

# Towards Pentecopolitanism: New African Pentecostalism and social cohesion in South Africa

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## **Abstract**

This article evaluates the challenges that militate against the full engagement of New African Pentecostalism (NAP) in the process of social cohesion in South Africa. It argues that this new religious phenomenon in South Africa has been preoccupied with the promotion of internal social cohesion within its ecclesiastical boundaries to the neglect of national social cohesion. Employing the notion of ‘religious cosmopolitanism’ (Cahill 2003) as theoretical underpinning, the article proposes a new concept termed Pentecopolitanism, as an ethical frame for New African Pentecostal engagement in democratisation and social cohesion in South Africa. The notion of Pentecopolitanism is envisaged to function as an antidote against sectarianism and fundamentalism within NAP and a framework for its constructive engagement with pluralism in the current South African search for national social cohesion. Pentecopolitanism is a philosophy which arises out of the need for recognition of the social function of religion, so as to enable human beings to discover their humanity through the humanity of others.

**Keywords:** Social cohesion, Pentecopolitanism, South Africa, Black Africans, New African Pentecostalism

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## Introduction

The ideological machines of today are religious, and they assume in many cases the functions of the guardian of the public (moral) order, the platform of political conscience and the refuse of a bruised and disarticulated sociability. We must strenuously reject political reductionism or symbolic expansionism, yet if there is an organised community which at the moment is part of the foundations of the democratic field of tomorrow, it is the church, in the generic rather than institutional sense (Jean Copans, cited in Ruth Marshall (1995:237).

The use of the article ‘the’ in Copans’ argument makes religion sound as if it is ‘the’ ideological machine; the truth is that religion is indeed a machine which has gained renewed popular currency in the last two decades in Africa. Copans sagaciously refers to the fact that the generic or performative church cannot be easily dismissed as it remains a key player in the process of democratisation and social cohesion in Africa. This means that the community of believers who actively re-enact their identity and faith in public social spaces such as churches, work, schools, and homes also have something to contribute to democratisation and social cohesion (Marshall 1995:243). The New African Pentecostalism (hereafter, NAP) as socio-religious movement has become a dynamic and popular brand of Christianity in post-apartheid South Africa precisely because of its engagement with the socio-historical struggles of the masses in black communities (Anderson 2005). In his article, ‘New African Initiated Pentecostalism and Charismatics in South Africa’, Allan Anderson (2005:67) observes that NAP among black South Africans has only taken centre stage after 1994 and has become so popular that at ‘the beginning of the twenty-first century between 10 to 40 per cent of SA’s population could be termed ‘Pentecostal’, depending on how this is defined’. This new phenomenon and its potential to be the religious machinery for democratisation and social cohesion is the main focus of the article.<sup>1</sup>

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1 For discussions of the different strands of Pentecostalism within South Africa see Balcomb (2001) and Anderson (1997, 2005, and 2013). For a lucid comparison between Neo-Pentecostalism and Classical see Stephen Hunt’s (2002) article, ‘Deprivation and Western Pentecostalism Revisited: NeoPentecostalism’. The new wave of Pentecostalism is classified variously as New Pentecostalism, NeoPentecostalism, Modern Pentecostalism, or Charismatics.

NAP is to be distinguished from two other forms of Pentecostalism: the classical Pentecostalism, the first 'wave' of Pentecostalism which began early in the twentieth century as a revival/renewal movement with emphasis on the manifestations and working of the Holy Spirit through spiritual gifts; and the African Initiated Churches (AICs). a Pentecostal type of church started independently by Africans without the help of missionaries from outside the continent. New African Pentecostalism is essentially an urban phenomenon and relates to a westernised urban black culture which attracts young generation, middle class Africans, the elite and fairly educated populations (Gifford 1998; Anderson 2005, 2013). The bulk of its members come from high-density townships such as Soweto, which is host to Grace Bible Church led by Bishop Mosa Sono. This is the largest single-congregation church in Soweto, with members numbering between 8 000 and 10 000 in 2010 (Anderson 2013; Frahm-Arp 2010). Members also emanate from nearby squatter camps (Molobi 2014).<sup>2</sup> This New Pentecostal phenomenon is characterised by an ideology of spiritual superiority and a prosperity gospel with strong emphasis on the ethics of 'separation from the world', which has shaped its political discourses (Anderson 2013:166). This process of 'separation from the world' is understood as 'breaking' with cultural pasts, social relations and the nation-state as constraints to the attainment of progress and prosperity (Van Dijk 2009, Meyer 1998, 2004).

