

# Job Yenge Chiliza: A Pentecostal Church Founder and Trailblazer

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**Abstract:** *This article analyses the theological views and ministry of Job Yenge Chiliza. He was educated at the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions' school and later became preacher in the church and later experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit through contact with members of the Apostolic Faith Mission. He later associated with the Zionists, led by Ezra Mbonambi, two other Pentecostal churches, the Full Gospel Church of God and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church before he founded an independent Pentecostal church, the African Gospel Church. The article applies the Lekgotla practical theology research method to understand this phenomenon and ask: What theological views did Job Chiliza hold as he moved from one Christian tradition to the other and how these manifested in his ministry? The article argues that he embraced three different theological views, Protestantism, Zionism, and Pentecostalism, that ultimately manifested as Ubuntu Pentecostalism in his ministry.*

**Key terms:** Protestantism, Zionism, Pentecostalism, Ubuntu Pentecostalism, theological views, fusion.

## INTRODUCTION

While Sundkler (1976) provides the initial details about the life and ministry of Job Yenge Chiliza, Khathide (2010), through his book titled "*Hamba vangeli Lisha: A portrait of Rv Job Y Chiliza-Pioneer of the African Gospel Church*" later detailed the life and ministry of Job Yenge Chiliza. He adds that the American Board of Commissioners sent missionaries to the former Zululand, current KwaZulu-Natal in 1836 (Khathide 2010: 28 and 31). This was a period of extensive colonialism where England had colonised Natal and the Cape Colony, and the Dutch settlers had colonised the Transvaal and Orange Free State. It was also the period Ethiopianism emerged in the Cape Colony and the Transvaal. Nehemiah Tile's church, the Ethiopian Church of Africa being the first church in 1884.

The American Board of Commissioners missionaries established a mission station and a school in Natal; and later introduced the first printing press that produced the isiZulu dictionary and isiZulu Bible. Job Chiliza's father, Yenge Chiliza, who worked as a horse groomer, was one of the first converts of American Board of Commissioners.

A hundred and forty years ago (1886-2026), a son, called Yenge, was born to Yenge Chiliza in 1886 in Mzube, Zululand, current Kwa-Zulu Natal. He was raised in a Christian family that had associated with the missionaries from the American Board Commissioners (later called United Congregational Church) (Khathide 2010:31–34). He attended the church's school until standard 5 and obtained standard six through correspondence, and he was later appointed the church's a marriage officer and preacher (Khathide 2010:28–29, 34). In addition to ministry, Chiliza worked as a shoemaker (Khathide 2010:28,89).

A few years later, Chiliza experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit after his encounter with some female members of Apostolic Faith Mission who referred him to their leaders (Khathide 2010: 35–36, 53). His encounter stirred him to associate with the Zionist of Ezra Mbonambi (Khathide 2010:46–49, 102,119), the Full Gospel Church (Khathide 2010: 52–60), and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (Khathide 2010:67–68). At the end Chiliza founded African Gospel Church (Khathide 2010:53,75) to continue his preaching passion.

### **Research Framework and Method**

Chiliza's movement from four denomination embracing different Christian views namely, the American Board of Commissioners, the Zionist led by Ezra Mbonambi, the Full Gospel Church of God, and the International Pentecostal Holiness before establishing his church, warrant a theological analysis. This is done by applying the framework of Ubuntu Pentecostalism (Mzondi M 2019 and 2022). This framework illustrates that South African Pentecostal was not static but evolved in four different phases beginning with the Pentecostalism of William Seymour that birthed the Apostolic Faith Mission and later that of the Zionist churches and *dikereke sa Postola* (Apostolic churches); followed by the Pentecostalism of the Assemblies of God, Full Gospel Church, Back to God Movement and African Gospel Church; Neo-Pentecostalism followed after, last was the Pentecostalism of TB Joshua and his followers (Mzondi 2024:2). Notably, practising Ubuntu, Pentecostalism and ancestral veneration was introduced in the first phase while the latter was discarded in the second, third and fourth phases.

The article thus asks: What theological views did Job Chiliza hold as he moved from one Christian tradition to the other and how it manifested in his ministry? The answer to the question lies in understanding his theological views and ministry using the Lekgotla practical theology research method (Mzondi 2022:4–9) that consist of four steps, namely describe the situation, participation, consensus, and presenting. Below is an explanation of the steps.

