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Pentecostal liturgical spaces: Contested or embracing spaces for LGBTQIA+

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Abstract

The Anglican Communion[1] recently faced a threat of a split between revisionist and conservative groups about the acceptance of LGBTQIA+ members and ministers in liturgical spaces or their exclusion based on their status. The study aims to use the journey of the Anglican Communion as a case study to find out whether these positions are also prevalent in liturgical spaces in Pentecostal congregations[2] and whether it is a contested or embracing space towards LGBTQIA+ members and ministers. The study employs decolonial and intersectional approaches to critically analyse ecclesial pronouncements of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, a Classical Pentecostal church in South Africa, to determine whether these position statements are conservative or revisionist; whether Pentecostal liturgical spaces are contested or embracing for LGBTQIA+; and if not, what can be done to transform Pentecostal liturgical spaces into welcoming and embracing spaces for LGBTQIA+ members and ministers. The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, standing in the Classical Pentecostal tradition, can find in their tenet of the priesthood and prophet-hood of believers, a democratic and transformative principle, that is inclusive of LGBTQIA+ members and ministers; Pentecost offers a humanizing pneumatological space that embraces the God-given humanity of the LGBTQIA persons and cultivate respect for their human rights to live without fear of discrimination, bias and prejudice in the household of faith. Such Pentecostal liturgical spaces reflect the queer sociality of the Azuza Street Revival.

1 The Anglican Communion represents 160 countries with Anglican-affiliated churches, consisting of 42 provinces that exist globally in the union as Anglicans (Asadu, Crary & Pepinster 2022).

2 The study takes cognizance that there are also Pentecostal responses from individuals (Resane, from the Assemblies of God) and Bowers-Du Toit from the Full Gospel Church of God), but the article is the result of consultations within the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. A limitation of the study is that it could not find any official position on the LGBTQIA+ from the other classical Pentecostal churches like the Assemblies of God and the Full Gospel Church of God, in the South African context.

Keywords

Pentecostal; liturgical; LGBTQIA+; decolonial; intersectional; priesthood; prophethood; humanizing; pneumatological

1. Introduction

Studies on the intersection of Christianity and queer sexuality indicate that these two lived experiences are irreconcilably contradictory but is mostly based on the conviction that Africa is heteronormative and homophobic (Robertson 2017:125). A decolonial and intersectional approach to the lived experience of LGBTQIA[3]+ persons can move beyond the irreconcilable contradiction between belief and sexuality, enabling a transformative religiosity. Robertson (2017:128) argues that positioning queer sexuality as something Western or European creates a false binary between a liberal accepting America/Europe and a backward hostile Africa, thus steeped in colonialist thinking about the Global South.

Bowers Du Toit (2022:119) claims that the calls to decolonise the field of practical theology, research, and pedagogy "is essentially a call to decentre whiteness and Western culture as normative and to re-centre African culture, its people and their agency in shaping the discourse." She further argues that practical theologians should faithfully engage their contexts to see how race, class and place intersect. Bowers Du Toit (2022:120) argues for a "place-sensitive practical theology" that takes the notion of place seriously, one of the focal areas in the paper which we will attend to later.

The study is situated in the field of practical theology and firstly has a critical look at liturgical[4] space and how it can assist us in answering

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3 The term LGBTQIA+ refers to lesbian (women attracted to women); gay (men attracted to men); bisexual (people attracted to men and women and other gender conforming identities); transgender (a person whose gender does not correspond with their assigned sex at birth); queer (people who do not identify as heterosexual); intersex (a person whose sexual anatomy does not fit the "typical" definition of female or male); asexual (people who do not have sexual attractions or desires towards anyone); and + (other sexualities and gender identities not stated here). [Online]. Available: https://www.africaportal.org/documents/19834/Transitional_Justice_and_Inclusion_of_LGBTQIAL_Rights_Policy_Brief_2020.

4 Liturgy describes how public worship is conducted during a spiritual service in the Christian tradition through certain acts like songs, sermons, holy communion, scripture readings, etc. (Kgatle 2024:1). The study uses the term liturgical space to

the major question of whether Pentecostal liturgical spaces are contested or embraced for LGBTQIA+ persons. After that, the term LGBTQIA+ is clarified and some major theological perspectives are offered to give a concise overview about the topic. The paper explores how the two positions, which is the conservative and revisionist positions, determine the involvement of LGBTQIA+ members and ministers in the Anglican Communion. The official position of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa on the LGBTQIA+ is examined, to determine the extent to which these two positions in the Anglican Communion, are reflected in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa as a Pentecostal congregation. The humanizing pneumatological paradigm of Amos Yong and the queer sociality of Azuza by Keri Day, two eminent Pentecostal theologians, is utilised as a framework to investigate whether the space that Pentecostal congregations offer is embracing to LGBTQIA+ members and ministers. The article concludes with the concept of Ikhaya, developed by the late Vuyani Vellem (2002), and further explored by Kritzinger (2022), that speaks of a wounded-but-resilient humanity, that can offer a home for all, inclusive of the LGBTQIA+, which finds support in an African value of communality that creates dignified spaces.