David Maxwell (1998) and David Martin (1990) demonstrate how Pentecostal social cohesion is engendered by the radical 'revision of consciousness' of its adherents as the means for their inclusion in the *oikos* (household) of the Spirit which Ruth Marshall (1993:216) classifies as 'the community of the saved'. Once incorporated in the household of the Spirit, the believer is expected to strive to maintain the bond of the Spirit in two ways: 'first, through continuous involvement in religious, social and welfare activities centred upon the church; secondly through abstinence from what are popularly described as 'traditional' rituals and practices and by means of participation in Christian alternatives' (Maxwell 1998:353).

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2 A similar trend has been observed by Damaris Parsitau and Philomena Mwaura (2010) in their research on NeoPentecostalism in Kenya.

In studying the Pentecostal notion of ecclesiastical social cohesion, some literature has focused on how this process of re-socialisation or re-tuning members' religio-social consciousness makes Pentecostal believers more industrious and socially mobile in a variety of ways, compared to those who are not Pentecostals (Van Dijk 2009; Maxwell 1998; Martin 1990). On one level this perspective demonstrates the ideological positioning of these scholars. This means that this perspective might not be accurate at another level of observation as Anthony Balcomb (2001) and Ogbu Kalu (2008) argue. Writing from within the South African context, Balcomb feels that Pentecostal 'revision of consciousness' in its adherents could have been politically beneficial for general democratisation and social cohesion in South Africa if it had raised a consciousness in members that could function beyond denominational-chauvinism and sectarianism. But the weakness of the movement is its preoccupation with personal salvation which some South African scholars feel worked against the movement in the days of structural and systemic evil wrought by apartheid (Balcomb 2001; Anderson and Pillay 1997; De Wet 1989).

While such parochial characteristics might have militated against any positive engagement against apartheid, despite the subsequent democratisation process among some Pentecostals, the article aims to demonstrate that within the tradition there are resources which can be harnessed for the purpose of developing what is termed here Pentecopolitanism – an ethical frame for Pentecostal engagement in social cohesion. This ethical frame can enable the movement to transcend ecclesiastical chauvinism and to embrace wider society; such an approach can also benefit the other church traditions in South Africa. The question is: how can Pentecopolitanism as a new ethical frame help NAP to broaden its notion of social cohesion in order to contribute more adequately to national social cohesion in South Africa? Or more precisely, how should contemporary African Pentecostalism in South Africa define itself in the context of religious pluralism for the sake of social cohesion? I will respond to these questions in three steps, corresponding to the three sections of this article. I begin by showing the challenges that militate against NAP's

viable engagement in the process of promoting social cohesion. Secondly, I will engage the potential of the movement for promoting social cohesion. Finally, I propose a new concept I term Pentecopolitanism, as an ethical frame for NAP's engagement in social cohesion in South Africa.

### **The NAP and the Challenge of Promoting Social Cohesion**

The notion of social cohesion in this study refers to the search for a socially healed and reconciled, just and equitable, inclusive, participatory society in which restitution and land redistribution have taken place. According to Stephanus de Beer (2014:2), this is a kind of society:

That does not minimise the reality of diversity and complexity but that displays high degrees of collectivity, interconnectivity, interdependence, acceptance, inclusivity, equity, justice, fairness, mutuality and integration. It speaks of a society that unifies people despite their difference; that builds on local, community and regional assets; that journeys towards a common vision or visions that have been negotiated and constructed despite (initially) competing visions.

It is a kind of society that promotes 'social solidarity and reduction in wealth disparities; social networks and social capital; place attachment and identity' (Vasta 2013: 198). The question is how to enable new African Pentecostal Christianity to engage in the 'process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunities within [South Africa], based on trust, hope, and reciprocity among all [South Africans]' (Jenson 1998:4).

Current research that has explored the possible role NAP can play in the promotion of political and economic development in South Africa has not specified ways in which this can be done, especially in reference to the promotion of social cohesion (Centre for Development and Enterprise - CDE 2008).<sup>3</sup> NAP promotes social networks, social capital, mobility, belonging and identity, and simultaneously emphasises 'rupturing and

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3 The CDE research on Pentecostalism in South Africa concluded that the movement remains underutilised as a social capital resource for socio-political and economic development in South Africa (CDE, 2008).

“breaking” [as] part of the overall ideology, they are in practice translated in day-to-day situations in patterns of social distancing’ (Van Dijk 2009:284).

