

## Article

# Africa Independent Churches as Amabandla Omoya and Syncretism in South Africa

James Kenokeno Mashabela 

School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg 3201, South Africa; mashabelaj@ukzn.ac.za

**Abstract:** This article presents a historical contribution of African Independent Churches in South Africa, particularly with references to the Ibandla lamaNazaretha of Isaiah Shembe, Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Engenas Lekganyane and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of Christina Nku. There is no doubt that these churches continue to be attractive and relevant to the South African context in the 21st century. They form an integrated part of African Christianity in South Africa. The article investigates ways in which these churches respond to the spiritual and cultural needs of Africans. It is interesting to look at how the Holy Spirit, healing, prayer and prophecy manifest in these churches. The concept of African Spirituality is discussed and contextualised within these churches.

**Keywords:** African Spirituality; ancestors; Ibandla lamaNazaretha; Pentecostalism; St John's Apostolic Faith Mission; syncretism; Zion Christian Church



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## 1. Introduction

African Independent Churches in South Africa are churches in Africa that are relevant to Africans as opposed to the Western or missional churches. African Independent Churches are unapologetically known as Amabandla Omoya, meaning the “Churches of the Spirit”, while Western missional churches are known as Amabandla Omthetho, meaning churches of the law. African Independent Churches successfully retained the reality of the Holy Spirit and divine healing, which are appealing to Africans in the church today. They have protested against the under-emphasis of the Holy Spirit in the African community by traditional/Western churches. The Ibandla lamaNazaretha or Nazareth Baptist Church, Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) are churches of the Holy Spirit, Amabandla Omoya, which is the foundation of Pentecostalism. They emphasise the gifts of the Holy Spirit, preaching salvation, divine healing, laying of the hands alone and performing miracles. As these churches developed spiritually, syncretistic practices emerged, such as blessing and use of papers, needles, strings, walking sticks and water as products used in healing and protection, church uniforms and other ritualistic practices aligned with African Traditional Religion (ATR). These churches highlighted syncretistic practices and shifted them away from Pentecostalism. The article is based on a three-fold Pentecostalism and syncretism-centred discussions: first, the article explores an essential role of the Holy Spirit and syncretism in African Independent Churches with special reference to Ibandla lamaNazaretha of Isaiah Shembe, Zion Christian Church (ZCC) of Engenas Lekganyane and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of Christina Nku. Second, it provides some recommendations on how these Pentecostal-type African Independent Churches can adjust their practices to be relevant in the Pentecostal context and, lastly, how Pentecostalism can accept them as they are.

## 2. An Overview of the Study

African Independent Churches are also known as African Initiated Churches or African Indigenous Church or African Instituted Churches. [Resane \(2020\)](#) states African Initiated Churches are established:

by Africans either as a reaction to established Christianity or based on a voluntary or divine revelation commission. This phenomenon can be traced from the 1880s to the present. It is an unavoidable and realistic phenomenon in Christian history studies in South Africa. (p. 3)

It is critically important to study the spirituality and theology of the African Independent Churches (AIC) in the context of Pentecostalism and syncretism as a central theme in the 21st century. AIC has brought another form of the church Reformation theology in Africa, which has also influenced the whole world. AIC's contribution has gained momentum in the form of establishing itself and learning about it since its birth, current gain and the future. [Buthelezi \(1995, p. 1\)](#) says African Independent Churches "call themselves "amabandla ka Moya, churches of the Holy Spirit". Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches call themselves "amabandla ensindiso, churches of salvation". This does not mean mainline churches such as the Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Congregationalist are not amabandla ka Moya and ensindiso. [Mogashoa \(2012, p. 189\)](#) states, "Pentecostalism appealed to the African people". Pentecostalism has a strong hold in AIC circles, which is why Africans are attracted by AIC spirituality and theology. This is influenced by African thinking that life is centred around the wholeness of an embodiment of the Holy Spirit and community. The article explores some of the issues around Pentecostalism and syncretism as a form of AIC attractive context and wholeness of life. The Ibandla lamaNazaretha, Zion Christian Church and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission, for [Resane \(2020, p. 6\)](#), are "churches branded themselves with the name "Zion" as a symbol of the New Jerusalem". The article is written from a historical theology perspective and an African Spirituality context. In conclusion, a recommendation is made as to why Pentecostalism should accept these independent churches.

