

FROM TEXT TO PRACTICE

The role of the Bible in daily living of African people today

Joachim Kügler, Masiwa Ragies Gunda (Ed.)

2nd Edition



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Études sur la Bible en Afrique
Bibel-in-Afrika-Studien

4
(2nd Edition)

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Bibel-in-Afrika-Studien

edited
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Volume 4
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FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

Joachim Kügler

The editors of the BiAS series are proud to present volume 4 of our series in a new edition which will be issued in a printed version also.

The second edition is an expanded one as it offers two articles more than the first edition did. My own contribution was originally planned for volume 7 on “The Bible and politics in Africa”¹. It was, however, replaced there by another contribution of mine, as in the progress of work the article “In the Cobra’s back” turned out to fit much better to the topic of volume 4 as it deals not only with politics but with the relation on Bible and Christian practice in general.

The other article which was added in the second edition was written by Joachim Kwaramba. It was also planned originally to be part of volume 7. Once the idea of a second edition of BiAS 4 was born it was, however, immediately clear that Rev. Kwaramba’s contribution also would fit much better to the topic of Bible practice relation.

This new edition is also a revised one as we were able to give all authors the chance to check their texts again in order to eliminate typographical errors and other. With the exception of Obvious Vengeyi’s contribution major changes were not undertaken so that the new edition really can be used as substitute of the first one. It must be noted, however, that the page numbers changed as we tried to avoid the volume to become too long. So we decided to adjust the size of the fonts to the smaller one which already was used in volumes 5 and 6 of the BiAS series. The size still is quite reader friendly and for those of our users who like to print out the online version, or at least parts of it, it will be possible to save paper with every single article taking less space. As the pages of the online version is formatted to German page size DIN A 5 in order to have the same size as the book format of the printed version we would like to recommend all users to print out the online files with the printer setting “two pages on one”.

¹ GUNDA, Masiwa Ragies/ KÜGLER, Joachim (eds.), *The Bible and Politics in Africa* (BiAS 7), Bamberg: UBP 2012 (<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-4726>).

While the first edition was done by Dr Masiwa R Gunda alone, I now joined him for the second edition so that we both are responsible for this new edition.

We hope that this new edition on the relation of Bible and practice can help a bit to reflect in a deeper way on what we really do when we use the Bible as guideline of Christian life. In the end we hope that this volume contributes in a way to make sure that practical use of the Bible in World Christianity may not only be according to Scripture but also according to God's will.

I take the chance and dedicate this second edition most gratefully to my great teachers who contributed so much to my scientific development.

Für
ERNST LUDWIG GRASMÜCK
und
PAUL HOFFMANN
mit den besten Wünschen zum 80. Geburtstag!

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

Masiwa Ragies Gunda

That the Bible is a manual for daily living is attested in almost all Christian denominations, how this role is transformed into practice is clearly an area that remains a contested terrain among Christians.

This volume is our modest contribution at looking at the relationship between the Bible and our practices. We present here the Africa related papers read at the International Bible Symposium, which was held in September 2009 at the Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg (IBS.BA 2009). To broaden the perspective additional articles on the topic of Bible and practice were integrated into this volume. The papers presented at the IBS.BA 2009 in German language are published separately and now accessible in volume 11 of the series of “*bayreuther forum TRANSIT*”.¹

The central question that the articles in this volume respond to is: how is the Bible related to our daily life? As James Kugel (2007:10) asks, “do the words of this ancient prophet or that ancient sage have any implications for our present situation?” It is questions like these that help us translate the text to practice. This is especially so on the African continent where religion appears to be gaining influence. Without taking anything away from western biblical scholars, African biblical scholars must also engage with the question: how do we put into practice the teachings of the Bible? This question is necessitated by the realization that “even though the books of the Bible were written a long time ago ... carefully analyzed, the words of these ancient texts might reveal a message about how people ought to arrange their affairs now and in the future” (Idem). This association of the Bible with ceaseless relevance is the basis upon which we continue to search for guidelines from it and our acting in accordance with it keeps the Bible alive.

The centrality of the Bible in Africa is captured succinctly in a bizarre way as indicated by Lovemore Togarasei below. It is noted that Desmond Tutu joked that even if colonizers had stolen all African land and left Africans with the Bible, Africans would be better off. This joke is seriously flawed yet pregnant with meaning for Christians and goes a long

¹ KÜGLER, Joachim/ SOUGA ONOMO, Eric/ FEDER, Stephanie (eds.), *Bibel und Praxis. Beiträge des Internationalen Bibel-Symposiums 2009 in Bamberg* (bft 11), Berlin: Lit Verlag 2011.

way to indicate the importance attached to the Bible by Christians. Such an important place cannot be without impact on the daily living of those who think the Bible is the most important thing that happened to Africans that all injustices they have suffered pale into insignificance. In Africa, the Bible is literature for both the literate and illiterate (Gunda 2010:35) since as John Mbiti (2005:240) observes, it is read in churches, schools and at home. This volume recognizes the fact that some of the practices by African Christians are a result of the fact that they “come to the Bible armed with questions arising out of their time and circumstance” (Dickson 1984:142) implying that the questions we bring to the Bible are questions on issues that we must put into practice. Alternatively, we use the Bible to legitimize the things that we do, even if such practices could also be justified by resorting to other resources such as cultural heritages. The relationship between the text and practice is so critical for the survival of the text itself, without this relationship no text can possibly survive.

The Bible without practice is headed towards extinction!

One of the critical questions that we encounter in our daily lives has to do with the relationship of our being “Bible believers” and our practices. This is not something new because when ancient interpreters turned to allegorizing the text it was “because allegorizing turned everything in the Bible that was particular and historical into something more general and immediately applicable” (Kugel 2007:19). The whole idea was to find ways in which they could translate the Bible to something pragmatic that could be lived. This question of Bible and practice is necessitated by several observations, on the one hand being the apparent contradictions between some teachings of the Bible and the observable practices of those who take the Bible as the “manual for daily living”. The contradictions can be double-edged, in that there are those who are “pacifists” yet there are biblical texts that apparently encourage “violent means” of resolving and solving disputes and other challenges, the so-called *lex talionis* texts such as Exodus 21:23-25 are good examples. On the other hand are “sadists” (people who enjoy inflicting pain on others) yet there are biblical texts that consider compassion and love as virtues, such as Matthew 5:38-39. The selective nature of “Bible believers” commitment to biblical injunctions can be seen from the apparent neglect the Book of

Leviticus suffers from most Christian denominations, except where it is alleged to be relevant in contemporary debates on homosexuality. These challenges are best summed up by David Kaulemu (2006:3) when he notes the existence of a “gap between principles and practice, between promise and performance.”

In the case of Zimbabwe, which is highly represented in this volume, the economic and political challenges of the post-1997 era have made the question of “Bible and Practice” a topical issue in daily life, though it has not received much attention from scholars. The deployment of violence as a political weapon by politicians who are also Christians is well attested (Vengeyi 2010) hence the question of biblical influence on a people’s conduct. Critical about this era is the apparent link between Christians and extralegal means to make ends meet, what was the role of the Bible in this desperate war of survival? One of the interesting epithets of 2008 is that “burning” a practice through which foreign currency was bought and sold unofficially was not really bad since Jesus “burned” two fish and five loaves of bread which he then used to feed the five thousand (Matt.14:17). This is one of the many ways in which the Bible is brought in to legitimize acts and practices in different circumstances.

The Bible has survived for close to three millenia because of many reasons, chief of which is the availability of some people who have vowed to “live according to its teachings” because it is “sacred”. It is in this context that we can understand confessional statements such as; “We believe in the Holy Scriptures as originally given by God to be divinely inspired, infallible, without error, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct”² (Verstraelen 1998:7). In fact, it appears that all other factors that may be cited depend on this particular combination. Hence the Bible is paramount because in trying to justify why they live according to “biblical teachings” (meaning the selected parts, as all Christians must, of necessity, prefer some texts of the Bible over others) the divine nature of the Bible becomes a handy explanation and justification. Through the commitment of ancient Israelites through whose commitment we have the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the Bible we have today owes its survival to the commitment to put some of the teachings of the biblical texts into practice. This all important task was inherited by the returning Jews

² This is the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) confessional statement produced in 1992. Clearly stated is the view that the Bible is the basis of our faith and our practice.

(from the Babylonian exile), whose commitment to see the teachings of the Bible put into practice saw them translating the Hebrew texts into Aramaic, the language that most Jews spoke after the exile, all this because “Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ez. 7:10).

This task continues among contemporary Jews but it has since been shared among Jews, Christians and Muslims. As this volume largely focuses on Christianity, let me quickly note that since the death and resurrection of Jesus, there have arisen a people that were once called “Christians” (Acts.11:26) but who now call themselves “Christians” who have dedicated themselves to putting into practice some of the teachings of the Bible. As Togarasei (2009:12) rightly observes, at home, at school and lately at the work place “the Bible was read to inculcate morality in us.” While we all have some idea of what morality entails, going back to the era of a fourfold sense of scripture can firmly place morality in our grasp. Kugel (2007:23) has the following explanation of the fourfold sense of Scripture; “The literal sense teaches the facts (or deeds), the allegorical, what you should believe, *the moral sense, what you should do*, and the anagogical, where you are headed.” The moral sense of scripture was taken to be concerned with what Christians ought to do, implying that morality concerns our practice and the Bible was read in order to give us direction on what we should do.

Clearly therefore, without some people vowing to live in accordance with at least some of the teachings of the Bible, the Bible will end up gathering dust in museums and libraries, the Bible will only carry an aesthetic influence among some scholars, studied for its longevity. Not that this has not yet happened, the Bible is fast reaching that stage in Europe but as the different articles in this volume testify, there is no such movement as yet in Africa. In fact, Africa has seen massive growth of Christianity over the last century meaning the Bible is and should be considered as part of the people’s daily living. This momentum has largely benefitted from the translation of the Bible to vernacular languages in Africa. Translation is understood, as “the transfer of the meaning of a text (which may be a word or a book) from one language to another for a new readership” (Peter Newmark 1996:5). For all the positives and negatives associated with translation of the Bible into local languages (Togarasei 2009:1; Dube 2000:13), translation has meant that there are always some people willing to order their lives according to some of the teachings of the Bible. This in turn has ascertained the continued survival of

the Bible into the new millennium. From the rural areas with the mushrooming “Apostolic Churches” to the urban centres where Pentecostals have captured the imaginations of the urban elite and ambitious youths, the Bible has featured in political discourse, in economic discussions and in public national discussions (Gunda 2010). In short, there are some people who proclaim unto others that they live in accordance with the Bible. Without such people, the Bible faces the fate of other pieces of literature, that is, death.

Reconciling different worldviews

One of the most popular dictums of the last decades is the “Bible is an African book” slogan. Several claims have been made to the effect that the African worldview is the same as the “biblical worldview(s)”, such that the story of the Israelites, Jews and Early Christians is continued on the African continent, especially from the period of colonialism to the present. This assertion from prominent African scholars is not without its merits, in fact, a cursory survey of the biblical stories of the Old Testament appear to confirm this. Practices such as the levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-6) do not shock Africans, past and present, because practices such as *Kugara nhaka* (wife inheritance) and *Kupindira*³ sound almost like the biblical levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 5, and which Jesus does not attack nor reject in Matthew 22:24-33, Luke 20:27-36. There are many other such correlations between practices in Africa and the biblical world. Similarly, the story of an oppressed people who are eventually liberated resonates with many Africans due to colonial and postcolonial experiences, such that the exodus stories are taken as indeed African stories.

Militating against this way of understanding the Bible is the clear and significant differences between the levirate marriage and wife inheritance and *kupindira* such as that among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, wife inheritance was/is not dependent on whether the late hus-

³ It is essentially impossible to give a one word equivalent to this Shona word, as in the Bible, this practice can best be understood through an explanation of what it stands for. *Kupindira* is a practice where a couple is childless for some time. Normally, the blame for childlessness is leveled against the woman, but there are times when the man is seen as the problem. In the latter case, the family asks a brother-in-law of the wife to help the husband to procreate by having a sexual relationship with his brother's wife.

band was childless or not. In other words, when a husband died (the practice itself is waning), one of his brothers would inherit the wife with whom the community expects him to procreate. Another such difference is that the biblical levirate marriage seems to suggest that it was only possible after the death of the husband implying that there was no room for a practice such as *kupindira* among the Shona.

However, while these similarities are interesting some of the correlations between the Bible and Africa make some Christians very uncomfortable because more often than not such similarities are considered part of the devilish heritage from pre-colonial times. It is in this context that Obvious Vengeyi looks at the role of the Bible among Christians, especially those of a Pentecostal persuasion. In his article, Vengeyi argues that the Bible has effectively replaced the Shona traditional *gona*, which was essential for manipulating the spirit world for the private benefits of the owners of the *gona*. Looking closely at the conception of the Bible among Pentecostal Christians, Vengeyi contends that the Bible has been inserted into the Shona traditional worldview where it has been used as an alternative or critically a replacement to *gona*. This clearly suggests there are differences between the Shona traditional worldview and the biblical worldview. In his argument, Vengeyi looks at the essence of *gona* among the Shona and the essence of the Bible among Pentecostals and Evangelical Christians.

Selectivity and the Bible

We noted earlier that part of the multiplicity of Christianities in Africa largely depends on a multiplicity of interpretations of the Bible. Similarly, practices by Christians are multiple because of the various readings of the Bible or parts of the Bible. The deliberate emphasis of some portions of the Bible at the expense of other portions is what we call here selectivity, implying that Christians in general practice a selective reading of the Bible, deciding in the process which portions they will read in order to avoid frustrating their own faith and ambitions. In this volume, we acknowledge we are guilty of selectivity because we have deliberately decided to focus our attention on African biblical studies, that has meant we have very few contributions from non-African biblical scholars, and even though, the non-African biblical scholars have also had to make contributions to African biblical studies.

In this regard, Gunda touches on the use of the Old Testament in Apostolic churches and how through these churches the Old Testament has been given a new lease of life. The fact that most of the daily practices of these churches are not highly thought of in other denominations only goes a long way in validating the question raised by Norman Gottwald (1985:9), when he asks: “Why is it that people have such different, even contradictory, understandings of the religious meaning and value of the Bible?” The selectivity of Christians when it comes to biblical readings is central to these divergent interpretations and behaviours.

The Bible is possibly the single most influential literature on the African continent, especially in sub-Saharan Africa which is predominantly Christian. “The challenge with texts that attain the kind of status that the Bible has attained in Africa is that it can inspire communities to do good to or to harm others especially when people only consider their actions right if ‘it is in the Bible’” (Gunda 2010:35). We are aware that many positive projects have been done throughout Africa by people who claim they base their actions on biblical teachings, but we are equally aware that much blood has been shed on the African continent by people who insist they are murdering in the name of God as proclaimed through the Bible. In some instances selectivity kills, but mostly selectivity breeds intolerance as one defends the selected parts over those not selected.

The Bible and the Quest for a different world

There are two major areas of concern for most people, the world of the spirits which is advertised by different religions as well as the world of human beings to which we all belong before we die. Our lives therefore must prepare for our eventual deaths so that we can enjoy the fruits of being loyal to God. We are also concerned about the world we live in. To this extent, most human beings want to see a better world, transform the world they live in. Of critical importance is the fact that we want to change the world we live in for the better. To do so, human beings have sought to identify the right conduct and sources of such information. The person and conduct of Jesus has been so influential because “He demonstrated how justice must be administered, how to treat children, the poor and the marginalized, and women, and generally how each individual must conduct his/her life” (Togarasei 2009:44). To that extent, the Bible has become the manual for conduct and practice, even though

the Bible may have contributed to some of the challenges faced across Africa, the same Bible has also been singled out as a possible tool for addressing the challenges.

To that extent the article of Lovemore Togarasei tackles the issue of HIV and AIDS, according to Togarasei “as a biblical scholar, [he] noted the continued surfacing of the Bible and what it teaches” in many meetings and interviews with Christians on the subject of HIV, AIDS and theology. In this case, the Bible is indeed part of the resources that people turn to for direction on dealing with the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS. Due to the centrality of the Bible in contemporary African communities, it is not enough to simply articulate how the Bible is being used by these communities, biblical scholars must make contributions towards the profitable use of the Bible hence Togarasei commits himself to “go further and look at how the Bible can continue to be used in contexts of HIV and AIDS”.

The Niger Delta in Nigeria has been a prominent feature of African news in Africa and abroad because of the exploitation of its resources, especially oil and the attendant violence that has been happening in the region. The complexity of the history of the region is such that it cannot be a challenge to one section of the society. It is a multi-sectoral challenge and therefore calls for a multi-sectoral response. To that extent, Solomon Olusola Ademiluka tackles the challenge of the unrest in the Delta region of Nigeria, which has cost thousands of lives. As there are many Christians involved on both sides of the conflict, Ademiluka seeks to make use of a resource that is found on both sides of the conflict, that is, the Bible. The eighth century environment and prophets of Israel have been seen as a resource not only for diagnosing the causes of the conflict but also the prescription to deal effectively with the challenge. Central to this is the injustice visited upon the ordinary people and the fact that “prophets warned the perpetrators of this injustice of the dire consequences but they would not heed their warning until discontent in the land led to the social unrest which paved the way for the collapse of the nation” (52-3). While it has become difficult in the contemporary world to see nations collapsing, the example of Somalia makes all Africans worried. The call here is for the deployment of the Bible in the search of permanent solutions.

Francis Machingura deals with the question of *glossolalia* in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) church in Zimbabwe. While speaking in

“tongues” is indeed associated with Christians from the beginning (Cf. the Pentecost event in Acts 2 vs. 4 is used for this purpose). The common attitude among Pentecostal Christians is succinctly expressed by Machingura when he writes below; “those who do not speak in tongues are regarded as lacking the Holy Spirit and salvation.” This suggests that Christians categorize themselves hierarchically by considering such gifts as speaking in tongues. Owing to this reality, challenging as it is, Machingura attempts to answer the questions: “Should tongues be taken as normative for every Christian? Are there any changes on the understanding of *glossolalia* as portrayed in Acts 2 with what one finds in the AFM in Zimbabwe?” While the issue of tongues is central to Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, the *Vapositioni* “Apostles” have ordered their daily practices in line with the rules and regulations found in the Old Testament even though the place of Jesus as Christ and Saviour remains intact. Biblical influence in these churches is seen from the dietary laws to the centrality of prophets and prophecy in their lives. This usage of the Bible extends also to purity laws and such practices as removing shoes when one approaches Holy ground. The Bible, I argue, is their manual for daily living and worship. Focusing on the *Vapositioni*, one cannot help but concur with Knut Holter (2002:1) when he observes “looking back, it seems clear that the twentieth century made the Old Testament an African book.”

The significance of the Bible in Africa has not gone unnoticed by African scholars, among the established African scholars, is Musa Dube, whose work has drawn attention from all over the world. Among followers of Musa is Stephanie Feder who takes a closer look at the work of Dube. The work of Musa Dube argues Feder can be summed up in the words, “biblical studies cannot be distinguished from theological interests, namely the fight for God given life” (111). The Bible therefore must be appropriated in the fight for life, this she has done exceedingly well in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Many of us are familiar with western missionaries to Africa, but little has been done to highlight the work of African missionaries to Africa. We read or have read the journals of western missionaries but not so much of African missionaries. Solomon Nkesiga is one such African missionary and his article gives us a firsthand experience with an African missionary to Africa and in the process a glimpse of the Bible in action.

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THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN HIV AND AIDS CONTEXTS

CASE STUDY OF SOME PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN BOTSWANA

Lovemore Togarasei

Introduction

In an assessment of the capacity of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to prevent HIV in Botswana that the Ditumelo Research Team of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Botswana undertook between October 2006 and February 2008, one of the methods we used to gather data was district participatory workshops (Togarasei, et al 2008). The workshops began with various activities meant to identify what FBOs considered to be major factors contributing to the spread of HIV in their district, what they were doing as faith communities and what their obstacles were. They were then followed by discussions in which the research team wanted to get clarifications on certain responses that came out from the participatory activities. It is in these discussions that I, as a biblical scholar, noted the continued surfacing of the Bible and what it teaches. Although we were not interested in discussions on what the role of the Bible is in responses to HIV since we were assessing all faiths not Christianity alone, on account of their large numbers, Christians often brought up the Bible and how it shapes their responses to HIV and AIDS. Often one would hear participants mentioning, "But the Bible says---." It is in this light that this article seeks to analyse the use of the Bible in contexts of HIV and AIDS. How has the Bible shaped the responses of Christian communities to HIV and AIDS, is the question at the centre of the article. It is also the intention of this article to go further and look at how the Bible can continue to be used in contexts of HIV and AIDS. The article is based on the research that I undertook between August 2007 and August 2008 among Pentecostal churches. But before delving into the central question of the use of the Bible in HIV and AIDS contexts, there is need to give a brief background of the place of the Bible in Africa. It is after appreciating the place of the Bible generally in Africa that one can then understand its use among Pentecostal churches in HIV and AIDS contexts in Botswana. The article

is therefore divided into four sections. The first section, as already stated, looks at the general use and place of the Bible in Africa. The second section discusses the methodology of my study of the use of the Bible among Pentecostal churches in Botswana. The third section presents the results of this study. The fourth section discusses the results before a conclusion of the article is given.

The Bible in Africa

Let me begin by specifying that by Africa here I mean sub-Saharan Africa and particularly southern Africa. The use of the Bible in this region dates back to almost two centuries ago through Coptic and Ethiopian communities (Holter 2000:9). From that period to this day, the Bible has deeply influenced the people of Africa. It has become a book that Africans hold very dearly to their hearts. As Mbiti (2005:234-248) says, Bible reading in Africa has become a mass movement. S. Nadar (2007) refers to Desmond Tutu's joke that even if colonizers had stolen all African land and left Africans with the Bible, Africans would be better off. Although just a joke, and one which many Africans would dispute, it sheds much light on the place of the Bible in Africa. Indeed Bible reading is a mass movement in Africa. The Bible, as Mbiti (2005:234-248) sub-titles his article, has found a place in "African homes, schools and churches." What Beasley *et al* (1991:26-28) say about the general approaches to Bible study is very true of the way the Bible is used in Africa. The most common approach is what they call the devotional/religious approach. This is the reading of the Bible to enrich personal faith. Here reading can be done individually, by a family, in small Bible study groups and also at church gatherings. The Bible is therefore the only book that one is likely to find in every home, be it a Christian or non-Christian home. Sermons which do not refer to the Bible are more likely to be criticized by listeners. In the devotional approach, the Bible is believed to be the Word of God containing guidelines on personal and spiritual growth. For many who approach the Bible from this perspective, the Bible has readymade answers to human problems. They therefore approach it, "with an attitude of reverence and prayer, asking that God's Spirit lead them in their study" (Beasley *et al* 1991:26). Nadar (2007) goes further explaining the centrality of the Bible among Africans. She says:

....the Bible is also a book of comfort and resources for daily living for African Christians. People look to it for daily inspiration. It is not uncommon for people to read a verse or a chapter each day for encouragement and comfort. The Bible is also used as a guide for daily living and spiritual direction. In other words, when Christians are faced with moral dilemmas they are likely to reach for the Bible to see what it has to say about the challenge they are facing.

Nadar also notes the magical use of the Bible in Africa. She refers to how, according to Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the Bible is put in babies' cots in West Africa to ward off evil spirits. The magical use of the Bible is also practiced mainly by African Independent Churches (AICs) prophets when it is placed upon the ill as a healing method. Among these churches, Musa Dube (2000:67-80; 2006:193-207) has also discovered the divinatory use of the Bible. The method is influenced by the African practice of throwing bones to diagnose human problems and to find answers to these problems. Dube noted that in the same way bones or other such divining objects were used by traditional healers, Christians in AICs used biblical texts. Instead of throwing bones, AICs prophets would hand the Bible to the patient, ask her to open whatever text and hand it back to the prophet. Through interpretation of the opened text the prophet then divines the problems of the patient and offers the remedy (Togarasei 2008:55-74).

But the scholarly/critical approach to the Bible is also used in Africa. This approach emphasizes the meaning of the biblical texts in their original settings and is therefore often used in schools, seminaries and universities. Considering the insignificant number of critical scholars in Africa, this is a very uncommon approach to biblical studies in Africa.

Since this article looks at Pentecostal churches' use of the Bible in contexts of HIV and AIDS, it focuses mainly on the devotional use of the Bible. It therefore looks at the use of the Bible as a motivation for personal, group and even national well-being.

The use of the Bible for HIV response by Botswana Pentecostal churches

Having seen how the Bible is used in Africa, let us then turn to consider how Botswana Pentecostal churches have used the Bible in HIV and AIDS context. The data for this discussion was collected through field-

work. Therefore below, I discuss first, the background to the project and the methodology employed. This will then be followed by the presentation of the results. I will end with a discussion of the results before the conclusion to the article is given.

Background and Methodology of the study

Data used in this article was collected between August 2007 and August 2008 as part of a project on modern Pentecostal churches and HIV and AIDS in Botswana. Modern Pentecostal churches, also referred to just as 'new' Pentecostalism (Gifford 1988, Anderson 2004), charismatic Pentecostalism (Dijk 2004), Charismatic Ministries (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005), or just new or neo-Pentecostal churches (Dada 2004) have taken the Botswana religious landscape by storm. They are generally attracting the rich and affluent in Botswana. Modern Pentecostal churches also attract those who feel they are on a journey to success in life. They are known for preaching a 'healthy and wealthy' gospel (i.e. a gospel that promotes physical well-being and material prosperity) and so this project sought to find out the roles of these churches in HIV and AIDS national response. The project was funded by the Office of Research and Development of the University of Botswana and it sought to:

- find out the role played by modern Pentecostal churches in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Botswana.
- find out, through an analysis of their role, the theology that informs the churches' attitude to HIV and AIDS.
- suggest ways by which the churches can continue to be partners in the fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

There are many modern Pentecostal churches in Botswana and so it would not be possible to make an exhaustive study of each of the churches. Purposive sampling was therefore used to select churches for study. Criteria were set for this purposive sampling. First, was the size of the church and its geographical spread. Churches with large memberships (those with at least one hundred members and are found in more than five villages or cities in Botswana) were selected. Second, to reflect the rural-urban divide in Botswana, the selected churches were also supposed to have membership both in urban and rural areas. Since the project sought to study Pentecostal view and contribution to the fight

against HIV and AIDS, it is only from these large churches that generalizations could justly be made. On the basis of the set criteria the following churches were selected for the study: Bible Life Ministries, Family of God Church, Forward in Faith, Winners' Chapel and End Time Ministries. The towns and villages in which the study was conducted are: Gaborone, Francistown, Tonota, Palapye-Serowe, Selibe-Phikwe, Ramotswa, Molepolole and Chadibe. Because the intention of the study was to find out the role played by these churches in the fight against HIV and AIDS, data was collected from the church leadership and church members, those affected and infected by HIV.

Four different instruments were used to gather data. To get data from church leaders, interviews were conducted using a designed interview guide. The same method (but with different interview guides) was also used to gather data from those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. At least one leader, one person living with HIV and one person affected by HIV or AIDS for each of the churches selected was interviewed from each town or village. All these respondents were randomly selected with the assistance of the pastors of the respective congregations. Questionnaires were used to gather data from the general membership of the churches. Again these were randomly selected with the assistance of the respective pastors of the congregations. All questionnaires were interviewer administered.

A total of 60 respondents (29 Female and 31 Male) completed the questionnaire. Their ages ranged from 20 to 65 years with 34 (about 56%) being in the 20-30 years age range. Most of them (34= 56%) had been members of their respective churches for over five years. It is section 6 of the questionnaire which is of relevance in this article on the use of the Bible in contexts of HIV and AIDS. Below is that section of the questionnaire with the questions as they were asked:

Section 6: Biblical interpretation in the age of HIV and AIDS

No.	Questions	Responses	Code
700	The solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS lies in the Bible: Would members of your church agree?	1. Yes 2. No 3. Do not know	
701	If Yes, state two ways in which the Bible can provide a solution to the problem of HIV and AIDS.		
702	If No, which of the following responses would you consider to be nearest to your church's position?	1. The Bible does not mention the word HIV/AIDS 2. The Bible promotes stigma	
703	Which Biblical passages would you say are used in your church to promote the church's HIV prevention activities? (Briefly explain how they are used)		
704	Which Biblical passages would you say are used in your church to promote the church's healing activities? (Briefly explain how they are used)		
705	Which Biblical passages would you say are used in your church to promote the church's care activities? (Briefly explain how they are used)		
706	State any other ways the Bible is used to address HIV and AIDS in your church		

Whereas it was easier to find respondents for the questionnaires, the same was not true for the interviews. Pastors themselves were difficult to find as some of them did not turn up for interviews as scheduled and

others would cancel appointments several times. People living with HIV (PLWH) and those infected were reluctant to be interviewed. All in all only 25 of the envisaged 40 interviewees were finally interviewed. Of these, 13 (13 male and 0 female) were pastors, 5 (2 male and 3 female) were PLWH while the remaining 7 (1 male and 6 female) were people affected by HIV and AIDS. The majority of the interviewees (64%) were aged between 31 and 40 years and had been members of their respective churches for between 2 and 20 years. The PLWH and those affected held different positions in their churches, from general membership to elders. This article makes use of data only from the sections of the Pastors' interview guide that dealt with use of the Bible in contexts of HIV and AIDS. Below are those sections in bold:

2.1 What HIV and AIDS Prevention methods does your church promote for:

- a) Youth?
- b) Women?
- c) Men?
- d) All members in general?

2.2 Which biblical or other teachings influence the methods the church promotes? Explain.

3.1 What Care programmes for the infected and affected people does your church promote?

3.2 Which biblical or other teachings influence the church's involvement in these programmes? Explain

Study Results

The use of the Bible for HIV prevention

Results, both from the questionnaires and from interviews with pastors, show that modern Pentecostal churches in Botswana use the Bible to promote two prevention methods: abstinence for those not married and faithfulness to one partner for those who are married. The texts mentioned in the interviews can therefore be divided into these two preven-

tion methods. The commonly cited text for promotion of abstinence was 2 Timothy 2:22, "So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, ...". Respondents emphasized the fact that all those who are not married should not be involved in sexual activities noting that if all in society would give heed to this teaching, there would be little to no transmission of HIV. Also cited to promote abstinence was 1 Corinthians 7:8, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do." As one pastor (FT08) said in interpretation of the passage, "Paul did not engage in sex, therefore by using his example, he was teaching single Christians not to engage in sex." Other texts used to promote abstinence among the unmarried are all those texts that teach against fornication and adultery: Exodus 20:14, Leviticus 20:20, Deuteronomy 5:18, Matthew 5:27-28, Romans 7:7 (You shall not commit adultery), Galatians 5:19 (Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity ...).

As a prevention measure, Christians are encouraged to get married. Again the Bible is the basis for this teaching. A number of texts were cited by our respondents as the basis for their teaching on marriage. Genesis 2:18 was the commonly cited passage, "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him." This was often combined together with 1 Corinthians 7:9, "But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry." One questionnaire respondent (GB15) explained these passages further saying that God provides an alternative to those who cannot abstain. This alternative, the respondent said, was marriage. Other texts cited to support marriage are 1 Thessalonians 4:4 (... that each of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor not in the passion of lust) and 1 Corinthians 7:2 (But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband).

Respondents underlined that for marriage to be an effective HIV prevention measure there should be faithfulness between the married. Several biblical texts were cited to support faithfulness. The most common text was 1 Corinthians 7:2-3, "But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her own husband." Texts against adultery (already mentioned above) were used also to promote faithfulness. Proverbs 6: 24-27 which teaches against prostitution and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, which teaches against divorce were also cited. One respondent (PS02) explained that

divorce also contributes to the spread of HIV and so if people would give heed to the biblical teaching against divorce, the spread of HIV would be curtailed.

Modern Pentecostal churches also use the Bible to address factors that they perceive to contribute to unfaithfulness among married couples. One such factor mentioned mainly by male respondents and by elderly women was the unsubmissiveness of wives to their husbands. The other factor mentioned was husbands' lack of love towards their wives. The understanding among those who cited these factors was that if a man is not respected by his wife, he is likely to seek extra-marital relationships. And indeed this has been confirmed by studies on masculinity elsewhere. Baker and Ricardo (2005) in a study of young men and construction of masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, noted that men, who felt that their wives did not respect them because they were not employed, tended to have extra-marital relationships. To address wives who are not submissive to their husbands biblical passages like Ephesians 5:22 and 1 Peter 3 are therefore read, "Wives be submissive to your husbands as to the Lord." They also believe that some women seek extra-marital relationships (thus putting themselves and their partners at risk of HIV) because their husbands do not show them love. Our respondents said to address this, texts like Colossians 3:19 are used, "Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them."

Other texts are also used to promote abstinence and faithfulness. 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:15 which talk of the bodies of Christians as the temple of God were highlighted. One respondent (FT03) explained, "According to these scriptures, the bodies of Christians are members of Christ, his holy temple. This means the bodies must be kept holy. Keeping one's body holy will therefore protect one from HIV and AIDS." Threats are also used to promote abstinence and faithfulness. One respondent (FT06) mentioned how they use the story of David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12) to show that God punishes sinners. According to the story God was angry when David committed adultery and murder at the same time. He later had to punish him together with his family. From this story, explained our respondent, Christians must learn that God can punish them for their sins and HIV can be one such punishment for sin. Another respondent (FT09) even described sexual immorality as leading not only to risks of HIV but also to demonic possession. Using the Pauline teaching that when you commit adultery you become one flesh with the person you are committing it with, the respondent

said, “You become one person with that person and so you also expose yourself to demon possession.” References to HIV and AIDS as God’s punishment was also mentioned by some respondents using texts like Jeremiah 30:12-13 (For thus says the Lord: Your heart is incurable and your wound is grievous. There is none to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you) and Romans 6:23 (For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord).

The use of the Bible for Care and support

Care and support of the weak and marginalized has been the work of churches for the greater part of Christianity’s history. In a number of countries in Africa, churches run a number of health institutions for care and treatment. In Zimbabwe, for example, churches run about 68% of the country’s health services (Weinreich and Benn 2004:101). Although not to the same extent as in Zimbabwe, in Botswana churches from the beginning of their missionary work ran health institutions (Mgadla 2007:115-154). This study on Pentecostal churches and HIV and AIDS also found out that these churches emphasise care and support of the infected and affected. Although none of the studied churches were running health institutions like medical clinics or hospitals, treatment, care and support of the infected is central to the missions of the churches. The Bible is read to underscore this need to care and support.

Often used to justify the churches’ care and support work was the figure of Jesus. Respondents noted that Jesus did not only care for those who were ill, he especially taught his followers to have a caring attitude. Nearly all respondents cited Jesus’ eschatological teaching in Matthew 25:31-46. For these respondents, the passage provides the most compelling criterion upon which the last judgement will be carried out. The criterion is the care and support of the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned, in short, those in need. It teaches that in providing care and support to the marginalized and the weak, which in the context of the respondents included the HIV and AIDS infected and affected, they will be doing this to Jesus. In support of Jesus’ caring attitude and his teaching that his followers should also be caring and supporting, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) was also referred to by respondents. As respondent GB02 explained, “The parable teaches Christians to be Good Samaritans wher-

ever they are. They should take care of the ill, whether they have been attacked by thieves or are receiving home based care.” Another respondent said, their care activities include providing even financial resources to meet the needs of those infected in their communities. She said in her church Mark 10:45 which says Jesus came to serve rather than to be served, encourages them to serve the infected and affected, whether church members or non-members, in their neighbourhoods.

