

Pneumatological Imagination in Pentecostal Scholarship and its Contribution to Theological Studies in South Africa

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Abstract

Pentecostal scholarship in the South African context has come a long way if contributions by early historians and biographers are anything to go by. The field is growing in the 21st century, considering the interdisciplinary inputs made by the current Pentecostal scholars in South African public universities. However, the reviewed literature demonstrated that Pentecostal scholarship is underutilised in the South African theological studies context. This article looked at how the contribution of Pentecostal scholarship to theological studies can be enhanced using the theoretical framework of pneumatological imagination. This framework is basically used to outline a Spirit-inspired scholarship. The background of the Pentecostal scholarship in the South African context was conducted to identify the research gaps. The pneumatological imagination was outlined and applied to Pentecostal scholarship. The main objective was to demonstrate the value of a pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship to theological studies in the present and its potential for the future.

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Keywords

pentecostal scholarship – pneumatological imagination – theological studies – public university – Pentecostalism

1 Introduction

Pentecostal scholarship refers here to how scholars have grappled with the developments of the Pentecostal movement in local and global contexts. Unlike Pentecostal theology, Pentecostal scholarship is not limited only to theological studies but engagements with the movement in and outside of theology by both insiders and outsiders. Pentecostal scholarship involves both theologians' and non-theologians' interest in Pentecostal studies. Indeed, Pentecostal scholarship has evolved over decades in the South African context. Given the growth and impact of African Pentecostalism, many researchers, scholars, and theologians have emerged demonstrating great interest in Pentecostal scholarship. Pentecostal scholars are a feature in many conferences organised by academic societies in South Africa and elsewhere on the continent. However, the challenge remains in its contribution to theological studies, transformation of curriculum, teaching methodologies, and pedagogies, which remain oriented in other Christian traditions other than the Pentecostal movement. This article seeks to highlight the major contributions that can be made by Pentecostal scholarship using the pneumatological imagination as a theoretical framework. The article seeks to demonstrate that pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship has a role to play in theological studies for the sustainability of the field. This is achieved by giving an overview of the Pentecostal scholarship in the South African context to highlight research gaps. The pneumatological imagination is introduced to unpack the role of a Spirit-inspired scholarship in theological studies and other fields of study. The article will demonstrate how this Spirit-inspired scholarship is relevant for both current discourses in theological studies and for the future of theology in public South African universities. Data was collected by reviewing relevant literature on Pentecostal scholarship, pneumatological imagination, and theological studies.

2 Pentecostal Scholarship in a South African Context: a Historical Overview

This section historicises Pentecostal scholarship in the last two centuries. However, this historical overview of Pentecostal scholarship is non-exhaustive but seeks to highlight only a few key scholarly works in specific periods. Early Pentecostals in the first quarter of the 20th century in the South African contexts did not write much but were engaged in the work of mission and evangelism as motivated by the imminent second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, their zeal was more on winning souls than engaging in Pentecostal scholarship. Much of what we know in this period is based on the development of the classical Pentecostal churches, such as the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel, mainly derived from the minutes of these churches and some of the founding documents, including the churches' constitutions. The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa finalised its constitution at the end of 1912, which they later used to register the church in 1913.¹ Most of these minutes of the church, documented from the foundations of churches like the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, are available at the church archives and at the Auckland Park Theological Seminary in Johannesburg. Therefore, early scholars such as William Burton, who wrote a biography of one of the gospel pioneers in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa in this period, and much later Gordon Lindsay, who wrote a biography of John G. Lake, relied on the minutes of the executive council in the early developments of the church.² Thus, most Pentecostal studies, such as those by Burton as highlighted above in this period, were more biographical and historical. The *Comforter* magazine edited by John G. Lake was also an important piece of writing, which highlighted the important matters in early developments of churches like the Apostolic Faith Mission, such as founding policies on mission, ordinations, and church governance.³ These early documents, such as the churches' minutes, the churches' constitutions, and the *comforter* magazine, became important sources that Pentecostal scholars in later periods could use to write on Pentecostalism in the first quarter of the 20th century. In addition, these

