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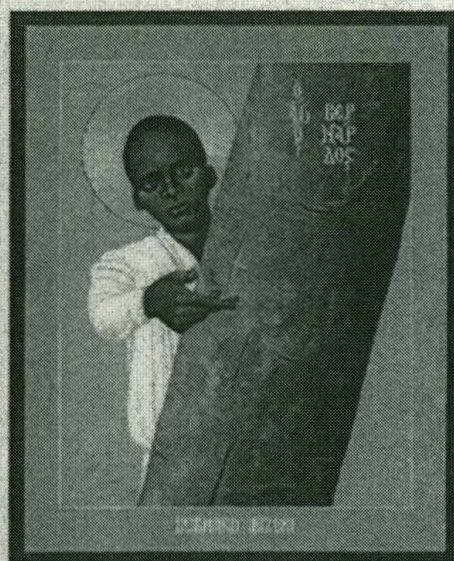
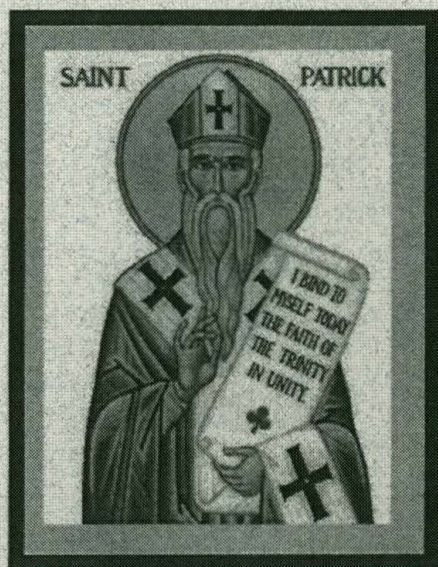
### **St. Patrick and Bernard Mizeki: Missionary Saints and the Creation of Christian Communities**

Dana L. Robert

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ST. PATRICK AND BERNARD MIZEKI:  
MISSIONARY SAINTS AND THE CREATION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

by

Dana L. Robert

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## **St. Patrick and Bernard Mizeki: Missionary Saints and the Creation of Christian Communities**

The formation of communal Christian identity is a complex subject that has fascinated scholars across different disciplines, including anthropology, history, and sociology, for the past quarter century. Compared to individual conversions, it is very difficult to describe the process through which an entire society comes to identify itself as Christian.<sup>1</sup> The Christianization of a people involves a multitude of social, cultural, and religious factors that converge during particular moments in history, and then develop momentum over a period of time. Christian belief and practices must be firmly rooted in the local culture. At the same time, the Christianizing community grafts itself into a larger movement that stretches across both time and space.<sup>2</sup>

For mission historians, one of the most interesting problems in a people's

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I am following anthropologist Robert Hefner's definition of conversion to a world religion as "an adjustment in self-identification through the at least nominal acceptance of religious actions or beliefs deemed more fitting, useful, or true." In other words, conversion implies accepting a new "reference point for one's identity." Robert Hefner, ed., *Conversion to Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), 17. In addition to Hefner's study, important recent studies by anthropologists of the development of Christian identity include Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991 & 1997); Andrew Orta, *Catechizing Culture: Missionaries, Aymara, and the 'New Evangelization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Historical studies include Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996); James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also the work of sociologist Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Christianization involves "the incorporation of indigenous communities into a new or larger macrocosm." Hefner, *Conversion*, 28.

identification with Christianity is the role of the missionary. Past generations of historians crafted “big man” theories of mission history.<sup>3</sup> Although there are theological benefits to the “big man” approach, to fixate on the missionary over-simplifies a complex historical process; it fails to do justice to the community whose worldview evolves in response to both internal needs and external influences. Yet to ignore, downplay, or caricature the foreign missionary as a tool of imperialists is not the answer. In notable instances, particular cross-cultural messengers embodied the dialogue that occurs between the universal intent of the Christian faith, and a local community.<sup>4</sup> As mission theologian Hendrik Kraemer said in the 1930s, the missionary him or herself can be the “point of contact” between people’s traditional ways and the belief and practices called “Christianity.” And as anthropologists have increasingly noted, “translocal and putatively foreign agents” are themselves important in the production of locality.<sup>5</sup>

In this lecture I focus on how a people’s Christian self-definition emerged in tandem with the stories of two particular missionaries. Both Catholic Patrick, the “Apostle of the Irish,” and Anglican Bernard Mizeki, the “Apostle of the MaShona,” illustrate the paradox of missionary outsider becoming the consummate insider. Communal mythification of these missionaries exemplified the Christianization process itself. Simultaneously, the process of Christianization shaped people’s commitment to

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, such classics as James Thayer Addison, *The Medieval Missionary. A Study of the Conversion of Northern Europe A.D. 500-1300* (New York: IMC, 1936); Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London : IMC, 1938), 140.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Orta, *Catechizing Culture*, 11.

their missionary saints. The two case studies are not parallel in the sense that the available sources for the study of the Mizeki cult in the twentieth century are richer than for fourth and fifth century Ireland. This lecture is weighted more heavily toward the less familiar and still unfolding story of Bernard Mizeki. For historians of Christianization, however, the dissimilarity in the type of evidence makes the comparison even more compelling: the details of the modern process allow greater insight into what might have happened in the distant past, and the trajectory of the past stimulates the historical imagination as to the possibilities of the present. St. Patrick and Bernard Mizeki represented the ability of particular communities both to deepen local identities, and to solidify commitment to a world religion. The meanings attached to the missionary by the receptive community are crucial to understanding the missionary founder's role in the gradual process of communal Christian identification. Through these case studies I argue that the meaning vested in the missionary over time by the Christian community is often more significant than the details of his or her life. The communal mythification process itself is what distinguishes an ordinary missionary from a "missionary saint."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The process of becoming a Roman Catholic saint is a formal one requiring several major steps over many years, including testimonies of miracles performed by the saint after his or her death. In Catholicism, therefore, formal sainthood is not even possible based on the mere "facts" of a person's earthly life. Although Anglicans do not have a formal canonization process, noteworthy individuals have been embraced as popular saints. Their feast days appear on official calendars, and an informal iconography gradually takes shape. Whether formal or informal, the concept of sainthood requires communal assent over many years.