NAP in South Africa cannot be understood except in the socio-historical context in which it has developed. The movement emerged in the context of entrenched marginalisation and the struggles of the underprivileged for their humanity, dignity and identity (Anderson and Pillay 1997; Balcomb 2001; Horn 2006; Frahm-Arp 2010). Black South Africans were denied their basic human rights even in many white Pentecostal churches, which for the most part supported apartheid (Anderson and Pillay 1997; Horn 2006). As a result, many black South African Pentecostals continue to function with an ‘otherworldly’ theology (Anderson and Pillay 1997). This means that while they talk about material success, their theological focus is much more on heavenly participation than on national experiences. Some scholars think that ‘Pentecostal and charismatic churches create new social, economic and moral structures and act to transform both the subjectivities and lifestyles of their followers’ (Freeman 2012:15). African Pentecostal scholars are not sure about this argument as they argue that the Pentecostal role in economic development in Africa is more ambiguous than some scholars acknowledge (Wariboko 2012; Zalanga 2010). This seems to be the position Ogbu Kalu (2008:191–192) takes when he argues that ‘the ordinary Pentecostal in Africa is less concerned with modernity and globalization and more focused on a renewed relationship with God, intimacy with the transcendental, empowerment by the Holy Spirit and protection in the blood of Jesus as the person struggles to eke out a viable life in a hostile environment’. It is important to highlight that an essentialist approach to Pentecostalism may fail to recognise that the movement functions differently in different contexts and this also contributes to diversity within it. This raises a question: how did Pentecostalism in South Africa construct its identity in relation to wider society?

### **The influence of beliefs on political engagement**

In the initial stages, Pentecostalism in South Africa, like global Pentecostalism – was framed in the discourses of becoming ‘born again’,

which was equated with being a 'new creation' (Van Wyk 2002:41). This demanded the adoption of a new moral code and spiritual life which put members in a process of constantly struggling to uphold a newfound religious identity, and simultaneously opposing mainstream Christianity, and subverting non-Christian religious traditions, African cultural heritage and national identities. Those born again were constantly challenged to adopt 'a new morality that condemns abortion, adultery, and homosexuality, all in the context of a symbolic break from the "world"' (Sorj and Martuccelli no date:30). Peter Berger (2010:3–9) has described Pentecostalism as a form of 'this-worldly asceticism' with a strong affinity with the Protestant ethic that promotes personal piety, discipline and honesty, and discourages excessive spending of money, while encouraging entrepreneurship. In the minds of many Pentecostals, all other identities are an inadequate reference for pleasing God and hence they engage in self-construction of identities that are antagonistic or in opposition to other religious and secular identities (Esterberg 1997). Such a self-construction is objective as well as subjective (Berger 1973). The way Pentecostals acquire knowledge is conditioned by the Pentecostal worldview enshrined in their belief systems. The significance of Pentecostal beliefs in identity construction lies in the emphasis on experience as a critical resource for doing pastoral ministry. Thus, it is not easy to identify Pentecostals on the basis of their beliefs or even theology. Pentecostalism has deliberately created the identities of its adherents as a mechanism for sorting through existential experiences, relationships and politics. This shared worldview shapes the members' empirical attitudes to and expectations of political activity (Wessels 1997). Nico Horn (2006:2), researcher for the Pentecostal Project for University of South Africa, notes that for many Pentecostals in South Africa 'politics was initially part of the taboo. Light and darkness had nothing in common. Empowerment of the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with society'.

NAP in South Africa seems to be positioned between opposing realities – political engagement or disengagement. The movement's thought system exists in tension with its engagement with issues of politics, development and

modern science. For instance, some scholars argue that many Pentecostals emphasise a ‘this-worldly ascetic’ orientation since their members are involved in all aspects of national life as a critical site for propagating their beliefs and practices (Anderson 1992a). Yet others see ambiguity in the theological orientation of the movement (Wariboko 2012; Zalanga 2010). The apparent contradictions in the observations could result from the methodological approaches, biases, and ideological orientation of field researchers but could equally result from ‘inherent contradictions, diversity, and tensions within the movement’ (Kalu 2008:194). Anderson (1992a) and other scholars who argue that the movement is this-worldly oriented, however, refer to the personal involvement of individual Pentecostal members which is not often done in the name of any denomination.