The biblical teachings on love (Luke 10:27, John 13:34-35, 15:12, Romans 12:9-12) were also cited to support the churches’ care and support work. Respondents explained that since God is love and calls upon all to love, Christians are compelled to care and support those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. One respondent defined love as, “The ability to support those who are in need” (PS01). Respondents also mentioned that the Bible teaches them not only to love in word, but indeed in their deeds. The spirit of sharing as done by the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:32-37) was given as an example to be followed in support of those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. Acts 9:36-42 which gives an account of Tabitha’s works of charity was also cited by many respondents as another basis for the need for Christian care and support of the marginalized. This text was cited together with other passages that encourage works of charity among the poor. One pastor explained that Christians are encouraged to care for and support those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS as in doing that they will be serving God who in turn will reward them. He cited Luke 6:38 as one of those texts used to encourage generous services to the needy, “Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” Many other biblical texts were also cited by respondents as texts used to encourage Christians to have compassion towards the HIV and AIDS infected and affected: Matthew 6:1-3 (give without sounding a trumpet and God will reward you), Galatians 6:2 (bear each other’s burden), Ephesians 4:4 (Christians are one body of Christ and so they should care for each other).

Christians also use the Bible to counsel the infected and affected. Several biblical texts used for counseling as Christian support were cited. Top on the list of these texts was however, the story of Job. Biblical scholars have noted two themes in the book of Job: the traditional interpretation of the need to remain faithful under suffering based on the prose section of the book and the modern interpretation of theodicy based on the poetic

section (Anderson 1993:8-10). All our respondents said they read the book of Job to highlight the need to remain faithful under suffering. Just as Job lost everything and suffered poor health but remained faithful to God, those infected by HIV are also encouraged to remain faithful to God even in poor health. Respondents also said the infected are encouraged to put faith in God for their healing as the following section shows.

The use of the Bible for Healing

It is in their claim to have powers to heal HIV and AIDS that Pentecostal churches have been criticized by medical scientists. The Ugandan Monitor recently carried an article entitled *Spiritual Healing Threatening Adherence to Antiretrovirals* (www.kaiser.network.org; accessed 17/10/08). This is because Pentecostals believe that HIV and AIDS can be healed in the name of Jesus. Compared to the other two areas of HIV and AIDS response discussed above, our respondents gave a lot of scriptural references as evidence to support the healing of HIV and AIDS. We were clear to first find out the respondents' understanding of healing and for almost all of them, HIV and AIDS healing meant the absence of the virus from the body of a previously infected person.

Most of the respondents started by quoting Luke 1:37, "For with God nothing will be impossible." Of the 13 pastors interviewed, 10 (about 77%) cited this scripture as the starting point for the belief that with faith in God the HIV and AIDS infected can be healed. References were also made to the healing of people with leprosy in the Bible (2 Kings 5:1ff, Luke 5:12-16). Respondents explained that just as God healed people with leprosy which was also considered to be incurable, he still has the power to heal those with HIV and AIDS. After all they quoted, "God said, "I am the Lord, your healer"" (Exodus 15:26). Another widely cited text was Psalms 103:3 (Bless the Lord, ..., who heals all your diseases). The word 'all' was emphasized by the respondents who referred to this scripture. One respondent to the questionnaire explained, "This scripture means God heals all diseases since *all* include HIV and AIDS." Similarly Isaiah 53:5 (... with his stripes we are healed ...) was also cited as evidence that God heals HIV and AIDS. Respondents were categorical that the Bible does not categorise diseases or state that there are certain diseases that are beyond the power of God. They said since HIV and AIDS are illnesses like tuberculosis, cancer or leprosy, God has the power to heal them. Respondent GB07 had this to say, "HIV/AIDS can

be healed because it is a disease like any other disease. In this regard, it can be healed. There is no weapon planned against us that can prosper. The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword and it is alive up to today.” Hebrews 13:8 (Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever) was used to argue that if Jesus healed all diseases and that he does not change, it means he is able to heal HIV and AIDS as well. Since he has given power to his followers to heal (Mark 16:17-And these signs will accompany those who believe ... they will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover), respondents were unanimous that today’s church has the power to heal HIV and AIDS.

The Bible was also used to prescribe healing methods. Mark 14:17 and Acts 9:17-19 were cited as prescribing the laying on of hands in prayer as a healing method. James 5:14 was cited as the scriptural reference for the use of oil for healing.

Discussion

“There is no mention of HIV/AIDS in the Hebrew Bible,” writes J. Stiebert (2003:30). The same is true of the New Testament. The whole Bible does not mention HIV and AIDS as they did not exist when the biblical books were written (Happonen 2005:128). However, as we have seen above, Pentecostal churches in Botswana find the Bible very useful in responding to HIV and AIDS. They use the Bible to understand the suffering and loss caused by HIV and AIDS, to prevent contraction of the virus, to care for those infected and affected and to heal those infected and affected. As one respondent said, “The Bible is the manual for our lives in everything even on HIV and AIDS.” (PS 02). What is clear therefore is that although the Bible does not mention HIV and AIDS, because of its place and authority in Pentecostal churches, Christians make what Happonen (2005:128) calls “extended application” between genuinely comparable situations we find in biblical times and our circumstances today. Pentecostal churches consider the Bible to be the inspired word of God. Bible reading and applications to situations in life is therefore central to members of these churches. As one Pentecostal theologian writes, “For Pentecostals, the thought and praxis of the tradition has been and continues to be informed directly by the biblical texts themselves” (Thomas 1998:310). Because of this tradition, questions about HIV and AIDS are therefore answered from the perspective of the

Bible. This result in what we experienced in the district workshops I mentioned above, “But the Bible says ... ” Following this method of using the Bible, one can easily understand churches, and particularly Pentecostal churches’ initial reactions to the outbreak of HIV and AIDS. Let us briefly revisit this initial understanding to see the role that the Bible played in responding to HIV and AIDS.

As they often do, when HIV and AIDS broke out, churches sought a biblical answer to the problem. This they found mainly in the biblical, specifically Deuteronomic, doctrine that teaches that God rewards the righteous and punishes sinners (Deuteronomy 7:12-15). As many scholars (for example, Togarasei 2002:254-271, Kgalemang 2004:141-168, Munyika 2005:74-117, Chitando 2007:21) have lamented, this reading of the Bible perpetuated stigmatization and discrimination. PLWH were seen as sinners receiving their due punishment for their sins. Informed by their reading of the Bible, churches, especially Pentecostal churches also became associated with rigid sexual morality and the rejection of prevention measures like use of condoms, sexual education for youth and rigid gender roles (Weinreich and Benn 2004:98). In fact all the accusations that were leveled against churches in their response to HIV and AIDS (e.g. being a “sleeping giant”, promoting stigma and discrimination based on fear and prejudice, pronouncing harsh moral judgements on those infected, obstructing the efforts of the secular world in the area of prevention and reducing the issues of AIDS to simplistic moral pronouncements (Perry 2003:3)) were to a large extent a result of their reading of the Bible.

This article shows that Pentecostals have not read the Bible only to stigmatise the infected. In fact, it is the understanding in these churches that this reading (that HIV activists thought promoted stigma) is meant to prevent HIV and AIDS. As we noted in the presentation of results above, Pentecostal churches believe the threat of God’s punishment for adultery/fornication should stop people from engaging in HIV risk behaviours. For them, the role of the church is to encourage people to live by the standards of God. It is in leading Godly lives that people can prevent themselves from contracting the virus. It is the Pentecostals’ use of the Bible that explains their attitude to condom use as a method of HIV prevention. Earlier studies of Pentecostal churches in Botswana (Mabotho 2007, Togarasei et al 2008) show that less than 50% of Pentecostal churches membership believe that condoms can be used outside marriage. Influenced by their reading of the Bible which promotes ab-

stinence for the unmarried and faithfulness for the married, many Pentecostals are against talk of condom use for the unmarried.

It is therefore my conviction that responses to HIV and AIDS by governments and Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) should take seriously the influence that the Bible has among Christians, particularly those from the Pentecostal churches. As noted above, Pentecostal churches take seriously the authority of the Bible. They believe that God has revealed himself to humanity through Scripture. They consider the Bible to be the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), inerrant and authoritative (Decker 2003:2-4). Christian life, for them, should be guided by the Bible as it is, “the Christian’s sole rule of faith and practice” (Decker 2003:2-4). With this understanding they want to respond to HIV and AIDS guided by the biblical teaching. It is encouraging then that (as the results of this study show) there are positive readings of the Bible in Pentecostal churches for HIV response. As presented above, Pentecostals find teachings on HIV prevention, care, treatment and support in the Bible. My assessment of this turn from readings of stigmatization and discrimination to readings of care, support, treatment and identification with the infected and affected is a result of massive education programmes on HIV and AIDS. There is no substitute for education, especially education tailored along the values, culture and beliefs of the people. It is in this light that the high value occupied by the Bible in the belief system of the Pentecostals should be taken seriously in calling them to be partners to HIV and AIDS response.

Let me end this discussion by noting that biblical scholars in Africa have really played a role in demonstrating how the Bible can be used in contexts of HIV and AIDS. Musa Dube (e.g 2008), Gerald West and B. Zengele (2006), Sarojini Nadar (2004, 2007), Malebogo Kgalemang (2004), Dorothy Bea Akoto (2004), Lovemore Togarasei (2002, 2008), Madiopane Masenya (2001:186-199) and many other African scholars and theologians with interest in the Bible, have demonstrated how the Bible can be positively used by Christians for HIV and AIDS response. Unfortunately these works usually remain accessible only to the academics who rarely influence government policies and practices among the Christians who want the Bible to guide their daily lives and practices. It therefore remains a challenge to us as scholars to make sure that our research findings filter down to the people who consume the Bible on a daily basis.

There is therefore need for stakeholders in national HIV and AIDS response, both governmental and non-governmental organizations, to work closely with biblical scholars in influencing the direction of biblical interpretation in churches. One way that has been promoted by the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) is the mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS in biblical studies and other theological studies in theological institutions (see Dube 2003 and Chitando 2008). This helps in producing pastors trained in interpreting the Bible and theology for positive HIV and AIDS response. But there are also many other ways of encouraging the positive use of the Bible by Pentecostal churches and indeed other churches. One such other way is the conducting of workshops on biblical interpretation and HIV and AIDS. Although time did not allow us to pursue discussions on the Bible and HIV and AIDS during the assessment workshops I have already referred to (Togarasei et al 2008), I was interested to note that participants were quite willing and enthusiastic to engage in the discussions. A number of pastors asked us if we could organize such workshops in future.

Conclusion

Despite that it was written many years ago in a completely different world from the modern world, the Bible remains very influential in the lives of Christians, particularly those of Pentecostal churches. As we have seen Pentecostals believe the Bible is normative and provides classic examples of how one should live a life pleasing to God. Biblical influence therefore infiltrates all aspects of a Christian's life. It is the first port of call particularly on questions to do with moral values and social responsibilities. No wonder when HIV and AIDS broke out, Christians sought answers from the Bible. In this chapter I have looked at how Pentecostal Christians in selected churches in Botswana use the Bible in contexts of HIV and AIDS. As the presentation of results of my field work show, the Bible is used for HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support. In their response, Christians are guided by their reading of biblical texts. I have argued from an analysis of this use of the Bible that for effective involvement of Pentecostal Christians and indeed other Christians for HIV and AIDS response, the place and function of the Bible in their lives should be taken seriously.

The Christian use of the Bible should not be seen as a hindrance to effective HIV and AIDS response. What is needed, however, is to encourage a reading of the bible that promotes effective HIV and AIDS response. This is because the meaning of the Bible is not static. In a study of the use of the Bible in the reformed Church in Zimbabwe (Togarasei 2003), I noted that Christians use the Bible as a classic model but allow other factors to influence their interpretation of the Bible. I found out that although the starting point for theologizing was the Bible, other factors like the church tradition and cultural practices influenced church teaching and practices. It was very clear, as we have seen among Botswana Christians, that the Bible is used contextually to address modern problems that biblical people never experienced. The running of Christian hospitals, for example, was compared to Jesus' practice of healing. What Christians seek therefore are practices comparable to those practiced in biblical times. To get to these they interpret the Bible. It is on this basis therefore that my argument that effective Christian response to HIV and AIDS should take seriously the way the Bible should be interpreted. Some of the ways of promoting this reading of the Bible have been suggested in this article.

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INTERPRETING THE EIGHTH-CENTURY PROPHETS IN ISRAEL IN THE CONTEXT OF UNREST IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Introduction

The eighth century witnessed significant economic improvement in ancient Israel but the wealth was concentrated in the hands of the upper class. The marginalization of the lower class led to social ills which proved a menace to the political and social stability of Israel, and eventually paved the way for the collapse of the nation. The prophets of the day had seen this coming and warned but they were largely ignored. Circumstances similar to those in ancient Israel have caused much unrest and violence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The unrest arose as a result of the exploitation and neglect of the region by successive governments in spite of the fact that oil was discovered there and has continued to be used to develop other parts of the country. The inhabitants complain not only of neglect, but also of environmental degradation, and therefore have continued to agitate for a better deal. The agitation has taken various forms and caused not little violence in Nigeria, the height of which was the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists in 1995.

The aim of this paper is to seek the application of the message of the eighth-century BCE prophets in Israel against injustice to the situation in the Niger Delta. It is believed that if compliance with this message is combined with the on-going Amnesty Programme this will bring about peace and order in the region. The paper first portrays the situation in eighth-century BCE Israel which warranted condemnation by the prophets, after which it examines the condition of the Niger Delta since the discovery of oil in that region in the 1950s. Finally the article applies the message of the prophets as a recipe for peace and order in the Niger Delta region.

The Eighth Century in Israel

The eighth century BCE in Israel witnessed significant peace and prosperity in both kingdoms. In the north much of the time fell in the reign of Jeroboam II (786-46 BCE) and that of Uzziah (783-42 BCE) in the southern kingdom. This situation was engendered by the political peace that was prevailing in the Assyrian Empire, especially in the west. Israel was also at peace with her immediate neighbours. For example, in Syria Damascus was distracted by Hamath, so she was in no position to maintain her hold on Israel. It was also a period when there was peace between Israel and Judah; hence they were able not only to protect themselves but even to expand their powers against their enemies. According to Bright (1981:155), by mid-eighth century the dimensions of Israel and Judah together were as great as those of Solomon's empire in the tenth century.¹

Full advantage of this political situation seems to have been taken so much that prosperity unknown since the time of Solomon ensued. Agriculture was the primary means of subsistence. The fertile regions of Samaria produced wheat and barley and, as the Samaria Ostraca attest, the hillsides yielded grapes and olives. Moreover, the major international trade routes once more passing through Israelite territory, tolls from caravans and free interchange of goods poured wealth into the country. Phoenicia provided Israel with luxury items such as ivory while Israel in turn traded grain, olive oil and wine with her. At the same time Israel supplied Egypt with olive oil and wine (King 1989:4). Judah, too, reached the zenith of its economic and military power in the reigns of Uzziah and Hezekiah (Bright 1981:259).

Unfortunately the wealth was not shared by all classes; rather it was concentrated in the hands of the upper class that dispossessed the others of their property. As Robinson (1979:63) explains, a wealthy merchant class emerged with a hereditary status, sharing the nation's wealth with the noble and building for themselves elaborate homes. Apparently there developed the habit of money making through land grabbing which developed with the emergence of an aristocratic class of landowners that dispossessed the small farmers by illegal means to make the

¹ I am aware of the current controversy among some archaeologists concerning the dating of the Solomonic era but since the argument is still inconclusive here the traditional dating of the era to the 10th century is adopted (see Schmidt 2005:109-140).

development of large estates possible. As Robinson aptly conjectures, a small farmer borrowed money from a rich merchant, mortgaging his land for it; when he was unable to pay his debt, he lost his land but was probably allowed to cultivate it on behalf of the new owner, paying a large portion of the produce as rent. The pathetic situation of the lower class is seen perhaps more closely in Isaiah 5:8 where it is attested that both landlords and government officials confiscated the houses and land of the poor, owning more and more houses, and bigger and bigger pieces of land until they alone were left in the field. It is similar to the situation painted in Micah 2:1-2. The leaders did not only steal the land of the poor, but resorted to violence against a man and his house.

From the foregoing it appears there was conspiracy between the merchants and the rulers against the less privileged. This suggestion is buttressed by Burrows (1982:138) when he affirms that the monarchy with its court and military establishment created a nobility of power and privilege. The involvement of the government in cheating the poor is also seen clearly in Amaziah's antagonism to Amos. As soon as the latter directed his message against the king Amaziah, the priest of the royal sanctuary at Bethel, accused him of conspiracy against Jeroboam and against Bethel, the royal city (Amos 7:10ff). Neither were the judges left out of the conspiracy against the poor, as justice was usually denied the needy in favour of the rich. Without money a man would not be given any hearing in the court of law. The smallest bribe (Amos 2:6) could secure a verdict against a peasant, and hand over to the rich not only the land, but in some cases the farmer himself and his family (Robinson 1979:64).

The socio-economic decadence just described went hand in hand with religious decay. Though the great shrines were busy, thronged with worshippers (Amos 4:4f; 5:21-24), it is evident that Yahwism in pure form was no longer maintained. Even the professional prophets and the priests practised for money (Mic.3:5, 11). Gunda (2010) captures succinctly the role of the ministers of Yahweh in the exploitation of the poor. He says:

... the priests were acting in complicity with the elites and the merchants in the violation of the rights of vulnerable groups. The priests appear to be encouraging the exploitation by positing that Yahweh is fully behind the wealthy members and in return the priests were benefiting immensely from the multiple sacrifices

and offerings being given by the rich. The prophet (Amos) identified the formalisation of Israelite religion as an impediment to the establishment of a just society. Religion had ceased to have a moral face, it had now been reduced to some tangible and practice oriented set of beliefs. What had become central was the ability to offer sacrifices and offerings, being able to take part in Sabbath meetings and festivals hence in 4:4, the prophet says; "Come to Bethel - and transgress; to Gilgal - and multiply transgression; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days."

The Prophetic Indictment

The foregoing represents the socio-economic milieu in which the prophets intervened, a society in which the small minority dominated the resources and literally enslaved the others. Hence, the criticism of the prophets intensively focuses on the upper class: the rulers, merchants, judges and ministers of God. The prophets describe the rulers as irresponsible people who oppressed the ordinary members of the society, whereas their duty was to defend the latter's cause. For example, Micah blames the government and the rich landlords who were entrusted with the administration of justice for using their power instead for committing injustice and heartless exploitation of the governed, devouring them flesh and bone (3:1-4; cf. Amos 6:12-14). In this way, the prophet likens these oppressors to cannibals preying upon their subjects, mercilessly devouring their substance like ravenous beasts, reducing them to absolute destitution, starvation and death (Archer 1970:755). Isaiah (10:1-4) condemns the rulers and law makers for making decrees to legalize their atrocities against the people. In the opinion of Bright (1982:498), this is referring to rulers who issued unjust laws designed to deprive the helpless of their rights perpetually. As Kidner (1970:597) puts it, for these selfish leaders, cheating their subjects became exploits of a life-time, finding their way through the law. So, apparently with anger, Isaiah assails these powerful and unscrupulous nobles for conspiring with the judges to cheat the helpless (1:21-23).

The wives of members of the upper class apparently collaborated with their spouses in oppressing the poor. Hence Amos denounces the frivolity of the women of the nobility, describing them as "cows of Bashan," who urged their husbands to oppress the poor and crush the needy in

order to provide them with the luxuries they demanded (4:1-3). The two main verbs in verse 1 are *‘asaq* (to oppress) and *rasas* (to crush). The former may also mean to cheat, to subjugate, to maltreat, while the latter in active participle as used here can also mean to kill or to murder (Brown 1977; Brill 2003). Thus the intensity of the oppression of the poor is plainly portrayed using these verbs. Hyatt (1982:620) affirms that Bashan was a fertile district east of the Sea of Galilee noted for its prize cows. If he is correct the prophet apparently deliberately contrasts these wealthy, plump women with the *dallim* (דַּלִּים) and *ebyonim* (אֲבִיּוֹנִים), the wretched and miserable, of the society.

The prophets were hard particularly on the rich merchants for the heartlessness and dishonesty with which they maltreated the poor. Amos (2:6f.) accuses them of “selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes,” which in Hyatt’s interpretation refers to rapacious creditors selling their debtors into slavery for trifling debts. For Amos this may have been achieved within the law but it is evil in the eyes of God. Interpreting Amos here Gunda posits that the exploitation of the poor farmers and producers by the rich estate owners and merchants should be understood as having been carried with “governmental and juridical connivance.” The poor had no redress anywhere because they had become part of the spoils for the rich, supported by the political elites and the judges. This exegesis anticipates the situation in the Niger Delta where successive governments kept on adjusting the constitution in favour of themselves as against the ordinary people. We have seen above how Isaiah (5:8) scolds the rich landlords and government officials for confiscating the property of the lower class until all became theirs. The prophets also criticized the corrupt judicial system. Micah rebukes the judges and the rulers together, for the way they investigated crimes was determined by the amount of bribe they received (3:11; 7:3; cf. Isa. 1:23). For these and other vices the prophets unanimously predicted Yahweh’s punishment in terms of the fall of the two nations. They declared that Israel had no future but utter ruin (Amos 5:2; 7:7-9; 8:1-4,8a; Hos.2:2-13; Isa.6:11f.). The Day of Yahweh which they hoped for would not be a day of deliverance but that of divine judgment (Amos 5:18-20; Isa.2:6-21) for which God had appointed Assyria as his instrument (Isa.10:5; Hos.11:5ff.). Israel’s hope was only in justice. It must roll like waters (Amos 5:24). According to Finley (1985:419), Amos particularly views justice in terms of fairness, especially towards the needy.

The fall which the prophets predicted indeed came when Assyria captured northern Israel in 722/21 BCE. However, it is obvious that the Assyrian invasion was only the straw that broke the camel's back. Before the invasion the inner weakness, the teething discontent within the land, the social disintegration, was manifest. This situation gradually culminated into the anarchy recorded in 2 Kings 15:8-31, which shows that Israel had almost collapsed as a nation. The instability of the time is best seen in the fact that four kings occupied the throne and two were murdered within two years, rival kings probably claiming authority during the same period. In the words of Hosea we see the graphic picture of the plots and counter-plots that had torn the polity asunder (8:4; 10:3f), the complete collapse of law and order in which neither life nor property was safe (4:1-3; 7:1). It was in such a period; during the reign of one of the usurpers, Pekah (734-32) that the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser III started the invasion and captivity which northern Israel never survived (LaSor 1970:359).

Thus in ancient Israel the upper class, that is, government officials and the rich, relegated the lower to the background. The prophets warned the perpetrators of this injustice of the dire consequences but they would not heed their warning until discontent in the land led to the social unrest which paved the way for the collapse of the nation. It is in the context of the prophets' call for justice in the midst of marginalization that their message is relevant to the current situation in the Niger Delta, the subject to which the rest of this article is devoted.

Unrest in the Niger Delta

It is not impossible that some may argue that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is not that relevant in modern times to warrant its application to the situation in the Niger Delta. The document is too old and the contexts are not the same. However, as will be proved later this article shows clearly that the criticisms of the prophets are very much applicable to the Niger Delta. To buttress this point I want to use Gunda's (2010, *Introduction*) succinct exposition. As he rightly points out,

the Bible as a whole is relevant to us as it was relevant to the intended audiences of the various texts. ...Today, we talk of different ideologies such as capitalism, communism, socialism, human rights and so on, yet the central concerns of these ideologies were already known to and even practised by many ancients. ...We have named and systematically pre-

sented these ideologies but we certainly were not their inventors. Further, the quest for a just society has been the preoccupation of many ancients that contemporary political activists cannot claim to be pioneers in this regard. Can we not learn something from past generations or even millennia? Also, it cannot be disputed that the Bible, with its latest texts being around one thousand nine hundred years old remains one of the most influential texts in this contemporary globalized world. This is especially true when looked at in Africa, where Christianity is still a force to reckon with, ... still very influential to the extent that African politicians still try to paint themselves as Christians and sometimes even 'create' some Christian leaders to legitimize themselves.

The points raised by Gunda here are very crucial for not only the Niger Delta but for Nigeria as a whole where most of the government officials handling the affairs in the Delta region were Christians, some of them Church ministers. Also, from his exposition the eighth-century prophets of Israel can be classed among the earliest human rights activists. Hence the condemnations of Amos and his contemporaries still apply today particularly to the Niger Delta context. In fact, as almost all of the agitators for justice in the region were Christians, they must have drawn inspiration from the texts of the prophets.

The Niger Delta, the delta of the Niger River in Nigeria, is a densely populated region sometimes called the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil. The area was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was expanded and became the Niger Protectorate (See information on the Niger Delta at www.en.wiki.org/wiki/Niger_Delta). However, as now defined officially by the Nigerian Government the Niger Delta extends over about 70,000 km² and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present-day Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states. In the year 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime expanded its definition to include Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Ondo states. Some 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups, including the Efik, Ibibio, Anang, Ogoni, Oron, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Igbo, Urhobo and Kalabari, are among some who speak about 250 dialects in the Niger Delta.

The main cause of the unrest in the Niger Delta has to do with controversy over the distribution of the proceeds accruing from petroleum. Shell-BP first discovered oil in commercial quantity in that region in 1956. In February 1958 Nigeria became an oil exporter, and within a period of 27 years, 1958-85, it became the world's sixth largest oil exporter (Mohammed 1989:105). By 1975 money from oil accounted for

more than 75% of Nigeria's export earnings, so much so that by the early 1990s the country had become virtually dependent on petroleum extraction economically (Obafemi 1994:49; Nwosu 1994:73). However, in spite of the oil boom the majority of Nigerians have seen little if any improvement in their standard of living. In practice, 85% of the oil wealth is retained by politicians and their cronies who comprise an insignificant percentage of the population. The Niger Delta people suffer most as they are not only neglected, but have also had to abandon their land on which they used to earn their living to the oil companies with insignificant compensation. But the one factor that has caused the most heated agitation in the region is environmental degradation. Much of the natural gas extracted in oil wells is immediately burned, or flared. Despite regulations introduced many years ago to outlaw the practice, most associated gas is flared in the Niger Delta, causing local pollution and contributing to climate change. In addition, oil spillage destroys the land and water resources of the region. Almost 7000 oil spills occurred between 1970 and 2000, more than one each day. Uncontrolled gas flares and frequent oil spillage pollute the land and the streams, thereby exposing the inhabitants of the area to health hazards (Wotogbe-Weneka 2009:9).

Hence environmental devastation associated with the oil industry and the lack of distribution of oil wealth have been the source and/or key aggravating factors of numerous environmental movements and inter-ethnic conflicts in the Niger Delta region. There is evidence of agitation from the 1970s. For example, in 1970 the Ogoni leaders petitioned the military government over Shell-BP's unbridled contravention of civilized rules. The land was highly polluted; agriculture had been disrupted; the company paid peanuts to landowners; cash crops were being destroyed; the untarred roads were no longer passable; and so on. The company responded that the leaders were lying, that it was doing enough for the people. Government did nothing about the petition (Ojo-Ade 1999:266). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s successive governments made many promises of benefits for the Niger Deltans but failed to fulfil them, the failure which led to various ethnic groups growing increasingly dissatisfied; hence the formation of ethnic movements for unified agitation. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was formed in 1992. Led by the Ogoni playwright, author and environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, MOSOP became the major campaigning organization representing the Ogoni people in their struggle for ethnic and environmental rights. Its primary targets, and at times adversaries, have been the Nige-

rian government and the oil companies, particularly Royal Dutch Shell. In December 1992 MOSOP issued an ultimatum to the oil companies demanding for damages, royalties, compensation, and for immediate stoppage of environmental degradation; it also demanded for negotiation on mutual agreement on all future drilling. The Ogoni threatened to embark on mass action to disrupt their operation if the companies failed to comply. The government responded by banning public gatherings and declaring that disturbances of oil production were acts of treason.

By 1993 government forces were becoming more violent against the people. On 30 April soldiers visited mayhem and massacre on the people of Biara village for protesting against Shell-BP's dualized pipeline after a recent oil spillage. That same year, the government of Babangida signed what was commonly called the Saro-Wiwa Decree, the Treason and Treasonable Decree, 1993, which was later used to condemn Saro-Wiwa to death. Saro-Wiwa led the Ogoni to boycott the June 12, 1993 presidential elections, the boycott which was the main reason for his June 21 arrest. Saro-Wiwa's imprisonment for one month and one day was marked by violence and counter violence. As Ojo-Ade (1999:279) puts it, "From top to bottom, one senses a pervasive atmosphere of tension, like an earthquake preparing for a tremendous eruption." Military repression against the Ogoni continued. On the 21st of May 1994 soldiers and mobile policemen appeared in most Ogoni villages, the occupation which eventually led to the murder of nine activists, among them Ken Saro-Wiwa, by the General Sani Abacha Junta on November 10, 1995 (see information on the conflict in the Niger Delta at www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/conflict_in_the_niger_delta).

The agitations for justice in the Niger Delta were not limited to the Ogoni. In December 1998 the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) issued the Kaiama Declaration. In the declaration, and in a letter to the oil companies, the Ijaw called for oil companies to suspend operations and withdraw from Ijaw territory. The IYC pledged to struggle peacefully for freedom, self-determination and ecological justice. The action which they termed Operation Climate Change would begin December 28. In response Nigerian troops occupied Bayelsa and Delta states. In the morning of December 30 the soldiers attacked protesters who processed through Yenagoa, the Bayelsa capital, killing several of the protesters and arresting many. On January 4, 1999 government forces attacked and set ablaze Opia and Ikiyan, two Ijaw communities in Delta State. Nonetheless, Operation Climate Change continued, and disrupted Nigerian

oil supplies through much of 1999 by turning off valves passing through Ijaw territory. This same year, in the context of high conflict between the Ijaw and the Nigerian Federal Government the military carried out the notorious Odi massacre, killing scores of the Ijaw (see wikipedia link above).

By 2003 the conflict with the Federal Government and among the various ethnic groups, particularly between the Ijaw and Itsekiri, coupled with a spike in the availability of small arms and other weapons, led increasingly to the militarization of the Delta and the formation of numerous paramilitary groups whose explicit goal was to acquire control of regional petroleum resources. They attempted to control such resources primarily through oil bunkering. Oil corporations and the Nigerian state pointed out that bunkering was illegal but the militants justified bunkering, saying they were being exploited and had not received adequate profits from the profitable but ecologically destructive oil industry.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is perhaps the most noticeable in what it calls the “oil war,” carrying out attacks on the companies’ installations and issuing threats to their home countries that they should steer clear of the region in their own interest. Kidnapping also became an awful aspect of the war. On May 15, 2009, a military operation began against MEND militants. It came in response to the kidnapping of certain Nigerian soldiers and foreign sailors. Thousands of Nigerians fled their villages and hundreds of people were killed on account of the offensive (see see wikipedia link above).

This was the situation in the Niger Delta region until the so-called Amnesty Programme of the present administration of Yar’Adua and Jonathan. The government gave an ultimatum from August 6 to October 4, 2009 for the militants to drop their arms and be reintegrated into the society and rehabilitated. Thousands of them have heeded the call but the rehabilitation process seems to be rather slow; hence the agitation still continues, though with relatively little violence.

It must be noted, however, that before the Amnesty Programme several attempts had been made by previous governments to attend to the situation in the Niger Delta; the major problem being that such efforts were never faithfully followed through. As Ojo-Ade (1999:263) traces the history, the 1960 and 1963 constitutions included a derivation policy requiring that 50% of mineral revenue and rents go to each region where minerals were found. With the outbreak of civil war in 1967 and the advent of militarism and unitary government, that policy was deleted from the

books. In 1970 the Gowon administration set up a commission to review the policy and make recommendations. The Dina Commission recommended 5% revenue and rent to mineral-producing areas. Gowon rejected the idea, and decreed that all offshore oil and its proceeds be confiscated. The Obasanjo military regime that followed in 1976 changed the policy to 25% but later wrote the Land Use Decree (1978) by which government owned all the land which it leased to its citizens. The 1979 constitution ushering in a civilian rule adopted the decree, giving back 100% control to Government. The Buhari Junta of 1983-85 allocated 11/12% of funds to oil areas; however, the money was not paid but lent to bankrupt states. The Babangida government of 1985-93 decided on a 2% derivation policy, the money for which was either never paid or, when paid went into the pockets of the military masters and their faithful civilian servants. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 (during his civilian rule of 1999-2007) with the sole mandate of developing the petroleum-rich Niger Delta region. Similarly, very little was achieved by NDDC; hence the Yar'Adua government saw the need to create a Niger Delta Ministry and launch the Amnesty Programme.

The Relevance of the Prophets

The foregoing description reveals that the situation in the Niger Delta has much in common with that of eighth-century Israel. In both contexts the rulers relegate the masses to the background. The message of the prophets is thus relevant to the situation in the Niger Delta in the context of marginalization and its effects. Just as the eighth century ushered in a period of unprecedented wealth in Israel discovery of oil in the Niger Delta placed Nigeria among the richest nations of the world. However, just as the wealth was monopolized by the upper class in Israel, Nigeria has been stratified into upper and lower classes with the upper class controlling the resources and forcing the other into destitution. But the suffering of the people of the Niger Delta is multiplied, as they are marginalized in several ways. The oil is drilled in their region yet the region is not only subjected to ecological destruction but also neglected in terms of social amenities. Hence the condition of the Niger Deltans compares closely with that of the small Israelite farmers dispossessed of their land by the aristocrats. In the Nigerian context the people of the

Niger Delta are the *dallim* and *ebyonim* who Amos contrasts with the “Cows of Bashan.” The criticism of Isaiah (5:8f.) against the greedy aristocrats who confiscated and encroached on the land of the poor also applies. Isaiah 10:1-4 which condemns the rulers and law makers for making decrees to legalize their atrocities against the people is particularly applicable to the successive governments of Nigeria which keep adjusting the constitution to deprive the Niger Delta of control over the resources obtained in the region. Amos’ accusation of the upper class for “selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes” (2:6f.) is also relevant to the Niger Delta. As we have seen earlier, the ultimate meaning of this metaphor is that the poor were sold into slavery (cf. 8:4). Unable to redeem his mortgage the poor farmer lost his land to the creditor on behalf of whom he then cultivated it and to whom he paid a large portion of the produce as rent. The situation of the minority groups in the Niger Delta is similar in a way; the oil obtained in their land is used to develop other parts of Nigeria while they are subjected to destitution in their own land.

The aftermath of the oppression by the upper class in the prediction of Micah (2:10) was that there would be no more rest in the land. Amos was more specific:

The land shall tremble and everyone mourn; ... and all of it rise like the Nile, and tossed about and sink again like the Nile of Egypt (8:8).