1 Minutes of the Executive Council (1912), p. 99.

2 William F. Burton, *When God Makes a Pastor* (Victory Press: London, 1934) is a biography about the life and ministry of Elias Letwaba and Gordon Lindsay, *Sketches from the Life and Ministry of John G. Lake*. (Shreveport, LA: Voice of Healing Publishing Company, 1952). It is a biography about John G. Lake.

3 John. G Lake, Article in the *Comforter* (May/June) 1911.

documents are important as they discuss the important fundamental teachings of Pentecostalism, such as salvation, sanctification, healing, Spirit baptism, and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Thus, the executive meetings of the Apostolic Faith Mission, for example, became a platform through which Pentecostal scholarship was done.

The book by Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, summed up the important issues in the discussions within Pentecostalism and independent churches in the middle of the 20th century.⁴ At this stage, Pentecostalism was starting to develop into discussions on important themes. Although Sundkler did not use 'Pentecostalism' in his title, the discussions in chapter 4 of his book and in other chapters on themes such as worship and healing became the point of reference for Pentecostal scholarship. Towards the end of this period, there were also interests by scholars such as Christof Hanekom to study the history of the Zion Christian Church, which, in a way, is part of the Pentecostal movement in South Africa.⁵ Moller's book, *Die diskussie oor die charismata soos wat did in die pinksterbewiging geleer en beoefen word*, which is *the discussion about the charismata as taught and practiced in the Pentecostal movement* in English, is an important one that brought out important discussion on the themes of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as understood by the Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa.⁶ This period also saw the emergence of scholars such as Oosthuizen, Gerhardus Cornelis, who cannot be ignored in the history of Pentecostal scholarship, even though His scholarship was much in African Independent Churches, which are arguably part of the Pentecostal movement.⁷

The last quarter of the 20th century saw the emergence of the Pentecostal scholars who really took Pentecostal studies very seriously and to another level. Some of these scholars, such as Jan Langerman and Christiaan De Wet, did their master's at the Fuller Theological Seminary in the United States of America. It is important to point out that even though their studies were done abroad, their dissertations were based on the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa.⁸

4 Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, (London: Oxford University Press for International African Institute, 1961).

5 Christof Hanekom, *Krisis en kultus: geloofsopvattinge en seremonies binne'n swart kerk*. (Pretoria: Academica, 1975).

6 Francois Moller, *Die diskussie oor die charismata soos wat did in die pinksterbewiging geleer en beoefen word* (Braamfontein: Evangelie Uitgewers, 1975).

7 Gerhardus Oosthuizen, *The Pentecostal Penetration into the Indian Community of SA* (Durban: Interprint, 1973).

8 Jan L. Langerman, 'The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, a revitalization of the Theological Concepts of Church Ministry' (D.Min dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary,

Scholarship in this period also began to seriously focus on the challenges of racial segregation, particularly the apartheid system, and how Pentecostals engaged with the same. While early Pentecostals shied away from dealing with this matter, scholars such as Horn engaged in these matters extensively. Important contributions were also made by Chikane, who also participated in movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement, and the contextual bible study to conscientize the black people in his church, Apostolic Faith Mission, and the rest of the country to engage in the struggle against oppression and the liberation of the majority black people.⁹ The works of Japie Lapoorta also engaged in similar issues of the liberation of black people through the Pentecostal approach to witness in the public square.¹⁰ The work of Gerald John Pillay also engaged issues of social change in the South African context.¹¹ Pillay also engaged in religious dialogue between Hinduism and Pentecostalism, particularly among South African Indians.¹² In this period, we also cannot ignore the contribution of Agrippa Khathide, one of the organic intellectuals whose studies were so in touch with the realities of the black people and their cultural practices.¹³

In addition, Khathide addressed other important issues facing society at that time, like the HIV-AIDS pandemic.¹⁴ While others engaged on important matters such as the fight against the apartheid system on one hand, others,

Pasadena, CA, 1983); Christiaan R. De Wet, 'Signs and Wonders in Church Growth' (MA Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, 1981).