## St. Patrick, “Apostle to the Irish”

On March 17, people of Irish descent celebrate “St. Patrick’s Day” in a show of Irish pride.<sup>7</sup> Nearly a million people stream into Dublin, Ireland, to enjoy the fireworks, concerts, parades, and street theater. St. Patrick’s Day parades first began in 1762, when Irish soldiers serving in the colonial British Army marched through the streets of New York City accompanied by Irish music. The importance of St. Patrick to the Irish diaspora was well-expressed in 1921 by Seumas MacManus, author of the sentimental favorite *Story of the Irish Race*: “What Confucius was to the Oriental, Moses to the Israelite, Mohammed to the Arab, Patrick was to the Gaelic race. And the name and power of those other great ones will not outlive the name and the power of our Apostle.”<sup>8</sup>

The irony of St. Patrick’s Day is that Patrick himself was a Briton. He was born in the northernmost Roman colony of Britannia into a Christian clergy family. The Britons practiced a mixed farming economy while the Irish were pastoralists.<sup>9</sup> After they conquered the Celtic Gauls who lived on the Continent, Roman legions crossed the English Channel in 43 A.D. and conquered the Britons. But they never conquered the less centralized and nomadic Irish. Even though the Britons and the Irish shared a “Celtic” cultural heritage, they were historical enemies who raided each other’s territories and

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<sup>7</sup> The following section on St. Patrick is taken from my forthcoming book *A Brief History of Christian Mission* [Oxford: Blackwell’s, 2007].

<sup>8</sup> Seumas MacManus, *The Story of the Irish Race* Rev. ed. (Old Greenwich, Ct: Devin-Adair Co., 1921), 124-125.

<sup>9</sup> On the differences among the British, Bretons, Irish, Scots, Welsh, Gauls and other Celtic groups as they developed through history, see John Haywood, *Atlas of the Celtic World*, foreword by Barry Cunliffe (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001).

enslaved the vanquished.<sup>10</sup> Young Patrick was such a slave—captured by Irish raiders in the early 400s from the relatively prosperous former Roman British colony. Slaves represented human capital for Romans, for Persians, and for the various “barbarians” of Europe who preyed upon both empires. After the last Roman troops withdrew from Britannia in 410, their unprotected former territories were like ripe fruit waiting to be plucked.

According to his *Confessio*, Patrick escaped from his Irish master after six years of harsh servitude as a shepherd. Later in life, as a priest, he felt called by God to return to Ireland to share the Christian faith with those who had enslaved him. Patrick’s calling was strongly motivated by his belief in an imminent day of judgment. He believed he was chosen by God to be his “ambassador”—not because he was educated or sophisticated, but because Jesus had prophesied that the Gospel would be preached throughout the world before it ended. To Patrick, the wilds of Ireland represented the biblical prophecy that the Gospel would be preached beyond the boundaries of human “civilization.”<sup>11</sup> Citing passages from Isaiah, Patrick noted that “To Thee [God] the gentiles shall come from the ends of the earth”; and “I have set Thee as a light among the gentiles, that Thou

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<sup>10</sup> See Proinsias MacCana, *Celtic Mythology* (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1970). According to archeological evidence, the Celts began spreading across Europe in the fifth century B.C., invading the Mediterranean region and Greek city-states, and infiltrating much of western Europe. In 390 B.C., they sacked Rome. But by the time of Patrick, most groups of Celts had been overrun by the Romans pushing up from the Mediterranean area, and by the Germanic tribes pressing from Central Europe. “Celtic culture” survived predominantly on the British Isles and Ireland and was reaffirmed (some say re-invented) by romantics and nationalists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>11</sup> Patrick, *The Confession of St. Patrick*, trans. Ludwig Bieler, 5.  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/patrick/confession.html>.

mayest be for salvation unto the utmost part of the earth.”<sup>12</sup>

According to historian Richard Fletcher, Patrick “was the first person in Christian history to take the scriptural injunctions literally; to grasp that teaching all nations meant teaching even barbarians who lived beyond the frontiers of the Roman empire.”<sup>13</sup> Patrick wrote that he sought “to baptize and exhort a people in need and want” in obedience to Jesus’ command,

Going therefore now, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world. And again He says: go ye therefore into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned. And again: This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall come the end. <sup>14</sup>

As the world of Roman Britain crumbled around him, Patrick felt himself burdened with Jesus’ final command to go into “all the world,” in anticipation of the end of civilization as he knew it.

Patrick is the historical archetype of the cross-cultural missionary-- a man chosen by God to spread the knowledge of God to people beyond the frontiers of his own civilization. Patrick was not supported or funded by imperial power. Patrick was vulnerable, and his life repeatedly endangered. He was an exile, a stranger, and a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1998), 86.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick, *Confession*, 6.

sojourner who lived on the margins of both Irish and British societies. But having suffered as a slave, he had grown capable of the physical, psychological, and emotional hardships required to leave the people of his youth, cross political and cultural boundaries, and return voluntarily to the land of his captivity with no guarantee that he would survive to tell about it.

Patrick's adoption of Irish identity shone clearest in his letter to Coroticus, a British chieftain who had attacked and enslaved a group of new Irish converts, still clothed in their baptismal robes. Like most missionaries down through history, Patrick was concerned with the physical well-being and what are now called the "human rights" of the new Irish Christians. He began the letter declaring that he was the bishop of the Irish, who lived among them as "stranger and exile," and had sacrificed his "country and parents and my life to the point of death."<sup>15</sup> In fury, Patrick reprimanded Coroticus and his men, calling them not Britons, but wicked "fellow citizens of the demons." With all the power of his office, Patrick rendered divine judgment on Christians who murdered the innocent and enslaved their brothers and sisters in Christ: "Wherefore let every God-fearing man know that they are enemies of me and of Christ my God, for whom I am an ambassador. Parricide! fratricide! Ravening wolves that 'eat the people of the Lord as they eat bread! As is said, 'the wicked, O Lord, have destroyed thy law,' which but recently He had excellently and kindly planted in Ireland, and which had established itself by the grace of God."<sup>16</sup> To be a Christian meant following the laws of Christ, including

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick's *Letter to Coroticus*, trans. Ludwig Bieler, 1.  
<http://www.iol.ie/~santing/patrick/CoroticusFrame.htm>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

giving up the violence of murder, and of enslaving one's brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Patrick cried out in "sadness and grief" for the killed and stolen Irish Christians: "The wickedness of the wicked hath prevailed over us. . . Perhaps they do not believe that we have received one and the same baptism, or have one and the same God as Father. For them it is a disgrace that we are Irish. Have ye not, as is written, one God?"<sup>17</sup> In this powerful letter, Patrick identified himself with the Irish in his phrase "we are Irish." As the bishop of the Irish Christians, he defended them with every ounce of his spiritual power, even if it meant defying a powerful military leader of his own ethnic background. To be a Christian was to become a member of the universal Christian family. Fellow baptized believers from every tribe or nation became one's new family and should be treated as such. Racial and ethnic differences melted away in light of the common relationship in Christ. In "becoming Irish," Patrick demonstrated the paradox that affirmation of local ethnicity by the missionary was itself a key to the universalizing ethic of the Christian community.