2. Congregations as liturgical space

Cilliers (2011:2) regards Lefebvre and Soja as the scholars who paved the way to understand space as a process of always becoming that is caught up in social relations. Space is a culturally determined phenomenon that continuously forms its concepts of space, leading to different notions in different cultures, for different powers and different individuals. Cilliers (2011:3) identifies three categories of space, *geographical space* which refers to physical places (first space); *imagined or idealised space* which refers to how space is or should be (second space); and *lived or existential space*, referring to the real or immediate space that people finds themselves in every day (third space). A link between liturgical space and imagined space creates a fourth space that Cilliers calls a *spiritual space* that calls for a

denote the place where worship and service take place within the Christian tradition but are not primarily focussed on the field of liturgy within the discipline of practical theology.

spirituality of anticipation between the transcendent and the immanent reality. Space can thus be imaginative and anticipatory, envisioning other spaces or simulating the other, an unknown space.

Cilliers (2011:3) contends that space is a multidimensional concept that includes all four categories and liturgical space do not just encapsulate physical and existential space but also "intends to recreate and transcends these forms of space" to become imaginative and anticipatory space." Cilliers (2011:3) derives from this that liturgy opens a space for imagination and anticipation that results in anticipation as waiting, celebrating, and refiguring.

In answering the question of whom we are waiting for in anticipation, Cilliers (2011:3) states that we are grappling in liturgy with the hidden and elusive God (*Deus absconditus*), that is absent in presence and present in absence. It is not a depressive waiting but one that inspires hope and turn into dancing. In his concept of the refiguring of the Eucharist, Cilliers means that that all commodification is removed; Jesus is no longer here but is still present through his Spirit; a space of expectancy that is pregnant with possibilities; connecting time and space; and portrays the presence of absence.

Mlambo (2022:105) finds in the theory of spatial justice a framework to theologise about spatial justice. She also builds on the theory of Henri Lefebvre's "spatial turn" in the social sciences, asserting that space is not abstract but socially produced and that it should be studied with the social relationships that are embedded in it. As an informer of culture and a tool for discourse domination, "the acts of producing space can be altered from being dominative to reflecting creativity and human living" (Mlambo 2022:106). According to Mlambo (2022:106), spatial justice includes "the development of spatial consciousness against the creation and maintenance of injustice through spaces" and is in "defence of the public space against commodification, privatisation and state interference."

Mlambo (2022:107) asserts that there has also been a "spatial turn" in theology which focuses on the politics of spatial dynamics and how it relates to theology. Reporting on certain theological contributions on a theology of spatial justice, Mlambo develops two tenets for social justice that consist firstly of the development of spatial consciousness in the act

of Bible reading that is important in building faith-based socio-spatial strategies; and secondly, the search for life-giving ownership acts relating to space in the Bible that encourage life in terms of land, ownership, and spatial power dynamics to achieve spatial justice. Mlambo (2022:113) derives from the theory and theologising of spatial justice that space is not abstract, its formations are founded on social relations that over time include exclusion, whiteness, and removal of the other, especially in the South African context. Youth activism has shown that spatial justice must be fought for with a desire for inclusivity, an innovative response and remains a generational legacy issue (Mlambo 2022:114).

Bowers Du Toit (2022:117) refers to the delayed "turn" towards economics and class as complex, while Mlambo (2022) adds to the debate the "spatial turn" towards spatial justice which makes a "gender/sexuality turn" towards gender and sexual justice possible, especially in liturgical spaces. Bowers-Du Toit (2022:120) pleads for a place-sensitive practical theology that forefronts place itself as meaning-making. The place is described as something more than a geographical location, but something invested with meaning and value, an interpreted, narrated, perceived, and understood place of meaning and memory making. The place reveals and reinforces certain social hierarchies and inequalities that determine social aspects like health, education, crime, etc. in the South African context.

Forced removals is an example of how a regime used racial and spatial segregation to subjugate and impoverish the majority black population, moving them to the margins of cities and towns, that is until today continued in an entrenched spatial inequality (Bowers-Du Toit 2022:120). Practical theological research engages with an acknowledgement of the intersection between race and space and the role of the church in making spatial justice possible, this paper argues that the turn to gender and sexual justice should be an active part of such a place-sensitive theology.

Bowers-Du Toit (2022:124) argues that such a place-sensitive theology "should not be blind to issues of power, privilege and our positioning … embodied in certain spaces and places in doing such research". In such communities the liberation slogan, "nothing about us without us" should be considered, establishing communities as agents of their own stories instead of turning them into objects of study. Such an approach in practical

theology takes the lived experiences of real people seriously, and in the next section, we will focus on the lived experience of LGBTQIA+ persons.

3. Pentecostal liturgy and Pentecostal liturgical spaces

Kgatle (2024) observes that Pentecostal liturgy is distinct from other forms of liturgies in the Christian tradition that is more reserved, while it is more participatory and livelier. In the article, it will become an event that the liturgical space in the Pentecostal tradition is not open to everyone. What is relevant though, is Kgatle's view that testimony can be a transformative experience in Pentecostal liturgy, although they have the same elements of singing songs, preaching sermons, sharing holy communion, etc., liturgy does not follow a set routine, greater openness for the leading of the Holy Spirit, not allowing the program of liturgy to hinder the movement of the Spirit (Kgatle 2024:2).

The transformative experience during worship makes Pentecostal liturgical spaces a place of deep change, especially for the person, that is made known through public testimony. Ngxangane (2015:88) agrees that Pentecostal liturgy is controlled by the Holy Spirit, and as a grassroots organization does not succumb to restrictive measures and remains an exuberant, enthusiastic, and experience-dominated encounter with God. The considerable participation of members in singing and dancing during worship makes the encounter lively but "freedom of the Spirit can also be abused during the liturgy. During liturgical acts, African Pentecostals believe that body, soul, and spirit are involved, thus offering holistic salvation (Ngxangane 2015:90).