## 3. African Independent Churches as the Healing Community

In Africa, healing is not an end in itself but is about abundant life in a salvation context. Healing is connected to the healthy life of people in "harmonious adjustment of the visible and the invisible world" ([Dube 1989, p. 111](#)). In South Africa, AIC believed and defined the church as a healing community, which was not defined and unused by the Western tradition or church ([Becken 1989, p. 229](#)). According to [Msomi \(1967, p. 66\)](#), on a Sunday, in AIC, a divine service is incomplete without a healing prayer. [Msomi \(1967, p. 66\)](#) stated: "Healing plays the central role. Healing is the main attraction. There is a great concern for the sick members. They don't believe that there can be a Christian Community without healing". AIC understands the church as a healing community because the Holy Spirit is central and provides health and healing in the African context. Africans believed that health and healing could not be absent in communal life. AIC context of the church as a healing community gives a profound sense because the African community embraces peace and a sense of belonging. In AIC, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are central and intertwined with prayer, prophecy and healing, especially during divine services. The sacrament of baptism is essential in this independent church, while Holy Communion is used sometimes or not used at all by other independent churches. In South African established churches, both sacraments are part of the church life.

## 4. Spirituality and Theology of the Zion Christian Church

The prophet Lekganyane established the Zion Christian Church at Mamabolo, Pietersburg, now called Polokwane in Limpopo, in 1924. ZCC headquarters is at Moria, Limpopo, where annual conferences are held ([Lukhaimane 1991, p. 227](#)). Lekganyane believed in the Spirit of God and healed people through the same Spirit. When he prayed, prophesied and

spoke in tongues, the Spirit was leading him to experience this. His ZCC church is one of the “dikereke tša Moya”, meaning churches of the Spirit (Häselbarth 1965, p. 12). The Spirit of God is present in Lekganyane and in his life. This is visible during his prayers, prophecies, healing people and speaking in tongues. Thus, his church is not led from a human and ideological perspective but from the Spirit context. In the current context, ZCC members normally say, “Moya wa Modimo o gona wa phela”, meaning the Spirit of God is present and live. This is mostly said by people who have experienced healing. This discussion is about the Spirit within the notion of Pentecostalism.

Lukhaimane (1991, p. 227) states that healing in ZCC is central as it attracts many Africans. “Engenas Lekganyane seems to have convinced many Africans about the way to their spiritual salvation. They would find this through the knowledge of the Bible and erudition, but also through good deeds to their neighbor”. The context here is that Africans are attracted and spiritually find salvation because the Bible is constructively used to encourage Africans to take care of their neighbour. This means the church gospel is attractive, relevant and useful to Africans.

Moria is regarded as their Zion City. ZCC is the largest church in South Africa and outside it; it is also business-oriented as it is self-reliant (Mogashoa 2012, p. 190). For many years, Lekganyane suffered from an eye disease. He received a vision that told him to move from Mamabolo to Johannesburg in 1912 to be cured by the church through an immersion baptism three times in water. He shared many dreams with his parents without getting an explanation. In Johannesburg, he was baptised by Elias Mahlangu and Joseph Mahlangu to become a member of the Zion Apostolic Church (ZAC) in South Africa. He was never a member of the Free Church of Scotland. He was ordained as a minister by the Mahlangu brothers and ministered at ZAC in Transvaal. However, in 1918, Lekganyane, together with his followers, left ZAC because of the leadership and his prophetic differences with the Mahlangu brothers. He then joined Edward Motaung, who was a leader of the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission (ZAFM) in Lesotho. The ZAFM Council accused Lekganyane of violating the church constitution because he took a second wife, leadership and appointed preachers, amongst other issues. In 1924, Lekganyane left the ZAFM to establish the ZCC after he prayed to God in the mountain at Mount Thabakgone, Limpopo. His followers joined his ZCC (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 228). Lekganyane experienced God’s calling, and he was healed from an eye disease through baptism. He was a gifted prophet, preacher and leader. It is clear that God called him to open his own church so that he can freely use his spiritual gifts in service of humanity. This is evident, as discussed earlier in a brief introduction of Lekganyane and his church work.