- 9 Various works of Chikane have engaged issues of how the church can deal with apartheid. Frank Chikane, 'The Incarnation in the Life of the People in Southern Africa', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 51.1 (1985), pp. 37–50; Frank Chikane, 'Children in Turmoil: The Effects of Unrest on Township Children,' in Sandra Burman and Pamela Reynolds (eds), *Growing up in a Divided Society. The Contexts of Childhood in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), pp. 333–44; Frank Chikane, *No Life of My Own* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1988); Frank Chikane, *The Road to Rustenburg: the Church Looking Forward to a New South Africa* (Johannesburg: Struik Christian Books, 1991).
- 10 Japie Lapoorta, 'The Necessity for A Relevant Pentecostal Witness in South Africa', *EPTA Bulletin* 10.1 (1991), pp. 25–33.
- 11 Gerald John Pillay, 'Pentecostalism within a South African Community: The Question of Social Change', *Mission Studies* 4.1 (1987), pp. 39–51.
- 12 Gerald John Pillay, 'Ritualistic Hinduism and popular Pentecostalism: Two Religious Worldviews in Dynamic Relation', *Religion in Southern Africa* 6.1 (1985), pp. 29–45.
- 13 Agrippa Goodman Khathide, 'A Theology of Mission: A Pentecostal Perspective' (Master's Dissertation, PU for CHE, 1998).
- 14 Agrippa. G Khathide, 'Teaching and Talking About our Sexuality: A Means of Combating HIV/AIDS', in Musa Dube Shomanah (ed) *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2003), pp. 1–9.

such as Allan Anderson, were developing a solid Pentecostal theology, particularly how Pentecostals in South Africa understood the role of the Holy Spirit in their own lives and in the life of the church.¹⁵ Therefore, Allan Anderson can be regarded as one such scholar who put the South African Pentecostal scholarship on the world map in that period and beyond. However, the researcher is not ignorant of scholars such as David Maxwell, who made an important contribution to the history of South African Pentecostalism.¹⁶

Today, there are various Pentecostal scholars in South African universities engaged in important themes within Pentecostal studies, such as Pentecostal hermeneutics,¹⁷ Pentecostal missiology,¹⁸ Pentecostal systematic theology,¹⁹ practical theology,²⁰ and Pentecostal history.²¹

