new classical Pentecostal hermeneutics developed since the 1970s and compared it with a description of the hermeneutical practices of neo-Pentecostalism to examine whether the hermeneutical practices of neo-Pentecostalist are undisciplined and in need of correction. This was determined by an evaluation of the use of the Bible in sermons and in explanation of practices by leaders of the movement.

1.5 Aims and objectives

1.5.1 Aims

Data collection, analysis, and interpretation are part of research. A systematic research process takes place within established frameworks and in accordance with existing guidelines, defining the objective, handling the data, and communicating the findings. Researchers use frameworks and guidelines to determine what types of information to include in their studies, how to conduct the studies, and what suggestions they might make based on the collected data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:18).

The aim of this research evolved from the discussion as outlined in the problem statement. This study aims to investigate the kind of hermeneutical practices that take place amongst neo-Pentecostals in Southern Africa, and to discuss what implications such practices have on African neo-Pentecostal churches. The research explores whether valid hermeneutical principles are applied, and it delineates possible hermeneutical guidelines that could be useful in countering the hermeneutical practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa.

1.5.2 Objectives

The research objectives, formulated from the central research question, are:

- To explore the hermeneutical practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa;
- To describe the reasons and justification of these practices;
- To describe the new classical Pentecostal hermeneutics which developed since the 1970s;
- To compare the classical Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics in order to propose corrections to the neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics that are related to the practices that were identified; and
- To develop guidelines that will be helpful regarding the hermeneutical practices amongst neo-Pentecostals in Southern Africa.

1.6 Research questions

The main question that directs the research study was concerned with investigating southern African neo-Pentecostal practices and its hermeneutical justification in order to compare it to the Pentecostal hermeneutic that emerged in the 1970s and in conjunction with early Pentecostal Bible reading practices. The research questions are:

- What are the hermeneutical practices of southern African neo-Pentecostals?
- How are these practices justified in terms of hermeneutical perspectives?
- What are the implications of such practices on African neo-Pentecostal churches?
- What are the new classical Pentecostal hermeneutics which developed since the 1970s?
- What guidelines can be suggested regarding hermeneutical practices amongst neo-Pentecostals in Southern Africa to prevent abuses?

1.7 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument is that some of the ministers belonging to African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa abuse Scripture and it leads to an abuse of members of the church.

These hermeneutical principles are compared against those of Pentecostalism and some corrective theological principles are proposed.

1.8 Research design and methodology

1.8.1 Research design

Research designs are developed at the beginning of a research project as they provide a rationale for the investigation and details of the task. Furthermore, research designs can also be described as the defining features of a research project as they provide a structure to follow, gives some direction, and provide a roadmap for data collection, and specifies the sampling process (Babbie, 2010:113; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:70). The research design therefore determines the quality of a research study.

The researcher conducted a comparative literature search which entails a review of existing sources related to the research topic as well as a study of media descriptions of both the practices attributed to neo-Pentecostal groups, and the explanation of such practices of leaders in order to describe their hermeneutical angles. This formed a plausible basis for the study to integrate the different components of this study in a coherent and logical way. As explained in Templier and Pare (2015), there are six steps involved in conducting a literature research that was followed and can be iterative when considering the research design:

Formulating the research questions and objectives,

Searching the extant literature,

Screening for inclusion,

Assessing the quality of primary studies,

Extracting data, and

Analysing the data.

1.8.2 Research methodology

The method of Documental Revision was used in the collecting of data. This method involves a new investigation or research that usually relies on documents and other reliable sources of information that are already available and trusted as sources of information (Bowen, 2009). Data was retrieved from reflective journals, newspaper articles, news reports and reliable literature. Smith (2008:214) highlights the importance of a literature study by purporting that it can assist to avoid “duplicating research that has already been done; identify gaps in the existing research that call for further study; interact with the most recent theories and empirical findings; and narrow

[one's] research idea in the light of greater insight into the field." Several objectives are accomplished through a literature review by sharing with the reader the outcomes of previous research that are closely related to the study in question. The study provides a connection between a topic and the literature, filling in gaps and expanding previous studies on the subject. It is a means to establish the significance of the study and to compare the results to those of similar studies (Creswell, 2003:29-30).

The starting point was doing a general search on the subject matter to gain an overview of key terms used in the field. The researcher requested guidance on material available from the library at NWU. Thereafter, the information was filtered and documented, and this served as a method for determining its relevance. The next step was using a more specific search engine such as Google Scholar where journals were accessed. The latest scholarly articles were sorted by date which was helpful to see what the newest developments in the debate are. In discussing distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutical aspects, the discussion was descriptive, based on intra-Biblical or Spirit-inspired readings as discussed in publications of early as well as later Pentecostal scholarship, exploring the hermeneutical practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa.

There is a fine distinction between exegesis and hermeneutics. On one hand, hermeneutics is the field of study which is concerned with how one interprets the Bible. Exegesis, on the other hand relates to the actual interpretation of the Bible by drawing the meaning out of the Biblical text. A potential exegetical method is suggested for African Pentecostal church when interpreting Scripture to ensure Biblical thinking.

In summary, the following methodology was followed:

- Selected sources/articles/journals were read and evaluated
- Subtopics and patterns were developed and properly organised
- A working thesis was developed
- The research paper was organised and typed out by using the findings from the sources/papers/journals/articles

1.9 Clarifications of concepts

As part of this study, it was important to interpret and explain concepts so that they had clear meaning that could have varied depending on context and setting. The charismatic movement is referred to as a renewal movement in Western Christianity, especially when operating within older and more established historic denominations; however, in sub-Saharan Africa, the expression 'charismatic' relates more to the new wave of independent Pentecostal movements, indicated in

Western Christianity as 'neo-Pentecostal' (Menziés & Menziés, 2000:447). Proper distinctions between terms are made clear to know how the terms are utilised in this study.

- Pentecostalism

Pentecostals derive their name from the feast and day of 'Pentecost' that comes from the Greek word *pentēkostē* (Πεντηκοστή), meaning 'fifty'. In the Book of Acts, the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost marked the birth of the Church as it made manifest miraculous spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues (Yong, 2005:19). A brief historical background of Pentecostalism has been discussed in the Preliminary literature study.

- Neo-Pentecostalism

Neo-Pentecostalism flowed historically from the Pentecostal movement during the 1980s and later as a separate movement emphasising independent churches and groups, in Africa under the leadership of apostles and prophets. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:12) defines the term as "a group of Christians who emphasise salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit [...] in which the 'Spirit phenomenon' (including speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, healing and miracles) are perceived as a historic continuity of the experiences of the early church [...]". The neo-Pentecostal televangelist movements in North America also influence churches in Africa with their mega-church philosophies and influential leaders who drive entrepreneurship and power (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:1). The term 'neo-Pentecostalism' is developed at length within the literature research focusing on African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics.

- Hermeneutics

An understanding of biblical hermeneutics is knowing how texts of the Bible are interpreted (Got Questions Ministries: 2019). It alludes to the art of attaining an understanding of Scripture and explores how the Bible is read and interpreted as texts that originated in a different era of time and context that differs from the modern world. In Biblical hermeneutics, interpretation depends on Biblical studies that comprises of both the Old and New Testament and its exegesis against the background of the texts. The aim is to develop standards for a valid interpretation of Scripture (Nel, 2019:2). Pentecostal hermeneutics varies and reflects diverse theological paradigms and socio-cultural beliefs as well as diverse theological training in reading the Bible. Hermeneutics as a method of interpreting Biblical texts requires examining the criteria for interpreting the text and their connection to its meaning (Gräbe, 1997:14). Pentecostal scholars differ in the way they approach hermeneutics; some hold to a postmodern approach in a qualified sense while others contend for more traditional approaches (Noel, 2007). It has been argued that African Biblical hermeneutics comprises the following methodological distinctives: communal reading and interpretation, Bible as

power, Africa and Africans in the Bible; Africa as a source of interpretation of the Bible and the Bible as a source of interpretation of Africa (Adamo, 2016).

- Exegesis

As part of a theological interpretation, exegesis refers to the application of critical analysis to a passage of the Bible. The word itself comes from a Greek word meaning “to lead out of.” Whenever possible, the goal when studying a Bible text within its context is to determine its original meaning. It takes a number of tools and strategies to convey what the writer intends the reader to take away from the exegesis. It entails comprehending and understanding both the literary and cultural context of Bible verses, then exploring the relationships between them and other Scripture verses to discover the message God intended. (Utley, 2017:108).

- Eisegesis

This is the method of interpreting passages through reading a particular belief into that passage that is previously held and that is not at all evident or clear in the passage itself. Imagination, exploration, and application of eisegesis are all interconnected (what message do I want to present) and comprise eisegesis (what are the implications of the message I present?). Eisegesis does not examine the meaning of the words in a text, their relationships to one another, or their context, as well as performing cross-referencing with links between passages and trying to better understand the meaning of the text (Got Questions Ministries: 2019). In regard to African neo-Pentecostalist hermeneutics, eisegetic principles of interpretation are common with the aim of bringing about liberation and transformation in Africa. Instead of interpreting the Bible and God according to Eurocentric Biblical scholars' hermeneutical superiority and ideology, African biblical scholars can closer examine the Bible and God through the lens of Scripture and African culture (Adamo, 2015).

- Southern African neo-Pentecostal churches

According to Anderson (1979), various African movements are grouped together and referred to as ‘Spirit-type churches’. The concern of these churches is focused on helping the people to live Spirit-filled, faithful lives and having a personal experience with God through the supernatural. Zionist and Apostolic churches form part of these Spirit-type churches. It is important to note, that in Africa there are some large independent churches that have emerged independently of the Pentecostal movement and can best be characterised as New Prophetic Pentecostal churches, which are the fourth wave of Pentecostalism in South Africa, according to Kgatle (2019). Examples of some of these churches that have been considered for this study are the End Times Disciples Ministries in Soshanguve, Alleluis Ministries International in Johannesburg, Bushiri Ministries in Pretoria, the Maranke church in Zimbabwe and the Church of All Nations in Nigeria. For this study, the researcher limited the literature research to certain independent churches belonging to the neo-

Pentecostalist movement within the southern African region. The reason for this choice is to focus on specific churches who has come into the limelight because of their practices, and to understand the type of hermeneutics that are applied.

1.10 Ethical considerations

The researcher’s aim is to promote knowledge, truth and avoidance of error. The researcher conducted his work in the following manner with:

Honesty and fairness in reporting and collecting of data, results, methods and procedures;

Objectivity and integrity; acting with sincerity as well as consistency of thought and action;

Openness to criticism and new ideas; and

A commitment to maintaining intellectual property rights, honouring copyright, and properly acknowledging all contributions to research.

1.11 Classification of chapters

1. Chapter One: Introduction and Problem Statement
2. Chapter Two: A description of abuses in neo-Pentecostal groups
3. Chapter Three: Hermeneutical basis of abuses in neo-Pentecostal churches
4. Chapter Four: Classical Pentecostal hermeneutics
5. Chapter Five: Comparison between classical Pentecostal hermeneutics and the hermeneutics found in neo-Pentecostal circles
6. Chapter Six: Recommendations and proposal for further study

1.12 Schematic presentation of research procedures

The research can be outlined according to the following schematic presentation.

Research title: Hermeneutical practices amongst Neo-Pentecostalist African churches in Southern Africa.		
Research question	Aim and objectives	Research method
What are the hermeneutical practices amongst Southern African Neo-Pentecostals?	The aim of this study is to explore and investigate the hermeneutical practices amongst African Neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa.	Use of media and other reports to describe practices making headlines.

What are the reasons for hermeneutical practices amongst neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa?	To identify and evaluate what the contributing factors are that prevent ministers from conducting proper hermeneutical principles.	Comparative literature analysis.
How have Pentecostal hermeneutics developed since the 1970s?	To describe the new classical Pentecostal hermeneutics that developed since the 1970s.	Comparative literature analysis and own observations.
What are the current implications of such practices?	To describe implications of these practices in terms of current hermeneutical perspectives within these churches.	Comparative literature analysis and own observations.
What possible exegetical methods should be used when interpreting Scripture?	To describe exegetical methods that should be implemented to interpret Scripture correctly within a Neo-Pentecostal context.	Literature Research as well as a study of relevant passages in the Bible.
What are the hermeneutical principles that can be implemented in an African context which could possibly alleviate any hermeneutical abuses of Scripture?	To compare the classical Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics to propose corrections to the Neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics that are related to the abuses that are identified.	Literature Research as well as a study of relevant passages in the Bible.

What hermeneutical guidelines could be suggested that might be useful against elevating hermeneutical religious abuses?	To delineate possible hermeneutical guidelines that could be useful against the hermeneutical religious abuses amongst African Neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa.	Literature Research as well as a study of relevant passages in the Bible.
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CHAPTER 2

A DESCRIPTION OF ABUSES IN NEO-PENTECOSTAL GROUPS

2.1 Introduction

A preliminary statement of the research focus, the research question, and the aims and objectives of the study are provided in the first chapter. In this chapter, the intent will be to present a description of the abuses in neo-Pentecostal groups with a focus on the practices that have evolved within the three Pentecostal waves. An overview of Pentecostalism is presented leading up to the neo-Pentecostal movement. The significant events of rather bizarre practices within neo-Pentecostalism are brought under scrutiny to determine what constitutes abuses within the movement. While abuse is viewed as a broad term, the aim of this chapter is to provide an appropriate definition of abuse within the movement in relation to the practices among neo-Pentecostals in African. In addition, by defining abuse correctly within the movement, the factors and implications of such abuse can be discovered.

2.2 An overview of Pentecostalism

A survey analysis done by Gregory Smith based on the results from the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey (2008), revealed the following statistics about Pentecostalism: Pentecostal denominations are diverse culturally and geographically. They present very high levels of religious dedication and church attendance. Pentecostal churches are more likely than historically black churches to report at least weekly attendance than more than half of all members in historically black churches do. Pentecostal denominations that are historically black have more than two-thirds black members (68%), compared with 92% of members of these denominations overall. According to the survey, Pentecostals also tend to earn low incomes and have lower levels of education than the public at large and other Christians (Pew Research Center, 2008 sic). These statistics are based on black Pentecostal churches in America; however, it is necessary to consider these results in an African Pentecostal context.

There are vast religious groups, cultures and beliefs housed on the African continent, a prominent example of this is the emergence of African neo-Pentecostals in conjunction with other Pentecostal groups. Currently, the Southern Africa region, has witnessed booming membership growth within the neo-Pentecostal churches, and this has been accompanied by peculiar practices. The extent of growth in Pentecostal movements varies across the sub-Saharan African region; at the upper end include Southern Africa – representing more than 20% of national populations (Pew Research, 2006).

Research provided by the World Christian Database on a survey of 10 countries of Pentecostals shows that the movement in Africa represent 12%, of Africa's population of nearly 890 million people (Grossman, 2015). People belonging to both classical and neo-Pentecostal denominations make up this group, which is growing expeditiously. Based on their findings, most Charismatic members of non-Pentecostal denominations in Africa are members of Catholic churches and Protestant churches. By 1970, the number of adherents to Christianity increased from about 10 million to 144 million, according to the database. Christianity is estimated to be practiced by 400 million people in Africa, or 46% of the total population. With the Pentecostal Apostolic Faith Mission reaching the level of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa in terms of popularity, Pentecostalism is now the second most popular movement in South Africa after the Catholic Church (Murphy, 2006).

The general doctrine and central practice shaped the Pentecostal experience as the 'tongue speaking experience' following miraculous signs and wonders; however, as Pentecostalism developed, there has been a drastic shift in its core practices. Horn (1989:01) notes that theology is never independent; it is always influenced by other movements in history. This is evident when observing the three waves within Pentecostalism and its development which has been fashioned by its own doctrine and practices. The movement has gone through a process of modification and has evolved into religious sectors under the name Christianity. Currently, there are many churches who do not view Pentecostalism as exclusive or even what may be termed Classical Pentecostalism, however, traditional practices have been supplemented with questionable experiences and styles of worship. There is a greater desire than just speaking in tongues; spiritual enlightenment through the 'men of God' is more popular demonstrated by practices such as combating demonic forces, speaking 'into the atmosphere', speaking life rather than death, commanding and claiming, and taking authority of one's own destiny.

Neo-Pentecostalism has become a dominating movement among southern African churches and has brought about its own set of opportunities and obstacles. There are many reasons that make Pentecostals unique; some of these distinctive factors are their spirituality and consciousness of the Holy Spirit, the empowerment of the Spirit's power and the manifestation of spiritual gifts (McKim, 2014:233). Pentecostalism in the 21st Century is a fad that speaks to humanity's spiritual emptiness, reaching beyond creeds into the core of our religiousness and rationality. Cox (2001:81) considers Pentecostalism a benevolent movement that can draw people closer to God. A marginalised and underprivileged society that struggles to find dignity and identity has become a target for the African Pentecostal movement. African Pentecostalism is rooted in deep beliefs and cultural values and is aimed at meeting various needs of the people. Ministers and so-called prophets are attracting large crowds and has developed an acceptable style of 'doing church'. In the continuous confusion of unconventional practices, it becomes difficult to distinguish between

cultic practices and genuine congregations when these services are spontaneous and led by the Spirit. Many Africans attach greater importance to Pentecostalism due to its combination of African religious expressions and mystical elements (Anderson, 2016:312).

Besides Kenya and Nigeria, South Africa was one of the first African countries to receive Pentecostalism when it was first introduced in 1908 (Mashau, 2013:16). Additionally, a large majority of South Africans (around 12,5 million) belong to a non-mainstream denomination, and Pentecostal churches in South Africa have experienced rapid growth in membership (Bernstein, 2008a:06). Nkurunziza (2013:60) comments that locals have been engrossed in the movement through the faith and healing campaigns, deliverances, prophetic utterances, and spiritual revival. According to Anderson (as cited in Pondani, 2019:23-24), three distinct types of African Pentecostal churches are identified in South Africa, namely the Pentecostal Mission Churches (PMCs), Independent Pentecostal Churches (IPCs) and the Indigenous Pentecostal-type churches (IPTCs). Pentecostal-like churches can be classified into several groups, but this study examines the neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa, led by prophetic figures better known as the 'man of God'.

Pondani (2019:23) mentions that these so-called prophets are not always keen to function under the umbrella of Zionist or any other African denomination even though there are similar threads in their style of worship. These ministers are most comfortable to establish their churches in rural areas amongst the marginally poor and uneducated people. Most of the churches do not own any properties to use for worship services; instead, they use tents, classrooms, and open fields. Kalu (2008:15) finds that locals tend to notice these churches by their names and theology, as they focus on evangelism, healing, and deliverance crusades, and by their theological emphasis on prosperity, holiness, and miracles. They offer worship in Pentecostal style but are not necessarily affiliated with a Pentecostal denomination. Thus, the aim in this chapter is to provide a description of the abuses and the misuse of authority carried out by neo-Pentecostal African churches that have been established by self-titled prophets who emphasise the centrality of the prophetic in their practices.

2.3 Abuse within Christian history

Abuse and the misuse of authority can be traced throughout church history. Over the centuries, many leaders have risen to the occasion to form distinct movements within religious groups and more specifically within the Christian faith to endorse a specific agenda. One example of this is the Crusades, which were formed as a series of Religious wars in Western Asia and Europe. This movement was supported and at times directed by the Roman Catholic Church and extended far beyond the original 11th century expeditions to the Holy Land, both in terms of chronology and scope. The crusades differed from other religious conflicts in that military campaign promised the

advantage of spiritual benefits such as the forgiveness for all confessed sin for those who totally committed to the movement. A specific agenda was enacted, resulting in an increase of power and intolerance between Christians and Muslims and between Christians and Jews, heretics and pagans (Rooney & Miller, 2016).

Another example of (corrective) wrong practices is related to Martin Luther, a well-known reformer who was a pioneer in the Christian faith. Born in Eisleben, Germany in 1483, he became one of the most important figures in Western history. Luther spent his early days as a devoted monk and scholar, but things changed dramatically when he penned what is known as his "95 Theses". A document that is considered an attack on the corrupt practice of the Catholic Church of selling "indulgence" to forgive sins. His theses revolved around two important beliefs; that the Bible is a central religious authority, and people can only come to salvation by faith and not by their deeds. This caused division between the Protestant reforms and the Catholic Church. Luther opposed the way Catholic popes and priests manipulated the church, and his writings changed the course of Western religious and cultural history (Hillerbrand, 2020).

It is evident that throughout the history of the church, ministers and leaders in position of power have abused and misused their authority and privileges. This, however, has not gotten better, in fact, there has been an ever-increasing number of church groups, particularly those belonging to the African neo-Pentecostal movement who are engaged in certain practices of hyper-authority. Nel (2019:7) explains that those belonging to the movement are of the belief that they are living within the larger narrative world of the Bible, where the supernatural and eschatological determined the apocalyptic worldview which was common to Jesus and the apostles. They believed their charismatic experiences are in continuity with the early church of the first three centuries and therefore this becomes the basis of continuing in this fashion. The behaviour patterns of such leaders can at times be demanding, dominating, controlling, and manipulative, and their practices have become somewhat convincing enough to make church members place full confidence and assurance in the teachings and practices of the ministry. Gernert (2001:122-123) argues that such behaviour is self-serving power of direct relevance to abuse – meaning that these actions are used to force control on others, and they exhibit an improper role for the exercise of power. The objective therefore is to carefully consider African neo-Pentecostal practices and its abuses by providing an informed understanding and reason behind these practices. It is also vital to carefully consider these objectives as outlined in the problem statement, by not only investigating the kind of hermeneutical practices amongst neo-Pentecostals in Southern Africa, but also by discussing both the implications that such practices have on African neo-Pentecostal churches, and whether valid hermeneutical principles are applied. The goal would then be to delineate possible hermeneutical guidelines that could be useful against the hermeneutical practices amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches. To attain the outlined aims, the focus will be on describing abuses within African neo-Pentecostal groups in relation to their practices.

The society that we live in often takes the term 'abuse' for granted and carelessly relate it to different experiences. Henzel (1997:4) discusses that one of the most common misinterpretations is to seek the meaning of the word 'abuse' in the "perception of abuse" rather than in the actual abuse itself. He goes on to say that in the 1980s and 1990s, the prevailing idea was that subjective perceptions rather than objective behaviour determined whether something was 'abusive'. He notes that this has permeated academia, the media, and even the judicial system to an alarming degree. It has had a significant impact on society and has led to some skewed and irregular developments about how abuse is to be understood. The term abuse has often been used in court systems as both a weapon of the prosecution and a shield of the defence (Henzel, 1997:6). In the context of this study, the term abuse will be focused on African neo-Pentecostal churches and their practices.