4. Lived experience of the LGBTQIA+

West et al (2016:1) state that theological work on LGBTI sexualities should be grounded in the lived experiences of LGBTI Christians. Using the theological position of Liberation Theology (LB) as a starting point, i.e. the poor, marginalised and disenfranchised, they reimagine engagement between churches and LGBTI groups on homophobia in Africa. They argue that imposing pre-existing theology onto new sites of struggle like sexuality, especially an old theology based on heteropatriarchy, does not fit anymore. Historically inherited theology should be interrogated for its usefulness in

this new site of struggle, with marginalised sexual communities with their particular experience as primary dialogue partners (West et al 2016:1). Churches should repent from using the experience of heteropatriarchy as its primary dialogue partner and African church theologies are not excluded from such theologies.

Within the shape of Scripture God acts in specific social contexts, taking sides with the oppressed (hears the cry of the slaves in Exodus 3:7; the Son of God born in a colonised and marginalised people Lk 2:1). Taking sides with the poor and the oppressed across historical time and geographical space, is a reminder that marginalised communities are a springboard for Christian theology, ethics, and ministry. Doing theology in this way requires that an epistemological privilege should be granted to the lived reality of LGBTIQ Christians. LGBTIQ communities are already doing their own "people's theology" which requires biblical scholars and theologians to become socially engaged with them to construct a "prophetic theology of sexuality". The church's task is not to come up with a ready-made theology to the contextual reality of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and/or intersexed experience. West et al (2016:2) state that "the starting point for doing this new sexual theology is the lived experiences written on the bodies of LGBTIQ."

West et al (2016:2) regard LGBTIQ theologies as a process that recognises the traumatised realities of LGBTIQ bodies, such trauma also happens in faith communities, infused by religious homophobia. Safe spaces should be created where traumatised persons can find their voices, reclaim their agency, and develop a vocabulary of embodied resistance. This can be done through being biblically and theologically equipped that builds theological resilience, recovers the agency of queer Christians, and affirm their dignity, before they "re-enter" the churches from where they were driven out. Just as there is not just biblical justification for slavery but also a biblical rejection of it, so there should be an acceptance that there is not a singular message in the Bible and not one church theology that applies to each issue. Churches should recognise the contested nature of sacred texts.

Commenting on toxic texts on homosexuality like Genesis 18–19, West et al (2016:3) argue that these texts should be re-read, demythologised and enable queer Christians to talk back to the establishment. The story of

Abraham and Lot who defended the stranger (or the other) from being abused and negotiated for the protection of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, does not just address the issue of homosexuality but also the inclusion of hospitality for the stranger, emphasising the need for the church to stand with the vulnerable.

West et al (2016:4) propose that systems that render LGBTIQ sexualities as abnormal and abhorrent, un-African, demonic, and evil, are robbing them of their humanity, and should be interrogated. They describe heteropatriarchy as a religious-cultural and socio-political system that undergirds homophobia; the desire to control African bodies through practices like criminalising gay and lesbian sexualities in African countries;[5] and brand it as socially deviant and religiously demonic. The intersectional nature of interrogating African sexualities considers constellation factors like race, class, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic realities. It provides possibilities of crossing boundaries standing in solidarity with others and re-imagine through interdependence and vulnerability a new way of being a community.

The presence and epistemologies of LGBTIQ people will facilitate the re-doing of African theology on sexuality, this is done by dialoguing and not debating diversity; creating a critical mass of queer Christians; carefully identifying church leaders who are willing to listen; making Bible study part of the see-judge-act process and have workshops done within a prophetic liturgical structure (West et al 2016:6).

Kraus (2011:99) confirms the importance of liberation theology for queer theology as a lens to interpret the patriarchal and heterosexist culture of Christianity, regarding it as a helpful model to reclaim the right of lesbian and gay persons to participate in Christianity. Based on the idea in liberation theology that God is on the side of the oppressed, Kraus (2011:101) argues that gay and lesbian Christians are victims of an oppressive heterosexist Christianity, but God is on their side as the oppressed. A Queer Christian theology finds in the Exodus story and the Gospel teachings, a biblical basis

5 The Ugandan Parliament recently passed an anti-homosexuality law that criminalises identifying as LGBTQ. [Online]. Available: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/33/uganda-passes-tough-antigay-law-bans-identification-as-lgbtq

for God's preferential option for the poor, marginalised and the victims of oppressive systems.

Kraus (2011:107) exclaims that "Queer theology can utilise the story of the exodus from Egypt just as liberation theology uses the Exodus as an empowering narrative that can liberate the oppressed … God can lead LGBT people out of the discrimination from heterosexist theology … (not) to be victims … empower themselves and become the chosen people of God much like the Hebrews." This refusal to condemn but rather to liberate sinners is continued in the ministry of Jesus, freely associating with social outcasts such as lepers, tax collectors and Samaritans, which can serve as a model for Christians to accept the queer community as outcasts of the day. Kraus (2011:108) further argues that Jesus cannot be a model for heterosexist Christian theology because he never married himself, porting him in only a heterosexual sense limits his ability to reach out to queer people and distorts his unconditional love for humanity. Kraus (2011:108) claims that just as the black Christ is embraced in black theology and as the Christ figure in feminist theology, Jesus can be seen as a member of the gay and lesbian-loving community.