Because of lack of historical documentation, it is unclear why so many responded readily to Patrick's message, and acceded to the rituals of baptism and confirmation. Was it because Patrick stared danger in the face, and possessed power over spirits, lower gods, and forces of evil? Did Patrick's message of one God forge a vehicle of inter-Irish unity and provide a guide for overcoming clan enmities, as opposed to the divisive nature of different local gods and spirits? Did the ethic of peace implicit in Christianity resolve inter-clan rivalries? Were young chiefs drawn to the church because he could teach them

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

valuable new kinds of knowledge, such as how to read and to write? Did the fact that Patrick was British mean that his Roman cultural or political roots attracted young Irish leaders as possible new avenues to power or prestige, even though Ireland itself was never conquered by the Romans? Had a desire for change permeated Irish society already, and Patrick's public ministry was a bridge to new cultural paths? All of these are plausible explanations of why Patrick's message was so readily received; and all of them have been advanced to explain the appeal of Christianity to clan-based Irish society.

Although the fascinating process of cultural adaptation remains shrouded in the mists of time, in the century following Patrick's death, Christianity spread throughout Ireland. Churches appeared in the areas where Patrick had traveled. Indigenous leaders baptized thousands, built churches and monasteries, developed a system of education for the training of ministers, and acted as catalysts to the formation of Christian worldviews. Hundreds of monks could live within the largest of the earthen enclosures that encircled their monasteries. By the seventh century, Christian monasteries composed the centers of settlement in a country that had no cities. Monks busied themselves with learning Latin, and copying Latin texts in beautiful Irish calligraphy. In contrast to the oral lore of the druidic scholars, a striking feature of Christianity was that it facilitated the skills of reading and writing. Writing was itself seen as a form of magical spiritual power by the pagan Irish. According to an early life of Patrick, his "clergy advanced through a land without writing, holding open texts 'like drawn white swords.'"<sup>18</sup> With literacy on their

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, 200-1000 A.D.* (Cambridge: Blackwell's, 1996 ), 204.

side, the monks of Christian Ireland provided a focal point for Christian laws and teachings that promoted and stabilized a pan-Irish unity. Just as Patrick had sternly confronted the chieftain Coroticus who enslaved the newly-baptized Irish, Christian monasticism stood as witness against inter-tribal militarism and the lawlessness of gang warfare.<sup>19</sup> Over time, as it welded the competing clans into a united vision of Irish identity, Christianity gradually displaced the oral religious system of the druids. Ironically, what remains today of ancient Irish epic poetry and pre-Christian legends exists because Christian monks wrote them down in efforts to preserve their cultural heritage—the literate monks performed some of the functions of learned druidic leaders who had preserved Celtic traditions, performed rituals, and interpreted the laws.<sup>20</sup> Although Patrick himself was a humble man who repeatedly apologized as he struggled to express himself in broken Latin, by a century later a fine Latin education was available in Ireland.

And what of Patrick himself? The uneducated former slave, self-appointed ambassador, and man who lived as an exile and was treated as trouble maker by the authorities of his day, was transformed into the patron saint of Ireland. His persistence and his spiritual power became the source of legends, as admiring biographers attributed to him miracles and power encounters against druid priests, as well as credited him with the ultimate success of Christianity over paganism, as symbolized by the snakes he

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<sup>19</sup> Competing groups of monks were themselves involved in inter-clan rivalry and competition for authority. Nevertheless, the gradual process was toward unification of Irish identity.

<sup>20</sup> MacCana, *Celtic Mythology*, 12-14.

allegedly expelled from the Emerald Isle. Various representations of Patrick show him battling snakes, or holding a shamrock to symbolize his teachings about the Trinity, or reading and writing. According to a seventh century life of Patrick, St. Patrick's "breastplate," a *lorica*, or "words of power" for protection against evil forces, purportedly turned him into a deer to escape from a druid king. Later generations believed that reciting the prayer would protect them from evil for twenty-four hours.<sup>21</sup>

In the early Middle Ages, "pilgrimage merged insensibly into mission."<sup>22</sup> The Christianization process of the Irish not only involved religious specialists, but ordinary people who undertook pilgrimages to places overflowing with the spiritual power of Patrick himself. One ancient holy site that was transformed into a destination for Christian pilgrims was the Croagh Patrick, a conical shaped mountain near Westport, County Mayo. This holy mountain still sees 25,000 pilgrims visiting on "Reek" Sunday each July. According to tradition, Patrick undertook a forty day Lenten fast there in 441. He prayed, saw visions, and was comforted by divine messengers who assured him Ireland would one day be Christian.<sup>23</sup> Roman Catholic authority over Irish Christianity was also confirmed in popular consciousness by the tradition that Patrick had learned of the consecration of Pope Leo the Great while he was on the mountain. He immediately sent word of his obeisance to the pope and was rewarded by the gift of holy relics from

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<sup>21</sup> Jacqueline Borsje, "Druids, deer and 'words of power': Coming to terms with evil in medieval Ireland," p. 12, Unpublished paper delivered at conference "Religion and Evil," Amsterdam, March 18, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 94.

<sup>23</sup> Robert C. Broderick, ed. *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1987), s.v. "Croagh Patrick."



Rome. After blessing the people, and assuring that no snakes could remain in Ireland, Patrick descended the mountain and celebrated Easter with his followers.

The legends of Croagh Patrick are significant not because they are necessarily true in an historical sense, but because they demonstrate how Irish druidism was transformed and fulfilled by Christianity in the name of Patrick. The snake is an embodiment of traditional divinities in many cultures. In these stories from lives of Patrick written several hundred years after his death, Patrick's ministry transforms the pagan holy mountain into a Christian one, drives away a symbol of pagan divinity, suffuses the mountain with holy power and miracles, and also links Irish Christianity to Roman Catholicism. The continued presence of European pilgrims at Croagh Patrick, as well as other sites such as Patrick's purgatory, Lough Derg, an island in a lake in County Donegal, affirm both Irish Christian identity and unity with the rest of Catholic Europe.<sup>24</sup>

Patrick's stature grew in tandem with the shaping of Irish national identity. Patrick the man left two poorly-written but passionate documents. Patrick the saint embodied a unified Irish people who paradoxically--and perhaps unreflectively--took their place as part of a multi-cultural and global religious family, which shared in theory, if not in practice, a universal ethic of love and justice under one God. The deeper paradox

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<sup>24</sup> The function of Christian pilgrimage in creating different types of community was analyzed by Victor and Edith Turner in their groundbreaking study *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1978). For a helpful overview of recent anthropological theories regarding pilgrimages, see John Eade, "Introduction to the Illinois Paperback," in *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, ed. John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), ix-xxvii.

of St. Patrick's Day is that in celebrating the particularity of Irish identity, it also commemorates their incorporation into a multi-cultural vision of universal community.