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- 15 Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991). Cf Allan Anderson, *Bazalwane: African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992); Allan Anderson, *Tumelo: The Faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1993).
 - 16 David Maxwell, 'Historicizing Christian Independency: The Southern African Pentecostal Movement c.1908–60', *The Journal of African History* 40.2 (1999), pp. 243–64.
 - 17 Leonard Maré, 'A Pentecostal Perspective on the Use of Psalms of Lament in Worship', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29.1 (2008), pp. 91–109; Matthew Clark, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutics: The Challenge of Relating to (Post)-Modern Literary Theory', *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 12.1 (2001), pp. 41–67; Marius Nel, *An African Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Distinctive Contribution to Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018); Thabang Mofokeng, and Mookgo S. Kgatle. 'Towards a Decolonial Hermeneutic of Experience in African Pentecostal Christianity: A South African Perspective', *HTS: Theological Studies* 75.4 (2019), pp. 1–9.
 - 18 Matthew Clark, 'Two Contrasting Models of Missions in South Africa: The Apostolic Faith Mission and the Assemblies of God', *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8.1 (2005), pp. 143–61; Chammah Kaunda, "'Minding the Pentecostal Paradox": Currents and Cross-Currents in Pentecostal Studies in Africa (PenteSA)', *Religion Compass* 18.7 (2024), pp. e12509; Peter White, 'Missional Church and the Healing of Memories: A Missiological Construction of African Pentecostal Praxis', *Mission Studies* 41.2 (2024), pp. 195–210; Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, 'Pentecostal Missiology: Encountering Wounded Society through a Scholarship of Engagement', *Mission Studies* 41.2 (2024), pp. 252–69.
 - 19 Collium Banda, 'Doctrine as Security? A Systematic Theological Critique of the Operational Theological Framework of the Controversial South African Neo-Pentecostal Prophets', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77.4 (2021), pp. 1–9.
 - 20 Kelebogile Resane, 'Response of Public Theology to the Voices of the Voiceless in Pluralistic South Africa', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40.1 (2019), pp. 1–7; Abraham Modisa Mkhondo Mzondi, 'Looking Back: Theological Reflections on the Intersection between Pentecostalism and Ubuntu within the African Section of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa', *Religions* 14.10 (2023), p. 1274.
 - 21 Thabang Mofokeng and Mokhele Madise. 'The Evangelicalisation of Black Pentecostalism in the AFM of SA (1940–1975): A turning point', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 45.1 (2019), pp. 1–16.

There are also scholars such as Maria Frahm-Arp and Madipoane Masenya who engaged important topics, the challenges faced by women in Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and the use of womanist theologies in reflecting on such challenges.²² These are scholars who have relevant qualifications at the doctoral level in church history, Old and New Testaments, systematic theology, practical theology, and Missiology. Thus, Pentecostal scholarship has been approached from the main disciplines in theology and beyond.²³

In addition, the 21st century has seen the emergence of scholars from anthropology, media studies, politics, and other human sciences to engage with important discourses on Pentecostal and charismatic churches. A volume edited by Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei, and Loreen Maseno on the approaches to African Pentecostalism, in which South African scholars contributed chapters, is a true reflection of the current trends of Pentecostal scholarship.²⁴ Yong in Nel adds, 'The 21st century sees Pentecostal scholarship moving into questions of scientific knowledge, and methodology, physics, biology, chemistry, psychology, medicine, anthropology, sociology, and technology'.²⁵ In grappling with these questions, the South African scholars organised themselves into an academic society, 'Southern African Society for Pentecostal Studies,' which was established for the first time in 2020. The name of this society indeed indicates that Pentecostal scholarship goes beyond theological studies into other fields of study, as highlighted above. The society has already hosted three successful conferences in the past, one was virtual in 2023, and two at the University of South Africa in 2024 and the North-West University in 2025. In addition, they established a journal of the same society under the name, *African Journal of Pentecostal Studies (AJOPS)*.

Pentecostal scholarship has come a long way since the foundation of the Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the 20th century. The history of Pentecostal scholarship can be summarised in four waves. The first two quarters of the 20th century were more historical and biographical in

22 Maria Frahm-Arp, *Professional Women in South African Pentecostal Charismatic Churches* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Maria Frahm-Arp, 'Constructions of Mothering in Pentecostal Charismatic Churches in South Africa', *Neotestamentica* 50.1 (2016), pp. 145–63; Madipoane Masenya, 'The Bible and Prophecy in African-South African Pentecostal Churches', *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 33.1 (2005), pp. 35–45.

23 Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, *African Pentecostal Theology: Modality, Disciplinarity, and Decoloniality* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023).

24 Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei, and Loreen Maseno-Ouma (eds), *African Pentecostalism from African Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).