2.4 Definition of the term abuse

Due to the nature and complexity of the term 'abuse', it is essential to consider its meaning within the context of African neo-Pentecostalism and to suitably arrive at an appropriate and accurate definition. Abuse is a familiar experience within Africa and is sadly woven into the livelihood of its culture. South Africa as a country has experienced its fair share of abuse over the years and more recently the subject has been a contemporary topic. There have been overwhelming reports about women and child abuse, and over the recent years there have been increasing reports on the number of abusive acts reported as gender-based violence that has ignited outrage, street protests and outcries on social media. An alarming report was released on 6 September 2019 by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) with regards to the number of reported rape cases that rose from 39% to 41% in the year 2019, the highest in four years. According to the report, South Africa has one of the world's highest gender-based violence rates in the world (as cited in the Alberton Record, 2019:5). These violent acts are a shocking reality of the type of abuses that has become a norm in society. The focus of this research however is not directed toward domestic or gender base violence and abuse. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the fact that abuse in Southern Africa is common, and it is not restricted to just one area. Abuse can be expressed in various aspects of life and can affect people or groups socially, physically, mentally, economically, academically and even spiritually. It has been clearly recognised that abuse is experienced in different contexts - not withstanding abuse within the religious sector. According to Reach Beyond Domestic Violence (2017:1-4), six common types of abuse patterns are explained and are identifiable in possibly every society around the world. The six types of abuse described as follows in the table below:

<p>Physical abuse: This includes physically assaulting someone by hitting, slapping, kicking, choking, or physically holding them against their will.</p>
<p>Sexual abuse: form of physical abuse that may include both physical and non-physical elements, including rape and other compulsory sexual activity.</p>
<p>Verbal/Emotional abuse: although signs of physical abuse may be visible, the effects of verbal and psychological abuse attack self-esteem. These are often negative words used to break a person inside.</p>
<p>Mental/Psychological abuse: mental or psychological abuse occurs when a person burns a sense of the other's mental well-being and health through a series of actions and words. It is often about making victims question their own sanity.</p>
<p>Financial/Economic abuse: this deal with power and control, abusers use all the means necessary to maintain that control. This often involves finance. This may be self-harm, or you may be in control of someone else's finances. Such abuses often lead to poor credit ratings, blacklisting, and product recalls.</p>
<p>Cultural/Identity abuse: it occurs when the perpetrator uses aspects of the victim's cultural identity to cause suffering or as a means of control. It does not allow anyone to listen to their beliefs, but rather to dominate the minority.</p>

Table 1: Six types of Abuse Patterns

For one to grasp a detailed understanding of the term, it would be essential to look at how it can be defined. According to the Gale Encyclopaedia of Medicine, the word “abuse” refers to acts of deliberate harm or injury to another person. The Oxford English Dictionary defines abuse as the “use [of] (something) to bad effect or for a bad purpose, example; *the judge abused his power by imposing the fines*” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Abuse, according to the Webster Dictionary is “a corrupt practice or custom, a deceitful act: to put to a wrong or improper use, abuse a privilege” (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2019). There are similarities in the definition of abuse amongst these dictionaries. The following statements within the definition used in this study are highlighted when evaluating it against the practices of African neo-Pentecostalism *to put to wrong or improper use; abuse a privilege; to use or treat something or someone so as to injure or damage; to deceive; a corrupt practice or custom; or the improper use of something*. Common threads in the definitions are observed which allude to a clear understanding in its meaning – a misuse of treatment that involves a specific action resulting in a negative outcome. The implications of such actions are harmful and detrimental.

To extend this definition, in an article published on the site, *Reach Beyond Domestic Violence* (2017:1-4), we see a frequently held conception of abuse as, “a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain and maintain power and control over another”. This supports an understanding of the term abuse as a form of manipulation, an unhealthy control and misuse of power and authority. The LAW.com dictionary best defines the term abuse in a sobering manner, pointing out that it describes “the misuse of power by someone in a position of authority, who can use the leverage they have to oppress others thought to be in an inferior position, and at times to induce others to commit a wrongful act.”

Gernert states that the risk of abuse are mutual, which involve all participants since it damages the fundamental respect of another (2001:124). It is apparent from the discussion above and in Table 1 that abuse is a human problem that deals with the behaviour patterns of those who take advantage of the feeble and defenceless. It is unambiguous from the discussion above that abuse is recognised and expressed in the manner of control, victimisation and manipulation of power. It is however crucial to look at a Biblical definition of the term to identify any commonalities that would better refine the description of abuses in an African neo-Pentecostal context.

According to the KJV Bible Dictionary (182) ‘abuse’ is defined as: “To use ill; to maltreat; to misuse; to use with bad motives or to wrong purposes; as, to abuse rights or privileges, to deceive; to impose on; improper treatment or employment; application to a wrong purpose; as an abuse of our natural powers; an abuse of civil rights, or of religious privileges.” The Biblical definition of abuse is parallel in its meaning to what has already been described. Gernert (2001:122) adds that abuse is by no means a spiritual act and has no ‘purpose’ or intent to justify its use as a ‘means’. However, a more comprehensive understanding of the term need to be expressed in relation to a theological study.

After a careful examination of the various definitions of the term ‘abuse’, the explanation pertaining to this study is clear and can be defined as; *those who use their religious prophetic authority and power with bad motives and for the wrong purpose*. In this study, abuse is referred to in relation to religion and people’s belief systems, which may not mainly be a neo-Pentecostal problem, but a prophetic Pentecostal problem. The distortion of hermeneutics is the cause of perverted practices among African neo-Pentecostals. The assumption (though debatable) is that the correction of hermeneutics can result in the correction of praxis. Based on this elucidation sound understanding and interpretation of Scripture can lead to a proper view and use of spiritual authority to build God’s church, then for self-aggrandisement at the expense of God and his people.

2.5 Practices within African neo-Pentecostal churches

Reflecting on the historical background of Pentecostalism, it is evident that the movement has been shaped by its own hermeneutics which has developed over time. From the earliest formation

of the Holiness movement, the term 'baptism with the Spirit' was used in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit which originated from the birth of the Church in Acts 2. The Pentecostal movement emphasised the 'baptism of fire' and this was distinguished from water baptism. The practice was a manifestation of supernatural and miraculous gifts such as prophecy and healing, speaking in tongues and interpreting them (Oyetade, 2020). Theological training was never a requirement for ministers within the Pentecostal movement, but the instruction of the Holy Spirit was of great importance since it assisted ministers in the interpretation of the gospel message. The charismatic gifts of the Spirit were highly emphasised during the second wave known as the 'charismatic renewal'; those were specifically speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*), words of wisdom, words of knowledge, healings, prophesying, and translating tongues of the Spirit (Allison, 2020:36). These practices became an exhilarating desire for every Christian to encounter; however, not all churches saw the movement as favourable. The main criticism was about excessive abuse of spiritual experiences and perceived injustice to the authority of Scripture as compared to more classical teachings.

As mentioned before in the early 1980s, a man by the name of Peter Wagner who was a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary helped design a course called, 'Signs and Wonders' which he taught. During this time, when the Charismatic Renewal was at its height, Wagner framed the term, 'third wave' as an apex of the new movement (Gingerich, 2019:16). There was no longer only a classical phenomenon of speaking in tongues and prophecies, but also a new dimension known as 'liberation of the Holy Spirit' (Bartos, 2015). Here; holy laughter, rolling on the floor, prophecies and the scheduled healings as a manifestation of liberation in the Spirit became the emphases. As part of a period known as *Power Evangelism* in Brownsville, Florida, in 1995, new concepts were introduced into Pentecostal language including 'rest in the Spirit', 'slain in the Spirit', 'release service', and 'spiritual warfare', accompanied by miraculous healing ministries (Bartos, 2015). Many Christians longed for spiritual power, material blessings and physical healing. There were many meetings that invoked the mysterious presence of the divine or that undervalued the role of reason and of Christian tradition. Wagner and Wimber soon came to the realisation that the movement was headed in a dangerous direction, and their concerns related to the incompatibility between Biblical signs and the uncontrollable signs of the movement, such as tremors, spiritual ecstasies and animalistic sounds (Poloma, 2003:59).

The Pentecostal movement has brought about neo-Pentecostalism, and during colonisation, several prophets emerged on the African continent. In the recent decade, Pentecostalism has experienced a revival thanks to these pioneers who restored spirituality. Many prophets and indigenous churches are engaging large crowds with their prophetic ministries in Africa (Pondani, 2019:3-4). The ministers leading these ministries have been elevated to positions of prestige and are respected with the greatest of honour as the 'men of God' who are endowed with supernatural powers. In contrast to the idea that these ministers were indigenous gods, Kalu (2008:36)

proposes that these figures should be understood as charismatic figures. Many desperate people seeking for spiritual guidance have been lured into believing that salvation is based on their loyalty and obedience to the 'man of God' instead of trusting in God.

In South Africa, there were major headlines and debates about the rising of self-proclaimed prophets and their outrageous acts. These acts of faith are backed up by a twisted support of Scripture to validate their practices. However, more than the support of Scripture, symbolic practices are key in African neo-Pentecostalism. In indigenous Pentecostal churches, divine healing is facilitated by praying and holding symbolic objects, rather than prayer, as other Pentecostals do (Pondani, 2019:24-25). Taking the example of Engenas Lekganyane of the Zion Christian Church in South Africa, he changed from a classical Pentecostal church to make healing an experiential experience by blessing tangible objects (Anderson, 1992:43). In the neo-Pentecostal churches today, there have been similar controversy-producing healings, due to some leaders using dangerous practices. These practices have been easily identified as out of the ordinary, when a prophet claims to turn petroleum into pineapple juice, grass into a meal, and a snake into a chocolate bar. All these practices are not done in vain, but with the promise of a greater spiritual fulfilment and a so-called demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Matters took an interesting turn when the 'Prophet of Doom', Lethebo Rabalago of Mount Zion General Assembly in Limpopo, used a multi-insect spray at a supposed night of prayer. The prophet demonstrated such power that he claimed to bring healing and deliverance to the people by spraying Doom on them. This would be considered questionable to normative church practices; however, prophet Lethebo is convinced that all things are possible with God. A comment posted on a Facebook account belonging to Mount Zion General Assembly reads; "Doom is just a name, but when you speak to it to become a healing product, it does, people get healed and delivered through doom." Maggie Maluleka stated the following in her testimonial on the same Facebook post: "I have pains on my waist since I gave birth to my child in January 2014; I haven't seen my periods; my ear was also painful, but the man of God sprayed 'Doom' on me, and my ear was healed and don't feel any waist pains anymore." On this point, it is Kalu's position that sorcery involves establishing contact with the victim through tangible items such as clothing, food, etc. He believes that the use of potentially lethal healing practices is more akin to sorcery (2008:180).

Pondani (2019:26-27) relates the 'Doom' phenomenon to faith healing and suggests that such practices may be driven by a certain expectation, or belief, but not necessarily a result of prayer to God. Furthermore, because expectations can be disappointing or rather false, there is a possibility that Doom may not be effective in transmitting healing; thus, the healing technique has been concluded as a dangerous healing practice. Doom's manufacturer calls such abuse and careless use of its product unnecessary since it can put people's lives at risk because it is formulated to kill specific insects. The company said the warnings on the packaging should be followed (Ngoepe,

2016). It is evident that there is an abuse of power at hand, by manipulating congregants in believing that healing is possible by spraying Doom insecticide.

Africa's health care system is in ruins, and the population is impoverished, so there is a huge demand for spiritual healing and miracles (Kalu, 2008:263). This means that due to financial hardship, poor individuals may be unable to afford medication and health care, so they turn to whatever offers a promise of recovery out of despair. While this is true about the poverty-stricken Africans, there are those who can afford medical care, but instead turn to their prophets for healing. As an example, many of the people featured on TB Joshua's television programs are well-to-do and can afford good medical care but choose spiritual healing. Many dangerous healing practices that are not medically proven bear serious health implications and reparations. During a survey (2017:1-3) conducted by the CRL Rights Commission, the commission learned that traditional healing practices and religious institutions were expanding in South Africa. Advertisements that promised health and prosperity have duped naive and desperate individuals. As a result, some of them have spent an excessive amount of money and risked their lives in search of a cure. What has been unconventional is now a norm, however risky in demanding people consume foreign objects, poisonous flowers and cleaning detergents to bring relief. All these practices are attributed to the 'glory of God' however; it poses serious health and medical issues that can often lead to chronic diagnoses (Rio, MacCarthy & Blanes, 2017:47).

When Alph Lukau, leader of Alleluia Ministries International in Johannesburg claimed to have raised a dead man named Eliot to life, there was a clear division on social media from the people's perspective; many were furious, and others were in full support of the apparent miracle. The members of the congregation who were present on that day responded with great excitement and praise at the witnessing of an unbelievable miracle. The resurrection of Eliot sparked faith in the hearts of many and gave people a sense of hope to believe God for the impossible in their own lives. The building up of one's faith is expected in any neo-Pentecostal service and the goal is always to be motivated enough to trust God for anything. However, serious discrepancies were noted about Eliot's apparent resurrection as discussed in chapter 1. Such a stunt seems rather deceptive and manipulative; it is a clear correspondence to the description given according to *the* KJV Bible Dictionary (182), "a corrupt practice; to deceive and to act improper, with a wrong purpose; as an abuse of one's natural powers; an abuse of civil rights, or of religious privileges and an abuse of advantages." Such a description of abusive is fitting for any prophet who acts as a deceiver by abusing his power for his own personal gain.

2.6 Factors of abuse in African neo-Pentecostalism

In an attempt to address the research question, the study moves to several factors pertaining to abuse that would need to be considered when analysing African neo-Pentecostal practices by exploring the hermeneutical abuses amongst African neo-Pentecostal African churches in Southern Africa. This section gives a deeper reasoning and outlines specific implications that take place when African neo-Pentecostal practices are carried out.

2.6.1 Abuse of power

Ministers belonging to the African neo-Pentecost groups seem to choose their target audience carefully and strategically; their assemblies are well established in suburbs and cities, but they are mainly recognised in rural areas amongst the poor and sickly who are desperately in need of any help. Anderson (2009:646) agrees that the miraculous phenomenon has become a dynamic display within the practices of African neo-Pentecostal churches as an attempt to manipulate the poor and defenceless. In recent years, there has been a change in the type of people gravitating towards these churches. Many of the victims of Bushiri and Omotoso come from beyond-average families and are well-educated professionals who had suspended their critical thinking to believe in miracles promised by neo-Pentecostal prophets.

Secondly, these churches are established amongst those who have a connection with African, indigenous practices and beliefs. There is a spiritual void and a thirst among the African people that can only be quenched by divine communion (Anderson, 1992:117). There are many contributing factors that allow for the abuse of power; however, gullibility and a lack of scriptural knowledge is a major contributing factor in believing that the 'man of God' possesses power.

The concept of identification within the movement has taken various forms of name calling such as 'man of God' and the 'big man' syndrome. These labelling ascribes great power to ministers; demanding of respect and honour. The big man rule has become a powerful syndrome in Africa, particularly amongst neo-Pentecostalists (McCauley, 2012:2). Rather than popular participation, Gifford observed a shift toward unchallengeable power structures in the movement (Gifford, 2004:188). The Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) revivalist movement is influenced by the concept of the 'big man'. Pentecostal leadership in Nigeria has been ruined by new forms of prestige (McCauley, 2012:11). This term conventionally describes the relationships between members of the congregation and the minister; with an emphasis of abusive power that the leader exercises. This is very much evident among women and children who fall prey, however more men are becoming victims to the demands of these ministers, who set themselves up as an example for godly living.

2.6.2 Miracles at a cost

The saying goes that “nothing is for free” and this is a true reality amongst neo-Pentecostals. Mangezi and Banda (2017:01) discuss that, “unlike the traditional model where to be a pastor amounted to renouncing the world to pursue a heavenly spiritual calling, the entrepreneurial model presents true spirituality and ministry as are authenticated by socio-economic progress.” Today, a minister’s success is measured by how wealthy and successful he is, and this is the ultimate example to follow; showing the ‘true’ marks of a blessed Christian. It is for this reason that many ministers are pressurised into commercialising spiritual gifts, especially prophetic encounters to keep up with the status quo (Mangezi & Banda, 2017:3). The focus of Jesus’ command given in the Great Commission has shifted to chasing after material possessions and extorting the congregation to fund these pleasures. People in many African communities are facing great challenges like unemployment, poverty, and disease, so they are turning to spiritual means to try to find some hope in their hardship. The message of prosperity is accompanied by ‘supernatural acts’ of deception by promising people things that they hope to have, and if they desire to see the manifestation of God at work. This is a clear act of abuse towards the desperate and gullible.

2.6.3 Financial implications

In recent years, many neo-Pentecostal churches have gained attention as the subject of controversy and under the investigation by the Commission for the Promotion and Projection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission). A lot of ministers belonging to the neo-Pentecostal group have been accused of being involved in money laundering and commercialising religion only to enrich their lives. The CRL Rights Commission put out a strong statement in this regard; “There are no such things as miracles. They are made up to try and get money from the hopelessness of our people” (Mouser, 2019). Financial exploitation has become a major concern amongst these churches and the CRL Rights Commission are distressed about the commercialising of religious practices as well as receiving money through the collection of tithes and offerings, which shows a conscious exploitation of the poor and needy (Pondani, 2019:26).

According to Kalu (2008:143), the relationship between money and prophecy is a gray area, especially because it could spark the emergence of fake prophets. Upon investigation done by the CRL Rights Commission, it was found that people have been lured into believing that ‘miracle money’ from heaven would reflect in their bank account by simply claiming and ‘pulling it down’ from heaven. Observing that such misleading claims have serious ramifications for destitute communities, Pondani (2019:27-28) says that these claims are caused by the assumption that everything these prophets say must be inspired. These so-called ‘men of God’ establish strong relationships and demand loyalty from their members, because curses and humiliation are to be

feared, no questions are asked, even if some action is against one's will. These church members fall prey to the vindictive behaviour of such ravish leaders and once again, there are clear signs of deception and abuse of one's power at work.

2.6.4 Sexual implications

One very disturbing issue faced by many neo-Pentecostal African churches are the reports of minister's participation in sex scandals involving female members. Women and children have mostly become victims of such defile acts, and some young boys have equally fallen prey. In a service that took place in north Pretoria, Soshanguve, the 'man of God' from End Time Disciples Ministries instructed all the female members to undress because they were allegedly unclean and needed a touch from God (Nemakonde, 2015:4). Prophet Mboro, a controversial figure also known as Prophet Paseka Motsoeneng prayed for a couple that was facing issues in their relationship. A couple seated on a bed was instructed by Prophet Mboro to test the genital requested in a YouTube clip while Prophet Mboro was investigating the erection. Prophet Tim Omotoso is another neo-Pentecostal leader who is accused of sexually abusing many girls in his care. As Neliswa and Anele Mxakaza explained in court, they experienced several humiliations at the hands of the 'man of God' and lived in fear if they refused to conform to his demands. Other victims also came forward and testified against Prophet Tim Omotoso, he has since been taken into police custody while proper investigations are done (Magwaza, 2018). To date, no conviction has been served.

Paul Sanyangore, a Zimbabwean pastor has been using dangerous healing techniques, as reported by Samukange in the *Newsday* online newspaper. The article states that in the prayer, the prophet was asking for 'anointed condoms'. Condoms being anointed by prayer is misleading and puts the public at risk. In addition, the article discusses the complaints raised by the Condomise Campaign at the International Conference on Aids and STIs in Africa. The United Nations Population Fund senior HIV technical advisor Bidia Deperthes strongly expressed, "Please stop praying for the condoms, it misinforms the public and its totally against science" (Samukange, 2015). These rather disturbing practices are humiliating and deemed dehumanising. Ministers are a representation of God, and they should uphold a standard of holiness by providing spiritual direction. However, in many African neo-Pentecostal churches, sexual conduct has become increasingly perverted. Experiencing indecent exposure of bodies, or performing dangerous healing practices that have sexual implications, at the expense of violating social norms, is regarded as immoral and problematic. (Pondani, 2019:28). God is invoked in the conduct of these practices; however, they do not come from God, and these acts of sexual abuse corrupts the hearts and minds of many who are following the movement.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the term 'abuse' has been brought into focus by providing a comprehensive explanation of the concept and how this relates to the wider society. It has been noted that the term abuse is expressed in a broader sense and affects every community irrespective of people's race, position, geographical location or religion. In relation to this study, however, the investigation derives at an appropriate definition of abuse of religion with the movement in relation to the practices amongst African neo-Pentecostals. As a result of Pentecostal experiences in South Africa, native people were able to form their own churches, which laid the foundation for neo-Pentecostalism. However, self-proclaimed prophets have taken advantage of their position and has set a platform where controversial and dangerous practices are conducted. The miraculous power of signs and wonders have been a widespread phenomenon within Pentecostalism and these supernatural encounters have been earnestly sought after.

It is evident from the findings that a solution to an impoverished and desperate society are attained primarily through the guidance of the 'man of God' who uses symbolic miraculous acts as direction from God. Such 'powerful' practices are connected to an African context. However, when thoroughly investigated the implications attached to such phenomenon are misleading, dangerous and abusive. The practices done by the so call prophets from African neo-Pentecostal churches have led to lasting implications and various factors of abuse. These bizarre practices have become a norm in weekly services and appear to be spiritual acts of God's mighty power at work. However, it has been established that the underlining results leads to various factors of abuse. These factors are regarded as; the abuse of power, miracles that comes at a cost, abuse having financial implications as well as sexual complications. It has been established that all of these factors allude to negative patterns of behaviour where the gullible and feeble are taken advantage of. It is certain that African neo-Pentecostal ministers have misused their spiritual and prophetic authority for inappropriate reasons. Their practices are proven to be corrupt and lead to an improper application that could even be dangerous.

CHAPTER 3

HERMENEUTICAL BASIS OF ABUSES IN NEO-PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher explored some abusive practices within African neo-Pentecostalism, particularly within the Southern region of Africa to define a suitable definition of abuse of religion. It is evident that the different practices at neo-Pentecostal gatherings are considered dangerous and ultimately abusive when compared to other practices. There are several factors that determine personal empowerment and miracles, including health, wealth and prosperity (Soboyejo, 2016); it is these factors that attract people to such churches. However, to the ministers and members attending these assemblies, the practices are normal and appropriate in an African context. There therefore seems to be a reason and purpose for distinctiveness in African Biblical hermeneutics that deals with the diversity of humans in an African context. There are scholars who are in full support and argue that the Bible should not be read and interpreted only within Euro-American lenses, but rather within what is required is to be knowledgeable in African Biblical hermeneutics. Among the challenges facing Biblical scholars, Pobee (1979:174) encourages them to consider African tradition, religion, and culture as hermeneutical components. Teresa (1996) endorses Pobee's campaign to move away from a Eurocentric interpretation of the Bible to an African hermeneutical one. In addition, the context of day-to-day living is clearly brought forward to make the African context explicit.