Lukhaimane states, “The Holy Spirit was regarded as a driving force in the development of the church. In principle, every member received the Holy Spirit at baptism” (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 233). The work of the Holy Spirit in ZCC was to heal the people and to drive away evil spirits from people, and prophecy is visible. In ZCC, wine symbolised the blood of Christ, and bread symbolised the flesh in Holy Communion. Baptism is performed in a three-fold immersion in water at a safe river. Baptism happens after candidates have completed the teaching about the theology and practice of the church, which leads them to receive a baptismal card (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 233). Again, in ZCC, the presence of the Holy Spirit affirms an identity of ZCC as the church of the Holy Spirit. This is central and the fruit of Pentecostalism. Healing and prophecy led by the Holy Spirit are the backbone of ZCC spirituality. However, the ZCC is not only emphasizing the Spirit, but the two sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are prominent as they are practiced from the biblical approach, and Jesus Christ is at the centre. However, currently, Holy Communion is no longer always practiced as the sacrament of ZCC, but the Holy Spirit and baptism continue to exist and are highly acknowledged in the church. The ZCC approach here is purely Pentecostalism.

Anderson (2000, p. 70) explains, “Lekganyane used to heal by laying on hands alone, but as the church developed, this become impractical and he began to bless various objects like strips of cloth, strings, papers, needles, walking sticks and water, to be used for

healing and protective purpose". This healing approach emerged later in the ministry of Lekganyane. He performed healing miracles, such as healing a crippled young man in Johannesburg in 1944 (Anderson 2000, pp. 70–71). In Pentecostalism, the early life of Lekganyane and his established ZCC have visible means of divine healing and miraculous events primarily performed by the Spirit. He healed people through the Holy Spirit, especially by laying hands on people and by prophecy. This was informed by his gift of Pentecostal ministry as he was profoundly a Pentecostal. However, later on, he introduced other forms of healing, such as the blessing of papers, walking sticks and others, which are well-versed in syncretism. This latest type of healing is basically introduced because Africans are now healed in local congregations through the ministry of prophets as the ZCC church was growing throughout South Africa and other countries in Southern Africa.

African Traditional Religions practice using healing products such as salt, water and others, which are visible means and present in AIC ministry. Lukhaimane (1991, p. 233) states that the role of ancestors in ZCC was important. Anderson (2000) heard from interviewees who:

believed the ancestors to have protective powers over their living descendants and that the basic traditional beliefs concerning the ancestors are still prevalent amongst the members of the indigenous churches. Ancestors still have an important role in the lives of most African Christians. (p. 180)

Kgatle and Mashau (2023, p. 2) have a different view about the role of ancestors as they state, "Ancestors are human and remain humans in the afterlife and therefore cannot be worshiped". They reject a notion of ancestors' worship in the context of African Christianity and Pentecostalism, while the ZCC embraces ancestors as central players of productive life in African Christianity, Pentecostalism and syncretism. ZCC is central to African Spirituality because it appeals to Africans who believe that ancestors are part of their daily lives. The Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ and ancestors continue to be intertwined in the African Spirituality. These are the realities of Africans' daily lives because this is Christianity in Africa. Mtetwa (1996, p. 21) states in African Spirituality, "Religion and culture are inextricably intertwined"; thus, a dichotomy of African Spirituality into the sacred and secular is theologically and practically distorted by the Western. Setiloane (1980, pp. 50–51) further states that the African Spirituality experience is not a "dichotomy between the secular and the sacred. All life is sacred". African Spirituality is a driving force to place Western Christianity into African Christianity. Thus, African Christianity is already present in AIC circles; this is because the Holy Spirit plays a huge role in the church. African Spirituality is always intertwined with the Holy Spirit in and outside church circles.

When the isagoma, meaning the diviner or traditional healer, is baptised in AIC, they get rid of traditional medicines and throw away dice and charms into the sea, and "then uMoya of Jesus comes to us". They are no longer just focusing on healing but also prophecy (Oosthuizen 1989, p. 189). ZCC discourages the newly baptised traditional healers from using dice and charms (Mashabela 2017, p. 4). Healing and prophecy become central in the ZCC, AFM and Ibandla lamaNazaretha, amongst other AICs. The practice of traditional healers is dismissed; however, such gifted prophets are given a space to practice prophecy in the form of healing and spiritual counselling. This is implemented through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

For Africans, witchcraft is a reality that is associated with misfortune or illness, but ZCC offered a spiritual solution to these challenges. ZCC membership grew faster because of illness and other problems. "Prevention of misfortunes by means of blessed water and sanctified papers played an important role. The laying of hands on the sick was an important means of prayer" (Lukhaimane 1991, pp. 234–35). Other methods of healing, such as confessing sins, pricking, salt water, coffee and tea, copper wires, vomiting and sanctified papers, were used to heal people. This resulted in the unemployed being employed, the barren women receiving children, etc., and, as such, people joined the church (Lukhaimane 1991, p. 235). These healing methods were developed later on as the church was in spiritual development. This ZCC approach to healing has given security and a better life for many

African people. It was not just about ZCC membership growth but about solutions to daily challenges faced by Africans.

