

A NEW PHENOMENON IN THE ZIONIST CHURCHES OF BOTSWANA: THE USE OF DIVINATION BONES AND SACRED PLACES

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Abstract

The birth of the African Initiated/Independent Churches (AICs) on the African continent brought with it phenomena which in the African worldview are not new, but in the ecclesiastical view, as perceived by the missionaries, were historically regarded as 'unChristian'. Here we are referring to phenomena such as the use of divination bones and the belief that certain natural places are sacred. This article will focus on three issues: (1) cultural practices in Setswana Traditional Religion; (2) natural places treated as sacred places by certain churches; and (3) a phenomenological approach to the healing ministry in the Zionist churches. Conclusions will be drawn at the end to show the new emerging paradigm in the AICs in Botswana.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article is intended to tackle an issue that has become a phenomenon in some of the African Independent/Initiated Churches (especially the Zionist churches) of Botswana. These are the churches that have embraced the use of 'bone divination', known in Setswana as *Ditaola*.ⁱⁱ This is a common practice among indigenous medical practitioners (otherwise known as traditional doctors) who adhere to tradition and who many people prefer to consult, when they are ill or in trouble. The practice of bone divination carried out by traditional healers is held in high esteem by African people - both Christian and non-Christian. However, some Christians, especially Christians from the mainline churches, tend not to disclose their continued adherence to this traditional practice, probably for fear of being labelled a 'heathen'.

In addition to the practice of *ditaola*, the AICs in Botswana treat natural places such as mountains, hills, caves, forests, groves, trees, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, springs, rocks, et cetera as sacred places. This is a new phenomenon in the Zionist churches, one which has never been practised since these churches were first established. Even the greatest prophets and healers who placed the Zionist churches on the religious 'map of the world' did not experience or practise this, and nor did they use *ditaola* (bone divination). Scholars too refer to *ditaola* only when they discuss African traditional religion and practices (Amanze 1998:14). However, the fact remains that, today, some churches, as indicated above, have gone further than using traditional medicines and have introduced the use of *ditaola* for healing. These are the Zionist churches,

specifically Temothuo Apostolic Church and the Bagethwa Apostolic Church. This has baffled church leaders and prophets from other Zionist churches.

What is wrong with *ditaola* if it is used to help and heal people? In broader terms, a look at the use of *ditaola* from an anthropological perspective needs to deal holistically and dynamically with human culture, simply because people are cultural beings.

This perspective will reflect on the different ways and purposes for which *ditaola* has been used through the ages and will reveal the prejudices of the Euro-American towards Setswana culture, especially its traditional religion and the practices of that religion. In their preaching and teaching, the Euro-American missionaries tried to inculcate these prejudices in their African converts. In this article, I intend to show that African-Setswana traditional religion has displayed an unprecedented resilience to European-American culture, ever since the introduction of Christianity to the African continent. This resilience reflects the positive attitude which the Batswana have always had towards their religion.

2 CULTURAL PRACTICES IN SETSWANA TRADITIONAL RELIGION

2.1 The importance of divination bones (*ditaola*) in Setswana traditional religion

Divination is a method of consulting the supernatural in order to obtain information from the Supernatural that is not normally available to human beings. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* the word 'supernatural' means spiritual; that which is not controlled or explained by physical laws; for example, angels, devils, etc. But in the context of this study and African traditional religion, the term 'Supernatural' refers to the spirits of the departed or deceased. The spirit is that part of human nature which is believed to survive after a person has passed away. In African traditional religion, human beings possess immoral spirits, hence the concept of the living-dead. Amanze (1998:11) has convincingly argued that the deceased are at once dead and alive and, because of their paradoxical nature they are known in recent literature on African traditional religions as the 'living dead'. Information from the Supernatural may well concern an aspect of life where uncertainty or complete ignorance makes a solution by rational means impossible; for example, the future, illness, the cause of baffling events, et cetera. Divination, as a procedure of receiving revelation or information from the Supernatural, is an extremely varied activity. There are many different methods of divination, such as the use of dolls, stones, gourds, numbers, palm readings, forming or seeing images in pots of water, interpreting animal marks, crystal balls, a set of four calabashes, divination bones (*ditaola*), and directly consulting the ancestors (Amanze 2002:102). However, the last two methods (ie *diatola* and consulting the ancestors) are the most common forms of divination.