25 Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

capturing the early developments of the classical Pentecostal churches. The few scholars who wrote on the Pentecostal movement in this period were interested in capturing the history of the classical Pentecostal churches, with some interest in the biographies of the likes of Elias Letwaba and John G. Lake. The second period in the middle of the 20th century involved understanding the indigenous expressions of the Pentecostal movement with the inclusion of African Independent Churches, particularly in the works of Sundkler and Oosthuizen. The third wave, as seen in the works of Anderson, contributed towards the development of the Pentecostal theology of the Spirit in the South African context. In calling the Holy Spirit, 'Moya', Anderson also managed to contextualise Pentecostal scholarship in the South African context at a time when it was not fashionable to do so. While others like Horn and Chikane concentrated on the Pentecostals' struggles against the apartheid system and advocated for the liberation of the majority black people. This wave produced Pentecostal theologians with proper doctoral degrees from South African universities and others from international universities. In the 21st century, Pentecostal scholarship, as highlighted by Nel, is more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary because of its ability to engage other fields other than theology. These waves of Pentecostal scholarship in South Africa are important for us to understand the contribution of Pentecostal scholarship in theological studies. To do so, this current study reflects on Pneumatological imagination as a theoretical framework in the next section.

3 Pneumatological Imagination: Framing the Discourse

A leading Pentecostal scholar, Amos Yong, frames pneumatological imagination as an orientation to God, ourselves as people, and the world.²⁶ In addition, pneumatological imagination is based on the activeness of God in the world, which also speaks to an orientation to the immanence of God rather than confinement to only His transcendence.²⁷ Through a pneumatological imagination, there is a connection between the divine and the

26 Amos Yong, 'The Pneumatological Imagination: The logic of Pentecostal Theology', in Wolfgang Vondey (ed), *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 152–62; Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), p. 29; Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014).

27 Yong, 'The Pneumatological Imagination', p. 152.

human through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world as it happened on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit becomes an agent through which the connection between God and human beings becomes possible. This explains why Pentecostals emphasise the baptism in the Holy Spirit, as the same Spirit makes it possible for encounters with God. This also connects the pneumatological imagination with the Pentecost narrative that encapsulates the three aspects of a pneumatological imagination, of which the first is called the 'Spirit's infilling'. The event of Pentecost day resulted in the coming of the Holy Spirit upon all believers, who were then filled with the same Spirit and received the power of the Holy Spirit. This makes the infilling of the Holy Spirit the core aspect of the pneumatological imagination.²⁸ However, most importantly, is to highlight the fact that the believer then becomes part of the divine experience because of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is also correct to say that the pneumatological imagination makes it possible for the believers to perform beyond human imagination because of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The second aspect of a pneumatological imagination is the 'sensory engagement'. Yong uses this terminology to explain that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, there were bodily movements in those who received the same Spirit. Yong says,

[T]he Spirit's descent upon and entry into human bodies is not generic but specified along multiple kinaesthetic registers. It is surely impossible to ignore sound, more precariously denoted as 'the rush of a violent wind, which suggests both a distinct hearing and an intense feeling, a hearing-feeling that overwhelms the senses, not just ringing in one's ears but tangibly perceived and palpably resounded through bodies from the tops of heads to the bottoms of feet.'²⁹

This means that each time a believer receives the infilling of the Holy Spirit, they not only connect with the divine but also experience the bodily movements and changes. Therefore, pneumatological imagination has an impact on human bodies, which makes its scope extend beyond spirituality into physiological, psychological, and emotional aspects. Pneumatological imagination, indeed, is activated by the Holy Spirit, but it involves the human being in totality, that is, in body, soul, and spirit. Yong continues to say that it,

²⁸ Yong, 'The Pneumatological Imagination', p. 156.

²⁹ Yong, 'The Pneumatological Imagination', p. 155.

means that there is an embodied, which means also richly affective, dimension of the pneumatological imagination so that theological thinking emerges from out of, not by ignoring, the affections of human life and experience. In other words, the pneumatological imagination is emphatically not disembodied; instead, the Spirit's in-filling involves wholly affective, emotional, and physiological domains.³⁰

This means that the coming of the Holy Spirit leads to the transformation of the life of human beings in their totality, not just the spiritual aspect alone. There is a need, therefore, of translating that which has happened in the Spirit into tangible works in the natural in the quest to make pneumatological imagination more impactful. The Spirit's involvement in embodied experience is also understood in terms of the theological studies as a field engaged by Spirit-empowered scholars.