In his discussion of the importance of recognising the different theological traditions and the specific ways they read and interpret the Bible, Nel (2015:1) focuses on the importance of understanding the distinctive existence of these traditions. Additionally, these different traditions are also rooted in varying ways of reading and interpreting the Bible, which provides justification for their existence separate from the rest of the Christian church. Lategan (2009:13) further explains that Biblical interpretation leads to “sense-making with existential consequences” that ultimately results in different theologies form the basis of different denominations. This leads to the purpose of this chapter. It takes into consideration the distinctiveness of African neo-Pentecostalism, reading the Bible and evaluating it against the practices which ultimately lead to hermeneutical religious abuses. The aim in accomplishing these outcomes is to begin by defining hermeneutics and how it is understood in an African neo-Pentecostal context. Upon this foundation, further discussion will centre around hermeneutical basis of religious abuses in neo-Pentecostal churches

and the factors that are preventing ministers from conducting proper hermeneutics in the case where Africa becomes the explicit context and subject of interpretation.

3.2 Defining hermeneutics

To discuss African hermeneutics, the term would need to be defined to understand what the general basis of interpretation should be within an African context. Hermeneutics is regarded as the “unavoidable activity of interpretation, an intellectual quest to discover meaning, driven by a governing question: What does the process of interpretation involve, and can it even uncover indubitable meaning?” (Kennedy, 2006:164). The Greek lexicon according to Nel (2015:2), uses the term *hermeneuein* to designate three basic meanings: to articulate or say out loud, to explain, and to translate. All three cases are made familiar and understandable by Palmer (1969:14) by transforming foreign, strange, and distanced elements into familiar and understandable content. Interpretation and explanation are necessary to familiarise the unfamiliar.

Interpreting human actions, especially texts, that are meaningful, and complex is the goal of hermeneutics as a method of interpretation (Vaicekauskaite, 2018). This is key in trying to understand the basis of hermeneutical religious abuses amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches and the implication of such actions. Hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation of texts that includes verbal and non-verbal discourse, understanding, and methodology of interpretation (Mueller-Vollmer, 2006:1). The question would then remain, do ministers belonging to neo-Pentecostal groups display evidence of linguistic ability to produce both verbal and non-verbal discourse? The study of Bible hermeneutics consists of exploring the principles and methods for interpreting the Bible's text (Got Questions Ministries, 2019). It alludes to the art of attaining an understanding of Scripture and explores how the Bible is read and interpreted as texts that originated in a different era of time and context that differs from the modern world. Biblical hermeneutics is a method of interpreting the text based on an exegesis against the background of both the Old and New Testaments and Biblical studies. The aim is to develop standards for valid interpretation of Scripture (Nel, 2019:2).

Pentecostal hermeneutics varies and reflects diverse theological paradigms and socio-cultural beliefs as well as diverse theological training in reading the Bible. This should not be confused with charisma and skill in luring the congregation into believing a personal theory or favour to one specific doctrine. Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasises three elements: the important interaction between (1) the Holy Spirit as the One who animates (2) Scriptures and empowers (3) believers (see Archer, 2009), so that members can effectively minister and witness in culturally meaningful ways (Rance, 2009:8). In Pentecostal hermeneutics, Biblical text interpretation is viewed in relation to the message of the text and its interpretation in relation to contemporary readers (Nel, 2015:21). In African Biblical hermeneutics, Adamo (2015) discusses the principle of interpreting the Bible for

transformation in Africa. He adapted Christian Scripture for an Afrocentric perspective, rereading it with a premeditated outlook. This can be demonstrated through an analysis of the Biblical text from an African viewpoint. The hermeneutical approach in African neo-Pentecostalism is mainly drawn towards a postmodern approach.

The postmodern movement places a high value on marginalised communities, which has introduced many postmodernists to a deep suspicion of the true beliefs of modernity. Crouch (2000) says, “postmodernism seems to mean anything, everything, and nothing”. He further explains postmodernism as that whatever one is most afraid of or most secretly desire. According to Carroll (1993:187), postmodern hermeneutics shares with Pentecostal hermeneutics other views, such as dialogue and multiplicity of meaning. To answer this question successfully, one needs to know whether the claims made by modernity are legitimate. It has been suggested that many truth claims can be explained by a story, one that privileges or marginalises some groups (Crouch, 2000). This is evident in African neo-Pentecostalism; truth is being interpreted in a spiritual light by taking into consideration certain factors such as social and economic conditions.

The definitions above serve as a key in the understanding of a distinctiveness in African Biblical hermeneutics that deals with the diversity within an African context. It is upon these definitions that discussion will be focused in determining the hermeneutical basis of religious abuses in neo-Pentecostal churches. According to Nel (2015:2), when it comes to interpreting the Bible, it is important to examine whether it is possible to speak of a Pentecostal hermeneutics. Such a discussion is crucial even towards an African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics. Adamo (2005) mentions a list of methodological distinctives found in African Biblical hermeneutics which will be used as a basis in discussing a neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics to carefully determine the basis of religious abuses within its hermeneutical practices. The following methodological distinctives are mentioned and will be discussed: communal reading and interpretation, Bible as power and Africa and Africans in the Bible as outlined by Adamo (2015).

3.3 African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics

3.3.1 Communal approach

Hermeneutics of the Bible are unique in their communal approach, which means reading with the community. According to Haferkamp (2018:13), the oral tradition and social memory have played an important role in academic studies of early Christianity for quite some time. Until about the second century, it is believed that communal reading of sacred texts was generally confined to urban areas, since writing materials were sparse and professional readers were few. By reading aloud together, Wright explains (2015) that early Christians were able to maintain their traditions while also avoiding making any major changes to their religious beliefs. The first century CE also saw the development of the book for the first time, making reading more accessible to people. In

his analysis, he contends that communal reading played an integral role in establishing public reading as an accepted part of everyday life in the social, economic, and political spheres.

Communal reading amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches is still practiced and is regarded by Adamo (2005:23) as "reading with the ordinary readers, reading with the community and reading with African eyes". Jonker (1999) advocates for communal interpretation and reading of the Bible among Africans, outlining some positive results. In discussing how one finds identity among scholars with a communal approach, he discusses how a shared experience leads to that identity, by eliminating a biased individualistic Eurocentric Biblical approach. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to examine the dialogue at the intersection of hermeneutics and theology and to participate in an 'open discussion of interpretation'. Familiar reading texts are selected that often pertain to the immediate needs of the congregation. Where this might be very liberating and beneficial in an African setting, by helping the common reader to identify with the text, it does however pose a threat with the rising of self-proclaimed prophets who tend to interpret the Bible individually, ignoring the voice of the faith community, and the abuse of power by advocating a personal agenda.

3.3.2 The Bible as power

In Africa, power has always been a subject that remains undoubtedly a central variable in understanding state behaviour, the economy and people's rights. Precisely, in South Africa, power is a subject of discussion that is deep in meaning when considering the country's tragic history. Prior to South Africa's democracy, power belonged to the white minority that led to the oppression of people of colour. Religion specifically was one of the tools used to bring about colonisation that ultimately led to segregation and the abuse of power. Desmond Tutu, who was an outspoken activist, is famed to have said "when the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible, and we had the Land. They said, 'let us close our eyes and pray.' When we opened them, we had the Bible, and they had the land." This brought about a change and shift of power; the indigenous people lost control over their land but gaining a new-founded strength in religion and the Bible as power. By the time the Pentecostal movement spread to Africa and eventually reached South Africa in 1908, the influence was accepted in offering to the people a 'Christianity' that offered hope and a solution to their crisis (Anderson, 2005:67).

The Pentecostal movement offers greater freedom to Africa since scholars like Estrelida Alexander, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu and Ogbu Kalu have positively celebrated for its liberation potential (Gabaitse, 2015). The rise of evangelistic work carried out in Southern Africa amongst the rural people is attributed to the influx of Nigerian, Kenyan, and Ghanaian preachers who preached sermons that were relatable to their needs such as poverty, witchcraft and the promise of a 'better' life. The promise of a 'better' life is found in its hermeneutical teachings 'as the Bible as power'. It is

hope connected to the culture and traditions related to an African context. Living under such hopeless and poverty-stricken conditions becomes fitting to view the Bible as a source of power and promise to improve one's life. Nowadays, it is evident that neo-Pentecostal churches are not just attended by the outcasts; the sick, the uneducated and the poor. There have been an increasing number of highly educated professionals attending Bushiri's, Omotoso's and Lukau's churches in recent years. In the Acknowledgement Pages of their masters and doctoral theses, a number of these scholars express gratitude to these ministers.

Neo-Pentecostals churches engage in the same form of Pentecostal hermeneutics that includes preaching, prayer, Bible study, hymns, and testimonies among other activities (Gabaitse, 2015). This type of hermeneutic is accurately described as 'pre-critical' by Gabaitse (2015), meaning that it takes the Bible at face value, disregarding its social, historical, and cultural context for interpretation. The history of the Biblical text and context of its writing are not always regarded as important. Reading and obeying the Bible is of special importance, since it is a source of power, as God's Word.

Resane (2016:5) discusses how emerging neo-Pentecostalism views itself as nondenominational because it desires to be seen independently from mainline Christian churches or classical Pentecostal congregations. Neo-Pentecostal churches stands out for many reasons but mainly because of their peculiar practices which are motivated by hermeneutical bases. These hermeneutical bases are found in a strong view of the Bible as power.

Ukpong (1995) emphasises that Africans interpret the Bible existentially; approaching the Bible as powerful which means that its interpretation is made significant to daily experiences of Africans. African Christians rarely engage in any attempts in defending or apologising for the Bible; rather it is trusted, respected and taken at face value. It is mainly in African indigenous churches that the Bible serves as a protective force where the terror of witches and evil spells are at work. Supernatural powers and encounters are sought after, such as the power to conquer sickness and evil spirits. In an African setting, it is not an unfamiliar practice for people to consult witchdoctors and communicate with ancestors. The Bible becomes an instrument of protection from one's enemies, and words of success and healing are sought after, especially when modern medicines cannot cure diseases. Miracles become deemed as necessary when all odds are against the desperate, and there is no quicker way to a 'better' life; the immediate solution is found in the 'wisdom' of prophets who have the 'power' to turn the situation around.

Neo-Pentecostalism in Africa is notable for its unusual practices which is motivated by hermeneutics that empower the economic and social conditions of people. Fear of failure, death, and uncertainty dominates this type of behaviour. It is evident from the COVID-19 pandemic that health care is of great concern. Due to fewer than 10 million South Africans having access to

private medical aid, the public health system is under pressure. This has resulted in overcrowded hospitals and a shortage of manpower. Adding to this number is the unemployment rate that is more than 34.5% of the country's population. As a result of the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, those within this raito are more likely prone to illness, crime and a dim future (Stats SA, 2022). It is certain that with an increasing population, these statistics will rise which in turn makes people more vulnerable, hence they end up looking for help at neo-Pentecostal churches. Despite disease, social discontent, poverty and unrest, Khanyile (2016:26) says that there is still hope for the future and neo-Pentecostal churches are operating as havens of deliverances.

An approach to hermeneutics puts an emphasis on communicative readings of the Bible, which incorporate a sense of familiarity with the text, as described in Nel (2015:21). Selective texts are chosen mainly from the gospels and specifically texts that pertain to one's current situations such as healing and self-affirmation. According to Nel (2019:6), neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics can provide psychological and even practical help to the impoverished, the marginalised, and those on the fringes of society. Hope becomes evident to those who are disadvantaged both socially and psychologically through empowering teachings and practices. People attending these services are encouraged and find a sense of identity and dignity in the teachings and practices that are conducted.

When considering the selective text, the original context is often ignored, and an extreme interpretation is done that is expressed in unorthodox practices. These practices are based on a modern expression of interpretation that rules out the basic form of hermeneutical interpretation. As the biblical narrative demonstrates, in addition to interpretation, there are also witness accounts which provide evidence that God is still working miracles today (Fogarty, 2015:5). According to West (2001:22), interpreters' interests typically fall into two major categories: interpretation interests and life interests. Those interpreting the religious text look for elements of the text that relate directly to their lives, as well as concerns and commitments that motivate them to interpret the text in a particular way. The purpose of this is to find out what the text has to say about matters that pertain to healing, protection, success or prosperity in life. One searches for a message from the Bible that is relevant to their own felt needs after reading it.

The reality is that the Spirit addresses Pentecostals in ways that transcend human understanding. It is the Spirit who leads and directs believers how to approach the Bible, not to interpret it, but to let the Bible act as a living Word that explains readers' lives (Moore, 2013). Spirit-centered interpretation practices overemphasise experiential pneumatic, which can quickly lead to subjectivist practices. Consequently, God's word is not confined to what is found in the Bible, but is also spoken. The interpretive exercise is not essentially a human academic enterprise. Methods of interpretation are based on constant reflection on the Spirit's role in interpretation. The Bible is not read for the sake of gaining knowledge about God, but rather to experience him through daily

encounters. It is important to know that the Bible stands as the objective standard for all interpretation and that God will never contradict what Scripture teaches. The practice of praying and worshipping God should complement biblical literacy in order to enhance the development of relationships with God and increase knowledge of Him (Nebeker, 2003:49).

Ministers in African neo-Pentecostal churches are regarded as spiritual leaders who are filled with wisdom and knowledge; however, many should be regarded as 'wolves in sheep's clothing' due to their distorted hermeneutics and their influence to persuade others. These modern prophets have demonstrated, people whose poverty may include cultural, spiritual, psychological, and economic factors are prone to using bad practices in religion because of material desperation and ignorance, resulting from cultural and spiritual immaturity as well as illiteracy (Maluleke, 2015:39). These prophets demand nothing but a blind loyalty and obedience, not just to their teachings but also to their self-appointed leadership. When an examination of the unusual practices in the neo-Pentecostal wave is conducted without reference to real academic activities in theological fields, it becomes clear that this is symptomatic of an anti-intellectual movement (Resane 2016:5). Most ministers in neo-Pentecostalism are not properly trained and prepared for full time ministry, and neither are they equipped to lead people. More important to them than formal qualifications is intensive training in doctrine and church administration for pastors (Kgatle, 2017). Among Neo-Pentecostal pastors, such training is not tolerated, let alone academic studies in theological fields. This is due to the strong belief that the Holy Spirit has been given to empower, equip and reveal 'new truths' to those who are yielded and obedient to the Spirit's working. A great support to such a theory is found in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

In accordance with African Biblical hermeneutics, God's revelation to the world cannot be limited; he is capable of revealing 'deep unsearchable truths' to the common man. Based on the basic belief that God acts as he did in the Bible, Pentecostalism places great emphasis on the value of experience and non-rational knowledge (Turnage, 2003:9). The Holy Spirit is regarded as the one who inspired and preserved the Bible, and a part of the purpose of the Bible is to illuminate, teach, and transform believers' lives (2 Timothy 3:16). By virtue of the Spirit's ministry, the Bible becomes the Word; it is the Spirit's authority that binds the Bible's authority (Nel, 2019:83). God continues to reveal himself now and on an ongoing basis, through the Holy Spirit, in new situations and through progressive revelation. The Holy Spirit remains the fundamental figure in African neo-Pentecostalism, and he moves without limit in demonstrating God's power through miraculous acts in peculiar ways.

A believer today ought to expect to experience what the apostles did in the early years through experiencing the same Spirit that worked in them as it did in the early days (Nel, 2019:83). The primary concern is not with the truth found and related to the immediate audience in the Bible; it is

more important to encounter the truth described as the Word of God and the moving of the Holy Spirit at this present time. Their worship encounters are perceived as an authentic experience with God, resulting at times in the non-deliverance of the sermon because of the move of the Holy Spirit. As a result of spontaneous worship among the community, miracles and conversions occur and testimonies are spoken. The members of African neo-Pentecostal churches are strongly encouraged to experience a direct encounter with the Holy Spirit in whatever way the Spirit wishes to move, even if these practices have a high probability of being dangerous. It is through such treacherous practices that God is at liberty to move and receive glory. According to this view, the fault lies with the individual and their lack of faith when needs are not met. It is up to the individual to conjure enough belief through prayer, singing and confession to experience some 'breakthrough'. The Bible as power is demonstrated in the confession of one's words to create and speak things into existence. The Bible is seen as a wisdom book that brings into effect success, healing and deliverance by simple confessions and positive thinking. Resane (2016:9) speaks about this kind of teaching as a form of 'hypnotism' that targets the desperate and gullible. Those who are exposed are not fully aware of reality and are woven into the belief of spiritualism. Those who orchestrate such practices create a sense of false hope by heightening people's emotions and expectations.

3.3.3 Africa and Africans in Bible approach

Africa and the people of Africa play another significant role in African biblical hermeneutics. The Bible may be regarded as an ancient Jewish text, but it may also be viewed as a document of African origin that contains African history (Adamo, 2016). A few African Biblical scholars (West, Maluleke, Masenya, and Mosala) have produced valuable work on Africa and Africans in the Bible, and they include: Hagar, the Egyptian concubine of Abraham, the African queen of I Kings 10:1-13, Ethiopia in the Bible, images of Cush in the Old Testament and the African wife of Solomon. These examples have helped give Africans a sense of belonging within the Bible and have motivated preachers to use an African methodology when interpreting Scripture. Using this comparative approach, Adamo (2015) draws comparisons between Bible texts, religions, and cultures from Africa. African culture is of crucial importance to the study of the Bible and Christianity, as demonstrated by this comparison. The outcome is a distinctive way of interpreting the Bible using Africa and Africans.

When considering Africa and Africans in the Bible, interpretation is viewed through an 'African eye' and the relevance of an African culture is brought to light. This is the basis for neo-Pentecostal hermeneutic that is grounded in African tradition and the Bible. Adamo (2015) mentions that an anthropological/sociological approach is used to analyse the understanding of the Biblical text when applying the approach of Africa and Africans in the Bible. This leads to an understanding of interpreting the Bible allegorically with the belief that behind the actual words of a Biblical writer,

there are always hidden meanings which defy literal explanations since they are spiritual and mystical. Allegorical interpretation holds that the passage's true meaning lies beneath the letter or obvious signification (Ramm, 1970:24).

The *school of Alexandria* (in Egypt) adopted an allegorical approach that was influenced by Origen (A.D. 185 – c. 254) as early as the first centuries of Christianity. He was a Hellenistic scholar who was educated in Alexandria around 185. Origen was particularly known as the father of allegorical interpretation. As a result of borrowing his interpretive techniques from Hellenism of ancient Greece, he was able to apply allegorical interpretation before he developed them himself. Philosophical and moral doctrines were sought to be reflected in ancient mythology and poetry. Origen was of the view that the entire Bible should not be taken literally. While Origen's theology was often opposed to premodern exegesis, an allegorical approach became the preferred method of interpretation down through the Middle Ages (Fazio, 2021).

Today, many African Pentecostal churches continue to interpret Scripture allegorically, by seeking a deeper, spiritual meaning within the text for their life situation. The words of Paul in Ephesians 6:12 are of great significance to African neo-Pentecostal Christians; the weapons of warfare are not physical, but it is a fight “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Scripture is often interpreted by ascribing a spiritual meaning to the text in an allegorical sense, considering an African culture and its social and economic stance. The Gospel of Mark 7:33 describes Jesus placing his fingers into a deaf man's ears, and then touching his tongue. A blind man at Bethesda was spat upon directly by Jesus in Mark 8:23; and in John 9:6, the man's eyes were covered with mud caused by Christ's spat on the ground. These demonstrations found in the gospels are used as a basis to justify current practices found within certain neo-Pentecostal churches.

These self-proclaimed prophets believe that if Jesus validated healing through the means of peculiar acts, then the spraying of Doom insecticide is just as powerful in displaying the power of God. As Wilkinson (1988:57) points out, this type of application can be explained by the way one is taught and understand healing in contemporary society, which is primarily dependent on understanding and practicing Biblical healing cases. Saliva has no recognition of healing properties, as healing virtues emanate from God. Therefore, in the case of spraying Doom insecticide on people, it has been scientifically proven to be harmful and dangerous (Biyela, 2016). These rare practices give people a sense of false hope and tarnish the reputation of Christianity. Once the beliefs and practices are worn-out, those who are hopeful are left slipping deeper into hardship and sicknesses because of ignorance and gullibility in trusting the words of the so called ‘man of God’. This may lead to some believers forsaking their faith in Christ.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter describes Adamo's methodology for examining the basis of abuse in the Scriptures. Three components of this methodology are outlined: communal reading and interpretation, the Bible as power, and Africa and Africans in the Bible. These are often expressed through styles and practices which relate to African tradition and culture. African Biblical hermeneutics deal with human diversity in an African context for a variety of reasons that seem distinctive. However, there is a clear misuse and handling of hermeneutical principles amongst African neo-Pentecostals which are considered abusive and dangerous. As a result of flawed theology of God, prophets emerge as the mediators between God and the people, creating a platform of reliance, control and abuse. The religious leaders profess to be following Jesus Christ as Lord, but their actions are inconsistent with what they profess. They seem to either complete with Christ's supremacy or complement Christ's deficiencies. When doctrine of God upholds the holiness and righteousness of God, then such religious abuse is deterred (Banda, 2018).

In African neo-Pentecostal churches, the hermeneutical basis for abuse differs from classical Pentecostalism, in that the practices include eating grass, eating snakes, drinking petrol, and spraying or using Doom insecticide on members. Certain emphasis are highlighted from Scripture such as the Holy Spirit revealing 'new revelation' (Jeremiah 33:30), and empowering pastors to perform 'greater miracles' (John 14:12). When self-proclaimed prophets attempt to gimmick Jesus' examples of healing, they act out of the will of God and try to perform what is only possible by God. The unique ways that Jesus chose to heal should be regarded as specially isolated cases performed by the 'God-man'. Ministers belonging to the Pentecostal movement should be blameless by not taking Scripture out of context, as most of their practices have no doctrinal acceptance of church practice throughout history. From the above discussion the driving force behind African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics is motivated by socio-economic factors within an African society. The problem however is falling prey to distorted teaching that leads to the abuse of power and danger within their practices. Through this approach, social norms, values, and the authenticity of Scripture are ultimately compromised.

CHAPTER 4

CLASSICAL PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS

4.1 Introduction

Clear reasons for distinctiveness in African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics which has led to hermeneutical bases of religious abuses were discussed in chapter 3, and it is therefore necessary to discuss classical Pentecostal hermeneutics that developed since the 1970s. The purpose of such a discussion is to make a comparison between classical Pentecostal hermeneutics and the hermeneutics found in neo-Pentecostal circles. To do this, the main features of classical Pentecostal hermeneutics should be evaluated. In this chapter, a broader understanding of Pentecostal hermeneutics is discussed to know how Biblical texts were interpreted and the reason for its interpretation. The purpose of this chapter is to consider Pentecostal hermeneutics and how it has developed over time; as well as showing the factors that are involved in defining its hermeneutics. This in turn will help provide clarity and ground for certain neo-Pentecostal practices that were addressed as problematic and dangerous in the previous chapter.

