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# REVIEW OF UBUNTU PENTECOSTALISM: THE DIALECTICS OF FAITH AND COMMUNITY IN AFRICA (2ND EDITION) BY MODISA MZONDI

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## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Dr Abraham Modisa Mzondi is a scholar and pastor with two doctoral degrees (Theology and Religious Studies) from the University of Johannesburg, specialising in Ubuntu, African theology, and Pentecostalism, and serving as a Senior Lecturer and Supervisor at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS)

## 2.0 SUMMARY OF CONTENT AND CRITIQUE

In *Ubuntu Pentecostalism*[1], Mzondi engages two angular concepts in the South African church experience with apt detail. He uses the explicit conversation of ubuntu and Pentecostalism not to conceal his furtive shibboleth but as his way of self-identification, signalling his loyalty and affinity. He, therefore, maintains traditional segregation and protects his valuable religious tradition from ecclesiastical or academic threats.

Mzondi divides the book, *Ubuntu Pentecostalism*, into five sections collapsed into chapters for emphasis. He establishes the relationship between Ubuntu and Pentecostalism and, answers whether this church phenomenon is "Pentecostalism or Ubuntu Pentecostalism" (1-5). The term Ubuntu, Mzondi maintains, first appeared in the New Testament translation works of the American Board of Missions between 1850 and 1950. It was, then, a taboo word for most African Indigenous leaders and people who had, "…rejected the use of the noun Bantu during the mid-1900s due to its connotation with colonialism and European supremacy attitudes" (1). Instead, they preferred nouns like Afrikan and black to identify themselves. But Mzondi opted for Ubuntu, rather than Afrikan or black, to categorise Pentecostalism and other South African indigenous churches' expressions (2).

[1] First edition published Alberton, RSA. Sci-Tech Maths Services PTY Ltd. (2017).

William Seymour, one of the founding fathers of the Asuza Street USA Pentecostal movement in 1906, claims Mzondi (4), is the father of Ubuntu Pentecostalism. He argues that although Seymour was part of the original 1901 Pentecostalism under Parham (1901), he, out of his African experience, fused Pentecostal Christian concepts with his African understanding and way of life. Seymour's Asuza Street revival was, observes Mzondi (43), "characterized by speaking in tongues, spontaneous worship, prophecy, divine healing, and exorcism". In his view, Seymour, the African slave society from which he came, was influenced by a cosmology that did not divide the spiritual from the physical (characteristic of Ubuntu). Since the belief in ancestors, deities and spirits influence such societies (41). This fusion of African experience and Pentecostalism is what Mzondi termed Ubuntu Pentecostalism.

Ubuntu Pentecostalism's theological underpinning relates Seymour's to the Ethiopian eunuch's experience as a distant worshiper in Acts 8:26-40 (16-33). Just as the Ethiopian eunuch was excluded from the Temple worship according to Mosaic law[2], claims Mzondi (40), so was Seymour, excluded racially from Parham's all-white fellowship.

From this framework of Ubuntu Pentecostalism, Mzondi interprets the post-1906 Azusa Street Pentecostal experience and establishment as a precursor to what would develop in South Africa (34-76). Mzondi (76-113) chronicles several manifestations of Ubuntu Pentecostalism among Africans between 1908 and 2018. He describes Pentecostalism introduced by the Dutch Reformed Church pastors, which spread throughout South Africa through splinter groups (5). It is a Pentecostalism characterised by singing, clapping of hands, dancing, prophesy, divine healing and miracles (76). These dynamic movements included *Zionism, Ibandla IamaNazaretha, maSione* (ZCC), and the *Bapostola* (St John Apostolic Faith Mission and its splinter groups). Mzondi also explains tensions and similarities within the movements and how they embraced Ubuntu Pentecostalism (34-38). He draws attention to an improvised strand in the Township Pentecostal movement in post-1994 South Africa, which paved the way for some pastors' union with T B Joshua. In these dynamic accounts, Mzondi depicts the fluidity of an eclectic Ubuntu Pentecostal movement in South Africa's varying contexts (74-76).

Mzondi delves into the intriguing faith manifestations among the African Pentecostal leaders between 1980 and 1990, marked with intense government restrictions and emergencies to stop the anti-apartheid movement unrest. He reveals their dilemma, being community leaders, observing that they functioned with "two souls" [3] (79).

Most of the African Township Pentecostal pastors avoided political involvement, for which they were labelled "sellouts because they did not align themselves with the struggle for the emancipation of most of the people" (102). Others, including Modisa Mzondi (author), stood against apartheid and joined Concerned Evangelicals (CE)" (106).

