


Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology and its relevance to South Africa

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The South African context has been characterised by the prevalence of various social realities and problems in the form of xenophobia, racism, poverty and social injustice, aspects that adversely affect the ecumenical dream of equality, unity, love and tolerance. This article delves into these issues critically by examining how Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's concepts, ideas and symbols as expressed in his Pentecostal ecumenical ecclesiology can effectively inform the South African context. This article also brings into perspective the credible foundational precepts within the Pentecostal tradition that are intricately intertwined within Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology and determines how these invaluable traits or precepts can be applied effectively within the South African context. Although these Pentecostal foundational precepts have for a long time been overlooked by traditional theologies, they are also embedded within ecumenical values such as cultural diversity, interracial communion, promotion of peace, gender equality and religious pluralism.

Contribution: This article is pushing the boundaries of how Pentecostal theology in general is understood by presenting its role and function in a wider ecumenical and geographical context. In this regard, this study makes a contribution by exploring ideas from Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology which can effectively inform the current South African context which has been plagued by elements of inequality and injustice.

Keywords: reconciliation; ecumenism; ecclesiology; koinonia; Pentecostalism; perichoresis.

Introduction

In this article, I explore how Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's ecclesiological concepts and ideas can contribute to the contemporary South African context. In order to assess the relevance of Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology to both the broader and local South African context, the critical themes of reconciliation, koinonia, ecclesiality and Christian unity, which are also embedded within the foundational Pentecostal precepts and values, will be used as guidelines. This article will also endeavour to link these Pentecostal foundational themes that are also embedded within Kärkkäinen ecclesiology to ecumenical ecclesiology. The relevance of these themes is clear because the South African context, whose background is characterised by religious polarisation, racial segregation, violence and tribal division, will require radical levels of reconciliation, tolerance and the recognition and acceptance of different particularities that characterise the nation.

The fact that South Africa is still suffering from the old wounds of the apartheid regime, coupled with new ills such as religious polarisation, politics of the stomach (corruption) and discontentment, despite the end of the Apartheid era, is also echoed by Andrew Ihsaan Gasnolar (2018) in the article published by *Daily Maverick*, in which he states that South Africa lacks 'a sense of common nationhood and a shared destiny'. This means not only that South Africa has an ugly past plagued with racial inequality and religious and tribal divisions that it is struggling to shake out of its veins, but also that the future poses great challenges, especially because of the mushrooming of racial issues and xenophobia in recent years. A recent example of the 'old-school white South African racism rearing its ugly head' happened when a picture depicting Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma (a female minister) 'as an ape' went viral on social media (Bartlett 2020). In terms of xenophobia, the recent cases of attacks on foreign nationals that took place in Johannesburg in 2019 when 'men with handmade weapon' marched along the streets burning tires and looting shops owned by foreign nationals are a clear indication of how serious the problem of xenophobia is in the country (Burke 2019).

The choice of topic of this research and the theologian is specifically owed to my background. I am a Pentecostal pastor, although I was born and spent most of my teenage years as a Roman Catholic. It was only after high school that I left Roman Catholicism and joined the Pentecostals. The motivation for leaving the Roman Catholic Church was that I needed a free church where I could express my spirituality freely without being hindered by streamlined and dogmatic precepts of traditional theology. However, within Pentecostalism I was confronted with a mixture of theological approaches that ranged from the conservative American system (which uses inerrancy

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of scripture as a point of departure) to extremely free and unstructured neo-Pentecostal systems. Although I still belong to the Pentecostal tradition, I believe there is a lot that Pentecostals and Roman Catholics can learn from each other. This exposure to two traditions that lie at the extreme opposite ends of the theological spectrum (traditional and free) has made it possible for me to be conversant with the teachings of both denominations and be able to compare the two, hence revealing the riches embedded in each of these traditions. According to Miroslav Volf (1989:9), 'free churches' particularly refers to two types of churches: the first category are those churches 'with a congregationalist church constitution' and the second group include those that insist on a firm 'separation of church and state'. It is also important to mention that the problems of division and misunderstanding common in the global church resulting from doctrinal differences and struggles for power and authority have been a source of concern for me. It is this religious environment of factionalism, strife, hatred and misunderstanding that has drawn me into studying ecclesiology and ecumenism, with the intention of seeking answers to some of the issues that have engulfed the Pentecostal tradition, the global church and the South African contemporary context in particular.