Pentecostalism in South Africa perceives itself in terms of a missionary and evangelistic vocation to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. This process also involves a spiritual struggle against ‘principalities and powers’, and the state and public spheres are often expressed in these terms. Horn (2006:2) argues that in the worldview of many South African Pentecostals ‘power and empowerment of the Spirit are the diametric opposite of the power and power structures of the world’. There has been a belief that the Holy Spirit has had nothing to do with the present world order. During apartheid many Pentecostals such as Reverend Nicholas Bengu ‘saw political involvement in political struggle as “sinful”’ (Anderson and Pillay 1997:239) or ‘even contrary to God’s plans and thus counter-productive’ (Horn 2006:3). To be fair, some Africans in Pentecostal circles engaged in political struggle against apartheid, such as the Reverend Frank Chikane. However, this was done at an individual level (Anderson and Pillay 1997).

Despite this occasional involvement, CDE (2008:61) finds that many adherents of NAP in post-apartheid South African are ‘notoriously averse to talking about or occupying their minds with politics’. This does not mean that Pentecostals have no ‘firm views about the political situation in South Africa,’ rather, ‘most preferred to emphasise spiritual rather than social and political convictions’ (CDE 2008:19). Many Pentecostals are sceptical about involving themselves in social activities due to a belief that the world

can absorb them into its social system and snuff out their spiritual vitality. They argue that one cannot influence the world by becoming 'like it or more tolerant' (Hughes 2011:54). The worldview that informs this kind of religious consciousness is ambiguous, perceiving political engagement as seduction by evil forces. It is therefore important to examine this worldview, as this article now does.

### **Pentecostal ontology as a locus for exclusive identity construction**

Defining Pentecostal ontology is fraught with insurmountable challenges. A reasonable way to approach this task, however, is to examine some of the notable features that embody Pentecostal thinking. In his article, 'Charismatic Christian Congregations and Social Justice: A South African perspective,' Gabriel Wessels (1997) identifies three most salient features of the New African Pentecostal worldview in South Africa as follows.

First, the ontology is essentially dualistic. It makes a sharp dichotomy between the present reality in which we live and the spiritual reality. The present reality is constructed as a site of struggle between spiritual forces of good and evil. Satan is understood as the ultimate source of human suffering and all evil, even those that have physical causality (Wessel 1997; Marshal 1995; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). The born again thus perceive their Christian vocation as God's calling to separate themselves from the world and its evil desires by living a holy life (Anderson and Pillay 1997:230). They see themselves as the temple of God which should have no agreement with idols; 'believers will not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, righteousness will have no fellowship with unrighteousness, and light will have no communion with darkness' (Hughes 2011:54). If there is any form of involvement in social activities, this is often motivated by an underlying desire to convert 'the sinners' to Pentecostalism. Social involvement is often unconsciously or consciously utilised as bait within a gospel marketing strategy. Such a dualistic worldview seems to have prevented Pentecostals from contributing adequately to democratisation and the social cohesion process in post-apartheid South Africa. There is a corresponding

ambivalence in most Pentecostals' understanding of citizenship. Most of them see a dichotomy between their national citizenship and heavenly citizenship. In fact some do not even see themselves as citizens of their particular nations but describe themselves as aliens or foreigners whose citizenship is in heaven. Writing from the Brazilian context Rudolf von Sinner (2012:116) argues that even in the 'increasingly publicly-present Pentecostal churches have widely abided by the principle that "the faithful don't mingle with politics"'. This appears to be the case even for NAP in South Africa. The question that arises is whether such an understanding of Pentecostalism makes it susceptible to being described as divisive and as an alienating religious movement.

The second flows from the first. It is that Pentecostal ontology is apocalyptic in nature. Whereas different Pentecostal churches subscribe to various beliefs about eschatology (the doctrine about the 'end times'), they nevertheless share a fundamental conviction of the imminent damnation or destruction of the present reality (Wessels 1997). They believe in the coming of the new world, which is qualitatively different from the present world and which will be inaugurated with the advent of Christ. This conceptualisation of the present reality as transient shows the important role played by the movement's eschatological beliefs in shaping and reinforcing conceptions of political engagement, particularly the church's sense of mission in promoting programs of social cohesion (Dempster 1993). The majority of these beliefs are based on the understanding that Christians live for the future, while sinners live for the present evil world (Hughes 2011:54). The consequences are that if people become convinced that the present reality is destined for imminent destruction, they become apathetic to socio-political activities because they no longer see themselves as part of that reality, nor do they see its activities as valuable and beneficial.