This article will concentrate on the divination method that uses bones in bone throwing (*ditaola*). According to Mokotedi Motseokae, who is the Vice-chairman of the Dingaka Association of Botswana, (personal interview 05.06.03), the divination bones (*ditaola*) are used by religious functionaries such as priests, prophets, diviners, herbalists etc, for religious purposes. It must, however, be pointed out that, in Africa, religion permeates every aspect of human life, which means that Africans are essentially religious people. Mbiti (1969:2) argues that, in Africa, religion integrates all aspects of life, aspects that are not easy or possible to isolate. The implication here is that, in Africa, one cannot demarcate between politics and religion, sacred and profane, spiritual and material etc because all things are perceived to be religious. This is why Mbiti (1969:2) claims that “wherever an African is, there is his religion; he takes it with him to the beer party or a funeral ceremony, and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament”. It is, in fact, unthinkable for an African to be non-religious.

As I have already said, divination throughout the ages has been used by religious functionaries to consult supernatural beings for information or revelation about human beings or any aspect of human life. For instance, indigenous medical practitioners are often consulted by people for various reasons, such as ill health, misfortunes, death (especially accidents), all kinds of losses, etc. Motseokae, (personal interview 05/06/03), maintains that, because of the nature and task of the diviner in discovering, identifying, disclosing or unveiling the mysteries of life he or she is consulted on a wide range of issues; for example, when people plan to undertake a journey, build a new home or begin a new business, when they are planning to get married, in times of sickness and death, when it is time to be circumcised, or to determine the sex of an unborn child. It is in this procedure of divination that *ditaola* plays a crucial role in terms of revelation or providing information from the ancestors (through the healer). *Ditaola* uses bones, small horns, hooves, shells of snails, etc. According to Bishop Keogile Lebamang, a prominent traditional healer from Ramotswa, a large number of diviners in Botswana use between six and eight bones, of which four are the principal ones (personal interview 14/04/03). He maintains that the bones come from different animals such as springbok, cow, etc. He postulates that, in most instances, these bones function in pairs as ‘husbands and wives’, and only rarely independently. He argues convincingly that the art of throwing *ditaola* has far-reaching implications in terms of revelation or providing information about the circumstances or situation of the clients or patients. He also maintains that, in the process of divination, the positions in which *ditaola* lie after the art of throwing has a lot to say about illness, misfortune, death, et cetera. It is in the light of throwing *ditaola* and the positions of the bones that the diviner advises his clients on what cause of action to follow, and whether he refers them to herbalists, hospitals or prescribes an appropriate treatment. Again, it must also be said that the diagnosis and treatment of disease depends on the knowledge and experience of the diviner in this field. The experience of a diviner is very important, since it helps in other cases of divination. For instance, Keogile Lebamang maintains that, sometimes, a diviner may begin by questioning the client carefully in an attempt to establish the main facts of the case. The

diviner will ask specific questions as well as more general ones. Through this process the diviner is able to identify all the important circumstances of the case. By questioning the client closely, he also learns the symptoms of the disease. This is how, in short, *ditaola* have been used in almost all African societies through the ages. However, as I said earlier on, this practice was challenged and discouraged by the missionaries during the colonial and mission period in Africa.

2.2 The negative attitudes of the missionaries towards African culture and African religious practices

The introduction of Christianity to Africa, especially in the sub-Saharan region, influenced both African culture and African religious practices. The missionaries, in their bid to evangelise and Christianise Africa and its people, advocated the total eradication of their culture and religion (Amanze 1998:56-61; Makhubu 1988:24-25). Indeed, the missionaries viewed Africa as a 'pagan continent', a continent without religion and without cultural values. From the very start, they were negative towards African culture without making any effort to learn and understand Africa's way of life (Amanze 1998:24-25). According to Bosch (1991:267-300), an eminent theologian and missiologist, the early missionaries were simply not prepared to learn other people's cultures; they enforced their own culture on the people they subjugated. Furthermore, he (Bosch) reiterates that the early missionaries were products of the Enlightenment which, in America, was called the Great Awakening. Enlightenment was a period in human history when the emphasis was laid on the use of reason as they way of salvation (Bosch 1991:269-273). This led to the rationalisation of theology and, as a result, theology was perceived as a science, 'the science of God', 'the greatest of sciences', 'the science of the science', superior, precisely as a science, to any other science (Bosch 1991:270).

This state of affairs certainly satisfied the rationalists who wanted to turn the Bible into the first book of science. Since then, Christian theology has increasingly associated itself with rationality. In this sense, rational theology was associated with mission, hence the perception that the task of the church was to propagate Christianity through science or knowledge (Bosch 1991:271).