The last aspect of a pneumatological imagination is that aspect of environmental experiences which Yong uses to describe the events of the Pentecost narrative as resulting in an environmental issue, such as 'mighty wind' and 'tongues of fire'. These metaphors are interpreted within pneumatological imagination as metaphors of the engagement between the Spirit-filled and their surrounding environment. However, this is not limited only to environmental issues, but it means that human beings can engage with what is going on in the world. This means that human beings with the infilling of the Holy Spirit can engage with socio-economic and socio-political issues as empowered by the same Spirit. In addition, Acts 2.4 speaks of the ability to speak in other people's languages because of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This means that the pneumatological imagination results in the responsibility towards other human beings and not just an individual experience. Yong continues, 'pneumatological imagination is a modality of engaging with and then reflecting on the world that is both interpersonal and intersubjective and can be so surely in and through dynamically embodied relations'.³¹ This means that pneumatological imagination is a relevant framework for human beings to begin to work together in harmony. However, it is not only a matter of working together but of understanding each other because of the very same Holy Spirit indwelling all believers.³² This also opens a possibility of

³⁰ Yong, 'The Pneumatological Imagination', p. 155.

³¹ Yong, 'The Pneumatological Imagination', p. 155.

³² Amos Yong, 'Academic Glossolalia? Pentecostal Scholarship, Multi-Disciplinarity, and the Science-Religion Conversation', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14.1 (2005), pp. 61–80;

collaborations in theological studies through the same indwelling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

4 Pneumatological Imagination in Pentecostal Scholarship

Many Pentecostal scholars, particularly as insiders, also embrace pneumatological imagination.³³ This means that their academic vocation is done through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, meaning God is present and active in their research through the same Holy Spirit. This is related to Yong's first aspect of pneumatological imagination, which is the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Nel highlights the fact that Pentecostal scholarship is more experiential as it is based on the same encounter with the Holy Spirit.³⁴ It is also correct to point out that some Pentecostal theological scholars have had an encounter with the Holy Spirit before they became scholars. This means that when they engage in scholarship, the very same Holy Spirit is leading and inspiring them for the academic work and research. Therefore, the pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship is based on the Pentecost narrative that signifies the infilling of the Holy Spirit upon all believers. The point made in this current study is that among these believers emerge Pentecostal scholars who also embrace the influence of the Holy Spirit in their academic calling. But at the same time, we cannot be ignorant of the possibility of Pentecostal scholarship being done by outsiders who have not had the experiences with the Holy Spirit or any connection with the pneumatic experiences. Hence, for scholars such as Nel, it is important to make a distinction between Pentecostal scholarship and Pentecostal theological scholarship.

The second role of the Pneumatological imagination in Pentecostal scholarship is an embodied scholarship. Since the infilling of the Holy Spirit results in what Yong calls 'sensory engagement', the Spirit-filled scholars also engage in an embodied scholarship. This means that Pentecostal scholarship goes beyond the mere engagement with scientific knowledge to be so

Amos Yong, *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow Through the Middle Way?* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 191.

33 Pentecostal scholars, such as Amos Yong, Allan Anderson, Marius Nel, and others, have been part of the Pentecostal theology and experiences of the Spirit in churches such as the Assemblies of God, Apostolic Faith Mission, and Praise Tabernacle Church.

