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Leadership by the Spirit in Pentecostalism: A transformational pneumatocracy approach¹

ABSTRACT

Pneumatology refers to the study of the Spirit within Pentecostal theology. Similarly, Pentecostals believe that pneumatology has a role to play in ecclesiastical leadership, which results in leadership through the Holy Spirit. In this article, this kind of leadership is theorised as pneumatocracy and is discussed in contrast to other leadership theories such as autocracy and democracy. The article seeks to demonstrate that pneumatocracy in the Pentecostal movement is important. However, it should engage in societal transformation, development of communities, and socio-economic and -political challenges for its relevance in the 21st century. Furthermore, this theory is proposed as an approach relevant to addressing gender parities in ecclesiastical leadership. The practices of pneumatocracy in early Pentecostalism, the early church, and contemporary times are explored in detail. A transformational pneumatocracy is proposed to address current leadership challenges in the African context.

¹ This article makes an important contribution in terms of outlining pneumatocracy as an alternative style of leadership. It suggests a transformational pneumatocracy that can transform society, develop communities, and address socio-economic and -political challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are various leadership theories such as autocracy, democracy, situational, behavioural, transformational, participative, team leadership, and so forth. Since the dispensation of the early church, Pentecostals subscribe to leadership by the Holy Spirit (Kärkkäinen 2001). Pentecostals believe that any person assuming the position of leadership should be filled with the Holy Spirit (Carter 2009). Pentecostals also believe that a church leader should follow the direction of the Holy Spirit in decision-making (Patterson & Kuperus 2016). They believe that a Spirit-filled leader should be the one who can discern the things of the Spirit (Parker 1996; Währisch-Oblau 2009). Thus, leadership in the Pentecostal movement is centred on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the leader. This kind of leadership style is theorised in this article as pneumatocracy. This leadership is informed by the pneumatology within Pentecostal theology which is the belief in the work of the Holy Spirit. This article argues that, while pneumatocracy is acknowledged as an important style of leadership in the Pentecostal movement, it should be balanced with the transformational approach for its relevance in the 21st century. This means that pneumatocracy should answer to societal challenges including socio-economic and -political challenges.

To achieve the above, pneumatocracy is introduced as a unique approach and different from other approaches of leadership such as democracy, autocracy, charismatic leadership, and so forth. The article outlines how pneumatocracy as a leadership style has been used in the Christian tradition, including in the early church of the Apostles. The article also highlights the distinctions of the pneumatocracy style of leadership within the Pentecostal movement, particularly in Africa. In addition, the article highlights various challenges that come with pneumatocracy and how such challenges can be dealt with in the 21st century. The contribution of this article is the transformational pneumatocracy approach to leadership that will consider societal transformation and community development in its framing. In addition, pneumatocracy is expected to be a framework that deals with various socio-economical and -political challenges in the 21st century. This approach is also expected to address the gender parities that exist in ecclesiastical leadership, particularly in the Pentecostal tradition. The next section introduces pneumatocracy as a theoretical framework for the article.

2. FRAMING PNEUMATOCRACY IN THE CONTEXT OF PENTECOSTALISM

Johan Henri Quanjer (2009) coined pneumatocracy as governance by the Spirit. Pneumatocracy is a combination of two Greek words, namely “pneuma”, meaning the spirit, and “Kratos”, meaning to rule (Ottuh & Thikan 2015). Therefore, pneumatocracy is rulership by the Spirit. The Spirit becomes the centre of leadership, which among Pentecostals is the Holy Spirit. In addition, in pneumatocracy, the Holy Spirit is the leader of the church within the Pentecostal leadership (Zeze 2012:19). Pneumatocracy becomes leadership through the divine instead of leadership through human efforts (Ross 2006:80). Pneumatocracy is God governing his people through the work of the Holy Spirit (Ottuh & Thikan 2015:9). This makes pneumatocracy a leadership style where the Holy Spirit or the leader, who is led by the Holy Spirit, is in charge of the church. Therefore, even if a human being is at the helm of ecclesiastical leadership, it is believed that God is in charge if that human being is filled with the Holy Spirit. Hence, in pneumatocracy, the Spirit baptism and being filled with the Holy Spirit are the requirements for one to assume leadership responsibilities. According to Riches (2020:191), Pentecostal theology is centred on being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in other tongues. For the same reason, any leader within Pentecostal circles is expected to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The leader who adopts a pneumatocracy approach to leadership will be expected to submit under the rulership of the Holy Spirit (Zeze 2012:87). Similarly, a leader who adopts a Christocracy approach to ecclesiastical leadership will be expected to submit under the rulership of Christ. However, since both the Holy Spirit and Christ are part of the trinitarian God, there is some connection between Christocracy and pneumatocracy. In this instance, the focus remains pneumatocracy. Although some scholars discuss pneumatocracy in contrast to Christocracy, Zeze (2012:76) highlights the differences between Bucer and Calvin:

Bucer stressed Christocracy, i.e. the government of the church by Christ, whereas Calvin stressed Pneumatocracy, i.e. the government of the church by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals, particularly in classical Pentecostalism, do not separate the leadership of Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father through the Son. Therefore, the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism is perceived as teaching the words and works of Christ; the two are neither in competition nor in contradiction (Thiselton 2013:232). Hence, pneumatocracy in Pentecostalism does not necessarily replace Christocracy but rather fulfils it. However, the emphasis among Pentecostals is the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

In this article, pneumatocracy is used as leadership through the work of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit baptism is the basis for one to take leadership, then anyone within the Pentecostal movement can assume a leadership role. Therefore, pneumatocracy is used, in this instance, to argue that all believers can be endowed with leadership if filled with the Holy Spirit. Pneumatocracy is also used to argue for a kind of leadership that transforms society and communities where the leader is located. In other words, being filled with the Holy Spirit must translate into transforming communities. Pneumatocracy is used in this article to argue that leadership should be able to engage in socio-economic and -political challenges. In other words, being filled with the Holy Spirit should not be equated to perceiving the challenges in society as otherworldly. However, before these arguments are made, it is important to draw a connection between pneumatocracy and pneumatology in Pentecostal theology.

3. EARLY PENTECOSTALISM'S LEADERSHIP MODELS

I do not claim to provide the history of all the early Pentecostalism's leadership models but rather to make links between early Pentecostalism and pneumatocracy. Traditionally, Pentecostals require proof of the anointing of the Spirit, provided in signs and wonders or some form of supernatural insights, in order to convince believers that the Spirit rests on them. In early Pentecostalism, this can be discovered in the leadership style of leaders such as William Seymour of Azusa Street Revival of 1906 in the United States of America, Los Angeles. To start with, Azusa Street Revival was itself the movement of the Spirit with great links to pneumatology. The reason for this is that the leader himself, William Seymour, embraced the work of the Holy Spirit as a requisite to taking up a leadership position by undergoing the teachings of Charles Parham. According to Akerlund (2018:4), leadership in early Pentecostalism, as demonstrated in leaders such as William Seymour, consists of traits such as power, influence, and charisma, which Pentecostal leaders believe are from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in embracing the Pentecostal theology of the Spirit, particularly the baptism of the Holy Spirit,

Pentecostal leaders wish to have access to power, influence, and charisma. However, it is important to note that the leadership of Seymour was not only centred on power, influence, and charisma; it was also a leadership that was able to bring transformation in not only Los Angeles but also elsewhere in the world by bringing different races to worship together. Thus, through a pneumatocracy, the divisions along colour and racial lines were crossed, in order to bring people together (Liardon 1996:125). Hence, I propose a transformative pneumatocracy in the 21st century.

In the South African context, the leadership style of leaders such as John G. Lake in early Pentecostalism also took after William Seymour on the reliance of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in attracting followers. Lake was an anointed leader who also pulled crowds in Bree Street, Johannesburg. He was also a leader of power, influence, and charisma, because he received the teachings of William Seymour from Azusa Street Revival of Spirit baptism, which he then implemented as his style of leadership in the South African context. It also seems that Lake admired Seymour because of his power and influence in his approach to leadership (Anderson 1996:117). The leadership style of both Seymour and Lake relies a great deal on the work of the Holy Spirit. There was a great connection between the pursuit of the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the leadership style in early Pentecostalism. Other similarities exist between the two in how they have been able to attract people from different cultural backgrounds to their meetings. In early Pentecostalism in South Africa, people from different races and cultural backgrounds attended Lake's meetings. Pneumatocracy brings unity to the Pentecostal tradition. Azusa Street Revival and Seymour's style of leadership greatly influence the leadership of Lake in the South African context. I have argued elsewhere (Kgatlle 2017:327) that the unity of the church faded away upon alignment with the teachings of Spirit baptism. Hence, the church such as the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa soon became divided along racial lines.