In 1699, the Society for the propagation of Christian knowledge was established for the building of libraries and schools as a means of distributing Christian literature. The perception was that the Kingdom of God would, through education and knowledge, through the spread of the Christian message, aligned itself with Western culture and civilisation (Bosch 1991:271). This, in effect, marked the beginning of the West's belief in its religious and cultural superiority. Westerners began to justify this belief by claiming that 'the Ancient Greeks called other nations barbarians'. The Romans and members of the great 'civilisation' likewise looked down upon others (Bosch 1991:291). Looked at historically, the claim was made that human history is characterised by powerful nations dominating the weak and the powerless. Western religion was therefore perceived as being predestined to be spread around the globe and Western culture as being predestined to be

victorious over all cultures. Bosch (1991:292) asserts that, even in the early stages of modern missions, the 'Christian West' claimed the right to impose its views on others. Julius Richter, the German historian of missions, writing in 1927, viewed "Protestant missions as an integral part of the cultural expansion of Euro-American people" (quoted in Bosch 1991:292). The statement that the early missionaries were products of the Enlightenment in Europe, called the Great Awakening in America now needs to be explained.

According to Wilson Walker (1986:454-476), an eminent theologian and church historiographer, the Enlightenment or the Great Awakening was a spiritual revival in the life of the Christian Church that introduced pietism and an eagerness to engage in mission. This spiritual renewal and pietism led to the establishment of countless mission societies whose members were eager to go to the ends of the world to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to the nations (Walker 1986:454-476). This mission changed the religious landscape of the Euro-American world and Third World countries forever. It was during the Enlightenment era that every part of the Third World was perceived as a mission field. Some of these pietistic and zealous missionaries came to Africa with the Enlightenment philosophy firmly planted in their minds (Bosch 1991:292-308). It must be borne in mind that, according to Enlightenment philosophy, and as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the missionaries felt they had a duty to impose their own Western culture on the 'inferior' nations whom they were trying to Christianise. Bosch (1991:292) expresses it explicitly when he asserts that "Like all other Westerners, in the Third World, missionaries were to be conscious propagandists of this culture." It is in this context that one can say that the early missionaries were products of the Enlightenment. In other words the early missionaries were an embodiment of Enlightenment ideals.

It is against the background of the Enlightenment that we should understand the missionaries' negative attitudes towards African culture and African religious practices. The missionaries attacked everything that symbolised African culture which, in their view, was pagan and heathen (Daneel 1991:69-83). For these missionaries, Africans had to confess their sins in order to be born again and truly saved. They perceived salvation as possible for Africans only if they renounced being African, that is, only if Africans renounced their beliefs and practices and showed a willingness to live according to the 'Christian principle' (Daneel 1991:68-101; Makhubu 1988:21-35). According to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which emphasised rational theology and Western cultural supremacy, the African's way of life required wholesale transformation (Bosch 1991:291-296). This is adequately expressed in Amanze's book, entitled *African Christianity in Botswana* (1998), in which it is reported that Robert Moffat's attitude towards the culture of the Batswana was one of extreme prejudice. It is claimed that Moffat clung to the view that "Batswana had no religious ideas at all, or at least none worth bothering about." He also felt that all their customs were wicked; the only proper response was denunciation (Amanze 1998:53). In all cases, the missionaries insisted on total abandonment of 'pagan customs'; their converts had to be totally new persons, persons who had completely rejected their past (Amanze 1998:61-53).

2.3 African perspectives towards African culture and African religious practices

In spite of the activity of the Euro-American missionaries, the majority of Africans remained positive towards their own culture and religious practices (Makhubu 1988:31-38). Indeed, they were prepared to do anything to protect their own culture. This was clearly reflected in their resistance to Western cultural domination, a resistance that led to the emergence and expansion of the African Initiated Churches. It is well-known in Christian circles that one of the fundamental reasons for the emergence of African Initiated Churches was Africa's need for cultural freedom and expression. In short, African people wanted to express themselves in their own traditional ways when they were engaged in worship. Daneel (1991:47-50) argues convincingly that Africans wanted to belong to a church which would assimilate the traditional and natural elements of African culture. And there was no doubt that the AICs were their refuge. Mofokeng (1990:47), for instance, explains this by calling the AICs the "principal religious custodians of African culture and traditional religion". This statement clearly shows that Africans were positive and protective of their culture and religion. In the context of Botswana, Amanze (1998:xv) argues that Setswana and traditional religion showed resilience, in the face of strong Christian opposition because of the crucial role it played in maintaining the Setswana social system.