The fulfillment of these predictions is already described above. The atrocities of the upper class in Israel had created disaffection and unrest in the land before the Assyrian invasion came to complete the destruction. The fulfillment in terms of violence is another way in which the message of the prophets is relevant to the Niger Delta situation. As discussed above the region has been characterized by violence for decades on account of neglect by successive governments of Nigeria. The summary of the situation of unrest in the Niger Delta is captured in the report below.

In the few years that militants held sway in the Niger Delta, Nigeria lost trillions of Naira and about 1000 lives. Their activities took a huge toll on Nigeria’s oil revenue. The country lost at least one quarter of its oil production due to the frequent attacks on oil installations resulting in shut-downs and the unwholesome activities of oil bunkering cartels. The report of the Ledum Mitee led Technical Committee on the Niger Delta estimated that the country lost about N8.84 trillion or S61.6 billion to oil theft and sabotage in the volatile region between 2006 and 2008 (Ajaero 2009:12; 2010:11).

However, the prophets are most relevant to the Niger Delta situation in their call for justice, fairness and equity. As far as they were concerned Israel's hope was only in justice. In the same vein, justice, fairness and equity are the most crucial instruments that will bring about peace and order in the Niger Delta region. It was because the governments of Nigeria have not cared enough for justice and fair play that they have neglected the region all over the years; and as we have seen, these are the principles that the agitators have been calling for. It is the absence of these principles that eventually led to militancy. Hence for peace to return to the region justice and fair play must be given priority even in the execution of the current Amnesty Programme. As discussed above, various governments have put in place various schemes to solve the problem of unrest in the Niger Delta but they have not been sincerely carried through. Hence many individuals and groups have emphasized the need for sincerity and justice in solving the problems of the Niger Delta. In the assessment of Professor Tam David-West (2009:4), for example, the Amnesty Programme would fail like the previous efforts unless government addressed the fundamental issues that led to insurgency; and he summed up all these issues under the principle of justice.

Conclusion

The eighth century was a period that witnessed unprecedented wealth in ancient Israel but the upper class sat on it exploiting the masses. The marginalization of the poor occasioned the condemnation by the prophets; they cried against the activities of the oppressors, calling for justice as the only parameter that would avert God's judgement upon the nation. As the warnings of the prophets were ignored Israel drifted into anarchy and eventually collapsed. The situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is similar. Since the 1950s oil has been discovered there and has been exploited but the inhabitants of the region have not only been neglected but have had their environment polluted and damaged. This injustice has brought about much violence leading to loss of lives and property. Hence the message of the prophets is applicable. For peace and order to be achieved in the Niger Delta, justice, equity and fair play must be given priority. The message of the prophets is also very applicable in the context of the Niger Delta because the operators profess either Christianity or Islam, religions in which these principles are very much

entrenched. In other words, we begin to have a just society if adherents of the religions put their doctrines into practice in all their dealings.

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A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF ACTS 2:1-13 AND THE IMPLICATIONS IN THE APOSTOLIC FAITH MISSION IN ZIMBABWE (AFM)

Francis Machingura

Introduction

The book of Acts especially Acts 2:1-13 plays an influential role on the beliefs and teachings of Apostolic Faith Mission as well other Pentecostal churches. The book has influenced the AFM theology, missiology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and pneumatology. Acts 2:1-13 is also important in understanding how the AFM approach the Bible in relation to speaking in tongues (glossolalia). The choice of AFM in this paper is not coincidental but is motivated by AFM's history of influence (particularly doctrinal) on most of the Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches like the: Apostolic Faith Mission Mugodhi, Awake Ministries, United Family Interdenominational Ministries (UFI), Heartfelt International Ministries (HIM), ZAOGA (Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa) and Grace International Ministries. The influence is also noted in some of the largest African Indigenous Churches like the Johane Marange Apostolic Church and some Zionist Churches. The interest on AFM cannot be overlooked considering the number of followers that the church commands, yet surprisingly not much has been done by scholars in terms of research save to mention in passing its existence as one of the biggest Pentecostal churches. Some academic focus has been on ZAOGA as done by David Maxwell¹ and a bit on Family of God Church by Lovemore Togarasei.² Most scholars exerted their research energies and time on African Indigenous Churches. This has provoked my desire in this paper to look at

¹ David Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism and the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement*, Oxford: Weaver Press 2006; "Catch the Cockerel before Dawn": Pentecostalism and Politics in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe, *Africa* 2000, 70, 2; 'Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?' Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28 (1998) 350-373.

² Lovemore Togarasei, *The 'birth' of a prophet: Andrew Wutawunashé's Break from the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (formerly Dutch Reformed Church)*, *Exchange Journal* 35/2 (2006) 215-225; *Modern Pentecostalism as an Urban Phenomenon: The Case of the Family Of God Church in Zimbabwe*, *Exchange Journal* 34/4 (2005) 349-375.

AFM's celebrated concept of glossolalia³ and their argument that their teachings are rooted in the book of Acts.

A Short History of Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

The experience which happened in 1901 in Topeka of Kansa (USA) resulting in “tongue speaking” under the leadership of Charles Fox Parham and William Seymour is linked to the origin of AFM. Charles Parham was a former Methodist Preacher and the Azusa Street Revival Leader from 1906 (hence the Azusa Street Revivals).⁴ It was Parham who formulated the basic Pentecostal doctrine of “initial evidence” as in Acts 2:1-13, after a student called Agnes Ozman requested Parham to lay his hands on her. When he did this, Agnes Ozman prayed successively in several tongues unknown to her and others in the group are claimed to have received the gift as well.⁵ Agnes Ozman is believed to have spoken in perfect Chinese dialect as documented by the United States government language specialists who are reported to have recorded 20 different languages which were spoken at the event and the other languages they could not interpret.⁶ After two years of the Azusa Street Outbreak; the Pentecostal movement had centres throughout the United States; many Northern European Countries, India, China, West and Southern Africa. J G Lake is credited as having spearheaded the missionary work through the help of migrant workers in founding the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa which was later instrumental in the formation of the Apos-

³ The term “glossolalia” is derived from two Greek words “γλῶσσα” which means “tongues or languages” and “λαλέω or λαλεῖν” implying “to speak or to talk”. ‘Γλωσσολαλίá’-glossolalia then becomes speaking in tongues. As it stands, the definition seems to be clear but the controversy features when one thinks of whether tongues refer to strange, unknown, unintelligible and incomprehensible language (understandable only to God) to human beings thereby requiring the gift of interpretation for it to be understandable (1 Corinthians 12-14); or refers to foreign languages which are understandable which do not need any interpretation for those who speak that language (tongues of men-Acts 2:11), B. M. Metzger (ed.), *The Greek New Testament with Greek-English Dictionary*, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1998, 409.

⁴ M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company Ltd 1984, 855.

⁵ S. B. Ferguson (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Leicester: Intervarsity Press 1988, 503.

⁶ Roberts Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival; When the Fire Fell: An in-depth look at the people, Teachings and Lessons*, Shippenburg: Destiny Image Publishers 2006, 224.

tolitic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe.⁷ By 1914 the Apostolic Faith Mission had spread to Zimbabwe through migrant workers who were Lake's converts. The group's impact was enhanced in 1922 by Kruger who went with a large group of missionaries to Zimbabwe.⁸ One of the prominent missionaries that Kruger worked with was Zacharias Manamela who entered the Gwanda reserve (located in Matabeleland South in Zimbabwe) as part of the movement's expansion from the northern Transvaal of South Africa.⁹ Since then the AFM has become one of Zimbabwe's largest Pentecostal Church as well as the regional leading spiritual contender, hence making it the major catalyst in the Pentecostal Christian movement.¹⁰ This makes AFM, one of the successful largest Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches and one cannot talk of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe without mentioning AFM. The Church's national official records claim of having a following of more than 2 million followers in a population of twelve million people and more than a 1000 assemblies run by full-time Pastors in 'sixteen'¹¹ provinces.¹² The Church has managed to plant assemblies in every district of Zimbabwe. The AFM presently has branches in Africa, Europe, Australia and America. It has a Bible College which churns more than eighty pastors every year.¹³ The pneumatic celebration of the importance of glossolalia has earned and characterised the identity of AFM as one of the Pentecostals churches.

⁷ B. Hwata, *An Investigation of Different phases of Pentecostal experience in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe*, South Africa: University of South Africa (*Unpublished M.A. Thesis*) 2005, 28.

⁸ V. Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pvt Ltd 2001, 400.

⁹ David Maxwell, *Historicizing Christian Independency: The Southern Pentecostal Movement 1908-1960*, *Journal of African History* 40/2 (1999) 253.

¹⁰ D. Maxwell, 'Historicizing Christian Independency: The Southern African Pentecostal Movement 1908-1960', *Journal of History* 39/2 (1999) 243-264.

¹¹ Instead of the known ten national provinces, the church creates provinces in line with the growth of the church. They subdivide the known national provinces into smaller ones and they are aiming to have 25 provinces by 2015.

¹² S. M. Mujeyi, *Apostolic Faith Mission's Magazine*, Harare: Living Waters Bible College 2006, 4.

¹³ Interview over the phone with Rev. Constantine Murefu, the Principal of Living Waters Bible College and one of the Senior Pastors of the Church, 15 September 2009.

The nature and Significance of speaking in tongues in Acts and the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

Luke's use of the Hebrew Scriptures takes what happened in Acts 2:1-13 as fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32. The quotation follows LXX but with a number of alterations to adapt the prophecy to Luke's context. The changes in the way in which Joel's statement "*and it shall come to pass afterward*" (Joel 2:28-32) has been altered to "*and in the last days it shall be*".¹⁴ Peter could have regarded Joel's prophecy as applying to the last days hence God's final act of salvation as beginning to take place. The symbolism used by Luke in Acts 2:1-13 is reminiscent of Old Testament theophanies (Exodus 19:15; 2 Sam 22:16; Job 37:10; Ezek 13:13).¹⁵ I.H. Marshall adds that, the speaking in tongues in Acts 2 should be contextually interpreted and understood from the perspective of Luke's theological interest of the worldwide significance of the event and not on the nature of such tongues.¹⁶ So Peter's sermon was delivered precisely in fulfilment of the prophecy, hence Luke's universalistic theology. The words '*they shall prophesy*' are thought by Luke to indicate 'speaking with tongues' yet Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:10 clearly distinguishes between 'prophecy' and 'glossolalia'. The catalogue of people in Acts 2:1-13 (even if it contains 12 names) shows that the Jewry of all nations is represented. Speaking in tongues for Luke is linked to the exaltation of the risen Lord (2:33). These were the mighty works of God (2:11) as seen by the presence and power of the spirit, hence the common language at Pentecost. The spirit's Pentecostal coming is therefore the sign and seal of the new universal covenant. It is a sign for the purpose of that covenant which is to reverse the confusion of Babel by uniting fallen men who were previously separated from God.¹⁷ In the AFM, the uniform speaking in tongues is a sign of the new important covenant of unity and love of Christ on every Christian believer.

Pentecostals find Acts resourceful on their understanding that tongues are the evidence of the manifestation of faith and the experience a Christian needs in order to have the fullness of Christian life, baptism or

¹⁴ J. W. McGarvey and P. Y. Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*, USA: The Standard Publishing Foundation 1986, 23.

¹⁵ J. W. McGarvey and P. Y. Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans* 1986, 26.

¹⁶ I. H. Marshall, *Acts*, Leicester: Intervarsity Press 1999, 24.

¹⁷ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1971, 173.

filling with the Holy Spirit and the pragmatic understanding of the Bible (Acts 2:4,10:44-47,19:4-6). Had Cornelius not spoken in tongues, Peter would not have known that they had received the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Speaking in tongues is regarded as very important for many reasons; certainly more than to prove that one has mystically received the Holy Spirit. There goes the popular Pentecostal saying that ‘the glossolalic language can confuse and not be understood by the devil. It should be a part of everyday life.’¹⁹ Praying in tongues is regarded as helpful for the Christian believers to be able to control the wildest members of their bodies like the tongue. The tongue becomes subjected to the Holy Spirit by breaking the unruliness of one’s tongue and foul talk (James 1:26 3:8).²⁰ Acts 2:1-13 is widely interpreted in AFM as showing that, glossolalia is a sign of the power of the Holy Spirit upon obedient believers; an assurance of the presence of God.²¹ Therefore glossolalia is associated with the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, which can only manifest on people of faith.

The understanding of glossolalia as a sign of being filled by the Holy Spirit is even clear on the AFM’s vision, mission and confession of faith statements. The vision and mission statements of the AFM International are as follows:

- Vision Statement: A well equipped, spirit filled Pentecostal church, inspired to reach out to the unreached and establish churches rooted in the word of God.
- Mission Statement: Equip the leadership of the member-churches and establish and develop a spirit-filled Pentecostal churches.
- Confession of faith: We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence (speaking in tongues) as promised to all believers. We believe in the manifestation of the gifts and fruit of the Spirit in the life of a Christian.²²

¹⁸ I. Cockburn, *The baptism in the Spirit: Its biblical foundations*, London: Fountain Trust 1971, 64.

¹⁹ Interview with a Church Elder in the AFM, Masvingo: 30 July 2008.

²⁰ Roberts Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival: When the Fire Fell-An in-depth look at the people*, Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers 2006, 220.

²¹ D. W. Bashau, *A Handbook on Holy Spirit Baptism: 37 Questions and Answers on the baptism in the Holy Spirit and Speaking in Tongues*, Springdale: Whitacker House 1969, 80.

²² Apostolic Faith Mission International, (<http://www.afm.co.zw>) accessed on 09 April 2010.

It is clear that, the aspect of being “spirit-filled” in the AFM has a lot to do with speaking in Tongues. It is therefore not surprising to find Christian artists with a Pentecostal background making recordings that parade them speaking in tongues as a sign of power. Pastor Charles and Olivia Charamba of the AFM did this on their song “*Ndoraramira Jesu*” (i.e. living for Jesus) from the title track “Amen”. The song talks about someone who aspires to live a holy life, receive help from God, being of God and power from God. The band members wind up the song by speaking in tongues as a sign of having finally possessed spiritual power that overcomes challenges of life. This general understanding of tongues as initial evidence is found across most of the Pentecostal churches as clearly specified in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe’ booklet that:

We believe that ‘speaking in tongues’ as the Spirit gives utterances (Acts 2:4) is the initial evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit; not only on the day of Pentecost for the hundred and twenty; but for believers for all time. Speaking with tongues is the ‘sound’ of the Spirit, heard by EVERY BELIEVER. It is synonymous with the cry of the ‘newborn babe’ in the first birth (birth of the flesh). It was a promise made by Jesus in Mark 16:16-17; fulfilled at Pentecost in Acts 2:4 and also manifested as reported in Acts 10: 45-46, 19:1-7 where it is the evidence of the presence of the Holy Ghost. Hence we conclude that no person is to be given the right of fellowship as a member of our church unless he is baptized in water in Jesus’ name and filled with the Holy Spirit (Ghost) with biblical evidence of speaking in other Tongues as the Spirit of God gives utterance.”²³

Speaking in tongues has generally become the defining tag of most Zimbabwean Pentecostals and with this, the Pentecostal movement has been described by critics as sectarian and fundamentalist, as their view of salvation and the church is parochial. Glossolalia in some Pentecostal churches defines whether one can enjoy fellowship or occupy positions of authority in the church as indicated above that “ ... we conclude that no person is to be given the right of fellowship as a member of our church unless he is baptized in water in Jesus’ name and filled with the Holy Spirit (Ghost) with biblical evidence of speaking in other Tongues” which creates the problem of Spiritual classes as happened at Corinth. A student pastor had this to say on glossolalia as evidence of the Holy Spirit:

²³ Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, The 2004 Organizational Manual, Indianapolis: Department of Publ. 2004, 129.

“If I am filled with the Holy Spirit, then I must speak in other tongues, there is no option on that as long as one has faith. As from the day I began speaking in other tongues I have not stopped yet. Glory to God! This is the only physical proof for real Christians who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.”²⁴

The Pentecostal religious world view is that those who do not speak in tongues lack faith, power and salvation. Besides the use of Acts, Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:4-5 is usually quoted to cement the importance they attach to glossolalia, when he said:

He who speaks in tongues edifies himself ... I would like every one of you to speak in tongues.

An AFM deacon had this to say: “With this positive statement from Paul about tongues, why is it that few Christians speak in tongues? I believe the answer is because there is very little sound, logical and scriptural teaching as to the scope and value of speaking in tongues.”²⁵ Critics like Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu argue that, it is as a result of a pragmatic approach to the Bible that is motivated by the selective hermeneutical tendency to wrench the biblical texts out of context to support predetermined arguments that causes theological problems.²⁶ The selective reading of the Bible is a common phenomenon in most Churches particularly Pentecostal churches. It has helped them to create their own identity and survive from established churches. The context of the quoted biblical texts is ignored by relating its literal wording to their immediate contexts characterised by: poverty, hunger, illness, witchcraft and sorcery. To some extent it is helpful as the Bible is made meaningful and creates hope to their audience, though some level of inconsistency can be observed in relation to the meaning and significance of glossolalia for the various men and women of the cloth and the laity.

Whenever Paul is quoted in 1 Corinthians 14:4-5, Pentecostals are accused as not concerned about the context in which Paul related about glossolalia and the reservations he had about the popularisation of the gift of tongues at the expense of other gifts. Critics argue that, the Pentecostal approach to the Bible and its application is a clear sign of post-modernism. For the postmodern readers, the past is not a unified whole

²⁴ Interview with an AFM Student Pastor who requested to remain anonymous, Harare: 06 September 2008.

²⁵ Anonymous AFM Deacon, Harare: 28 February 2008.

²⁶ Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*, Leiden: Brill 2006, 215.

into which the text fits. There is no “past” to be found. As with the “author’s intentions,” so with “the past”: the modern interpreter insists that the historical record of the past makes his/her interpretation of the text the best; s/he is always talking about his own interpretation of that historical record.²⁷ Pentecostals claim to shun the past (2 Cor. 5:17) as no longer important for a Christian, but it is clear that their teachings portray a ‘hidden’ or subtle engagement with it; sometimes by refashioning it in response to the world view of their respective audience. Ogbu Kalu calls it ‘bumper sticker’ hermeneutics or ‘experiential literalism’, where the personal and corporate experiences are woven into the hermeneutical task’ by sometimes fusing the horizons of the past and present with a ‘pragmatic hermeneutical leap’.²⁸ This is the scenario that seems to take the toll in AFM and other Pentecostal churches on the interpretation of biblical texts; where texts are read and applied without respecting their contexts. Critics argue that, the Pentecostal tradition of ‘proof texting’ approach undeniably results in erroneous views on certain theological issues like glossolalia; a feature that has been raised on recent topical issues on the Pentecostal theologies of deliverance and prosperity.

Critics have also noted that, there seems to be no distinction in AFM between the Holy Spirit and Speaking in Tongues as glossolalia is sometimes taken as evidence that the Holy Spirit has come which finds biblical support in Acts. This position is exacerbated by Luke in Acts that whenever, there is mentioning of the Holy Spirit; it is accompanied by speaking in tongues. Glossolalia is equated with the Holy Spirit; a position that is also assumed in Acts 1:8, 2:4, 8:17, 9:17, 10:44, 19:6). This impression can be derived from Acts 8:15-17:

“When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit”; Acts 19:2-6: “and asked them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” ... When Paul placed his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

²⁷ A. K. M. Adam, *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1995, 21.

²⁸ Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008, 267.

If not accompanied by glossolalia, the glossolalic implication can be sifted out from the biblical texts. As a result of this, AFM does have a justification and basis in the Bible in relation to their understanding of tongues though with some theological challenges. Besides basing on Acts, Pentecostals take every textual mentioning of “baptism, Spirit, Holy Spirit” in the New Testament as implying “speaking in tongues” particularly Luke-Acts (Luke 1:15-17, 41, 67, 3:16, 22; 4:14; 11:13; Acts 1:2, 5, 8; 2:1-13; 4: 25; 5:1-11; 7: 51; 8:17-19; 9:17; 11:12; 13:1-4; 15:8; 19:5-6 and 21:11).

AFM have that emotional fondness for such narrative texts such that they get that experiential affinity between their spiritual world view of tongues and that of Acts. E Stiles adds that, Pentecostals have that belief that the more one prays in tongues the more the manifestation of other gifts of the Spirit and glossolalia is the door into the rest of other gifts.²⁹ Tongues whether done in public or in private are regarded as needing no interpretation at all. For critics, this has resulted in unorthodox and often inconsistent methods being applied in some Pentecostal churches like AFM and ZAOGA to make their followers “speak in tongues”, raising questions and controversies on the aspect of glossolalia. D.A, Johns has observed that, people are told to open their mouths, lift up the sound of their voices and speak forth whatever words the Holy Spirit places on their lips. Some have claimed to have started speaking in tongues when they began by making noises with their mouths as a sign of faith.³⁰ Critics argue that, this understanding of tongues has resulted in faking by some so as to be accepted into the group. It is interesting to note that, besides glossolalia giving identity to the group, the phenomenon is associated with certain benefits.

The gift is associated with protection against evil forces, fear, poverty, unemployment, business failures, marital distress, barrenness, sickness or diseases and pain in whatever form. L Stoneking notes that, the benefits that one accrues from that glossolalic experience become important.³¹ Although most of the Zimbabwean Pentecostals are known to shun their African cultural past, critics take their theology to have been shaped by their local concerns, contexts and needs of the audience they

²⁹ J. E. Stiles, *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, London: Intervarsity Press 1970, 17.

³⁰ David and Jeane Wyns, *A Reader on the Holy Spirit: Anointing, Equipping and Empowering for service*, Los Angeles: International Church of the Four Square Gospel 1993, 29.

³¹ L. Stoneking, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, New York: Schenectady Pvt Ltd 1975, 23.

serve. It is clear that, Africans believe that some diseases or problems are caused by the evil spirits and therefore cannot be healed using western medicine.³² The emphasis by Pentecostals on spiritual protection, deliverance and healing make a lot of sense to an African audience as it addresses economical, social and spiritual problems. It sounds theologically correct and is a relevantly familiar territory for Africans as they are particularly accustomed to the world of unseen spirits; some which are good or bad. If glossolalia is then taken as protective of evil spirits, it then becomes a 'special and sellable commodity' to Africans as they believe that one cannot survive in life without this protection from the spiritual realm. Any call along those lines will get the necessary attention as it resonates and clicks with the spiritual mindset of Africans. Tabona Shoko notes that, health is one of the primary concerns of Shona Religion, where the Shona traditional religious belief system identifies various causes of illness, most of which are linked to the spiritual worldview.³³ Pentecostals particularly AFM have managed to offer that spiritual bridge that people so desire and cannot be found in Mainline and other Protestant Churches with a western background. Pastor A. N. Chinyemba (Overseer and Senior Pastor in AFM) in his unpublished research claims that:

Glossolalia has ritual value and is a divine therapist for the sick when they pray in tongues. Those who speak in tongues automatically receive or mysteriously accumulate peace, joy, blessings in all forms as long as they regularly speak in tongues.³⁴

J Jensen adds that, many testimonies have been given of speakers in tongues who experienced healing; what is interesting is that these claims have never been verified and have remained religious statements said in a church gathering.³⁵ Some even claim to be under protection from whatever diseases. Critics argue that, all these claims do not have any textual support; making one wonder the possible reasons that influence them to come up with such postulations. This has resulted in some

³² Lovemore Togarasei, *Modern Pentecostalism as an Urban Phenomenon: The Case of the Family of God Church in Zimbabwe*, Exchange Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research 34/4, 349-375.

³³ Tabona Shoko, Healing in Hear the Word Ministries Pentecostal Church Zimbabwe, in: David Westerlund, *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions*, New York: I.B.Tauris and Co-Ltd 2009, 45.

³⁴ A. N. Chinyemba, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit (Unpublished Dissertation)*, Harare: Living Waters Bible College 1999, 49.

³⁵ L. Stoneking, *The Gifts of the Spirit*, 24.

followers in the Pentecostal churches suffering from HIV&AIDS claiming healing the moment they engaged in the glossolalic utterances. However, their claims are not supported by medical tests showing the results. For critics, that is nothing short of religious propaganda that is meant to lure converts from other churches. It is a way of disarming established churches in the undeclared fight for followers and influence in society or environment characterized by insurmountable problems like disease, economical crises and poverty. Critics point to unconfirmed claims that, many Pentecostal Churches experienced a phenomenal and unprecedented growth when the social, economical and political problems were chocking Zimbabweans as from year 2000-2008. The economy was not promising to both the rich and the poor such that they were hoping that the solution had something to do with one's spirituality.³⁶ Zimbabwe was characterized by chronic problems in every facet of life, for example, most of the hospitals had closed and the economy was not performing well. The inflation was over a billion percent and a lot of people were despondent about their future. People looked forward to some mystical intervention (something promised by Pentecostals) over their problems and this is easy to understand why people would love to speak in tongues.

The theological Challenges on the Pentecostal claims on Glossolalia

Critics like Richard Burgess notes that, Pentecostal understanding of glossolalia is a clear sign of intolerance on the part of the Pentecostals towards any alternative readings of Scripture by those outside their particular constituencies.³⁷ Pentecostals for David Westerlund would be placed on the exclusivist side of the spectrum³⁸ where other Christian groups are excluded by virtue of not speaking in tongues. The tendency to demonize other religious groupings is widely prominent in most of

³⁶ That perspective developed as a result of certain Pentecostal pastors who widely propagated that, poverty was a result of one's sinfulness. With repentance, every believer was assured of prosperity.

³⁷ Richard Burgess, *Freedom from the Past and Faith for the Future: Nigerian Pentecostal Theology in Global Perspective*, *Journal of PentecoStudies* 7/2 (2008) 29-63.

³⁸ David Westerlund (eds.), *Global Pentecostalism: Encounters with Other Religious Traditions*, New York: I.B.Tauris and Co. Ltd 2009, 2.

the Pentecostal churches and is justified by resorting to the Bible. This includes ridiculing, demeaning and labelling other Christians, particularly Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans as 'dead Churches' lacking the spirit of God; hence the saying '*Kereke Dzisina Mweya*' or Churches lacking the presence and Spirit of God'. The understanding is that, if they lack the presence of God then it implies some other spiritual force other than God is in charge. Such Churches are then labelled as urgently in need of redemption. They are characterised as "other, them" without the light of Christ. This religious understanding has created a theological challenge as shown above in relation to the understanding of the Bible in relation to tongues. African Indigenous Christians have not been spared from the onslaught as they are regarded as syncretistic and the AIC(s)' way of speaking in tongues is described as erroneously 'demonic'.

Critics have noted that, the Pentecostals' actions are possibly justified by the way they approach the Bible and finds support particularly in the vocabulary in Acts which seems to provide a foundational basis on their central beliefs like glossolalia. H. Gunkel argues that a careful analysis of Luke's figurative vocabulary needs to be done to get its meaning and significance. In all instances, Pentecostals take the Lucan vocabulary literally and the sense is usually the immediately apparent one which create problems and theological challenges on the interpretation of the Bible, for example, when Luke says that men spoke 'through' the Holy Spirit; he means they spoke charismatically (Acts 21:4, 20:23, 21:11, 11:28). This also involves Luke's use of terms like 'filled with speaking, fell upon' (Acts 6:3-5, 8:39, 10:44, and 11:15). The point of the metaphor was to denote a relatively overwhelming experience of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ However the very nature of the metaphor; its restricted use and the way it is handled suggests that he does not think that all Christians in this age have sufficiently intense experiences with the spirit as to warrant the application of the metaphor in their case.⁴⁰ This is true of Acts 2:17-21, Peter's talk of the spirit being 'poured out' is not to be taken literally: the spirit is not regarded as a kind of liquid. Critics point that, the Pentecostal taking of everything in the Bible literally creates problems on the status, meaning and significance of texts especially their favourite book of Acts.

³⁹ H. Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1979, 64.

⁴⁰ Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit*, 64.

Even though it might seem to justify their claim to authority on what they do in Acts; the context and theology of the writer is still very important which when observed can minimize the theological challenges created as a result of the Pentecostals' approach to the Bible. J. E. Hull argues that, the Lucan use of these expressions allows that a believer might on many occasions be 'filled with the Holy spirit' while nevertheless constantly remaining 'full' of the spirit: the two types of metaphor makes different but complementary assertions.⁴¹ It is then probably problematic to make Acts 2:4 (with its assertion that the disciples were 'filled with the Holy spirit') the key to Luke's Pneumatology and describe the period before Pentecost either as one of the absence of the spirit in the disciples or as a period of the meagre nativity of the spirit received at Pentecost as mostly done by Pentecostals.

Luke is not saying all Christian disciples receive 'the fullness of the spirit' whether by virtue of confirmation (*contra inter alios*) or conversion. F. D. Bruner argues that, the way Acts speaks about the 'giving' and 'receiving' of the spirit or of the 'gift' of the spirit strongly suggest that the Early Church did not use this language primarily to express the idea of contractual 'giving and receiving' of the person of the spirit in union with believers.⁴² The language by Luke on 'giving' and 'receiving' is metaphorical. It is then clear that neither 'persons' nor 'unions' are 'poured out' (Acts 10:45; 2:33); nor usually for that matter are they 'given' through their laying of hands (Acts 8:18). This would call into question the lack of consistency on the Pentecostals' doctrinal understanding of the Bible particularly the Trinitarian theology, for example, if God is three in the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit; how can He then be poured into or given people? The possession of the gift of tongues would then resonate with Paul's understanding that, gifts are graciously given as determined by God and come from the same source, which is God or the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:11).

Conclusion

This paper has clearly shown that the concept of glossolalia can be related to what is found in Acts 2:1-13 on other aspects like the nature of glossolalia but its understanding dramatically differs when it comes to

⁴¹ J. E. Hull, *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles*, Plainfield: Logos 1968, 64.

⁴² F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1970, 163.

the significance of the phenomenon in the life of the believer. The significance attached to speaking in tongues in AFM as argued by critics show some changes when related to Acts, if Acts is understood in its theological context of tongues. Critics have found that the Pentecostal significance attached to glossolalia is sometimes difficult to establish in the Bible. In some cases, there is apparent agreement in Pentecostals' beliefs with the biblical texts they cite but sometimes cited out of context to suit their teachings. This is also as a result of the noted post-modern influence on the understanding and interpretation of texts; where the interpreter takes texts as directed and speaking to their situation. The selective hermeneutical tendentiousness towards the Bible in general and Acts in particular is rife in most Pentecostal churches where formal theology is deemed as secondary or not important at all; creating tension in terms of socialization with other Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal believers in relation to the understanding of pneumatology and glossolalia. However, to take tongues as normative for every Christian is limiting the understanding of pneumatology to "speaking in tongues" which calls into question the doctrine of Trinity, e.g. what will then be the relationship of God with the Holy Spirit, if glossolalia is equated with the Holy Spirit?

MUSA W. DUBE READS THE BIBLE

POSTCOLONIALISM, FEMINISM, THE CONTEXT OF HIV AND AIDS, AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR BIBLE IN PRACTICE

Stephanie Feder

Introduction

This question often comes up: “Why are you as a white European woman engaged in African biblical hermeneutics?” Somehow my life brought me there. After finishing school, I spent one year as a volunteer in Tanzania and nothing has shaped my life as Tanzania has. When I started studying at university, I kept on with Africa and theology in general; later on I focused on biblical readings in African contexts. My Master’s thesis was about the book of Ruth and its interpretation in the Anglo-African context. For my dissertation I try to find out the similarities and differences in reading the Bible in Africa and the West; again the book of Ruth will serve as the object of investigation. One of the first interpretations of biblical texts I can remember was the text ‘*Divining Ruth for international relations*’ by Musa W. Dube. Reading more texts by her has really made me a fan.

In this chapter, I want to present the most interesting aspects of her work, especially regarding the topics of biblical interpretation and its relevance to practical work. First, I would like to introduce some biographical notes on Musa Dube. Then I will outline the three major topics Dube deals with, which are a) Postcolonialism, b) Feminism, and c) Reading the Bible in the light of HIV and AIDS. In my conclusion I will try to summarize Dube’s main achievements for exegesis in Africa, and I will attempt to give a review of Dube’s work.

Musa Wenkosi Dube – a biographical note

Musa Dube was born in Botswana in 1964 in a Ndebele family. After finishing secondary school, Dube studied at the University of Botswana in the capital Gaborone. In 1988, she completed her Bachelor in Humanities, Environmental Science, and Religious studies. After teaching some classes at the University of Botswana, she got a scholarship and

first went to the United Kingdom at the University of Durham where she did her Master's on New Testament Studies. After that she went to Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, United States. From there she holds a PhD in New Testament Studies. In 2001 she came back to Botswana and taught New Testament studies at the UB. Two years later she became an associate professor.

Since Botswana has one of the highest infection rates of HIV and AIDS, Dube tried to integrate HIV and AIDS into her work as a biblical scholar and in the classroom. Together with her students, she found ways of dealing with the disease and showed its relevance in linkage with biblical texts. The World Council of Churches learnt about her dedication to the fight against HIV and AIDS and her talent to link theological, especially biblical, insights with the disease and its impact on people. So she was engaged by the World Council of Churches as a HIV/AIDS and Theological Consultant from 1997 to 2002. Before coming back to the University of Botswana again and teaching as an assistant professor, she taught at Scripps College in Claremont, United States. Currently, she is Professor for New Testament studies at the University of Botswana.

Dube's interests can be summed up in three main categories. Her PhD dissertation with the title *Postcolonial feminist interpretations of the Bible* shows two of them: she reads the Bible within a postcolonial context and as a feminist. Furthermore, – as I have mentioned already – she links HIV and AIDS with biblical texts and themes. This article will deal with these three major areas of Dube's work.

Postcolonialism

To introduce the term postcolonialism I am citing Bill Ashcroft's definition from the book *'Key-Concepts in Post-colonial studies'*:

"Post-colonialism [...] deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as the post-colonial state, 'post-colonial' had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization."¹

¹ ASHCROFT, Bill: Art. post-colonialism/postcolonialism. In: ID. / GRIFFITHS, Gaerth / TIFFIN, Helen (ed.): *Key-Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London 1998, 186-192: 186.

In her thesis and in various articles, Dube brings up different authors who shaped the discourse on postcolonialism; she mostly refers to Edward Said and his book *'Culture and imperialism'*². Dube operates with postcolonial criticism and tries to show how it can also be used fruitfully in reading the Bible. This concept is not a new one. Fernando Segovia and Rasiah S. Sugirtharaja³ are only two of many biblical scholars who are engaged in the field of combining postcolonial criticism with the Bible. Dube ventures to implement postcolonial principles on biblical texts since "the Bible is also a colonizing text: it has repeatedly authorized the subjugation of foreign nations and lands."⁴ She analyzes "the literary constructions of colonizing texts"⁵ and figures out how they justify imperialism. How postcolonial reading works for biblical (and other colonizing texts) is summed up by Dube in five main points which I will shortly introduce to you with the help of questions (and examples) Dube puts towards the text.

(1) Characterization is the first of the five aspects. In colonizing literature "the colonized and colonizer are sharply contrasted."⁶ On the one hand the text relates to subjugated people who are "helpless, evil, inarticulate, backward, disorganized, lazy, exotic, and babies in need of instruction."⁷ On the other hand the colonizer is depicted as someone in control, "civilized, Christian, teacher [...], articulate, literate and cultivated."⁸ In order to make this aspect apparent while reading, Dube asks the question: "How does the [...] text construct difference: Is there dialogue and liberating interdependence, or is there condemnation and replacement of all that is foreign?"⁹

(2) Another aspect is geography. Imperial thoughts are transferred according to Dube by "[s]ome lands that are depicted as empty, unoccu-

² Cf. SAID, Edward: *Culture and Imperialism*. New York 1993.