The relationship between Pentecostal fundamental precepts and Kärkkäinen's ecclesiological themes

Pentecostalism was founded on the values of Christian unity, interracial communion, a theology of non-violence and cultural diversity, aspects that have been overlooked by traditional theology for a very long time. Such Pentecostal foundational values were visible in the Azusa Street Revival, where people from different races (white residents, Latinos, the rich, immigrants and African Americans) and wide religious traditions came to listen to the message of liberation, which prompted them to sing, shout and pray freely, as enabled by the Holy Spirit (Blumhofer 2006:20–22). These diverse elements within early Pentecostalism were not only depicted by the fact that these Azusa meetings, taking place in an atmosphere of religious enthusiasm and spiritual ecstasy, attracted people from all walks of life, but also by the early code, which called for Christian unity everywhere. This understanding that the Pentecostal foundational principles call for reconciliation and unity for all believers is also echoed by Marius Nel (2018), who states that the pioneers of the Pentecostal movement believed that the release of the Holy Spirit's power during the Azusa street revivals would unite all believers from different Christian traditions as depicted in the Pentecostal event of Acts 2, which resulted in the formation of the early church. This pluralistic ideology was not only evident in the Azusa street revival but was also spearheaded by the early Pentecostal missionaries in South Africa, who cherished fellowship, communion and love and disregarded racial, economic, gender and cultural barriers. Roy (2017:120) describes the early Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) church meetings to have been characterised by racial

integration, and in such fellowships people of different social status mingled freely as they sought to worship God. Although these early leaders of Pentecostalism did not motivate for this anticipated unity and pluralism practically by spearheading ecumenism, they expected a spontaneous and natural result by adhering to their restorationist and primitivist concepts (Nel 2018).

Although Kärkkäinen lived at a time that spanned almost a century after the initiation of the Pentecostal movement, the values that he spearheaded align with the Pentecostal foundational principles in a splendid way. The initial Pentecostal pluralistic theology, which disregarded social and ethnic barriers such as race, gender and culture, and considered every creation as equal despite their particularities, aligns with Kärkkäinen's Trinitarian theology of reconciliation and Christian unity, which uses the Trinitarian framework of the equality of persons to spearhead the equality of all human beings in the church. The Trinitarian theoretical framework basically makes use of the term *perichoresis* to explain the type of unity that exists between the three divine persons of the Trinity. According to Qeko Jere (2018), *perichoresis* speaks 'of the three major Trinitarian operative frameworks', which are equality, unity and distinctiveness. It is very critical to realise that these three aspects that make up the Trinitarian framework not only feature very prominently in Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology but also in ecumenical theology.

An important aspect of Kärkkäinen's (2013a:xii) theology worth noting is that he does not propagate a superficial kind of religious pluralism that ignores the differences between diverse religious traditions and Christian groups but rather centres his theology on the understanding that people have different particularities that define them. In this same vein, Kärkkäinen (2013a:223) recognises that each faith tradition is complex, and hence he acknowledges and upholds the distinctiveness and uniqueness that characterise each individual and the integrity of each religious tradition. In reality, Kärkkäinen draws us to a point where we appreciate the uniqueness, difference and particularity that characterise each individual, Christian tradition and religious grouping by encouraging 'dialogue across these differences in a spirit of confidence and hospitality' (MacDougall 2017:101–110). Such an attitude, where difference and uniqueness are appreciated, ultimately culminates in a situation where others are embraced no matter their particularities. Rather than brushing off theological ideas and ecumenical voices from different confessions, contexts and doctrinal locations, an inclusive church pays attention to them, hence understanding the 'realities that constitute the world, as broadly construed as possible' (MacDougall 2017:101–110).