### 5. Spirituality and Theology of the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission

African and prominent women such as Christina Nku, commonly known as MaNku, have contributed to the church Reformation on African soil and the whole world. Mogashoa (2012, p. 194) says, "Women also became founders of Zionist-Apostolic churches. The spontaneity and the healing of bands of the Zionist-Apostolic churches encouraged the talents of women and their capability for leadership". The prophet Christina Nku was born in 1894. When she was a young girl, she used to have many revelations. She became seriously ill at the age of twenty and experienced more heavenly visions. In one of her visions, God promised her that she would not die (Anderson 2000, p. 72). She was the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) member prior to establishing her own church. She left the DRC and became the Apostolic Faith Mission member, where "she was treated for ill health by a Zionist leader" (Mogashoa 2012, p. 194). After she was married to Lazarus Nku, she became ill again and was unconscious as she saw a vision of a large church with twelve doors. She was told to be baptised with a baptism of John and Jesus. She and her husband were baptised in the Apostolic Faith Mission in 1924 (Anderson 2000, p. 72). According to Resane (2020, p. 5), "her Pentecostal experience was confirmed, especially the baptism of the Holy Spirit". Her baptismal immersion experience is affirmed in the context of the Holy Spirit.

She never stayed long in the Apostolic Faith Mission church as she had a vision to build a twelve-door church near Evaton, South of Johannesburg, in 1933. She started praying for that land in order to build the church (Anderson 2000, pp. 72–73). In 1939, she successfully built the church called St John's Apostolic Faith Mission (hereafter AFM) on a land that was predominantly white people, and black people were not allowed to build anything at Evaton (Mogashoa 2012, p. 195). Her church is known as the Temple and is regarded as the largest building in Gauteng. Bishop Lazarus Nku, the husband of Nku and Elias Ketsing, the preacher whom she met in 1918<sup>1</sup>, assisted Nku towards AFM development (Anderson 2000, p. 73). Nku unconditionally accepted her calling of establishing the church. Her calling is a spiritual gift in service to the people of God. She implemented her spiritual vision of building a twelve-door church because it was a moment of healing and hope, as per her dreams. The Spirit of God was upon her to liberate the people from spiritual and economic injustices. It seems that AFM's introduction of the bishop was for administrative purposes, while Christina Nku's role was spiritual.

Nku spent her daily life in a covenant of prayer. She, dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues. This happened because she is a gifted healer and recruited people into her church, AFM. The name "St John" was added because she named her son John. AFM was founded according to the Pentecostal movement (Anderson 2000, p. 73). Nku was led by the Holy Spirit; hence, her church, AFM, is inclined towards the Pentecostalism principle. Surely, she was able to pray for people who received healing from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Anderson (2000, p. 73) states, "But her practices, particularly in her healing rituals, brought increasing distance between St John and the white-led Pentecostal movement". People used bottles and buckets of water, which Nku prayed for, for the powerful healing of people. The church became popularly known as the Water Church (Anderson 2000, p. 73). The presence of the Holy Spirit and prayer is central to Nku's gift of healing. Water is the central method of healing the people. The context of healing people with water was appealing to African people who eventually joined AFM. The Holy Spirit has given life and healing intertwined with water to provide spiritual solutions to Africans. This was central to Nku's African Spirituality and theology. Water in AFM might be viewed as syncretism because, in this context, water is not used in the form of baptism but also healing. Water is very central not only in baptism but also in the healing context because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and prayer. This is also profoundly a Pentecostal context.