### **Bernard Mizeki, "Apostle to the Shona"**

In June of 1996, an estimated 20,000 people gathered in Marondera, Zimbabwe, to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of Bernard Mizeki, an Anglican catechist. Billed as the largest gathering of Anglicans on the continent, the annual Mizeki pilgrimage is also the only regular meeting of the entire Central Africa Province of the Anglican Church. Bishops, priests, and members of indigenous religious communities, Mothers' Unions, laymen from Bernard Mizeki guilds, and ordinary Christians come regularly from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Botswana, as well as occasional delegations from as far away as the United States. At the Centennial Celebration, the Archbishop of Canterbury laid a wreath at Mizeki's shrine. Mizeki's transformation from "native house boy,"<sup>25</sup> to "native teacher,"<sup>26</sup> to "missionary martyr," to "Apostle of the Mashona," and now to "saint" whose feast day is marked June 18 on the Anglican calendar,<sup>27</sup> is a metaphor for the growing self-confidence and identity of Anglican Christians in South Central Africa during the twentieth century.

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<sup>25</sup> "Long before he was called to join the white-robed army of martyrs, he had filled a place in the white-robed army of house-boys. He stands for modern Africa." Fr. Osmund Victor, quoted in Jean Farrant, *Mashonaland Martyr: Bernard Mizeki and the Pioneer Church* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1966), xxv.

<sup>26</sup> Bishop G.W.H. Knight-Bruce, *Memories of Mashonaland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1895), 88-89.

<sup>27</sup> Bishop C.W. Alderson, "Foreword," in Farrant, *Mashonaland Martyr*, ix.

Bernard Mizeki was born in 1861. His birth name was Mamiyeri Mizeka Gwambe. He was a Shangaan who grew up near the Bay of Inhambane in what became Mozambique. As a young teen curious about the world, he sailed to Cape Town. Finding employment in a butcher's house, he was known as "Barns" in the white world. Around age 20, with some fellow migrants, he began attending a night school run by a German missionary woman under the aegis of the Cowley Fathers, a young high church Anglican monastic community that sent missionaries to the Cape Colony. Under the influence of Fraulein von Blomberg, Barns struggled with his reading and writing, but he was fascinated by instruction on Scripture and the rudiments of Christianity. Said his teacher, "in everything concerning religion he was always the first and best pupil."<sup>28</sup> Taking the name Bernard, in 1886 Barns was one of the first group of seven baptized by triune immersion, by the Cowley Fathers in Cape Town. The next phase of Bernard's life consisted of forsaking secular employment, moving into a church hostel, and becoming a mission worker with the Cowley Fathers.

Mizeki's baptism coincided with the period of the "scramble for Africa." After the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, European governments divided the continent into spheres of influence. In 1888 Cecil Rhodes obtained the mineral rights over the vast territory controlled by the Ndebele King Lobengula. Chartered as the British South Africa Company, a group of adventurers hired by Rhodes invaded and conquered Matabeleland and Mashonaland, thereby opening the territory of Rhodesia to European conquest and settlement. At the same time, increased interest in world evangelization was

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Farrant, *Mashonaland Martyr*, 23.

drawing half a dozen Christian denominations to the unevangelized regions of South Central Africa. The struggle for influence in Mashonaland, and the church's uneasy relationship with the European adventurers and settlers who founded Rhodesia, is captured by the comment of missionary David Carnegie in 1889 to the London Missionary Society, "God and the gospel are fighting for the mastery, and I fear gold will win."<sup>29</sup>

As part of the race for Rhodesia, Bernard Mizeki was one of several "native catechists" who accompanied Anglican Bishop George Wyndham Hamilton Knight-Bruce on a boat from South Africa to Portuguese East Africa, and then inland to the newly-erected Episcopal see of Mashonaland in 1891.<sup>30</sup> Already in 1888, Knight-Bruce, then Bishop of Bloemfontein in South Africa, had walked through Mashonaland and negotiated with King Lobengula in hopes of someday being allowed to open missions among the Shona.<sup>31</sup> The Shona had been subjugated and treated as a slave class by the Ndebele since 1840, when Shaka's lieutenant Mzilikazi had invaded and subjected them to a scorched earth policy. Knight-Bruce opposed the Rudd concession that granted Mashonaland to Cecil Rhodes in exchange for weapons for Lobengula. Although Knight-Bruce eventually came to terms with the changing realities before he died from

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<sup>29</sup> David Carnegie, quoted in *Gold and the Gospel in Mashonaland 1888, being the journals of the Mashonaland Mission of Bishop Knight-Bruce, and the Concession Journey of Charles Dunell Rudd*, ed. Constance E. Fripp and V.W. Hiller (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), v.

<sup>30</sup> On the importance of migrant workers in the evangelization of Mozambique in the 1800s, see Patrick Harries, "Christianity in Black and White: The Establishment of Protestant Churches in Southern Mozambique," *Lusotopie* 1998:317-333.

<sup>31</sup> See Knight-Bruce's journal in *Gold and the Gospel*.

complications of malaria in 1896, he continued to lament the colonization of Mashonaland. "I have said that for me the charm of the country vanished with the coming of the white man."<sup>32</sup>

Knight-Bruce and the catechists overcame great obstacles to walk across his new 20,000 square mile diocese in 1891. The bishop negotiated with Shona chiefs to allow missions in their territories. Thus Bernard Mizeki, born in Mozambique, minimally educated in South Africa, and with little knowledge of either the Shona people or their language, was settled in the territory of Chief Mangwende. The only other catechist who could stand the isolated life and remain faithful to the missionary vision, Frank Ziqubu, settled in the territory of Chief Makoni. Mizeki's isolation was broken by visits of Father Douglas Pelly, a young missionary who divided his time between the two mission outposts.

Bernard Mizeki's ministry among the Shona lasted five years. In that time he proved himself to be the best linguist of the Anglicans in Rhodesia. He mastered Shona within a year. Ultimately he came to know eight African languages, as well as English, Dutch, Portuguese, and some French, Greek, and Latin. In his mission work he itinerated among villagers, led the daily offices of the church, kept a successful garden that included vegetables and flowers, and taught children. One of his attractions for the people was his superior musical ability, and he gave singing lessons and taught hymns. He had a charismatic personality and was liked by both white colonists and Mangwende's

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<sup>32</sup> Knight-Bruce, *Memories of Mashonaland*, 81. Knight-Bruce argues on page 83 that a mission could have been established without extensive colonization, though it would not have been "on the present scale."

people. The senior wife of Chief Mangwende became his special patron, and many royal women were attracted to the mission.<sup>33</sup> In 1895, an itinerant Anglican priest married Bernard to an unbaptized Shona woman, Mutwa, who was an adopted granddaughter of Chief Mangwende. In that year, Bernard worked in a translation team, putting prayers and Bible portions into Shona.

As Bernard grew more confident in his understanding of Shona customs, he increasingly challenged the work of *ngangas*, the traditional diviner/healers. Through prayer, he opposed their animal sacrifices for healing. He rescued twins and opposed the punishment of witches. He participated in vaccination campaigns and supported western medicine. In religious instruction, he tried to teach the people that *Mwari* was a loving God who listened to people and met their personal needs.<sup>34</sup> As Mizeki gained influence, around 1894 he received permission to found a settlement at a sacred grove on a stream-fed mountain. Bernard removed some of the sacred trees and planted a large garden and experimental wheat crop. He protected his garden from the traditional spirits by carving crosses into trees around its perimeter. These spiritual and economic challenges to the traditional spirit mediums--opposing their healing practices, desecrating a sacred grove, using crosses to fence off the movement of ancestors across the land, and drawing followers to the new ways--proved to be fatal when in 1896 the Shona rebelled against the British.