Edsinger (2019) differs from this viewpoint, regarding queer theory as an attack on the concept of fixed sexuality. Feminism has put the concept of gender forward as a social construct, while our biological sex is fixed, our social roles as men and women are fluid and created by culture. Queer theory stipulates not just gender but also biological sex, so traditional concepts of sexuality, as well as differences between men and women, should be rejected (Edsinger 2019). Edsinger (2019) argues that the stories of the LGBTQI+ movement who have been marginalised in church and society in unrighteous ways, should not be regarded as irrelevant. Hearing their cries from the margins should not be ignored by the loving Christian community, denying treatment for people who on good grounds need medical and psychiatric care. Kraus (2019) states that "we are all a bit 'queer' – i.e. marked by the brokenness of a fallen world (Rom 8:22–23)."

Kraus (2019) points certain dangers out when the experiences of the LGBTQI movement is used to define the perception of sex and gender within the heterosexual majority. Considering its impact on the younger generation, who struggles to identify as girls and boys, males, and females,

by transferring a personal struggle of the (LGBTQI+) minority to the heterosexual majority. It further creates unnecessary confusion concerning their choices of partners by encouraging heterosexual youth to start dating both sexes as the norm is oppressive.

In his biblical alternative, Kraus (2019) opts for direction from the creation account (Gen 8:22), where the hetero norm and two-sex norm are foundational and laid down as binary opposites. The next generation should see themselves as spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23) who are human and broken, reclaiming the foundational nature of creation order. Sexual identity might be bigger but not more important than to be human beings or children of God, whether heterosexual or LGBTQI+. Solid research should be done on creation theology to understand the traditional male and female view in the created order, engaging the Bible, and scientific evidence from medical, psychological, and sociological experience. Edsinger (2019) concludes that we should demonstrate through our own lives "that the path to freedom for heterosexuals and LGBTQI+ alike is to fix our identity not in our sexual orientation, but in our origin from the Creator God."

A transformative queer religiosity moves away from negotiating sexual and religious identifications towards reconciling and co-producing life-affirming identifications (Robertson 2017:134). Queer theology creates space for a queer Christiandom/Queendom of God which seeks to question and transform heteronormative understandings and practices of Christianity. Robertson (2017:136) posits that most literature dealing with queer sexuality and religion utilises it as two opposites from which to conduct theoretical and empirical work resulting in two narrow arguments that position "queer, religious individuals as irredeemable sinners, or as unreformed queers who believe in a false god (the Church), which will always condemn rather than welcome."

Trends in queer scholarship indicate that there is a move away from the assumption that queer sexuality and religions stand in contradiction with each other, it provides spaces to think firstly, beyond finding new spaces and religions for queer Christians to find congruency in their identifications; Secondly, to go beyond the inclusion of diverse identities into current religious institutions and advocate for the deconstruction and transformation of existing normative identifications and systems of power

within Christianity and the church (Robertson 2017:138). There is a lack of research into the institutional church and religion's interaction with the everyday lived experiences of queer Christians in Africa, especially how their lived experiences shape institutional cultures, practices, and policies. Robertson (2017:139) concludes that "this line of enquiry can support and nuance understandings of how identifications and social institutions continually shape, content, alter and reinforce transformative queer religiosities", which holds possibilities for the African context.

4.1 Emergence of same-sex unions/marriages

Loggerenberg (2015:5) offers a brief historical account of how same-sex unions or marriages evolved as a valuable institution. In the Near-Eastern world of antiquity, homosexual and homo-erotic acts were known and practised without moral or religious judgement. Although interpreted differently by theological scholars, both the Old Testament (Gen 19:1–29; Judges 19; Lev 18:22; 20:13) and the New Testament (Rom 1: 26–27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) refer to homosexuality. Nowhere in the Four Gospels does Jesus refer to homosexuality but set an example of unconditional love and inclusion by challenging categories of exclusion (Loggerenberg 2015:5).

In pre-modern Europe same-sex unions were seen as natural, and Greek and Roman law or religion did not regard homosexual eroticism as of less value or different from heterosexual eroticism. During Medieval times in Europe, same-sex relationships were mostly associated with clergy, who were bound by the vow of celibacy. From the fourteenth century, through socio-political changes in Europe and pressure from Muslim and heretical groups, Christianity came under pressure to combine Roman civil law and Christian religious principles to standardise clerical supervision. In the post-modern era, different lenses or ways of interpreting reality led to more acceptability of homosexuality, like gender studies and epigenetics – explaining that some behaviours are out of the control of the person. In postmodern times changes in support of gay marriages took place, in South Africa it was legalised on 30 November 2006, receiving mixed reactions from acceptance to rejection by Christian communities (Loggerenberg 2015:6).

Loggerenberg (2015:6) asserts that the 2007 *Resolution on homosexuality* by the DRC, caused immense suffering for gay ministers due to the complete

rejection they experienced as human beings in the church. Some felt the church invalidated and belittled their calling from God; lacked openness from church leaders to have dialogue; perceived to be without God, the church and accused of atheism. The research with these ministers "gives insight into how gay ministers experience decisions that are taken – unilaterally – by non-gay people." It helps to sensitise communities of faith and beyond about the suffering gay people and in this case gay ministers experience.