## 6. Spirituality and Theology of the Ibandla lamaNazaretha

The prophet Isaiah Shembe had a visionary encounter with God. [Becken \(1965, p. 2\)](#) states Shembe was born in Bergville District, near the Drakensberg mountain, and his date of birth is unknown. He heard voices speaking to him at the age of 12–15 years. They spoke to him to become a Christian, but he did not respond to his call. Later, he moved to Harrismith District, Orange Free State, and he was married. He then experienced the strongest voices, which forced him to join the church. Finally, “He underwent the catechetical instructions in the local Methodist Church, at that time known as the ‘Wesleyans’, in order to be baptised” ([Becken 1965, p. 2](#)). However, another source indicates the birth year of Shembe to be 1865 ([Marinovich 2018, p. 34](#); [Mzizi 2004, p. 191](#)); this is not a favourite of scholars of Shembe, as popular dates, again, approximations, as earlier stated, are 1867 ([Oosthuizen 1981, p. 12](#)) and 1870 ([Papini 1999, p. 3](#)). There is a view that it is incorrect to claim that Shembe’s date is unknown. It is highly possible that the birth date of Shembe is unknown, and it is incorrect to dismiss the view of Becken, who personally interviewed John Galilee Shembe, who is the son of Shembe.

He never liked European education. He worked in a town where he and his migrant workers taught each other to read and write isiZulu. Before he was baptised, he was already preaching, and people were following him. When he was ready to be baptised, he asked to be baptised according to the biblical notion of immersion baptism; however, a Methodist white minister rejected it. Shembe found William Lesheja, a minister in the African Native Baptist Church from Johannesburg came to Harrismith to baptise him together with his few followers by immersion. Some of his followers were later baptised at the Methodist Church ([Becken 1965, p. 2](#); [Vezi 1996, p. 36](#)). Shembe received God’s calling at a young age to serve the people and God. This has unconditionally led him to attend catechetical instructions at the Methodist Church in order to be baptised. However, he was denied the right to be baptised with an immersion baptism at the Methodist Church. Finally, pastor Lesheja baptised him by immersion to become an African Native Baptist Church member.

Another view is that other authors such as [Morton \(2014, p. 74\)](#), [Jarvis \(2019, p. 10\)](#) and several other articles, state that the minister who performed Shembe’s baptism is called Leshega. This is an unknown author’s view who is not in favour of the old source of Becken, and furthermore, they say, “The problem of using old sources, and accepting the data they provide at face value instead of verifying it with other sources, preferably recent. Additionally, it is important to justify the choices one makes in the instance of several choices and renditions of facts”. Becken’s source is not used because it is old but primarily because it is one of the historical and original contributions and sources in the academic world. Thus, the minister named Lesheja by Becken cannot be dismissed because it is old, and recent scholars use the minister name Leshega. The minister’s name, Lesheja, is what Becken found during his interviews with the son of Shembe in 1965. Thus, Lesheja’s name should be accepted as one of the contributions to South African education and scholarly work.

For three years, Shembe and Lesheja worked together in the African Native Baptist Church. Shembe was a gifted healer as he laid his hands on the sick people who received healing, and people were healed through his preaching of the Word. He was appointed an evangelist in the African Native Baptist Church. He celebrated Holy Communion and the ceremony of feet washing in this church, and he never used medication since 1900 until his death in 1935. Lesheja requested Shembe to separate from him because of Shembe’s approach to ministry. In 1903, Shembe formed the Nazareth Movement ([Becken 1965, p. 2](#)). Shembe was an anointed man of God. He healed people through laying hands on people, and his preaching of the Word of God brought healing to people. However, the separation of Shembe and Lesheja was a different approach to ministry, which was closed by the formation of the Nazareth Movement.

[Mthethwa \(1989, p. 247\)](#) explains, “He had not been converted into Christianity by any person, but by visions”. Shembe healed people immediately by talking to them or by sending his messengers to tell a sick person that they were healed. It can be understood

that Jesus Christ, in this context, was understood as the “Black Messiah”. The sick laid hands to receive healing because they had “faith in God and in Jesus Christ”. The healer healed the sick because they believed in Jesus Christ. The sick are healed without medicine (Becken 1989, pp. 235–37). The sick people are “healed through the power of the Holy Spirit, UMoya, acting through the agency of healers and of the congregation as whole” (Motala 1989, p. 198). The Holy Spirit is the real presence of religious power in the Ibandla lamaNazaretha church to heal and edify people (Van Wyk 1965, p. 4). The sick are expected to declare to the healer the nature of the sickness, and their faith plays a central role in healing. Support is given to the sick (Motala 1989, p. 198–99). Shembe was teaching and preaching about the Holy Spirit and its work in his church and the daily lives of people (Becken 1965, p. 7). Shembe was a spiritually gifted healer and prophet, healing people not only in the church but also in the community. Shembe applied a Pentecostalism principle to heal the people. In Ibandla lamaNazaretha, the Holy Spirit is visible to edify and heal people through the means of prophecy and prayer sessions. Mogashoa (2012, p. 189) stated that it is not difficult for African people to join churches such as Ibandla lamaNazaretha because the church is “indigenous, spiritual, Pentecostal and Zionist at the same time”. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit and healing are inseparable in the Ibandla lamaNazaretha at its “cultic centre”, in this case, at Ekuphakameni and Nhlangakazi (Resane 2020, p. 14). This shows that the Ibandla lamaNazaretha has always been the Pentecostal Church from an African perspective.