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<sup>33</sup> On Mizeki's ministry, see Farrant, *Mashonaland Martyr*, 118-142.

<sup>34</sup> *Mwari* is the name of the Shona high god, whose central oracle resides in the Matopo Hills. M.L. Daneel, *The God of the Matopo Hills—an Essay on the Mwari Cult in Rhodesia* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970).

With the founding of Rhodesia in 1893, it became apparent that the British had come to stay. Although the Shona had been brutally subjugated by the Ndebele, they nevertheless saw the British defeat of Lobengula as a deeper challenge to their way of life, especially when Rhodesia imposed such things as a hut tax, disease control, and the branding of cattle. Incorporation into the colonial economy gave the advantage to modernizers like Mizeki, who had salaries and access to western commodities. Led by traditionalist spirit mediums and a series of directives from the high god in the Matopo Hills, the Ndebele revolted against the British and the Shona soon followed.<sup>35</sup> As the uprising began, Mizeki was warned to leave his mission and take refuge in a safer location. But with a pregnant wife, and as benefactor of his small village, Mizeki wrote, “Mangwende’s people are suffering. The Bishop has put me here and told me to remain. Until the bishop returns, here I must stay. I cannot leave my people now in a time of such darkness.”<sup>36</sup> After midnight on June 18, 1896, three of Chief Mangwende’s male

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<sup>35</sup> The classic account of the first *chimurenga* is Terence O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7: A Study in African Resistance* (London: Heinemann, 1967).

<sup>36</sup> Mizeki, quoted in Farrant, *Mashonaland Martyr*, 208-209.

relatives came to the mission, stabbed Bernard with a spear, and left him for dead.<sup>37</sup> Mizeki managed to crawl to the nearby stream of water and wash his wounds. His wife Mutwa and another woman went to his hut to gather blankets and make him some gruel. As they later testified, when they walked back up the mountain, they saw a blinding white light and heard a noise like many birds' wings where Bernard lay.<sup>38</sup> When they looked again, he had disappeared and his body never found. One month later, his closest student, John Kapuya, accepted baptism as the first Shona convert of the Anglican mission.

Because Cecil Rhodes gave mission lands to the Anglican Church, Mangwende's territory remained under Anglican control after the suppression of the rebellion. In 1899, a white Anglican priest returned to the site of Mizeki's mission and built a small school for boys. Sometime in the early twentieth century, Father Ernest Simpson tentatively identified the site of the martyrdom, painted a cross there, and held an annual service on June 18. Then in 1933, Father Edwin Crane found the floor of a hut underneath collapsed

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<sup>37</sup> There are many reasons why Mizeki was killed, ranging from the incursion of colonialism to family jealousy at his influence with Mangwende and his head wife. The conversion of the chief and his first wife potentially disempowered the children of other wives because Chief Mangwende would have had to give up his multiple wives. Mizeki challenged *ngangas*, who were directing the revolt. Mizeki's economic power to access trade goods, his perceived political power through friendship with white farmers and his playing the role as interpreter, all made him a threat to some in Mangwende's community. For a helpful overview of the theme of resistance to domination in African history, see Klaas van Walraven and Jon Abbink, "Rethinking resistance in African history: An introduction," in *Rethinking Resistance: Revolt and Violence in African History*, ed. van Walraven and Abbink (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1-40.

<sup>38</sup> According to Terence Ranger, the first written account of the story of the "strange and unaccountable light" was recorded by Archdeacon Foster in 1909. Terence Ranger, "Taking Hold of the Land: Holy Places and Pilgrimages in Twentieth-Century Zimbabwe," *Past and Present* 117(1987):177.



ruins that some elderly people identified as the location of Mizeki's hut.<sup>39</sup> Over this place of martyrdom, Crane built a circular shrine, with an altar, elevated above the original mud floor. On June 21, 1938, about a thousand Africans and a hundred Europeans celebrated a high mass at the dedication of the shrine. In 1946, for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mizeki's martyrdom, six hundred persons attended, including two bishops, many clergy, and a message read from the Governor of Rhodesia. Two thousand communicants participated, including Mizeki's widow and daughter as guests of honor.

Africans outnumbered Europeans as participants, but the formal communion celebration marking the Mizeki anniversary remained under the control of white bishops and clergymen well into the mid-twentieth century. The Cowley Fathers promoted his cult wherever they did mission work. White prelates sang his praises as an exemplary convert, who in traveling the road from convert to martyr, remained faithful to his missionary calling. Although Mizeki's faithfulness to the Shona people was heralded as the reason for why he was considered a martyr, his popularity among white Anglicans remained assured because he had also been faithful to them. He had maintained deep friendships with white colonists and priests, and he remained where the bishop had placed him. In the views of historians Terence Ranger and Janet Hodgson, the Mizeki site was promoted as part of an early twentieth-century pilgrimage strategy to create "a new mystical geography" that would cement African loyalty to Anglicanism. From a white Rhodesian perspective, the non-racial shrine "could be used to foster loyalty to cross and

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<sup>39</sup> Ranger sets the discovery date at 1933, while Farrant points to 1936.

crown. Mizeki thus became the prototype Christian colonial citizen.”<sup>40</sup>

The white Archbishop of the new Province of Central Africa first visited the shrine in 1960 and acted as celebrant and preacher with the white Bishop of Mashonaland. The diocese authorized an official biography of Mizeki, which was published in 1966 as *Mashonaland Martyr* by Jean Farrant. By the time of the book’s publication, memorials to Mizeki in South Africa, Rhodesia, Botswana, and Swaziland included half a dozen stained glass windows, two reliquaries, several murals and carvings, half a dozen churches and schools bearing his name, and the inclusion of his name on the Anglican provincial calendars of South and Central Africa.

But the nationalist struggles of the 1960s and 1970s undercut the neatly-defined colonial appropriation of Mizeki. In 1961 Rhodesian Bishop Cecil Alderson reinterpreted Mizeki as a prophet, a “forerunner of the African nationalist intellectual.”<sup>41</sup> In a concession to Shona theologies of ancestral intervention, Alderson by the mid 1960s was also arguing that African belief in the intervention of ancestors was consistent with Christian beliefs in the intervention of the saints on behalf of the living. Mizeki’s path to symbolic sainthood during the 1960s was not simple, however. As civil war broke out in Rhodesia, Mizeki could no longer serve as an effective symbol of non-racialism. To Father Salathiel Madziyire, keeper of the shrine in the 1970s, the Mizeki shrine was primarily a symbol of cultural nationalism. But to many who were fighting for freedom from the white Smith regime, Mizeki remained a colonial collaborator. As the bloody

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<sup>40</sup> Janet Hodgson, “Ecclesial Communities of the Excluded,” in *African Christian Outreach: Vol. II The Mission Churches*, ed. Dana L. Robert (Pretoria: SAMS, 2003), 134.