Resane (2020:1) contends that homosexuality is a "real inevitability" but that the real concern that needs to be addressed is homophobia – the dislike of or prejudice against homosexual persons; the hatred and antipathy by heterosexual people towards non-heterosexual people. Homosexuality and same-sex relations are not something new to Africa and could be found among certain tribes in Southern Africa like the Khoikhoi people (*koetsiri* – a man who is sexually receptive to another man); Amazulu (*inkotshane*); Basotho (*boukonchana*); Mampondo (*tinkonkana*); and Xitsonga (*nkontshana-boywives*). The culture of boy wives was well-known in isiZulu, Sesotho, isiMpondo and Xitsonga. Resane (2020:2) states that "homosexuality was not viewed as the antithesis of heterosexuality. There was widespread liberty to move between the two and engage in sexual activity with both men and women." Under colonial rule, legislation was passed to criminalise homosexual acts as a crime against nature.

With the passing of the *Civil Union Act* (2006) South Africa became one of the few countries in the world to legislate same-sex marriages, offering LGBTIQ+ people the freedom of constitutional and statutory protection from discrimination in employment, provision of goods and services. LGBTIQ+ were now protected through their civil rights and moved from being condemned based on their orientation to being equal with other citizens. Amidst this legislation, LGBTIQ+ South Africans are still facing homophobic violence like corrective rape and discrimination as sexual and gender minorities.

Resane (2020:2) finds a relationship between homophobia and sexism because both are rooted in patriarchy. The use of violence to enforce and regulate sexuality maintains patriarchy and heteronormativity. Homophobia is further heightened due to the tension between religion and

culture with homosexuality, which see same-sex encounters as wrong and sinful, reactions against it are appreciated as upholding religious beliefs (Resane 2020:3). Same-sex desires and same-sex orientation are regarded as part of broken and disordered human sexuality due to sin. For some being homosexual and Christian is antithetical, therefore they have no or little space for gay brothers and sisters, expressed through messages of intolerance.

Resane (2020:4) regards sacraments and liturgy as the two bones of contention for the church, questions asked are: "Should a minister/pastor conduct weddings for gay people?" "Should gay people be allowed to participate in Holy Communion?" "Should gay people be baptised?" "What about ordination or credentialing into the ministry?" Resane (2020:4) argues that barring people from the Lord's table based on their sexual orientation is to deny them the right to have communion with their Creator, a sign of theological insecurity. This kind of exclusion happens because people want to be at the centre alone, to control people's sexuality, a result of hatred, indifference or intended dehumanisation (Resane 2020:5). No one has the right to exclude persons based on their orientation from the privilege and joy of open membership, where Christians are justified sinners (Rom 5:1–2) and God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Resane (2020:5) accepts this as part of the African value of human solidarity, seeing all humanity descending from the same source. Dialogue between the church and homosexual people can be very helpful to find answers to these questions.

Accepting each other as dialogue partners, the church and the LGBTIQ+ community refuse to dialogue in compartments but opt for a comprehensive and eclectic approach that engages all partners, both perpetrators and victims, supporters, and opponents (Resane 2020:6). Dialoguing with the three partners, community, church and homosexual people, theology will be enabled to journey out of the continuous hermeneutic circle spanning the biblical text, dogmatic traditions, and the present, ever-changing historical context. In such dialogue, everyone participating's perspectives, aspects and views matter, and homophobia flourishes due to a lack of listening. Through dialogue, social stigma and homophobia can be alleviated. It connects with the African value of *ubuntu* that speaks of solidarity, is life-giving and inspires hope. As a community of love and inclusion, the church should love people in all their real social aspects. Exclusion of people from

the sacraments and ordination is denying them an opportunity to meet God in a loving and embracing manner.

Earnshaw et al (2024:15) report that the stigma surrounding LGBTQ is a global experience that ranges from extreme acts of violence, marginalization, social exclusion, denying of employment opportunities, poor health care, etc. Stigma functions are defined by the boundaries of acceptable sexual and gender identities, practices, expressions, and communities that create social consequences when these boundaries are not adhered to (Earnshaw et al 2024:17).

Among the different ways in which stigma manifests itself, religious teaching and law, also have a share, ranging from accepting and welcoming to those who are rejecting and abusing the LGBTQ (Earnshaw et al 2024:21). Besides structural changes through policy interventions, stigma reduction among receivers is key, like enhancement of education and interpersonal contact. Stereotypes can be challenged through education that builds knowledge through courses, texts, online platforms, etc. Interventions should also include the development of clinical skills that include stigma-free language, taking medical histories of patients and delivering gender-affirming medical care. As indicated in the above paragraphs, a culture of dialogue and listening should be developed that is intersectional and contextual.

4.2 LGBTIQ+ – Fellow believers and co-ministers

Nel (2019a) explains that it is difficult to explain the notion of accepting LGBTIQ+ people for theological reasons when you move from the Bible to experience. The same principle that Pentecostals apply from the Bible, to justify the notion of inclusion of women in ministry, should also be applied to their acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people, as fellow believers, and co-ministers of the faith community. Nel (2019a:533) applies Pentecostal hermeneutics to the LGBTIQ+ question, starting with the existential experience of the love of God for all people, he argues that that they cannot be excluded from the communion of faith and the communion table. The Pentecostal experience of the Spirit, revealing the love of God for all people (Jn 3:16) and the God that is love (1 Jn 4:7–8), they understand the "hermeneutical ecology" created by the presence of and fellowship with fellow Christians that happens to be gay and lesbian. The presence of LGBTIQ+ people in the

charismatic community helps them to listen to the liberating word of God together challenges all forms of enslavement and shapes our theological anthropology in Spirited Conversation with the Living Word.