³ SUGIRTHARAJAH, Rasiah S.: *Charting the Aftermath. A Review of Postcolonial Criticism*. In: ID. (ed.): *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*. Malden/MA 2006. – SEGOVIA, Fernando: *Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism. Meaning and Scope*. In: ID. / STEPHEN Moore: *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*. London et al 2005, 23-78.

⁴ DUBE, Musa W.: *Toward a post-colonial Feminist Interpretation*. In: *Semeia* 78 (1997) 11-25: 15.

⁵ loc. cit.

⁶ loc. cit., 16.

⁷ loc. cit.

⁸ loc. cit.

⁹ DUBE, Musa W.: *Postcolonial biblical interpretation of the Bible*. St. Louis/MO 2000, 129.

ped, and waiting to be discovered.”¹⁰ The question Dube puts to the text is: “Does the [...] text encourage travel to distant and inhabited lands and how does it justify itself?”¹¹

(3) The third aspect mentioned by Dube is traveling. The travelers are foreigners, mainly coming from metropolitan centers of the world and they are only few. The few travelers are regarded as authority which “is grounded on race, religion, technology, and knowledge.”¹² Since those travelers describe deficiency of civilization they see the need in developing the colonized people. The right of traveling is only a colonizer’s opportunity; colonized people depend on the support of their colonizers to travel to distant lands; colonized people without any status do not even have the possibility to travel at all. The questions Dube puts to the text is: “Who travels and [w]hy? Which side of the text am I journeying on as a reader?”¹³

(4) Colonizing texts can have a special gender perspective. As Dube writes: “The colonized are symbolized by their indigenous women, who epitomize all backwardness, evil, and helplessness.”¹⁴ Dube’s question to the text is: “Does the [...] text employ gender and divine representations to construct relationships of subordination and domination?”¹⁵

(5) The last point Dube refers to is the material interests which are reflected in colonizing texts. However, the economic interests were disguised and moral values such as education, civilization, and Christianity were mainly focused on. In another article, she refers to a quotation of Thomas Pringle, a missionary in Africa. His words [illustrates what Dube means]:

“Let us enter upon a new and nobler career of conquest. Let us subdue savage Africa by JUSTICE, by KINDNESS, by the talisman of CHRISTIAN TRUTH. Let us *thus* go forth, in the name and under the blessing of God,

¹⁰ DUBE, Musa W.: Toward a post-colonial Feminist Interpretation. In: Semeia 78 (1997) 11-25: 16.

¹¹ DUBE, Musa W.: Postcolonial biblical interpretation of the Bible. St. Louis/MO 2000, 129.

¹² DUBE, Musa W.: Toward a post-colonial Feminist Interpretation. In: Semeia 78 (1997) 11-25: 16.

¹³ DUBE, Musa W.: Rereading the Bible: Biblical Hermeneutics and Social Injustice. In: KATALONGE, EMMANUEL (ed.): African theology today, Volume 1. Scranton/PA 2001, 57-69: 57.

¹⁴ DUBE, Musa W.: Toward a post-colonial Feminist Interpretation. In: Semeia 78 (1997) 11-25: 17.

¹⁵ DUBE, Musa W.: Postcolonial biblical interpretation of the Bible. St. Louis/MO 2000, 129.

gradually to extend the moral influence, and, if it be thought desirable, the territorial boundary also, of our colony, until it shall become an Empire.”¹⁶

The first part of the quotation shows the moral interests. The second part reveals the economic interests which lay behind the moral ones. By reading the biblical texts according to Dube’s questions the reader becomes aware of the imperial and colonial appearance of the text. A decolonial perspective on the text is required to which I will refer later.

Feminist readings

Besides the postcolonial lens, Dube also reads biblical texts from a feminist point of view. To speak of feminism in the African context is challenging since African women’s experience with patriarchy differ from western feminist experiences. Thus, African women go along with the idea of womanism and try to find their own ways and forms of liberation from patriarchal dominance. Dube sometimes refers to the crucial fact that two-thirds world women often fight for “first things first” which means that the fight for liberation from colonization and imperialism is more evident than the struggle against patriarchy.¹⁷ She shows that her postcolonial approach can be combined with the feminist interests however, her postcolonial feminist readings of biblical texts do not go along with western feminist readings of the same biblical stories. Western feminists ignore imperial settings, structures, and characteristics of the text as Dube has shown in various examples.¹⁸

The feminist and postcolonial points of view are not strictly distinguished by Dube. Dube looks for representations of women in colonizing texts because through their depictions imperial features can be identified. But feminist readings are not only done in that single way. African cultural practices are considered as well: Dube is a formidable story-

¹⁶ PRINGLE, Thomas: Narrative of a residence in South Africa. London 1934, 112.

¹⁷ DUBE, Musa W.: Searching for the Lost Needle: Double Colonization & Postcolonial African Feminism. In: Studies in world Christianity 5 (1999) 213-228. “During the struggle for independence African women, for example, were encouraged to put aside gender concerns and to focus on ‘first things first’, that is, fighting against the colonizer for national liberation”, 217.

¹⁸ Cf. DUBE, Musa W.: Rahab says Hello to Judith. In: SUGIRTHARAJAH, Rasiah S. (ed.): The Postcolonial Biblical Reader. Malden/MA 2006, 142-158: 150 f. - DUBE, Musa W.: Postcolonial biblical interpretation of the Bible. St. Louis/MO 2000, Chapter 9.

teller. African tales are used to illustrate similar aspects in biblical stories¹⁹; or Dube tells a biblical story anew as she has done impressively in *'The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth'*.²⁰ The untold story of Orpah is a convincing example of telling that what is not told yet or that what is told only from a colonizer's perspective. There is the option of reading the biblical stories with African (or Asian etc.) myths, songs, folktales so that the reading of the Bible "resists the colonizing use of the Bible and seeks liberation by reading the Bible with, and not above, other world cultures."²¹ Dube demands appreciation for the non-biblical texts of other cultures so that the biblical perspective can be complemented by other stories, other points of view, and the untold stories. This last step is called "de-colonial" reading by Dube. Reading colonizing texts does not close with the deconstruction of the text. There is the further creative effort to understand the de-colonized biblical texts, to grasp the theological meaning and its relevance for one's own life, and to replenish other traditions and untold stories.

Reading the Bible in the light of HIV and AIDS

The latest research activity by Dube can be found in the field of HIV and AIDS²². In her article "Doing Theological/Religious Education" Dube tells the story of how she became interested in HIV and AIDS and how she tried to find answers within her theological discipline:

"As I went about with business as usual, teaching the S[ynoptic] G[ospels] from a feminist, narrative, historical or redactional criticism and the like, there came a point that this academic approach began to be-

¹⁹ Cf. DUBE, Musa W.: Jumping the fire with Judith. Postcolonial Feminist Hermeneutics of Liberation. In: SCHROER, Silvia / BIETENHARD, Sophia (eds.): *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible and Hermeneutics of Liberation*. London 2003, 60-76. – DUBE, Musa W.: *Twenty-Two Years of Bleeding and Still the Princess Sings!* In: ID. (ed.): *Grant me justice!* Maryknoll, NY 2005, 186-199.

²⁰ Cf. DUBE, Musa W.: *The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth*. In: BRENNER, Athalya (ed.): *Ruth and Esther. A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*. Sheffield 1999, 145-150.

²¹ DUBE, Musa W.: *Postcolonial Biblical Interpretations*. In: HAYES, John H. (ed.): *Methods of biblical interpretation*, 361-366: 363.

²² Dube shifted from using the term HIV/AIDS to using HIV and AIDS since the new term stresses "the importance of the concept that these are related but very different concepts of health." (DUBE, Musa Wenkosi: *Toward Doing a Prop[h]etically-Healing Scholarship*. In: ID.: *The HIV & AIDS Bible. Selected Essays*. Scranton / London 2008, 3-16: endnote 1; p. 16)

come artificial and strange even in my tongue. I began to ask myself: Why am I talking about historical contexts of Jesus, redactional criticism, narrative and all this stuff and skirting the main issue in this context and the gospels; namely sickness and healing. I began to ask myself a question, which every student also had in mind; namely, If Jesus can heal this much, why can't Jesus heal us of HIV/AIDS in our nation and the world? With the HIV/AIDS death scare, stigma, suffering and fear of dying or contacting a disease, how do you read the Synoptic gospels? The social setting of illness, fear, and discrimination against the sick and orphans demanded a rereading".²³

So Dube got down to business. During her activity at the World Council of Churches she published various articles of how to read biblical – mainly New Testament – texts and show their relevance to HIV and AIDS. New Testament stories like the Talitha Cum-Story in Mark 5²⁴ and other miracle stories like the cleaning of a leper and the centurion's servant in Matthew 8²⁵ but also stories from the Old Testament like Dinah, Tamar, Ruth and Naomi²⁶ were read, analyzed, and interpreted by Dube. She uses different methodological approaches on which she reflects in her book '*HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum. Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*'²⁷.

First, Dube suggests well-established methods of biblical studies; she puts them into three categories: historical, literary, and social-scientific approaches. Regarding the context of HIV and AIDS, the historical and the social-scientific methods can help "to have a better understanding of illness and healing in ancient times and biblical thinking."²⁸ Literary methods of analysis will bring out information about the reader, the text, and the context which can be quite important while reading the text.

²³ DUBE, Musa W.: Rereading the Bible. Biblical Hermeneutics and Social Justice. In: KATONGOLE, Emmanuel (ed.): African Theology Today, Volume 1. Scranton 2002, 57-68: 64-65.

²⁴ DUBE, Musa W.: Talitha Cum! A Postcolonial Feminist & HIV/AIDS Reading of Mark 5:21-43. In: ID. (ed.): Grant me justice! Maryknoll, NY 2005, 186-199.

²⁵ DUBE, Musa W.: Healing Where There Is No Healing. In: PHILLIPS, Gary / PATTE, Daniel (eds.): Reading communities reading scriptures. Harrisburg/PA 2001, 121-133.

²⁶ DUBE, Musa W.: Preaching to the Converted: Unsettling the Christian Church! A Theological View: A Scriptural Injunction. In: Ministerial Formation April 2001, 38-50: 42-43.

²⁷ DUBE, Musa W. (ed.): HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum. Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes. Geneva 2003.

²⁸ DUBE, Musa W.: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Biblical Studies. In: ID. (ed.): HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum. Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes. Geneva 2003, 10-23: 16.

Furthermore, Dube presents other methods which are for most of us Westerners quite unknown. She refers to “African methods of reading”²⁹ which are: story-telling, divining biblical texts or reading a text with the help of gendered communal and cultural hermeneutics as introduced by the Kenyan minister and linguist Musimbi Kanyoro. Furthermore, biblical texts can be read because they give answers or discuss special issues like sickness, human sexuality, etc. It could also be tried to “pick a particular biblical book and study it in the light of HIV/AIDS or one of the pertinent themes”³⁰ as it has been done with the book of Job for example. The last approach presented by Dube is the comparative approach where similar topics in different biblical books are studied.

For most of the western biblical scholars one of the most important questions is: How can HIV and AIDS which is obviously something which is not referred to in the Bible, be relevant for biblical studies? Dube answers this question as she writes:

“First, HIV/AIDS is a major attack on life. Since biblical studies is a discipline that centers on the divine creation of life and the search for the divine will for all life and relationships, it cannot ignore HIV/AIDS’s attack on life and how it affects particularly socially disadvantaged populations [...]. Second, the impact of HIV/AIDS itself warrants a pedagogical response in biblical studies. [...] Third, [HIV/AIDS’s] incurability has raised spiritual questions and its interaction with other social epidemics has exposed culture and many social structures and institutions as inadequate and in need of a review”³¹

which Dube hopes to find through reading the Bible.

Conclusion

Dube’s exegetical work and its relevance in practice

As I have shown above, Dube’s understanding of biblical studies and theology is close-knit. Biblical studies cannot be distinguished from theological interests, namely the fight for God given life. Therefore, every aspect of life can be a starting point for reading the Bible and for doing theology. By reading the Bible postcolonially, from a feminist point of view, and in the context of HIV and AIDS, Dube tries to find answers in biblical texts for suffering, for coping with an incurable dis-

²⁹ loc. cit., 18.

³⁰ loc. cit., 21.

³¹ loc. cit., 11.

ease, and for life in general. What has not been mentioned yet is the fact that Dube and many biblical scholars from the South repudiate biblical interpretations which link HIV and AIDS with the act-and-consequence-connection. HIV and AIDS cannot be put into that connection and people living with HIV and AIDS who suffer a lot only from their disease will suffer even more from stigmatization which is brought in through the idea of act-and-consequence.

Due to the fact that Dube works with ordinary readers, her work is practically informed as well.³² The interpretations of biblical texts are not found behind the desk but in fieldwork. Ordinary readers are not repudiated in African biblical studies but are seen as readers and listeners to the Bible who have their own right to finding interpretations.³³

Dube's publication list shows that she links her exegetical work with practical work. The book, '*AfricaPraying. A Handbook of HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermons and Liturgy*', which was edited by Dube demonstrates the engagement of many biblical scholars and other theologians from southern Africa in the field of HIV and AIDS. They do not stop in writing academic articles but try to publish their academic results for people who are in need of a pastoral care which is grounded in theological disciplines. The handbook had undergone five printings within four years.³⁴ This shows the massive demand for books like this.

Dube's achievements

Within her 10 years of academic publication, Dube achieved much for biblical studies in sub-saharan Africa and for the fight against HIV and AIDS. She is one of the most well-known biblical scholars from Africa who published many articles and books and she struggles for an own African way of reading and interpreting the Bible. Her engagement especially during her time at the World Council of Churches brought the

³² DUBE, Musa W.: Postcolonial biblical interpretation of the Bible. St. Louis/MO 2000, 184-195. – WEST, Gerald O. / DUBE, Musa W.: An Introduction. How We Have Come To „Read With“. In: *Semeia* 73 (1996) 7-17.

³³ It is not only Dube who worked with ordinary readers. Gerald O. West published results of interpretations by ordinary readers. See: WEST, Gerald: 1 and 2 Samuel. In: Daniel PATTE (ed.): *Global Bible Commentary*. Nashville/TN 2004, 92-104. – WEST, Gerald O.: *The academy of the poor. Towards a dialogical reading of the bible*. Sheffield 1999. – WEST, Gerald O. /DUBE, Musa W.: An Introduction. How We Have Come To „Read With“. In: *Semeia* 73 (1996) 7-17.

³⁴ Cf. DUBE, Musa W.: *Curriculum Vitae*. Unpublished document.

topic of HIV and AIDS into curriculums of theological education. HIV and AIDS is no longer a non-theological topic.

As a feminist, Dube stresses the gender imbalance which becomes more evident and even life-threatening in the context of HIV and AIDS. Dube links gender-aspects within biblical texts with the subjugation of women in today's societies. She demonstrates the importance of finding gender equality; however, at the same time she repudiates western (colonizing) concepts of gender equality and tries to find own African ways of coping with that issue.

Dube's postcolonial approach achieved a more reflected perspective on biblical texts and their colonizing attitudes. Even this aspect can be linked with HIV and AIDS: colonizing attitudes from the West towards African people are still there when negotiating about anti-retroviral drugs which can ease the symptoms of AIDS with the pharma industries, when importing western concepts against HIV-infections like the ABC-method (abstaining – be faithful – condomize) which do not work for raped women and children and for women who have little or no control over their sexual partners. In her article '*Adinkra! Four Hearts Joined Together*', Dube develops her own concept of HIV and AIDS prevention from an African point of view.³⁵

Review of Dube's work

Although there are so many achievements and positive lessons to be reckoned in Dube's work, there are still points to criticize from my western point of view. First, there is the opportunity (not the fact!) to apply biblical texts for personal concerns. The texts are read for the personal needs; considerations whether the text originally had that meaning and the awareness of the 2000 or more years that lie between today and the origin of the texts are bracketed. This increases the risk of fundamentalism, especially in the work with the ordinary readers. Although there are tools integrated into the work of Dube to avoid fundamentalist interpretations, to emphasize situations of such immense suffering, could lead to a total disregard of well-established biblical methods and to an over-emphasis of only today's interpretations. The one-sided interpretation of

³⁵ Cf. DUBE, Musa W.: *Adinkra! Four Hearts Joined Together*. On Becoming Healing-Teachers of African Indigenous Religion/s in HIV&AIDS Prevention. In: PHIRI, Isabel Apawo et al (eds.): *African Women, Religion, and Health. Essays in honor of Mercy Amba Ewuziwa Oduyoye*. Maryknoll, NY 2006, 131-156.

biblical texts – as it is done in most parts of the West with the historical-critical method as well – could cause another ignorance of western biblical interpretations in Africa and African biblical interpretations in the West as it has been since the 1960s.

The close-knit relationship of biblical studies and theology can be regarded positively. However, biblical studies can also be seen as a discipline of its own which not only serves theology. In order to find out the meaning of biblical texts, the detachment of biblical studies and theology can also be a fruitful opportunity. Another aspect I would like to point to is the lack of a real methodology. The reading of biblical texts in the context of HIV and AIDS is geared to the methods which were developed before. Because of the special challenges with HIV and AIDS, not every method serves the reader's needs. Thus, there is a variety of methods used but to me it seems that no methods for the HIV and AIDS context have been developed yet. This implies the risk of fundamentalism as well.

In the beginning there was the self-imposed question why I as a white European PhD-student am interested in African biblical hermeneutics. I gave a biographical answer. But it is more than this. As I have shown with the help of Musa Dube's work, there is a very vivid way of reading the Bible in Africa. The biblical texts are brought to life since they are read, told, and interpreted and because they speak to people's lives especially in challenging situations such as living with HIV and AIDS. Dube's creative dealing with biblical texts is something Western exegetes could be inspired from. There is no limitation to just the historical method to understand biblical texts. The fact that ordinary readers are regarded as "full" readers of the Bible could also expand to western biblical studies. But it is not only a "We want to have what we do not have yet" but a real quest for understanding the Bible. Musa Dube also reminds me of difficult things that we need to learn from African ways of reading the Bible: the (post)colonial perspective. Although there are several points of criticism which cannot be brushed aside, it is the struggle for justice, creativity, and making the biblical text relevant to our lives that really fascinates me.

'THE BIBLE EQUALS GONA'

AN ANALYSIS OF THE INDIGENOUS PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES OF ZIMBABWE'S MAGICAL CONCEPTION OF THE BIBLE

Obvious Vengeyi

Introduction

In his discussion of the first encounter between the BaTlhaping of Botswana and Christian missionaries, from the 1800s, Gerald O. West observed that, 'among the "goods of strange power" that included guns, beads, ox wagons, ploughs, watches, mirrors, telescopes, letters, tobacco and other items brought by missionaries in their land was the Bible'.¹ From such first encounters, West argues that the Bible is perceived by indigenous peoples, at least in southern Africa, as an object of power more like the gun, among others. More importantly for this article, is the perception dating from these early encounters of the Bible as dice: bones, shells, and other materials used in divining.² This article demonstrates this belief among the Indigenous Pentecostal Churches of Zimbabwe who regard the Bible as magical, the equivalent of the traditional religious fetish called *gona*. From the general claims and testimonies about the Bible being a mysterious object of power, as is the *gona*, the article traces the history of the Christianization of Zimbabwe, and Africa at large as possible conduits through which these traditional beliefs about *gona* penetrated into the Indigenous Pentecostal churches. The role of African Independent Churches in interpreting Christian beliefs and objects such as the Bible from the traditional worldview necessitates the conclusion that to fully comprehend the Indigenous Pentecostal beliefs and practices in Zimbabwe, one has to first understand African Independent Churches and African Traditional worldview.

¹ Gerald O. WEST, Early Encounters With the Bible Among the BaTlhaping: Historical and Hermeneutical Signs, *Biblical Interpretation* 12, 3 (2004) 251-281.

² Cf. WEST, Early Encounters, 272.

What is *gona*?

A *gona* is usually an animal horn according to the Shona.³ The Karanga, a sub-group of the Shona, call it *nyanga* from which the name *n'anga* (traditional healer) derives from.⁴ Implied in this connection is the fact that these horns are used by traditional healers, owing to the special capabilities of these horns. Among other groups of the Shona, the *gona* could be an animal bone, gourd, wood, or shaped calabashes. Most of these *gonas* are decorated either by a diviner or by the bearer. The opening at the top of many vessels is plugged with a carved stopper. One end of the stopper is long and tapered to stir the medicine (oil in the *gona*); the other end often terminates in a figurative image, usually the head of a man, sometimes a complete human figure or animal.⁵

Several of these containers have been found throughout the north-eastern region of South Africa and into the adjacent areas of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, in the places where the Shona and Tsonga (Shangaan) peoples reside⁶. In South Africa, the association of the *gona* with healing powers is relatively new and has been traced back to the influence of the Shona, in particular, the Ndau (one of the five Shona groups). The healers who use these vessels are often exorcists associated with a possession cult. Contrary to the South African custom, these diviners are inhabited by alien spirits; who are not family members.⁷ In short, the *gonas* are Shona fetishes.

Gona in Shona Myths

Leo Frobenius and Douglas C. Fox corroborated the link with the Shona groups in the study of the Vawungwe. The Vawungwe are custodians to myths and traditions associated with the origin of 'humanity' that is agreed to by all the Shona groups. One myth says that the Vawungwe were traditionally experts in making fire. In fact they were the only ones that could make it. However, their privileged circumstances were trans-

³ G.L. CHAVUNDUKA, Witchcraft: Belief and realities: A debate-Belief in Witchcraft, *Zambezia Vol. 13, No. 2*, 1986, 119-138.

⁴ Herbert ASCHWANDEN, Karanga Mythology: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga in Zimbabwe. Gweru: Mambo Press 1989, cf. 149; 154.

⁵ Rayda BECKER, African Art and Rituals of Divination. (www.metmuseum.org/explore/oracle/soafGourds.html)

⁶ BECKER, African Art.

⁷ BECKER, African Art.

formed over night into a very hard life after losing their fire maker. From then on, they were forced to eat meat and fish while raw. The fire maker was a horn called *gona* filled with *mushonga* (medicinal oil) and closed with a stopper. One day the priest who was responsible for keeping it had a quarrel with the king's daughter and hid the fire maker. He died before revealing where it was hence the plight of the Vawungwe.⁸ Although the information is mythical and meant to convey more than the obvious meaning it does not only reveal how difficult in the old days it was to make fire but also evidences the centrality of the *gona* for the wellbeing of the Shona society.

In another myth belonging to the Vawungwe, the world was brought into existence from the *gona* and it revolves around the *gona*. A drop of oil from the *gona* was sufficient to make the first woman on earth (according to the Shona), cosmically pregnant. The possession of the *gona* (horn) gave one magic power over elements and over game⁹ (spiritual or otherwise). The myth is termed Mwedzi-a name derived from the first man to live on earth according to the Shona.

Life on the planet earth was mysteriously created from the contents of the *gona*. Each of the stages of procreation represents epochs in the development of the cosmos from the pre-human with Mwari or Musikavanhu (the creator of humanity) calling Mwedzi (the moon) from the Dziva (pool), to Nyamasase the morning star, Venus, and Murongo, Mwedzi's second wife who is going to procreate, in super human fashion, the plants and animals and children who grow overnight.¹⁰ In the myth, Mwedzi was given the *gona* with oil by Mwari as he was leaving the pool for the dry land. When it was night Mwedzi, took his *gona* (horn) and moistened his index finger with a drop of the *gona* oil. Mwedzi touched Nyamasase with the ointment on his finger. In the morning Nyamasase began to give birth to grasses, bushes, trees and she continued until the earth was fully covered. When Nyamasase died after two years, Murongo was given to Mwedzi by Mwari as his second wife. In the evening Mwedzi smeared his loins and Murongo's loins also with the oil from the *gona*. They did this for consecutive days. Murongo gave birth first to chickens, sheep, goats, secondly to eland and cattle,

⁸ Leo FROBENIUS/ Douglas C. FOX, African Genesis. Great Britain: Faber & Faber Ltd 1930, 35.

⁹ FROBENIUS/ FOX, African Genesis, 35.

¹⁰ George KAHARI, The Rise of the Shona Novel: A study in Development, 1890-1984. Gweru: Mambo Press 1990, 139.

thirdly to boys and girls, fourth day bore lions, leopards, snakes and scorpions.¹¹

Gona in Shona Traditional Life

It is clear from the myth that according to the Shona, the *gona* has occult powers hence can cause injury to a person or property or do psychological harm. A large part of the traditional healer's practice therefore involves prescribing remedies and preventive charms. Some of these charms (*gonas*) confer immunity against specific types of illness or protect individuals against misfortunes that could be caused by *gonas*. Other charms confer positive benefits such as strength and other desirable qualities.¹² Alexandre Junod who recorded in detail the social and religious life of the Tsonga referred to gourds in connection with protection in battle/war. All the vessels (*gonas*) are considered to belong to the ancestors (or to the spiritual world)-an ownership that adds potency to the medicines stored in them.¹³ The vessels therefore 'held' the spirits of various ancestors and served as vehicles through which the ancestral spirits were contacted, that is, they functioned as repositories for ancestral spirits rather than as medicine containers.¹⁴

Traditionally each Shona family had a *gona* which would be passed from one generation to the other hence the claim that the *gona* belonged to the ancestors. It could be associated with family trade such as hunting, farming, dance etc. There are some *gonas* that were for prevention against any harm.¹⁵ There are families, who have mysterious powers owing to these *gona*/charms or fetishes. For instance, individuals belonging to such families may not be bitten by snakes. When a snake sees the person with such charms it becomes weak until he/she passes. Some families may not be be-witched. When a witch tries to harm any member of the family, the witch may become unconscious until the next day. During tribal wars the *gona* was used to weaken the opponents in battle. In some cases the opponents may begin to fight among themselves. As a

¹¹ KAHARI, *The Rise of the Shona Novel*, 139.

¹² CHAVUNDUKA, *Witchcraft*, 119-139.

¹³ BECKER, *African Art*.

¹⁴ BECKER, *African Art*.

¹⁵ J. GOMBE, *Tsika dzaVashona*. Harare: College Press 1995, 62.

result of the *gona*, there are some families who excel in farming even when all others fail.

The efficacy of the *gona* depended on observing various rules (*miko*) governing the use and keeping the *gona*. Violation of such rules had serious consequences and sometimes would result in death. Rules depended on the type and purpose of *gona* one or a family possessed (dangerous or good). It could require the beholder to practice incest, not to eat or to eat some herbs every day, not to visit funerals or celebrations etc. Some of the *gonas* need the bearer to practice human sacrifice, while other *gonas* may demand a wife or husband from among the owner's children or relatives. Some *gonas* are kept away from home in places such as caves, huge trees, river banks etc. Those that are kept at home could be kept under pillow. As such no witch can come near the bearer when the *gona* is under the pillow. Some of the *gonas* are kept under the floor, in the ceiling of the roof, in clothes, in bags etc. Where ever the *gona* is placed, nothing harmful may occur to the bearer. It protected the bearer as long as he/she kept the rules.

As I have alluded to above the Shona understand that some *gonas* were dangerous for the society. *gona rehuroyi* (witchcraft), *zvitsinga* (sorcery), *mubobobo* (mysteriously sleeping with someone's wife without her or the husband knowing) were considered dangerous for the wellbeing of the society hence the need to protect one self, family or tribe from such charms by acquiring a more powerful *gona*.¹⁶ During the liberation struggle for instance witchcraft was regarded as counterproductive in the prosecution of the war. If one was caught with a *gona* it would be burnt in fire. Several stories of them (the *gonas*) not getting burnt in the midst of fire or them talking are common. Since each family aspired to have protection from the evil *gona*, they would acquire from the traditional diviners. What would normally happen is they could get what they were not prepared for. Some individuals and families acquired *gona* hoping to enhance themselves, for example, in farming but the traditional healer would give them *rehuroyi* (for witchcraft), or all the vices that the society detested. In such cases one became a danger to the society.

In recent years, the concept of *gona* is popularly associated with goblins (*zvikwambo*). These are associated with prosperity and lucky. The bearer miraculously gets things done for him. For example, if he is a driver of a bus or long distance trucks, his/her *gona* can drive when he retires to

¹⁶ Cf. GOMBE, Tsika dzaVashona, 62-64.

sleep. Many stories in Zimbabwe have been reported regarding the goblins that have sex with women.¹⁷ This is the world view that the white missionaries relegated to myths and superstition. But it is this background that African independent churches and the Pentecostal churches take seriously.

Indigenous Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, Pentecostal Churches are among New Religious Movements but can be divided into two groups, those that have direct connection to American or Western Pentecostalism and Indigenous Pentecostal churches. J. Verstraelen however, notes that there is confusion among scholarly circles regarding the African Independent Churches which are sometimes classified under New Religious Movements. For him these do not qualify the designation since they were already gaining momentum in many African countries from about 1870. In Zimbabwe, 'Ethiopian' notions connected with African leadership in churches began to spread among the Ndebele and Shona before 1910. From around 1917 Shona migrant labourers in South Africa became the pioneers of 'Zionism', which takes the African Traditional worldview seriously.¹⁸ On the contrary, the New Religious Movements are a brand of Christianity largely from the fundamentalist stream of churches and most of them originating and reflecting the views espoused by the Religious Right in the United States of America.

Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches although they can be classified under this brand, they are also indigenous in that they were founded in Zimbabwe by black Africans, who are exposed to the same spiritual and geographical environment as the rest of their peers (African Indigenous Churches). They have therefore borrowed a number of their characteristic features from Evangelicals, New Religious Movements, African Traditional Religions and African Independent Churches. There are mainly two denominations that fall under this category: Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith (ZAOGA FIF) and Family of God (FOG). There are however several splinter groups and smaller Pentecostal estab-

¹⁷ For a detailed study on the spiritual beliefs of the Karanga (Shona) see Tabona SHOKO, *Karanga Indigenous Religion: Health and Well-being*. England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 42.

¹⁸ Inus DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a study of African Independent Churches*. Gweru: Mambo Press 1987, 47-59.

lishments in Zimbabwe. Although the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) is not as 'indigenous'¹⁹ as the above two, since the time Africans took over the leadership from white missionaries, the church is closely following the model of the two above. After all, ZAOGA leadership were active members in AFM before they split.²⁰

Since these Churches were founded and are led by Africans they seem to be influenced directly or indirectly by African traditional religious perspectives about life. Like missionary churches they condemn everything traditional but unlike missionary churches they substitute with closely related concepts and terminology. This makes Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe closer to African independent churches (Apostolic and Zionist sects). The Apostles for instance do not ignore the fact that their followers are still attached in many ways to a strong belief in the powers of witchcraft. Their sermons contain frequent references to witches (*varoyi*), to horn (*gona rovuroyi*) which witches use, and to the influence of avenging spirits (*ngozi*).²¹ They counteract these evil forces, however, with the stronger power of the Holy Spirit, which is transmitted to them either through the Bible or through their prophets and by the laying on of hands during healing sessions.²²

The same is true with Pentecostal establishments. Popular themes in many of these churches are demon possession, ancestral spirit possession, misfortunes caused by witches, etc. They claim that the Bible has the power to overcome these forces. This explains why, although the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe claim that African Traditional Religion (ATR) belongs to the past and that Christianity emphasizes the need for one to be 'born again' so that immediately a new era begins, where upon one becomes a new creation-a status in which the past has no grip

¹⁹ Lovemore TOGARASEI/ Fidelis NKOMAZANA, Pentecostal Churches and HIV and AIDS in Botswana, in: Lovemore Togarasei et al, (eds.), *The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana: Responses and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars 2011, 104-116, classified churches such as AFM under classical Pentecostal churches in that, like main line churches, were introduced by missionary Pentecostals from the West, through South Africa.

²⁰ Cf. David MAXWELL, *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism & the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement*. Harare: Weaver Press 2006.

²¹ M. L. DANEEL, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches: Background and Rise of the major Movements*. The Hague: Mouton 1971, 133-165.

²² C.M. DILLON-MALONE, *The Korsten Basketmakers: A Study of the Masowe Apostles an Indigenous African Religious Movement*, in: M.F.C. Bourdillon (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi*. Vol. 2. Gweru: Mambo Press 1977, 211-219.

on,²³ they have carried along the Shona philosophical understanding of the *gona* to interpret the Bible and various elements within their movements. They systematically have sought to undermine the traditional world view by not only attacking these elements when preaching, but also by supplanting all the various elements of traditional culture. The Bible among other Christian symbols is regarded as having occult powers even greater than the *gona*.

Popular Claims and Testimonies about the sacredness of the Bible

Since 1994 when I joined the Pentecostal brand of Christianity, I cannot remember how many times I heard claims like the following:

*Kana une Bhaibhiri unezvese zvaungada muupenyu! Unenge uine n'anga huru, Chitopota chaicho, chinoona pakadzikadzika. Kana uine Bhaibhiri une Gona rakasimba. Hauzoda zvakare kufamba mudzin'anga umu uchitsvaga makona, uchitsvaga kuromba kana kupona kana kutsvaga raki. Hu-penyu hwese huri muBhaibhiri.*²⁴

Translated to read

'When you have the Bible you have everything you may need in life! You have with you the best traditional healer, when you have the Bible; you have the best or strong medicine horn. You will not need to search for traditional healers for charms, healing or looking for luck. All life is contained in the Bible.'

The same claims are made about Jesus. He is presented as all that one needs, hence some scholars call Pentecostal Christianity, Jeseocentric faith in that sermons and teachings make Jesus their hermeneutical focus.²⁵

Such a message receives deafening applause from all Pentecostal establishments in Zimbabwe because it is for them 'Gospel truth'. The Bible is not just a heap of pages it has power in itself hence it protects; it is in fact a weapon. I have heard several times this comparison between the

²³ Frans J. VERSTRAELEN, *Zimbabwean realities and Christian responses*. Gweru: Mambo Press 1998, 29.

²⁴ Such claims are common among Pentecostal establishments in Zimbabwe. Usually the claims are made during testimonies and during witnessing sessions or during outreach ministries.

²⁵ Madipoane MASENYA, 'The Bible and Poverty in African Pentecostal Christianity: The BOSADI (Womanhood) Approach', in: Peter Paris (ed.), *Religion and Poverty: Pan-African Perspectives*. London: Duke University Press 2009, 152-165.

Bible and weapon: 'A soldier always carries his gun, a hunter carries the spear, a traditional healer has his gona and so should be the Christian with his Bible. What protects you when you do not have the Bible? Many Christians have experienced misfortunes because they don't carry the weapon! Imagine what happens when a soldier goes to war without his gun!²⁶

Almost in an act to validate the mysteries associated with the Bible the Family of God Churches begin prayer sessions with declaring that the Bible is the weapon that every Christian must use to defeat the Devil. At the beginning of every church session, a preacher has to call upon believers to join him in a war cry against the devil while raising the Bibles: '*Satan (or Devil) move over! We are crossing the line! This is my weapon!*²⁷ It is strongly believed that the devil does indeed fear the Bible. In other words the Bible as an object has sacred powers that can defeat the powers of the devil. Every problem, be it poverty, every sickness, be it HIV/Aids, it is defeated by the power of God that resides in the Bible.