34 Marius Nel, 'Rather Spirit-Filled than Learned! Pentecostalism's Tradition of Anti-Intellectualism and Pentecostal Theological Scholarship', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37.1 (2016), pp. 1–9.

immersed in the experiences of believers at the grassroots level.³⁵ This is the ability for the Pentecostal scholar to not only focus on their intellectual engagement with literature but to be involved with what is going on in Pentecostal churches. Pentecostal scholars, therefore, are able through pneumatological imagination to reflect on their own personal experiences and those of the congregants in Pentecostal communities. This means that a Pentecostal scholar, through pneumatological imagination, is an active participant in their own research. Nel goes on to say,

The integration of the experiential, playful, embodied, and analogical dimensions of understanding and participation in the world takes Pentecostal scholars to the forefront of the renewal and revitalisation of the postmodern academic world.³⁶

The argument made in the current study is that this is possible given the pneumatological imagination that comes through the infilling of the Holy Spirit upon the Pentecostal scholar. This embodied epistemology makes an academic work more holistic, involving the person as a whole rather than only relying on the intellect of the researcher. This results in an impact on theological studies that cannot be ignored in the context such as South Africa.

The last role of the pneumatological imagination in Pentecostal scholarship is an engaged scholarship that engages other scholars and research communities. Yong makes this point that the infilling of the Holy Spirit resulted in human beings engaging with one another and environmental engagement. Pentecostal scholars receive more insight through an engagement with various activities within Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity. In the South African context, this allows Pentecostal scholars to be able to engage with the daily challenges of the believers so that their scholarship is more contextual, as was the case in the generation of Frank Chikane. This is something raised by Togarasei, who asserts, ‘the challenges that Africa faces do not allow scholars to pursue scholarship just to fulfil intellectual curiosity. African scholarship should engage the daily troubles and joys of the Africans if it is to be considered relevant’.³⁷ Pneumatological imagination, through its

³⁵ Nel, ‘Rather Spirit-Filled than Learned’, p. 6.

³⁶ Nel, ‘Rather Spirit-Filled than Learned’, p. 6.

³⁷ Lovemore Togarasei, ‘Are you Pentecostal? Personal Experiences in the Study of African Pentecostalism’, in Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei, and Loreen Maseno (eds), *African Pentecostalism from African Perspectives: Volume 1: Methods*, (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), pp. 147–63.

environmental engagement aspect, is relevant for Pentecostal scholarship to be an engaged one that engages scholars and other research communities so as to identify the challenges as highlighted by Togarasei. In this way, the concerns of communities at the grassroots level become part of Pentecostal scholarship rather than a scholarship that remains in the ivory towers.

5 The Role of Pneumatological Pentecostal Scholarship in Theological Studies

Before delving into the role of the pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship in theological studies, it is important to provide a brief overview of the current status of theological studies in the South African university context. In recent times, in universities such as the University of Pretoria and the University of South Africa, the leadership and management in theological faculties and or departments have to justify their existence in such universities, given their low numbers in student enrolments.³⁸ So many factors have contributed to the decline of student numbers in theological studies, such as the merging of universities after the attainment of democracy in 1994, which led to the reduction of faculties of theology into smaller departments.³⁹ Some of the faculties of theology, such as at the University of Limpopo, had closed for good because the faculty could no longer be sustainable. Another challenge is the commercialisation and commodification of higher education in South Africa, of which theological studies cannot keep up with given its numbers. Thus, the issue of numbers in theological studies is compared with the economic sustainability of the faculties or departments of theology.⁴⁰ The main reason for the decline is the numbers, because most public universities are currently driven by the same numbers. This kind of decline in student enrolments in faculties or departments of theology in public universities calls for something

38 Johan Buitendag and Corneliu C. Simut, 'Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonisation through Education and Contextualisation', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73.1 (2017), pp. 1–7; Johan Buitendag and Corneliu C. Simut, 'Ecodomy as Education in Tertiary Institutions. Teaching Theology and Religion in a Globalised World: African Perspectives', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76.1 (2019), pp. 1–7; Corneliu C. Simut, 'Teaching Religion as Change for Social Transformation in Contemporary African and Non-African Universities: A South African Manifesto', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79.2 (2023), pp. 1–7.