Pentecostals should thus resist homophobic elements in their culture, contending to the fact that the task of the church is not to convict of sin or judge sinners but let the Spirit do its work to convict whether the practice of same sex is a sin (Jn 16:8–12). Nel (2019:532) points out that the main cause for homophobia among Pentecostals is their rejection of "homosexuality" or its practices as a sin, which is not informed by Jesus' teaching and ministry about judging others.

Jesus spent time with the "others", those who were disenfranchised and marginalised, without legal rights and representation, victims of faceless powers like the tax collectors, disputable sinners, the poor and displaced (Mt 9:10–13; 11:19; Mk 2:15–17; Lk 5:30–32; 7:34; 15:1–2). Nel (2019:532) states that the church of Jesus "will consequently also be found among people who are shifted to the margins of society; these are the people Spirit-filled believers love with the compassion of their Lord. They share their Lord's predilection for the "others", including victims of society's homophobia."

Jennings (1977) points out that the debate tends to be a contest between defenders of traditional morality on the one hand and apologists for homosexual lifestyles on the other hand (conservative-liberal confrontation) without much theological reflection. Guarding against a knee-jerk sympathy for homosexuals and heterosexual certainty Jennings proposes certain fundamental Christian principles to illuminate the question or complex issues. Firstly, no human act or condition can of itself constitute an insuperable obstacle to God's grace; our created, fallen and redeemed humanity is to be understood as co-humanity; interrogate the principle of procreation and the sanctity of family; do biblical proscriptions express a central principle of faith or is to be understood as accidental, peripheral or time-bound; stand with the outcast; consider the theological ambiguous character of sexuality; no clear basis for equating the vocation of celibacy with the condition of homosexuality; how can a homosexual inclination be obedient or of service to Christ; the ambiguity of temptation that homosexuals face. Jennings (1977) stands open to be corrected, concluding

that "theology functions not in a vacuum but in dialogue with many voices … corrections may come from two directions – from the Judea-Christian heritage and from a better understanding of homosexuality (which includes above all the context of dialogues with gay men and women)."

5. The case of the Anglican Communion

During the recent Lambeth Conference (Lancaster, July 2022) the Anglican communion that consists of 42 provinces was deeply divided/ in disagreement concerning the recognition of same-sex marriages and the ordination of LGBTQ[6] clergy (Asadu, Crary & Pepinster 2022). The Communion represent 160 countries with Anglican-affiliated churches worldwide, of which some are embracing LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies while others are against any form of revision of policies (Asadu, Crary & Pepinster 2022). Statements that are pushing a West-against-the-rest approach are not helping the debate because not all members from the global South in the Communion support an anti-LGBTQ position. Roughly it appears as if there are two positions, a conservative and revisionist position on both sides of the end, which we will now consider. The case of the Anglican communion serves as an example of the struggle faced by many churches that grapple with the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ members and ministers in their ecclesial spaces. The following two positions in the Anglican Communion reflect this tension within liturgical spaces.

5.1 Conservative position

Conservative bishops, mostly from the provinces of Africa and Asia, took a hard stance against LGBTQ inclusion and demanded repentance from more liberal provinces. They pushed for the reconfirmation of the 1998 Lambeth position that rejects same-sex marriages but without being successful (Asadu, Crary & Pepinster 2022). Some provinces are so adamant in their opposition that they want to move towards separation from the global Anglican Communion. This group is represented by the

6 West, Van der Walt and Kapya (2016) defines LGBTQ as an initialism, standing for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and queer, an umbrella term that describes sexual diversity and difference, signifying its complexity and diversity.

Global South Fellowship of Anglican churches, consisting of 75% (80–85 million members) of churches in the Anglican Communion.

5.2 Revisionist position

Married Lesbian and gay bishops were invited for the first time since 2008 to the Lambeth conference (2022), where they pushed for a revision of policies that discriminate against LGBTQ clergy in the Anglican Communion. Some provinces like the USA, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, Scotland, and Whales are pushing for more LGBTQ-inclusive policies. The Archbishop commended the sincerity of the revisionist group on human sexuality, especially their different views on sexuality after a long period of prayer, deep study and reflections on human nature.

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa support the revisionist view, they are developing proposals that dioceses may allow same-sex marriages. The General Synod of the Church in England recently considered whether to allow same-sex marriages in their churches (Chappel 2023). The Church voted to maintain its ban on same-sex marriage and decided on a compromise approach that is described by some as a breakthrough while others saw it as a flawed compromise or an outright mistake.[7] The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, acknowledged that the church continues to have differences on such questions which go to the heart of human identity. On the other side of the spectrum, others identify an arrogant attitude to the debate, evident from the colonialist mindset that Western culture is progressive, while dissenting voices from Africa are silenced or ignored on the issue (Chappell 2023).

6. Position of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa

The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa states in their pronouncement on homosexuality that the church "affirms its position that all sexual immorality, whether heterosexual or homosexual are unambiguously and

7 The General Synod of the Church of England voted at a meeting of their governing body on the 9th of February 2023 in favour of blessing same-sex couples, lamenting the historic harm done to LGBTQI+ people and its failure to welcome them, taking a compromise approach to the matter. [Online]. Available: https://www.nrp.org/2023/02/09/1155695894/church-of-england-same-sex.

unconditionally forbidden by God's Word" (Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa website).[8] The stance of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa on homosexuality is prompted by the increased pressure on churches and individuals who hold orthodox views on marriage and sexuality; the political and religious acceptance of homosexual relationships and same-sex marriages; and the marginalisation of those who hold to these traditional outlook on sexuality.