Another popular claim about the Bible especially in marriage settings is the typology of the Bible as an aunt or a manual for happiness in marriage and life. The Bible has taken the role of a traditional office that was very pivotal in the marriage institution. In fact, the Bible has readymade answers to all human problems.²⁸ You always hear such claims as: 'The bible is our aunt; whoever does not listen to the aunt does everything wrong. Whatever problem we have the aunt is always there. You do not need to get onto the bus to her. She is right there with you. Just take your bible and read. Things will begin to change for the better. Your situation no matter how difficult it will change. Does your husband cheat? Does your wife cheat? Do your children misbehave? These days

²⁶ As noted above, the theology contained is quite representative of nearly all Pentecostal movements in Zimbabwe. Christians in these churches are encouraged to be always prepared to preach the word to lost souls wherever they are. They could be on the bus, car or in the city doing shopping. As such one has to always have the Bible.

²⁷ All Family of God worship services begin by this declaration. It is therefore very difficult to find a Christian or believer in this church, as in all Pentecostal churches, without a copy of the Bible.

²⁸ TOGARASEI, 'The Use of the Bible in HIV/AIDS Contexts: Case Study of Some Pentecostal Churches in Botswana', in: Id. et al, (eds.), *The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana: Responses and Challenges*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars 2011, 117-135.

we no longer use love portion, we call upon Jesus! We just consult the Bible. Do this you will get all your answers!’

From such claims about the Bible some believers go to the extent of sleeping with a Bible under the pillow. This magical use of the Bible seems rampant in Africa among Pentecostal and African Independent Churches. In West Africa, for instance, the Bible is put in babies’ cots to ward off evil spirits.²⁹ The belief is that when the evil spirits come (of which they are normally believed to operate at night- a conception taken from a traditional understanding of witchcraft) they will not do any harm to the believer who has the Bible either as his/her pillow or under the pillow. The practice is also meant to chase away bad dreams and invite sweet ones. Some have even gone further to use the Bible during exorcisms. For example, if one is sick and as it is usually diagnosed by the spirit that the sickness is a direct cause of the evil spirits (witches, avenging spirits or alien spirits) the Bible is placed on the head of the sick during the exorcism.

David Martin observes that ‘sometimes the understanding of sickness (in Pentecostal movements) includes a magical aspect. Thus the Bible can be used as a talisman of spiritual energy, particularly perhaps by those unable to read it. One Pentecostal described: ‘I lay down on the cot, and I had my Bible with me. I began to read the Bible and became sleepy and I put the Bible on top of me. I went to sleep and the pain was gone when I woke up.’³⁰ I have witnessed some individuals go as far as beating the head of the sick with the Bible. I have also observed several people who are given the Bible to hold in their hands and raise it during prayer sessions. The Bible, it is believed mysteriously confers some powers on the individual holding it.

Because of these beliefs among many images of Jesus and the Bible, ‘it is not a surprise that African (Zimbabwe Pentecostal) Christians carry the Bible wherever they go and use it as a charm for protective pur-

²⁹ TOGARASEI, *The Use of the Bible in HIV/AIDS Contexts*, 119. For a detailed discussion, see Musa W DUBE, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*. St Louis: Chalice Press 2000, 67-80; and Sarojini NADAR, ‘Module 3. Studying the Hebrew Bible in HIV and AIDS contexts,’ in: Musa W Dube (ed.), *HIV/AIDS Curriculum for Theological Education by Extension in Africa & 10 HIV and AIDS Modules, CD*, Geneva: World Council of Churches 2007, who both cited Mercy A Oduyoye.

³⁰ David MARTIN, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 1993, 167.

poses.³¹ It is a common practice in Zimbabwe that Pentecostal Christians put the Bible in the car, so as to have protection against accidents. The presence of the Bible in the car itself ensures safe travels. Many people have refused to travel without the Bible in the car. Christian brothers and sisters who may not be driving should always carry the Bible in their purse as they go about their daily routines. This is meant to protect all the belongings in the purse and the owner from dangers (accidents, thieves, misfortunes etc). I have attended several assemblies where believers were encouraged to always carry the Bible not only so that they can constantly read but also to ensure their security. Recently Ivy Kombo, one of the most prominent female gospel singers in Zimbabwe, who herself has been an active member of ZAOGA and now wife of Admire Kasi, bishop of a church that split from ZAOGA was asked to name one thing that she would not travel without. Her response was very short: The Bible.³² It is clear from the reply that she sees the Bible as having some magical powers. And her reply serves to confirm that the belief is wide spread.

A number of students at the University of Zimbabwe Christian union, which composes mostly Pentecostal students do not adequately prepare for examinations. Most of them read the Bible and pray instead of visiting the library to prepare for examinations. Spectacular are some two students who have gone to the extent of not attending classes while selling their wares that include biscuits, sweets, pens, pencils at campus. Students referred to them as 'Holy Brothers', a derogatory designation, however not without enough ground. In the mean time they will be preaching to other students who would be either waiting or have just finished lectures. Since they were studying economics, they despised other students who were studying theology. For them the Bible is not for scientific study but for salvation. The Bible is usually on top of their wares maybe to enhance luck so that the wares could be bought. Unfortunately contrary to the common interpretation of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 in Pentecostal circles (which particularly promises prosperity and success in everything to believers), in the semester that ended May 2008, they both scored below average in a number of courses.

³¹ Israel KAMUDZANDU, 'The nature and Identity of Jesus in Mark 7: 24-37: A Zimbabwean Interpretation,' in: Nicole Wilkinson Duran, et al, (eds.), *Mark: Reading Mark From a World of Perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2011, 5-13: 13

³² Ivy KOMBO on, The Truth About: Ivy Kombo. New Zimbabwe.comNews. 21.04.2010.

The above consequences for not reading are not very common among Pentecostal believers. A majority claim to experience success in everything that they do after reading the Bible. Tichafara's testimony at the Holy Ghost Powerful Church national conference in Highfield in the same year is evidence of the power in believing in the Bible. He says:

... towards writing my A level examinations, I called upon the name of God....I read Deuteronomy 28:1-14 several times that night and claiming my success. As I set in the examination room I realised all the questions were difficult. I slept (face down) on my answer sheet for the whole duration of the exam. When I woke up at the end of the examination, all the questions were responded to. I passed the examination with flying colours. I am due to enrol at the University. God will always make us heads and not tails..!³³

Although this testimony was extra ordinary compared to others, people could not stop praising God for such a powerful testimony. Among Pentecostal believers God is a God of miracles and such extraordinary miracles draw many to church. This God has got to be involved in every undertaking.

On one occasion for the payment of Bride price that I attended, the bride price was put inside the Bible as it was paid by the would be son in-law. The parents of the bride were firm Pentecostal believers and wanted to make sure the marriage of their daughter is founded upon God. They invited the pastor who functioned as both father and go between. The family became an example in every sermon of how a Christian should behave. It is believed, the use of the Bible in the payment of Bride price is guarantee of durability and blessings in the newly established family. The blessings include children and material wealth also. Traditionally, the bride price should have been put in a wooden plate and dedicated to the ancestors. The ancestors would guarantee the blessings to the newly established family. The Bible in this context is seen as a holy object.

As such, extra ordinary testimonies about the Bible are common in Zimbabwe. For example, I have heard one Mrs Muchero, testify that the house got burnt including all the belongings therein but the Bible re-

³³ Such testimonies are common and are in line with the Pentecostal faith gospel. For more information on the faith Gospel, see Paul GIFFORD, 'The Bible as a Political Document in Africa', in: Niels Kästfelt, *Scriptural Politics: The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa*. London: Hurst & Company 2003, 16-28.

mained intact.³⁴ Other testimonies talked of the Bible not getting wet when one drowned. In one testimony a man claims that he was baptised while holding his open Bible but it did not get wet. Even his clothes did not get wet. This was all because of the power of the Bible.

Similar testimonies are common among Johanne Marange Apostolic sect. They talk of instances where their leaders read the Bible amidst the flames of fire but not getting burnt. Objecting to claims by Godfrey Nzira, a prophet at Juranifiri Santa, Johanne Masowe Apostolic church that does not read the Bible claiming that 'there is a true Bible behind the material text and people should rather focus on it'³⁵, in accordance to the teachings of the founder of the church,³⁶ Kambarami, of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe (BSZ) and other protestant formations hold a contrary view. They believe in the power of the Bible as a sacred text that transmits the Word of God. The Bible is believed to have transformative powers. Kambarami told a story of a man who read the Bible and used its pages to roll a tobacco cigarette. The man claims to have been converted or transformed by the message from the burnt pages of the Bible as he smoked.³⁷

Influence of the claims and Testimonies on daily life among Zimbabwe Pentecostal churches

Pentecostal Christians, in Zimbabwe, always seek to establish their lives either private or public on the principles of God's word. As such what they are taught at church should be practiced at home and everywhere. To that extend, traditional rituals, marriage practices, among others are detested and substituted. Immediately when one converts to Pentecostal

³⁴ Mrs Muchero is not her real name but a man actually testified in church about the incident. Also, I have heard a numerous of such stories from believers in Pentecostal churches and also from African Independent Churches.

³⁵ Sibusiso MASONDO, review of Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2007.

³⁶ See Masiwa Ragies GUNDA, *The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe: A Socio-historical analysis of the political, cultural and Christianian arguments in the homosexual public debate with special reference to the use of the Bible* (BiAS 3). Bamberg: UBP 2010, 95-96.

(<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-2522>)

³⁷ Matthew ENGELKE, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. The quotation was taken from a review of the book by Sibusiso Masondo, University of Cape Town.

churches, there are concerted efforts to change the mentality, and turn one completely from his own family. The new believer automatically gets new family members among the believers. One has to make a complete break with the past.³⁸ This they facilitate through various ways, including making sure the believer is fully occupied with church activities hence has no time for the family. Church activities are arranged all-year round, nearly every day without any break from one activity to the other.³⁹

It is emphasized in Pentecostal churches that there is no need to consult traditional systems or channels since the Bible has assumed the position. Because of such beliefs, I have witnessed several marriages (weddings) that were conducted in church without the presence of close relatives as they were regarded conduits of evil spirits. Their roles were distributed among believers.⁴⁰ Mark 3:31-35 is usually cited to justify this practice. White weddings are also regarded as the only 'Godly' marriages. Every other traditional marriage establishment is *kubika mapoto* (co-habiting). Those who come to church being traditionally married should remarry in the sight of God.

The importance of ancestors as conveyor belts to the spiritual world is undermined.⁴¹ Like the white missionaries, Pentecostal Christians believe that the place of ancestors was important before Christianity. Now what is central is belief in the Holy Spirit, which closely analysed manifests almost in the same way as ancestors. Prophet Uebert's claims reveal the similarities between the call of these preachers and that of traditional healers. He says; "I prophesy because I was born to prophesy. I knew that I'd be a prophet at the age of five when I fell critically ill. This

³⁸ For more information on Pentecostalism and recreation of an individual to make him/her separate from blood relatives, see Birgit MEYER, 'Make a Complete Break with the past.' *Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse*, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 28, Fasc. 3 (Aug. 1998), pp. 316-349.

³⁹ Lovemore TOGARASEI, *Modern Pentecostalism as an Urban Phenomenon: the case of the Family of God Church in Zimbabwe*, in: *Exchange* 34 (4) 2005, 349-375.

⁴⁰ See also David MAXWELL, 'Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?': Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe, in: *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, Fasc. 3 (1998) 350-373.

⁴¹ See for instance Ruth MARSHALL, 'Power in the Name of Jesus': Transformation and Pentecostalism in Western Nigeria 'Revisited', in: Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (eds.), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A. H. M. Kirk-Greene*. Oxford: St Antony's College 1993, 213-246.

was confirmed when I was in Grade 2 when a voice called out to me from a bush and told me that it was Jesus Christ who had saved me from death".⁴² In the Shona traditional setting sickness was sometimes caused by ancestral or alien spirits as communication channel to the living of their interests. When one is in spirit, one speaks in another voice and special tongues and one may fall on the ground in a state of unconsciousness. All these features are almost ancestral possession. In a Shona traditional fashion, one who is thus possessed commands more respect than those who do not exhibit spirit possession. The same perspective has been carried into church.

Shona traditional practitioners were also supplanted by pastors. Traditionally the Shona got their counselling, medicines, ideas from the traditional healer among other practitioners but now that has been replaced by the men of God. He/she gives advice on all matters be they family or personal matters. The *gona* as one of the very important apparatus of the traditional functionaries was replaced by the Bible among other Christian symbols and paraphernalia. The above testimonies and practices often confirm to the believers that the Bible is mysterious. As such, there does not seem to be a distinction between God and the Bible. Criticising the Bible, by raising textual or exegetical questions is tantamount to questioning God hence punishment is inevitable. It is almost violation of *muko* of the Gona. I will demonstrate this with the sodomy case of Rev Canaan Sodindo Banana as it was interpreted in Pentecostal establishments. Banana was arrayed before the courts in 1996 on allegations of sodomising his bodyguard. He was finally convicted and sentenced. As the news of his arrest came out, Pentecostal pastors got ground to revive their attack on him at the same time justifying the mysterious nature of the Bible. Banana had from 1991 caused a stir in churches particularly Pentecostals by suggesting that the Bible needs to be rewritten to foster peace in the world particularly in the middle east and to facilitate the accommodation of traditional local revelations of God.

The Rev Canaan Sodindo Banana episode

On the 6th of April 1991, Banana called for the rewriting of the Bible as a possible alternative to the exploitative situation in the Middle East. This

⁴² Prophet Uebert on an interview with Tendai Manzvanzvike of Zimpapers, 'The Holy Spirit is my Friend', The Herald, 22 April 2010.

would for him liberate the Bible from dogmas that make God the property of ethnic syndicates. His arguments were premised on: the need to liberate the Bible from culture specific world views; how the Bible has been and continues to be used as an oppressive instrument; a short review of the origin and development of the Christian Bible; what a demythologised, liberated Bible might mean for humanity today; and on the question: is Christ the product of the Bible or the Bible the product of Christ?⁴³ Banana went further and asked: has God's revelation finished? Is it not possible that there is more that needs to be added to (as well as subtracted from) the Bible as we know it today to make it relevant to our times and people?⁴⁴ This was very revolutionary and attracted responses from every corner.

From that day, rewriting the Bible became a catchword that inflamed an intense controversy. The debate was not limited to academic and theological circles but in the market place also. Newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations covered the debate extensively. The arguments were vehement in tone and most of the time opposed to Banana's position.⁴⁵ The debate was more aggressive in Pentecostal establishments. Some accused him of being an atheist and asked for him to drop the title of reverend. Anyone who then wanted to study theology was advised not to be like Banana. There was a very strong feeling against the study of theology, particularly in the Universities and theological colleges that are not Pentecostal. Today anyone studying religious studies in Zimbabwe is not taken as a serious Christian among Pentecostal churches. I was asked several times to explain what exactly I will be studying in the Bible at University level.

When in 1996 Banana was arrested, it was preached in Churches that he was punished by God for trying to rewrite the Bible. Christians were always warned, 'Do not theorise on this book. You can do that on other books not the Bible. Banana tried to theorise on the Bible some years ago and what did he receive? You must not play with God! The Bible in Revelation says you must not add or subtract the words of God!' The

⁴³ Canaan S. BANANA, *The Case for a New Bible*. 17-31, in: *Rewriting the Bible: The real issues. Perspectives from within Biblical and Religious Studies*. Gweru: Mambo Press 1993.

⁴⁴ VERSTRAELEN, *Zimbabwean Realities*, 92.

⁴⁵ I. MUKONYORA/ J. L. COX/ Frans J. VERSTRAELEN, Introduction: *The Central Issue*, in: *Rewriting the Bible: The real issues. Perspectives from within Biblical and Religious Studies*. Gweru: Mambo Press 1993, x-xii.

implication of such a statement is that Banana was punished for violating the biblical teaching, Revelation 22:18 in particular. His sin was an attempt to add and subtract from the Bible.

Others who were not familiar with Banana's real argument preached that he wanted to rewrite the Bible so that he would add some verses to accommodate homosexuality. The case of Banana is still referred to as evidence of possible consequences for those who criticise the Bible. We are reminded constantly not to criticise the Bible because the consequences are dire. The Bible is therefore not just 'the word of God', it has power in itself, whether it is read or not. It has the capacity to protect believers from evil while injuring the offenders. This is almost all the *gona* was known to confer among the Shona before and even after Christianity.

Comparison between Gona and the Bible: possible circumstances

In as much as the *gona* guided everyday life of the Shona, Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches believe that the Bible should guide every step of their feet. This forms the rationale for arguing that the prominence given to the Bible in Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches is a substitute for the *gona*. As all other evangelicals, the authority of the Bible is unquestionable in Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches. It is the only legitimate source of theology. And from such a belief, there is constant attack on Christian traditions that appeal to other sources of theology rather than appealing to only the Bible. The Bible is the word of God! That is all. Unlike some Shona Independent churches that no longer read the Bible, for Pentecostals it is the only channel through which one can access and understand God. You often hear people saying whatever claim you raise about life should be in the Bible word for word. It is this belief however that influences the various mysterious or rather magical roles of the Bible. It is important to highlight also that this magical role of the Bible has been part of the African Independent churches since the time they were founded. We would like therefore to try to find possible roots for the understanding of the Bible as *gona* among the Shona.

The mission and death of Fr Gonzalo da Silveira (1561)

The year 1560 signalled the very first attempt at Christianising the Shona. Portuguese missionary Fr Gonzalo da Silveira landed in south-east Africa and went inland, baptising Tonga rulers and four hundred subjects on one day. He proceeded up the Zambezi to the Shona country of Munhumutapa, in what is now called Zimbabwe.⁴⁶ When on 25 December 1560 Gonzalo arrived at Mutapa court, the king sent customary gifts to him - money, servants and cattle - and inquired what gold and land and women he wanted. But Gonzalo declined the offer. Instead he presented the king with a statue of the Virgin Mary, whom the king after some days saw in his dreams enthroned in light. Immediately the king and his mother desired baptism.⁴⁷ After not so many days of instruction Gonzalo baptised them, together with 500 of his family and nobles and several court officials within a month of his arrival.⁴⁸ But did the king understand the meaning of his conversion? Hastings argues to the contrary. For him, the king for his part might have wanted to undergo a ritual which was apparently closely associated with the power and wisdom of these strange foreigners.⁴⁹

This could be true given the internal problems to his throne. The king wanted political strength and to be granted wisdom to subdue the rivals. It is therefore clear he understood the baptism as acquiring (*kuromba gona*) to strengthen his power and to gain wisdom. Fr Gonzalo was therefore interpreted by the king as a very strange and powerful traditional healer - more powerful than the entire king's advisors (traditional healers and diviners).

These mass conversions and the reliance on Gonzalo by the king frightened Shona traditional leaders (and Muslim traders) that within two months a rumour spread that Gonzalo had bewitched the king. The king was advised by the leaders to return to traditional religion to avoid something terrible happening to him and to the country.⁵⁰ Muslims confirmed to the king that Gonzalo was indeed an arch-enchanter (sorcerer)

⁴⁶ Geoffrey PARRINDER, *Religion in Africa*. London: Pall Mall Press 1969, 122.

⁴⁷ C. P. GROVES, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*. Vol. 1., London: Lutterworth Press 1964, 134.

⁴⁸ D. E. NEEDHAM/ E. K. MASHINGAIDZE/ N. BHEBE, *From Iron Age to Independence: A History of Central Africa*. London: Longman 1984, 58.

⁴⁹ A. HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1994, 79.

⁵⁰ HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa*, 58.

and that the ceremony of baptism was part of his enchantment (sorcery).⁵¹ He was also told that the white missionary was a Portuguese spy through whose water of baptism and the strange words he had used, the people would fall under the priest's spell so that he could rob the country, just as the Portuguese had done at Sofala. As a clear proof of Gonzalo's witchcraft they spoke to the king's dream about the Lady in the picture who had spoken to him.⁵²

All these stories of witchcraft and spying seemed to be confirmed in the King's mind by Silveira's refusal to accept offers of cattle, gold, wives, land and servants. Gonzalo had also attacked everything associated with the traditional Shona family and marriage system.⁵³ The local medicine men (traditional healers) were convinced that Gonzalo was up to nothing good and pressed king Negomo to have him killed. The king finally abandoned the faith and decreed that everyone who had converted should follow his example. Gonzalo was strangled together with about 50 locals (maybe they had refused to obey the king). Their bodies were all thrown into a river.⁵⁴

Tradition has it that Shona traditional leaders were troubled by Gonzalo's operations. The accusation of witchcraft appealed to their minds owing to a number of things that identified closely with traditional apparatus that witches employ: the human borne (a relic) which was always in his pocket and which he kissed when praying, saliva that he used on faces of the converted ones, a strange language (maybe Latin) associated with that and the Bible. They argued that Gonzalo's book had blinded the people, he had actually bewitched them. Gonzalo would always carry with him, the Bible and would read it to the king and everyone that converted. For the traditional leaders, the Bible was a mysterious book in the fashion of the *gona*. In fact, it had proved to have more power than their *gonas*. This understanding has remained among the many African Indigenous Churches and Pentecostal Christians in Zimbabwe as well as the rest of Africa. It is evident that this thought pattern was built upon similar objects of power that the people knew and that is the fetishes such as *gona*. The Independent and Pentecostal churches

⁵¹ GROVES, *The Planting of Christianity*, 134.

⁵² John BAUR, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publ. 1998, 81.

⁵³ NEEDHAM/ MASHINGAIDZE/ BHEBE, *From Iron Age to Independence*, 58.

⁵⁴ NEEDHAM/ MASHINGAIDZE/ BHEBE, *From Iron Age to Independence*, 58.

just transferred concepts about the *gona* onto the Bible and other Christian symbols.

Emergence of African Independent Churches

G.C. Oosthuizen, observed that in these churches that have variously been described as ‘independent’, ‘separatists’, syncretistic, post-Christian, etc, ‘The Bible in the new vernacular gave it a new intrinsic quality and stands for vitality, directness, renewal, and is powerfully religious and dynamic, with spontaneity. It could as in a few cases, become a fetish lying on a chair during service but never opened.’⁵⁵ I strongly agree with his observation on the importance of the Bible among African Christians that include Pentecostal churches. He however thought that the use of the Bible was ‘in a few cases’. Instead nearly all the Independent and Pentecostal churches that I know that use the Bible view it as some form of fetish. This seems to be confirmed by information from the beginning of these movements.

An interesting link among the various dimensions (Ethiopian, Spirit churches, Apostolic, Zionist etc) of African Independent Churches in Southern Africa was done by I Daneel. He observed that the moving spirit behind this movement was a woman called Kimpa Vita, renamed Dona Beatrice at her baptism. When she was twenty in 1700 she claimed to have been possessed by the spirit of St Antony. She began preaching forcefully against the Catholic Church’s formalism and externalism. She began to destroy all the crosses, crucifixes and images of Christ because she said they had simply become new fetishes replacing the old.⁵⁶

If her beliefs could be taken as representative of the masses, we have reasonable ground to speculate that even the Bible could have been seen as fetish. This theory holds water if taken from the perspective of the reaction of the people to the first evangelisation in the Kongo kingdom. J. Baur tells us that at the arrival of the first missionaries the people gathered fetishes (*nkisi*) to be burned by the Christian priests, thus following the well-established tradition among Africans of destroying old fetishes to make room for new and more powerful one. Baptism crosses, statues, church ornaments were seen as the new fetishes and the Chris-

⁵⁵ G. C. OOSTHUIZEN, *Afro-Christian Religions (Iconography of Religions)*, Leiden: Brill 1980, 3.

⁵⁶ DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging*, 46.

tian priests were interpreted as their traditional healers or medicine men (*nganga*). Even the traditional medicine men were afraid of the Christian priests as they saw them as possessing greater powers than theirs.⁵⁷ Although the Bible is not mentioned as having been distributed to the people, we can assume that since it was an indispensable object of faith in the missionary work, people should have associated it with fetish.

The Bible could have been interpreted as fetish, given notable radical teachings of Kimpa Vita that include the localisation of Biblical features, places and personalities, proclamation of a paradise on earth and the restoration of the Kongo kingdom. One needs to understand that missionaries had condemned everything that was Kongolese as satanic. Not knowing anything about ancestor and fertility cults, or the African distinction between protective and harmful magic and between medicine man and witch, the missionaries rejected all.⁵⁸ Her radical teaching should be interpreted as a reaction to this background.

According to Baur, she taught that there should be a truly Kongolese religion, i.e. a church for the Kongolese saints headquartered at Sao Salvador. After all, Jesus and Mary were in fact Kongolese hence ancestors. Jesus was born at Sao Salvador (Bethlehem) and she taught that Mbanza Soyo was Nazareth.⁵⁹ With this level of supplantation of Christian concepts, places and teachings with traditional ones, she as everybody else may have understood the Bible to be fetish or magical. Although her radical interaction with Christian beliefs led to her death, she was venerated almost to the level of a saint before she was killed by the colonial authorities. Later in the nineteenth century, from about 1870 onwards, we find a gathering momentum in the emergence of modern Independent Churches in many African countries. In these Independent churches the same themes that Dona Beatrice raised recur time and again in many different forms⁶⁰ suggesting that Africans tried to understand the Christian teachings from their traditional perspectives. In the process they would transfer traditional conceptions on to the Christian beliefs and symbols. Places such as Christian villages in the case of Rhodesia for example, could have provided a fertile ground for such supplantation to take place.

⁵⁷ BAUR, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, 71.

⁵⁸ BAUR, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, 66.

⁵⁹ BAUR, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, 72.

⁶⁰ DANEEL, Quest for Belonging, 47.

The Christian Villages in Rhodesia and the Bible

I strongly suspect Christian villages as possible areas where the whole supplanting took place. Lawrence Vambe gives us insights into the nature of the Christian villages in Rhodesia, although he is concerned about the VaShawasha people. His analysis of the VaShawasha situation in Rhodesia is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Vambe argues that the disintegration of the VaShawasha village after the death of their Chief, Mashonganyika, was not brought about by the death of the chief alone. Living under missionary control at Chishawasha, the tribe was now subject to pressures from the white religious fathers, which had the cumulative effect of rendering them less and less able to decide upon anything for themselves, even the simplest details of everyday life such as food, attire and behaviour. Not surprisingly, many of the VaShawasha longed for a freer environment far away where they could independently conduct their lives and follow their own religious customs.⁶¹

In the Christian villages all over the country there was a very deliberate attempt by missionaries to dissociate the people from their indigenous culture. For instance, in these villages the traditional religious life of the Shona was not tolerated. Traditional music, ceremonies, regalia and anything associated with ancestors was punishable. There were no more rain-making or spirit dances, nor any of the rousing drum-beating song assemblies that often made tribal life so distinctive. The missionaries decided in the early days, to appoint Christian chiefs to supplant traditionally inclined chiefs who spurned the white men's religion. The fathers simply picked certain men for this purpose on the evidence of their outward religious zeal and claims to a certain influence in the tribe. Thus each of the Christian villages ('Montserrat', 'Manressa' and 'Loyola') had a chief. But these men were fiercely disliked, if not actually hated by the people. They were considered usurpers of an ancient office that was synonymous with Shona freedom and independence.⁶² Given this set up of restriction on traditional religious life, it is possible that the people under the control of Christian missionaries were forced to transfer their traditional beliefs onto the Christian symbols as the Bakongo did.

Another possibility is that people may have interpreted the Bible mysteriously especially from observing how the missionaries revered it. The

⁶¹ Lawrence VAMBE, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 1976, 1.

⁶² VAMBE, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, 36.

Bible was almost 'venerated' by the missionaries as they emphasised that it contained everything about everyday life. Although by the time Christianity came to Africa, the Bible had been seriously questioned especially its authorship and content, the missionaries decided deliberately to emphasise the mysteriousness of its authorship and power. Preaching from their Bibles the Fathers dwelt at length on the sins of the world, the unimportance of earthly life and its material wealth in contrast to the sheer intoxicating glory of the world to come. They selectively preached from verses that denounced earthly possessions such as land and property an approach that made the Bible an instrument of oppression and exploitation. This process gave birth to a well-known anecdote: when the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said, 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible'.⁶³

Some of these priests for Vambe were splendid characters, whose vision of heaven became more and more realistic and mesmerising as they grew older. Old Father, Hesse, for example used to burst into tears at the end of his sermons in which he had stripped naked the wickedness of the world.⁶⁴ Obviously the onlookers or parishioners could have believed the mysteriousness of the Bible. This could have influenced Shona adherents to see the Bible in the same light as fetishes. The ministry of the first African Independent church seems to give a clue in this direction. The very first of this was *Shiri Chena* by Zvimba brothers (Mathew and Misheck). This Independent church was formed in 1907 in a Methodist Christian village of Zvimba compelling Vambe to believe that Matthew must rank as one of the most original exponents of Christianity as an instrument for achieving black liberation.⁶⁵ Taking refuge in the Bible to express his hope about reclaiming African inheritance he says; the powers of evil would overreach themselves. The anger of the Almighty would see to it that this evil was destroyed. God would clear all the fog and smoke in the African minds, and they would seize their rightful destiny.⁶⁶ As he was utterly against white domination in Rhodesia, he chose to fight the legitimating force for their power - the church, through an exclusively African Christian movement, founded and controlled by

⁶³ Gerald O. WEST, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a dialogical Reading of the Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1999, 9.

⁶⁴ VAMBE, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, 38.

⁶⁵ VAMBE, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, 80.

⁶⁶ VAMBE, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, 79.

himself and based on Shona spiritual values. Matthew was very intelligent to understand the inseparability between African personality and religion. He was convinced that manipulating such a force would aid him achieve the objectives of freedom. He is reputable for reinterpretation of Christianity in light of Shona religious and political historical perspectives. For instance, he claims to have been ordained by the Holy Spirit to be the king after the whites would have been vanquished and the Zvimba kingdom restored. He always preached that the White Bird (*Shiri chena*) represented the dove of the Holy Ghost. Obviously this had direct Biblical influence as taught by the missionaries. He however went further to preach that it also represented the traditional Shona messenger of God (Mwari). Contrary to missionary teaching, his saints and martyrs were the men and women of the Zvimba area who were killed by the Europeans in the Mashonaland rebellion.⁶⁷ Quite many of the Shona people had been killed by missionaries who fought alongside the settlers in order to suppress rebellion and eventually colonise Zimbabwe.⁶⁸

With this set up, it is possible that with time the Bible could have acquired mysterious status in the minds of the people. Partly it could have been the process influenced by the missionary teaching on the sacredness of the Bible but also it could have been the reflections of the Shona people themselves. We have very little doubt of this probability especially having observed how the Bible was central in the theology of Zvimba. It is clear that Zvimba's ideas were influenced by the missionaries, but at the same time they represent a genuine attempt towards understanding the Christian religion and its symbols in the light of one's cultural and spiritual context.

Emergence of African Pentecostal churches

Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe are products of this era and were responding to almost the same issues that led to the emergence of Independent Churches. Notable among both groups is their taking seriously the African cultural world view, indicating the common problem as reason for the formation of the churches. Although they both reject the

⁶⁷ VAMBE, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe*, 80.

⁶⁸ C.J.M. ZVOBGO, *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe: 1890-1939*. Gweru: Mambo Press 1996.

traditional objects and institutions, they did not discard the philosophy. David Maxwell argues that despite the appearance of newness, African Pentecostalism has deep roots in the colonial past, arising either directly or indirectly from waves of American and European Pentecostal missionary activity. It therefore presents an intriguing mix of religious, political and economic themes concerning African nationalism, American commodification of religion, and interracial ambivalence.⁶⁹ These characteristics are quite traceable in churches such as ZAOGA, FOG, and AFM among others owing to their common roots. AFM for instance gave birth to ZAOGA; while 'it is often argued that AFM sprang from the earlier Zionist movement'. But the relationship between Zionism and AFM was one of symbiosis rather than direct succession. Founders of AFM never broke links with Zionism. Whilst some formed AFM others like Daniel Nkonyane, Elias Mahlangu, and Michael Ngomezulu used their relative autonomy and informal links which they had with AFM to develop their own Zionist followings. Once free from missionary supervision, these leaders developed Africanised versions of Pentecostalism very different in form and intent from the original American packages.⁷⁰ It is almost clear that African Pentecostalism sprouted at the same time with African Indigenous churches. This explains why their beliefs and practices overlap.

When AFM crossed the Limpopo northwards, it made strides in conversions which saw both Johanne Masowe and Johanne Marange become members. The link between Masowe and AFM was Enoch Gwanzura who around 1930s initiated Masowe into an AFM preacher. Eventually Masowe went his own way, taking his AFM heritage with him. Marange's link with AFM was Joel Juma. AFM tradition has it that Juma met with Marange in Mutare and baptised him in the spirit and later accompanied Marange as his mentor. This relationship between AFM and Zimbabwean Christian Independency made relations between AFM and the settler regime deteriorate. Of great importance is the religious worldview of these churches that follows closely the African traditional cosmology; Maxwell noted that 'African Christian prophets like Marange and Masowe mined the scriptures for legitimating charters for what were to become great transnational movements (such as ZAOGA and FOG) in them they also read about Zion and Bethesda, sacred cities, and

⁶⁹ MAXWELL, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 3.

⁷⁰ MAXWELL, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 43.

streams, and holy mountains. These images provided the basis of a new African hymnology and the imaginative material to re-sacralise the landscape in Christian fashion.⁷¹ In the end, all the three movements (AFM, Marange and Masowe) were not very different. They responded to popular fears of witchcraft in the same manner. Official opinion always conflated these three movements together. This was not surprising since they all looked alike, preached the same message, practiced divine healing, and fostered various ecstatic phenomena.⁷² AFM preachers like the two Apostolic movements had white robes, shaven heads, pieces of cloths, staffs and kept long beards.

In 1957 the AFM church suffered a major schism as a result of white missionaries that wanted to reassert their authority, 'correcting' what they thought was too Africanisation of the church. They began to speak against keeping beards, polygamy, against witch hunting and many other practices that African preachers were involved in. These missionary attempts to impose orthodoxy were fiercely resisted. Black AFM preachers had retained links with Vapostori leaders and an osmosis between the movements continued and Zionist-type practices continued. The AFM adherents loved to carry wooden crosses, sashes and grey coloured uniforms and continued to practice old-style religion in the hills at night, the AFM prophets continued to roam the villages divining witchcraft. What is more important is how these African preachers thought about their new religious symbols.

According to Oosthuizen, symbols such as, water, holy staffs, cords, flags, pieces of cloth and even the uniform is associated with healing. And all these objects could become fetishes that replaced traditional ones. In this case, the bones used in traditional society were replaced by the cloth and horn by the cords. A staff also has power over enemies and sicknesses.⁷³ Hence the gradual imposition of missionary notions of orthodoxy led to a wave of schisms which created a new set of Vapostori-like churches; Madida (Moyo), Elijah Mugodhi and Isaac Chiumbu (Kachembere) among others. In these churches traditional symbols have been re-interpreted and the powers resident in the traditional apparatus were transferred onto the new objects. There is no doubt that these sym-

⁷¹ MAXWELL, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 52.