Again, the Batswana understand their tradition and religious values as sacrosanct and it is therefore anathema, as far as the Batswana are concerned, to abandon their values completely (Amanze 1998:xv). This is why, through the ages, the Batswana have maintained that the two religions, Christianity and traditional religion, should co-exist and be practised alongside each other (Amanze 1998:xv). And this is exactly what is happening in Botswana and other African countries, people in the mission churches have not completely forgotten their traditional roots (Bourdillion 1997:356; Dwane 1989:25-36). When they have serious problems they consult traditional healers or the leaders of the AICs. It is in this context that Bourdillion (1997:356) claimed that "Christians continue to resort to traditional healers, often against the official rules of their churches, and often in contradiction to their stated beliefs". In most instances, Christians do not want to be seen consulting such people. This reflects the fact that Africans have not abandoned their cultural roots. Siggibo Dwane in his book entitled *Issues in the South African theological debate* (1989), tells a wonderful story that illustrates and explains this point. A church elder accompanied the minister on his pastoral visit to his congregants. As they went from house to house, the elder began to show signs of impatience with Christian people's adherence to old traditional beliefs and practices. Matters came to a head when he could no longer contain his disappointment. The minister frankly and honestly inquired from their host (member) as to why she continued observing the traditional festivals. At this point, the elder burst into a tirade, the substance of which was that people were being obstinate and resisting the gospel by indulging in heathen practices. At the end of the 'discussion' the host burst out laughing and said, "Don't worry Mfundisi (minister) about the elder's strictures; he knows all about this, and he attends our festivals" (Dwane 1989:30).

3 NATURAL PLACES AS SACRED PLACES

3.1 The significance of natural places in the ministry of the Zionist churches in Botswana

As I indicated earlier on in this article, there are beliefs, sentiments, myths, legends, etc attached to various religious objects and places. This is also the case with the Batswana. According to certain traditional healers and Zionists (personal interview 06/07/03), in Gabane village, near Gaborone, there is a mountain named after the village: Gabane Mountain. Some villagers call it *Diremogolo*; it is surrounded by the village. The villagers believe that the mountain is a dwelling place for God, gods and ancestors, and as a result, the place is perceived as sacred. For the villagers, the mountain *Diremogolo* symbolises the meeting point between the visible and invisible worlds, the heavens and earth. Anything which interferes with natural places is quickly resented, and even produces a negative and hostile reaction from the people concerned. Anything that takes place at *Diremogolo* has a special meaning to the villagers and general public. In fact, Tswana traditional and religious services used to be held at *Diremogolo*. It is believed to be a 'miracle mountain'. The people of Ramotswa, likewise, have a similar belief about the hill *Lenaong la Matsieng*.ⁱⁱⁱ There are other natural places or sites such as caves, forests, waterfalls, trees, springs, rivers, et cetera, which have myths attached to them, and which were and are used for traditional and religious purposes. The introduction of Christianity to the African continent had an enormous impact on the African way of life. The missionaries' tireless endeavours to discourage African traditional religious practices led to a decline in the use of certain geographical features for religious purposes. The traditional healers were the only religious functionaries who were not discouraged (by the missionaries) from continuing with their work of healing the sick at these natural sites.

But matters changed completely once the Zionist churches appeared on the scene. These churches restarted the practice of healing at certain geographical sites. In fact, today, the situation has become one of a contest for these sites between traditional practitioners on the one hand and some of the Zionist leaders on the other.

3.2 The theology employed by the Zionists for the use of natural topographical sites for healing purposes

While traditional healers have used these sites for healing from time immemorial, the Zionists have only recently begun to use them for the same purpose. For instance, churches such as the Temothuo Apostolic Church, the Bagethwa Apostolic Church, the Emmanuel Church in Zion, the Barongwa ba Morena Christian Church and the Bethsaida Apostolic Church are now practising healing at these sites. This is a baffling phenomenon, one which has surprised some leaders and prophets from other Spirit type churches. Indeed, this development has astonished even traditional healers and the general public but, at the same time has generated a great deal of interest, because the Zionists are becoming more and more African in their practices.