Although these similarities we have looked at between the foundational principles of Pentecostalism and Kärkkäinen's ecclesiological concepts are critical, the key concepts that connect these theologies are the different Spirit Christologies that emerge when we analyse them. The interesting aspect of these Spirit Christologies is how they link Christ to the Spirit and to the Father, hence acknowledging the unity of the Spirit within the persons of the Trinity and how this unity

extends to the whole universe. Understanding the concept spearheaded by the Trinitarian framework in essence can also lead us to a position where we appreciate the work of the Spirit in the universe as the whole.

It is vital as we delve into this aspect of Spirit Christologies that we acknowledge that Pentecostalism is ultimately a Christocentric system, contrary to many popular theological voices that consider it to be simply a pneumatological system (House 2006:1). This Christological aspect of Pentecostalism is regarded by Kärkkäinen (2013a) as an intuition because it is embedded within the very core of the tradition:

[W]ith its focus on different roles of Jesus as savior, Sanctifier, Healer, Baptiser-with-the-Spirit and the Soon-Coming-Eschatological king in the power of the Spirit, has also helped highlight the then and current ministry of Jesus. (p. 49)

In this Pentecostal model, the 'person and the work of Christ are intertwined' in such a way that there is a mutual collaboration and conditioning between Christ and the Spirit (Kärkkäinen 2013a:208). This mutual connection between Christ and the Spirit (Person and works) automatically fuses other theologies that have been sidelined over the course of history, such as contextual, Pentecostal and African theologies, to traditional theology. This means that the Pentecostal Spirit Christology that Kärkkäinen spearheads, once placed in its proper perspective by casting it in a relational and dynamic world view and the correct Trinitarian framework, culminates in an inclusive theology that promotes the communion of people with different particularities and religious traditions. The Christocentric nature of Pentecostalism automatically removes the tradition from the list of presumptuous sects categorised as cults and places it in the same group as mainline traditional churches, although some theologians such as Newbigin (1953:94–122) feel that Pentecostalism deserves its own space as a new Christian form of evangelicalism, because of its emphasis on glossolalia.

Ecumenicity of Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology

The focal or common areas of emphasis between ecumenical ecclesiology and Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology basically include the following: the broader work of the Spirit in the universe, *koinonia* (the expression of visible unity), theological education as a critical platform for ecumenical interactions, mission and the importance of interfaith dialogue. Kärkkäinen's approach, in which he attempts to discern the work of the Spirit in other religious traditions and in all creation, can be noticed when he tackles topics such as pneumatology, soteriology and Christology. In these themes, Kärkkäinen clearly indicates how he values diversity, and this somehow shows the uniqueness of his ecclesiology (Penner 2017).

Furthermore, Kärkkäinen's (2013b:29–40) argument for the presence of the Spirit in the public sphere, religions and the whole of creation culminates in what is called *pluralistic pneumatology*, where there is a recognition of the different

spirits, energies and powers at work in all sectors of our society in the same way 'that the Spirit of God is at work in' these areas. This bold step by Kärkkäinen of tracing the Spirit's presence in the universe as a whole makes it possible for us to conclude that his ecclesiology is indeed ecumenical; however, it is also very significant to acknowledge the unique dimension of Kärkkäinen's (2017:334–335) ecclesiology because it goes beyond the traditional boundaries or limits of the ecumenical movement by constructing an ecclesiology proposal that seeks to embrace not only other religions but the whole of creation in the divine community of God. Although Kärkkäinen's ecclesiastical proposals may face several challenges in terms of their practical application on the ground, his courageous move needs to be applauded because it paves the way for self-understanding, dialogue and the appreciation of other traditions.