Describing the situation involves describing and explaining the issue before the elders or the community...there is an interrelated back-and-forth movement between Participation and Consensus with a strong emphasis on reflecting on and ascertaining oral traditions, norms, and praxis passed from generation to generation. Once conformity to oral tradition, norms, and praxis is ascertained and there is mutual agreement on how to conclude the matter(s) before the Kgotla, the participants will have reached the step of Consensus. The Lekgotla process concludes with praxis-theory, Presentation, that anticipates that the supreme being will bless the outcome of the Kgotla (Mzondi 2022:7).

Hence, the article is subsequently divided into two main sections, namely, understanding Job's Chiliza's theological views— which covers the describing the situation and participation steps and

understanding Job Chiliza's ministry—covering the consensus and presenting steps. First, his theological views are traced in the theological views of the three Christian traditions he joined and left and the theological views of the church he founded. The theological views of the American Board of Commissioners are discussed first, followed by that of the Zionists, the Full Gospel Church, and the International Pentecostal Holiness; that of the African Gospel Church are discussed last. Second, understanding his ministry also provides insights of his theological views.

### **Understanding Job's Chiliza's Theological Views**

This section explores Chiliza's views from his association with the American Board of Commissioners, the Zionists, Full Gospel Church of God, International Pentecostal Holiness, and African Gospel Church.

#### **The Theological Views of the American Board of Commissioners**

Sundkler (1976:85–86) mentions that Chiliza's family is benefactor of Protestantism the American Board of Commissioners upheld hence Job Chiliza considered himself a Christian (Sundkler 1976:86). Protestantism refers to a Christian movement that emerged out of the then Roman Catholic Church. The latter called them Protestants as they were protesting the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestantism is an offshoot of Martin Luther's theological views, ninety-five theses (Karolides, Bald and Sova 2011:278), that challenged the teachings of the then Roman Catholic Church (Bishop 2014:3–4). More theologians like John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and others joined the Protestant movement and challenged the teaching and practices of the then Roman Catholic Church. Collectively they are called the Reformers, and their efforts culminate into the views of the Reformed theology called the five Solas (Kortner in BosserHuber 2015:5): *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), *Sola Fide* (by faith alone) and *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone). These are expanded as follows:

##### ***Sola Gratia***

We believe that salvation is granted by the sovereign grace of God alone.

##### ***Sola Fide***

We believe that salvation comes through the instrument of faith alone.

##### ***Solus Christus***

We believe that salvation is granted in the name and by the merit of Jesus Christ alone.

##### ***Sola Scriptura***

We believe that everything we need for salvation Christian discipleship is found in Scripture alone.

##### ***Soli Deo Gloria***

We believe that salvation is granted and Christian discipleship pursued for the glory of God alone.

Since Chiliza was a preacher in American Board of Commissioners for six years, this means that he taught these confessions and was expected to practice them. However, these confessions were challenged when he encountered some women who attended a Pentecostal church named, the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa. As mentioned in the introduction, he later experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit after listening to the teachings and preaching of two of the pastors of this church (Khathide 2010: 35–36). This experience stirred him to embrace a new spirituality that is found among African Pentecostals associated with the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, hence he began to hold house services with some members of the American Board of Commissioners to practice what he learned and pass it to them (Khathide 2010:35, 53). He later left the American Board of

Commissioners with this group after seemingly experiencing conflict with the leaders about his new preaching that promoted salvation and the Holy Spirit (Nxumalo 1992:32 in Khathide 2010:108–109).

He then began to associate, for a short period, with the Zionist church led by Ezra Mbonambi (Khathide 2010:102, 119), a different group from the two splinter group from the Christian Catholic Church in Zion in Johannesburg and Wakkerstroom. He also left them to join two Pentecostal churches in succession, the Full Gospel Church of God after listening to the sermon of Pastor Archibold Cooper, and later the International Pentecostal Holiness.

### **The Theological views of the Zionists**

It is apparent that after experiencing baptism in the Holy Spirit., Chiliza continued to practise Reformed theology and his newly found Pentecostalism within the American Board of Commissioners. He later practiced Zionism of splinter Zionists like Zion Apostolic Church in South Africa and the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion, after seceding from the American Board of Commissioners.

Mzondi M (2019:44–62, 2022:49–61) explains that the Zionist were a former church that associated with John Alexander Dowie of Christian Catholic Church in Zion, based in Chicago, in the United States of America, through the teachings of Rev. Peter le Roux. The church in South Africa was called Christian Catholic Church in Zion, later called Zion Apostolic Church in Zion. It had branches in Johannesburg and Wakkerstroom. Dowie’s Zionism taught personal salvation, holy living, and divine healing (Khathide 2010:47; Synan [1925]:1980xx).