Despite that, in her recent study of New Pentecostalism in South Africa, Maria Frahm-Arp (2010:68) notes that the movement in its most recent manifestation is no longer a world-rejecting movement but rather one that calls for embracing the world and seeking ways to change it by encouraging members to express their faith in the public sphere, engage in

evangelism and take up leadership in all aspects of civic and economic life. Frahm-Arp (2010:68) adds that there is a notable emphasis 'on building communities as secure places that shield members from the forces of evil'. What Frahm-Arp does not acknowledge is that there are no consistent theological admonishments given to members to be involved in political activities. Much of the members' involvement takes the form of personal initiatives which are motivated by Pentecostal values and too often do not impact significantly on all levels of society. This does not mean that Pentecostalism is politically neutral. These seemingly apolitical and socially unconcerned beliefs and practices have serious political implications and 'are not confined to the sphere of subjectivity' (Sorj and Martuccelli no date:31). They have serious 'repercussions for daily life, building solidarity and becoming a purveyor of meaning and collective identification'. However, these repercussions are only for the members of that particular Pentecostal denomination (Sorj and Martuccelli no date:31). This means that while Pentecostalism provides social cohesion to its members, it also threatens the national vision for social cohesion by negating political and other public spheres.

This leads to the third aspect of this ontology. It is seen as pessimistic because it rejects the present world in favour of the coming world. This perspective is especially true for classical Pentecostals who are essentially premillennialists<sup>4</sup> (Balcomb 2001). But many New African Pentecostal churches are world-affirming postmillennialists.<sup>5</sup> However, the weakness of these churches is that while 'they represent coherent ideological alternatives' (Ranger 1986:3) to premillennialism, they do not engage in rational socio-political analysis and develop deliberate strategies for promoting social cohesion beyond their ecclesiastical corners. They are also involved in vicious competition for members and accusations of 'sheep-stealing' (Kalu 2008).

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4 Premillennialism is a classical theology based on the argument that there would a millennium of blessedness which will begin with the imminent Second Coming of Christ.

5 Postmillennialism is a theological view that the Second Coming of Christ will culminate in a millennium of blessedness.

Further, many of these NAP churches can be regarded as this-worldly in focusing on the immediate existential needs of any individual member and preoccupied with progress and prosperity, while simultaneously promoting sectarian approaches to other religious traditions and secular institutions. The ideology of ‘breaking’ has also promoted individualism, as some have preferred to break with extended family and social relational obligations (Van Dijk 2009; Meyer 1998). In addition, many NAP churches are preoccupied with how to remoralise political and public spheres completely through the power of the Holy Spirit (Marshall 1995; Gifford 1998). The effect of this self-construction is that the political spheres and their agendas are perceived negatively, as controlled by evil forces (Marshall 1995). Such a contradictory postmillennial view of this world seems to militate against positive engagement in social and political action, except narrowly to advance self-preservation and security. This means that for the NAP to become proactive in championing social cohesion there is a need for it to develop coherence within its worldview.

### **The potential of NAP to contribute to social cohesion**

Despite the weaknesses observed above, I argue that NAP has enormous potential for the mobilisation of its adherents for nation building and social cohesion in South Africa. In many Pentecostal churches the believers are encouraged to ‘develop new personal and commercial skills through the programmes offered by their churches that support them in managing the various demands of modernising neo-liberal [South] African economies’ (Frahm-Arp 2010:68). As observed above, the theology of some of the New African Pentecostal churches in South Africa can be classified as this-worldly because of its emphasis on context realities. For instance, Bishop Musa Sono of Grace Bible Church in Soweto or Pastor Vusi Dube, who is a politician and senior pastor of eThekweni Community Church in Durban, seek in their proclamations to overcome the current pessimistic attitude that nothing has changed in the new South Africa ‘and that black people were destined to spend their lives on the economic and political fringe of the world’ (Frahm-Arp 2010:115). They therefore encourage

their members to participate actively in socio-political, economic and cultural transformation in the country. In addition, they emphasise the building of strong family ties. The nuclear family is understood as a sign of God's blessing and expression of holiness in the world. Therefore men are admonished to play an active role in the upbringing and care of their children, and to have a strict moral code of purity. They are urged to desist from premarital sex, extramarital sex, alcohol, gambling, pornography, tobacco, drugs and a range of activities which Pentecostals perceive as sinful (Frahm-Arp 2010). In terms of the protection of family institutions, preservation of home life and defending the personal spheres of many South Africans, the CDE survey established that Pentecostalism has done far better than any public institution (CDE 2008:30). There are also certain social therapeutic benefits for becoming born again in South Africa today such as recovery and abstinence from alcohol and drug abuse, promotion of family ties and the work ethic associated with saving, valuing success, and obtaining material wealth by the grace of God.