It is this uniqueness, ecumenicity, simplicity and the broader approach of Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology that make it an ideal theology that can inform the contemporary South African context. Although Kärkkäinen's context differs from the South African context, his extensive exposure and broader knowledge make his ideas critical in this Global South context.

The need for reconciliation and unity

South Africa is a vast country that is composed of different tribal groups, many Christian churches and denominations (which range from major historic churches to Pentecostal, charismatic and African-initiated churches [AICs]) and different races, and in recent years it has also seen an influx of political and economic immigrants from different neighbouring countries and other parts of Africa as they search for a better life. The attitude of local South Africans has also been changing towards immigrants, particularly with the rising unemployment levels and the economic recession, which has resulted in a rise in xenophobic attacks and the displacement of foreign nationals.

Apart from the influx of immigrants and high unemployment levels in the country, most of the local low-cost areas, particularly in my area (Nelspruit), are mainly monoracial (mostly consisting of blacks), and the middle-cost areas consist of a mixture of races, an aspect that represents economic disparities between races. The fact that in these middle-cost or peri-urban areas with diverse people there still exist a lot of monoracial churches is a clear sign that there is a lack of cohesion and communion between different groups of people and races, an aspect that reflects serious problems of division in our local communities and the nation as the whole. This understanding is also evidenced by the 'Diagnostic Report of the National Planning Commission', which states that 'South Africa still remains a divided country' and that the key aspects that contribute to this conclusion include the critical elements of race and class (National Action Plan 2019). The 2019 edition of the South African Reconciliation Barometer goes deeper into explaining

these prevailing challenges of inequality in South Africa by stating that a vast majority of South Africans agree with the understanding that the country still needs reconciliation, and the main hindrances to this goal of reconciliation include political divisions, corruption, the continuation of poverty among blacks despite the end of the apartheid era, persistent cases of gender-based violence, 'use of racial categories to measure transformation' and the reluctance by the government to fully address the problem of racism (Potgieter 2019:8). The issue of poverty contributes to this inequality and division in the sense that a recent study by the University of Witwatersrand shows that only '3500 individuals own 15% of the country's wealth', whilst half of the country's adults cannot manage to save anything; hence they survive only by daily income (Chatterjee 2020).

The breakout of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in South Africa has brought to light other serious issues relating to the high level of poverty in the country, particularly in relation to the large number of homeless people in the streets of the major cities, overcrowding in the black townships and poor service delivery. One aspect that has also come out so vividly during this period is the high level of food insecurity in the country, with vast numbers of people not having enough food to eat during the lockdown. This comes as a surprise in a country that has always been thought to be food secure. In regard to the homeless, Stephan De Beer (2020) states that:

[T]he crisis of Covid-19 is a threat to some. It could be an opportunity for new life, an affirmation of dignity, and a new chapter in rolling out life-affirming and high quality services, for hundreds of homeless persons. Covid-19 made homelessness visible.

Enforcing a complete shutdown to curb the spread of the disease was a serious challenge despite the presence of the police and the soldiers on the streets, particularly in my area in Nelspruit and the surrounding communities, because of the high percentage of local people whose survival is dependent on daily income and the homeless people in the streets. The high percentage of the population who are also dependent on grants from the government further complicated the situation, because many of them could not adhere completely to the lockdown, raising fears of a rapid increase in infections. Social distancing, which is critical to curb the spread of the viral disease, became almost impossible for people staying in poverty-stricken and crowded black townships such as Msholozhi, Game, Phola, Zwelisha and Kanyamazane, which led soldiers into using a heavy hand in order to enforce the regulations.