The question may be asked: what is wrong with using these places in this way if the aim is to heal people? From the theological standpoint of Genesis 1:26-31 and Psalm 24:1, the appropriation and adoption of natural sites for the art of healing by the Zionists is perfectly justifiable. For instance, Genesis 1:26-31 states clearly that human beings, who are made in the image of God, have been given dominion over the earth. This implies that people can use whatever they want for their own good, and the good of their fellow human beings. Again, Psalm 24:1 says: 'The world and all that is in it belongs to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it is His'. From this verse it is evident that natural places such as mountains, hills, caves, forests, waterfalls, trees, rivers, lakes, et cetera, belong to God; even the people who use these places belong to Him. The implication here is that human beings, who are made in God's image, are in His service when they use these natural places for the good of His people, His creation. A typical example is the miraculous story of the healing of Namaan, (the commander of Syrian soldiers) who suffered from leprosy. He was instructed to dip himself seven times in the river Jordan by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-14). The pool of Bethesda was used for the same purposes. This clearly indicates that certain natural sites were used as places of healing in biblical times. It is in the context of this broad and profound theological understanding that the use of certain natural features by some of the Zionists is not baffling at all but is, in fact, entirely justifiable and acceptable.

Again, it is a well-known fact in ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical circles that the Zionist churches are hybrids of Christianity and African traditional religion; it is therefore not surprising that these churches practise some of the things that are also practised in African traditional religion (Steyn 1996:129). Again, owing to the fact that these are the churches in which Africans can assimilate the more traditional and natural elements of African religion, the use of such sites for healing purposes is totally understandable (Daneel 1991:47-50). Daneel (1991:31) states explicitly that these churches are of African origin, founded by Africans, and, as a result, are adapted to the needs, life-view and lifestyle of black people. This is why Mofokeng (1990:47) calls the Zionist churches the "principal religious custodians of the African culture and traditional religion". In these terms, too, it is quite clear that the use of natural features by some of the Zionists is perfectly appropriate. The reasons advanced here for the use of natural places in healing are exactly those advanced regarding the use of *ditaola*. And the churches which use *ditaola* for healing are those which, in most instances, use the topographical features mentioned as sites for healing. This convincingly demonstrates that the Zionists have adapted old Tswana traditional healing practices for their own good, and the good of humanity, on the basis that whatever God has created is available for the purposes of helping and healing people. This is the context in which the appropriation of *ditaola* and natural sites for healing must always be understood: the Zionist churches' approach to healing is both more holistic and more dynamic. However, their approach to healing has caused tension between them and traditional healers.

3.3 Natural sites: A contest for sites of healing between Zionists and traditional healers

According to certain traditional healers who live and practise in Gabane (personal interview 06/07/03), these sites have been used by traditional healers since time immemorial but, today, things have changed completely. The Zionists too now use these places for healing and, as a result, there is tension and contest between them and traditional healers. For instance, the Zionist churches also use the Gabane Mountain or Mount Diremogolo for healing purposes. The Zionists go to the mountain very often, in great numbers, to perform their healing rituals and religious practices such as sacrifices, offerings, prayers etc. The congregants of these churches climb the mountain at different angles or points, at different times for different occasions and sometimes one group finds another group already engaged in healing on the mountain. It must be borne in mind that the Zionists are interested in Mount Diremogolo because of the myth attached to it, that it is a dwelling place of God, gods, and ancestors and, as a result is sacred and miraculous. As a result, the Temothuo Apostolic Church, the Bagethwa Apostolic Church, and the Emmanuel Christian Church in Zion all use this mountain as their permanent sanctuary for healing. Indeed, the Temothuo Apostolic Church has erected its church building at the foot of the mountain so that its members can be closer to the mountain and use it as they want for sacred purposes. This state of affairs shows clearly that the Zionists now dominate the Miracle Mountain, which is a major concern for the traditional healers who have used it for healing purposes through the ages, and who therefore perceive themselves as having a divine right, so to speak, to use the mountain for their own healing practices. They maintain that the Zionists want to monopolise the Miracle Mountain. This concern was recently raised at the meeting of the Botswana Association of Traditional Healers (2001), where it was resolved that the traditional healers would continue to use Mount Diremogolo for their healing purpose and would, in fact, make a point of expanding their membership. The Association's resolution was, in essence, a recruitment of new and more traditional practitioners with a specific view to using the mountain for healing. The fact that there is a contest between the two groups for the use of the mountain may be seen, for instance, in the fact that, after March 2001, the Zionists complained that Mount Diremogolo is a holy place that was being defiled by traditional healers. The Zionists maintained that the traditional practitioners had a tendency to leave the (used) razors for incisions, head-bands, amulets, feathers, half-full and empty bottles of medicinal concoctions, medicinal gourds, porcupine skins, etc strewn all over the mountain. They maintained that this was unhealthy and dangerous. Another complaint was that some of the clients (of traditional practitioners) left their old clothes all over the place after being healed. This usually happens with people who have experienced misfortunes in their lives, such as those who have just been released from prison, widows, widowers, job-seekers. The belief here is that such people need to go through ritual purification and cleansing from every 'scrap' of ill fortune. This is why they leave their old clothes behind them, in the place where the rituals were carried out. But all these complaints on the part of the Zionists about the defilement of the holy place are perceived, by the traditional healers, as an excuse by the churches to monopolise the miracle mountain. From March to June 2002, this tension increased to the point that the two groups began to threaten each other, and that intervention was needed. The government, through the Ministry of Home Affairs (which is responsible for the registration of churches and religious