Some sociologists of religion have observed that metaphysically NAP is a movement that is not just more hospitable to gender equality but promotes the emancipation of women (Berger 2010). On the contrary, some recent studies on these movements demonstrate that while the earliest Pentecostals promoted emancipation of women, in NAP women remain marginalised from positions of authority and remain under the leadership of men (Masenya 2004; Nadar 2009). This shows that NAP is far from any form of utopia for women. In fact, the irony about the Pentecostal empowerment of women is that it disempowers women through its vehement propagation of the theology of unquestionable submission of women to male authority which strategically relegates women to subaltern positions. Yet there is a level at which the New Pentecostalism has provided a safe space and 'avenue for the recognition and integration of marginalised people' (CDE 2008:26). The CDE concluded that of all public institutions, and 'all the denominations, the Pentecostal churches are probably best able to reach out to South Africa's marginalised communities' (CDE 2008:26).

NAP also claims to have divine secrets and the power to solve every human problem, and has contributed to perceiving itself as a legitimate religious *locus* for constructing and shaping new social identities (Anderson 2013; Frahm-Arp 2010; Horn 2006). Pentecostal churches in South Africa are no longer mere contexts of spiritual renewal but have become critical sites of identity construction and moral formation – spaces where people who are politically and economically excluded find inspiration as they join together to apprehend religiously what it means to be and live in post-apartheid South Africa with its socio-political and economic struggles (Chipkin and Leatt 2011; Frahm-Arp 2010; CDE 2008). Pentecostalism is a socially therapeutic space for purging of the old self fashioned in the image of apartheid. It is a socially introspective site for evaluating and re-evaluating identities and evolving new identities fashioned in the image of the Pentecostal imagination. These churches act as spaces for experiencing ‘deliverance’ and engaging in activities that overflow beyond formal church services into other social spaces such as family and work. The recent survey on the impact of Pentecostalism in South Africa revealed that ‘religious commitment in general imparts a buoyant mood and spiritual “capital” seems to be correlated with social capital, confidence, patience and fortitude. Religion seems to insulate people from political and economic stress even without “other worldly” seclusion or fatalism’ (CDE 2008:61).

The following five key aspects render NAP a desirable force needed in South Africa, a country searching for strategies for nation-building and social cohesion: First, the recent study by Ivor Chipkin and Annie Leatt (2011) demonstrates that new Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religio-social movement in South Africa. This means that the movement is contributing enormously to reshaping the cultural identity of post-apartheid South Africans. This has major implications for nation building and social cohesion. There will no doubt be radical worldview alterations in future South African religious and socio-political landscapes. Second, Pentecostalism has faithful members who regularly attend church, not only on Sundays, but during the week. Anderson (2013:3) notes that the adherents of new Pentecostalism ‘are often on the cutting edge of the

encounter with other religions and ideology, sometimes confrontationally so'. Third, Pentecostal membership comprises mostly the younger generation, which is believed to be more volatile and an age group that contributes significantly to social unrest and upheaval in South Africa (Thomas 2003). This means that in many ways the future of South Africa lies in the hands of these churches. Fourth, Pentecostal churches have successfully maintained a strong public presence in the media, more than any other religious groups or social institutions. This means that Pentecostalism appeals to wider audiences beyond their local churches. Consequently 'they shape new forms of public religiosity that spill over into various forms of popular culture and resonate with broad audiences' (De Witte 2012:144). Fifth, these churches also promote 'internationalism through global travel and networking' (Anderson 2005:87). These patterns of Pentecostal pilgrimages also contribute to shaping the transcultural nature of present-day Pentecostalism. This means that through such visits to other Pentecostals in different countries, new cultures are developing among South African churches and consequently the cultural life of the nation will soon become transformed either for good or bad. To revert then to the main question: how can Pentecopolitanism as an ethical frame of thinking assist NAP to engage efficaciously in the process of social cohesion in South Africa?

### **The Pentecopolitanism: An ethical framework for engaging in social cohesion**

In the present South African context, one that is radically religiously pluralistic and secular, it has become increasingly necessary for any religion to search for theological premises that can guide it in relating to other religions and in finding life-giving ways of engagement in the process of social cohesion. Hans Kung (cited in Cahill 2003:23), a Roman Catholic theologian, rightly argues that what is needed today is 'religiosity with a foundation but without fundamentalism; religiosity with religious identity, but without exclusivity; religiosity with certainty of truth, but without fanaticism'. This kind of religion is what Desmond Cahill