He started preaching Christianity in 1900. He established the Nazareth Baptist Church, also known as Ibandla lamaNazaretha, a decade later (Mthethwa 1989, p. 246). Shembe preached, baptised and healed people until he stayed at a place called Ekuphakameni, where he found rest. He established a healing centre, and his followers received God’s blessings. This place became a church centre and a holy city for events such as rallies, work camps, etc. The church’s second place was the holy mountain Nhlangakazi (Becken 1991, pp. 157–58). Nhlangakazi festival was held in July every year, where sick African people receive healing (Becken 1965, p. 10). Ekuphakameni is regarded as a holy and high place of worship. Both Ekuphakameni and Nhlangakazi are central places for the church and a place of rest and healing.

He reoriented European missionaries to teach the “gospel of the heart” because Christianity was about a change of heart, not a change of culture. He opposed an early missionary preaching of changing a culture instead of a heart. He dismissed biblical texts that were against his Zulu and Sotho culture (Mthethwa 1989, pp. 246–47, 55). Ibandla lamaNazaretha is the Zionist Church type because Zionist healing is associated with worship (Motala 1989, p. 198). “Like the ZCC, this church also combined spiritual life and economic life” (Mogashoa 2012, p. 190). Missionaries regarded the African culture as evil; hence, missionaries demanded that Africans change their culture. Shembe defended African practices of culture as a blessing. His approach to preaching was closely spiritual for people to change their hearts in order to preserve their African liberating culture. The missionary preaching approach was irrelevant because it pushed away an agenda of Africans to abandon their culture. Shembe’s preaching approach was Spirit-centred and very contextual to Africans. Religion and culture are intertwined in the Ibandla lamaNazaretha.

In 1903, the Nazarite Movement was established. Shembe worked during the week and preached on weekends, and many people followed him. In 1908, Shembe left the migrant labour and moved to Ladysmith District, where he focused his ministry more on preaching, baptising and healing people (Becken 1965, p. 2). Ibandla lamaNazaretha was established by Isaiah Shembe at Ekuphakameni, a high place, in 1910. The church was growing (Becken 1965, p. 5). “The place Ekuphakameni symbolised a holy mountain for the church”. The church is formed from the Zulu social structures, and its leader was a high priest addressed as inkosi, chief and Zulu dance (Mogashoa 2012, p. 190). There are two pilgrimages: the first is the January Feast of Tabernacles on Inhlangakazi mountain, and the second is the great festival in July at the Ekuphakameni headquarters. In the July festival, Shembe explains the church teachings (Resane 2020, p. 4). The January festival at Inhlangakazi occurs first

because Isaiah Shembe had a vision in December 1913 near Umphumulo. He spent two weeks in this mountain praying and fasting. This festival focuses more on healing. After the January festival, people move in a procession to Ekuphakameni. The meaning of the July festival held at Ekuphakameni is about praise and thanksgiving for what God has done for people. Prayers are offered, asking God for protection, the spread of the Gospel and repentance from sin. This is also a moment for a church leader to preach, heal, baptise and minister Holy Communion (Becken 1965, p. 9). These two festivals are central in the life of the church and also bring the whole church members together.

In 1911, a woman called Ellen Shobede married a son of the Mjadu family who was unable to be healed by “doctor-priests”. “When Shembe came, he prepared water for her and put her into it, and the woman was healed” (Becken 1991, p. 158). Her family of Mjadu believed that Shembe healed her because of God. Shembe baptised people at various rivers that had snakes or crocodiles before he prayed to ask God to take them out of the water. What he asked for happened, and people were baptised in these rivers (Becken 1991, pp. 158–60). Shembe was a gifted prophet who healed people because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It was evident when he asked God to take out snakes and crocodiles in the water for him to baptise people. He performed such miracles in the presence of the people.