Classical Pentecostals recognise the importance of historical hermeneutics for a faith community where their hermeneutics parallels the earliest faith communities. The aim of the researcher is to develop an argument that outlines the hermeneutics adopted within the movement. The objective in this chapter is outlined by the following points of discussion: the historical and grammatical exegesis of Scripture leading to hermeneutics influenced by people's socio-economic conditions. Further discussion is centred around Pentecostal hermeneutics that was influenced by personal experience and testimonies that shaped a Biblical language. The elements in Pentecostal hermeneutics and the change to a fundamentalist-Biblicist hermeneutic are explained to better describe classical Pentecostal hermeneutics. Lastly, the eschatological expectations are considered and regarded as one of the strongest theological viewpoints in classical Pentecostalism. It is fundamental to consider the above factors that helped define and shape hermeneutical practices within the movement.

4.2 Historical/grammatical exegesis

God intended to convey meaning through the Bible passages, and it is essential to define the concepts of literal interpretation and proof-texting in order to understand and apply Bible historical/grammatical exegesis. Literal interpretation asserts that the Bible text should be

interpreted as the “plan meaning” conveyed by their grammatical construction and historical context. The literal meaning is thought to reflect the author’s intentions (Fee, 2002:14). Proof-texting is citing a biblical passage in defence of a belief. At times the passage will be accompanied by the book, chapter, and verse reference, but in other cases, the reference will be just the chapter/verse reference without any text at all as though the biblical reference alone is sufficient as authoritative proof. In addition to the short text itself, the text is its own authority and does not require further explanation or interpretation. In essence, proof-texting involves quoting or referencing passages without explaining them, since the proof-text is its own, undeniable authority (Fee, 2002:17-18).

During Jesus' life, the disciples believed that Jesus would restore Israel to its proper place in the world before Pentecost. They were nonetheless able to develop a new understanding of Scripture through the Spirit's outpouring, which gave them a fresh perspective of God's plan. Pentecost proved radically transformative for the early believers in terms of epistemology, worldview, and hermeneutics (Nel, 2017:87). In the first century, the disciples shared a common perspective and interpretation of Judaism. In addition to a Greek philosophy that was widely spread, the disciples were also instilled with this philosophy through the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (Martin, 2018:1-2). The apostles interpreted the Bible in their context on the Day of Pentecost, yet they incorporated many Jewish exegetical practices (Martin, 2018:1-2). The texts were read in contexts within Christian communities. This means that they believed the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit as described in the New Covenant Scriptures should parallel an experience. Keener discusses how cultural awareness can offer a common basis for intercultural dialogue, as well as provide a foundation for understanding and describing Scripture. He maintains that the text came into existence not in a cultural void, but rather in a clearly defined linguistic, cultural, and historical context. Hebrew, Aramaic, and even Greek words and letters become unclear when taken out of their respective linguistic contexts. In Keener's view, the more persuasive the texts are when heard in their context, the more likely they are to be reinterpreted in a new way (Keener, 2015:19-20).

Pentecostals see the historical narratives as important and valuable in constructing doctrine as a specific theological assumption. In this case, the Lukan narratives were given much prominence by Pentecostals with explicit focus on the book of Acts and the work of the Holy Spirit that formed part of the core foundation of the movement (Menziez, 2013:121). The account of Acts chapter 2 forms part of a vital point in shaping Pentecostal hermeneutics, with the focal point on Jesus' instruction to his disciples to wait in the upper room for what was promised to come on the Day of Pentecost. Luke recorded in Acts 2:2-3 what took place when Jesus' instruction was obeyed; “there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them

utterance.” The Church was formed as a result of this miraculous phenomenon and the Apostles were encouraged to take the Great Commission to the ends of their world, but more importantly God was performing a 'restoration' of the kind of Christianity found in the New Testament to the contemporary church according to Pentecostals. In this way, it was viewed as a return to the work of God that finds its roots in the New Testament, built upon the events of the early church.

According to Stott (1976:15), the emphasis on Lukan narratives constituted a paradigm shift from didactic to narrative texts used to define Pentecostal theology within Pentecostals' exegesis and hermeneutics. Noel (2007) asserts that normative beliefs and practices come from a narrative based on historical examples that can be applied to the Pentecostals. Pentecostals, however, read Acts because they have specific goals in mind, by allowing the Holy Spirit to do the interpretation. Stott (1976:17) argues that narrative texts would struggle to lead to theological conclusions, as opposed to didactic texts. In order to understand the Bible and particularly the Lukan narratives, one must comprehend a cycle of hermeneutical practices in which the record of God's people in the past informs the experience of his people today (Stronstad, 2018:48). Therefore, the divine Word becomes a living, active, and relevant Word for these times, instead of being merely a historical document. The Bible did not simply form the basis of Pentecostal worldviews, but rather transformed their worldviews.

Based on a common cultural worldview derived from the Pentecostal movement, people from the latter rain were able to gain an identity (Nel, 2019:7). As interpreted in Acts, the accounts are presented in the context of the latter rain, and described as the pattern by which the early church received the Holy Spirit, and it needs to be emulated by each individual believer (Archer 2009:140). It is the latter rain narrative that Pentecostals used to build their interpretive methods. A key purpose of the latter rain narrative is to explain and evaluate Pentecostalism, as it became a way of life for many people (Nel, 2014:291). Among Pentecostals, the concept of ecclesiology is a nondenominational concept that sees the church as part of God and as rooted in the heritage of the early church (Anderson, 1979).

Pentecostals accepted the Fundamentalist-Dispensational and inclined towards a literal approach of viewing the Scripture. Early Pentecostals believed that exegesis should be as literal as possible in order to be credible. Pentecostalism has been regarded as literally interpreting the Bible based on it being applied directly to individuals' circumstances according to Wacker (1984:365). The Bible, for Pentecostals, serves primarily as a guide by using historical examples in a manner similar to how the Spirit guided believers previously. Despite the fact that both Pentecostals and Fundamentalists applied literal interpretations of the Bible, Spittler (1994:108) suggests that the Pentecostal standard for truth differed somewhat from that of the fundamentalists. According to the fundamentalist approach, rationale is emphasised over religious experience, whereas the Pentecostal approach places more emphasis on faith than reason (Nel, 2017:7). It is important to

evaluate the truthfulness of Scripture from a relational, personal, and experiential perspective rather than from a scientific and intellectual perspective. Although the scientific and intellectual understanding of Scripture should not be avoided, Pentecostals lean toward an experiential presupposition with an understanding that the Bible is more interactive and personal as compared to viewing it from an intellectual point of view. In other words, interpreters have to possess a certain level of intellectual capacity to be able to translate languages they do not know, cultures that are not their own, and histories of people who do not exist in their own country. While theology cannot be grounded in experience, experience helps to understand history in its contemporary setting (Archer, 2009:97).

Interpretation of the Bible based on the Pentecostal perspective is not fixated on any one aspect or principle, as it engages with diverse areas such as historical-grammatical exegesis, the importance of the local church and the work of the Holy Spirit to inspire, enlighten, and illuminate readers (Becker, 2004:34). Scripture was read and understood as plainly as possible, with the application of common sense in interpreting the Scripture literally. Jacobsen (2003:136) explains that within Pentecostal hermeneutics the historical-grammatical exegesis is not important, because today's believers are expected to practise the immediacy of the Holy Spirit, and the standards of the Church are meant to define this. A person reads the Bible not for historical or dogmatic reasons, but rather to develop a better understanding of spirituality. The reading process involves experiences, which then become interpreted. Thus, the experiential is a condition for interpreting the text in a way that describes God's encounters with them, creating their expectations of encounters with him (Nel, 2017:86). According to Holm (1995:14), early Pentecostals were not concerned about whether Biblical texts were historical or scientifically accurate, rather they were concerned that men and women would be sensitive to hearing and experiencing God.

Founded in 1970 by classical Pentecostals with the main objective of providing a forum for academic discussion for all academic disciplines, the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) combines academic discipline discussion with a spiritual focus on creating a distinctive Pentecostal identity (Olena, 2016:7). By establishing a scientific basis for their interpretation, the Baconian Common-Sense philosophy could support and provide a solid foundation to their interpretation. In those days, Common-Sense epistemology was the prevailing philosophy of the academy, as all denominations did not require theological training (Nel, 2021:81). This greatly influenced people's perspective on hermeneutics and their understanding of the Bible. It was an approach that reinforced and confirmed their already held faith commitments and the unquestioned philosophy of choice. The theory gave support to the already held convictions and beliefs of the people within the movement to find a supported meaning within the Biblical text (Diogenes, 1985:193). Olena explains that a primary objective of SPS is to stimulate, encourage, recognise, and publicise the work of scholars who are engaging in Pentecostal and Charismatic studies, while exploring the implications of Pentecostal theology in other academic fields for the purposes of enhancing a

Pentecostal understanding. SPS argued that the interpreter's religious experience should be incorporated significantly more into the interpretation process than what the grammatico-historical method typically allows (Olena, 2016:7-8).

Zuck (1984:120), in his writings, states that one must bridge communication gaps within their own culture, just as one must interpret the Bible according to common sense. He goes on to explain that when a statement in an author's writing appears to conflict with one of his or her previous statements, the reader normally gives the author the benefit of doubt. No distinction was made of some historical distance between the modern believer and the text; there seemed to be no importance of studying the Scriptures within its historical, literary and cultural context, but rather the purpose to apply directly to the immediate context and what the text was saying at the present time (Synan, 1975:26).

4.3 Hermeneutics shaped by socio-economic conditions

A Westernised view of interpreting the Bible was adopted when the Pentecostal movement was formed, and scholars were required to relinquish any preconceived philosophical beliefs or oral culture that would be a stumbling block of encountering God in an experiential way (Martin, 2013:220). This Westernised view has shaped the identity of those belonging to the movement in a remarkable way and has changed the believer's worldview through its hermeneutical practices. It began by hearing the Good News and followed by a radical conversion to Christianity, which meant a conversion to the community of faith. It then becomes necessary for each member to testify about their renouncement of sin and bad habits, as the Spirit does the transforming work of sanctification and the converted sinner experiencing God in a personal way. Conversion becomes more than just an intellectual assent; it is expressed through an experience and encounter in worship yielding to the Spirit's control (Tomberlin, 2010:37). Moreover, Neil (2017:88) asserts that human beings become partakers of the divine nature when they are born again, thus demonstrating how they are not just followers of the divine, but a part of it. This implies that the Holy Spirit enlightens the minds of those born again to the understanding of Scripture and what it means to each individual specifically. Hermeneutically, the Pentecostal paradigm consists of a personal revelation, illumination of the Holy Spirit, and response by the individual (Johns, 1995:92). In addition, "there is no hermeneutics unless and until the divine hermeneut (the Holy Spirit) mediates an understanding" (Ervin, 1985:27).

The majority of converts came from peasant backgrounds and had a different religious perspective from the Evangelical Protestants (Anderson, 1979). What was common to the people were their spiritual practices that involved mysticism, supernatural and animistic ecstasies. Due to people's social and economic backgrounds, early Pentecostalism originated largely among the marginalised

(Nel, 2019:8). Pentecostalism became a source of hope to the common problems of poverty and unemployment by focusing on the power of miracles, signs and wonders. Pentecostal gatherings did not consist of qualified people, but rather the members who joined the movement consisted of peasants, artisans, labourers and poor people (Hunter, 2013, 2-3). As Archer (2009:30) points out, the poor flourished in a mental and spiritual state that compensated for their socioeconomic deprivation-induced personality defects. By 1950, Pentecostalism had become more than just a religion for the poor and marginalised. Although many from other economic ranks joined the movement also, Pentecostalism did not become only a religion of the poor or the marginalised (Peel, 2009:184).

Much of the approach to Pentecostal hermeneutics was found within the anti-intellectualism as a practical hermeneutic replaced a scholarly one. As Hayford (2006:16) notes, professional theological training was shunned in the early Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals were convinced that the Holy Spirit and Scripture was enough to provide all the knowledge that was needed. A Spirit-filled Christian considered theological knowledge harmful, even dangerous, since it could undermine their experience (van der Spuy, 1985:107). In order to interpret Scripture correctly, it must be interpreted within the context of the reader's community. The Biblical text was read closely to understand believers' current socio-political and economic conditions. Those from a lower class, who were often disregarded, found a new sense of belonging and inclusiveness within the faith as they were able to be a part of the service in a way that was more than just being part of an audience. The theology amongst early Pentecostals was done in an oral manner, with a deep desire to encounter God personally and to offer a solution to people's immediate needs (Anderson, 1979). Pentecostal theology is seen in terms of the symbolic cosmos of the Pentecostal movement as opposed to systematic comprehension and right reasoning (Cox, 1995:11). He proposes that Pentecostal theology should be viewed in terms of moral and emotional values along with cognitive matters. The music, prayer, sermon, and testimony of Pentecostal theology, rather than the form of lengthy discourses, seems to flourish in this context (Cox, 1995:11). This is rooted in the words of the Apostle Paul found in 1 Corinthians 14:26, "What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up." Pentecostal theology was not conducted in a standard Western mode of formalism but rather through songs, poems, testimonies, and dances; they were much more interested in orthopraxy than orthodoxy (Land, 1993:154). According to Pentecostals, doctrine was established through communal encounter with God through the Spirit of God, based on the experience of the community of faith (Sheppard, 1994:140).

According to Arrington (1988:376), Scripture is interpreted through the Holy Spirit as it is given by the Spirit. It was more beneficial and appropriate practising theology in an informal style that focused upon creation, culture, and tradition and the Holy Spirit emerging truth and revelation to the immediate context. Pentecostalism ensures that each individual's participation is an important

aspect of its identity because it is inclusive and recognises every individual's contribution. Local pastors contributed their thoughts about the message to the interpretation of Scripture, even though most of the members of the community were uneducated and unassuming (Spittler, 1985:75). Believers belonging to the movement are given a new perspective through its hermeneutical lens; they inherit the title of priesthood and prophethood of believers. This is rather a beneficial sense of belonging as those who initially joined the movement at the onset of the twentieth century were mainly poor, uneducated and ordinary members. They gained a new identity as Christians, however, and became valuable as preachers and interpreters of the Bible through democratically delegated roles (Moore & Henderson, 2014:12-13).

The gathering of Pentecostals began in homes, that were open to the community, as a result of these sorts of meetings, congregations eventually arose in which every individual was responsible for the well-being of the community (Stronstad, 1999:65). As members of an assembly, believers took part in all aspects of assembly life, including the worship service. This meant that one had direct access to God as in contrast of any human intervention representing men before God. The Bible has always held the power to shape and change the worldview of believers as a result of the Holy Spirit's influence. It is through the nature of narratives found within Scripture that people are influenced to change. Using their hermeneutical process, the Spirit reveals the relevance of Biblical passages for modern life to the community of believers (Archer, 2009:212). Pentecostalism brings a theological assumption to the task of interpretation that has a strong sense of identity with the experiences and practices of the first century as guided by the Spirit within an immediate context that is viewed as a uniform continuity of God's relationship with the church.

4.4 Pentecostal hermeneutics shaped by personal experience

Pentecostals are the only contemporary interpreters who take personal experience into account consciously, intentionally, and critically. Anderson (1987:57) observes that all interpreters can intentionally or inadvertently include personal experience into their hermeneutical practices. Pentecostals are grounded in the history of experience and the early church as its model. In the view of Thomas (2010:34), a Pentecostal spirituality is a Christo-pneumatic church where worship is seen as a form of an encounter with Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is specifically the very essence of religiosity that the Pentecostal movement seeks to uncover behind the Christianity faith. Without any spirituality and a personal experience, Pentecostal hermeneutics makes no sense as experiencing God in a personal way is the goal. It has become normal for Pentecostals to experience God in a personal way. Davies (2007) argues that reading the Bible is a fundamental way of encountering God. Pentecostals do not read the Bible for reasons of education or religious duty but rather do so to encounter God in the text. Pentecostal scholarship is experiential as

believers and did not concern themselves with theology and doctrine. What was important was encountering God through a personal way and this in turn was verbalised to witness to others about Pentecostal truth.

As Davies (2007) observes, Pentecostals did not read the Bible for any of the three purposes mentioned before learning about Israel's history, developing early theology, or even learning about Jesus' life. Instead, the aim was to find God in the text through a Holy Spirit encounter. Pentecostals found it fitting to be part of the Biblical narrative and in doing so, Scripture reading becomes an experiential experience rather than a descriptive activity. Pentecostal worldviews were driven by the affective experience of God, which provided the means for interpreting reality with an apocalyptic perspective (Martin, 2018). God was known to people in life-changing ways, and Scripture was the channel through which they experienced God through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, a Pentecostal interpretation would be more than cognitive; it would emphasise the reader's encounter with a transcendent God as well (Johns, 1995:85). The interpretation of the Scriptures in Pentecostal churches is expected to bring about change. They embraced the message of the Bible and believed its words and they read the Bible in order to live like people whose stories were told in the Bible rather than to define doctrine or theology about Biblical issues. In the early times of Christianity, the apostles lived out the expectation that the Spirit would lead them during their ministry times, experiencing the expectation of living according to the Spirit. The concept of experience was an important and distinctive feature of a Pentecostal hermeneutics. Doctrine in the Bible is defined by an experience of God by means of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals would often connect their experience as a sign of the authority of the Scripture. Ellington (1996) points out that Pentecostals began their ministry by having an encounter with God that led them to explain Biblical inspiration by using terms that conservative evangelicals were familiar with. Additionally, he argues that experience with God through Scripture impacted on everyday life in the Pentecostal movement in a manner that transformed Biblical authority. In the case of Pentecostal interpreters, they display a deep understanding of the text, empathy for it, and sensitivity to its concerns, which other interpreters lack and cannot possess (Stronstad, 2018:63).

The authority of Scripture among Pentecostals, according to Ellington (1996), was never grounded in inerrancy, but in direct relation with God, and doctrines developed in interaction with the community of faith. According to Pentecostals, truth has to do with the way they relate to God based on what they choose to read in the Bible. Certain Biblical narratives were selected by Pentecostals for theologising which became the model for people to follow and re-experience in the contemporary setting. With their emphasis placed on the re-experiencing of the Biblical text through preaching a literal interpretation of a passage of Scripture, Pentecostals aimed to recreate an experience with the text. The original context was rarely or never given any consideration, but

instead was accompanied by testimony that God still performs miracles today as evidenced by Biblical narratives (Nel, 2015:10).

Pentecostals approached the Bible reading method through the search for all references to a given subject in the Bible and creating a theological statement based on those references. Archer (2004:72) describes this method of searching for Scriptural references as a method involving searching all Scriptural references to a specific subject. Doctrine was not considered a function that generates knowledge but, rather, that which describes experience, since Pentecostals used doctrine to describe their experiences. Nevertheless, this was evidence for the truths that lie outside of experience (Ellington, 1996). The interpretation of the text is influenced by the Pentecostal experience of the interpreter, which determines how the scope of the text is perceived. Therefore, the interpretation has similarities and differences, given the text and the interpreter's experience (Israel, Albrecht & McNally 1993:145). Many brought about a miraculous experience while studying the Bible to affirm the supernatural components contained in Scripture, so personal experiences were vital in confirming these parts. The selected narratives constantly emphasised the supernatural manifestations within the worshipping community, with the purpose of experiencing these manifestations. People's daily experiences altered their epistemology as narratives were understood literally, as they pertain directly to one's need through repetition and personal application.

4.5 Pentecostal testimonies that shaped a Biblical language

In Pentecostal hermeneutics, truth was seen by believers as a testimony to God's interaction with them in the form of language describing their experiences (Dela Cruz, 2010:100). The description of their perception of revelation as relational, as defined by Elliott (1996:19), was the reason for the need for a specific language among Pentecostals. The definition of such an experience is an internal renewal made possible through God's astounding work such as healing, deliverance, and divine intervention, and outward experiences through demonstration of His work (McClean, 1984:49). Pentecostalism provided people with an independent worship style of inclusivism; that allowed everyone to live out their ministry and yet at the same time characterised equality between members. People of all ages and backgrounds participated in public worship in a diverse way, including by offering personal testimonies, and in their testimonies they explained how they participated in activities of the church because the Holy Spirit gave them that capacity (Purdy, 2015:46). Their methodology of generating truth was based on what they considered to be the biblical model of testimony providing truth, which was why they required the recall of memory in their evangelism and worship. History is revealed by the testimony of witnesses, not by the events that led to it. Nonetheless, witness testimony is inevitably biased due to their subjectivity, and the

acceptance of their testimony by the communities determines how far they are trusted (Castelo, 2004:53).

Early Pentecostals experienced such similar encounters; man was inspired to work to bring God's kingdom into being through the new revelation of his ongoing plan and campaigning for its establishment by God (Ellington, 1996). As a result, biblical tales became a basis for validating them against actual experience, indicating the importance of biblical appropriation by Pentecostal communities (Nel, 2017:7-8). Pentecostals have always viewed God as active and interactive with his creation by communicating to his peoples through personal experiences, and such a view of God influenced the way Scriptures were perceived. Pinnock (2000:22) states that Pentecostals were able to infuse the perfect combination for their theological beliefs which was based on their worship gathering and personal experience. With the expectation of experiencing similar experiences, as portrayed in the Biblical narrative as God's ongoing interaction with humankind, they have been inclined to participate in the narrative in a literal and existential sense. Consequently, their theology developed from their experience rather than the other way around (Johns, 1995:4).

Pentecostal hermeneutics also leaves space for a non-verbal, intuitive communication between humankind and God, which has been the basis for miracles when God reveals himself through his Spirit, as Ervin (1987:113) points out in his observation of Pentecostal hermeneutics. This became part of an experience that sat in accordance with the Bible's account of dreams, visions, healing miracles, and salvation, along with glossolalia, the symbol of intuitive spirituality, took place. Nel (2017:9) states that Pentecostals represented a variety of hermeneutical approaches, but agrees with Ervin that the Bible has been viewed mostly in light of visions, dreams, ecstatic experiences and prophetic revelations through an encounter with God. Due to this 'thoroughly experiential supernaturalistic' worldview, early Pentecostalism flourished momentarily, which ultimately sprang from an attempt to mimic the early church and selective versions of the Bible.

4.6 Three elements in Pentecostal hermeneutics

According to Nel (2015:3-4), Pentecostal hermeneutics is defined by three elements. The elements include the interrelationship between the Holy Spirit as those who animated Scripture and empowered the believing community; the individual role of Scripture; and the communal role of living in response to Scripture. Its purpose is to equip members to effectively minister and witness in the context of their culture (Rance, 2009:8). Pentecostals view baptism in the Spirit as a spiritual infusion that makes available the presence of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of God's Word. The Holy Spirit illuminates a believer's mind so that they are able to receive and understand God's truth and guidance. The meaning of the Biblical message cannot be explained apart from the Spirit.

This is often referred to as pneumatic epistemology which shows that knowledge is not cognitive but a relationship with the Spirit that creates the knowledge. One remains clueless to the meaning of the Bible until the Holy Spirit illuminates the believer. Pentecostals believed that the Spirit was essential for the interpreting of Scripture and argued that living in the Spirit would properly make sense of the Bible; they argued that the Spirit must be experienced and lived in order to understand it. Consequently, Pentecostal theology comes into existence only when the believer experiences the anointing of the Holy Spirit while engaging with Scripture (Arrington, 1988:377).