(2003:23) classifies as ‘a new religious cosmopolitanism’. This is a similar point that Jean-Daniel Plüss (2014), a Pentecostal scholar, makes when he calls for rethinking Pentecostal ecclesiology in the context of ecumenical engagement. These scholars appear to be pointing to the need for a new cosmopolitan theological discourse that demonstrates an equal love for other religious traditions as much as one loves his or her religious tradition. This is because God’s Spirit is presented in the Bible as a cosmopolitan Spirit of unconditional love and solidarity with the whole universe. The Spirit of God is present and active in the lowest of all creation as much as it is present in the greatest and most intelligent of all creation. Thus, I suggest a Pentecostal ethical frame of engaging in the process of social cohesion based on Pentecostal cosmopolitanism or a newly-coined term, ‘Pentecopolitanism’.

The idea of Pentecopolitanism is based on theological and ecclesiastical openness toward divergent religious and nonreligious experiences and a life-giving way of managing ‘meaning in an interconnected and pluralistic’ South African society (Hannerz 2006). The term Pentecopolitanism suggests an application of the notion of cosmopolitanism to NAP in South Africa. It is a way of connecting denominational knowledge to the immediate national context and global realities by embracing and celebrating a state of identity and religious hybridity – both to be Pentecostal and to embrace the religious other and seek to engage their religious values. The argument is that Pentecostalism may need to embrace ecclesia-ethics of openness towards diversity as the movement itself reflects some degree of religious contamination. The term contamination is used in the sense of being affected by other religious systems and not claiming religious purity. Harvey Cox (1995:16) in his empirical research on Pentecostalism discovered that the movement is ‘a kind of ecumenical [hybrid/contaminated] movement, an original – and highly successful – synthesis of elements from a number of other sources, and not all of them Christian’. He (1995:16) further notes that Pentecostal ‘worship constitutes a kind of compendium of patterns and practices from virtually every Christian tradition’ including African traditional religions, as has been demonstrated by various scholars working

on the movement on the continent (Gifford 2009; Meyer 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005).

In his seminal book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Kwame Appiah (2006) offers a particularly compelling vision that has implications for the way Pentecopolitanism is to be articulated. He (2006:144) argues, 'One distinctively cosmopolitan commitment is to pluralism. Cosmopolitans think that there are many values worth living by and that you cannot live by all of them. So we hope and expect that different people and different societies will embody different values'. Appiah (2006:163) further argues that valorising pluralism extends to embracing 'a variety of political engagements' and multiple approaches to social cohesion. In a similar trend of thought, Achille Mbembe's (2007:28) argument captures the religio-cultural, socio-historical and aesthetic sensitivity that should underlie the notion of Pentecopolitanism. He thus writes,

Awareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, the relativisation of primary roots and memberships and the way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness, the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites.

That should be at the core of how NAP frames itself in the context of searching for social cohesion. To return to Appiah, he believes that religions that maintain a critical distance and solidarity from the state are significant in broadening the definition of social cohesion; similarly Pentecostalism can contribute to national consciousness precisely because African life is deeply entrenched in the religious dimension. In his analysis of Appiah, Justin Neuman (2011:150) observes that 'strong religions run afoul of the second tenet of Appiah's cosmopolitanism, fallibility: 'Another aspect of cosmopolitanism is what philosophers call fallibilism – the sense that our knowledge is imperfect, provisional, subject to revision in the face of new evidence'. This is precisely so because despite the observation

that cosmopolitanism is entrenched in pluralism and fallibility, Appiah (2006:143) believes that, ‘the neofundamentalist conception of a global *ummah* (community of believers), by contrast, admits of local variations – but only in matters that don’t matter. These counter-cosmopolitans, once more like many Christian fundamentalists, do think that there is one right way for all human beings to live’. This is the situation that the Pentecopolitan perception of reality aims to overcome, by enabling its adherents to come to terms with the fact that in contemporary South Africa no single religion can have a divine monopoly on universal truth and claim universal validity (Neuman 2011:150). The question is: what practical steps can NAP take to realise the vision of Pentecopolitanism for promoting social cohesion? Drawing from Cahill’s (2003:20–21) suggestions on the role religious institutions can play in promoting social cohesion, two multi-faceted contours are proposed as follows:

First, there is an urgent need to reconceptualise Pentecostal theology of prosperity as a framework for creating social capital for the social and economic well-being of South Africa. The theology of prosperity should become part of the Pentecostal commitment to the future of South Africa’s ‘social capital which is built around bonds, bridges, links and acceptance of the other indicat(ing) the processes that facilitate individual and social well-being and positive communal and societal outcomes within a nation or a group’ (Cahill 2003:20). A theology of prosperity as a frame for conceptualising social capital will be grounded in the following aspects: a) accurate socio-historical analysis of the South African context ; b) means for critical resistance to corruption and greediness within the church and government institutions; c) nurturing ‘positive psychosocial characteristics such as openness to new challenges and ambiguities, the tendency to modernity and long-sightedness, the propensity for care, nurturance and honesty’ (Cahill 2003:20); and d) critically reclaiming and appropriating life-giving African cultural values in dialogue with contemporary theories of political economy and modern science to broaden Pentecostal prosperity theology. This is significant in broadening Pentecostal methodology for

creating social capital for social cohesion, within the family, economic, political, recreational and other endeavours (Cahill 2003:20).

Secondly, there is a need to reconceptualise Pentecostalism as a counter-cultural prophetic voice in South Africa. This is not to suggest that Pentecostals abandon their traditional understanding of prophesy as predicting of future events or foretelling, but calling them to broaden the notion to include social analysis and critique of the prevailing socio-political and economic order. The church is still in the world because both the church and the world need each other. Pentecostalism is well positioned in South Africa to point to and show up 'the wrong, misguided actions and false values of government, its institutions and of individuals misguided in their lust for power, sex or whatever god' (Cahill 2003:21). The church was created by God as an agent of God's prophetic mission in the world to call to account human institutions by 'challenging corruption, hypocrisy and mistaken directions' (Cahill 2003:21) in the following two ways:

First, this means that for Pentecostals to consolidate their prophetic voice in South Africa, participation in policy discourses should be regarded as a sacred task similar to homily proclamation on a Sunday. It should become a crucial aspect of the public prophetic ministry of NAP.<sup>6</sup> If the Pentecostals become involved in policy making discourse they will have a more significant impact on public life and affect the course of national events. This also entails that the church must learn the language that is used by policy makers so that it can effectively and intellectually participate in the process. This may require organising workshops on the policy making process which may include, but should not be limited to, the significance of public policies for national life and how they affect the lives of individuals in different ways. This should also include how to identify policy problems, formulate proposals, and legitimise, implement and evaluate public policies. Without such preparation, some Pentecostals may be uncomfortable with

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6 In the article, 'Churches and public policy discourses in South Africa', Nico Koopman (2010) discusses at length the why and the how the church's involvement in the process of policy making in South Africa.

engaging in public policy processes mainly because they have little or no understanding of what is involved in the process of making public policy.

Secondly, Pentecostals must also be concerned about the struggles of the working class in South Africa as this class contributes significantly to the financial stability and wellbeing of mushrooming churches. There is a need for a prophetic Pentecostal strategy that can advocate for the dignity and rights of the working class in South Africa. The concerns of the workers in their work places are sacred concerns because human beings are sacred. Therefore, their concerns must be taken as ecclesiastical concerns. For instance, Pentecostalism must have a prophetic response to concerns such as the Marikana massacre in which 44 lives were lost during a prolonged wage strike. The Pentecostals must seek to engage in advocacy against exploitation in the field of wages, working conditions and social security for the working class. It should be calling for fair wages and safe work places for these are issues of social justice and human rights. Pope John Paul II (1981:33) in the encyclical of 1981, *Laborem Exercens (On Human Work)* notes that ‘the principle of the priority of labor over capital is a postulate of the order of social morality’. This means that the church cannot leave the concerns of the workers in the hands of government and unions alone. There is a need to achieve social justice within the work places of South Africa and the Church has a role to play in this.

## **Conclusion**

This article responded to the research question of how Pentecopolitanism as a new ethical frame can help NAP broaden its understanding of social cohesion in order to contribute more adequately to national social cohesion in South Africa. It has demonstrated that NAP lacks the theology that is effective in enabling the movement to engage in the process of promoting social cohesion in South Africa. Despite its theological weaknesses, NAP in South Africa has ‘cultural advantages’ in terms of social mobility and the promotion of social cohesion. Thus, this article has proposed Pentecopolitanism as a new ethical frame for NAP’s engagement in social cohesion. The notion is intended to help New African Pentecostalism to

broaden its religious identity by reconceptualising itself as a cosmopolitan religious movement within South Africa in which pluralism is perceived no longer as a threat but as an opportunity for religious growth.

The article has also demonstrated the need to develop a theological methodology through which NAP can adequately engage in the political spheres in South Africa without fear of losing its religious distinctiveness and flavour. This will help the movement to become more proactive in engaging with issues of democratisation and social cohesion in South Africa.

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