Rev. P le Roux who later embraced Pentecostalism after listening the sermon of John G Lake and his colleague, Thomas Hezmalhaalch, introduced Pentecostalism to both branches. Later, two groups, led by Elijah Mahlangu and Daniel Nkonyane seceded from the Christian Catholic Church in Zion to form the Zion Apostolic Church in South Africa, led by Mahlangu and the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion, led by Nkonyane. The latter introduced church uniform and the use of a staffs in services (Khathide 2010:49–50; Mzondi 2019: 48, 2023:4, 2022:54). Over time, these churches also introduced ancestor veneration (Khathide 2010:108)

Prior to the secessions, the church in Johannesburg was called the Apostolic Faith Mission and the one in Wakkerstroom the Zion Apostolic Church. It is worth mentioning that other Zionists churches also emerged in the then Transvaal and Natal provinces. These churches emphasised divine healing and being led by *Umoya* (Holy Spirit) in their services like in the Apostolic Faith Mission where their leaders and members first encountered the baptism of the Holy Spirit after Rev. Pieter le Roux introduced it to them. In addition, the use of sticks, uniform, barefoot worship, and prophecy were introduced in these churches. Undoubtedly, their new church names reflects that they also treasured their historical and spiritual background with Alexender Dowie’s church Christian Catholic Church in Zion. This historical link is seen in Elijah Mahlangu, Daniel Nkonyane, and others who added “Zion” to their church names. Not only that, but they also treasured the historical and spiritual background with the Apostolic Faith Mission by adding “Apostolic” to their church names.

These tendencies reflects that the Zionist saw their churches as a continuation with both Zionism and Pentecostalism. However, the emergence of Zionist churches created a doctrinal tension between the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Zionists. The former did not recognise them as Pentecostal.

At this point, Chiliza and followers had clearly fused Reformed theology with Pentecostalism learned from the Apostolic Faith Mission and Zionism learned from the Zionists group of Ezra Mbonambi that emerged in Natal since he and his followers were mainly based in Natal (Khathide 2010:102,119). This fusing continued and was entrenched as he joined and seceded from two Pentecostal traditions: the Full Gospel Church and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. This ultimate fusion is discussed in the last section, the theology of African Gospel Church, below. Next, is discussing the theological views of a Pentecostal church he joined, the Full Gospel Church.

The theological views of the Apostolic Faith Mission are discussed alongside that of the Full Gospel and the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, since they are grouped as Pentecostals.

### **The Theological Views of the Full Gospel Church of God**

Chiliza left the Zionists group of Ezra Mbonambi after listening to Pastor Archibold Copper sermon, at a tent service, when he was on his way home from work (Khathide 2010:52–53). After some time, he convinced his followers to follow him as he had opted to join the Full Gospel Church in South Africa (Khathide 201:52—56). His decision to join the church contributed to the expansion of the church (Khathide 201:52—56).

The Full Gospel Church is one of the oldest Pentecostal Churches in South Africa. The Full Gospel Church was established after the Bethel Pentecostal Assembly (Newark, New Jersey, USA) sent missionaries to South Africa (Hobe 2024:2886).

Pentecostal churches teach justification by faith, sanctification as a definite work of grace, baptism in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues, divine healing ‘as in atonement’, and the personal pre-millennial rapture of the saints at the second coming of Christ (Khathide 2010:62). In a summary, like in all Pentecostal circles, the Full Gospel Church upholds that baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the function of the charismata are key (Hocken 1976:83). This position is noticed Chetty’s (2002:32) view that the Full Gospel Church and the Apostolic Faith Mission share the same teachings:

churches laid emphasis on the New Testament character of the church; both administered baptism by way of immersion; both revealed a strong belief in the imminent return of Jesus. Also, the preaching of divine healing and holiness was always at the centre of their teachings; both were also highly evangelically orientated.

Leadership conflicts in the Full Gospel caused Chiliza and his followers to leave, after sixteen years (1926–1942) and join the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. He joined the church and was now using the name African Gospel Church (Khathide 2010:67). It is evident that by then Chiliza and his followers had moved from fusing Pentecostalism with Zionism to embracing a clear Pentecostalism taught at the Full Gospel Church. He had also seceded from three churches, namely the American Board of Commissioners, the Zionist and the Full Gospel Church of God, for different reasons. These are a Pentecostal experience within the American Board of Commissioners, doctrinal reasons from the Zionists, and leadership conflict from the Full Gospel Church of God.

### **The Theological views of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church**

The International Pentecostal Holiness Church was established in 1915 in South Africa after a African couple, the Lehmans, headed the call to come to South Africa. They began the work in Phokeng, near Rustenburg and were joined by a Caucasian couple, the Rhodes, that began their work in Munsiville,

near the former Krugersdorp, current Mogale City. These couples upheld the same Pentecostal teachings listed above.