In the early Pentecostal movement, churches formed, and many of the differences were the result of racial and cultural differences or adherence to powerful leaders (Dayton, 1987:17). It became apparent to develop a statement of faith, as hermeneutical problems arose by the time of the Third Wave and denominational loyalties and structured systematic theology became unstable (van der Merwe, 2016:554). The movement saw the increase of chaos as many people all over claimed to be 'Spirit filled and led', being given new revelations and experiences that were contradictory to the interpretations of Scripture. This came as a threat to the validity of the movement if no consensus would not have been reached on the chaos that was experienced, especially towards the conflicting interpretations of Scripture. As a result of trying to solve various theological issues by meeting and debating, the Pentecostal movement divided into three main factions: Unitarians, those adhering to 'Jesus Only' theological beliefs; Dispensionals, those holding that Israel is the only true God; and Apostolics, who believed in a 'Teaching Preaching Ministry'. Trinitarians who believed in the 'second blessing' view of sanctification (Spirit-baptism being a third blessing). Trinitarians believed in the 'finished work' view of sanctification as taught by William H. Durham and the Keswick movement (Spirit-baptism being a second blessing) (Synan, 1975:81).

The task was to develop a theological analysis of Pentecostalism that was inclusive of the major types of the movement. The theological analysis that was concluded expressed the term: 'full gospel' that encompassed Jesus' return to earth as part of an overall divine plan to bring salvation, healing, and holiness to mankind (Land, 1993:6). Martin Luther's belief in justification by faith as the culmination of God's work during the Reformation has been included in the 'Statement of Faith'. Besides restoring the doctrine of sanctification by faith, the Wesley brothers also played an important role in this process. By restoring the doctrine of divine healing by faith, as well as the truth of Jesus' second coming, the Pentecostals gained motivation through the subsequent restoration of the doctrine of baptism with fire and the Spirit followed by signs (Nel, 2014:29).

4.7 The change to a Fundamentalist-Biblicist hermeneutic

When speaking about Pentecostal hermeneutics, it is necessary to discuss the change to a fundamentalist-Biblicist hermeneutic due to cooperation with Evangelicals since the 1940s and 1950s that changed the face of Pentecostalism. Most mainstream denominations see Pentecostals as heretical sects, rather than accepting them as legitimate groups (Nel, 2018:1). In spite of that, Pentecostals sought ways in which acknowledging their faith and becoming accepted would enhance their standing (Nel, 2016), and not to be regarded as sectarian or cultic. They then realised that to be accepted, they had to align themselves with Evangelicals. However, the result was that their hermeneutical position was obscured by dispensationalist fundamentalism and moved from literalism to inerrancy (Kärkkäinen, 1998:80). The primary difference between fundamentalism and Pentecostalism as is the charismatic aspects of the former against the didactic aspects of the latter (Kraus, 1979:58-59). He associates Pentecostalism with Wesleyan/Arminian theological orientation with the assurance of the gifts of the Spirit, and fundamentalism linked to Calvinistic theology and the inerrancy of Scripture. Anderson (1993:233) states that although Pentecostalism was essentially different from fundamentalism, they however preceded to associate with them. In response to the notion of verbal inerrancy and infallibility of Scriptures, which was accepted by fundamentalists, Pentecostals regarded the Bible as sacred, inspired, inerrant, and authoritative, resulting in changes to the Pentecostal hermeneutic, as well as its foundational principles (Ammerman, 1998:61). After reading the Bible with a different perspective, it was determined that the Bible was the ultimate source of authority for their teaching. Previously it was read in anticipation of an experience. Previously, Pentecostals looked inwardly for the voice of the Spirit in order to understand Scripture interpretation; now, Bibles are read in a less rational and literal way that lets the Holy Spirit provide interpretation. As a result, they adopted a new way of reading the Bible, determined mostly by a grammatical-historical interpretive approach (Archer, 2009: 189).

For much of the 20th century, Pentecostalism was a fundamentalist movement, but essential changes took place among the movement, as an emphasis on theological interpretation gradually replaced a focus on anointing of the Spirit (Menzies, 2013:129). Fundamentalism, according to Nel (2017), is a modern phenomenon, having its origins in the Enlightenment ideal of objective truth. Its basic premise is that reality is objectively observable, and only that which can be known is true, as opposed to an explanation based on supernatural intervention. Traditional fundamentalists held that the Bible was objectively true, rather than claiming that it contained myths and legends (Nel, 2017:3). The Bible cannot be understood historically located or contextually sensitive when it is interpreted in a literalistic or prescriptive way because it is given the role of being the final authority in all matters (Firestone, 2014:16). The result of such an adoption between Pentecostals and Evangelicals led to Pentecostals gaining a better acceptance amongst other churches. This also

gave way to the movement's establishment of Bible schools in order to train pastors in reading the Bible in a fundamentalist, literalistic manner (Lewis, 2016).

Fundamentalism arose out of debates over modernism and a historical critical analysis of the Bible (Patte, 1976:7). Although believers valued theological education, they did not consider it equal to the power of the Holy Spirit (Fee, 1991:84), leading ministers to carefully select theological institutions that were 'spiritually-motivated,' Bible-centred and Bible-oriented. Lewis (2016) notes that Pentecostals entering the academy began to affiliate themselves with the Evangelical church as early as the 1970s. A better part of the movement decided that their pastors should obtain theological training to lead others more effectively towards a Pentecostal liberal education (Turnage, 2003:21). As the realisation evolved that more solid theological training was needed for effective ministry, theological training became a prerequisite for those wishing to enter full-time ministry. Anointing with the Spirit no longer sufficed since it was realised that it would be inappropriate to rely exclusively on anointing for ministry (Nel, 2014:108). As a result, the professional pastorate evolved alongside this development. Even as they accepted some of historical criticism's methods, students at Evangelical universities retained the focus on Scripture and continued to hold it to be reliable (Fee, 2002:3).

4.8 Eschatological expectations

One of the strongest theological viewpoints in Classical Pentecostalism is the endorsement of the movement's hermeneutical stance on eschatological matters. Early Pentecostals were not bound to any one system of eschatology, regardless of their influence from dispensational theories and the Scofield Reference Bible (Richmann, 2009:2-3). In essence they believed that Christ would return in the near future. Hocken (2009:117) writes about the historian D. William Faupel who said, "The second coming of Jesus was the central concern of the initial Pentecostal message." The eschatological expectations motivated early Pentecostals to an urgency of world evangelisation as Pentecostals awaited the second coming of Jesus which was upon them. The eschatological 'latter rain' had a profound effect on Pentecostals throughout their lives, turning them into the 'sealed bride of Christ' (McQueen, 2012:6). Their lives were governed by the presence of God during this time as it was seen as a sign of the final return of the Lord. In essence, Pentecostals focused on the imminent return of Christ and any formal theological training was discouraged as the real concern was focused on souls being saved. The Bible was read with one result in mind: as a guide to equip the church for world evangelism as they anticipated the return of the Lord. The Pentecostal message was clear for the world to be saved, sanctified and filled with the Holy Spirit; those who were sick to be healed, and for everyone to be a witness to proclaim the return of Jesus.

The Bible was read through a charismatic lens, focusing on the supernatural and the eschatological presence of God. Pentecostals live by and experience the presence of God in the

eschatological timeframe, which is a supernatural and experiential worldview (Archer, 1996:64). The Pentecostal movement portrayed a desire to relive the experiences of the apostles of the New Testament (Archer, 1996:131). Joel 2:28-32 is a passage that is closely related to Acts 2:16-21. It describes an event that is eschatological and indicates the approaching Day of the Lord. The Book of Joel, chapter 2:18-29, was fulfilled on Pentecost according to classical Pentecostals; “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.” The Spirit was poured out on those present in the upper room; however, the Spirit continues to fill the lives of many who are yielded to Christ and who anticipates his return. Rather than participating in activities that delayed the return of Christ, the movement focused on assisting those who were preparing for it. People were imparted with dreams and visions, prophecy and speaking in tongues with the purpose of affirming the thoughts of God especially matters concerning the end times. The need of experiencing the Spirit groaning as mentioned in Romans chapter 8:22-23, was in anticipation of God's reign to be revealed in a new world when He comes. Pentecostals became convincing as time went by due to the eschatological expectation and the countless catastrophes that had taken place throughout history that have been depicted as signs of the ages; pointing to the end of the world (Faupel, 1996:21). The Bible is combined with the tools of the spiritual gifts in order to cultivate skills that are necessary for ministry - such as prophecy, knowledge and wisdom, and the ability to interpret tongues (Nel, 1993:12).

Spirit baptism was interpreted early and often as a way to empower eschatological mission (Nel, 2014). Most Pentecostals were premillennialists who interpreted the end times in a literal sense; the Church would be raptured, the rise of the antichrist and tribulation will take place, thereafter the kingdom of peace will be established and last for a thousand years when Jesus returns to earth personally. Therefore, for Pentecostals the outpouring of the Spirit with the evidences of speaking in tongues was a sign of the last days, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel quoted in Acts, and that Christ would return once a worldwide revival broke out (Anderson, 1993: 597). The word tongues simply mean languages, however a more accurate description of the phenomenon is needed. A distinction is made between ‘glossolalia’ and ‘xenolalia’ or ‘xenoglossy’. The former comes from the Greek words for ‘speaking in tongues’ used in the New Testament, *glōssais lalein*, and it refers to ecstatic, incomprehensible speech. Xenoglossy refers to the speaking of a foreign language that one has not learned. Pentecostals understood the gift of tongues considering what occurred in Acts 2, and they believed that it was given as a missionary tool that would allow them to speak in foreign languages without study. The main Pentecostal newspaper, *Apostolic Faith*, declared: “The baptism with the Holy Ghost makes you a witness unto the uttermost parts of the earth. It gives you power to speak in the languages of the nations” (Anderson, 2014:182).

Pentecostals who went into the mission field equipped with the gift of tongues soon discovered that was futile. These Pentecostal missionaries encountered a harsh reality. It was evident to them that they would not be able to communicate in the native language once they arrived on the mission field. Eschatology was set aside by Pentecostal ideology in favour of *glossolalia* for its own sake. This doctrine is the first evidence that an individual has been baptised by the Holy Spirit. Under classical Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit is promised to those who become saved, and tongues as the uniform sign given to all who receive Spirit baptism. Thus, speaking in tongues became inseparably linked with the believer's salvation. Despite the failure of tongues on the mission field, Pentecostals remain committed to the idea that tongues involve speaking foreign languages, and such beliefs are often reinforced by specific situations when a foreigner would be present at a church service.

4.9 Conclusion

A historical assessment of classical Pentecostal hermeneutics has been evaluated by outlining its development since the 1970s. It is plain from the discussion that there is no one fixed nature of Biblical interpretation. In this chapter, development of Pentecostal hermeneutics is outlined by the contributing factors mentioned. The Bible was read at face value and its hermeneutics dealt primarily with the actual context of the reader. In the early days, preaching was done primarily by the local pastor. Locals did not have a lot of training in theological matters. The historical narratives became key in constructing doctrine as a specific theological assumption was brought into effect. The Word of God was not thought of as historical documents, but as active and present words for its time. This historical and grammatical exegesis of Scripture lead to hermeneutics that were influenced by people's socio-economic condition. These conditions were rooted in the problems of the marginalised, and in turn Pentecostal hermeneutics was found within the anti-intellectualism as a practical hermeneutic replaced a scholarly one. It is clear that Pentecostal hermeneutics were influenced by personal experience and testimonies that shaped a Biblical language. Furthermore, eschatological expectations have also influenced theological views within classical Pentecostalism. The people believed God's final return was a sign of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and they were surrounded by it and lived in it.

During the 1940s, Pentecostals sought ways in which that could be accepted as part of the Christian world, a Fundamentalist-dispensationalist hermeneutics, which tends to be literalist and adheres to the doctrine of inerrancy of Scripture, was accepted by Pentecostals when they formed a partnership with Evangelicals. Towards the end of the 1970s, Pentecostals asserted the importance of theological education and established theological schools for studying Pentecostal theology (Nel, 2014:274), which ultimately led to consider the original hermeneutics that

characterised the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostal hermeneutics are held in high regard by its followers from the time of the movement's origins, and the movement continues to grow. However, it is pivotal to compare classical Pentecostal hermeneutics to neo-Pentecostalism with the aim to consider the developing hermeneutics that has resulted in a growing divergence within the movement which has led to hermeneutic religious abuses, particularly in Southern African churches. In the next chapter, this comparison will be discussed to propose corrections to the neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics that are related to the abuses that are identified.

CHAPTER 5

COMPARISON BETWEEN CLASSICAL PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE HERMENEUTICS FOUND IN NEO- PENTECOSTAL CIRCLES

5.1 Introduction

Throughout the years, a great deal has been written about Pentecostal hermeneutics, a subject that has been largely ignored until the mid-1990s (Nel, 2017:86). It is a subject of discussion that is distinctive in nature due to different theological traditions that have embraced the Pentecostal movement to read and interpret the Bible only in a specific way. In this chapter, a comparison is drawn between classical Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics and how its practices have evolved. The aim is to describe these practices in terms of current hermeneutic perspectives and to establish the implications of such practices. In recent years, African neo-Pentecostal churches have been in the limelight because of the uncommon practices that have been shaped by its own hermeneutics. This study proposed that these practices have led to hermeneutical religious abuses. The researcher will consider similarities and differences in hermeneutical practices between classic Pentecostalism and African neo-Pentecostalism that enable stories of abuse to arise. These two movements will be summarised, and the core elements discussed. The following points have been identified as essential in the formation of Pentecostal hermeneutics: centrality of Holy Spirit, historical/grammatical exegesis, socio-economic conditions, personal experience, theological training and eschatological expectations. The approach considers the facts presented for the formation of early Pentecostalism to its current times to establish how much has changed within Pentecostal hermeneutics and what can be done to change the future of bad practices within African neo-Pentecostalism.

5.2 Summary of classical Pentecostal hermeneutics

5.2.1 Origin

A connection exists between classical Pentecostalism and the Holiness Movement that emphasised the doctrine of sanctification of the nineteenth century. During this time, personal sanctification was required to live a desirable Christian life. Once a person came to salvation, the goal was to attain growth in holiness and ultimately complete sanctification. When the era of spiritual revivals came to an end, a greater hunger was birthed that prepared the way for classical Pentecostalism and its hermeneutical practices. Early Pentecostals believed that their

hermeneutics were equivalent to the earliest faith community. The movement was inspired by a revivalistic atmosphere and expected that Christ would return soon. By restoring spiritual gifts in the Christian Church and evangelising the world, the Holy Spirit was expected to regenerate the church spiritually (Amaechi, 2010:5).

5.2.2 Biblical view

Historically, God's redemptive plan was seen as the whole story of the Bible, preserved by the Spirit for illumination, teaching, and transforming human lives (Gordon, 2011:45). In providing the inspired Word of God, the Holy Spirit expresses the precise truths He intends to convey, which makes the Bible an authoritative revelation about God (Arrington, 1996:107). A Bible encounter was equivalent to a personal encounter with God, thus requiring no credal formulation, since it was believed to be God's last and ultimate revelation. The Bible was interpreted based on personal experiences with God through the Spirit and to meet God through progressive revelation and not on doctrine passed down. Classical Pentecostals regarded the authority of Scripture, not based on inerrancy or doctrine, rather the formation of doctrine is not about an individual encounter with God, but about a community of faith and the experience of the group (Ellington, 1996).

A Pentecostal hermeneutic emphasises the Lukan narratives with prominence in the book of Acts and the Holy Spirit as the focal point for guidance and interpretation (Menzies, 2013:121). In the presence of the Spirit, Scripture becomes the living Word. There was no consideration of how distant contemporary believers are from the text. Despite its social, cultural and historical context, the text was initially ignored by Pentecostals (Nel, 2021:70). In their view, it was more appropriate to take Scripture at face value and apply it to its immediate context, as though it had been written for a specific purpose. Various levels of meaning were found to exist within Scripture, allowing for different interpretations of the same passage to be accepted (Cargal, 1993). Scriptural references were found in the Bible regarding a topic and, following the Holy Spirit's guidance, a theological statement was formulated. Bible reading methods were used for producing a doctrinal statement concerning the topic under discussion, as well as providing a Biblical understanding of that subject (Archer, 2004:75). Through allegory, analogy, typology, or tracing hidden and spiritual meanings hidden within difficult texts, difficult texts were viewed from a new perspective and applied to the immediate context (Ellington, 1996).

5.2.3 The influence of the Holy Spirit

Compared with the authority of Scripture, the Holy Spirit commands a greater place; subsequently, it is impossible to distinguish between illumination and inspiration (Henry, 1979:500). Every believer had the opportunity to be baptised with the Spirit on Pentecost, as the Spirit continues to

work among believers through signs and wonders. It was the Pentecostals who validated their faith firmly by claiming that 'speaking in tongues' was an initial sign of being baptised with the Holy Spirit (Oyetade, 2020). It is believed that Pentecostals lived in the time of the latter rain, where the Holy Spirit baptism symbolised the completion of bringing the Kingdom of God into existence.

The narratives in Acts are read specifically with an intention to bring about the continuation of the biblical stories in modern times by allowing the Holy Spirit to act as interpreter (Stott, 1976:23). Pentecostalism is centered on the Scriptures, which is the foundation and focus of their faith. As such, the focus of the hermeneutic of the faith is the role of the Spirit within the Bible and its function for believers (Arrington, 1996:107). People who experienced the manifestation of the Spirit are often led to preach and testify about their faith. The emphasis of classical Pentecostalism emphasises the believer's direct experience with God and the awareness of the Spirit's indwelling to empower the believer in witness, worship and testimony (Sandidge, 1987:141).

5.2.4 A Pentecostal worship experience

The community of faith is a vital part in shaping a Pentecostal hermeneutics. Public worship services draw participants who are considered outcasts of society including the uneducated and poor. There is a consensus that early Pentecostal hermeneutics were characterised by "oral, charismatic, ahistorical, relatively non-contextual, literal interpretations, and moral and spiritual absolutism" (Nel, 2015:21). Regular people were able to partake in the worship service through song, poems, dance, preaching and testimonies. Personal testimonies in classic Pentecostalism were demonstrated, explained and affirmed through supernatural components told in Scripture, and the experience of the miracles of their study of the Bible that was evident through healing, deliverance and divine interventions (McClean, 1984:49).

Believers did not need to have much knowledge about God; it was essential to encounter God personally, as described by biblical witnesses. According to Pentecostal interpretation, it is always intended for the Bible to be understood by experience and the leading of the Spirit. The purpose of Bible interpretation and preaching was to connect to each listener by offering a message that was practical for their needs (Byrd, 1993). In the course of relating their encounters with God through their testimonies, Pentecostals learned how to speak about their experience as effective witnesses to Pentecostalism. Every believer, as realisation of the prophethood and priesthood of all believers, is valuable to God's Kingdom in sharing the gospel through what God has done for them. As Christ performs great works in the assembly, members are established and equipped (Langerman, 1983:124).

5.2.5 Pentecostal alliance with Evangelical fundamentalist

Pentecostalism was not easily accepted by other denominations and from the 1940s, they sought ways in which that could be recognised and accepted. As a result, the Protestant church affiliated itself with the evangelical movement. Evangelical fundamentalists did not reject Pentecostal theology altogether. The Pentecostal movement stresses fundamentalist and dispensationalist hermeneutics, including literalism and inerrancy of Scripture (Lewis, 2016). As a result, Evangelicals gained a more significant influence of Pentecostals associated with their position and Pentecostals achieved a better acceptance amongst other churches. According to Lewis (2016), Bible schools were formed when Evangelical pastors were taught how to interpret the Bible based on fundamentalist-literalistic approaches. At first, early Pentecostals rejected any kind of formal theological training; theology happened in an oral manner (Anderson, 1979). However, when Pentecostals aligned themselves with Evangelical fundamentalist, theological institutions were carefully chosen so as not to replace the work of the Holy Spirit (Fee, 1991:84). Pentecostals who pursued their theological studies continued to maintain the connection by studying at Evangelical universities and, though ultimately they also accepted certain methods of historical criticism, this represented a commitment to the reliability of Scripture (Fee, 2002:3). It was ultimately decided to focus on the historical context of biblical narratives rather than their content, underlining the closeness of the text and that it has different meanings and relevance to the times (Cargal, 1993). Pentecostalism expanded through the era of three waves and soon reached Africa to what we see as the results of African neo-Pentecostalism.

5.3 Summary of African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics

5.3.1 Origin

Soon after the Azusa Street Revival, the Pentecostal movement flourished throughout Africa. A huge portion of sub-Saharan Africa was almost completely ravaged by Pentecostalism, which has its roots in nineteenth-century slave religion (Kavan, 2004:171). South Africa was the first African nation to receive Pentecostalism in 1908, connecting African Pentecostalism directly to the classical form of the 20th century (Anderson, 2005:27). Neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa embrace African traditionalism and incorporate it into their theology. Theology in these churches is contextualised and is based on African lessons (Kgatle, 2018). The movement had led to larger, independent churches in Africa that have arisen independently from the Pentecostal movement and are regarded 'Spirit-type' churches in their own right as part of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs). They share a pneumatological view of Scripture and acknowledge the spirit world as an influence in shaping its hermeneutics. Despite the fact that some neo-Pentecostal leaders choose not to use the title prophet, much of their work can nonetheless be understood as prophetic in nature and can be referred to as Prophetic Pentecostalism (Kgatle, 2019). Essentially, these are

churches that retain classical Pentecostal doctrines, but emphasises prosperity theology that is demonstrated by signs and wonders and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

5.3.2 Biblical view

A Pentecostal hermeneutic, according to Fogarty (2015), is based on a re-experience of Scripture through preaching that aims to impart an immediate understanding of the text. Selective texts are chosen mainly from the gospels and specifically to address people's immediate needs. The original context of Scripture is often ignored as practices are based on a modern expression of interpretation that rules out the basic form of hermeneutical interpretation. Adamo (2015) argues that an anthropological/sociological approach is used to analyse the understanding of the Biblical text when applying the approach of Africa and Africans in the Bible. This leads to an understanding of interpreting the Bible allegorically with the belief that behind the actual words of a Biblical writer, there are always hidden meanings which defy literal explanations since they are spiritual and mystical. The Bible is seen as a wisdom book that brings into effect success, healing and deliverance by simple confessions and positive thinking. It is taken at face value as supernatural powers and encounters are sought after and are mainly used to combat witchcraft and evil spells where fear is manifested.