The pandemic brought into focus the realities of the inequality that prevails in South African society, where a large percentage of black people live in crowded communities in which poverty and a lack of basic amenities are the order of the day. According to Rasool (2020), COVID-19 'has drained the proverbial swamp and exposed our vulnerabilities in public health, education, social welfare, local government, housing, sanitation, and water provision'. He continues to

say that this pandemic has brought into an open space the gaping inequalities in South African society in a way that no other situation has done, because the very institutions that are supposed to save the face of the country, such as businesses and civil societies through their critical work of food distribution, fighting the pandemic and alleviating poverty in the hardly affected communities, could not operate as expected. This wide gap between the rich and the poor as exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic is a source of concern because it shows the level at which inequality and economic injustice is a serious issue in the country.

Although it is vital to recognise the efforts that have been made in the past to deal with the problem of poverty, improve the economy, bring together the different races through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and integrate immigrants into the local communities, there is still a lot that needs to be done to curb these problems in the country. In reference to the problem of racism in South Africa, Jerome Joorst (2019), a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Education Policy Studies at the University of Stellenbosch, states that the problem in South Africa is not necessarily that there is a lack of legislation to deal with the recurring problems but rather the persistence of 'general assimilatory practices', where races are not treated as unique, special and individual groups; hence they are expected to adapt and conform to a particular standard in order to be accepted in particular situations. Although Joorst focuses his research on schools, the general assimilation practices he outlines are a serious problem in many sectors of South African society. These problems of assimilation entail that a black man or woman must speak a white language or behave like a white person in order to be accepted in a white local church, whilst the reverse is not applicable. This not only brings into perspective the problem of accepting difference and diversity but also the power play between races.

In order to reach a point of appreciating difference and diversity, it had to start with understanding oneself. Tinyiko Sam Maluleke (1996:19–42) puts it in a clearer manner by stating that African theologians and Africans in general must reconnect to themselves by analysing and problematising African culture for the purpose of finding ways to best connect to it. This necessary move entails a deliberate resuscitation of black self-love and African identity by 'a mature reappropriation of past and present manifestation of African culture, because of and in spite of oppressive and racist conditions' (Maluleke 1996:19–42). The inevitable implications of such a move are the revival of African and black 'theologies of liberation', the decolonisation of our African values and the appreciation of ubuntu. This idea is also echoed by Kärkkäinen, who advocates for critical self-understanding and the appreciation of other perspectives by applying methods within comparative and constructive theology as key in identifying the points of intersection necessary for initiating dialogue and understanding (Brennan 2017:129–131).

Another aspect that Kärkkäinen alludes to that is critical to this study is the application of reconciliation within the Trinitarian framework, because of the way it brings forth a multifaceted connotation embedded in the term. The ideas that are embedded within the Trinitarian framework are that despite the persons within the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) being unique beings with distinct qualities, they are equal 'and united through perichoresis' (Jere 2018). According to LaCugna, the perichoretic unity, which is spearheaded within the Trinitarian framework, is made possible through the 'indwelling and interpenetration of the Persons into each other' (Jere 2018). Applying reconciliation as depicted within the broader framework of the Trinity illuminates the critical need for equality, unity and love and hence enables the recovery of the broken relationship between races, different tribal groups, people from different nations and the whole creation at large through communion, integration and collaboration (Kärkkäinen 2013a:364).

However, the first step in the process of reconciliation involves recognising the differences that exist within the human species, which in this case are the cultural background, race, nationality and ethnic identity. This recognition and acknowledgement of the critical aspects of our identity that separate us or create barriers between us should translate into appreciation of diversity. Appreciation of diversity should not be simply taken as a way of conforming but rather as a way of understanding that different groups of people complement each other.

According to D'Costa, an attitude of delighting in possible encounters with others who are different from us should involve acknowledging each other's distinctive attributes (Kärkkäinen 2013a:223). This involves recognising the other 'as the possible face of God' (Kärkkäinen 2013a:223). This entails acknowledging that God is at work through his Spirit in all people, religions and the whole of creation. This exclusiveness within the particular races in South Africa can only be ironed out through communion, which is driven by equality, mutual trust and love for each other. Critically looking at communion, as a formidable tool within faith communities, brings into focus the inevitable role of the community in solving most of the problems that relate to inequality that ravage the country.