organisations) and the Ministry of Land and Local government intervened by urging the two groups to solve their problem amicably. The two government departments stated clearly that if the groups failed to deal with the matter amicably they would be forced to fence the place, thereby making it inaccessible to everybody. This government intervention succeeded in making the two groups more tolerant of each other.

The same kind of conflict is seen between the Zionists and traditional healers of Ramotswa village over the hill commonly known as *Lenaong la Matsieng*; this is also a place of miracles, so to speak, with a long history and a number of myths attached to it. It is used by churches such as the Bethsaida Apostolic Church, the St Mark Christian Church in Zion and St Phillip's Church for healing purposes. The traditional healers, likewise, use it for the same reason. The Zionists, again, accuse the traditional healers of defiling of the sacred place, and the traditional healers perceive this accusation as an excuse by the Zionists to monopolise the hill. This 'competition' for the hill reflects how important it is for the healing practices of both groups. Competition has not yet started between these two groups about the use of other places such as waterfalls, caves, forests, rivers, lakes, etc for healing purposes. The reason for this is that the majority of traditional healers do not use these natural sites as they do Diremogolo and *Lenaong la Matsieng*. It seems as if the Zionists use waterfalls, caves, forests, rivers, springs, lakes without encountering traditional healers as often as they do at Diremogolo and *Lenaong la Matsieng*. The Zionists therefore dominate, or feel a sense of ownership for, such natural sites. This adoption of traditional healing and the use of natural places are regarded as remarkable and impressive by other Zionists, by mission churches, and the general public in Botswana. It is a completely new way of doing things in the history of the Zionist churches in the whole of Southern Africa and, as such, is not only puzzling but also attractive to many people from other churches and those from non-Christian environments. Today, some Zionists are debating the wisdom of following this new trend of appropriating the traditional healing for their own good, and not all Zionist churches are adopting this practice. However, it seems as if other Spirit type churches, which are not necessarily Zionists, are going to follow suit. As long as this is done for the good of others, it is perfectly justifiable. What matters most is that the churches' approach to healing is holistic and dynamic.

4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO HEALING BY THE ZIONIST CHURCHES

Healing is a distinctive feature of the Zionist Churches. Their success lies in the holistic approach they adopt to healing. In most instances, healing begins with a diagnosis of the patient's ailment, which is done by divination using the Bible. This process involves detecting the course of the disease, problems, troubles, misfortune, et cetera (Amanze 1998:178). The healer, who, in most instances, is the prophet, begins the divination by reading a passage from Scripture. He then begins to prophesy to find out from God the cause of his patient's disease, troubles or misfortunes (Amanze 1998:178; Makhubu 1988:77). In cases where *ditaola* are juxtaposed with the procedure of divination, as in the Temothuo Apostolic Church, the Bagethwa Apostolic

Church and the Emmanuel Christian Church in Zion, the prophet (who in most instances is also a herbalist, diviner or traditional healer) receives a revelation from God through the ancestors about the cause of his patient's problems. These churches believe that, whenever the use of *ditaola* is involved, the ancestors play a significant role in the healing process. Once the nature of the disease is revealed by the prophet-healer to the client, its treatment is also prescribed; this treatment always depends on the nature of the disease and God's revelation through the ancestors. The art of throwing *ditaola* and the position in which they lie play a significant role in revealing the nature of the problem. Sometimes, the response of the patient during the divination also plays a crucial role. The following methods are fairly common in those Zionist Churches which practise healing at certain natural topographical sites.