⁷² MAXWELL, *African Gifts of the Spirit*, 54.

⁷³ OOSTHUIZEN, *Afro-Christian Religions*, 9.

bols are fetishes. This is why even the Bible is regarded as one in these churches together with their Pentecostal counterparts.

ZAOGA being a direct product of the similar clashes with white missionaries cannot escape the influence of the African worldview. The Bible in ZAOGA as I have indicated at the beginning is viewed magically. Ezekiel Guti, the founder was an evangelist in AFM and leader of a prayer band that sang and preached in many places in Rhodesia. Their central message was 'against all forms of sin, including drinking, smoking and ancestral worship.' Here one can observe white missionary influence. But the group had some characteristic features of African Pentecostalism that include performing miraculous healing to all forms of problems, even demon possession. A stream of clients would come to Guti's cottage in Highfield in search of healing. Guti had a particular gift of curing infertility. These activities attracted the attention of white missionaries who were concerned with orthodoxy more than anything else. There were a number of confrontations with these white missionaries and finally Guti's preaching licence was taken from him.⁷⁴

Eventually Guti formed ZAOGA around 1960. In principle it shares a lot with the rest of the Independent churches, particularly on the centrality of the Bible whether open or closed. All the various offshoots from ZAOGA have maintained the characteristic features of the parent church. Because of its numerical power, ZAOGA has influenced not only offshoots but also some churches of the same nature such as FOG and even AFM its parent. In these churches (FOG and AFM), traditional notions are vehemently resisted but not the underlying philosophy. As such they have supplanted traditional symbols by Christian ones including the Bible.

Conclusion

Contrary to the general claims by the Zimbabwe Pentecostal establishments that their members have no links with the past (African Traditional Religion), I believe these movements managed to swell in the communities because of not only their claim to have solutions to African spiritual fears but also by systematically transferring those elements to Christian symbols. The philosophical basis of their belief structures is heavily influenced by traditional conceptions, such as belief in *gona*. As

⁷⁴ MAXWELL, African Gifts of the Spirit, 67.

such, to understand the operations of these churches independent from the philosophical frame work produces misleading results. One must understand these churches through the Shona traditional religious setup.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND DAILY LIFE: TURNING THE BIBLE INTO A MANUAL FOR PRACTICE, THE CASE OF AFRICAN INITIATED “APOSTOLIC” CHURCHES IN ZIMBABWE

Masiwa Ragies Gunda

Introduction

Many works have been written on the founding and developments in and of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Africa and in Zimbabwe in particular yet there has been little in terms of seeking an understanding on how these churches interpret the Bible, the basis upon which the beliefs and practices of these churches are founded. In short, how does the Bible feature in the daily life of these churches? Alternatively, what is the relationship between the Bible and practice in these churches? Demographically, the AICs have now taken over a significant percentage of the Christian population in Zimbabwe, including urban areas¹ and Togarasei is right when he writes “during weekends shades of trees are turned into seas of red, white, blue and all sorts of colours of religious regalia.”² This assertion is an apt summation of the impact of AICs, as they are the ones that do not congregate in buildings at the same time challenging the oft raised assumption that these churches are rural based. That these churches have become an important part of the religious or Christian landscape in Zimbabwe cannot be understated hence the need to understand more aspects associated with these churches. While it is a question of accessing the doctrines and dogma of mainline churches to understand their beliefs and practices, “foundational to these churches (AICs) are definite theological presuppositions, found more in the practice of their Christianity than in formal dogma.”³ It is therefore contented in this article that the use of the Old Testament as a

¹ Masiwa Ragies GUNDA, “A critical analysis of the survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches” in: L. Togarasei and E. Chitando (eds.), *Faith in the City: The role and place of religion in Harare*, Uppsala: Universitetstryckeriet 2010, 41-62: 41-42.

² Lovemore TOGARASEI, “One Bible Many Christianities: Christianity in Zimbabwe Today”, *Unpublished* 2005, 1.

³ Allan ANDERSON, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*, Asmara: Africa World Press 2001, 17.

manual for daily practice is readily observable from the practices themselves.

The lack of systematic dogma in these churches cannot be taken to mean the lack of dogma, since by literally basing their practices on the Bible and enforcing their observance; a kind of dogma is established. This study therefore seeks to critically describe the interpretational trends of the biblical texts, especially the Old Testament, in these churches and the biblical basis upon which some of the practices and belief systems in these churches are founded upon. While the Old Testament is the basis upon which practices in these churches are legitimized, there is no denying what John Mbiti observed when he writes;

African religion has prepared the religious and spiritual ground for many of its adherents to listen carefully to the teachings of the Bible, to reflect seriously upon them, to find a high degree of credibility in them, to discover meaningful parallels between their world and the world of the Bible, and in many cases to convert to the Christian faith without feeling the sense of spiritual loss.⁴

This is despite the open war between these churches and traditional religious practices, which they declare to be their pre-eminent enemy.⁵

African Initiated Churches

The designation AICs comes from an attempt to categorise the different strands of Christianity in Africa. This has been an attempt by scholars to respond to Gifford's challenge when he asks, "in the light of the new alignment within African Christianity, how adequate now are older typologies (like Ethiopian, Zionist etc)? What typologies exist now to categorise the vast array of churches in Africa's major cities?"⁶ Generally and taking cognisance of Makhubu's work, AICs are churches founded by Africans with no missionary links, in essence these are churches founded by Africans for Africans in Africa.⁷ While it has generally been noted that most of these churches were founded on nationalistic

⁴ John MBITI, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press 1986, 11.

⁵ Masiwa Ragies GUNDA, "Christianity, Traditional Religion, and Healing in Zimbabwe: Exploring the Dimensions and Dynamics of Healing Among the Shona" in: *Swedish Missiological Themes*, 95 (3) 2007, 242-243.

⁶ Paul GIFFORD, (ed) *New Dimensions in African Christianity*, Ibadan: Sefer 1993, 1.

⁷ Paul MAKHUBU, *Who are the Independent Churches?* Johannesburg: Scotaville Publishers 1988, 6.

grounds, there can be no denying that biblical interpretation played a part in arousing the need for an African founded church in the minds of some Africans. This is especially pronounced in these churches because “Africans hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the pages of the Bible.”⁸ The close correlation between pre-colonial African practices, some of which have continued to date, with especially Old Testament practices and worldviews led to the claims to ownership of the Bible in many AICs.

This paper will focus on the practices and beliefs in some of these churches, especially those that Inus Daneel classifies as the Zionist-type, those that emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit⁹, which in this paper we shall conveniently call the “Apostolic” churches. It is also important to note that the issue of categorising these Christian churches has been at the centre of many scholarly works and possibly cannot be exhausted since the starting point does not seem to be similar among the different scholars who have dealt with the issue. However, in this paper we are more interested in those AICs of the “Apostolic” type. These churches are so named because of the prevalence and prominence given to the name “apostolic” as shown below in the names of these churches: Bethsaida Apostolic church, Paul Apostolic church, Followers of Jesus Christ Apostolic church, The Miracle of God Apostolic Church, *Kudana* Apostolic church, *Simbaguru* Apostolic church, Pentecost Apostolic church, Bible Apostolic church, St. Joseph Holy Apostolic church.¹⁰ Further, as Allan Anderson observes, “the largest and the second or third largest denomination in Zimbabwe, is the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange (AACJM), known as *Vapostori*, estimated at almost one million affiliates in Zimbabwe in 1999.”¹¹ These seem to fit into Daneel’s classification of the messianic-type churches where the attention of the members is captured by the eminence of the leader.¹² Since the main focus of this paper is not on the categorisation of these churches, we shall confine our arguments to the general designation given above and to a lesser extent that suggested by Daneel.

⁸ MBITI, *Bible and Theology*, 26.

⁹ Inus DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1987, 30.

¹⁰ GUNDA, A critical analysis of the Survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches“, 44-45.

¹¹ ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 116.

¹² DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging*, 30.

Of central importance is that while the names of these churches are New Testament inspired¹³, as seen in the adoption of names of New Testament personalities, the practices and beliefs appear to be dependent on the Old Testament more than the New Testament. There is no denying that the New Testament is important in these churches, as seen in the idea of the Holy Spirit and the belief in Christ as saviour. However, the daily life of adherents to these churches is governed more by the laws and injunctions of the Old Testament. To that extent, the central characteristics of these churches are that the “preachers in Zimbabwe wore [wear] white robes, carried staffs, shaved their heads, and grew beards, and taught Old Testament laws.”¹⁴ This, seemingly as a challenge to the “life of faith” which gives individuals huge responsibilities to decide what is acceptable and not. These churches wanted a life governed by biblical injunctions at every turn, and the Old Testament gave them just as much if not more. To that extent, the Old Testament is not simply a document or documents that prepare the way for Christ but are documents that are as relevant and valid as the New Testament itself, especially when it comes to daily life. It appears that in the Old Testament,

Africans feel that their own lives are described..., they as human beings are affirmed in it and that they belong to the world of the Bible...The world of the Bible did not vanish two or three thousand years ago. People [Africans] discover that it is for them a world of yesterday and today, a world of their own lives and communities.¹⁵

AICs do indeed call into question the Christian understanding of the Canon. Especially so because when Johane Marange received a vision in 1932, he was told that he should inform the people to keep Old Testament laws and the seventh-day Sabbath.¹⁶ From observations of these churches, they have developed a canon within the Canon as widely understood in mainline churches, and their Canon also adds “the visions and personal experiences of Marange [or the respective founders], called *The New Revelation of the Apostles*.”¹⁷ The Canon of most AICs does not treat the Old Testament as the Old Testament in the manner in which it is understood in mainline churches, rather the Old Testament in these

¹³ GUNDA, *A critical analysis of the Survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches*, 45.

¹⁴ ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 116.

¹⁵ MBITI, *Bible and Theology*, 26-27.

¹⁶ Cf. ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 116.

¹⁷ ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 117.

churches should be understood as the earlier Testament but still valid and at the same level with the New Testament, if not higher. There is a greater prevalence of combinations of practices from both the Old and New Testaments such as foretelling the future and speaking in tongues, exorcism and faith-healing. With these observations, it becomes laudable to argue that “the entire movement of independency [AICs] across Africa takes on the aspect of a drive to recover a more biblically based religion.”¹⁸ This quest is central if we are to appreciate the role of the Bible in the ordering of lives of the *Vapostori*.

The Old Testament in African Initiated Churches (AICs)

A general analysis of the AICs’ beliefs and practices reveals aspects and concepts replete with Old Testament reminiscences, these churches appear to have seriously attempted to establish a biblically based religious tradition. In fact, participatory observation in these churches is a journey back to the Old Testament times. The adherents of these churches literally “live the Old Testament, or some sections of the Old Testament.” So many factors can be cited to demonstrate that the fundamental beliefs and practices of these AICs rest on the Old Testament teachings, this notwithstanding the fact that some of their practices are adopted from the traditional heritage.¹⁹ It is the intention of this paper to critically outline how these churches have depended so much on the Old Testament for their beliefs and practices. This dependence has been sustained by an interpretation of the Old Testament as will be demonstrated below. The following key aspects will receive attention, as an overview analysis, in this paper: laws, prophecy, healing, the position of women and festivals. In short, the practical lives of these churches have been fashioned after the lives of ancient Israelites and Jews, as gleaned through the pages of the Old Testament. This is the perspective one gets from talking to members of these churches, there may be some similarities with traditional practices, but these churches justify their practices by resorting to the Bible, especially the Old Testament.

¹⁸ David BARRET, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (1968), in: Mbiti, *Bible and Theology*, 31.

¹⁹ GUNDA, “A critical analysis of the Survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches”, 46.

Laws and Purity

The history of Christianity is replete with incidences where Christians are opposed to each other regarding the observances of Old Testament laws by Christians, this is already present in the works of the Apostle Paul and the epistle of James, where faith and law are juxtaposed. While, Jesus is believed to have simply given two laws to humanity, that is, Matthew 22:37,39 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” This would appear to be revolutionary in Jesus’ time since there is overwhelming evidence and general consensus among scholars that the Old Testament religion has texts that point towards a legalistic religion whose foundation was the law.²⁰

Legalism “is a term Christians use to describe a doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth. Legalists believe in and demand a strict literal adherence to rules and regulations.”²¹ The assumption of legalists being that Old Testament religion and its adherents are portrayed as having been governed by a set of rules and regulations. All aspects of the life of the community were legally governed from how members of the community relate, what they ate and how they conducted sacrifices. It is clear that, as argued by Vriezen, the Priestly Code (and thus also some other sections of the Pentateuch) makes a direct connection between the cultic legislation and the actual institution of the religion by Moses. It is envisaged as having been given directly at Sinai (Exo. 25ff; 35ff; Lev. and Num. 1- 10:11). It is in this light that we can understand that even the whole construction and design of the tabernacle, the laws concerning the priests and the high priest, the sacrificial system, rites of purification, festivals and so forth, are included.²² While the Old Testament religion might not have been entirely legalistic there is no doubt that its interpretation among AICs has more often than not emphasised the legalistic dimension. This centrality of legalism in religion can be detected in AICs in Zimbabwe today as shall be demonstrated below.

²⁰ Paul J. ACHEMMEIER, (eds.) et al, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, San Francisco: Harper 1985, 548.

²¹ Got Questions Org, “What does the Bible say about Legalism?” available online: (www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html) accessed 04 Febr. 2010.

²² Theodore C. VRIEZEN, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, London: Lutterworth Press 1967, 257

Legalism is a characteristic phenomenon of most AICs and this, according to Oosthuizen, comes naturally to the African, who finds it difficult to accept teaching as binding unless it is supported by outward sanctions.²³ It is important to note that legalism also characterises the African Traditional Religion (ATR) hence nothing would suit the traditional African mind better.²⁴ While we acknowledge that legalism was part and parcel of the traditional religion, it should be appreciated that these AICs disown such traditional religion but they remain attracted to legalism. This fascination with laws may be explained in terms of worldviews, while there is the movement from traditional religion to Christianity, it would appear that there is yet another movement which is below the radar, the movement of Christianity from the Western worldview to the traditional African worldview. In this worldview, teachings are always accompanied by external sanctions. This legalistic interest is then fulfilled when these churches turn to the Old Testament. While these are Christian churches, they emphasise the Old Testament in as much as a legalistic religion is concerned hence in these churches legalism is found in their adoption of almost all the legal requirements contained in the Old Testament such as dietary and purity laws.

Dietary Laws

Almost all AICs of the apostolic type in Zimbabwe follow Leviticus 11 to the letter. This chapter specifies what animals were considered clean and unclean hence edible and inedible respectively. It is not surprising therefore that among these churches; followers are prohibited from eating swine, hare, any fish (water creatures) without fins and scales, as well as the ostrich. According to Madzimai (Female title meaning simply Woman) Presnagne:

*Mukereke medu hatitenderwi kudya mhuka dzinorambidzwa muchitenderano chekare. Mhuka dzacho dzinosanganisira nguruwe, turo, mbeva, kana hove dzakadai nemuramba, nyamasasi, hunga kana hwakwa nekuti hadzina mahwamba.*²⁵

²³ G. S. OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological study*, London: Hurst and company 1969, 171.

²⁴ OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa*, 171.

²⁵ Madzimai PRESNAGE, *Interview*, Harare: December 2004.

In our church we are not allowed to eat unclean animals as stipulated in the Old Testament; these include pigs, mice, hare, as well as fish such as the eel or any other such fish without scales.

The New Testament texts that appear to challenge these dietary laws are interpreted allegorically or ‘spiritually’ in these churches. A clear example is the vision of Peter in Acts 10:9-16, which in these churches has nothing to do with the dietary laws but with the spread of Christianity to non-Jews. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 8, is also interpreted to mean the “weaker brother” is the one who continues to be drawn to forbidden foods and therefore requires the patience and tolerance of the stronger brother, that is, those who have moved on to live by God’s laws.²⁶ On dietary laws, the New Testament is interpreted in the light of the Old Testament calling into the question the general assumption that all Christians see the New Testament as the fulfilment of the Old Testament and therefore taking precedence over the latter.

Besides the lists of prohibited animals and food items, other important observations have to do with Leviticus 11:39-40, which reads;

If an animal of which you may eat dies, anyone who touches its carcass shall be unclean until the evening. Those who eat of its carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening; and those who carry the carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening.

On the basis of this reading AICs therefore prohibit their members from eating not only those animals declared unclean in the text but also those clean animals that die without being slaughtered. This, according to Makava and Moffat of *Kutenda Kwe Vapostori* (Faith of the Apostles) church, is associated with the Old Testament teachings²⁷ such as Leviticus 7:26, which reads; “Moreover you shall eat no blood whatever whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwellings,” as also does Leviticus 17:10, which reads “If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people.” Anyone who fails to live by these injunctions would have to undergo costly purity rituals for them to be able to commune with fellow church members. It is therefore, crystal clear that the Old Testament determines the dietary rules and regulations observed in these churches as illustrated above.

²⁶ D. MAKAVA and N. MOFFAT, *Interview*, Harare: May 2005.

²⁷ MAKAVA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

These dietary laws impact also on the manner in which church adherents in these churches relate with non-church members within their communities of abode. In those communities where most have access to meat from the so-called “unclean animals”, the *vapostori* do not eat in households belonging to non-church members, because of the fear that their utensils are contaminated. At funerals these Christians do not partake of meat provided at the funeral because of the traditional custom of dedicating the slaughtered beast to the dead. Indeed, being a member of these churches means taking on a new lifestyle, dependent on the laws and injunctions of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. This dependence does not pertain only to dietary laws but can also be observed in purity laws.

Purity in Apostolic Churches

In the above section, we noted the close relationship between dietary laws and the quest for purity in these churches. Eating prohibited foods makes one impure and therefore not whole. The quest for purity is also felt in the manner childbearing women and women in general are treated in these churches. Makava and Moffat bluntly put across this treatment:

*Kana mudzimai abatsirwa anenge akasviba saka haatenderwi kupinda panzvimbo yekunamatira kwemwedzi kana abatsirwa mwana mukomana, kana mwedzi miviri kana abatsirwa mwana musikana.*²⁸

When a woman gives birth she is considered unclean such that they are not allowed to attend church services with others for a month if the child is a boy and two months if the child is a girl.

Literally, these churches cite Leviticus 12, which lays down a cleansing programme for women who would have given birth. In admitting the existence of these purity demands on women in general, Loveness Mabhunu writes, “If a woman is menstruating, she is forbidden from attending church services...she will be, they believe, unclean. Furthermore, if a woman gives birth to a baby boy, she is purified after thirty-three days. In the case of a baby girl she is purified after sixty-six days.”²⁹ It is clear

²⁸ MAKAVA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

²⁹ Loveness MABHUNU, „Revolting against the biblical and traditional stereotypes of women? Women prophets in African Initiated Churches”, in: L. Togarasei and E. Chitando (eds.), *Faith in the City: The Role and Place of Religion in Harare*, Uppsala: Universitetsstryckeriet 2010, 63-84: 74.

from this assertion that their perceptions are Old Testament conditioned, especially the lack of gender sensitivity on the position of women in purity codes, as illustrated in the cleansing programme, which discriminates against the sex of the child. For a woman who would have given birth to a baby boy, the cleansing period is one month while the one who would have given birth to a baby girl, the cleansing period is double. It would appear that women are generally impure, particularly because they have a consistent monthly impurity through their menstrual cycles, which is also recognized as impure in the Old Testament where Leviticus 15:19 reads; “When a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening.” Blood makes one impure, hence consuming or discharging blood is considered impure in the Old Testament and has been adopted in these churches also.

Sexual intercourse is also another cause of impurity as understood in these churches, where adherents are advised against having sexual intercourse on the eve of prayer meetings.³⁰ While in traditional settings there were instances when sexual intercourse, especially heterosexual, was understood as weakening and dirty, traditional communities appear to have largely sacralized sexual intercourse. In these AICs however, the Old Testament has been the basis of their understanding of sexual intercourse and Leviticus 15:18, “If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bath in water, and be unclean until the evening,” appears to have given the basis for the discouragement from sexual intercourse before church meetings. Since this prohibition is directed against married couples/people, it should be noted that through the ritual of “Mazambara” (gates), members who are unmarried are screened for adultery and other offences by the prophets and those found to be impure have to undergo cleansing rituals before they can be allowed within the congregation.³¹

As has been illustrated above dietary laws and purity codes as set forth in the Old Testament particularly in Leviticus provide the basis for the legalistic nature and emphasis of AICs, in terms of what adherents may eat as well as the observance of festivals hence Rosette notes that every member of these AICs should partake in the celebration of the Passover

³⁰ MAKAVA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

³¹ Madzimai PRESNAGE, *Interview*.

festival, the festival of the Unleavened bread or the festival of the Tabernacles.³² While Rosette also emphasises the observance of the Sabbath supposedly on a Saturday, this however needs special mention in that some of these AICs due to New Testament influence now worship on Sundays. This study will therefore argue that while not all AICs observe the Sabbath on Saturday, those who do so like John Marange as cited by Rosette do so under the influence of the Old Testament. In essence, the law found in the Old Testament has been used in the creation of a legalistic religion among AICs in Zimbabwe. In essence, these churches stand far away from Martin Luther's "Justification by faith alone" and apparently have adopted James' "faith without works is dead" perspective. While there are many laws that are operational in these churches, these few examples will suffice for this article. Below we consider the understanding and practice of healing in these churches.

Healing in African Initiated Churches

Zimbabwean Apostolic churches attract most of their converts due to the centrality they accord healing. This centrality of healing can best be understood in the light of the economic environment where conventional medical practice has been priced out of the reach of many. In fact it is because of the centrality accorded healing in these churches that M. Schofeleers argues for the designation "healing churches" because in these churches healing in its broadest sense plays a pivotal role, especially in the recruitment of members.³³ In an economic environment that thrives in extreme individualism, these churches have become more attractive as Gundani writes,

"the prophets in particular churches distinguish between community work and private consultancy. The former is a free contribution to the corporate image of the church, while the latter is career-based self-development. The benefits from the former normally come in the way of more members for the church, while for the latter gifts are extended to the prophet as token of appreciation."³⁴

³² Bennetta JULES-ROSETTE, *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the John Maranke*, London: Lornell University Press 1975, 34.

³³ Martin SCHOFEELEERS, "Healing and Political Acquiescence in African Independent Churches" in: *Religion and Politics in Southern Africa*, ed. C. F. Hallencreutz and Mai Palmberg, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1991, 90.

³⁴ Paul H. GUNDANI, "Church, Media, and Healing: A Case Study from Zimbabwe" in: *Word and World, Volume XXI, Number 2* (2001) 139.

From the above assertions, it is clear therefore that these Apostolic churches exploit the prohibitive medical environment among other factors by offering free health care to converts and therefore resulting in them controlling a significant percentage of the Christian population in Zimbabwe today. While we appreciate and acknowledge the important observations made by Gundani, he however does not seek to uncover the basis upon which the healing practices of these churches are founded upon, an attempt this paper will try to demonstrate.

To understand the concept of healing in these churches, we must again reiterate the double movement we noted above, that is, movement from traditional religion to Christianity and equally important, the movement of Christianity into the traditional worldview. As I argued in another paper, disease was traditionally understood both in physical and spiritual terms hence any successful cure would have to deal with both aspects of disease. This is why missionary medical centres failed to uproot traditional diviner-healers.³⁵ While the diseases that affected and continue to affect the adherents of these churches have remained the same, their refuge has changed hence they can no longer seek the services of the traditional diviner-healers. These churches, through the creative use of the Bible have found ways of replacing the diviner-healer without leaving their adherents lacking in any of the services they once got from such religious functionaries. AICs unlike their mainline counterparts have taken fully on board, the traditional worldview of their adherents, bringing to light an almost authentic version of African Christianity.

Healing in AICs is associated with a number of tools and other objects. Gundani argues that the prophets' healing methods are similar to those of traditional healers (*n'anga*) because they specialize in exorcism and the extraction of pathogenic objects from the clients. Further the prophets also prescribe some weird solutions such as egg and salty water, egg and milk or salt and Coca-Cola.³⁶ While these observations are important in understanding the healing methods, this paper seeks to demonstrate that it is not enough in that an attempt has been made to relate them only to traditional religion when it is known that traditional religion is not highly regarded in these churches. In fact, part of the challenge has been that scholars have quickly subsumed the traditional worldview

³⁵ Cf. GUNDA, "Christianity, Traditional Religion, and Healing in Zimbabwe," 239-243.

³⁶ GUNDANI, "Church, Media, and Healing", 141.

under traditional religion. What we see in these churches is a continuation of the traditional worldview and not of traditional religion. It is our contention therefore that by noting the possible links to traditional religion, Gundani could have also extended his observation to the Old Testament religion which is arguably closely related to traditional religion. The concept of healing among these churches could have been greatly influenced by the Old Testament in that it is a compromise between being a “western influenced Christian” or an “African traditionalist” hence the Old Testament influence makes adherents of these churches “African influenced Christians.”

In these churches healing is associated with rods or staffs (*tsvimbo*); water, salt and oil. While other objects and substances as cited by Gundani are also used these seem to be the pivot of healing practices in these churches because their centrality is derived from some Old Testament texts. While the manner in which these objects and substances are used in AICs may differ with the denominations, it is their common appearance that is of interest in this paper. The use of a rod or staff by men or the church leaders is understood in the context of Moses and other Hebrew ancestors who were shepherds. It seems from Exodus 4, it was customary for Jewish men to have a rod but in the activities of Moses the rod or staff assumed a new significance as it becomes the most prized asset in miracle working (Exod. 4:3ff). It is this literal understanding that dominates the significance of a rod or a staff in AICs. In Exodus 7:20, it becomes crystal clear that the rod has become a miracle-working vehicle in that:

Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the rod and struck the water that was in the Nile, and all the water that was in the Nile turned to blood.

It is in this light that we can best understand the use of the rod in many AICs. In some AICs like the African Apostolic Church, the Bishop, senior leaders in the church and prophets use rods.³⁷ Prophets use the rod or staff, especially in their healing sessions and attribute it some supernatural powers and equate such rods to that of Moses hence the contention of an Old Testament basis in the healing practices.

Plain water is also used extensively in these AICs as a cure of many illnesses. This plain water is known as *mvura yemuteuro* (water that has

³⁷ N. M. CHIMBADE, *Interview*, Harare: October 2005.

been blessed and medicated with prayers, the prayers are supposed to give the water medical and curative powers). This water is supposed to have been taken at a waterfall for those who have access to running water while in urban areas, even tap water is accepted.³⁸ The scriptural basis for using water as rightly observed by Makhubu is that Naaman in II Kings 5 was healed by simply washing himself seven times in the Jordan River at the instruction of Elisha.³⁹ With Naaman being washed clean in the Jordan, it is understandable why most AICs prefer using water from the river and also explains why more often than not, all river cites that are commonly used by these churches are known as “*Jorodhani*” a Shona rendition of Jordan.

Another commonly used substance is salt. While the use of salt can also be traced within traditional religion, there is little doubt that AICs detests ATR and traditional customs and practices openly and seem to find their justification from the Old Testament. It is commonly believed that salt is used to unmask (*kufumura*) evil spirits or in preventing the evil from attacking an individual.⁴⁰ It seems this use of salt is based on the understanding that Elisha, the man of God, used it because in II Kings 2:19-22, he asked for salt which he used to cure the water which was regarded as bad. It is this understanding which is the basis of faith healing in AICs where the use of herbs is considered pagan and evil because their role models used simple objects and substances as in the case of Elisha.

The traditional worldview in which AICs are steeped is one which acknowledges the existence of multiple spirits, both bad and good. The bad spirits are always attacking individuals, including those who are members in these churches. Further, diseases, misfortune and other mishaps are understood to be the result of the work of these spirits. In order to cleanse people from these spirits, exorcisms play a central role. The spirits are believed to influence the behaviour of individuals and when not exorcised, it is believed the individual can never prosper in any venture. This is mainly based on New Testament texts, which are interpreted within the African worldview. Texts such as Matthew 10:8, which reads; “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give,” become central in justifying exor-

³⁸ CHIMBADE, *Interview*.

³⁹ MAKHUBU, *Who are the Independent Churches?*, 25.

⁴⁰ MAKAZA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

cism in these AICs. Exorcisms are also central in the maintenance of purity and good health within these churches, such that all services always include sessions for “exorcising evil spirits.”⁴¹ The practice of healing is intimately connected to prophecy in these churches.

Prophecy in African Initiated Churches

Among the most revered offices in AICs is the prophetic office. While so much has been written by scholars on the origins and significance of prophecy in the Old Testament, it is important to note that prophets were understood as messengers of God whose main duty was to intercede between God and human beings⁴², as can be seen in Genesis 20 verse 7, which reads; “Now then restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live ...”. It is in this and other texts that the basis for understanding prophets as miracle workers in Israel and in AICs is founded upon. The second characteristic understanding of prophecy in AICs appears to be based on 1 Samuel 9:6, in which the servant of Saul says, “There is a man of God in this town; he is a man held in honor. Whatever he says always comes true. Let us go there now; perhaps he will tell us about the journey on which we have set out.” Besides being miracle workers, prophets are also understood as foretellers, men and women who possess an unnatural gift of seeing into the future.

According to Daneel, in the Shona spirit-type churches, the prophetic office finds expression both in the reformed sense of the word of God being preached and in the Old Testament sense of revelations and divine communications being transmitted to the wider body of believers by individuals with special prophetic gifts.⁴³ It is clear therefore that prophets in these churches become the focal point for the believers in that they are understood as the conveyors of the word of God to the believers and also possess some gifts which separate them from ordinary members. It is in this light that we acknowledge that more often than not AICs of the apostolic type are centred on the personality of a prophet who would

⁴¹ ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 117.

⁴² Gerhard VON RAD, *The Message of the Prophets*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers 1967, 12.

⁴³ Inus DANEEL, *Old and New Shona Independent Churches*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1980, 23.

have had telephonic communication experiences with the spirit of God.⁴⁴ The role of the prophet in these churches makes practical sense in churches steeped in an African worldview where adherents are not only in search of total healing but are keen to know what the future holds for them.

Closely connected to the office of the prophet in both the Old Testament and AICs is the profound interest in mountains as areas of divine communion as can be found in the centrality accorded Mount Sinai/Horeb in the Old Testament. It is this centrality accorded mountains in the Old Testament that we can best understand the concept of *Masowe* (A place of worship more often than not a hill or mountain) in AICs. This concept can best be explained by noting the significance attached to prayers done in solitude, which could best be rendered in two ways:

(a) *Masowe* might be undertaken by an individual, who decides to go up a mountain for purposes of praying alone and this is done to avoid unnecessary interruptions to their communication with the divine. While normally the concept of *masowe* is associated with mountains or hills it can also refer to any place that allows the individual to pray without disruptions especially in those areas where there are no mountains.

(b) The concept can also be associated with a group prayer session. This also qualifies to be individualistic in the sense that the whole group is focused on one particular goal. The group might refer to the whole congregation or part thereof.⁴⁵

Prophets are indeed the response of AICs to the traditional office of the diviner-healer and has somewhat succeeded where western missionaries failed because it is an office that is steeped in the Bible, while at the same time being well grounded in the African worldview. Adherents to these churches are not asked to change their worldview, only their religious affiliation while the essences of the traditional services are replicated in the name of the new religion. Even non-members who are also Christian have found these prophets attractive than traditional diviner-healers because the former are Christians also. Not only are people healed by these prophets, they are forewarned of impending dangers and are assisted to avoid what can be avoided. Through this prophetic ministry, the greatest fears of men and women are addressed.

⁴⁴ OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa*, 35.

⁴⁵ MAKAZA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

Other beliefs and Practices in African Initiated Churches (AICs)

This section seeks to highlight other beliefs and practices that are found within these churches whose foundations are within the Old Testament, among them being polygamy, which is tolerated in most of these churches. While this practice was prevalent within traditional African societies such as the Shona, in AICs, it is primarily justified on the pretext that the most prominent figures in the Old Testament are presented as having been polygamous such as Abraham who married Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 16), Jacob married Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29), King David married Michal (I Sam. 18:20ff), Abigail (I Sam. 25:39), and Bathsheba (II Sam. 11). In the light of these texts, it is easy therefore, to appreciate Oosthuizen when he writes that the Old Testament has the atmosphere that is sympathetic to polygamy.⁴⁶

Makhubu provides another aspect, which is deeply entrenched within the Old Testament as a basis for polygamy in these AICs when he writes that these churches justify polygamy on the pretext that when one wife is menstruating she is unclean (Lev. 15:19ff) hence she cannot discharge most of the duties expected of a wife until she is purified. During this time of uncleanliness, other wives would therefore come in handy.⁴⁷ These justifications based on Leviticus are part of the thesis that these churches are too dependent on the Old Testament for most of their religious practices and justifications. It is in these contexts that Mbiti argues, "African Christians began to detect a basic discrepancy between missions and the scriptures on what were to them the major points of conflict, namely the traditional customs being attacked by the missions."⁴⁸ It is clear that those AICs that hold on to polygamy justify the practice by citing the Old Testament even though the practice could have been justified on the basis of traditional practices. By using the Bible, these churches have disarmed the major critique from missionaries and mainline churches, while at the same time the African worldview continue to be appreciated in their brand of Christianity.

Another important factor has to do with the veneration of important church leaders, especially the founding lineage. In some songs, Johane Marange is venerated as the 'king of heaven', without superseding

⁴⁶ OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa*, 169.

⁴⁷ MAKHUBU, *Who are the Independent Churches?*, 25.

⁴⁸ MBITI, *Bible and Theology*, 30.

Christ.⁴⁹ In the John Marange and John Masowe apostolic churches, one often hears the members pray to “*Mwari vaJohanne* (The God of John) in such a way that reminds one of the Old Testament idea of the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob (Ex. 6:2-3).” This seems to be what Daneel above refers to as the centrality of the individuals in these churches that sometimes one may fail to appreciate the difference between Christ and the founder of the church. While again it is common among some African societies such as the Shona people of Zimbabwe, the justification lies in the Old Testament. While there are many of these churches founded by women prophets, patriarchy is still prevalent in most of them. It is in this light that we can also understand why women are hardly given positions of authority in these churches unless the Holy Spirit possesses them. These churches exude patriarchal biases prevalent in the Old Testament. At a service of the Faith Apostolic Church (Mugodhi) attended by the writer it was interesting to note the protocol followed in the church by speakers, which goes as follows:

Ndinokwazisa baba vakatanga rino sangano ndichidzika nezvidanho zvavo kusvika kumukomana vekupedzisira; Ndozokwazisawo mai mukuru ndichidzika nezvidanho zvavo kusvika kumusikana vekupedzisira.

(Literally, I greet the founder (a man) of this church and all other men in the order of their ranks to the last boy, I also greet the Senior woman (normally wife of founder) and all other women in the order of their ranks to the last girl.)

After a careful and critical analysis of the implications of this protocol, this writer was convinced that in these churches women are not treated as equal to men in the mode of Galatians 3:28, rather the social hierarchy of the Old Testament is followed to the letter. It is therefore no coincidence that all men are greeted before any other woman because they are ranked higher than all women regardless of age.