Because it is in the community that the problems of poverty, racism and unemployment are rooted, it means that it is within this same community that the solution to these problems can be found. However, the government has the responsibility to empower the community members so that they can play the role of being each other's keeper. During the COVID-19 epidemic, for example, 'the announcement of a state of disaster, activists in communities across the country (Community networks, coalitions, NGOs) mobilised to protect their communities', with their roles ranging from resolving conflicts and distributing sanitiser to sensitising community members about the virus and encouraging social distancing (Von Holdt & Essop 2020). The role of the

community in solving the ills that ravage our society is critical because it entails dealing with problems from the grassroots level, and according to Von Holdt and Essop (2020); this strategy has proved to be more effective, agile and faster.

Apart from the other issues we have looked at, South Africa is a country also plagued by violence, an aspect that is evidenced by the high numbers of killings, rape cases and destruction of property during protests. This context, marred by high levels of violence, can benefit from the non-violent theologies that Kärkkäinen (2013a:32) propagates. Although a theoretical attitude that simply acknowledges the non-violent theology without affecting its concepts can do more harm than good, it is clear that Kärkkäinen proposes a workable solution or strategy that can easily be applied in a South African situation. The fact that much of the violence experienced in South Africa is attributed to the great need to fix the problems the society is facing (inequality, poor service delivery and lack of basic necessities) after all diplomatic methods have failed to achieve the desired results, it means that the government must react promptly by addressing the inequalities that prevail in South African society through restitution (compensating victims of former apartheid policies) by allowing equal access to resources for all races and dealing with institutional racism by practically implementing legislation against racism.

Kärkkäinen aligns his non-violent theology with that of Martin Luther, as indicated in his report 'on the Finnish school of Lutheran studies', when he states that 'God's alien work means putting down, killing, taking away hope, leading to desperation' whilst his 'proper work means the opposite: forgiving, giving mercy, taking up, saving' and encouraging (Southgate 2019:279–290). His conclusion on this intertwined nature of God is that humans must learn to trust in God by cultivation of a calm and submissive attitude in the face of suffering and hence propagating a non-violent theology where the peaceful resolution of conflict and forgiveness take centre stage rather than violence. In a way Kärkkäinen urges his readers to trust God rather than take matters in their own hands when he prefers the emulation of God's proper work rather than his alien work, because God's alien work is only necessitated by human disobedience. Kärkkäinen (2016:407) stresses the importance of dialogue and forgiveness in resolving conflicts when he echoes the words from the World Council of Churches, stating 'we understand peace and peacemaking as an indispensable part of our common faith'.

Application of koinonia in the South African context

Even though koinonia mainly refers to different denominations and church groups dwelling together in unity by applying the biblical concept in the book of Acts (Pentecostal event), where different groups of people gathered to hear the disciples preach in different languages, it can also apply to a situation

where different races, tribal groups and people from different nationalities live and work together as a community. Kärkkäinen (2007:1–15) considers *koinonia* to be a broader term that includes critical aspects such as fellowship, participation, communion and material sharing. In short, Kärkkäinen regards *koinonia* to be a comprehensive terminology that encompasses the spiritual, material and social cohesion within a particular community. The term *ubuntu* in the South African context aligns itself with such a broader understanding of *koinonia* as depicted by Kärkkäinen, because it refers to the importance of all people, despite their particularities, being united by the removal of selfish practices, for the sake of allowing the human race to prosper, evolve and peacefully exist. The communal cultural values embedded within the term *ubuntu* include tolerance, respect for each other's particularities, caring, social sensitivity, consideration, generosity, hospitality, humbleness and virtuousness (Mabovula 2011:38–47).