Firstly, praying for the sick during the service is a common method of healing that is practiced by almost all the Zionist churches (Amanze 1998:179, Anderson 1993:71-72). The difference, however, is that most of the prayers for healing are spoken on the mountain itself or at other natural sites. In the Zionist churches, prayer services are only conducted at certain times during the day. For instance, prayers for healing cannot be said from 12 o'clock (noon) until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It is believed that this is an awkward time for the ancestors to listen to people's prayers, because this is when they are normally resting and therefore cannot listen to the prayers being offered to them. In fact, during this time of the day, nothing must be done in relation to healing. This belief emanates from the traditional African way of life, where traditional healers do not practise their profession during this period of the day. Indeed, they do not even go to the veld or bush to dig up their herbs during this part of the day. It is believed that doing so could seriously hamper the efficacy of the healing medicine and even annoy the ancestors. Other African traditional taboos include the fact that burials or funerals are not, and cannot, be conducted during this time, water cannot be fetched from rivers, dams or pools, *lobola* (price paid by the bridegroom for the bride in African culture) cannot be negotiated and so on. It is therefore not surprising that the Zionist churches do not practise these hours of the day. This 'clinging' to the old way of doing things, including the recognition of certain taboos, in itself accounts for the uniqueness of these churches. This uniqueness is not surprising when one remembers that the Zionist churches are hybrids of African traditional religion and Christianity (Steyn 1006:129).

The implication of this analysis is that healing can be practised at any time of the day except for the above-mentioned period of time, and indeed members of the Temothuo Apostolic Church normally go to Mount Diremogolo early in the mornings on Sundays, especially in summer, for healing services. Their church building is at the foot of this Miracle Mountain, as I said earlier on and therefore it is easier for them to climb the mountain in the early hours of Sunday mornings (because they normally hold a Saturday evening church service which lasts until the following day). On the mountain, healing takes place while the flowers move in the morning breeze and the birds commence their morning song. In this atmosphere, every individual who participates in the healing service feels that he or she is part of nature. The healing service begins with everyone singing a hymn softly while facing sunrise. The prophet-healer then lights his candle and asks the congregation to do likewise. This is

followed by a moment of silence, after which the prophet leads the congregation in prayer after closing his eyes to link with God, the Creator of the universe (Psalm 24:1).

After this, he asks the congregation to pray for those who are sick before the laying on of hands commences. In most instances these prayers are said in a soft and orderly way. Strangely enough, at such services people are not emotionally charged as they often are at other services. In other words, this kind of service is characterised by seriousness and a consciousness of the presence of God on the Miracle Mountain, God who can do His miracles of healing through the ancestors. All this is based on a strong belief that God and the ancestors listen attentively to people's prayers and requests and that, therefore there is no need to shout at them when praying. The laying on of hands is done very gently but firmly, rubbing the painful parts of the body in such a way that the patient feels relief. The healing techniques are in most instances performed to the satisfaction of the sick. They are then given the 'blessed' or 'holy' water to drink, which is tap water mixed with *sehwashd*^{iv} and prayed over, by the bishop or prophet-healer. The prophet-healer will then announce that those who were treated but who feel that they still need more treatment or special attention, should visit him at the church during the week. The service will conclude with the singing of the favourite chorus 'Be still and know that I am God' which assures those present that God and the ancestors on the Miracle Mountain have heard their prayers and requests for healing. The service ends with a benediction

The other healing services of the same church, which are held from 3 o'clock in the afternoon to 12 o'clock midnight and afterwards, are boisterous. These services are characterised by loud prayers, rhythmic singing, dancing, shouting, clapping of hands and drumming. The prophet-healer is also, in most instances, noisy because he is believed to be in an altered state of consciousness in which he is linked with God, the Holy Spirit, and the ancestors. The laying on of hands, which is an integral part of this healing ritual, is not at all a gentle activity, since physical force is often applied when necessary in the form of hard slapping (by the prophet) to dislodge the evil spirit which possesses the patient. This hard slapping is sometimes performed on different parts of the body: for example, shoulders, back, arms or forehead, in order to dislodge the evil spirit. The same method can be used to conduct the Holy Spirit into the person (Williams 1982:128-129; Oosthuizen 1989:88). Healing takes place in this boisterous emotional atmosphere. Sometimes after healing, depending on the nature of the illness, misfortune, trouble or success, the client is advised to perform a specific ritual to propitiate the ancestors, to thank them for good fortune, or to combat the sorcery and witchcraft aimed at him or her. Again, depending on the divination, prophecy or diagnosis and treatment, the person is advised to go to the graveyard to pray to his or her ancestors in order to venerate and propitiate them. In cases which involve the ritual sacrifice of animals, the following are normally recommended: a goat, sheep, cow or chicken for the healing and to propitiate the ancestors. After healing, the sick are given appropriate advice and everyone is given the 'blessed' or 'holy' water to drink, even those who are not sick. The belief is that water is a primary symbol and an important element of healing. But I would like to make clear that, although churches such as the Bagethwa Apostolic

Church, the Emmanuel Christian Church and the Bethsaida Apostolic Church operate in a similar fashion, there are certain differences between them.