Leaders such as Elias Letwaba in the Apostolic Faith Mission can be considered leaders of great influence and charisma in early Pentecostalism. Letwaba was also a leader who followed the fundamental teachings of Pentecostalism, particularly Spirit baptism and the performance of various miracles, signs, and wonders that attracted crowds to his meetings. This made Letwaba one of the outstanding and influential Black leaders in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (Anderson 1996:125). Although he came from very humble beginnings, he was remarkable because of his alignment with the leadership style of the Spirit. In addition, because of the many miracles and wonders he saw under the ministry of Lake, he was also inspired to adopt such a style in attracting followers to his ministry. Furthermore, Letwaba's leadership style, similar to that of Seymour and Lake, was a transformative

one in the sense that he was able to start the theological college Patmos, which became known as the first theological college of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. There is a great connection between pneumatocracy and the transformation of communities. Even in early Pentecostalism, pneumatocracy was the style not only of simply relying on the Spirit, but also of transformation. The next section draw connections between pneumatocracy and pneumatology as part of Pentecostal theology.

4. PNEUMATOCRACY AND PNEUMATOLOGY

One of the tenets of Pentecostal theology is pneumatology theology of the Spirit within Christian theology (Kärkkäinen 2018). A Pentecostal theology is a theology of an encounter between God and the Pentecostal believers through the work of the Holy Spirit (Warrington 2008; Anderson 2013). This is what makes Pentecostal theology and Pentecostal spirituality more practical than theoretical. In addition, pneumatology makes Pentecostal theology quite distinct from other Christian traditions, including other protestant movements (Kgatle 2022). This does not mean that other Christian traditions do not talk about the Holy Spirit. It means that Pentecostal theology is centred on the work of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis and the pursuit of the encounter with God through the work of the Holy Spirit makes Pentecostalism a unique movement. Pentecostal theology is not based so much on its conceptualisations but on how it is practised in local contexts (Kalu 2008). Pentecostals worldwide always long for that encounter with God through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is through a pneumatological approach that Pentecostals have sought the next move of God since the inception of Pentecostalism (Synan 2012). This aspect of the Pentecostal movement is what makes it a popular movement in different contexts, particularly in the Global South. Hence, the movement has grown to greater heights in the 21st century in both the Global South and Africa, because Pentecostals worldwide have embraced the theology of the Holy Spirit as they long for an encounter with God through the Holy Spirit.

Pneumatocracy is connected to the theology of the Spirit, that is, pneumatology. The two concepts are interrelated, as they both draw from the work of the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology becomes a theological basis, in which pneumatocracy as the leadership through the Holy Spirit is grounded in the Pentecostal tradition (Chung 2002). For this reason, Pentecostals have embraced pneumatocracy as a style of leadership because of their theological orientation of pneumatology (Morgan 2007; Menzies & Menzies 2000; Nel 2016; Riches 2019). Pneumatocracy is different from other styles such as the charismatic leadership style, as it is not only about the charisma of the leader, but also deeply rooted in Pentecostal theology of the Spirit. While charismatic leaders would only rely on gifts, pneumatocratic leaders depend on the

work of the Holy Spirit to activate their gifts. Therefore, for us to understand the pursuit of a pneumatocracy by Pentecostal leaders, there is a need to understand the pursuit of pneumatology within the Pentecostal movement. This means that pneumatocracy is embraced by Pentecostals because they have already embraced a pneumatological approach to Pentecostal theology. The next section explores the practice of pneumatocracy in the early church of the Apostles. This is also discussed in conjunction with the pneumatological approach of the early church.

5. PNEUMATOCRACY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The early church practised pneumatocracy as an approach to leadership. Spirit baptism was one of the criteria for leadership positions in the early church (Sanders 2017). Although other factors such as prayer and integrity were considered for the leadership positions in the early church, the Holy Spirit was the main factor in choosing such leaders.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word'. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6).

It is clear from this biblical text that, in the early church, the criteria for selecting leadership that was supposed to serve in the church was being filled with the Spirit and wisdom (Getz 2003). All the chosen men such as Stephen and the others were filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 7:55 also refers to Stephen as a man filled with the Holy Spirit.

Other biblical texts in Acts show that the Apostles took up leadership in the early church because they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Johnston 2006). In Acts 11:24, Barnabas was able to lead many people to the Lord because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This points to leadership through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:9 and 13:52 also refer to the disciples, including Paul, who used to be Saul as being filled with the Holy Spirit. This points to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the requisite for the leadership positions in

the early church and the reason for the expansion of the same. However, not only were the leaders at the top leadership level in the early church expected to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but any responsibility given to a believer also demanded that the same be filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Akin *et al.* (2010:62), Paul encouraged “every believer to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit”. This kind of leadership was relevant in the early church as the church began to grow in numbers because of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit in the early church influenced the leadership of the church and its ability to grow in numbers.