After joining the International Pentecostal Holiness Church due to leadership conflicts at the Full Gospel Church of God, Chiliza was allowed to function as the African league of the church. However, after five years (1942–1947), doctrinal tensions of water baptism and the matter of what church name to use caused him to leave the church and opted to continue to function as African Gospel Church (Khathide 2010:67–70). This was the third time they experienced conflicts arising from doctrinal issues. The first in the American Board of Commissioners and the second was among the Zionists.

### **The Theological Views of the African Gospel Church**

Chiliza is among African male Christian leaders who seceded from mission churches to established independent churches. While others established Ethiopian churches (e.g., Mangena Mokone), Zionist churches (e.g., Daniel Nkonyane and Ezra Mbonambi). Christinah Nku, the first female African Christian leader, established an Apostolic church. On the contrary, Chiliza established a Pentecostal church.

At the time of establishing the African Gospel Church (Khathide 2010:27), Chiliza's had already fused Reformed theology, Pentecostalism and Zionism. Such fusion point to what Mzondi M (2019; 2022) calls Ubuntu Pentecostalism. Chiliza seemed to have also easily blended his African cultural practice and singing ability and wedding song composition with his preaching ability learned at the American Board of Commissioners. To this dynamic, he later added his new Pentecostal spirituality labelled an Ubuntu Pentecostal (Mzondi M 2019:72–74; 2022:81–84). Such fusion later enabled him to develop an indigenous Pentecostal manifestation like Ubuntu Pentecostalism demonstrated in his ministry, where he consciously taught his followers to embrace African practices displaying Ubuntu (Khathide 2010:93)

Ubuntu Pentecostalism according Mzondi M (2019:31–104, 2022:34–118) acknowledges that Pentecostalism in South Africa flows from William Seymour's 1906 Azusa Street Pentecostalism that John G Lake and colleague introduced in 1910. Rev P le Roux, former minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, had joined the Christian Catholic Church in Zion with his Dutch Reformed Church congregations a Johannesburg and Wakkerstroom. He later influenced the two branches to embrace William Seymour's Pentecostalism that Mzondi (2022:3–4) argue is influenced by the African worldview and spirituality.

Mzondi M (2019:35; 2022:39; see also Mzondi 2009: 45–51; 20:146–155) lists five values that underlie Ubuntu. These are caring, sharing, respect, seriti/isithunzi (moral force), and belief in the divine. From these values emerged two forms of Pentecostalism, one that displayed all five by incorporating ancestral veneration and another that displayed all five but did not incorporate ancestor veneration.

The Zionist group, led by Daniel Nkonyane, that seceded from the Wakkerstroom Christian Catholic Church in Zion, that was later called the Zion Apostolic Church, constitutes the first form of Pentecostalism that fused Pentecostalism and ancestral veneration. This group that was later called the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion, was followed by Engenas Lekganyane of the Zion Christian Church, Christinah Nku of St. John Apostolic Faith Mission, and Isaiah Shembe of

*iBandla lamaNazaretha*. Theirs is a first form of Ubuntu Pentecostalism (Mzondi M 2019:66, 74–78; 2022:74–76, 84–88).

Conversely, their contemporaries in the African section of the Apostolic Faith Mission follow a different form of Ubuntu Pentecostalism, Elias Letwaba being the most prominent of such leaders and Job Chiliza is another leader. Chiliza had earlier associated with those who fused Seymour’s Pentecostalism with ancestor veneration but later realised that he and the Zionists were not in the same spirituality (Sundkler 1976:86). Theirs is another form of Ubuntu Pentecostalism (Mzondi M 2019:70–74; 2022:80–84). Chiliza’s ability to sing and compose songs and choruses in isiZulu language display his leaning towards Ubuntu Pentecostalism and Holy Spirit guidance and not practising ancestor veneration beliefs (Khathide 2010:113–114,116–117). He further displayed the view of placing Jesus Christ mediatory role above the highly seemed ancestral mediatory role among African communities and the Zionists churches (Mzondi 2024:10-11).

Some years later, after these leaders, the following African Pentecostal leaders followed this trend. Richard Ngidi of the Apostolic Faith Mission and others. Nicholas Bhengu the founder of Assemblies of God-Back to God and Phill Molefe of the International Assemblies of God (Mzondi M 2019:78–81; 2022:89–92).

