

The Process of Becoming Different - A Discourse Analysis on Faith and Change in a Namibian Pentecostal Congregation

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Pentecostalism and related charismatic movements represent one of the fastest-growing segments of global Christianity, especially in Africa. According to recent estimations from the World Christian Database, Pentecostals represent 12 percent of the African population - Charismatic members of non-Pentecostal denominations make a far larger number, and both groups are growing by the day. Regarding the “discourse of development” in Africa, Pentecostal influence is a force that can not be neglected.

This article is based on a case-study in a Pentecostal congregation in Windhoek, Namibia – a country that has experienced a significant “mushrooming” of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches (PCC:s) during the past few years. It aims to take a closer look into the “discourse of change” in this particular congregation, where “change” was identified as a nodal point as the members of the congregation revealed their life-trajectories to me. Different members of different ages in the congregation were interviewed, and on a first look the discourse could be said to be extremely homogenous and hegemonic, due to the fact that to a large extent it consists of intertextuality and assumptions, referring back to a Pentecostal interpretation of the Bible. A deeper analysis of the commonly used word “change”, however, revealed a discursive antagonism, an antagonism within the question of whether you are an *agent* or an *object* of change.

In the interviews performed it was clear that after what the members described as their first “change”, commonly attached to joining the church and being touched by the Holy Spirit, most of them expected a second change to occur. This change had a more “this-worldly” character, as in finding a job, receiving money, finding a husband or a wife, and so on. According to the analysis, there is an uncertainty of “who is supposed to change what”. Some revealed views that can be interpreted as some types of personal action stand in opposition to “being serious with the word of God”. The question is asked whether the large emphasis on personal change can serve as an obstacle for change on a larger, societal change. Events were hardly ever put in a structural, societal perspective in this discourse, bringing up a discussion about the connection between “personal change” and “societal change” in this particular area of research.