5.3.3 Africa and Africans in Bible

The 'Africa and Africans in Bible' approach is an essential aspect in shaping African Biblical hermeneutics. This is the basis for neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics that is grounded in African tradition and the Bible. The Bible is viewed as an African document (through an 'African eye') that is rich in African history and relevant to African culture. Specific examples of Africans in the Bible are mentioned in chapter 3, and this has motivated preachers to use an African methodology when interpreting Scripture. This has given Africans a sense of identity and belonging that incorporates African culture and the Bible. To have an identity and belonging comes with a sense of empowerment that is felt amongst African believers. The concept of empowerment has a direct influence on African hermeneutics which remains a central variable in understanding state behaviour, the economy and people's rights within Africa. The promise of a 'better' life is found in its hermeneutical teachings since the Bible has power that connects to the culture and traditions in an African context. Sermons centre on economic and social conditions such as poverty, witchcraft and the promise of a 'better' life. The Bible is relevant to lived realities within an African context because it is read in light of Africans in Scripture as a model to follow.

An important characteristic of African Biblical hermeneutics is its focus on reading as a community. Wright (2017:87) asserts in his study of the communal reading that the early Christian traditions and teachings remained relatively unchanged. A major influence behind the widespread practice of public reading is the combination of social, economic, and political factors. This has become a

familiar part of everyday life and can be regarded as “reading with the ordinary readers, reading with the community and reading with African eyes” (Adamo, 2015).

5.3.4 The influence of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit remains the fundamental figure in African Pentecostalism, as God continues to reveal himself, though progressive revelation and within the cultural context. Experience as well as non-rational forms of knowing are valued highly by the Spirit, whereas Scripture holds little authority (Turnage, 2003:9). During the performance of extraordinary miracles, the Holy Spirit manifests itself in the form of personal and individual experiences. While neo-Pentecostals do not typically consider *glossolalia* to be evidence of Spirit baptism, the Spirit is not limited in how he wants to lead the church, as he is responsible in equipping the church in doing “greater works” (John 14:12) by overcoming evil forces and demonic activities.

5.3.5 Worship experience

Worship gatherings are spontaneous and viewed as genuine experience with God is made possible by the Holy Spirit. These services often result in the non-delivery of sermons and are packed with singing, testimonies and miracles in the present day, in the same manner as found in the Biblical narrative. This makes Pentecostalism the most appealing religion in Africa, as it is able to transcend and adapt to a variety of cultural environments, as indigenous people are free to adopt culturally relevant practices and forms of worship (Mashau, 2013:16). Members gather to receive ‘new and in-depth’ revelation from their pastors, who are looked upon with high regard and honour. The preaching given by these ministers is taken as inspired and direct revelation from God. The expression of worship in these churches is unique but not uncommon to its cultural setting. People are encouraged to express their faith by doing certain activities (in some exceptional examples, drinking petrol, eating snakes and grass) that prove their spiritual growth. Furthermore, the emphasis of a blessed and successful life is reiterated as the goal to attain spirituality and overcoming evil.

5.4 Comparison between classic Pentecostal and African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics

Now that a summary has been outlined, key elements are compared between the two hermeneutical angles by highlighting the peculiarities that each movement has in terms of the major points of agreement and disagreement, in order to propose corrections to African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics that are related to the abuses that are identified.

5.4.1 The centrality of Holy Spirit's role in Pentecostal hermeneutics

Traditionally, the work of the Holy Spirit involves regeneration and sanctification. This, however, seems to constitute a limitation to Pentecostals. The Holy Spirit, according to them, has blessed them in another way, commonly called 'the baptism with the Holy Spirit' which is distinct and subsequent to conversion. The role of the Holy Spirit is a central figure in both classic and neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics are similar in shaping its hermeneutics. Pentecostalism is defined by the influence of Scripture on the believer's community, and the dominance and role of Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Arrington (1996:107) emphasises that this doctrine rests on the influence of Scripture and the community of believers. The Holy Spirit is responsible in revealing the progressive plan and will of God on a continuous basis even at this present time. Pentecostal hermeneutic is recognised as the hermeneutic in which the Holy Spirit is given substantial prominence as the one involved in the interpretation of the Scripture. By the same Holy Spirit, believers are also able to discern the mind of God by accessing the revelation of Christ contained in the Bible. (Wenk, 2003:64). An important belief of Pentecostals is that the Holy Spirit connects the reader of the Bible in modern times to the teachings of the Bible in biblical times.

There are, however, specific aspects that set both movements apart in their actual understanding and function of the Holy Spirit. From the development of classical Pentecostalism, the movement believed in salvation through confession as well as baptism and spiritual gifting of the Holy Spirit (Kgatle, 2017). Although Jesus Christ remained the centre of the Pentecostal message, the awareness and indwelling of the Holy Spirit was greatly desired (Williams, 2015:1). The Spirit's revelation of inspiration and administration leads one to experience an encounter with Christ (Ma, 2005:8). Among the key components of classical Pentecostalism is receiving Christ and speaking in tongues, both of which demonstrate that one has been baptised in the Holy Spirit, enabling a believer to "live a Spirit-filled and empowered life". Firstly, the emphasis on speaking in tongues was mandatory and is found in Acts 2 verse 10 and 19 which became the evidence for supernatural signs. In the Pentecostal tradition, speaking in tongues indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit. Prayer was encouraged for faith in the gift of tongues, and believers were challenged to develop a deep desire for this unique manifestation of the Spirit's power and presence.

Secondly, early Pentecostals concluded that baptism would enable them to live a life filled with the Spirit in which they would encounter Christ (Nel, 2021:5). According to Torrey (1895:9), having the gift of the Spirit is essential for a Spirit-filled life for Christ. In the early church, individuals were taught to wait for the fullness of Christ by living a Spirit-filled life that was often expressed in witness, prayer, preaching, prophecy, and missions. Nel (2019:18) argues that biblical terms such as receiving power from above, receiving the Holy Spirit, and being filled with the Spirit can be used to describe the experience of baptism with the Holy Spirit. A believer is properly revealed to Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and is able to worship and witness to Him directly through His Spirit

(Menzie, 1970:2). As a Pentecostal, baptism in the Spirit involves surrendering to and committing to fellowship with Christ the Saviour and the community of believers. According to Mahan (2015:52), Spirit baptism acts on the believer to quicken their natural, moral and spiritual power, to enter the mind with the knowledge of truth, and to give the believer the assurance of salvation. Furthermore, there is a deeper relationship with God through Jesus, enduring spiritual blessings and unity among believers.

Thirdly, in addition to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a significant theological component of the Pentecostal movement is the concept of Christ as the 'Coming King', which is heavily intertwined with it (Stephenson, 2009:27). Throughout the Scriptures, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is associated with a prophetic signalling of the end times, which was a necessity for all believers in order to prepare for the second coming of Christ. During the latter rain, baptism in the Spirit occurred, showing God's power at work before the return of Christ. Early Pentecostalism referred to Joel 2:23-29 as a key passage that explained the 'later rain' (Stephenson, 2009:45). The eschatological expectation lay between Christ as 'Baptiser' and Christ 'the Coming King'. For early Pentecostals, the desire was to encounter the baptism of the Spirit in order to be endowed with spiritual gifts and the power to witness, with signs and wonders following in anticipation of Christ's return.

The neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics of Africa are both similar to classical Pentecostalism in many respects, but they differ in many respects as well, not just because of the characteristics of their African heritage, but also because of the spirituality that they emphasise. With Neo-Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit can work in a more uniquely African manner, which provides Africans with a greater sense of divine involvement. In contrast to classical Pentecostalism, where speaking in tongues is used as a sign of the indwelling of the Spirit, African Pentecostalism is seen as a much broader movement that affects a very wide range of people (Mashau, 2013:17). God's truth is revealed in all its activities by the Spirit, and that work is not rigid. The Holy Spirit is able to reveal new revelations today, just as he did during classic Pentecostalism, which is often called revelation knowledge, functioning on same level as scriptural revelation (Yong, 2007:247). God is not only able to speak through dreams, visions, songs and personal encounters, but He reveals his truth to those who are considered 'prophets' and 'men of God'. With the Holy Spirit's revelations and insights, their ministry is enriched with God's revelations and wisdom. The Holy Spirit continues to work unrestricted and progressively, relevant to the times just as he did amongst early Pentecostals.

It should however be pointed out that many prophets belonging to African Neo-Pentecostal churches have used the Holy Spirit as an excuse for their hermeneutical practices by claiming to be led by the Holy Spirit in their practices. Banda (2019) explains that the Holy Spirit's divinity and personality are undermined by impersonalising Him as a powerful force, turning the Holy Spirit into

an object that could be mastered and controlled by prophets. This undermines the Spirit's sovereignty and independence as God. Uncommon practices that have been introduced in the church promotes the idea of the Holy Spirit as unpredictable and needing to be manipulated through miracles. Instead of promoting the desire for a personal relationship and walk with the Holy Spirit, there is a craving for power that is performed by trusted prophets. It is evident that neo-Pentecostal prophets misrepresent the Holy Spirit's personality by inserting themselves as the only channels through whom the Spirit could work in people.

A comparison of early Pentecostals to African Neo-Pentecostals that emphasise the availability of post-Biblical Holy Spirit gifts is relevant to show that particularly among African Neo-Pentecostals, baptism in the Spirit was seen as an integral part of living for Christ in the early Pentecostal movement (Mashau, 2013:17). Pentecostal teachings are exemplified in the performance of extraordinary miracles that are exceptional examples of their gifts, including *glossolalia*, healing, prophecy and the laying on of hands. The distinctive feature of African neo-Pentecostal worship services is the emphasis on the Holy Spirit's power and gifts associated with tangible items and substances, such as anointing oil, drinking gasoline, and consuming snakes (Pondani, 2019:45). A great emphasis is placed on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome sickness and evil spirits. These elements of the 'Holy Spirit's move' were not common in early Pentecostalism as compared to today, which has become relevant to a specific cultural setting. The problems that African people experience are the very problems that Spirit-type churches offer a solution to. The Holy Spirit is credited with setting the guidelines for neo-Pentecostal practices as well as inspiring them, and Hebrews 2:4 is used to affirm this: "God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

For classical Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is the key figure that 'holds the movement together'; his role is as prominent as in the formation of the early church and the promise made to the disciples in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." The early Pentecostal movement teaches that the Holy Spirit is the one who brings believers into a more profound knowledge of God and is active in a supernatural dimension despite the era and cultural setting. Just as the Holy Spirit was involved during the writings and interpretation of the Scriptures, so too does he illuminate ordinary believers in fully understanding the Word of God. Furthermore, he establishes believers in the body of Christ for worship, fellowship, and service. He is ultimately the one who prepares the hearts of those sanctified for Christ's second coming. Classical Pentecostalism and African neo-Pentecostalism will be contrasted in view of these concepts.

5.4.2 Historical/grammatical exegesis

According to early Pentecostalism, the interpretation of Scripture does not follow a predefined structure, since it takes into account historical-grammatical arguments, faith communities, and the Holy Spirit's inspiration, enlightenment and illumination of the readers and listeners (Becker, 2004:34). Unlike historically based and contextualised hermeneutics, Pentecostalism is ahistorical, austere in interpretation, and absolute in morality and spirituality. Due to the Pentecostal emphasis on direct experience of the Holy Spirit, the historical record is less important for them than its ability to help determine what believers can expect. (Jacobsen, 2003:136). The Pentecostals' view of Scripture is that statements regarding the text must agree with statements concerning the Spirit. By examining the text's claim through the lens of the Spirit's claim, one can determine whether the Spirit's claim corresponds to the text's claim (McQueen, 2009:106). Therefore, the doctrine of Pentecost traces its origins to believers engaging Scripture through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, guiding its interpretation through three pillars: pneumatic, experiential, and historical (Arrington, 1988:377).

Early Pentecostals were required to relinquish any preconceived philosophical beliefs or oral culture that would be a stumbling block for encountering God experientially (Martin, 2016:4). This is particularly true when considering its cultural context, as most believers read the Bible for their spiritual value, not for knowledge of history or theology. It has been explained by Nel (2016) that the interpretations of the text are based on typology and allegory in their literal and immediate meanings which have been applied to the present context. Classical Pentecostals read and understood the Bible as plainly as possible, with the application of common sense in interpreting Scripture literally. Although Pentecostals applied a literal interpretation to Scripture, they did not regard the historical context of the texts as important, compared to the present meaning that was applied. The Bible was read to understand themselves (Ricoeur, 1975:30), instead of knowing the writer's original intent. As the experiential guided its interpretation, the text served as a guide for interpreting the experiences, in the same way as the text provided them with the language to express their experiences and expectations of meeting God (Nel, 2017:100). What was read was interpreted in terms of what was being experienced. The Pentecostal movement views the Bible as the 'Word of God' communicated in human terms, a fact that suggests it is a coherent text in its own right, independent of the pneumatic illumination, which makes grammar and history relevant since they are human categories as well Nel (2017:103).

In the same way, when one considers African neo-Pentecostalism, not much has changed in the way the historical-grammatical exegesis is viewed within its cultural setting, as compared to classic Pentecostalism. In spite of this, the immediate heritage of African neo-Pentecostalism is not classical Pentecostalism, but the Word of Faith movement which was founded by E.W. Kenyon before Pentecostalism. Having said that, what classic Pentecostalism fails to do in an African

setting, neo-Pentecostalism provides a solution. When the Pentecostal movement reached Africans, it was considered that conversion should be based on the beliefs and standards of 'Western civilisation'. It meant that becoming a Christian meant losing the "African" characteristics and "more civilised" (Williamson, 1965:40). Converting to Christianity required one to abandon any former way of worship and view Christianity through a European worldview (Nel, 2019:7-8). However, this kind of approach was resisted as an African methodology became necessary for the movement to be accepted and successful in an African context. African people needed a religion that was more 'African' which would incorporate their cultural practices. Therefore, reading the Bible through 'Westernised eyes' was unreliable to native Africans. Africa was not particularly interested in that viewpoint since it did not offer answers to its existential problems.

The distinctiveness of African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics is found in the adoption of Africa and Africans interpreting Scripture. African Biblical hermeneutics, according to Adamo (2015), is a way to interpret the Bible for social transformation. For a movement to stay strong and vital, it must cultivate a deep commitment to Africa's history and worldview, while also keeping an eye on the needs of contemporary Africans. Opposed to the classic form of Pentecostalism, African traditions support the neo-Pentecostal idea that spiritual forces are always present, which is in line with the traditional view of the universe. It relates to people experiencing the deep need to have their problems understood by divination or knowledge of the spiritual, in a world in which nothing happens by accident or merely by natural causes (van den Toren, 2015).

Hermeneutical practices reach beyond the typical form and norm of laying hands on. Instead, in an African worldview, God works through his Holy Spirit in unusual ways that are relatable to an African context. The Scripture is read and understood from an African worldview and cultural perspective.

In demonstrating the importance of African culture to the analysis of Scripture, Adamo (2015) compares its texts to those related to African traditions, religions, and cultures. He further argues that biblical interpretation is analysed through an anthropological/sociological method when the perspective of African people and Africa is applied to the text (Adamo, 2015). The Bible is read as a function of a cultural worldview. A Biblical allegory is therefore derived from this interpretation of recognising the Bible with the belief that behind the actual words of a Biblical writer, there are always hidden meanings that defy literal explanations since they are spiritual and mystical.

African religious beliefs represent a worldview that involves the physical world, indicative of spiritual realities. The neo-Pentecostal movement in Africa discusses similar themes found in the Bible, such as poverty, famine, racial inequality, gender oppression, and witchcraft. According to African belief, they live in a magic world despite constantly having to confront evil forces. Consequently, all events have a spiritual cause as they are purposefully created. Furthermore, what happens on earth has a direct influence on events in the spiritual realm (Nel, 2019:8). For this

reason, African neo-Pentecostals have valued the Bible and handle it with reverence because it is used in ritualistic ways, as a book of supernatural power. A resulting effect is that some African neo-Pentecostals tend to ignore the context of the text and tend to hear what suits them when reading the Bible. Therefore, a lack of appropriate hermeneutics is responsible for this reinterpretation of the Bible, as it fails to acknowledge the historical context and setting of it (Menzies & Menzies, 2000:78).

Both classical and neo-Pentecostals concentrate on specific narratives (New Testament, particularly the synoptic Gospels and the book of Acts) when reading the Scripture, with the intention of encountering what the early church experienced through the power of the Holy Spirit. The historical, Biblical events are examples that should be re-experienced in contemporary times that allow for miracles to continue. However, the 'signs and wonders' expressed in some African neo-Pentecostal churches ignore the context of the text and encourage their congregation to participate in some extreme practices such as drinking petrol, eating snakes and grass. These ministers lean on the words of Jesus found in Mark 9:23, "Everything is possible for one who believes." In contrast to a scientific view of the world that denies the possibility of supernatural events taking place, Lataster (2013:30) argues that such an approach is compatible with supernatural intervention and miracles. However, ministers who are responsible for these 'supernatural acts' do not consider the historical-grammatical background of the text. They tend to ignore the context of the text and do not stay true to the writer's original intent. These ministers advocate subjective experiences of supernatural encounters, which demonstrate how accurate the supernatural elements of Scripture are. Accordingly, it makes sense to approach knowing the truth through the Bible from the Spirit's perspective, because the Spirit revealed the meaning of Scripture through the Bible (Nel, 2019:90).

5.4.3 Influence of theological training in Pentecostal hermeneutics

Classical Pentecostals opposed formal academic training as a hindrance to the Holy Spirit's movement, which they believed would derail the work of the Holy Spirit. There was no desire for any kind of professional theological training as membership consisted of people who did not necessarily have an education. Most of the early members were illiterate. Theology was done in an oral manner, with a deep desire to encounter God personally and to offer a solution to people's immediate needs (Anderson, 1979). The lack of critical thinking resulted from the Bible being read literally and interpreted at face value in addition to avoiding any theological or academic expertise since theological knowledge is deemed damaging to the individual and corrupting to institutions (Chan, 2000:45).

In the early days, Pentecostals would gather in homes to have church services, and they were responsible for the welfare of the assembly. However, no requirements of formal training were

needed for leading the congregation as most of the leaders were not educated themselves. Pentecostal churches conferred elderhood, deacons, or missionary status on members without requiring theological education (Langerman, 1983:125). Every believer has been made eligible to receive this promise of Jesus in John 16:13; "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." Theological training was looked upon as a threat to the power and work of God, and as an attempt to replace gospel knowledge with intellectual speculation (Tarr, 1997:197-198). Pentecostals were convinced that the Holy Spirit and Scripture were enough to provide all the knowledge that was needed to deal with contextual challenges. The Holy Spirit greatly impacted Pentecostal believers during interpretation such that they became equipped for ministry through the Scripture and the Holy Spirit guiding their lives (Nel, 2015:21).

By bridging the gap between the Bible and the believer, Anderson (2007:58) explains that the Holy Spirit provides spiritual growth, equipping, and empowerment for ministry and proclaiming the gospel of salvation to the world as a preparation for Christ's imminent return. Early Pentecostals were confident that speaking in tongues was sufficient to equip and qualify believers as effective witnesses (Menzie, 2007:80). Believers were gifted the ability to speak in tongues by the Holy Spirit so that they could preach the gospel to nations without training in theology. Formal training has thus been viewed by Pentecostals as unnecessary, rather than helpful, since they perceive it as a response to formal religious exercises, seeing them as lifeless (Nel, 2016). The Pentecostal experience revealed that theological knowledge undermined the spiritual faith of many believers, so they thought it was not only unnecessary, but injurious to spiritual growth (van der Spuy, 1985:107).

When early Pentecostals looked to be accepted into the academy since the 1940s, they thought it would be best to align themselves with Evangelicals in order to be accepted by other denominations (Lewis, 2016). The absence of theological training contributed to animosity in the community. It meant that they were ineligible for school board positions, marriage commissioner positions, or participation in religious programs (Putter, 2010:1). By embracing the fundamentalist-literalistic way of approaching Bible texts, they became more comfortable with their understanding of Scripture (Lewis, 2016). However, theological institutions were carefully chosen as not to replace the mission of the Holy Spirit. Theological education was not designed to serve as evangelistic training or to enrich theological discussions, rather for equipping and training ministers to engage in evangelism (Gee, 1932:82).

By the 1970s, a change took place in the mindset of Pentecostals and a new development sparked. As part of this transformation, biblical schools were replaced by theological training, as well as theological colleges were founded (Chinappan, 1993:4). As a result, most denominations required theological training for ordination as a prerequisite to becoming an ordained minister. Effective ministry training was essential for equipping ministers to meet the needs of the day, especially for full-time ministers (Goff, 2008:91).

When contrasting the influence of theological training among African neo-Pentecostals, the parallel seems to shift. There is a shared commonality that is evident, however, African neo-Pentecostals are distinct in the way their ministers are informed and empowered. Theological education and ministerial preparation differ according to the racial segregation and the local ecclesiastical tradition of Christians in South Africa (Resane, 2017). The standards and level of education were unequal and diverse, and African neo-Pentecostal churches were not left unscathed. Neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa view the Bible from an African perspective, and these churches find African solutions to the problems they face, which is not solved in Western theological schools (Anderson, 1996:9). They tend to care little about hermeneutics. What makes sense is a religious experience influenced by the divine work of the Holy Spirit (Plüss, 2003:3-4). The sentiment is well encapsulated by Woodbridge and McComiskey. According to them, more powerful works will be accomplished than Jesus personally performed, hidden information will be revealed, and the Holy Spirit will facilitate these in addition to accompanying signs. In the absence of Jesus, the Holy Spirit teaches them all things (Woodbridge & McComiskey, 1991:302).

The Neo-Pentecostal denominations are non-denominational because their structures are unbased on religion, morals, or social doctrines (Anderson, 2006:157). They do not only oppose formal academic training, but they refuse to be affiliated and bound with established denominations or classical Pentecostal churches. These churches are generally unwilling to become affiliated with the South African Council of Churches (SACC) which can be regarded as a sign of their anti-institutionalism (Resane, 2016:5). These pastors prefer to operate independently from other denominations or academic training, which allows them to formulate a hermeneutics specifically within their cultural context. Unlike traditional Pentecostal churches, these congregations follow a socially relevant doctrine, have non-traditional perspectives, and are neither orthodox nor dogmatic (Kgatle, 2017). Rather than theological doctrines, African neo-Pentecostal theology emphasises an experiential relationship with God, such as worship, evangelism, and service (Resane, 2017). Pastors and prophets within the movement are considered to hold much authority and are the ones to speak on God's behalf. Oftentimes new insights, prophecies and revelations become doctrine, which forms part of a hermeneutical basis of belief (Khanyile, 2016:15).

For African neo-Pentecostals, the local church occupies the primary institution of training and ordaining ministers for service. Martin (2016:3) notes that many ministers today look for examples from people who have succeeded. As a result, pastors at megachurches often hold training seminars and pastors' conferences rather than attend college. The availability of information has reduced the need to attend formal education since books, training materials, and selected online resources can be consulted and used as training materials (Martin, 2016:3).