In line with a broader and holistic understanding of *koinonia* that can be linked to *ubuntu*, Mogobe Bernard Ramose (2016:86–98) considers the application of the concepts embedded in the interconnectedness of human beings despite their race, ethnic background and nationality to be vital in the 'restoration of justice' and the reversing of 'the dehumanising consequences of colonial conquest'. Such an approach of fixing the imbalances that characterised the past can result in mutual agreement, respect and caring for the others, receiving and 'passing on the goods of life to others' (Ramose 2015:240–242). The way that different religious groups and different groups perceive or view each other is vital in order to determine whether *koinonia* can exist in a sincere and truthful manner. This means that *koinonia* must be applied within the Trinitarian framework of equality.

Applying the Trinitarian framework of equality enables everyone despite their particularities to have equal access to opportunity, employment and resources. Van Wyngaard (2017:1–8) identifies elements of superiority (disseminated from a distorted interpretation of the Old Testament) among the Afrikaner people, which he links to the general 'white racial anthropology' adapted from the Christian Europe colonial concepts, as one of the critical elements that allowed the flourishing of the apartheid ideology of racial segregation. Dealing with such a wrong theology entails embracing *koinonia* within the Trinitarian theology of equality because it is in community that theologies can be changed. Kärkkäinen (2002:7–8) embraces this equality that is embedded in the Trinity by extending its relevance to all dimensions of community life by the combination of both Latin Trinitarian concepts that characterise the Western church and the sociological Trinitarian views that characterise the Eastern church.

The interpretation of ecclesiality in South Africa

Before determining the interpretation of ecclesiality in South Africa, it is logical to delve into the ecumenical history of

South Africa as eerily reminiscent of the events that led us to the point where we are now. History shows us that the ecumenical movement was very active in the country during the period prior to the first democratic elections in 1994 and shortly after the inauguration, because these were stages when the cooperation of churches was imperative (Duncan & Egan 2019:1–18). According to Graham Duncan and Anthony Egan (2019:1–28), the South African ecumenical movement should be credited for the development of black theology, the Black Consciousness Movement, the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society, the Church Unity Commission and the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa during the apartheid era, and that helped meet the currents and the needs of their time.

However, since the end of the apartheid period, there has been some laxity in terms of the role of the ecumenical church in the country simply because 'there is no longer any urgency with regard to organic union as the aim of ecumenism' (Duncan & Egan 2019:1–28). One of the setbacks of the ecumenical movement in post-apartheid South Africa has also been the loss of focus and vision as a result of some main players within the movement, such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC), developing close relations with the government (Pillay 2017). However, this church–state relationship has been deteriorating, leading to the weakening of these alignments and connections over the years. The main contributing cause to this souring of relations between the government and the ecumenical church is that SACC has been very critical of some of the government's policies relating to the tackling of corruption and eradication of poverty (Duncan & Egan 2019:19).

Another serious setback to the ecumenical church in South Africa has been the dwindling of international financial support to the SACC, which has hampered its operations. The sidelining of the ecumenical church meant that the Pentecostal bloc, which basically includes charismatics, Pentecostals and a number of evangelicals, eventually replaced SACC as the new government favourites. However, this partnership between the government and the Pentecostal bloc has been largely uncritical, which gives the SACC a window of opportunity to fill the missing gap. The steps taken by SACC in 2012 and 2013 through its letters to the ruling party urgently calling for social development in favour of the marginalised and poor in the country was a great move in the right direction because it represented the return of the movement to its prophetic role, which previously contributed to 'the dismantling of apartheid' regime (Klaasen & Solomons 2019:6). Despite this huge step by the SACC to be restored as the prophetic voice, it is not clear how it intends to maintain this role and whether its plea for economic justice and equality will lead to the transformation of the society. It must also be acknowledged that the success of SACC in its social agenda (reconciliation, healing, transformation, strengthening democracy, 'challenging economic power relations', attending to problems of inequality and poverty and advocating for family life)

entails working in collaboration with the community, church leaders and other ecumenical organisations (Klaasen & Solomons 2019:1–14).