In 1910, Shembe decided that a special day of worshipping God was on Sunday. However, in 1913, he decided to change the day of Ibandla lamaNazaretha worship of God to be on Saturday. This was informed by his understanding of the Sabbath day, and Ibandla lamaNazaretha members and non-members were expected to live a holy (Christian) life and prepare themselves spiritually for the Sabbath. The Bible and Shembe’s hymnal are used for worship (Mthethwa 1989, p. 250). For Shembe, a day of worshipping God was very significant. Church members prepared themselves spiritually for worship services. This is profoundly important because the Holy Spirit and prayer are at the centre of worship and healing.

On Sunday morning, AIC members visited the Durban Sea wearing their colourful uniforms, washing their feet, and inserting their holy sticks and flags into the sand. These black Christians were at the banks of the sea, enjoying singing, dancing, preaching and praying. Individuals were dipped into the waves. Traditional churches worship God in church buildings (Becken 1989, pp. 229–30). The significance of the sea was that it was a powerful landscape to worship God. The sea is a gift from God. It was a meaningful place to embrace God’s creation. It was a very strange thing for traditional churches to see AIC members worshipping God next to the sea.

In the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, the stick was carried during baptism (Becken 1989, p. 232). A barren woman “was offered a reed mat with the words: On this mat are sitting beautiful children. And when Shembe entered, somebody whispered to her: There comes the messenger of God who brings good news for you”. The sick people are healed through prayer during the service (Becken 1989, pp. 237–38). Salt is used for the purpose of vomiting and taking out evil, cleaning people’s stomachs, and mixing with water and ash for medical reasons. Salt is regarded as the special power, purity and projective aspects, and protection is against evil spirits (Oosthuizen 1989, pp. 170–71). This type of healing is related to issues of spirituality and giving a prosperous life. These churches go deeper and deeper to use salt and other natural forms of healing as they believe that God’s creation products, such as salt, trees and others, are central to human healing and getting rid of evil and poison. Praying and calling the Holy Spirit are closely connected to such natural products in service of African human healing and spirituality.

## 7. The Spirituality of Holy Communion in Ibandla lamaNazaretha

Pastors wear clerical gowns when they bless Holy Communion and at the Sabbath services. The church leader wears green and blue in addition to the black talar. In Holy Communion, there is a washing ceremony, which is followed by the distribution of the Holy Supper (Becken 1965, pp. 7, 9). Holy Communion is significantly intertwined with a washing ceremony. Thus, this celebration is unique because of its washing part.



## 8. Is Pentecostalism Able to Accept These Independent Churches

In Pentecostalism, these churches understand baptism as the role of the Holy Spirit, who is received by people who are cleansed and their sins are removed. The Holy Spirit is at the centre of the AIC theology, which offers a comprehensive way of spiritual life. The Holy Spirit's insights reveal a profound contribution to the daily life of AIC members. Independent churches such as the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, Zion Christian Church and St John's Apostolic Faith Mission emphasise the Holy Spirit to a range that the Holy Spirit become so central to every aspect of their Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, practice and doctrine. AIC focus on the Holy Spirit is strongly influenced by Christian expression and context.

These Pentecostal-type African Independent Churches must be accepted by Pentecostalism as they are because they still emphasise the presence of the Holy Spirit, and syncretism is alive. This is not a strange phenomenon, and it must be embraced and an enhanced phenomenon in Africa. Transforming Pentecostalism is necessary here. This is an open approach, which calls pastors of mainline, African Independent Churches and Pentecostal churches, academic theologians, university, and theological training institutions to have conversations around issues of Pentecostalism and syncretism, which are necessary for the well-being of African Christians.

## 9. Conclusions

The study has shown that the Holy Spirit within the Ibandla lamaNazaretha, Zion Christian Church and the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission is so central within the context of syncretism as elements such as salt, water mixed with salt, papers, etc., are prominent in the ministry. The interpretation of baptism as a sacrament is understood in the context of receiving God's grace, healing and spiritual power. The study shows that these three-fold African Independent Churches' first practice is the Pentecostalism principles, as these churches are still developing syncretism, which emerged later. However, there is no need for these churches to move away from syncretism. Pentecostalism should accept them as they are. This should be viewed as transformative Pentecostalism.

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## Note

- <sup>1</sup> This does not mean Elias Ketsing, the preacher and Christina Nku started to build the AFM church in 1918. This explains the year in which they met.

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