<sup>41</sup> Ranger, “Holy Places and Pilgrimages,” 190.

Rhodesian civil war continued through the 1970s, participation in the Mizeki pilgrimage shrank precipitously.<sup>42</sup> During *chimurenga*, interpretations of Mizeki were as fractured as his followers.

### *Mizeki after Colonialism*

By the 1960s, with decolonization in full swing throughout Africa, both churches and states lurched unevenly toward indigenous control. Anglicanism was beginning the post-war growth that would roughly double its numbers from 1960 to about eighty million in the year 2000. The decolonization of the Mizeki cult occurred in tandem with the growth of Christianity in southern Africa. In the late 1960s, black Anglican migrants working in South Africa felt excluded from ordinary churches and began attending Methodist, Zionist, and parachurch gatherings that allowed them to express their cultures in prayer, song, and revivalistic worship styles. With the dedication of a largely migrant church in Paarl to Bernard Mizeki in 1973, the Bernard Mizeki Guild was established for Anglican laymen who sought a more intense, African style worship life including all night prayer vigils, healing, and sharing of dreams.

Ironically, even as Mizeki was considered a colonial collaborator by revolutionaries in Rhodesia, his reputation as a symbol of African resistance was spreading in South Africa. Composed largely of Xhosa-speaking migrant workers, Bernard Mizeki Guilds spread across South Africa.<sup>43</sup> Laymen wore purple waistcoats, a special badge, and danced with staves. Anglican migrant workers could identify with

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 190-192.

<sup>43</sup> Hodgson, "Ecclesial Communities," 135.

Bernard Mizeki as a fellow migrant who sacrificed himself for Christ. By linking lay piety to the name of Bernard Mizeki, Anglicanism was also able to slow defections to the Methodists or the Zionists. Members of Bernard Mizeki Guilds aspired to make the annual pilgrimage to the Mizeki festival.

After the end of *chimurenga* with the establishment of the country Zimbabwe in 1980, the Mizeki pilgrimage entered a period of rapid growth. The formal Eucharistic celebration on Saturday morning of the annual pilgrimage transitioned from white to black Episcopal leadership. But the deeper contextualization of the Mizeki pilgrimage occurred at the informal, lay level. In the growing popular appropriation of Bernard Mizeki, his meaning became Africanized alongside a deepening of Anglican unity. The high popularity of the pilgrimage can be seen as continuous with Shona traditions of pilgrimages to the burial places of chiefs in the mountains.<sup>44</sup> Since such gatherings also affirmed the ties of people with the land, the postcolonial “mystical geography” of the Mizeki pilgrimage celebrated black indigenous control of Zimbabwe. When the Archbishop of Canterbury laid a wreath on his shrine at the centennial pilgrimage in 1996, it was not to honor a faithful colonial retainer, but to honor as Anglican martyr “a simple catechist in Mashonaland who died for his witness for justice.”<sup>45</sup>

Descriptions of pilgrimages from the late 1990s into the early twenty-first century reveal multiple layers of African Anglican identity expressed in the celebration of Bernard Mizeki. Lay people arrive in the thousands on buses and trucks from South

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<sup>44</sup> Ranger, “Taking Hold of the Land,” 163.

<sup>45</sup> Archbishop Rowan Williams, “Sermon in Odibo, Namibia, January 30, 2000, Anglican Communion News Service 2011, 7 February 2000.

Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana, and of course Zimbabwe for the weekend nearest the martyrdom anniversary of June 18. Recalled Father Stephen Gendall, who led an annual delegation of thirty from his parish,

I can never forget the experience of coming around the final corner on the strip road and seeing our destination: the black hillside with the glow of scattered wood fires. As we drew closer we could make out people walking, dancing and singing, or huddled by their fires. Before we knew it we were in the midst of the thousands of pilgrims. The singing was loud and drums were beating; the mountainside was alive with worship to God.<sup>46</sup>

Pilgrims camp out from Thursday until Sunday of the Mizeki pilgrimage weekend. Mothers' Union members, in their distinctive blue and white uniforms, surround the shrine where they sing hymns and preach. Younger people, camping farther from the shrine, mingle with each other, singing praise choruses, dancing, and eating. People cook their food on wood fires and huddle near them on the cold winter nights. In the spirit of an old-fashioned camp meeting or an all-night *pungwe* meeting, people sing, dance, pray, and exhort throughout the night.<sup>47</sup> The Bishops and high-ranking clergy are nowhere to be seen, as they are housed in hotels and cottages. On Friday occurs the annual provincial meetings of religious communities, and on Friday evening a choir competition from various church choirs.<sup>48</sup> To Lin and Liz Parsons, American Episcopal missionaries who

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<sup>46</sup> Stephen Gendall, "A Bernard Mizeki Pilgrimage," *The Bridge* (June 2005):8.

<sup>47</sup> On night meetings as an enduring feature in Zimbabwean spirituality, see Titus L. Presler *Transfigured Night: Mission and Culture in Zimbabwe's Vigil Movement* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> The choir competition has in recent years been suspended as being too competitive and not in the spirit of Mizeki. Fr. John Kaoma, interview by author, 16 May 2005, Boston, Massachusetts.

attended the pilgrimage in the early 2000s, the most impressive aspect of the celebration is the vibrancy of the singing.<sup>49</sup>

For the clergy and bishops, the central ritual of the Mizeki weekend is the two-hour long Saturday morning communion service, with choral accompaniment. A giant procession, in full regalia, builds up in rank beginning with members of religious communities, then diocesan deacons, priests, bishops, and finally the Archbishop of Central Africa. The bishop from Mozambique, who has been participating since 1986, carries a large cross brought from there, as if to remind everyone that Mizeki was a Mozambican. Clerical authority is evident in that subdeacons and laity are left out of the procession, even though Mizeki himself was a lay catechist. With archbishop as celebrant, and bishops as concelebrants, the liturgy is conducted in all the main languages of the Province. The multiplicity of languages underscores the broadening and unifying significance of Mizeki for the Province, for in earlier years the liturgy was conducted in English and Shona. After the priests distribute communion to the thousands in attendance, the key clerics process out after the “Go in peace.” (Nunc dimittis)

After the hierarchy withdraws, the people’s celebration begins. Popular leaders like Reverend Lazarus Muyambi, founder of the Zimbabwe Spiritual Healing and Manger Centre at St. Agnes Mission in Gokwe, Zimbabwe, and members of his religious community, begin healing people. Because healing services are not typically held during Anglican services in the province, and because Fr. Muyambi performs exorcisms, his work and that of others like him remains controversial among bishops and diocesan