Mzondi refuses to affirm every Pentecostal experience in South Africa as valid; instead details its vulnerability for our discourse (119-162). He explains the attraction to and the errors of T. B. Joshua and Lesego Daniel Mosoue. In a new irony, just as Pentecostalism entered South Africa through Afrikaans pastors, Mzondi notes, it was the Afrikaans-speaking leaders from mainstream

[2] This question of the Ethiopian eunuch's exclusion from Temple worship has been appraised. Since, probably in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, Isaiah urges eunuchs not to see themselves as permanently excluded from the circle of faith. It was no longer an issue at the time of Jesus. (See here Africa Journals Online "Eunuchs In The Bible," *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 7. (2005): .256. file:///Users/istore/Downloads/ajol-file-journals_30_articles_52578_submission_proof_52578-349-81264-1-10-20100310%20(1).pdf).

[3] The term William Du Bois was coined to refer to the issues that created a serious Intra-and interpersonal problem of being a Negro and an American: a. emancipation from slavery, b. being denied access to equal opportunities in America, and c. being forced to view themselves through others. (In Ngada, N H and Mofokeng, K E., *African Christian Witness: African Indigenous Churches* (Pietermaritzburg: Claster Publications, 2001), 26.

Pentecostalism who introduced T. B. Joshua's "another Pentecostal spirituality" among Christians in South Africa (119). That the likes of Mosoue, purporting to 'do greater things than Jesus', are the public face of Pentecostalism in South Africa disappoints Mzondi (143-148). It is not the public media backlash, the "troubling practices of Christians seeking deliverance and healing being made to eat grass and drink questionable concoctions" (143), it is the misrepresenting of Jesus Christ and the Ubuntu Pentecostalism that vexes most.

Finally, Mzondi evaluates and proffers his Ubuntu Pentecostalism (162-202). He first observes the silence of Classical Pentecostal training institutions (162). Then, in a captivating analysis, Mzondi (179-200) showcases the Ubuntu Pentecostalism model in the life and ministry of Alson Ginger Nene (1926-1996) through "his theology doctrine and ministry training and the Ubuntu values of belief in the divine, sharing and caring and community" (180).

In *Ubuntu Pentecostalism*, Mzondi has mainstreamed Ubuntu, which academics have considered amorphous, and Pentecostalism, which mainline theologians have consigned to the ecclesiastical margins. Pentecostalism encompasses African epistemology, cultural dynamics, and cosmological peculiarities. This awareness has informed Mzondi's conceptualisation of Pentecostalism in an African slant.

In discussing deities in the African context, scholars distinguish the Christian (Western or missionary) from the African perspectives of God. Although Mzondi concurs with them and uses terms like God of the Bible (55, 65, 83, 92, 93, 109 and 110), Christian God (see 66, 89, 110), and God of Christianity (71**,** 79), he differs by referring to God in the normative term when mentioned in the African context. For example, when explaining the belief of *amaZayoni* churches, Mzondi states, "For them, ancestors are next to God, and those who die join God and ancestors (112). However, Dr Falconer distinguishes God while discussing atonement from an African perspective. He states, "Although the traditional African God is in some ways similar to the Christian God, he is ultimately a very different kind of God. He is a God without Christ!" [4]

Some theologians dismissed the use of African customs in Christianity as dangerous syncretism, resulting in the binary "othering" of African spiritual experience, characterising it by orthodoxy against heretic or mainstream over syncretism. Through interesting testimonies of God's move among the Pentecostals In South Africa, Mzondi has winnowed out contradictions, making a case for "…the need for Christianity to take cognisance of their culture and to worship God through their culture" (72). African Pentecostalism, Kalu argues, is a renewal of the African social system, substituting "possession" by ancestral spirits with the Holy Spirit. [5] However, Mzondi notes how, for Africans, Ubuntu Pentecostalism (baptism in the Holy Spirit) found resonance with the 'way of the ancestors' (49). Hence his bold invitation to reconsider our position on "the worship of the Christian God and '*makgwa ya borra rona*' (ways of the ancestors)" (81).

## 3.0 CONCLUSION

Out of Ubuntu, Mzondi patiently constructs a theology from the confluence of Christianity (Western) and African spirituality, giving us a theoretical grip on studying African spiritual realities. He articulates a consciousness which contradicts what is otherwise normative in Western Christian theological paradigms, hence Ubuntu Pentecostalism.

[4]Robert Falconer, *Spectacular Atonement; Envisioning the Cross of Christ in an African Perspective* (Cumbria: Langham Global Library, 2023), 79.

[5]Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism. An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 172.

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