The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa takes a strong stand against any revisionist position that introduces revisionist expositions of biblical texts to justify homosexual practices. Any queer theological approaches are deemed as heresy because of their efforts to reject biblical texts that condemn homosexual behaviour as antiquated, misunderstood, unclear or simply unacceptable. The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa states that "a doctrinal ideology which legitimises homosexual practice should be pointed out in the New Testament as heresy" (Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa website)[9].

To create space for pastoral care for individuals and families affected by homosexuality, the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa provide a guiding document that follows an inclusive approach. The document focuses on a biblical foundation of ministries; the faith community or local church's approach to homosexuals; the way that families deal with homosexuality after it is disclosed or discovered; and pastoral ministry provided to such families. The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa's pastoral approach is holistic (focusing on the person's interaction with others) and interdisciplinary (engaging with other disciplines like the medical, psychological, and social work fields).

A pastoral approach to homosexuals and their families requires an attitude change towards homosexuals as the biggest sinners (but only after they repent from their sin); after disclosure, no condemnation rejection or marginalisation should be directed to the person but rather a love, support, understanding and caring; condemnation through preaching and teaching against homosexuals should be prohibited in the Apostolic Faith Mission

8 AFM Pronouncement on homosexuality.

9 AFM Guiding document on homosexuality.

of South Africa; local churches should be more accommodative towards homosexuals (who have repented and accepted Jesus as Saviour); an in-depth focus is needed on the causes of homosexuality as an orientation (for which there is no biblical footage) and as behaviour (rejected in the bible); biblical teachings about human sexuality should be given in the church; church leaders should not force homosexual persons to disclose, to repent, threaten them with expulsion or force them to find other places of worship. The church should rather act with love, compassion and understanding.

Warning against the dangers of offering quick fixes or a one-size-fits-all approach due to the complex nature of sexuality, pastoral ministry to homosexuals should be grounded in the grace, mercy, and power of the Triune God. It should be based on the Word of God and prayer. Pastoral responses can include certain techniques like attending, storytelling, listening, responding, questioning, probing, challenging, or confronting, teaching and filtering.

The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa documents evidence of the contested and embracing space Pentecostal Christianity faces when it comes to LGBTQIA+ members and ministers. At his point, it is clear that there is a strong stand against a revisionist position but at the same time, their holistic and inclusive approach creates space for an interdisciplinary conversation that might open Pentecostal liturgical space for the LGBTQIA+ community. An African Pentecostal Liturgical space that is welcoming and embracing towards the LGBTQIA+ is possible.

7. Pentecostal paradigms

Pentecostals work with different paradigms to interpret the space created by the Spirit and the Pentecost paradigm of Amos Yong and the Azuza paradigm of Keri Day offer an embracing space for LGBTQIA+ in Pentecostal Christianity. Yong (2021) works from the Pentecost narrative in Luke and refuses to limit it to a Pentecostal experience of the Spirit, whether in the Azuza setting or some other context. In that way, Pentecost is not owned by a particular Christian tradition and is not applied in a hegemonic or totalising manner. Day (2022) works from the Azuza Street Revival experience in the United States in the early 1900s to show how many ways it breaks from the heteronormative, white-dominated culture

and how it created space for a queer sociality. Let us consider each position briefly and its relevance to our discussion on Pentecostal liturgical spaces that are embraced.

7.1 Pentecost – humanising pneumatological paradigm

For Yong (2019) the narrative of the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts provides an indication of the divine reign as an egalitarian, democratic and just-ordered community (Acts 2:17–21//Acts 2:29–31). The community of Pentecost are intersectional and intergenerational because it includes both sons and daughters; promotes gender and sexual justice for both women and men; and economic justice because both slaves and masters are part of it.

Yong (2019:78) derives from this Pentecost experience that there is a spatial and temporal togetherness, linking disparate spaces and times across multiple time zones (*the Spirit came upon those who were gathered together to pray*). Pentecost bridges the transcendent and the immanent, the divine and the human, God's spirit, and human spirits, touching them as embodied humans in their physicality (*the Spirit was poured out on all flesh*). Humanity is touched by its vast ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, enabling a multicultural community (*Acts 2:5: they were all speaking in tongues, glossolalia*).

7.2 Azuza – queer sociality and futility

Day (2022:123) describes Azuza's erotic life as reflecting a broader queer sociality and fugitive practice. Borrowing from Linn Tonstad's understanding of queer as moving in and beyond questions of sexual identity, orientation, expression and inclusion, Day (2022) claims that Azuza fostered a queer sociality that has an intense, intimacy and connection across, racial, gender and class lines. Criticising the American context of racism, Day (2022) argues that Azuza refused to participate in their racist and hetero-patriarchal practices of subjugation and death. Queer sociality offered by the Azuza experience of the early Pentecostals includes "the vision of socio-political transformation that alter harmful practices aimed at marginalised and vulnerable populations which include gender minorities but is not reduced to such groups."