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<sup>49</sup> Lin and Liz Parsons, interview by author, 31 August 2005, Somerville, Massachusetts.

priests.<sup>50</sup> But for thousands of laypeople, Mizeki is interpreted as a healer full of spiritual power and they have come to be healed. As Fr. Muyambi and leaders from Mothers' Unions conduct healings around the shrine, thousands begin walking up the holy mountain to the stream in which Mizeki washed his wounds. A penitential climb made in prayerful silence is the heart of the pilgrimage to those who have come for healing.<sup>51</sup> They queue in long lines to dip containers into the stream to take home the holy water, believed to have healing powers.<sup>52</sup>

Farther up the mountain is the rocky cave from which Mizeki allegedly disappeared. A tree split by lightning and grown back together helps mark the spot.<sup>53</sup> People tear off bark from tender saplings, and then tie their bark string around the several larger trees at the sacred rock. They pray, confess their sins, and beg Bernard to intervene with God on their behalf. They feel Bernard's mystical presence on the holy mountain. The mixture of traditional religious beliefs with Christianity is evident in the ascent of the mountain, which is a holy grove according to Shona traditional religion. Since chiefs were traditionally buried in high mountain caves, marked by holy groves, there is a deeper continuity with Shona tradition in the climb to the cave than in the communion service at the shrine itself. Many taboos originate in the spirit of traditional religion:

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<sup>50</sup> See Tabona Shoko, "Mainline Church Healing in Zimbabwe: Two Case Studies," in Robert, ed. *African Christian Outreach*, 208-235.

<sup>51</sup> Fr. Gift Makwasha, interview by author, 26 May 2005, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>52</sup> Bishop Tawonezvi notes that bishops do not encourage the popular aspects of the pilgrimage such as collecting bottles of "holy water." Bishop Godfrey Tawonezvi, interview by author, 1 August 2005, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

<sup>53</sup> See the online reflection on the pilgrimage by Ethan, "The E-report from Windhoek," <http://apgar.net/chillye/windhoek/html>.

pilgrims are not allowed to dip up water with a black pot, nor to bathe in the water. Reminiscent of Croagh Patrick, people believe that no snakes can live on the mountain.<sup>54</sup> In Shona traditional religion the snake is a sacred animal that can embody ancestors or spirits, or be a witch's familiar.<sup>55</sup> The sacred grove itself is still respected by the people, as they bring in their own wood for cooking fires and do not fell the trees on the holy mountain. They do pocket leaves and soil to take home for medicine, however. According to the Reverend Gift Makwasha, a Zimbabwean diocesan priest, Mizeki would not have approved of the incursion of traditional beliefs into Anglicanism, as he himself felled trees in the sacred grove in order to plant his crops.<sup>56</sup>

Reflecting the basis of popular religion in oral cultures, traditions grow and change during the pilgrimage. One such tradition is that every year a lamb makes its way from the mountain and passes through the gathered people. The word ripples through the crowd that the lamb has passed.<sup>57</sup> Another tradition that emerged in the late 1990s was that every year someone will die at the pilgrimage and go straight to heaven. Since so many people come to be healed, it is probably natural that sickly and vulnerable people are at risk in the crowds. It is believed that the spirit of Bernard takes somebody to itself in revenge for his murder, and that person becomes a martyr.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Kaoma interview.

<sup>55</sup> On Shona symbolism in African Traditional Religion, and its significance for African Christianity, see the extensive studies by M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, Vols. 1-3* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971- 1989).

<sup>56</sup> Makwasha interview.

<sup>57</sup> Kaoma interview.

<sup>58</sup> Makwasha interview. I wish to thank John Kaoma and Gift Makwasha for their assistance in constructing the basic outline of the Mizeki pilgrimages.



On Saturday afternoon, a dramatization of the life of Bernard Mizeki takes place at the shrine. Performed by charismatic Anglicans who tend to oppose traditional religion, the play shows Mizeki's work as healer, catechist, and one who loved the Shona people by refusing to leave them. It pits Mizeki, a violator of traditional taboos, against traditional *ngangas* and forces of evil ancestors. In the play Mizeki wears a clerical collar even though he was actually a layman. One of the killers is depicted as a *nganga*--another bit of theatrical license. In the play the ancestors decree that Mizeki be destroyed in order to save their land. After the stabbing, Mizeki prophesies that one day Anglicans will fill the mountain. His disappearance in a flash of light, witnessed by the women, reminds worshipers of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or the disappearance of Elijah.

The dramatization of Mizeki's life becomes for the observers a ritualized way of reconciling the dissonance they might feel between traditional religion and Christianity. Although the *ngangas* and ancestors are seen as responsible for Bernard's death, in the end the religion of Jesus Christ overcomes the traditional religion. Traditional religion has power, but Christianity is more powerful. Mizeki's prophecy of the growth of Anglicanism, enough to fill the mountain, is fulfilled in the presence of the people at the pilgrimage. The sacred grove is retained on the holy mountain, but now under the ultimate power of the Christian God. Through Bernard Mizeki, traditional religion is fulfilled rather than displaced by Christianity.<sup>59</sup> Or as expert in Shona religion M.L.

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<sup>59</sup> "Fulfilment theory" is a major way in which mainline Protestant missionaries have conceptualized the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian religions since the late 1800s. See Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy, and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914* (London: Epworth, 1995).

Daneel would say, Christianity transforms traditional religion without obliterating it.

On Saturday night, people remain awake. In the flickering light of hundreds of small fires, they sing, pray, give testimonies, and speak in tongues. The uncontrolled noise and spiritual wrestling is not supervised or led by the clergy. Then on Sunday morning is the final Eucharist, served by local priests. People get on their buses and trucks and go home on Sunday afternoons. Pilgrims feel that their spiritual devotion has increased, their sense of unity as African Anglicans across ethnic and national boundaries has deepened, and they return to their ordinary lives inspired and perhaps healed of the problems that make life difficult.

### *Contested interpretations of Mizeki today*

The transformation of Bernard Mizeki into a multi-ethnic people's "saint," or an Anglican "ancestor" for the provinces of Central and South Africa, is neither complete nor uncontested. As recently as 2004, a writer calling himself Murairidzi, meaning Teacher or Guardian, wrote an article in the Zimbabwean *Sunday Mirror* entitled "Saints who have hands tainted with blood." Claiming to be a spirit medium for the "Great Spirit," the author accused outsiders of destroying the Shona "culturally and spiritually" and Mizeki of being their agent, "whose scorn was even more arrogant than that of the whites." Whites had "miseducated" Mizeki and "stolen his mind and soul in Cape Town" so that "he could not tell the difference between the white man's culture and God's word." Rather than a saint or martyr worthy of an annual pilgrimage, the author argues,

Mizeki was a traitor who deserved to have his head crushed like a viper.<sup>60</sup>

It is hard to know simply from the above cited article the extent to which Shona traditionalists might be resisting the Mizeki pilgrimage at a grassroots level. The seizure of white-owned farms and businesses in the early 2000s was billed by some as the “third *chimurenga*,” and the anti-colonial rhetoric of the liberation struggle was revived in government quarters. Yet even amid crippling fuel and food shortages, economic collapse, and an 80% unemployment rate, 18,000 persons participated in the Mizeki pilgrimage in 2005.<sup>61</sup> Clearly the popular affection for Mizeki rejects attempts to re-politicize the pilgrimage or to pit a post-colonial Anglicanism against Zimbabwean national identity.