Through participatory observation in some of these churches, this writer observed that in all these churches, no one is allowed to wear shoes within the demarcated area set aside for church service. On approaching the area, men, women and children have to take off their shoes. This practice is not limited to the place where the church congregates only but it applies to all places where members may be holding prayers, be it in private homes or in the *masowe*. Upon enquiry, this writer was informed;

⁴⁹ ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 117.

*Tinobvisa shangu nekuti Moses akanzi naMwari abvise shangu apo akataura naMwari. Nekudaro, patinonamata tinenge tichitaura naMwari saka tinotedza gwara rakasiwa naMoses rekubvisa shangu panzvimbo dzinoyera uye panguva yekunamata.*⁵⁰ (We take off our shoes when in a church service because Moses was instructed to do the same by God. Hence when we pray we will be talking to God thus we follow in the footsteps of Moses by removing shoes.)

The text upon which this practice is based is Exodus 3:5, which relates Moses' encounter with the burning bush. The text reads, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." On the strength of this text, most AICs also understand their worship centres as holy places hence they have also adopted the Old Testament aspect of removing shoes when approaching holy ground for purposes of worship. They also maintain that their worship centres constitute the holy places and also when they pray even in homes they also remove shoes, as they would have turned the home into a holy place since they would be communicating with God.

While there are many other practices that are prevalent in these churches whose existence is testimony to the manner in which the Bible has been turned into a manual for daily practice, it is hoped that these suffice to augment the claim that AICs have developed a legalistic religion that is closer to biblical religion, in particular Old Testament religion. These beliefs and practices have been aided by the translation of the Bible into local languages, "in this sense, therefore, it may be concluded that vernacular scriptures have been a major causative factor in the spread of independency in Africa, though not of course the only one."⁵¹ With the scriptures in vernacular, African Christians have responded by identifying aspects of the scripture that cohere with the traditional worldview.

Conclusion

While this paper is not exhaustive on the subject under discussion, some concluding remarks and observations can be noted from what this paper has done. Primarily it is clear that in these churches as highlighted throughout this paper we seem to witness African traditional practices and Christianity being married, despite the justification coming from

⁵⁰ MAKAZA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

⁵¹ BARRET, in: Mbiti, *Bible and Theology*, 30-31.

one source the Old Testament, there is no doubt some of the practices are traditionally inspired. Central to this marriage is what we have called the double movement manifest in these churches; on the one hand, they have crossed from traditional religion to Christianity, while on the other hand they have moved Christianity from a western worldview to a traditional African worldview. The result has been an authentically African influenced Christianity. A literal interpretation of the Old Testament therefore offers a convenient compromise between the two hence the centrality of the Old Testament in these churches. It is interesting therefore to note that while AICs publicly denounce traditional religion and its practices, sometimes more than mainline churches, they are in the forefront of christianising such practices by seeking biblical justification to some practices which are also African.

Another important observation is that from an analysis of this nature it is possible to see these churches as turning the Christian canon on its head in that while mainline Christianity makes the Old Testament necessary only in as far as it points to Jesus, in these churches, it points nowhere but to itself. It is important to note therefore that the Old Testament assumes higher importance in these churches than in other strands of Christianity. The Old Testament therefore speaks more clearly and easily, in a language an African can easily understand, in images and practices an African can readily identify with hence it has been given a new dispensation as it has been used to redefine African Christianity as opposed to Western Christianity that places the New Testament at a higher level, a form of Christianity most of these churches have rebelled against.

TWELVE YEARS OF MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA FROM DECEMBER 1992 TO MAY 2005

Solomon B. Nkesiga

Introduction

The story of our missionary experience in South Africa is one of a roller coaster ride of emotional highs and lows, a mixture of excitement, anticipation, delight, fulfilment as well as stress, frustration, uncertainty and disappointment. It however ends on a high with tears of love and joy. These experiences are recorded along a life journey of twelve years.

We entered South Africa at a time of political transition from an oppressive autocratic system to a multiparty democracy. Instead of the anticipated bloodbath during this national changeover, a prospect that naturally frightened us, we witnessed miracles as God's hand prevailed. Living in South Africa was indeed a learning curve for us and that experience is indelibly engraved on our lives forever. We gave of ourselves and received much in return from the rich cultures of a diverse people as we interacted socially and spiritually with them and engaged in theological dialogue and dissension.

There would be long-lasting memories of friendship in the congregations that we had served with dedication and love. We might have touched many with our ministry but we know that God used us to reach specific individuals in their greatest time of need. We praise God for all the people who were blessed by our ministry in a special way.

For twelve years we served the 'rainbow people' of South Africa, to use Archbishop Tutu's phrase for the people of the 'new' South Africa. We can confidently say that we achieved the objective of contributing to the process of reconciliation between black and white, and we did more; we addressed the problem of poverty through development projects and we created HIV/AIDS awareness. In addition to these, we too learnt a lot. We always knew that our participation in South Africa's experience would result in our being better informed. We learnt how racist we were, an attitude that we would only discover because of the context around us. Our traditional positions of thinking were expanded, for better or for worse. We returned to Uganda wiser than when we had left. Whatever we worked at we did with a sense of urgency as if time was running out.

And now we are back in Uganda literally learning how to live in our own country again.

Background to our missionary call

When we announced our intentions to go to South Africa, Edward Muhima, a confidante, said, “But South Africa is a time bomb waiting to explode”. We argued that many people were praying for South Africa. Edward too was praying that God would intervene in the political tension that spelt ‘holocaust’ in the stories about the South Africa of the 1980s and 1990s that hit the headlines. This is what Webster recorded in a book entitled Desmond Tutu Crying in the wilderness concerning the state of affairs in South Africa at the time:

The South African Council of Churches (SACC) has issued a serious warning that unless fundamental change occurs in the Republic reasonably quickly, then those who are working for peaceful change will rapidly become discredited. Many people, in desperation, will want to use violence as a last desperate resort. At this stage we in the SACC are striving for a peaceful solution of the crisis in our land. But time is not on our side. Something must be done, and done urgently.¹

Like Edward, we did not know the answer to this dilemma; we prayed that God would change this situation because we had a strange desire to be with South Africans, black and white at the birth of their new nation. We prayed that by our Christian witness and service we might be part of reconciliatory efforts. Edward reluctantly released us, encouraging us to limit our stay to a specific period of perhaps two years.

The Lambeth Conference of All Anglican Bishops of 1988 declared 1990s a Decade of Evangelism and at its launching a call was made for those who wished to go for missionary service from Uganda to other parts of the world. It was during this event that we felt that we had been duly commissioned to go to South Africa as missionaries. Apart from this general commissioning, there was no other send-off arrangement. We would learn later that a formal commissioning was important for eventual financial support. It seemed as though only our families and close friends knew we were going for missionary service in South Africa. It felt as though we were out there on our own. This anomaly to the conventional manner of commissioning missionaries was going to

¹ WEBSTER [ed.] 1986: 17.

haunt us. We now appreciate the importance of a sending church, and how this is biblically supported especially in Paul's missionary journeys "the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2-3). Such commissioning was a collective recognition of a call to missionary field. Matters of accountability and redeployment come into question once missionary service was over.

After completing our pastoral training Diana and I desired to work in a parish setting. Instead our Bishop posted us in a Theological school to train pastoral workers. It was ironical that we would train people to go where we had never been. Whenever we raised the need for us to have pastoral experience, our Bishop would find it difficult to post us sighting the fact that both my wife and I were pastors who could not be put in the same pastorate. School was a better setting for our work. However, it was our deep desire to have pastoral experience that led to seek missionary service. This was possible though in a small way. In the missionary field, I would receive posting in 3 parishes. Diana planted and pastured a chaplaincy at University level and had pastoral experience in a hospice, including administration experience of an HIV and AIDS project for rejected children and adults. We would return to Uganda as a couple with 24 combined years of pastoral experience for the benefit of the church of Uganda. She now serves as a Vicar Pastoring a church of over 4000 persons and I have continued the task of training pastors for parish work with confidence.

We thank United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG) who adopted us. We were not quite their type of missionaries since we had not been selected, trained and sent by them from Britain. The situation became even more controversial when the phrase "South-to-South missionaries" was thrown into the fray. We were from the south and had gone further south for missionary work. South-to-South sounded better than calling us African missionaries to Africa. This term, though understood by some leaders in South Africa at the beginning, was to later cause difficulties. What did it mean? In the process of trying to define our relationship with the USPG and the hosting Diocese some mixed interpretation of the Memorandum of Understanding caused a lot of pain and precipitated the end of our Missionary service in South Africa. Nonetheless, we now believe that from the divine arrangement of things our time in missionary service was up.

Preparation for departure to the mission field

We planned to leave Uganda after Christmas of 1992 to take the fruit of Christian harvest from our country to South Africa. Uganda had benefited from the Evangelical influence of the Great East African Revival. We (Diana and I) had given our lives to Christ in response to the revival message. We hoped to share the love of Christ who gave his life as a sacrifice by taking our punishment on the cross, so that we may be redeemed. Romans 1: 16 was on our hearts: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jews first and also to the Greeks.” For the gospel was true and reasonable to us. It was powerful and redemptive. We would demonstrate it in word and in action.

It was this Christ to whom we had surrendered as our personal Saviour, Lord and Friend when we were young. He had reconciled us with our father God and with one another. We had witnessed in Uganda’s 15 years civil war. First 8 years of Idi Amin’s tyrannical rule (1971 -1978), followed by another 5 years of national people’s protracted war up to 1986. We had gone through a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” and many national and local events aimed at achieving national reconciliation. We trained as educators with regard to HIV/AIDS awareness campaign. Ugandan Christian and political leadership had openly disclosed that Uganda was under the HIV epidemic. We had a message of reconciliation to share with South Africans in their struggle for freedom from oppressive apartheid laws. We also had an urgent message to warn them about the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

The thought of going as missionaries filled us with excitement, yet we remained aware that we differed from the missionaries of the 19th century who had come to Uganda. They had walked long distances to their mission stations; endured hardships; some died of African diseases; their progress impeded by hostile people and slave traders. We hoped that modern technology and social politico-economic advancement of the 20th century would make our missionary service much easier than theirs.

We had another motivation. In 1949, about seventy years after the first European missionaries had arrived in Uganda my parents had trodden the missionary trail to Byumba in Rwanda, South West of Uganda. Their experience was one of great need which they met with immense faith. For months they would go without pay. They would travel on foot for

days to faithfully deliver collected funds to the parish headquarters. Their spirit of missionary service was our inspiration.

Somehow we hoped that we would not have to face any of the challenges of either the European missionaries or those of my parents. Our mission was to share Christ, participating alongside the local church of which we had learnt so much through Archbishop Desmond Tutu's writings. My parents had been Africans going to fellow Africans in another part of Africa. On our part we were Africans going to fellow Africans also in another part of Africa, just a little further to the south. For some reason, we had not thought of language challenges and we were naive concerning cultural differences. Most of all we had not anticipated a deep rift in theological emphasises between the Anglo-Catholicism (the theological stance of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa) and the evangelical theology. This was an underestimation on our part.

Our departure

We borrowed money; we sold our belongings to raise enough for two and half tickets for Diana, Ignatius and myself. Bishop Jacob Dlamini (RIP) who had invited us to his Diocese of St. John's, Umtata (now Mthatha), Transkei assured us that ÚSPG would reimburse travel costs. After all preparatory expenses we had \$520 extra which we would use to purchase some essentials as we settle in.

A day before our departure an uncle to my wife died; our flight from Nairobi, Kenya to Oliver Tambo International Air Port in Johannesburg, delayed, we missed our connecting flight to Mthatha. In these series of emotional ridden anxious events, and as I tried to telephone the people who were waiting for us on the other end, the money we had saved for our start was stolen from me.

This very distressful incident triggered a sense of doubt and I began to wonder whether this was an indicator that we should not have gone into missionary work. Despair filled my heart as Ignatius tugged at my empty coat asking for something to eat. We received a consolation voucher board and meals which was helpful for the moment. But my mind raced ahead to the days to come. We would be arriving to an empty house needing beds, blankets, food, crockery and other incidentals.

We arrived in Transkei on 29th December 1992 ready to live by God's grace. From the start we learnt to trust the Lord for everything. I was a

penniless husband and father; it was the Lord on test. Would he sustain us? The congregation at St. Cyprian's, our parish, provided everything we needed in the house. They also decided to give me the Sundays' collection, until we get our first monthly pay.

As we look back to this event at the Airport and wonder how God had invited us to trust him and not money. When we did this he provided for all that we needed and even more, not just for a new start but for a lifetime. He provided things and money but most of all lovely South African friends, both black and white. Someone has said "The will of God cannot take you where His grace is not available to provide for you". For us this common saying was true to our situation. We look back with thanksgiving even as we trust in Him for the present and our future.

On our arrival we were met in style by the Dean of St. John Mthatha Cathedral, the Very Rev. Mzamani He whisked us off to Pondoland, the traditional home of the amaQwathi, one of the prominent clans of the amaXhosa. This is the birthplace of great men such as Nelson Mandela of Qunu, stalwart Walter Sisulu of the Ezibeleni, the peasant activist Govan Mbeki of Butterworth and King Mathanzima of Mthatha. But these men had been forced to leave their homes decades before in their quest for political justice. With this line-up the place should have been the envy of all if they were at home. However even in comparison to our Uganda it was visibly poor and deserted. The rocks and galleys on the hillsides, the stiff dry scanty grass planes with a desert-like look in the December-January summer was typical of the apartheid labour reserves where living was hard, a phenomenon that forced many men to seek employment in the mines of Johannesburg. This would be our missionary field for the next two years (1993-1994).

The clash of Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic theologies

My first sermon was entitled 'The Gift of Salvation'. I used the lovely text from John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". I pressed the point that to grow in the grace of God we needed to respond by accepting this gift of his son Jesus Christ whom he gave us. I ended with my own testimony, narrating how during Easter 1968, at the age of 8, I had accepted Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord. I told them how I had confessed my sins such as stealing mummy's sugar and

being disobedient to my parents. Though I was a small boy, the message of the death of Christ on the cross hit home so clearly. Looking at the joy of my parents and other Christian leaders, I was convinced that they had received something special in their lives, something I desired to possess. So when they had invited people who wanted to have Christ in their lives, I had stood up.

I could see the eyes of the members of my new congregation open wide. I went on to explain how I had realised my salvation and call to priesthood ten years later in 1979. Consistent with my age I could now give testimony of how Christ had changed my life. Christ in his own gracious way had protected me in my ignorance at a time when many of my peers got infected with HIV and eventually died of AIDS. I ended by telling them that we were compelled by this love of Christ to come to South Africa to share with them God's love, invited them to repentance, reconciliation and warn them of the roaming HIV epidemic. I sensed that my sermon was being received with difficulty. I even ventured to offer them the opportunity to ask questions if there was any part of my sermon they did not understand. To this invitation the chief churchwarden later responded that it was not their custom to ask questions after the sermon.

The theological stance in Uganda is predominantly evangelical and most priests there have this fervour in their preaching and teaching. This tradition is the basis for the spiritual character of the church in Uganda. The thrust of evangelical preaching is to invite people to put their trust in God, through Jesus Christ, to serve Him in the fellowship of the Church by the power of and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf Bishop Temple 19th Century's definition of Evangelism). Any preacher in Uganda or the East African region is expected to press for these ideals and to invite the congregation to respond to the message. But some aspects of my preaching had scared them. One was of relating it to my own life story and another was the mention of HIV/AIDS. Although they did not ask any questions, they nevertheless went away and talked about it in the trading centres with their friends. Some went as far as informing the Archdeacon. One lady, Mrs Caroline Nyabaza, got to hear the story of my sermon. So did the Archdeacon, the Venerable Nompuku. These two people were yearning for an evangelical stand to the gospel of Christ. Caroline booked me for lessons in evangelism while Venerable Nompuku, placed me on his preaching roster and itinerary. In the two years of my stay in Transkei, I travelled all over with the archdeacon and Bishop Jacob Dlamini to missions and Christian confer-

ences. They elected an interpreter for me, a nurse from All Saints' Hospital.

Bishop Dlamini and Archdeacon Nompuku were part of Iviyo, a revival movement that had sprang up in Kwazulu-Natal. It has characteristics similar to those of the Great East African Revival and the evangelical theological stance. I came to learn that these two were not popular because of their evangelical theological stance. Having been saved by grace, one was required to respond appropriating this salvation in their lives. The evangelical faith practice had the expectation of living a life of virtue with knowledge, self-control, steadfastness and godliness all in increasing measure. Just as Peter taught that these need to be in an increasing measure so as to make one effective and fruitful in their knowledge of Christ Jesus (Para. 2 Peter 1: 5-8).

Anglo-Catholic theological teaching was different. Emphasis was not put on personal conversion. Traditional rituals such as baptism and confirmation took a high preference. By these one became a member of the church and would be nurtured through youth groups, St. Agnes for young girls and St. Magdalene for young-adult ladies and then guilds such as Mothers' Union for mothers and Bernard Mizeki for the men. All this was packaged in a form of spirituality expressed in a ritualistic life of worship, including prayers, meditation, wonderful singing and most of all the Holy Eucharist. The priest is central to the Anglo-Catholic Theology. He is the main facilitator of means by which the Christian can journey on in faith. He stands in the place of Christ at the Eucharist and absolves people's sins. A situation is assumed that sinners (people) are helpless without the priest (Christ). Ironically, what the priest does is not a duty which serves as an intervention for people's sins. Instead it is people's effortless Christian living. Resultantly there is no moral expectation for those who have become Christians. But since their teaching and preaching did not have the aspect of being born again, the question of moral values "after conversion" did not arise. To insist on evangelical disciplines in the journey of faith would be too moralistic and at worst legalistic.

Some have argued that to press for these disciplines is tantamount to trying to earn one's salvation. We do not work to earn our salvation. But surely we have to read our Bibles, pray and be witnesses for our Lord Jesus Christ and be members of Bible Study or Cell Groups. The question is: when do these actions take place? The answer is: once we have experienced God's forgiveness, through the ministry of Jesus Christ on

the CROSS. When we have experienced his love and care, we cannot but respond to this divine impulse. This is not working for our salvation but as Peter says “Therefore brothers be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure for if you practice these things you will never fall” (2 Peter 1:10) . Because God has already forgiven us, our assumed ‘work’ is taking place on the other side of forgiveness. This is our response that keeps us in fellowship with our father God and our fellow believers. It is our expression of gratitude for what Christ has done for us. This message would not only be the burden of my preaching but would also bring me face to face with formidable pastoral conflicts. Eight families would later leave our congregation to start an independent evangelical Church with my blessing.

Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic theology may share the same spiritual language, but it became clear through the years that we had different definitions and understandings of the key theological terms. As they articulated the understanding of their faith, I came to understand that being saved for them was a peripheral trajectory to Christian preaching and teaching. Salvation was salvation from social and politico-economic injustice, at least in the case of the blacks in the townships.

Other theologies in South Africa at the time

At another level South Africa was deep into the articulated and practical expressions of liberation theology with its origins from Latin America.

In the late 60s a new social and intellectual movement appeared on the Latin American continent. The movement is rooted in the Christian faith and Scriptures and seeks its ideological superstructure based on the religious reflection in close association with the Church organization (1). It is typical not only for Latin America but for the entire Third World and any social situation of oppression.²

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, head of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa and Frank Chicane, then General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (later to become the Director of the Presidency), had become the Gutierrez’s and Sobrino’s of South Africa. Just as Gutierrez had stated:

² Marian HILLAR 1993, *Humanism and Social Issues. Anthology of Essays*. M. Hillar and H.R. Leuchtag, eds., American Humanist Association, Houston 1993, 35-52.

Injustice, the exploitation of some human beings by others, the exploitation of the human being by the state, institutions, and mechanisms of economic systems, must be called by their name.³

They advanced the priori/action and reflection on the context of institutionalised social politico-economic injustice. They sought answers and ways of how to practically respond in this oppressive context as guided by God who was on the side of the poor and oppressed. By advancing liberation theology it seemed that only the perpetrators of apartheid needed to denounce the evil they were doing and repent. Often the oppressed were so engaged in exposing the injustices of the oppressor that there was no time to assume that they (victims) had sins of their own, not related to the conflict. Conflict studies show that a weak victim is not necessarily innocent. If victims had a chance they would retaliate in equal measure against their oppressors.⁴(cf Volf 1996: 101).

Then there was the “tragedy” of Bible misinterpretation. First it was the Dutch Reformed Church as they sought scripture to justify apartheid rule in South Africa. They avoided the texts that challenged them and chose those which emphasised what they wanted to hear and do. For example the Afrikaners on one hand, read into Pauline texts the fact that they, and not the blacks, were predestined for salvation and exclusive social-politico-economic rights. In fact they considered themselves as the chosen of the exodus story. Apparently similar events such as the Great Trek, the crossing of the Orange River, the Afrikaner encounter and victories against the British colonial and native Zulu armies all seemed to qualify them as the elect of Southern Africa. It is interesting to note that when Israel declared her independence in 1948, the Afrikaner also declared their own.

They evoked many texts among which the prominent one was Acts 17:26 “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him,” This text justified the Group Area Act. Worse still was their interpretation of Genesis 9:24 -27 in which Noah’s son Canaan was according to them the ancestor of all black people who were cursed to be servants to the blessed white descendants of Shem and Japheth. It is only by 1980s that the World Alli-

³ IBID.

⁴ Cf. Miroslav VOLF, 1996. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation.*

ance of Reformed Churches declared apartheid a heresy. A commentary on the declaration of “Apartheid is a heresy” article recalls:

Historically, the ‘establishment’ of the white Dutch Reformed Church has provided the theological underpinnings of apartheid of the ruling, three million Afrikaners – using the bible erroneously to promote a form of white supremacy. The church, with about one million adult members, was expelled from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in the early 1980s after the WARC declared apartheid a heresy. The church was told it could not be reinstated until it agreed with this statement”⁵

The oppressed black community on the other hand put emphasis on those texts that spoke of their liberation from injustice. One such favourable text was Luke 16:19-31. They liken themselves to Lazarus who after death would be taken into a beautiful place in the bosom of Abraham. And their oppressors would be suffering like the rich man crying for help. The words of Abraham explained it all, “Child, remember that you in your lifetime you received good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you in anguish”. This eschatological element provided hope that one day they would be free not after death but in their life here on earth. During the run up to the elections of 1994, some black Africans thought that once a black leader takes over, they would simply move into the white suburbs and the whites would move away. They had seen this happen for their neighbours both in Mozambique and Angola when the Portuguese were defeated. Because the whites did not leave sporadic murders are common, caused by frustrated blacks, especially against isolated white farmers.

Some pastoral challenges

When we offered ourselves for missionary service, it was pastoral work that we desired to experience. As mentioned earlier, while at Uganda Martyrs Seminary Namugongo, we desired to work in parishes but an opportunity never presented itself. It was important that we who were training priests for the Anglican Church of Uganda should have that parish experience. It is only once armed with this experience that we could confidently and ably prepare men and women for parish ministry. We would then be able to share not only our theoretical knowledge but

⁵ An Article under “Apartheid is a heresy” written recently 2007.

also our informed experiences. Since the Seminary board was not ready to send us to the parishes for this experience, we then sought it in the missionary field. We are glad we made this decision. I shall relate a few special aspects of parish experience in some South African parishes.

The witch doctor who accepted Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour

Her encounter with the Lord Jesus had taken place in perhaps 1992, one year before our arrival in South Africa. She had received a vision of an angel, in a place called St. Barnabas in Tsolo. Her story was very clear to her, although I found it difficult to comprehend. It was necessary for me to understand since it fell into the category of a revelation often considered personal. In the vision she had been ordered to quit witchcraft and divination and become a Christian.

Viewed from the point of colonial influence on Africa's traditional culture the South African black population presents a relic of the African traditional religions we used to hear of in tales of pre-Christianised Uganda. Because of apartheid's separate development, it had left most black South Africans in their African traditional practices untouched by western 'civilisation'. In some cases even those who embrace Christianity still continue to be deeply involved in African traditional religions and this lady was an example to this development.

It was not an easy thing for this witchdoctor to abandon her traditional divination and healing calling. She was like a 'priest' to the people. She also drew income from her services to support her family of six which included her mother. She shared her story with me. As a young girl she had complained of some or other ailment. Her parents took her to a male sangoma (witchdoctor) who claimed he knew her disease and that he could treat her. He ended up taking her in as one of his accumulated wives. She had no option then but to become a sangoma as well. She learnt the trade and was soon an expert in her own right. Later, after they divorced, she started her own practice.

When she became a Christian she changed her profession to practising homeopathy. This is what she was doing when I met her. She was now a devout member of the congregation and one who proved to be very supportive; she in fact ministered to us in many ways. There was a genuine

desire and determination to abandon the practice of a witch doctor and to surrender completely to Christ.

Since my own mother was a herbalist and a devout Christian, I was never put off by this lady's claims, particularly the use of herbs for medicinal purposes. She often called me to come and pray in her clinics to chase away evil spirits that had assumed possession of them. Here I learnt how to use water with salt and burn incense to ward off evil spirits from places they have occupied. Such knowledge comes through discernment and experience. The Church of the Province of Southern Africa has provision in the Book of Common Prayer for blessing premises and for exorcism. This section was very handy to a cross-cultural missionary like me. Surprisingly, in the prayer book the rubrics suggest that one should not carry out an exorcism before contacting the Bishop. Yet some cases arise out of discernment of a singular specific situation that presents itself with urgency.

It was, however, her stories as a diviner, a practice that she had now abandoned, that was important for my pastoral experience. One priest, who became a close friend, had accepted ordination after an early retirement from the finance department of the former Transkei quasi-independent government. In his heyday he used to go to this lady for divination. Both were now my friends and whenever we were in fellowship with one another they would recount how the evil one had imprisoned them in witchcraft. They would laugh at the deceptive nature of divinations offered and received.

Back in Uganda I had met two men who had been witch doctors but had turned to God and abandoned this evil practice. Their testimonies were very helpful as I ministered to my South African friends. Although I had not been involved in these evil practices before becoming a born-again Christian, I had listened to the vivid testimonies of these Ugandans. Now I could add to my list the one of the South African lady plus that of one of her long time clients.

It was these experiences that I took with me to Walmer Township, still a stronghold of African traditional religions syncretistically practiced alongside Christianity. I shall relate some of my encounters with the open practice of traditional rituals that were in contradiction to the hope and faith that we have in Jesus Christ.

The practice of umsebenzi (a ritual of appeasing the ancestral spirits)

A member of the parish council came to me and requested a loan of R300 (Ush 75, 875; ± \$41 - updated Jan 2007). When I inquired why he wanted this money, he responded that he had one big problem which required *umsebenzi* (slaughtering a goat and drinking a lot of alcohol to appease the ancestors). I inquired further as to what the nature of the problem was. So he narrated his story.

Apparently for some days, rats had been coming into his room at night and while asleep they would nibble his toes. He had shared this disturbing visitation of rats with our senior lay minister (later to become an outspoken *sangoma*), who had then advised him to prepare a ritual to appease the ancestors. But he did not have the money. So he came to me (his priest) for assistance. On hearing this, I instead suggested that he buy rat poison and clean up his room and its surroundings. That way he would get rid of the rats. He took my advice and was spared the unnecessary expense of monies which he did not even have. We have been close friends ever since but the village did not like it because they missed out on a free party!

The young man who could not find a job because of his face

The next story is of a young man who went looking for a casual job among the farmers of the Eastern Cape. He tried for months but all his efforts were fruitless and he became desperate. His mother was equally concerned. She decided to take him to a *sangoma* who would divine as to why he was not being favoured by the farmers. As expected the *sangoma* knew the reason why the young man could not get a job, she gave it as his face being repulsive (this was not a physical description but a supernatural one, to the contrary it was and still is a handsome face). But she had a remedy for this problem. For three days the *sangoma* prepared hot herbs and the young man would be covered with heavy blankets so that the herbal steam could cleanse his face. At the end of the third day the skin on this young man's face peeled off. As he went through the agony and pain of this excruciating experience, the *sangoma* announced that he was now rid of his hideous face and had a completely new one, one that would be acceptable. She claimed that he would now be favoured and given a job right away.

Unfortunately his reception by the very first farmer he approached after his ordeal was worse than before. This time the farmer did not only express his disgust, he also sent his dogs after him. He was lucky to escape without being bitten by those vicious creatures trained to identify blacks as their prey. The young man shared the story with me after he had come to the Lord, having accepted him as his personal Saviour, Lord and Friend.

The mother who in life was a teetotalter but in death demanded brandy!

This story split our congregation right down the middle. When it had reached its final conclusion eight families had left the church. This is how it all started. Jane (referred to only by her first name) died. She had been a devout member and we buried her in great celebration for she was advanced in age and she came from a large family.

Two months after her death, her young and only daughter reported that she had dreamt of pigs snorting on her feet. On sharing this dream with her sisters-in-law, the information was relayed to her elder brother. This brother consulted the *sangoma* who interpreted the dream to be a message from their mother from the grave. Apparently she was very cold and needed some brandy. A family meeting was called and the important message was conveyed to them all. However all the other brothers had been born again through my evangelical preaching. They challenged their brother. "Our mother did not drink any alcohol" they argued, "how come in death she demands brandy?"

I had taught that such rituals were nothing but an excuse for a village party. They often left many drunk and worse still none of these rites ever ended without several girls and women being raped. In some of the worst incidents lives would be lost through violence. I maintained that cultural events should be judged by their outcome. If they fostered unity and the well-being of the community then they were okay. But if people drank themselves silly, fought and women raped, then these events could not be of God and such cultural practices would stand to be challenged by the gospel of Christ.

Dissension broke out in the congregation. There were those who maintained that cultural practices were not in conflict with the gospel. But some were on my side. I insisted that some cultural practices were in

serious contradiction with the word of God. I had advised the born-again members of the family not to spend money, which they did not have any way, to feed a village and make it drunk over a weekend. This did not augur well with those who enjoyed free food and drink at these ritualistic parties. They started harassing the born-again members of the congregation. The situation soon deteriorated into verbal attacks.

The result was a break away. Our congregation 'lost' eight families. Earlier on I had called them into the vestry and we had discussed it. I should have invited the Bishop to comfort them and encourage them to stay. Their case was so elusive that before I could engage the conflict at official level they had slipped through my fingers. But they remain in fellowship with me even up till now. Ironically they have become a seed of what I consider to be authentic response to the gospel in this community.

Looking back now, I realise that I should have been more culturally sensitive. I should have proceeded slowly but surely in correcting cultural aspects which were inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, to say that I did not understand the culture and that that is why I hit out at it is not correct. Instead, it is because I knew the ravages of these cultural rituals on the Christian faith that I went all out to teach and preach in order to rescue the people. Would I teach and preach differently if I were put in a similar situation? The answer is yes. I would probably do more one-on-one counselling than mass preaching. But that I would still preach and invite people to put their trust in God and abandon these evil traditions, there is no question.

Jonathan Thembekile, "the Mayor" of Walmer Township

Jonathan loved us from the beginning. He was always the first one in church on Sunday mornings. He sang bass or shall we say double bass and he danced rhythmically to the tunes. This is all he loved and wanted but deep in his heart he had a longing. This craving was expressed in a thirst. He was a drunkard for thirty years before stopping at the age of fifty. Among my prayers for ministry in Walmer Township was asking God to give me a heart to love the people as God loves them. I developed a love for those that were most degraded and Jonathan was one of them. Alcohol had reduced him to the laughing stock of the township where he was known as "the Mayor". He drank from morning to morning, from

one corner of the township to the other. This is why he was given the name “Mayor”. I loved him. I shared with him the danger of his alcoholism and he tried going to rehabilitation centres but that didn’t help and he would return and resume drinking.

One week, I took him away to a Haggai Regional Conference in Cape Town. He was drunk but I took him. That week he spent in prayer and listening to the Word of God. He made promises and committed his life to God. When we returned, Diana and I supported Jonathan by giving him some work. As an experienced driver his duty was to drive with Diana who was completing her learners licence period before doing her driver’s licence test. But what he had not told us was that he had been arrested for drunken driving and that he had not reported to the police to pay his fine. Three years later early one morning, at 3.00 a.m. to be precise, Jonathan was rearrested at his house and taken to prison 30 kilometres away from us.

Diana waited for him that morning; instead his nephew arrived with the news of the arrest. I travelled to see him at the prison. He complained that some inmates had harassed him and asked me to give him R5 to pay them for his safety. This I did. His hearing was a week later. At the hearing he was given bail of R200 pending his case coming to court. I did not have the money at hand which meant that I would have to wait for the next week’s court session to pay his bail. I returned the following week and paid. Jonathan came home with me.

But his arrest and stay in prison had drained him of his resilience. He resumed drinking to drown his frustrations. He even jumped bail and I had to go to court to plead that I would see he’d be there the following week. I succeeded in getting him there but his case was postponed for another week. Hearing this Jonathan vowed never to go back to court. The result of this announcement of his was a physical struggle between us, with me trying to drag him before the prosecutor so that he could be taken into custody again. Only then would I be able to recover my money. In the scuffle Jonathan recanted and agreed to return with me to court again. We drove home in silence. The following week we went to court and his sentence was read. He was given a suspended sentence of five years during which time he would be under my care doing community service.

That became Jonathan’s turning point. We drove to Alcoholics Anonymous where he was taken through the introductory session and given a timetable. As we walked out, I realised he was crying. When I asked

why, he said that the gentleman who had led him through the introductory session was himself a smoking addict. How could such a person offer help to another person with drinking addiction? Jonathan resolved to commit his life to Christ and trust Him to end his addiction to alcohol. Now (2006) Jonathan is in his 8th dry year, all because of Christ.

The church congregation was his support group and not fellow recovering alcoholics, a different way of recovering from an addiction. I am not denying that AA works for some people, but for Jonathan it was the fellowship of believers (sinners after all only saved by grace) to whom he reported every Sunday giving thanks to God for protecting him from backsliding. This reporting became a pattern of Christian testimony as many with their own challenges trusted God for a day and a week at a time. Sunday service became a time of thanksgiving for the week's victories. This was a wonderful experience and learning curve in our daily Christian walk. It also meant that our Sunday services which had normally lasted for 1 ½ hours were taking more than 3 hours.

The dilemma of living a life of luxury on ill gotten gains

There were many other experiences where people desired to understand the evangelical stance of our Christian witness. One such lady I mentioned earlier on, Caroline Nyabaza. She loved the Lord Jesus. She often felt that there was something missing in the Anglo-Catholic practice of faith and had been attracted to us after hearing of my sermon on the gift of salvation. She attended my classes on evangelism. This put her on another level and she began to feel the call to evangelism. But there was a problem; her husband owned a liquor store where people drank themselves to bankruptcy. That Caroline and her husband derived an income to live a life of luxury at the expense of other people's lives disturbed her very much. Ironically together with her husband they donated generously to the church in thanksgiving. Here I learnt that there are different sources of income from which people tithe their free will offering. I learnt to ask God to sanctify the offerings for His work.

She asked me for counsel. I was in a dilemma. If she left the liquor store where she was expected to help her husband, their marriage would be strained. Should she then continue in this sinful business? The answer was no. So we went on our knees and prayed for five years. Meanwhile her husband was given a franchise to supply liquor to a wider region.