Day (2022:124) mentions that the term queer is opposed by Pentecostalism and many Pentecostal communities are opposed to what we call queer people and their lifestyle practices, so calling Azuza a queer sociality might not be an acceptable term to them. Day (2022:123) follows the definition of Tonstad that goes beyond sexual identity and orientations but also expands to forms of social living that dare to transgress the harmful normative standards of society. Pentecostals from the Azuza Street Revival refused to submit to the normative life of white racism and the dominant sexist treatment of women within ecclesial and social communities (Day 2022:124). As Day (2022: 119) so rightly observes "Azuza invoked the Pentecost of ancient days in which an otherwise community of persons fostered a more liberate practice of care and connection."

Day (2022:123) asserts that Azuza's queer sociality depended upon certain fugitive practices, which is simply an act of rebellion by certain groups that are "taking flight" from the "hegemonic, normative boundaries of life and living", especially from the racist practices that treat blacks as non-subjects, as objects and commodities. It disrupts the nature of desire between ethnicities, genders, classes and more. Azusa's liturgical practices brought a willingness to risk vulnerability for the sake of the other as a joyful and not painful experience, generating inclusive practices of belonging (Day 2022:125).

Pentecostal liturgical spaces need this fugitive queer sociality associated with Azusa, a willingness to be vulnerable for the sake of the "other" and in this case LGBTQIA+ members and ministers in their midst. The question remains whether they are willing to disrupt harmful practices that discriminate and abuse LGBTQIA+ persons in their liturgical spaces, recognising their God-given dignity as fellow humans and creating welcoming and embracing spaces. This connects well with the concept of Ikhaya, a home for all as it is discussed in the following section.

8. Ikhaya – a home for all

The concept of Ikhaya refers to the homestead of a particular family, integrated with the term oikos or household in the Bible, which signifies a place of order and safety amid chaos. Reminiscent of the dome or firmament that God put above the earth – signifying God's protection and

caring authority over creation (Gen 1), and the dome represented in the form of the rainbow (Genesis) after the earth was destroyed through the flood – an architecture of Gods' protective and providential care, the safe home for all (Kritzinger 2022:104).

Kritzinger (2022:104) derives from this that all authority is God's authority that is expressed in a dome shape of caring and blessing. As stewards, caretakers and vice-regents, authority from one human to another should not be oppressive, triangular, or hierarchical but dome shaped. In upholding a dome-shaped authority we are all standing in a circle which is a harmonising and unifying image. In such a dome-shape circle we are standing *face to face* (dialogue- listening and talking to each other, building understanding and trust); *shoulder to shoulder* (partnership-facing in the same direction, working together for the same goals); *back to back* (integrity – remaining loyal to each other and not betraying the trust growing between us, when we are apart); and *in-front and behind* (maturity taking turns to be in front; having the humility to lead and the courage to follow).

9. Conclusion

The Bible and how it was interpreted over the years, especially when it comes to LGBTQIA+ matters, has become a contested space and it should not be used to justify theological positions that do not take the lived experiences of "the other" seriously. The scars from centuries of domination and marginalisation through biblical interpretation are felt until today and theologies of liberation help us to read with and interpret with a "hermeneutics of suspicion", not accepting every interpretation at face value as timeless and a one-fit-for-all.

European and African history indicates that same-sex unions are as old as humanity and any dialogue should take religious-cultural and socio-political factors into account when addressing issues related to the LGBTQIA+ community. There is nothing un-African, non-human and "abomination" about LGBTQIA+ people, the roots for the hatred and violence towards them must be judged for what it is – discrimination against "the other". The Church should deal with heterosexism and heteropatriarchy, which are important facilitators of homophobia, and its

basis should be interrogated together with religion-cultural practices that enforce and sustain it.

Constructive confrontational dialogue is the best way forward and finding common ground is the main priority. As indicated by the contributions it entails deep engagement with the LGBTQIA+ persons and the church community as equal partners. In such dialogue, the lived experience of the LGBTQIA+ should serve as an important frame of reference. Agreement is not the result of dialogue but a basis for an honest and unbiased pre-dialogue intention to agree to disagree.

The Anglican Communion should take the criticism of Western hegemonic dominance in this debate seriously from the global South section of the church (especially Africa and Asia). The global South should also listen to dissenting voices from within their ranks that identify a hegemonic and oppressive attitude in their conservative viewpoints. Both the revisionist and the conservative positions should learn from their colonial past that dominance and threats are not healthy for mutual dialogue. We are dialoguing as equals and everyone's opinion, views, perspectives and lived experiences matter.

Pentecostals who started as a group among the ranks of the marginalised and the poor, especially among African Americans, poor black people in Africa, and white poor communities in urban and rural areas, should be the first to understand what it means to be regarded as the "other" (Nel 2019b). How South African Pentecostalism expanded "in a marginalised and underprivileged society struggling to find dignity and identity" should be enough reason to create a welcoming and embracing space for the LGBTQIA+ persons and ministers in their midst.

The concept of Azusa's queer sociality and fugitive practises is contributing a challenge to Pentecostal liturgical spaces, whether they are willing to create liberative liturgical practices of care and connection, "take a flight" from oppressive normative practices like heteronormative, patriarchal and homophobic practices that undermine members and ministers God-given human dignity, gifts and ministries. An Ikhaya that constitutes a home for all requires dialogue (*face-to-face*), partnership (*shoulder-to-shoulder*), integrity (*back-to-back*) and maturity (*in-front and behind*) relations. In such a home LGBTQIA+ members and ministers feel welcome and accepted

as fellow human beings and children of God – sharing in the unconditional love of God, filled with the Spirit of love and being true worshippers of Jesus in the church – a safe liturgical space for all.

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