Most public tensions over the meaning of Mizeki are played out not between traditionalists and Christians, but between the clergy’s continued appropriation of Mizeki as a source of their own power, and the lay people’s interpretation.<sup>62</sup> For ordained clerics and linguistically-limited western visitors, the formal liturgy is the core of the pilgrimage. After their ritual performance on Saturday morning, bishops get into their vehicles and drive back to their hotels. The “cultured despisers” look down on or ignore the popular exercises.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Murairidzi, “Saints who have hands tainted with blood,” *The Sunday Mirror*, 30 May 2004. [www.africaonline.co.zw/mirror/stage/archive/040530/weekend19934.html](http://www.africaonline.co.zw/mirror/stage/archive/040530/weekend19934.html).

<sup>61</sup> Tawonezvi interview.

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed study of similar tensions between popular pilgrimage and clerical hierarchy in southern African Anglicanism, see Janet Hodgson, “Mantsopa: Popular Religion and the Anglican Church in South Africa,” in *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel*, eds. G. Cuthbertson, H. Pretorius, D. Robert (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2003), 210-235.

<sup>63</sup> Bishop Godfrey Tawonezvi of the Anglican Diocese of Masvingo, Zimbabwe, indicates that dioceses have agreed in principle to erect chalets for bishops so that higher-ranking clergy can spend the night

But the people fight back, not only by maintaining their unscripted customs, but by objecting when people disturb their spiritual equilibrium by politicizing the festival. People grumbled when in 1999 the five Zimbabwean bishops stood at the shrine and read a joint statement against political violence.<sup>64</sup> Then in 2003, forty parishioners from the Cathedral of St. Mary's and All Saints in Harare attended the pilgrimage to demonstrate against their Bishop Nolbert Kunonga for actively supporting the destructive economic and social policies of the dictator, President Robert Mugabe. Said one of the protestors, "Our bishop continues to tell Zimbabweans that we have mended our differences but he continues to preach hatred. His politics has destroyed our once good church. The bishop has continued to attend ruling party and government functions, abandoning his spiritual role, home and hospital visits, church services and even the burial of parishioners which he is being paid for."<sup>65</sup> Despite the merit of the parishioners' grievances against a bishop who has been banned by the European Union for his support for the Mugabe regime, others decried the politicization of the Mizeki pilgrimage. Even so, participants in the pilgrimage criticized church officials for ostensibly collecting millions of dollars from pilgrims, but not providing them with toilets or safe drinking water.

In addition to tensions between laity and clergy, and between groups of lay people at the pilgrimage, clerics also seek to control the Mizeki name. Although the Anglican Africans bishops promote the shrine as a symbol of unity for the Province of Central

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comfortably near the pilgrimage site. Tawonezvi interview. Public perception remains, however, that bishops and many clergy do not approve of the popular exercises connected with the event.

<sup>64</sup> Kaoma interview.

<sup>65</sup> Precious Shumba, "Anglican Flock Stages Demo against Kunonga," *Daily News* 16 June 2003. [http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/jun16a\\_2003.html#link7](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/jun16a_2003.html#link7).

Africa,<sup>66</sup> and they gather there for the consecration of bishops and other provincial tasks, disputes among the Zimbabwean Anglican bishops can spill over into control of the shrine. No doubt money and power are at stake for the hierarchs, despite their general disdain for the popular aspects of the pilgrimage. Bishops' tussles over the control of Mizeki's shrine are reminiscent of the 1100s when the Archbishops of Armagh claimed Patrick's chapel on Croagh Patrick because "they were his successors," but the Archbishops of Tuam claimed it because it was located in their diocese.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the Africanization of Bernard Mizeki is how he is evoked to undergird both local ethnicities, and the catholicity of an Anglican version of Christianity that spreads beyond tribe and nation. To Shona pilgrims, Mizeki is a Zimbabwean. He is the founder of their church, better known than his white sponsor Bishop Knight-Bruce. He married a Shona woman related to a chief, and he refused to leave his Shona people to save his life. He chose to become a Shona. To Mozambicans, Mizeki is a compatriot born and bred among them who deserves praise for his great deeds. South Africans take credit for having converted, trained, and sent him out, and for having organized the powerful Mizeki Guilds. Yet the plural national affiliations of Mizeki compose the united identity of South Central African Anglicanism, and point beyond it to the realities of Christianity as a global religion. African Christian unity has supplanted the symbolic role Mizeki played early in the twentieth century as a loyal catechist and reconciler between the black colonized and the white colonizers. In the

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<sup>66</sup> Tawonezvi interview.

<sup>67</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Croagh Patrick."

same way that legends of St. Patrick signaled both Irish identity and participation in the multi-ethnic Catholicism of the crumbling Roman Empire, so do the Mizeki observances reinforce both African identity and the multi-ethnic Anglicanism of the former British Empire.

## **Conclusion**

What can be gained by comparing a 4<sup>th</sup> century Briton among the Irish, with a 20<sup>th</sup> century Mozambican among the Shona? The appropriation of Patrick by the Irish demonstrates how ancient history and myth can illuminate the current process of the spread of Christianity in southern Africa. The multiple contested meanings of Bernard Mizeki reveal how a contemporary situation can enlarge our interpretation of historical processes whose details are lost in the mists of time. In both cases, the significance of the missionary saint lies in how his memory stimulates a process of inculturation that bridges local and universal realities.

I compared these two figures because of the similar role they played for their adopted communities as outsiders, who by mediating the larger worlds of empire and church, helped to create new localities that coalesced and endured after their deaths. Both were colonial subjects on the edges of empire who felt called by God as missionaries to a nearby and related local culture, though in Patrick's case the political empire was receding, and in Bernard's case it was growing. Both Patrick and Bernard confronted traditional religions with which they were intimately familiar, and transformed them in the eyes of their followers. Both came to identify themselves with the people they embraced—Patrick calling himself “Irish” when his converts faced enslavement and

persecution, and Bernard remaining with his Shona converts at the price of his life. Both preached messages that attracted high-placed women and men. But most importantly, their myths and miracles represented the rapid spread of Christianity over a relatively brief period of time, among particular groups of people. As Christianity grew and spread in the immediate centuries after their deaths, the “Apostle to the Irish” and the “Apostle to the MaShona” were born.