Pastors and leaders of African neo-Pentecostalism have become the example of spirituality that should be attainable. Members belonging to these churches attribute great authority to their

leaders. This has motivated many leaders to undertake some sort of training to be 'qualified' and set apart from the average congregant. Online training has become the preferred method for ministers because it does away with the complexities of a formal institution's physical format (Resane, 2015:4). These online courses are not up to the standard qualifications and at times lack theological insight and depth. Parsley (2007:206) mentions that these ministers prefer convenience over a commitment to study hard. They do not value theological and ministry preparation, which makes the propensity for risky behaviour and practices high (Kgatle, 2019). As a result of their lack of theological education, church leaders are at risk of making doctrinal errors. The theological course material used by these ministers contains information without any sifting to validate its texts or ideas.

After learning of the report in the Sowetan Newspaper, the Department of Higher Education and Training was shocked (Sithole, 2014) on counterfeit Doctoral degrees and programmes that were offered by a 'university' which was operating illegally in Johannesburg. As a result of the investigation, it has been determined that Anointed University, owned and operated by Nigerians, was not recognised by the Department of Higher Education. At the time, Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, condemned these institutions and planned to take stricter measures to shut them down. For the purpose of investigating and examining abuses and exploitation of cultural, religious, and linguistic practices in these institutions, the Commission for Promoting and Protecting Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities Rights (CRL Rights Commission) was established. It is possible that such measures have resulted from lack of appropriate theological training, which has led to skewed explanations of Scripture that have led to hermeneutical religious abuses within the movement.

5.4.4 Hermeneutics shaped by socio-economic conditions

Socio-economic conditions have been a major influence in the formation of Pentecostal hermeneutics and have contributed to the spread and growth of the movement. Pentecostalism has historically been a religion of the excluded and marginalised, particularly those who face racism in their communities. People living on the margins were often oppressed in the early days of the movement (Archer, 2009:198). These were peasants, artisans, labourers and poor people who were disregarded but found a sense of belonging with fellow believers who faced common struggles (Anderson, 1979). Pentecostals had often expressed disapproval with how society perceived them, leading them to express that dissatisfaction publicly. These socio-economic conditions had influenced the way Scripture was read and interpreted. Pentecostal hermeneutics stresses immanence as a core philosophical principle, which implies that God is present and can provide, allowing Him to be involved in world affairs. He desires every human being to be blessed spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically (Anderson, 2021:210). When the experience of the

Spirit was given primacy, traditional Pentecostalism was of interest to the illiterate and the outcast, offering a voice to those marginalised by racism, sexism, ageism, classism, among other things (Cox, 1995:106). People who suffered from social stress, economic conditions, and psychological problems turned to Pentecostalism to compensate for their circumstances, because they felt deprived, disorganised, and inferior (Nel, 2020:7).

Similar trends can also be observed on the African neo-Pentecostal front, which emerged as an explicit political movement with a clear vision and an external ideology, unlike traditional Pentecostalism, perceived as Western and unrelated. An African perspective on neo-Pentecostalism is based on the African worldview of fighting evil and spiritual forces in the supernatural world in order to resolve personal and social problems. Hunt (2002:4) suggests that this movement is supported by the idea that deprivation and neo-Pentecostalism are closely related. When the Pentecostal movement reached South Africa, the native people were deprecated; they lived under poverty-stricken conditions, and because of racial segregation, they faced many socio-economic challenges. In a world that neglected, misunderstood, and deprived Africans of basic needs, desires and aims, the Pentecostal movement met these needs with acceptance and fulfilment (Anderson & Pillay, 1997:234).

The Pentecostal movement considered townships and rural areas to be mission grounds; these groups generally attract economic illiterates and those without any real connection to African culture (Clark, 2001:95). The development in the movement dealt with aspects of deprivation that included the poor and the middle class in Africa. The African neo-Pentecostal churches contrast by having young, educated professionals with global perspectives. The church is seen as a source of hope and promise to improve one's social and economic condition. The Bible is read, not as a book of ruling priests and lords, but with a specific class of people in mind such as the destitute, the godless and the prejudiced (Moltmann, 1975:6-7). When sermons are preached, selective texts are chosen that are specific to people's immediate needs. These churches offer an alternative to the daily struggles of sickness, unemployment and poverty. The original context is often ignored, and practices are based on a modern expression of interpretation that rules out the basic form of hermeneutic interpretation.

Kgatle (2019) suggests that Neo-Pentecostal movements have a variety of 'social causes' that vary by group and are often focused on meeting individual and social needs. The economic and social conditions such as poverty, beliefs about witchcraft and the promise of a 'better' life become the focal point of theology. The Pentecostal influence is accepted in offering people a solution to daily socio-economic problems. Thus, material gain is equated with spiritual gain in order to improve social conditions as a result of this kind of acceptance. A neo-Pentecostal church in Africa can benefit diverse African social groups both psychologically and socially by providing support to one another, releasing emotional tension, and giving a sense of belonging and identity (Parsitau & Mwaura, 2010:5). There are distinctive practices associated with Neo-Pentecostalism in South

Africa that are based on people's fears and anxieties; these fears include concerns with witchcraft, illness, and failure to achieve success. Having lost touch with reality and entered a state of 'spirituality' leaves the congregants weakened and at risk of becoming disoriented. In addition to causing an emotional response and altering the state of consciousness, the use of these practices violates the rights of individuals (Resane 2016:9).

Certain ministers in African neo-Pentecostal churches are prime examples of appealing to people through unusual practices with the promise of a 'prosperous' life. However, hermeneutical religious abuses are evident and are exposed through the media of particular churches using socio-economic conditions to take advantage of people's situations. In a recent scandal reported by Nkgweng (SABC News, 2020), self-proclaimed prophet Shepherd Bushiri and his wife, Mary, along with four others, were arrested in October 2020 by the Hawks over allegations of money laundering amounting to R102 million (including fraud and theft charges). This is the couple's second arrest as they were previously charged over a suspected R15 million money-laundering scheme. Bushiri has used his influence and power in manipulating his followers by promising them a prosperous and improved socio-economic life. He has created, as Khanyile (2016:26) expresses, a haven of deliverances against multifaceted ills. However, instead of improving the quality of life, he has manipulated Scripture for his personal greed. The guilt of these actions is clearly seen through the High Court in Pretoria declaration of a bail amount of R200 000 for each. The couple has since abandoned their congregation and fled to Malawi.

The sad reality is the extraordinary influence and control such false prophets have on their members. Many pledge their allegiance to him, and blame what has happened on others' jealousy and spiritual warfare. Terrence Baloyi, who is a spokesperson for the church, said, "We can assure you the prophet and prophetess are innocent creatures of God; whatever they are charged with are charges that are baseless and cannot stand any test of any court proceedings" (Nkgweng, SABC News, 2020). This is the case in many African neo-Pentecostal churches, where gullible people fall prey to the deception of dishonest pastors that promise a religion of success through the reading of selected Biblical narratives.

It is evident that Pentecostal hermeneutics in both classic and neo-Pentecostalism attracts the marginalised, and every believer is given access to the Bible. It is not uncommon for self-proclaimed Pentecostal ministers to manipulate their readings of the Bible in order to accomplish their own ends by assuming and interpreting the text from their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Reading Scripture in light of socio-economic and cultural experiences will lead to renewal and growth, but will also lead to a false hermeneutical interpretation, which often leads to abuse of Scripture authorities (Khanyile, 2016:15-16).

5.4.5 Pentecostal hermeneutics shaped by personal experience

Personal experience is an essential and common factor that has influenced Pentecostal hermeneutics in both classical and neo-Pentecostalism. An analysis by Archer (2004:41) shows that Pentecostal hermeneutics does not make sense without any spirituality or personal experience, showing the community's unique story from an experience hermeneutical perspective. In this encounter with God, Scripture presents the central reference point for Pentecostal theology, and this encounter with God stands at the foundation of Pentecostal identity (Johns, 1995:75). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal believers employ the Bible to empower their members to have a personal relationship with God and interpret the Bible for others (Nel, 2017:5). In Pentecostal hermeneutics of experience, the Bible is understood as the Word of God only in its present form, as it can only be understood and read by use of the Holy Spirit.

The hermeneutics used by classical Pentecostal churches are shaped by personal experiences, however, a difference is noted between the current hermeneutics practices used by certain African neo-Pentecostal churches. The differences are evident in recent practices, showing that personal experience in these African churches is inconsistent with the Biblical principles. There is a stark contrast between classical Pentecostalism and its current practices, which include the eating of grass, eating of snakes, drinking of petrol, spraying of Doom on the congregants and other uncommon practices.

As discussed in chapter 4, according to Pentecostal tradition, Scripture authority is not a function of inerrancy, but rather is determined by encounters with God within a community. Pentecostals read the Bible by searching for scriptural references for specific subjects and then connecting the two to form a theological statement. The purpose of reading the Bible was not to learn theological principles or to learn about Christ's life, but to encounter God through the text. Pentecostals would often connect their experience as a sign of authority of the Scripture. Believers did not find it necessary to focus on theology and doctrine, as having a personal encounter with God mattered. Pentecostals used doctrine to describe their experience rather than as a source of doctrine, because doctrine was never viewed as essential but descriptive.

Non-verbal communication is an important part of Pentecostal services, enabling the congregation to communicate with God. The experiences encountered by Pentecostals were expressed in worship services that operated on the assumption that God would do what pleases Him. Worshippers encouraged spontaneity and emotion during their worship, and the Spirit was allowed to manifest at any time. The intuitive nature of spirituality is often represented by dreams, visions, healing miracles, and *glossolalia* (Ervin, 1987:113). Throughout his work, Hollandweger (1972:54) emphasises the importance of a community's full participation and active participation in this form of spirituality, such as an oral liturgy and narrative theology. Pentecostals thrived in their fellowship through song, prayer, sermon, and testimony. This allowed ordinary people to participate in the

public worship service through their testimonies that made theological sense as a believer's life was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power.

Theological statements within Pentecostalism were identified in personal testimonies expressed in the language that described their experiences. Early Christianity featured widespread communal reading, and this reading helped Christians avoid major changes to their teachings and practices (Wright, 2017). The charismatic experiences and common stories of Pentecostal believers helped to create a sense of common identity among communities. Further, the programme provided the opportunity for 'an open interpretation discourse', as well as an evaluation of the relationship between hermeneutics and theological discourse (Adamo, 2015). Contemporary believers experience empirically what the apostles experienced through using the same Spirit and following the same charismatic phenomenology that the early church did (Ervin, 1981:22).

Traditional practices and experiences of religion are important aspects of how African neo-Pentecostals conduct their religious practices. The theological foundations of African neo-Pentecostalism are linked to Western Pentecostalism. Yet, its own worldview is closely aligned with the indigenous primal worldview, and its hermeneutics are rooted in African culture. By preaching an accurate reading of the Bible, the neo-Pentecostal movement in Africa is rediscovering the Biblical text through personal experiences and encounters. A Biblical narrative of demon possession may seem mythical to Western theologians, but to Africans it represents something similar to what they faced. According to Nel (2019:6-7) within African Pentecostalism, secular and sacred realities cannot be separated. It offers a way of understanding that Christianity goes beyond the natural world, which is an influence of the spiritual world of evil versus good. It consists of an appreciation and understanding that the universe is the product of both benign and malignant forces, which are to be used by everyone for their own good and benefit (Nel, 2019:7). Many encounters with spirits that Africans have are perceived as genuine experiences that influence how they approach the Bible and their worship (Keener, 2016:90).

When compared with classical forms, neo-Pentecostalism in African cultures does not adhere to any one form, structure, or style. Pentecostalism in Africa is known for adapting to cultural contexts and for transforming through in-depth personal experiences often based on personal experiences. Shorter (1975:24) observed that this occurs in part due to their independence of spirit. This allows them to develop unique culture-relevant expressions. A dialogue between Christianity and ancestral beliefs is what Anderson (2000:196) sees in African Pentecostalism.

The predominance of tongues in classical Pentecostalism diminishes in comparison to supernatural encounters and miracles that remain central in African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics. "The African Pentecostal narrative is concerned with the solutions of personal problems, like impotence, infertility, mental or physical illnesses, and failure at work or in relationships, possession or other problems arising from occult practices, and it interprets these problems and its solutions in terms of the African worldview and settings" (Nel, 2019:8). Although Christ is at the

center of the story, it also presents miracle healings, deliverances, and victories as well as non-orthodox Christian perspectives (Khanyile, 2016:15). African neo-Pentecostal churches have become less interested in the traditional ways of worship and are more business-like while also promoting personalities, programmes and sacred objects used to perform miracles. Practices are based on a modern interpretation that rules out the primary form of hermeneutic interpretation (Kgatle, 2019). Sacraments formerly observed by early Pentecostal churches are replaced by practices involving eating snakes, drinking petrol, displaying nakedness, walking on other people's bodies, and spraying Doom onto followers (Resane, 2016:5). Although amulets are important to Pentecostalism in Africa, alternative means are available including "anointing oil, blessed water, calendars, and handkerchiefs" (van den Toren, 2015). The use of material objects for spiritual communication is a fundamental element of African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics (Kgatle, 2017). In cases where the fear of witches and evil spells are manifest, supernatural powers and encounters may be used as a means of protection.

The usage of tangible elements such as holy water or anointing oil confirms the persisting problem that African churches face that the CRL Commission has noted, and is considered commercialised (CRL Rights Commission, 2017). Abraham (2015:3) reports in *The Citizen* about Prophet Bafana Zondo of Rivers of Living Waters Ministries near Vereeniging, who opened a registered shop to sell holy water and oil. He claims that the water is powerful enough to heal and derives from Jesus' instructions to anoint and heal the sick. Furthermore, he said, "It is not a sin to sell anointing oil, as Jesus himself said in Matthew 25 'go and buy oil to them that sell it'". Despite the tendency of the CLR to generalise matters within the Christian faith, Kgatle (2019) points out that in most cases, abuses are attributed to the neo-Pentecostal movement. He also refers to the "atomised environment" that develops in neo-Pentecostalism due to its openness to capitalism, consumerism, and entrepreneurship, which leads to a better quality of life and a more generous society even if the cost is high (Abraham, 2015:3). Certain African neo-Pentecostal ministers believe that their hermeneutical practices emphasise the relevance of studying the Scriptures from the African culture perspective. According to Maluleke (2015:39), this behaviour is the product of cultural, spiritual and educational deficiencies, as well as a result of ignorance.

There are bad examples of hermeneutical practices that have led to negative and abusive outcomes. According to Bolowana (2020), several African church leaders travelled to West Africa to be initiations in order to receive miraculous powers. According to the article, Apostle Makhado Ramabulana told the CRL Commission that he was involved in these practices and has now disassociated himself from such doings. Ramabulana confessed and tells of how his initiation took place in Nigeria, and upon his return, was given a pig's head to bury in the church grounds. Ramabulana states that it was not long after he saw the results, and his church in Soshanguve thrived. The article mentions another prophet called Jay Israel, who has a church in East London; he referred to the movement as a 'secret society'. Israel was initiated in Benin, which is known for

its occult tradition, and met an entity called Atovi, which he later came to call 'god'. He was given an animal's horn to bring back to South Africa, and this promised to bring him great success through supernatural miracles. Both Israel and Ramabulana have rejected such cultic practices that they regard as abusive and manipulative. Israeli says Ramabulana is still going through the healing process despite leaving his practice many years ago. Ramabulana is now a minister at the Faith Mission Church in Sebokeng. The CRL Commission asked what congregations should be aware of in their churches when evaluating them, and Israel warns that people should be careful of these radical ministers who claim to have supernatural powers to heal and create wealth. He explains that these self-proclaimed prophets are skilled in stirring up the emotions of people to experience something that is not real. This is a clear indication of power abuse and manipulation of African culture.

5.4.6 Eschatological expectations in shaping Pentecostal hermeneutics

One of the strongest theological viewpoints in Pentecostal hermeneutics is an endorsement of the movement's hermeneutical stance on eschatological matters. Eschatology is about the tension between the present and the future. It is more precisely what has already happened and what is yet to come. Eschatology challenges the believer with regard to his or her fate, as well as social and cosmic factors. It deals with history's interpretation as meaningful, ethical and purposeful. It is only through understanding eschatology that early Pentecostalism can be properly understood, as it is at the core of the movement and its message. The eschatological convictions of classical Pentecostalism are historically influenced by fundamentalist dispensationalism and oscillate between apocalyptic and eschatology (Nel, 2019:19-20).

According to Adedibu (2019), eschatology ought to examine ethical and moral grounds on which to evaluate actions during the imminent and ultimate time. The eschatological expectations motivated early Pentecostals to an urgency of world evangelisation as Pentecostals awaited the second coming of Jesus which was upon them. During the later rain eschatological outpouring, the Pentecostal church became the sealed bride of Christ, having power in all facets of their lives (McQueen, 2009:6). Those who lived in God's eschatological presence were deeply affected by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which was a sign of Christ's return. It was believed that the second coming of Jesus would take place in this generation, therefore formal theological education was discouraged for the sake of saving souls. The Bible was read with one result in mind; as a guide to equip the church for world evangelism as they anticipated the return of the Lord.

The Bible was read through a charismatic lens, focusing on the supernatural and the eschatological presence of God (Archer, 1996:64). Through Pentecostalism, God's eschatological presence shaped the spiritual and experiential worldview. Among Pentecostals, the accounts of the

apostolic experience of the New Testament are considered key because they motivate the church to recreate these events. Interpreters viewed the outpouring of the Spirit as a sign that the Day of the Lord will soon arrive. The ability to speak in tongues accompanied Spirit baptism and was considered an emblem of eschatological empowerment.

Historically, Pentecostalism focused on the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a major belief in the second coming of Christ. Pentecostal preachers frequently use Hebrews 9:27 to illustrate life and death, showing that human existence on earth is not the end. On the contrary, certain African neo-Pentecostals have distanced themselves from holiness teachings and emphasised materialism rather than holiness, emphasising the notion that divine bliss may be found on earth as a reward from God. Despite believing the end is near, neo-Pentecostals practice intercession to transform the Church into a Kingdom of God on earth through the power of the Holy Spirit. The focus is directed mostly towards a blessed life; success, wealth and prosperity are desired over the second coming of Christ (Walls, 2002:92). The true markers of a believer are based on evidence of fertility, a happy marriage, physical wellness and financial success. Wepener (2013:91) recognises that in order for humans to find salvation, all existence's challenges can be addressed holistically - spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially, legally, and psychologically. A holistic viewpoint encompasses both material and spiritual well-being as part of healing.

The classic Pentecostals talked much about speaking in tongues, holiness, and the return of Christ; they continued to place much emphasis on healing and prophecy. Neo-Pentecostal churches are inherently empowered by these themes, which speak to the aspirations of Africa's young population. Pentecostal churches also share these themes, but neo-Pentecostal churches are known for their empowerment and prosperity messages. God's mode of revelation to the world should not be limited; he is capable to reveal 'deep unsearchable truths' that are beneficial to prosper and provide for the average man in this lifetime. Comparatively, accountability and ultimacy seem less important today as compared to classical Pentecostalism. Neo-Pentecostal eschatology stresses life over death, which implies that eschatology is more of a way of understanding life than a way of understanding accountability before God in the end (Adedibu, 2019). Some church leaders within the neo-Pentecostal movement exploit members to live extravagantly, teaching that a heavenly experience can be fulfilled on earth, rather than placing ethical and practical responsibility on Christians to act according to Scripture, eschato-praxis is applied with a false interpretation and application. There is a school of thought that proposes there may not be a final judgment; heaven will be promised to Christians. On the other hand, Christians can experience heaven now as a preview (Adedibu, 2019). This is evident in the decisions of certain ministers within African neo-Pentecostal churches who believe that money and earthly acquisitions can appease God and thus free themselves from his final judgment, resulting in a blissful existence here on earth without any sense of accountability (Igboin, 2017).

5.5 Conclusion

The researcher examined what enables religious abuse in hermeneutics by exploring how it occurs and how it can be remedied in hermeneutics of experience. A comparison between classical Pentecostalism and the hermeneutics found in neo-Pentecostal circles has been carried out. The researcher has summarised and outlined some important hermeneutical factors in both movements and the bearing that this has on its church practices.

The comparison between classic and neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics shows that although there is a commonality between the two, there are differences that set them apart. With the emergence of Pentecostalism in Africa, Christian teachings are encountering the difficulties of neo-liberalism in Africa, which creates poverty and corruption, thus desperation, and in turn blames religion for misfortunes (Kgatle, 2019). This hermeneutical approach promises material goods to Africans and solutions to their problems, including the power of evil and the forces of the universe. However, certain African churches within the neo-Pentecostal movement have deviated from classic Pentecostal hermeneutics. They have abused their power by applying a skewed interpretation of Scripture. Power abuses like these continue to undermine the founding narratives of the Pentecostal movement and create dangerous conditions for its theological practices.

Therefore, it is crucial to consider possible hermeneutical guidelines that could be useful against the hermeneutic religious abuses amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa. The researcher believes that the failure to discern the hermeneutical practices in African neo-Pentecostal churches will lead to the abuse of power, spiritual pride, exclusivism and spiritual oppression. In light of the well-established accountability structures and ethical codes of conduct in place in the neo-Pentecostal movement, it is valuable to suggest solutions suited to the movement. Further recommendations for future work should be considered by understanding the questions raised through this study. It is important to try and know where the future of African neo-Pentecostalism is heading, but also to identify the problems it creates and provide necessary recommended solutions to these problems.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSAL FOR FURTHER STUDY

6.1 Introduction

Considering all that has been discussed about neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics, this study aimed to accomplish two goals: to investigate hermeneutical religious abuses that are taking place amongst African neo-Pentecostals, particularly within the churches of Southern Africa, and to discuss what implications such abuses have on the congregants. Based on the research problem, this chapter provides a summary, by first outlining the research objectives and how the research argument of each chapter develops. Built on the outcomes, potential exegetical methods are suggested when interpreting Scripture to ensure Biblical thinking, and possible guidelines that could be useful against the hermeneutical religious abuses amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches. Additionally, areas of research needing attention are discussed, as well as the implications of this study.

6.2 Summary

Firstly, the objectives were formulated into the following key points: (1) to explore the hermeneutical religious abuses amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches in Southern Africa, (2) to describe these practices in terms of current hermeneutical perspectives within these churches, (3) to describe the new classical Pentecostal hermeneutics which developed since the 1970s, (4) to compare the classical Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics with each other to propose corrections to the neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics related to the abuses that were identified, and (5) to offer instructive findings that might be informative and helpful about the hermeneutical religious abuses amongst neo-Pentecostals in Southern Africa.