39 Elelwani Farisani, 'Impact of New Policy Developments in Higher Education on Theological Education', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36.1 (2010), pp. 1–10.

40 Farisani, 'Impact of New Policy Developments', p. 3.

drastic to happen to change the status quo. In other words, what could be done to remedy the situation of the decrease in numbers and the possible closure of the faculties of theology?

In responding to the challenge, we have to take cognizance of what Banda raises as an irony of these declining numbers, which, for him, does not make sense given the growth of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches in South Africa.⁴¹ In other words, how can the number of student enrolments decrease while there is an opportunity to theologically train pastors in the growing Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches? This is where the pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship comes in, given its embodied and experiential aspects, to serve as a framework for the increase in numbers. In other words, since pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship is based on the experiences of Pentecostals at the congregation level, it can be instrumental in the recruitment of the same to enroll in theology at the institutions of higher learning. Many of the students who are required in these public universities could come from the Pentecostal and charismatic churches, including African Independent Churches. The only challenge is that in the current theological curriculum, there is no effort by many South African public universities to include Pentecostal scholarship in the curriculum of theological studies. The growth of Pentecostal scholarship shows that it is a vital contributor to theological scholarship and one that most likely will continue.

Another important contribution that can be made by pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship is its ability to engage other human beings and the environment, as highlighted by Yong. This means that Pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship can play a role in fostering collaborations among academics. The Spirit's descent on the day of Pentecost led to engagement among human beings with one another and engagement with the environment as well. This is important since collaboration is one of the important factors to increase the numbers, particularly when looking at the research outputs in theological studies. In addition, pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship can play a role in theological studies in making the field interdisciplinary. In other words, theology in public universities can continue to have an impact due to an interdisciplinary approach between theological disciplines and other fields of study. The interdisciplinary approach will also ensure that theology is not isolated and targeted because it will be studied with other disciplines. This is possible since the pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship is not only spiritual or theological but also touches on other

41 Collium Banda, 'On Saving Theology in Public Universities in South Africa', *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 10.11 (2024), pp. 27–42.

aspects of life, such as physiology and psychology. This makes it possible for the approach in theology can be studied in an interdisciplinary way with other fields of study for its impact and sustainability in South African public universities. However, pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship is not only relevant in public universities alone but is applicable to other Bible colleges and seminaries, whereby theology should continue to interact with other fields for its sustainability. Therefore, this study is not only about pressuring public universities to include Pentecostal scholarship but also the encouragement of Pentecostal pastors to engage in theological studies. This is also a call to strengthen the current seminaries on Pentecostal studies, such as Auckland Park Theological Seminary, the AFM Theological College, and many other bible colleges and schools.

6 Conclusion

This article looked at how far Pentecostal scholarship has evolved over the years in the South African context. The pneumatological imagination was used as a theoretical framework that unpacks the value of a Spirit-inspired scholarship and its contribution within the theological studies in South Africa. But the results are applicable elsewhere in the world. The research gaps emanating from the reviewed literature demonstrate that the Pentecostal scholarship is currently underutilised in most South African public universities. The study found that the pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship can inspire an increase in numbers in the South African theological studies. The pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship is relevant for the interdisciplinary study between theological disciplines and other disciplines in other fields of study. The study also found that this framework is relevant for the collaborations between scholars, which also enhances the research productivity, quality, and visibility of emerging scholars. Therefore, the pneumatological Pentecostal scholarship is important in theological studies for research productivity, research collaboration, and interdisciplinarity. However, it is also important for the future of theology to consider opening research chairs and research centres to secure the future of theological studies. Such chairs can be established and enhanced by Pentecostal scholarship, given the growth and impact of the field. Therefore, it is suggested in this study that rather than always looking down at Pentecostal scholarship by other traditions, great collaborations could be made with Pentecostal scholars for the sustainability of theological studies.