For instance, the Bagethwa Apostolic Church, which also uses Mount Diremogolo for healing purposes, prefers to perform healing rituals in the morning and at night. Again, the morning breeze, the flowers and the sounds of birds welcoming a new day have a tremendous impact on the patients, causing them to feel that they are part of nature. The other healing services are conducted at Mount Diremogolo from 12 o'clock midnight on Saturday until Sunday morning at 10 o'clock. The difference between the Bagethwa Apostolic Church and the Temothuo Apostolic Church is that they do not have any form of a healing service from 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The former have their public healing services on Sunday morning from 10 o'clock to quarter to twelve, while the latter holds it on the same day from 3 o'clock onwards. This supports my point that the methods of healing vary from church to church although they share certain common features (West 1975:92). The midnight healing service is held when Mount Diremogolo is bathed in pale moon light, and in the still of the night, when everything is quiet and peaceful, and when the heavens are listening, so to speak. The healing rituals themselves are performed by bishops, prophets and women of prayer.

The tranquility of the mountain always adds meaning and significance to the healing rituals. This healing service is the same, in many respects, as that conducted by the Temothuo Apostolic Church for healing purposes on Sunday mornings. As I have already indicated, it is the kind of service during which the principal healer, or any healer, does *not* go into an altered state of consciousness: everyone is conscious right through the service to the end. The laying on of hands is a gentle but firm activity while the singing is soft but powerful and meaningful. The service is very orderly and the healing rituals are performed, in most instances, to the satisfaction of the sick. However, on occasion these churches also have boisterous healing services.

All these churches operate in a similar fashion when it comes to healing the sick. The churches that use the hill called *Lenaong la Matsieng* at Ramotswa Village do almost exactly the same thing as the churches in Gabane. The most noticeable difference between these churches is in their treatment of sicknesses such as possession, barrenness, sore feet and mouth sores. For instance, the Bagethwa Apostolic Church treats any case of possession by an evil force in caves, while the Emmanuel Christian Church and the Bethsaida Apostolic Church prefer to perform the ritual of exorcism in forests. The Temothuo Apostolic Church usually treats cases of demonic possession on the mountain, like all other diseases but there are a few cases of possession or sickness that are treated in the caves. For this church, it seems that the extent to which one is possessed determines the place where one is treated. All the churches that practise exorcism believe that this kind of healing has to take place away from the patient's place of residence. The belief is that, when exorcism is done a distance away from where the victim lives, the evil spirits will wander in the caves, forests, mountain, et cetera, and will not go back to torment the person again. Other sicknesses such as barrenness, sore feet and mouth sores, as indicated above, are also treated at places such as waterfalls, springs, lakes, rivers and forests. In other words, healing in these

churches is holistic and dynamic, and it is this that has made these churches so successful in their healing ministries.

5 CONCLUSION

It seems that the Zionist churches in Botswana are content to use *ditaola* and natural places for healing and to acknowledge these phenomena as Christian. One cannot ignore the fact that the Batswana from Botswana became Christians owing the efforts of the missionaries, people who dismally failed to realise that the Batswana already had some form of belief in divinity. The Batswana's use of the scriptural texts quoted in this article to justify their traditional practices shows that they took their conversion to Christianity very seriously, but could not live outside their belief system of a holistic religion. As a result, not only do the Christian churches (particularly the Zionists) use *diatola* and natural sites for healing, but this very use has created tension between the Christian religion and African traditional religion over the use of these resources (namely *ditaola* and the sacred places). As far as Christianity is concerned, the mainline churches have found themselves cornered owing to the decline in their membership. This has finally made the mission churches in Botswana 'think again' in an attempt to keep their members and indeed, survive as churches. The only way they (the mission churches) can do this, is to copy what the Zionist churches are doing. In short, it is obvious that people believe very strongly that ancestors play a big role in both their everyday life and their Christian faith.

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Personal interviews

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Name: Mrs Kegomoditswe Seema
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ENDNOTES

- 1 This is S S Matsepe's research for the Masters Degree, which he has already obtained. A chapter from this research has been converted into an article for the purposes of publication, in collaboration with the supervisor Dr M J S Madise.
- 2 *Ditaola* are devices used for divination, which is a procedure followed in order to receive revelation or information from the Supernatural, God, gods, ancestors, etc.
- 3 *Lenaong la Matsieng* is a hill at Ramotswa village where a footprint believed to be that of Matsieng, a shepherd of thousands, was found. Because of this myth, this place is believed to be sacred.
- 4 Sewasho refers to ash mixed with water, a mixture which is used for cleansing, specifically for the purpose of misfortunes.