It was necessary to define the concept of 'abuse' within the context of African neo-Pentecostalism, and to evaluate this against the hermeneutical practices found in certain churches. The definition applicable for this study consisted of those who used their religious prophetic authority and power with bad motives and for the wrong purpose. Those guilty of such are corrupt and their hermeneutics lead to a perversion of meaning and improper application. Based on this precise definition, the researcher wanted to know what are the hermeneutical practices amongst Southern African neo-Pentecostals, and what the implications of such practices are. Furthermore, questions were raised and answered in chapter 2 to identify the contributing factors of hermeneutical religious abuses amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches. The analysis showed that certain African neo-Pentecostal churches engage in certain practices of hyper-authority while their

behaviour of leaders also displayed controlling and manipulative characteristics. One of the factors that was outlined is the abuse of power and oppression of the vulnerable and poor. Their motives, in some cases, involved financial greed, money laundering and commercialising religion for personal enrichment. The researcher agrees that these behavioural patterns are self-serving and of direct relevance to abuse of spiritual experiences and perceived injustice to the authority of Scripture compared to more classical teachings.

These irregular behaviour and practices led to investigating the hermeneutical bases of religious abuses in neo-Pentecostal churches. The researcher evaluated this by outlining the definition of hermeneutics in various aspects to understand the bases of religious abuses amongst African neo-Pentecostal churches and the implication of such actions. This also includes Pentecostal hermeneutics that reflects diverse theological paradigms and socio-cultural beliefs and diverse theological training in reading the Bible. In the evaluation, three important elements of Pentecostal hermeneutics are noted, Scripture, the Spirit and the community of faith. Believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit so that they can witness appropriately in the cultural context. However, the evidence shows that many African people did not find Western Christianity relevant to an African context. Therefore, African biblical hermeneutics evolved into a method of interpreting the Bible from an African perspective for the benefit of African transformation. African hermeneutics are drawn towards a postmodern approach and attract a specific group of people like the marginalised and outcast and middle-class people, aiming to empower their economic and social conditions. Its hermeneutical teachings promise to better the lives of believers in all areas of life whether spiritually, physically, financially, emotionally and even academically. Upon analysis of the data, it was clear that socio-economic concerns played a role in exposing some of these circles to potentially harmful practices, which were caused by material desperation, ignorance, cultural and spiritual immaturity, and insufficient knowledge.

It is important to place African neo-Pentecostalism in a historical context to describe the new classical Pentecostal hermeneutics that developed since the 1970s. This presented two important elements within classical Pentecostalism; Spirit-baptism and speaking in tongues, both of which are critical evidence of transformation within the believer's life. Furthermore, it was clear that theology was formulated orally, as personal encounters with God mattered most over any formal training. The Bible was taken at face value and its hermeneutics dealt primarily with the immediate context of the reader, without making any distinction of some historical distance between the modern believer and the text. Based on the information in chapter 4, a comparison was made between classical Pentecostal hermeneutics and the hermeneutics found in neo-Pentecostal circles. This demonstrated that although there is a commonality between the two groups, differences set them apart, the latter of which has led to a growing concern among certain African neo-Pentecostal churches. These churches are described as neo-prophetic churches that are a mixture of African Independent Churches, the Classical Pentecostal Churches and Charismatic

groups. In this category, known as prophetic Pentecostalism, there are the New Prophetic Churches, which is regarded as the most controversial.

The comparison showed that abusive and manipulative hermeneutical principles characterise certain African churches. Its hermeneutics of experience are encountered upon the ascendant neo-liberal economic setup that promises material wants and solutions to African problems. These hermeneutical practices in African neo-Pentecostal churches have led to the abuse of power, spiritual pride, exclusivism and spiritual oppression. Based on the research results and the fact that hermeneutical religious abuses are taking place within certain African churches, a neo-Pentecostal approach to theology must be rebuilt based on an appropriate methodology, as well as codes of conduct that have a close relationship with the hermeneutics of ethnic neo-Pentecostalism.

6.3 Suggested solutions to correct African Neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics

In spite of its diversity, Africa is a continent of many cultures which makes any study of the continent a huge undertaking. The culture of every African community is characterised by its own symbols, codes and behaviour (Hyden, 2006:11). In the African Pentecostal community, a sense of superiority stemming from socioeconomic or cultural distinction prevents its discernment of unity and weakens the Spirit's ability to ensure unity. The Bible is the supreme authority and central to the lives of African Christians and their practices. Based on their context of the Bible, neo-Pentecostals take different approaches to different groups of people; therefore, there is no consistency on the nature in the way exegesis is conducted. This has given ministers within the movement the leeway to apply a hermeneutical interpretation that leads to abusive practices. There is thus a need for correction when hermeneutical interpretation is abused, and these suggested solutions provide a framework of accountability, by determining the hermeneutical principles that can be implemented in an African context which could possibly alleviate any hermeneutical abuses of Scripture. A potential exegetical method is discussed for African Pentecostal churches when interpreting Scripture and ensuring Biblical thinking. The researcher points out what this means to various groups and who should be responsible to ensure that Biblical hermeneutical guidelines are in place.

6.3.1 A potential exegetical method when interpreting Scripture to ensure Biblical thinking

To help alleviate the problem, the researcher presents a potential exegetical method for African neo-Pentecostals as interpretation of Scripture. These suggested principles are to help guide African churches in comprehending the intended meaning of the Biblical text, which will ensure Biblical thinking and application to an African setting. The aim is for African Pentecostal Christians

to practice their faith within their cultural setting, while simultaneously ensuring Biblical thinking that will lessen hermeneutical religious abuses.

In African Christianity, there are several types of hermeneutical methods, one of which is grammatical-historical exegesis. The purpose of this method is to maintain the original context and allow readers to have a better understanding of the communication methods from the past. The historical-critical method helps to rightly interpret and understand Scripture and should be the basis for African Pentecostals to adhere to. These are the guided steps that should always be applied to ensure proper interpretation and Biblical thinking:

(1) Identify the kind of literature of the text - genre and general form of the text are considered here. There are different styles and structures used for presenting each type of literature. Narratives, prophecy, poetry, history, gospel, and epistles may be presented in one of these ways.

(2) Evaluate the context of the passage. This step helps for accurate interpretation, and a better understanding of the text meaning. History, politics, religion, social and literary characteristics must be considered. A logical line of thought should be followed to understand what the writers intend to say, which will avoid the risk of taking the text out of context.

(3) Reading the text plainly will enable one to understand its obvious meaning. African churches should avoid approaching the Bible with the intention of finding hidden meaning within the text. In the Bible, there are many figurative and symbolic references which are mainly used with the intent to enhance the plain meaning of the text.

(4) Understand the writer's intentions. It is important to know the writer's intended message, before applying it to the current context.

(5) Consider the language of the text. To gain a clearer understanding of the text, it is ideal to study the original language. However, not everyone is well versed in Hebrew and Greek, therefore lexicons and word study books should be used to offer a clearer understanding.

(6) Have a God-centred perspective and Identify theological themes – this includes a theological interpretation and understanding of what the text reveals about God and his creation.

(7) Apply and interpret appropriately - It is possible for one text to have one intended meaning, but to have a number of theological applications and themes. This is a critical step in an African context, if proper interpretation is not followed it may lead to a skewed application.

Critical and contextual exegesis constitutes the basis for hermeneutic integrity. For Pentecostals to attain the truths of Scripture, they must understand that the Spirit communicates to the church through spiritual gifts for the purpose of edifying, correcting, and comforting believers in their culture.

Although the grammatical-historical exegesis is helpful to ensure Biblical thinking, it is not sufficient in dealing with issues rising from an African context and answering some pressing African issues and church practices. Traditional exegetical approaches seem to be more academic and abstract when addressing the African people in their context. Therefore, the researcher suggests a relevant hermeneutical method for an African context, by asserting that Scripture should be understood using other critical methods. Firstly, neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics should be designed to include Pentecostal praxis and theology, which is applicable to the present African setting. In this case, the audience will be used to synthesise the results from other exegesis techniques by applying them to the African context. African Bible interpretation examines how the Biblical text is connected with African reality and how it can be understood and interpreted through a culturally relevant African perspective. A contextual approach to Biblical interpretation within a specific setting allows for an open dialogue and criticism. Furthermore, it is the type of method which is appropriate during the process of developing African theologies that addresses the realities of life in Africa (Nyiauwung, 2013).

Now that the researcher strongly advocates for an African hermeneutics that is relevant to its cultural context, there are specific elements that should be considered when applying an African Biblical interpretation. It is important to have an African mind-set, by thinking like one, that is separated from a westernised mind-set in Africa. It is only when one thinks like an African in Africa, that issues can be addressed. A process of revisiting what has been taught and of being aware of one's culture within the context of Bible study is required in order to develop an African mind-set. An African mindset implies a commitment to the plight of Africans and a willingness to make Africans' welfare a priority. An African mind-set should lead to telling of their own stories and proverbs. It is essential that Africans are able to have their stories shared in order to experience holistic change. African Pentecostalism is able to develop a critical hermeneutic as a result of growing awareness of cohesion in the community, which results in a critical experience of the Spirit.

Secondly, an African interpretation and translation in the mother tongues of Africans is recommended, so that the Bible would be available in the language they understand. The Bible in African languages allows people to discover that God speaks their language, as well as give them a chance to reflect on the Bible's African roots. It is not enough to simply translate Biblical terms into African languages. Bible ideas, concepts, values, and thoughts must also be translated into African worldviews, while translating directly into African beliefs. African preachers should not just read the Bible in their native language, but they should also deliver their sermons in their mother tongue. The Holy Spirit who is a key figure in shaping Pentecostal hermeneutics, will enlighten the hearts and minds of people no matter the language and cultural setting. Scripture can be seen as relevant to believers' lives and experiences by translating it into their own language. This contributes to the diversity of ethnicity, which will help the local people to participate in the worship

service and understand the Bible within their cultural context.

Furthermore, the researcher endorses that more than just applying an African Biblical interpretation to Scripture, a study Bible for Africans should be developed in their language. African voices are underrepresented in Bible commentaries and study Bibles, therefore, for Africa to move forward, Africans need to offer their own perceptions on the Bible. Most Africans struggle to comprehend the Bible since the language and context are not what they are used to on a daily basis. That is why an *Africa Study Bible* is necessary, which should feature African proverbs, stories, history, insight, and academic writing from an African perspective. A deeper understanding of history and an African framework should also be considered instead of relying only on Western historical-critical methods. In order to contextualise a biblical interpretation, the existential realities of Africa should be considered. By having an African Study Bible, Africans will be able to test their hermeneutics in terms of the value and effect of the revelation they receive when reading the Bible. To create solutions to the diverse socio-economic problems that Africans face, African hermeneutics needs to be based on a rereading of Bible texts. The appropriation of the text will provide a context for exploring an African context, thus facilitating a dialogue. Before an interpretation and application to an African context, engagement with the texts is essential. In this way, Scripture becomes a part of life that transforms both the individual and the community by studying the Bible in an African setting.

The need for an African Biblical interpretation, by translating the Scripture in the mother tongues of Africans and developing an African Study Bible will lead to a contextualised Biblical hermeneutics. The deliberate and explicit interpretation of the biblical text comes from understanding how different segments of society interpret the text. Taking into account people's experiences and expressions in the context of their social, religious, and cultural settings is imperative for understanding the Bible. It is concerned with contextual difficulties, suffering, hardships, and the way God is perceived through culture. Cultural hermeneutics describes approaches that challenge irregularities in a cultural context and encourage cultural expression. It recognises the importance of culture in its methodology. The researcher agrees that this is a relevant method of interpreting the Scriptures, Pentecostals in Africa can be challenged to interpret the Scriptures in this way so that their basic truths are maintained in an authentic and Biblical manner. This type of contribution could translate the Biblical message into African cultures. In addition to social change, a spiritually relevant approach must be implemented.

6.3.2 Hermeneutical guidelines that might be useful against elevating hermeneutical abuses

6.3.2.1 Develop a strong faith

Pentecostal hermeneutics places a high value on the faith and experiences of the Holy Spirit. An important guideline beneficial for neo-Pentecostals is to be strong and consistent in their faith which will enable them to know God through personal experiences and his Word. There is one Spirit that connects all believers to the Father (Ephesians 2:18), which is established through having relationship with God. Having faith in the Spirit is crucial for believers, by submitting their will and intellect under the Holy Spirit's guidance. In consequence, depending on the Spirit may result in subjective interpretation, therefore, Nel (2021:6) is correct in saying, that an appropriate balance needs to be maintained between experiential and exegetical components during Pentecostal interpretation. Understanding God depends on intimacy with Christ, not on precepts and doctrines, which is often expressed in testimonies that allow Pentecostals to address God authoritatively. One's experience of God shapes their perceptions of God, and one's reflections of God are influenced by it, which is often left open to interpretation and expression. If common believers can communicate with an all-powerful God, then he can guide and direct his people to the knowledge of himself based on the Bible. Although this will inspire believers to think critically of what is read and put into practice, it should not be done in isolation of individual interpretation. Instead, the right thinking, feelings, and actions should follow; intertwined in Pentecostal hermeneutics, that advocate for life-transforming power and not merely just a set of principles.

The priesthood and prophethood of believers is central to Pentecostal hermeneutics in shaping their identify and how Scripture is viewed. This means that the Bible is available to every believer and can interpret what is read and witness to the truth of their personal encounters with God. Those who follow the teaching of the Pentecostal church expect to have direct communication from God by reading the Bible and being led by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they can know God's character and nature in a personal way, which should help safeguard against certain self-proclaimed prophets within the movement that create the impression that their words are authoritative and to be obeyed. Although these ministers are not primarily concerned with the truth found in the Bible, this does not mean that anything goes in a relativistic fashion. To speak with any authority, should require Biblical support. Scripture teaches a constant harmony between what God says and what Scripture teaches since the same Spirit inspired both Bible authors and contemporary believers. Therefore, any instruction and practice should be subjected to discernment, which needs to be exercised with Scripture as a measure. A great example is found in Acts 17:11, when the Bereans examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true. This should be the same standard adopted by Pentecostal churches, and not taking man's words as infallible. Instead, everyone should strive in building a relationship with God, and by this, they will know God's character and nature that correspondence with what is revealed in Scripture.

6.3.2.2 Scripture as a guideline

Scripture forms an important part of Pentecostal spirituality and should remain the basis for African hermeneutical practices. Biblical narratives are read with a specific aim in mind, having different meanings and relevance to the times. The concern highlighted in this study is that these different meanings lead to extra-Biblical revelation, and hermeneutical practices that is abusive in certain African churches. This is a resulting risk and danger of hearing in the Bible what suits them, which leads to reinterpreting the Bible, because through its exegesis, the Bible loses the critical context of its historical and factual significance (Menzies & Menzies, 2000:78). As a standard for such encounters, canonical texts should be used to protect against continuing revelations. It is imperative to engage in a thoughtful, grammatical-historical and critical-contextual based analysis to avoid the risk of subjectivism. Through linguistic, literary, and historical analysis, we are able to better understand the Scriptures (Keener, 2015:19-20). A stable framework should include the history of the text, which considers the language of writing, the time and place of writing as well as the interpreter being aware of the communal nature of interpretation. The Biblical narratives should not only be read as “literature” or as analysed texts, but it should also be read to gather insights and encouragement in an ongoing campaign with the kingdom of God in mind. Furthermore, God is revealed in the Bible in the saving of mankind, demonstrating a fundamental theological unity between the canon and its interpretation.

A cross-cultural reading as a possible hermeneutical strategy can be considered as another necessary path to understanding and interpreting biblical texts. As a result, readers can obtain a deeper understanding of biblical characters by examining them in other contexts before interpreting them on their own terms. Moreover, it should be possible for the Bible to be identified as containing elements with powerful ideological implications, such as perspectives expressed by the authors that reflect their different philosophical and theological backgrounds (Nel, 2021:7). Cross-cultural Bible reading involves understanding insights from cultural anthropology because these various Scriptures provide insights into the lives and behaviour of people in the context of a particular sociocultural, political, and religious context (Nyawung, 2013). If neo-Pentecostal churches with African roots are engaged in Biblical interpretation, regardless of whether they are interacting with an application context or not, they ought to avoid ethnocentrism. The Bible should be read as literally as possible and taken at face value, encouraging critical thinking. Even though the Bible is viewed as the road map to God’s ongoing revelation, it should remain the bedrock of truth, that should be measured against the guidelines provided in Scripture. Since the Bible is the ultimate objective standard, its interpretation should be based solely on the Bible. A key aspect to defuse hermeneutical religious abuse is for Pentecostals to always begin their reading practices by taking into consideration the readers' charismatic experiences, while allowing the Holy Spirit to interpret what Biblical authors intend to say regarding the current challenges facing their faith community

(Nel, 2021:6). Rather than contradicting the original content, the goal is to allow readers to gain insights through the Spirit as they read and apply God's truth in whatever situation or circumstance, they find themselves in.

6.3.2.3 The community of faith

Life-changing encounters with God are the basis of Pentecostals, which provides an opportunity for believers to experience transformation and ultimately establish a faith community. The community of believers is regarded as the context for Biblical interpretation, through the power of the Holy Spirit. This process involves the Holy Spirit interpreting Scripture passages on behalf of the community of believers so that the meaning is made clearer in the context of the church life in which they are a core part of their spirituality and theology. As a result of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, people are able to live the biblical experience of those who lived in Scripture. Theology must serve as a means by which God reveals himself to people and allows the faith community to respond to that revelation, not the other way around. Therefore, discernment should remain the focal point of church life to protect the community from subjectivism risks. Within the local churches, spiritual leaders should be appointed to evaluate preaching and practices as to whether it is in line with Biblical teaching. Every instruction and practice should be subjected to discernment of the faith community to provide the correctness of their interpretation.

The Pentecostal faith community's participation will help counteract the dangers of subjectivist readings. To avoid abusive hermeneutical practices and ensure that interpretation aligns with broader historical and contemporary exegetical perspectives of the ecumenical community, a serious dialogue should be conducted with the Pentecostal and wider Christian communities. This is achieved by answering three important questions: what does the text mean to the individual, what did it mean to church through the ages, and what does it mean to the local faith community now? Asking the necessary questions will ensure a safeguard against individualism, and bad hermeneutical practices. There should always be continuous dialogue among the faith community that will ultimately support and protect a Biblical hermetical practice relevant to its context.

The Cultural, Religious and Linguistic (CRL) Commission plays a vital role, and should be prominent in placing stricter measure for the safety of church communities and guidance against these self-proclaimed prophets who abuse their power of authority. Communities should not just be encouraged to develop their historically diminished heritage, but the CRL Commission should step in to assist them with that effort as well. Furthermore, they should also promote the establishment of an African Pentecostal council of churches to establish codes of conduct for fair and responsible practices that may contribute to social transformation and unity of the faith.

6.3.2.4 Training

Interpretation of the Bible is primarily the responsibility of the faith community therefore, to protect against hermeneutical religious abuses, they should be united in mind and spirit by avoiding individualism in Biblical interpretation. They should ensure that they are gifted with the ability to discern spirits, and that their experience is community driven. A Bible reading practice that incorporates prayer and worship can be effective, and with the intention of always being open to learn and grow. The local churches should incorporate African Biblical Studies into their ministries. Two solutions that African Pentecostal churches can consider include in-service theological training programmes and contextual Biblical studies. In their gospel ministry, Pentecostal churches can benefit from theological training. The Bible should be taught more authentically in an African context and promote the African identity. It should ultimately result in a greater understanding of God based on the intentions of the Biblical writers, and at the same time, understanding God within an African context. It is helpful to consider what Van Eck (1995:223) asserts regarding some crucial elements about which Pentecostals should be trained about namely; the construction of an understanding and application of social science criticism is essential for the interpretation of African Biblical texts if the social and economic structure of the text is to be understood. In addition, the reinterpretation of African theories and models is required. Using these guidelines, exegetes can confirm any presuppositions and determine the outcome of their interpretations.

6.4 Implications of the study and areas of needed research

While this research has considered the hermeneutical religious abuses experienced in African neo-Pentecostal churches, and its implications, further analysis and dialogue is needed, to understand the situation more clearly, and to try to know where the future of African neo-Pentecostalism is heading, as well as to identify the implications if hermeneutical abuses continue. Menzies and Menzies (2000) state that Pentecostalism's future is uncertain because it does not have a strong theological base, which underlines the importance development of Pentecostal hermeneutics. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to foster dialogue and learning about intercultural theology, to help African neo-Pentecostal churches define hermeneutical practices that will safeguard them against abusive interpretation. There must be an involvement of other Christian denominations, in order to avoid alienating the African community and its hermeneutical practices, in order to see change.

We need to ask if there is a need to go back to some of the classical approaches of hermeneutical interpretation coupled with current theories of social critical analysis. Or should higher learning institutions in Africa contextualise African theology in their Biblical studies curriculum? Teaching and learning should happen through an African language, and curricula should be the products of

academics who are representative of the demography of African countries. It is important to teach Biblical studies in a way that reflects who Africans are. The Bible might provide the opportunity for students to become educated themselves and perhaps inspire their desire to share their testimonies in an African context through introducing them to it in a way that encourages a kind of thinking. They ought to apply Scripture to their specific contexts correctly since they are equipped as dedicated students of Scripture. It is essential to continue asking relevant questions: How much of an African theology is endorsed? Are institutions of learning having the credibility of communities of faith-practice? Is there a theological discourse that can speak to all South Africans? There is hope for African Biblical scholars and the quest to define strong African neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics must continue so that those belonging to the movement may know God's Word within their own cultural context and practices.

6.5 Conclusion

The research was conducted to investigate southern African neo-Pentecostal practices and its hermeneutical application in order to compare it to early Pentecostal Bible reading practices in combination with Pentecostal hermeneutics emerging from the 1970s. As a result, this was addressed by discussing how neo-Pentecostals justify themselves hermeneutically, as well as what such practice means for African neo-Pentecostal churches. Following that, the researcher examined the recent developments in Pentecostal hermeneutics since the 1970s. It was necessary to compare classical Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics in order to suggest corrections for neo-Pentecostal hermeneutics that are related to their practices. In addition, guidelines for hermeneutical practices were recommended in an effort to prevent religious abuses among neo-Pentecostals in Southern Africa.

Based on the findings of this study, certain African neo-Pentecostal ministers follow hermeneutical practices that are undisciplined and in need of correction. Their abuse of power has involved applying a skewed interpretation of Scripture. Such abuse of power undermines the found narratives of the Pentecostal movement and has led to dangerous theological practices.

It is in the story of Pentecostalism that God chooses a people for himself among the unwanted of society. It effectively addresses major problems that Africa suffers from, including poor physical health, joblessness, loneliness, sorcery, and being possessed by spirits. As the church grows in the global South, many issues in the Bible relate to the lives of African church members, such as poverty, famine, racial and gender oppression, and persecution. Therefore, when communicating with others and interacting with the world in general, Neo-Pentecostal Christians in Africa should maintain a hermeneutical emphasis. Pentecostalism's understanding of truth must be maintained on a constant basis, and should never be compromised for the sake of postmodern pluralism. The Bible should, however, be read prayerfully and with complete reliance on the Holy Spirit in order to

understand what it is saying. Exegetical work should be done diligently and carefully, by applying common sense and logic in knowing God's truth and avoiding a poor hermeneutical interpretation. If we want to truly know God and safeguard against false prophets, then we should take heed to the words of Paul given in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

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