### **Understanding Job Chiliza’s Ministry**

Certainly, Chiliza was a Protestant-Zionist-Pentecostal who displayed Ubuntu Pentecostalism like Elias Letwaba, his peer from the Apostolic Faith Mission. Khathide (2010:17) mentions that Chiliza popularised the preaching of salvation, divine healing and baptism in the Holy Spirit among African churches. As it is mentioned above, this form of Pentecostalism embraces the values of community, caring, sharing, belief in the divine and respect but disregard ancestor veneration.

### **Belief in the Divine**

Khathide (2010:89, 123) mentions that Chiliza was preaching *ivangeli elisha* (the “new gospel”) after witnessing that Christians were not leaving as expected and later hearing a loud voice in his workshop instructing him to preach *ivangeli elisha* (the “new gospel”). The last experience displays his belief in the divine and denouncing ancestor veneration (Nxumalo 1992:35 in Khathide 2010:108).

This emphasis on God and not the ancestors is observed in his songs that accompanied his African centred preaching, deliverance and healing ministry (Khathide 2010:110, 111–112). This shows that his ministry addressed the people’s worldview that did no separate the physical and the spiritual by teaching his followers believing in God mean disregarding unbiblical African practises and continuing with biblical African practices (Khathide 2010:92–93,129). He addressed people’s concerns about the influence of spirits by teaching that believing in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit was sufficient to handle fears of attacks from the spirits (Nxumalo 1992:35 in Khathide 2010:108; Khathide 2010:93).

### **Community, Caring, and Sharing**

From his time at the American Board of Commissioners, Chiliza was always surrounded by people who accepted him as their leader; Khathide (2010:35, 53) list members of this core group. These followed him as he moved from one church to the other, until he finally established an independent Pentecostal church, the African Gospel Church. Chiliza habit of combining ministry with shoemaking stirred him to teach his followers to be self-reliant and not to depend on missionaries funding by

teaching them to tithe and give offering (Khathide 201:105). To illustrate his convictions about self-reliance, he built a school at their church premises to provide education for church members and the community (Khathide v201:86).

Chiliza's wife, Effie, also illustrated this conviction about self-reliance by establishing a women ministry called the Dorcas Society (Khathide 2010:76). The Society became the core financial funder of the church. This shows that she and husband had the interest of the community of believers a heart (Khathide 2010:106).

Chiliza displayed the common practice of sharing among Africans. The following are two main examples of his sharing habit, he allowed: Nicholas Bhengu to stay with his family in a small married quarter (Khathide 2010:125); someone to be the moderator of the newly registered African Gospel Church and he the vice-moderator demonstrates that he was not afraid to share his leadership functions with others (Khathide 2010:102)

### **Respect**

Chiliza actions and decision earned him respect as observed from his move to join the Full Gospel Church and later the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. Again, it is worth noting that throughout his leadership, Chiliza respected all people he association with at different levels in the community and at the various denominations (Khathide 2010:106,112). He associated with young and old people, the uneducated and educated, respected leader by submitting to them. He further did not show disrespect in his secession from one church to the other. Sundkler's (1976:94) observation demonstrates his respect for Chiliza "...was one of the most outstanding Church leaders in South Africa in this century":

### **CONCLUSION**

Job Yenge Chiliza is one of the African Christian male leaders who established an independent church after seceding from mission churches. His contemporaries, established Ethiopian, Zionist, and Apostolic churches long before he established his Pentecostal church, the African Gospel Church. Some of these leaders moved from one denomination to their own churches, others from two denominations to their own. Interestingly, Chiliza is credits for being the only African Christian leader to move from four different denominations— a Protestant church, a Zionist church, and two Pentecostal churches— before establishing his church. His movement from four denominations stirred the conceptualisation of this article to determine his theological views and ministry praxis. The article concluded that his movement from one denomination to the other reflects that he fused three different theological views—Protestantism, Zionism, and Pentecostalism The article further shows that he also displayed Ubuntu values belief in the divine, respect, community, caring, and sharing.

These developments mentioned in his article resonates with the title of the article: *Job Yenge Chiliza: A Pentecostal church founder and trailblazer*. He embraced the continuity of the charismata as he emphasised salvation and the Holy Spirit (Sundkler 1976:88). His ministry was holistic—met people spiritual needs and physical needs by instilling self-reliance among his followers (Nxumalo in Khathide 2010:105, 107–108) and was commented for being one of the most outstanding church leaders in South Africa in the last century (Sundkler in Khathide 2010:17). He is also described

As a proud African Christian, [who] believed that those traditional practices that were compatible with biblical teaching such as Ubuntu...forsake...ancestral mediation or worship... trust in God alone for haling and protection against witchcraft and evil spirits... [emphasised] the sufficiency of the [g]ospel of Jesus Christ (Khathide 2010:93).

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