One also notes the role of the Holy Spirit in the early church when the Spirit-filled leaders were able to reach out to the communities to help those in need. According to Acts 2:45, “[t]hey sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need”. This means that the leadership of the Spirit was able to lead them into taking part in social transformation as they did their best to help those in need. Pneumatocracy is thus a leadership theory concerned with the well-being of the people, as shown by the early church (Schwarz 2007). In addition, through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, leaders in the early church were able to confront the socio-political challenges of their time (Mwambazambi 2014:3). The Spirit-filled leaders were always in confrontation with the political powers that be in demonstrating leadership through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, pneumatocracy in the early church functioned as a transformational leadership style that was relevant not only to the church, but also to the communities surrounding the church. The next section of the article discusses the function of pneumatocracy in contemporary Pentecostalism.

6. PNEUMATOCRACY IN THE CONTEMPORARY PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

The vast majority of Pentecostal churches in the 21st century practise pneumatocracy. This means that leaders are not chosen based on conventional styles such as elections but they are chosen through the leadership of the Holy Spirit. However, this differs from one Pentecostal tradition to another. Elections are still common among classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church (Anderson 2001; Clark 2009; Resane 2018, Kgatle 2021a or b?). It must be pointed out that, even with elections, believers would still be encouraged to seek God in prayer and follow the direction of the Holy Spirit in choosing a leader. Therefore, pneumatocracy still prevails even where there is a claim of democracy. Pneumatocracy is practised without fail among the neo-Pentecostal churches. Leaders in African neo-Pentecostal churches would choose their leaders without even following a democratic process such as

elections and so forth (Banda 2020a:3). When choosing leaders, the pastors in these churches would claim to be led by the Holy Spirit. This means that the appointment of the leaders is the sole responsibility of the pastor, not the interaction of the believers.

Pneumatocracy has some challenges. The first challenge is that the church leader or pastor in most of the churches is perceived as the one who hears from the Holy Spirit (Banda 2020b). The congregants are regarded as those who have to hear from the pastor or the prophet in most of the new prophetic churches (Kpobi & Swartz 2018). This is also common among the neo-Pentecostal churches, particularly the new prophetic churches that believe in the leadership of one individual prophet. This means that the selection of leaders in these churches solely becomes the duty of the pastor or the prophet. As such, a pneumatocracy in contemporary times becomes another form of autocracy, whereby pastors claiming to be led by the Spirit single-handedly appoint their leadership. It is for the same reason that pastors cannot be corrected by anyone, as they believe that they carry sovereign authority. As such, a pneumatocracy is used to perpetuate some form of abuse by the prophets who claim to be led by the Holy Spirit. Some of the prophets have abused their positions and authority by claiming to be led and inspired by the Holy Spirit (Orogun & Pillay 2022). This calls for a new approach that will find a balance between being led by the Holy Spirit and the appointment of leaders within the Pentecostal churches in Africa.

When a pastor, who claims to be led by the Spirit, makes the decisions, pneumatocracy becomes an undemocratic style (Lane 1976). In other words, pneumatocracy ceases to be leadership by the people but leadership by an individual pastor. This differs greatly from the practice in the early church because all the believers got together and heard from the Holy Spirit. In the early church, the responsibility of appointing a leader, who is filled with the Holy Spirit, was assigned to all believers. The task of believers was to ensure that the person being appointed is filled with the Holy Spirit. However, in neo-Pentecostal churches, only the pastor hears from the Holy Spirit and makes decisions alone (Kgatle 2020). This silences the voices of the people who have also been empowered by the Holy Spirit. This kind of leadership can easily move towards a more autocratic style since one person makes the decisions in leadership and the appointment of other leaders. This means that pneumatocracy has the potential to become an autocracy, especially when only the prophet appoints leaders.

Some neo-Pentecostals, who claim to be led by the Holy Spirit, are led by the evil spirits in the spirit realm (Kgatle & Anderson 2020). Some prophets in the new prophetic churches tend to secretly consult the fetish priests and come to church to claim the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Quayesi-Amakye

2009). Prophets are abusing pneumatocracy as there is only a claim of being used by the Holy Spirit. In essence, other spirits are using them. However, by adopting discernment, one can distinguish between an evil spirit and the Holy Spirit (Kgatle 2021b). This presents some form of dualism, where a prophet is a Christian during the day but practices African traditional religions at night. Similarly, some prophets claim to perform miracles and prophecies in the name of the Holy Spirit, but they perform the same through divination. This is problematic since the Holy Spirit is used and abused in pneumatocracy. It is a problem when the believers cannot discern which spirit is leading the pastor and the prophet in neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa. However, this is not only limited to the neo-Pentecostal churches, but it can also happen in classical Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. This calls for an alternative practice of pneumatocracy that will distinguish between the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the leadership by other spirits in the spirit realm. The next section discusses a transformational pneumatocracy approach to ecclesiastical leadership as an alternative to abusive forms of pneumatocracy within the broader Pentecostal movement.