According to Duncan and Egan (2019:19), the reason why Pentecostalism tends to take a centre stage, particularly in the modern South African context, is basically because it represents the emergence 'of a global phenomenon'. This perspective about Pentecostals is also shared by Yong, who states that its close 'affinity to indigenous tradition' (both white and black) makes it possible for the tradition to participate in primal spirituality, hence filling the vacuum in contemporary Christianity (Duncan & Egan 2019:19). This ability by Pentecostalism to cut across contexts in order to become relevant helps it to transcend racial, cultural and ethnic barriers; hence its approaches are invaluable in the current ecumenical needs. The ability by Pentecostalism to adapt to new contexts and embrace difference even within itself serves as an alternative to the old strategy of uniformity, where diversity and difference are undermined.

One of the vital features of the contemporary South African religious context that serves as the cardinal entry point for Kärkkäinen's theology is that it consists not only of various religious traditions, but even within its Christian religion, it has representation of almost all the categories of denominations and churches, which includes AICs and various African traditional religious groups. This means that determining the ecclesiality of a particular Christian tradition needs to go beyond a particular set standard if ecumenism has to take root and encompass the various churches and denominations found in the country. Engaging in an ecumenical campaign in a country like South Africa, which could be true with other countries as well, is quite a complex issue because it entails coming up with a definition of the church that is broad enough to include every religious group within the Christian tradition. Kärkkäinen's proposal for determining the ecclesiality of the church, where he includes not only the four traditional marks but also the 'Protestant reformation emphases on the' correct management of the sacraments and the mission nature of the church, and also his re-interpretation of these six features, broadens his sphere (Penner 2018:1–6). Kärkkäinen's effort to broaden his ecumenical spectrum in his Pentecostal ecclesiology makes his proposal very relevant to the South African context.

Kärkkäinen's ideologies, which are intended to refine Pentecostal ecclesiology through a convergence of ideas, can make more sense when the Spirit's work in all creation, including various religions and Christian traditions, can be acknowledged, and the diversity that characterises the religious world is cherished. The broader diversity that characterises South African society requires appreciation and mutual understanding among the different religious traditions, tribal groupings and races, which can culminate in unity. According to Kärkkäinen, such an appreciation and mutual understanding among different people can only be brought about through 'a greater ecumenical understanding of God the Holy Spirit' (Clarke 2005:123). Such an endeavour,

however, should not be underestimated by creating a false unity or reconciliation that does not put into consideration the complexity of different people groups and Christian traditions. This is the reason why Kärkkäinen suggests an approach of demystifying other traditions and groups of people through analysis, which will bring out the riches embedded in such traditions or groups of people in order to confront the misconceptions and differences that stand in our way to cordial relationships with others. This does not in any way insinuate the removal of differences in order to achieve a false unity but rather the celebration of these differences and complexities, hence promoting unity-in-diversity.

Conclusion

It seems clear that Pentecostalism will be a huge social force in the South African context, and only time will tell the specifics of the great role it will play. Pentecostalism not only appeals to the local and regional African population, but it is also made up of foundational tools, elements and features that can be used effectively to foster the ecumenical dream, as can be noted through the ecumenical Pentecostal traits and concepts within Kärkkäinen's ecclesiology. However, the ecumenical nature of Pentecostalism has not been explored fully; hence there still lingers a dark cloud over what Pentecostalism is all about and what it can bring to the ecumenical table. This article sets the pace for a further exploration of Pentecostalism in an effort to correct the misconceptions and assumptions of this tradition for the purpose of understanding its critical role in fostering the ecumenical dream. It is clear from this section that the ecumenical Pentecostal ecclesiology of Kärkkäinen can inform the South African religious, cultural and social context in order to bring unity and cohesion in a country where racial, tribal and social divides still linger even after the collapse of the apartheid era.

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Author's contributions

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