7. A TRANSFORMATIONAL PNEUMATOCRACY APPROACH TO ECCLESIASTICAL LEADERSHIP

To deal with the current challenges in the practice of pneumatocracy, this article suggests a transformational pneumatocracy approach to ecclesiastical leadership, particularly in the Pentecostal tradition. This means that being spirit-filled should be balanced with issues of social transformation. Being Spirit-led is expected to be a leadership theory that transforms society. This means that transformational pneumatocratic leaders are agents of transformation for society. The reason why they chose leaders who were filled with the Holy Spirit in the early church is that they wanted leaders who could change their society. In the 21st century, transformational pneumatocratic leadership is expected to do the same. This means that leadership is not the promotion of self, but the transformation of others. Hence, transformational pneumatocratic leaders are not selfish but selfless leaders. In Africa nowadays, there is a need for more leaders who will advocate for the transformation of others rather than self-enrichment (Kgatle 2018; Kretzchmar 2023).

The leader who is filled with the Spirit is expected to transform his or her community. The early church, from which we learn about pneumatocracy, is the perfect example of how the preaching of the gospel helped develop the communities. It follows that, in the 21st century, relevant leadership is one where the leader develops not only him- or herself, but also the entire

community. This means that a transformational pneumatocratic leadership is not interested in pastors and bishops owning private jets and mansions but rather in them building schools, hospitals, clinics, and so forth, in the development of communities. A Spirit-filled leader advocates for the community to live in development. This means that Pentecostal churches in Africa are expected to become centres for development in the 21st century. The Pentecostal churches are expected to become centres for the development of communities because of the transformational pneumatocratic leadership style. The leader, who is filled with the Holy Spirit, is thus expected to provide for the needs of the community within the Pentecostal tradition.

A transformational pneumatocratic approach is a leadership that addresses socio-economic and -political issues in the 21st century. Being Spirit-filled is not an excuse to ignore the socio-economic and -political challenges as they arise in society. As they were filled with the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, they were able to address the economic challenges around them. The early church of the Apostles was able to share to a level where no one lacked food and other necessities in life. This is a lesson in 21st-century leadership where there are so many inequalities between the leader of the congregation and the congregants. The pneumatocratic approach to leadership is expected to address not only the spiritual needs of the people but also their economic needs. In addition, being filled with the Spirit does not mean that political issues should be perceived as otherworldly but rather be confronted by the same Spirit in the believer. Therefore, a spirit-filled leader can deal with both socio-economic and -political issues as they rise in society.

8. A LEADERSHIP THAT ADDRESSES GENDER PARITIES IN ECCLESIASTICAL LEADERSHIP

Since pneumatocracy is leadership through the Holy Spirit, this means that all who are empowered by the Spirit are eligible to take up leadership positions (Gheorghe-Luca 2021:103). This means that leadership cannot be a function of the male candidature but the leadership by all who are filled with the Spirit. Once a woman has been empowered by the Holy Spirit, she can take up a leadership position in the church (Kgatle 2019:3). This means that a pneumatocracy approach has the potential not only to liberate women from oppression but also to elevate women to positions of leadership within the Pentecostal circles (Mapuranga 2018:139). This means that the pneumatocracy approach is also relevant for the upliftment of the marginalised in the community, including women and children. Since the infilling of the Holy Spirit happens to the marginalised, it opens opportunities for them to also become leaders.

9. CONCLUSION

This article highlighted the importance of leadership by the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal movement. This style was popular in the early church of the Apostles, where leadership was defined through the direction of the Holy Spirit. However, the literature review in this article highlighted various challenges to the pneumatocracy approach to leadership such as an overreliance on the Holy Spirit. In other words, pneumatocratic leaders tend to depend on the Holy Spirit even when they should be able to make decisions themselves. This calls for a new approach to the pneumatocracy approach in the 21st century. This article suggested a transformational pneumatocracy approach that will scrutinise social transformation in the construction of a leadership theory. In addition, there is also a need to look at the development of communities in the construction of leadership. A leadership theory should look at addressing the socio-economic and -political challenges of the 21st century, in order to remain relevant in the Pentecostal movement. Lastly, a transformational pneumatocracy approach is expected to address the gender parities that exist in the ecclesiastical leadership in the Pentecostal tradition. This changes how Pentecostal scholars study pneumatocracy in the Pentecostal movement. This theory should be perceived not only through the lens of the Holy Spirit, but also through the lens of transformation.

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