Although they were not directly involved in serving alcohol, the effect of their service was now even greater. We wondered what God was saying to us. If they left this business, they would lose their main source of income. Her husband did not share the same spiritual convictions. If she did not want to sell liquor she was free to move on.

Their son was studying in Britain to ensure he received a better education. They needed money for his fees and needs in Britain. This was to provide the answer for this dilemma. I persuaded her to stay with her husband. You can judge me. Divorce and poverty would not have been a better witness. The result was that when the boy finished his studies he was a qualified civil engineer. They were able to sell the business and her husband worked for his son as his public relations officer in a new and spiritually acceptable business to Caroline. Later Caroline would answer the call to full time ministry in the Anglican Church. She could now wage war against the evil one through authentic preaching. This she could not have done if she had left her husband and family. Maybe, I do not know. What I do know is that if she had left him some other woman would have had justification to nab him and this would not have stopped people from consuming alcohol! But now as she evangelises many will be rescued from sin and find their freedom in Jesus Christ.

The Reverend Diana Mirembe Nkesiga celebrates ten years of ordination to priesthood

The question of women's ordination had been a contentious one in the Anglican Communion as far back as the Lambeth Conference of Bishops of 1978. Then they had taken a joint resolution to move fast on the matter. Rather seek discernment while keeping the matter on the agenda. However upon their return, one Ugandan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Festo Kivengere ordained the very first Women in the Church of Uganda. Uganda. This Bishop's radical move is now being used by some voices in the liberal west to justify their adamant rejection of resolution 1.10 of the Lambeth Conference of Bishops of 1998. Against this resolution they also went ahead and consecrated to the office of a Bishop one who was living in a same sex relationship.

Arguments have been raised that priesthood is for men only. Those deep into the Anglo-Catholic tradition would maintain that since God chose to manifest in the male gender in his incarnation, then we should remain

obedient and allow men to the ordained order. Here those who advocate for the ordination of women argue that God's ministry as revealed to us in the Old and New Testament was never limited to men alone. Judges 4 and 5 tell the story of Deborah a prophetess, a judge over Israel and a wife. All these designations required her to speak both in civic and religious contexts. This is a challenge to those who hold on to Paul's texts as indicated below.

Paul's text 1 Corinthians 14:34 "the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" is widely used to oppose ordination of women. Those who support the ordination of women consider such text to be bound in the Jewish religious culture in a bid to limit noise in the church, because of the temple architecture. Women were considered to be second to men as 1 Corinthians 11:1 suggests that man is the head of a woman. And because there was a wall that divided the men's section from the women's, it was often difficult for the women to hear through a hole provided in the wall. Women would call out for clarity of what was being said. This is what gave rise to Paul's statement in respect to the subject of orderly worship. Elsewhere and in respect to prophecy, Paul's teaching takes a shift, albeit carefully. For example in the same text Paul corrects his view making it more theologically aligned. He says "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God"

In Christ we form a new culture of Christians. Each one of us sought by God, there is no other intermediary person except Christ. The text which suggests that women should ask their husbands at home has been overtaken by events. Women would be doomed to hell if their husbands did not understand the faith or as it is common, for most men do not go to church, who then would communicate matters of faith to women generally? To this argument we can evoke Paul's conclusion "Judge for yourselves" (1 Corinthians 11:13). In any case Paul had here moved to the dress code appropriate for prophesying, a ministry that was not closed to women (cf. Judges 4 and 5).

African culture, like the Jewish one, exercises men's dominance over women. Ordination of women was never accepted by all in Uganda. Diana in her Diocese of Namirembe, the Bishop and his synod resisted

the ordained ministry of women until 1990, ten years after the Bishop of Kigezi had ordained women. Her ordination to the diaconate had been delayed for three years even into the 1990s. She was instead inducted to serve as a commissioned worker of the church like all women in Namirembe Diocese at the time (1989-91). Pressure increased as women with the divine call to ordination became evident, not by their own claims, but also by the presence of the many women in churches who needed ministry by their fellow women. Elsewhere in the world signs of change were building a force whose dynamism could not be fought against any longer. And so in 1991 Diana was at last ordained to the diaconate.

In the CPSA we hoped that Diana would be accepted into full time ministry especially, as the church was on the forefront of fighting for justice for all. We were wrong; as soon as we landed we discovered that women priests were a cultural aversion in the Transkei and in more subtle ways the rest of SA. The synod of 1994 proved to us that our dreams for Diana being in fulltime Ordained ministry in the church were a long way off. A Ugandan at that synod, who had come to SA ahead of us, had also submitted to the dominant Xhosa culture which did not support the motion. Some women too were against the motion. I debated with all wisdom until the debate was declared controversial. We voted in houses. On return, the vote was a tie and the motion was declared lost. Chatting with Bishop Dlamini afterwards he said, 'Thank you very much for your input because this is a success.' I was confused by his comment but he explained further. 'At the previous Synod the motion was rejected, this time it was lost and there is a high chance it will go through at the next Synod.' Corresponding to the Bishop's argument, indeed the Ordination of women in St. John's Diocese was passed in Synod of 1996. Two of our old friends Caroline Nyabaza and Namabaso were among the first women to be ordained as deacons. To date the issue of the ordination of women is still raging on.

"Some 363 parishes - 23 per cent more than 10 years ago - are now so unhappy at the Church reforms that they are refusing to remain under the pastoral care of their local bishops who have ordained women as priests".⁶

⁶ Tim ROSS, *Religious Affairs* Editor: 7:35PM BST, 28 Oct 2010.

Why did Diana Seek Ordination?

Listen to a an expert from her story

“Years later (1985), as a young teacher in the school where I had come to faith, I became restless. As assistant chaplain I had somehow become involved with counselling some traumatised students who had been raped or assaulted during the war that had ousted Amin. I had no answers for them and I anguished over the injustice of crime and why God had allowed such an abominable thing happen to good people and especially young girls who had put their trust in him.

After much prayer and seeking I headed off to Bishop Tucker Theological College to start my long journey towards ordination. One of my brothers suggested that I should get married first, to spare them the embarrassment of having an old spinster for a sister and missing out on ‘*lobola*’ (Bride price).’ After the first night at Bishop Tucker my mind was made up, a clergyman was not for me and if I decided to get married at all, it would not be to any of this miserable bunch. Little did I know that amongst them was at least one intelligent, handsome, god-fearing and woman-honouring man.

It is at college that I first struggled with gender issues. It is here that I fought for equality. It is here that I first encountered the face of AIDS. It is here that I struggled with my identity. It is here that the story of South Africa began to impact on my life. Romans 1:16 ‘I am not ashamed to proclaim the gospel of Christ which is power and wisdom of God for the salvation of mankind’, became central to my life.

In 1989 I completed my ordination training, and I was commissioned as a worker of the church. (Do not ask me what it means because up until this day I do not know.) In the same year Solomon and I got married and we started work at Uganda Martyrs Seminary Namugongo. In 1991 I was ordained deacon.

But in conclusion, if you really want to know who Diana is, here is the personal creed I subscribe to.

‘I believe in the Holy Triune God

The God of Love, Mercy and Justice

I believe in the redemptive work of Christ and its power to transform me and make all things new.

I believe in life before death, eternal life starts here.

I believe AIDS and other ills in society have simply taken advantage of our own 'woundedness'.

And it is only by the wholeness that Christ gives, that we can overcome it.

I believe the devaluing of another gender is the devaluing of yourself.

I am passionate about wellness, body, mind and spirit, wellness of the whole person.

I believe in people because God believes in me.

I believe loving, valuing and empowering relationships restore hurt individuals back into caring community.

I believe in you and me because I believe in God".

For the struggle to ordination of women worldwide, for overcoming the trials that surrounded Diana's ordination to priesthood and more importantly for God's grace in a ministry where Diana felt fulfilled, it was befitting for us to organise a thanksgiving celebration on the 10th December 2004 in our Parish of the Zwartkops River Valley in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Economic experiences:

affluence and poverty alongside each other

One of the devastating effects of the apartheid rule in South Africa was the systematic institutionalisation of poverty among the greater number of black South Africans. As the term apartheid, separate development, suggests, whites were given most of the opportunities while blacks were denied them. At most, black South Africans were reserved for manual jobs such as domestic servants for women and garden 'boys' for the men. The other jobs available to Africans were teachers, nurses, prison wardens and police. These jobs were necessarily left open so as to produce blacks who would in turn serve their own people in these institutions. This plan included the creation of the quasi-independent Bantustans such as the Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei and others, places that were not any more than labour reservoirs from which the whites would obtain cheap labour. To leave the homelands as they were called, one needed a pass. This pass cleared one only for the period during which he or she had employment within the assumed borders of the Republic of South Africa. However many sneaked into the Republic and created informal settlements adjacent to white suburbs.

Poorly paid persons occupied these informal settlements. But also many political activists and criminals used these places as hideouts. It was the level of crime in terms of frequent murders that earned Walmer Township the reputation of being one of the notorious townships in South Africa. We lived for five years in this township on the sand dunes along the Indian Ocean of this southern most part of Africa.

According to the apartheid Group Areas Act, this area was earmarked as a black spot suitable for white occupation. But for a combination of reasons the occupants refused to vacate the township. One reason was that it was the labour reservoir for domestic servants and garden 'boys' for the next door affluent Walmer. A fence had been erected to separate the two areas and to check on the movements of the black inhabitants. Only those who had the employment pass book were allowed to cross over to the prosperous white area. Walmer Township was left to deteriorate in the hope that people who enjoyed decent living conditions would, in time, move out. Even in 1998 you could still find bucket toilets and no garbage collection services there.

Across the railway line and a road with wide verges separating the two districts, resided some of the most affluent people of the Port Elizabeth white community. This scenario placed abject poverty alongside visible wealth. On one side of the fence were people living in shelters made of tin and plastic or cardboard (known as shacks) with an average of 5 persons per family occupying an area of not more than 15 square metres. On the other side were mansions, in well-maintained grounds often with swimming pools and tennis courts, constructed on 100 metre by 100 metre plots, separated by wide streets with lights. Here an average of two people lived in massive houses of not less than 70 square metres. This was a clear example of what was meant by apartheid (separate development) in the racially polarised South Africa. However, by the time we left, I estimate that up to two million black South Africans had perhaps joined a high income bracket and were therefore able to live alongside the whites in the affluent areas of South Africa.

To us the thrust of missionary task could not be just reconciliation but it would have to include addressing the question of institutionalised poverty expressed in this vivid inequality. As such I established my personal mission statement as "Evangelism and Development". Through evangelism we achieve the reconciliation which only Christ gives and through development we address the problem of poverty, reducing its dehumanising effects and its evil consequences on the general security of the

community. This is why our ministry included development projects. By development I mean improving the capacity of people to access information and manage their lives including the establishment of structures to aid these purposes. We learnt that poverty is the main source of conflict. A poor and notorious community would have the potential to remain disorganised and also be a danger to its neighbouring communities.

The white affluent community was in constant fear and danger (there were violent attacks, some of them fatal, due to the poor and the hungry in an often disorganised community in the township. God reveals through his Prophet Amos 2:7 “those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted” that they would be punished unless they repent. Many of the Apartheid leadership heeded to this message, just as Amos had said “Seek good and not evil, that you may live ... and establish justice in the gates; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts will be gracious to the remnants of Joseph” (Amos 5: 14 -15).

Community development projects

Early in my pastoral work we resolved to express our ministry through Evangelism and development. We followed James’ injunction that “faith without works is dead.” (James 2:14-26). It was important to address the issues of reconciliation in order to free people’s mind from the anger and fear and hatred that had accumulated for over 3 living generations. In order to achieve proper transformation we addressed the need for foundational education for the new generation of free South Africans. My wife Diana, a teacher started a school. I supported her by setting up the physical structures for this school.

Many black South Africans did not have skills for self employment. We set up a skills centre for youth and women. They work with clay to produce ceramics and the women did bead works and sewing. This enabled them to bring in the necessary income for their families, boosted their confidence and appropriately they would become firm in their faith. As I conclude this story (October 30, 2010) I got an opportunity to go to South Africa for the Lausanne III Congress. I visited the projects which I initiated in Walmer Township. I was glad to find them still in operation. My heart was filled with wells of thanksgiving tears to the Lord for this contribution of our ministry service.

We had to multitask, because in the midst of all these projects we would have to sound the trumpet warning people of the roaming HIV/AIDS epidemic. It seemed as though our initial cry was falling on deaf ears. Some even suggested that this was a disease from Africa. This is because most South Africans black and white alike, sometime have to be reminded that they are on the African continent. We were compelled by the message in Ezekiel 3:16-21. We considered it our obligation to sound warning to the people. We mobilised nurses from a local hospital. They willingly joined us. We went on the streets of our pastoral town Ngcobo and simply shouted loud to those who cared to listen. Those who turned away from immoral living they would save their lives. But those who did not at least they had been warned. Soon they would invite us to bury those who had died of AIDS where some priests would be scared and unable to handle the situation caused by HIV/AIDS. But we had seen and buried many in Kampala some 3 years before our arrival in South Africa.

Diana established a support group composed of people either affected or infected by HIV and AIDS. This was borne out of her experience at the AIDS Haven in 1995/6 and later during her University chaplaincy work. This would define her ministry as that of caring for the vulnerable. Even when she was posted to the hospice, she quickly set a grief care support group. This new aspect of hospice service attracted many in need as well as financial supporters. A hospice was not a place where you took your relative in their final days. It was also a place where you received counselling to pick up your life after a loss of a loved one. Back in Uganda Diana has started a similar ministry of support groups alongside her fulltime parish ministry.

My near drowning in the Indian Ocean at Umtata Mouth

It was the 1st January 1994. Diana, the boys and I were at a lovely place, the envy of tourists, the Umtata River Mouth. I had been invited to speak at a youth conference similar to the one I had attended the very day I arrived in South Africa on the 29th December 1992. The journey to this tourist destination was as eventful as the time spent there. The car we hoped to drive had been declared mechanically unfit after waiting a whole day for it to be repaired. We borrowed another one and set off at 4 p.m. on a journey of about 100 km. The rain poured down in buckets

and we did not know the way; we hoped to ask directions as we drove along. But this was not to be as darkness descended on us.

The car skidded many times in the wet conditions, one time spinning right round. In the dark we were fortunately unaware that we were in fact on top of a ridge with steep drops on either side of the road. I managed to turn the car and drove on. About a kilometre further on we found a broken down bus which was perhaps an indication that the road ahead was even rougher. We pressed on and rolled onto an old bridge which we guessed crossed the Umtata River. It felt endless, but we eventually reached the other side. We could now hear the sea's rolling waves but we could not see the river. It had worn deep into the rocks of the Wild Coast leaving a wide and deep gorge about 100 metres long. Suddenly a light appeared as if from nowhere and at midnight we drove into a resort where we were given two chalets. We had arrived at Umtata Mouth alright but it was on the white's side. It was far too poshy for the youth from the black Diocese of St. John's.

The next morning we asked at the resort whether they knew of any youth group camping in the area and were directed to one about two kilometres away. We paid a fortune and checked out. Arriving at the camp site, it was clear that this was where our youths were. It consisted of a cluster of rondavels in the bush with every sign of neglect, they were falling apart. There was no time to waste. Soon we were in action worshipping at a central shelter and within moments I was on stage giving my talk through an interpreter. I spoke on Ephesians 6:10 to the end. I stressed the need to put on the full armour of God and I emphasised the point that it was our responsibility to put it on. Then we can stand firm on the day of battle.

The conference ended well and most of the youths left while a handful stayed behind with us. On the morning of New Year's Day we decided to go to the beach. With us was a young girl, Sissy, the daughter of a Ugandan medical doctor. She was a good swimmer. However, clearly displayed were signs: 'No Life Guard on duty, swim at your own risk' so we instructed everyone to keep to the shallows and paddle or build sand castles whilst enjoying the cool sea breeze. All was well until Sissy swam just a meter or two beyond the rocks that marked the visual extent of our shallow point. Next thing she called out to me, "Uncle Solomon, there is no ground here".

I was puzzled, I could see her. Seeing I had not understood her she went on to explain, "I am standing on a rock". Hearing this I impulsively

charged in her direction to rescue her. This was silly, of course, where there is 'no ground' it does not matter how tall you are. Sure enough I started sliding into a hole. I could feel the mighty strength of the under-current sucking me down under the wild waves that were crashing onto the rocks. At that moment a wave rolled over me and water covered my head. When I surfaced Sissy was nowhere to be seen. I learnt later that she had dived onto this same wave and had swum to safety. I do not know how to swim; I cannot even float. So why did I rush into the waters of the Wild Coast that had claimed merchandise ships from China? The responsibility of being in charge of this girl had driven all rational thought from me and I had acted instinctively. Now I was being sucked under while Sissy was on the dry ground watching as one of the youths swam over to rescue me.

In the mean time the good Lord had led me to a rock below the surface of the water. I felt with my hands and was able to get a good grip on it. Some of its sharp edges dug deep into my flesh but fortunately I only discovered that later. My grip on the rock was so firm I reckoned I could hold on until help arrived. But the young man was fighting the waves to get to me. He called out and on seeing him I reached out to grab him. I wanted to get as good grip on him as the one I had on the rock. To my fury he dodged me. Keeping his distance he spoke, "If you hold on to me, we will both drown. All I am doing is encouraging you to come to me. Don't try to grasp at me." At that moment I was so frightened I could not understand his reasoning. Again he started approaching me and then withdrew as I grabbed at him. Fortunately as I let go of the rock a wave pushed me towards him and I felt my feet on sand. I ran up the beach to where Diana had been all along building castles. She had missed the drama. God is wonderful. He rescued me and spared Diana from witnessing the nasty scene of a helpless drowning husband.

Now I can sing with deep meaning, "Rock of ages cleft for me let me hide myself in thee (hold on to thee)". The young man who had 'rescued' me had given me a picture of my service as a minister of the gospel of Christ. I do not save people by my preaching. But by my experience I persuade them into taking their own initiative to dive into the kingdom. I do not down play the incident by these interpretations. But it has made me more humble in my evangelistic enthusiasm. I am equally vulnerable to what causes others to fail and backslide from faith. As in the drowning experience, the ancient rock of our salvation is present for us to hold on to. His servants ministering the gospel beckon us to safety.

We do not hold on to the ministers of Christ but on to Christ himself, our fortress and rock of our salvation.

The thief who we prayed would return

One morning we woke up to find that the doors to the church had been broken. We called the police. On inspection we found that many items had been stolen; the Holy Communion set, candle stands and altar wine. Statements were taken. Days went by and nothing happened. We repaired the church for Sunday service when I prayed that God would bring back the thief. Lo and behold that afternoon the thief returned. He broke into the church again and made off with another chalice, one which we had borrowed for the Sunday Eucharist. I chased him. He ran into a ruined building and dropped the chalice down a hole. I shouted at the top of my voice "Thief, thief, thief". As he emerged into the trading centre some people caught up with him and he was arrested. We retraced our steps back to the church, on the way searching the hole where he had dropped the chalice. Here we found all the stolen items from the church. We praised God who had answered our prayers. The thief was handed over to the police but I have not heard a thing from them since then.

A priest without a gun

We bought our first car from Rev. George Bode. George was a dear friend who had decided to stay in Transkei with the blacks. He was a soft spoken man yet resilient in his fight against apartheid. He was a good preacher though now advanced in age and we served together at St. Cyprian's where I was priest-in-charge. Our house did not have a garage, so the car was simply parked outside our bedroom window. I had bought a steering lock called a gorilla lock and the senior churchwarden helped me install an alarm system. So, though outside, the car was secure.

One night Diana woke me up. The alarm had gone off just once which was strange. I cautiously peeped under the curtains and saw a light in the car and the left side door flung open. I shouted out. "You get away." The person moved and I crawled to the telephone and called the police. Within minutes I heard a gunshot and then a knock on our door. The police had come. I opened up and we inspected the car. Apparently the

alarm had been disabled and the car thief was struggling with the gorilla lock when he was interrupted by my shout. The steering had been bent but the gorilla lock could not be removed and with it still on he could not drive the car away.

All this took place on a Saturday night. On Sunday at the service I announced the attempted theft. One of the deacons asked “Why didn’t you shoot the thief?” I replied, “What? I don’t own a gun.” To this the deacon replied “I must get you a gun”. My answer was “No”. He was surprised. “How do you think you will live here without a gun” he asked. I had no answer that would satisfy him, but I could not take his gun. After that incident I would drive the car to a central garage belonging to Bunny Titus the chief churchwarden and leave it there for the night. I had learnt how vulnerable we were in this crime infested community. This particular vehicle had been stolen three times. I had bought it from Rev Bode while it was still at the police station after its third recovery. There were bullet holes in the rear and marks of a violent rescue attempt before the thief had abandoned the car and left it to roll to a halt on its own.

There are many other incidents involving guns; at our door, in our car with passengers and in the deacon’s briefcase right next to his Bible. Bishop Dlamini, an advocate for a gun free South Africa, had argued that if thieves know that you own a gun when they attack you they aim at shooting you first. Since most people own guns, this accounted for the fact that nearly every robbery resulted in fatalities. I agree with the Bishop. In Uganda armed robbers do not necessarily use their guns on their victims; they only use them to threaten them. Only in rare circumstances would they kill those they rob.

During our stay in South Africa we have endeavoured to work with the people in the communities we have served. We have contributed to visionary leadership, taking action and working alongside the locals. We successfully worked ourselves out of the projects by training locals, working with them and then letting them run the show. We leave them fully responsible to take the projects to new and hopefully greater heights. We therefore feel fulfilled in our 12 years of our missionary work in South Africa. Whatever challenges we met that spelt discord cannot match the contribution and the sense of accomplishment that we derive from these experiences. We have grown a lot in our perspectives, in the working of organisations, community development projects, po-

litical transitions and theological dialogue across cultures and social contexts.

We go back with a wealth of knowledge and wisdom through our interactions with people, more racially aware of our racist attitudes and therefore able to control them. We shall be more caring for people who find their way across our borders and in our care. Our experience informs us largely on what not to do as missionaries and how to be sympathetic to people who feel called to serve far away from home. We are also deeply aware as to what extent a missionary should be involved in local politics whether in secular or church matters. We know now more than ever before that a missionary leaves his or her spirit of patriotism at home. This is a very limiting factor, yet freeing, for it allows a single-minded focus on the ministry of the gospel. In South Africa one always failed to satisfy the political hunger, which among others, permeated religious expressions.

Looking back we see God's hand from beginning to end. He provided circumstances in each case that steered us into his will. Although humanly speaking some situations appeared man-made they were divinely arranged. We know this because the gracious hand of God remained with us. Our ministry had reached a settled stage and we now know that it was time for us to return to our home country Uganda. Our boys suffered by the decision to move. Their experience in adjusting to the education system in Uganda is our constant reminder to our missionary sacrifice. It will remain with me when trying to understand the place of the children of missionaries and their education. Agencies should always consider this financially so as to enable such children to find special attention once their parents have returned home.

Once again we convey our sincere gratitude for the support received from USPG, may God continue to bless your ministry as an organisation in these challenging times.

Rector's Final Reflection in River Roundabout, the monthly news magazine of the Parish of the Zwartkops River Valley

As I write this last contribution in my capacity as the rector, I pulled out the very first copies after our arrival in the parish of River Roundabout (June and July 2000). If you still have them I suggest that you read them

along side this one. Refresh your memory concerning our thinking when we joined you, our goals and objectives, our fears and hopes. Take a trip through the years and measure our performance against those aims, not forgetting our failures, especially starting a church choir!!! This unsuccessful undertaking stares me in the face; I gave it a shot and I missed!! I still think that you love music and at some appropriate time you will surely have a formal choir. As for now we shall be content with the lovely singing congregation that you have become. And this satisfies me down to the bottom of my heart.

The three objectives mentioned in June 2000 have been achieved. There is indeed spiritual growth, a competent administration, and a responding congregation. Not that these were not there before, but they have been ably maintained and to some degree enhanced. We came to this parish under a transformation venture in the Diocese. But surely, not much effort was required in causing you to accept us. I felt at home in my ministry and wherever I went, especially in peoples' homes, I was loved and ministry was given and received by all. An interesting incident took place once while I was dressing in the Vestry for a service. A member of the church came in and somewhat breathlessly announced, "There is a black man in the church". For a split second I wondered what she meant, then I realised that I, the rector, was no longer viewed as just a black man out there with the haunting memories of bad times. I wittily responded, "I am sure he has come to worship with us".

You as a parish have indeed graduated from mere tolerance of races to a higher level of integration. This is demonstrated in your ministry to the members of Lithemba, the Supper Club, and of course Wells Estate. These gestures are steps in the right direction, showing once again that only in God, and not through politics (legislation such as the Equity Bill, Affirmative Action) or economics (Black Economic Empowerment) will real transformation be achieved. You were and have been, and may you always be a caring people. I have experienced it and all I did, if anything was to encourage you. This quality has developed so gloriously and may God be continually honoured in you as you continue to be a caring people.

I need to share with you more about myself. When we came to South Africa, our desire was to participate in the process of reconciliation and we believe that we have done this in good measure. However, in the last three years a relationship with a certain person with whom we had previously had a cordial rapport broke down. His attitude towards us

changed for the worse. Though I constantly sought means of resolving the conflict no one facilitated this and the situation has persisted to almost the end of our stay here. I shared this burden with my intercessors and the church wardens.

As my time to leave drew nearer, my heart grew colder and heavier. I could not imagine leaving South Africa with such anger and pain resulting from this poor relationship. However, the Lord is a wonderful God. He, in his own way against all human odds, made time and opportunity and granted me an audience with this person. He did not want to see me, but I insisted. When he started repeating his misgivings about me, the Spirit within me said, "This is the moment, speak to him now". In the presence of an "angel" who had in some way facilitated this meeting, I apologized that my dealings with him had clearly caused him heartache. I went on to tell him that his changed attitude towards us had caused us a lot of pain and stress and that to some degree had prompted our decision to resign from the Diocese. I then extended the hand of Peace to him. He accepted it. The hours and days that have followed this incident have been ones of great relief and peace in my heart. I felt like Simeon, when he held the baby Jesus in his arms and sung "Now let your servant depart in peace..." Despite my colleague saying nothing, the moment was electric, filled with the presence of God.

Even though it was largely through his attitude that all the trouble began it had caused a sense of resentment and anger in me; these I need to repent. Psychologically victims of violence, whether physical or verbal, always swap places with their assailants. Don't we all carry with us a feeling of retribution whenever wrong is done to us? I learnt that even victims need to repent, most especially of anger, hate and that feeling of "if I had equal power and advantage, I would retaliate equally". The Lord has healed me in all this. But I have learnt that there are still pockets of need in the areas of reconciliation and xenophobia and one needs to be vigilant to resist or challenge these wherever noticed. I shall be drawn to prayer whenever the memory of this unnecessary state of affairs comes to mind. Very early in my life after being teased and bullied during my first year at High School, I made a pledge never to treat anyone in the same way I had been treated. This pledge has been reasserted in me as I go back to Uganda to head an institution that has international staff and students. I will not use my power and authority to maliciously refuse to be a channel of their provision or deny them support in whatever area of their need as foreigners.

On a lighter note, I return to Uganda with a sense of fulfilment. My experience is imbued with what you have rubbed off onto me. You have as a parish sharpened me for higher service. I will, for many years to come, be drawing on our experiences together as I adjust to and address new situations. Many of you have been and will continue to be my reference as I communicate the challenges that face South Africa and how faithful people are in meeting them through the love of Christ. Here Litemba, the Supper Club, Redhouse Benevolent Association and other initiatives come to mind.

I go ahead of Diana and the boys. There are tasks waiting for me both personal and at KEST. Do pray for us all as we adjust to this involved situation. We hope to come back in April 2006 for my graduation. We will have missed you enough to want to see you just a bit! After that you, the big parish party is invited to Uganda. We trust that this will be possible, whether in groups or as individual families or persons, we welcome you to Uganda and in our home (which we are going to build now).

The whole family, Diana, the boys and I thank you for being a wonderful people; we thank you for your love and care, for your response to faith and for constantly pressing on in your Christian journey. We trust that God who calls you will enable you to fulfil the responsibilities which he has given you as a parish.

Finally, people of God whom I love so much, I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which will build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (read Acts 20:18-38). May the good Lord grant you eternal life both in the present and in the life to come, Amen.

Rev. Solomon Basabose Nkesiga, Rector of Zwartkops River Valley, May 2000 to May 2005.

Response by editor, River Roundabout.

At this emotive time of farewell it is difficult to express the honour Solomon and his ministry with us deserves. He has alluded to the June 2000 River Roundabout. In it he wrote, "We come to you with Christ's love, that is what we pledge and we feel we have it and we will give it." He has been true to that pledge. Never before have we felt so loved and we thank God for his servant Solomon through whom his love has been

so visible and so tangible. We have, individually and as a parish, grown and matured spiritually to an extent and in ways we never would have thought possible. We have been so blessed by his presence among us and we know that wherever he goes God's love will be spread abroad. We will remember him for his wisdom, his humility, his dignity, his compassion, his gentleness but above all for his example of Christian love.

THE BIBLE, THE RICH AND THE POOR CONVERTS TO CHRISTIANITY AND THE MISSION OF CHRIST

THE CASE OF SOME PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN ZIMBABWE

Joachim Kwaramba

1. Introduction

This paper examines how the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe engage in discipleship of their congregants. This endeavour in the churches faces a challenge of the prevailing “Prosperity Gospel” which is being preached from almost every pulpit in Pentecostal churches. The prevailing form of *preaching* is raising eyebrows and uncertainty among the church fraternity. Historically, it may be noted that the members of the churches come from differing backgrounds; economically as well as socially. It may also be noted that in the Pentecostal society every class is represented yet a form of social stratification seems to unearth a new kind of discipleship from the biblical one. This kind of view is found supporting the rich in the church and looking down on the poor or less privileged of the same society. It seems then, that everyone must be rich or attain some form of wealth in order to be accepted in the 21st century Pentecostal church. Just as in Church History, especially the Reformation, the issue of penance was viewed with reservations and squabbles left the church in a schism. Hence, this issue of discipleship of the rich and the poor in the church needs some examination alongside the mission of Jesus Christ. For this study then, discipleship of these two different groups in society among the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, especially in Harare, needs a close examination.

2. Definition of key terms

The Bible

The Bible is a term which is derived from the Greek τὰ βιβλία (*ta biblia*) which means “the books.” It is the collections of the primary religious texts of Judaism and Christianity. There is no common version of the Bible, as the individual books, their contents and their order vary among

denominations. For the sake of the bias of this paper which is Christian theology, we shall talk of the Christian Bible. The Christian Bible is divided into two parts. The first is called the Old Testament, containing the (minimum) 39 books of Hebrew Scripture, and the second portion is called the New Testament, containing a set of 27 books. The first four books of the New Testament form the Canonical gospels which recount the life of Christ and are central to the Christian faith. Because of the languages of the Bible certain discussions will include the Hebrew and Greek languages for further understanding the concepts.

Richness or wealth

Wealth is the abundance of valuable resources or material possessions. Ropers, Richard (1991:14) argues that the word wealth is derived from the old English *wela*, which is from an Indo-European word stem. An individual, community, region or country that possesses an abundance of such possessions or resources is known as wealthy. 'Wealth' refers to some *accumulation* of resources, whether abundant or not. 'Richness' refers to an *abundance* of such resources. A wealthy (or rich) individual, community, or nation thus has more resources than a poor one. Richness can also refer to at least basic needs being met with abundance widely shared. The opposite of wealth is destitution. The opposite of riches is poverty.

The Poor/Poverty

Sheldon H Danziger et.al (1994:18) purport that "*poverty* is the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money". Absolute poverty or destitution refers to being unable to afford basic human needs, which commonly includes clean and fresh water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter. For most of history poverty had been mostly accepted as inevitable as traditional modes of production were insufficient to give an entire population a comfortable standard of living. Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society.

Poverty also means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it

often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. All these explanations will be helpful in this paper, to explain how poverty has affected the church and society at large.

Converts

For Oscar S. Kriebe (2008:18), Conversion to Christianity is the religious conversion of a previously non-Christian person to some form of Christianity. It has been called the foundational experience of Christian life. Conversion to Christianity primarily involves belief (faith) in God, repentance of sin, acknowledgement of falling far short of God's glory and holiness and confession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the all-sufficient and only means by whom one's sin can be atoned for and therefore the only route to salvation (John 14:6). While conversion to Christianity may simply involve a personal choice to identify with Christianity rather than with another religion, many Christians understand it to mean that the individual attains eternal salvation by a genuine conversion experience or act—a "radical transformation of self." Conversion has also been described as the point of transition from "natural life" to spiritual life. In this sense it is seen as both a "radical change of heart and life" and also a more gradual process in which the convert's spiritual nature develops through Christian culture and education. Those who engage themselves in this process are called converts. According to theologian Charles Curran (1970:33), conversion is the central moral message of Jesus. He describes it as an "awakening to a consciousness of the presence of divine reality" in one's life. Therefore, conversion is the Biblical term for the turning of the sinner from his evil ways to God.

Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostalism is a diverse and complex movement within Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, has an eschatological focus, and is an experiential religion. Hollenweger, Walter (1997) suggests that the term *Pentecostal* is derived from Pentecost, the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks. For Christians, this event commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts. As such Pentecostals tend to see their movement as reflecting the same kind of spiritual power and teachings that were found in the Apostolic Age of

the early church. For this reason, some Pentecostals also use the term *Apostolic* or full gospel to describe their movement. This could have influenced most Zimbabwean Christians to be Pentecostal.

3. *Background of Economic issues and their impact on Christianity in Zimbabwe*

In Zimbabwe, economic aspects of poverty focus on material needs, typically including the necessities of daily living, such as food, clothing, shelter, or safe drinking water. All over the world, including in Zimbabwe, poverty in this sense, has been understood as a condition in which a person or community is lacking in the basic needs for a minimum standard of well-being and life, particularly as a result of a persistent lack of income. Analysis of social aspects of poverty links conditions of scarcity to aspects of the distribution of resources and power in a society and recognizes that poverty may be a function of the diminished "capability" of people to live the kinds of lives they value. The social aspects of poverty may include lack of access to information, education, health care, or political power. In the same light poverty penetrates Christianity because the same people who come to church and are affected by it are raw materials from the society at large where full-blown poverty is prevalent.

According to John Scott (1984:229), the term 'wealth' implies a social contract on establishing and maintaining ownership in relation to such items which can be invoked with little or no effort and expense on the part of the owner. The concept of wealth in Zimbabwe is relative and not only varies between societies, but varies between different sections or regions in the same society. Concepts of wealth also vary across time. Modern labor-saving inventions and the development of the sciences have enabled the poorest sectors of today's society to enjoy a standard of living equivalent if not superior to the wealthy of the not-too-distant past. This comparative wealth across time is also applicable to the future of Christianity in Zimbabwe; given this trend of human advancement, it is likely that the standard of living that the wealthiest enjoy today will be considered impoverished by future generations.

In a Zimbabwean setup concepts of wealth also vary across time. Poverty may also be understood as an aspect of unequal social status and inequitable social relationships, experienced as social exclusion,

dependency, and diminished capacity to participate, or to develop meaningful connections with other people in society. Such social exclusion can be minimized through strengthened connections with the mainstream, such as through the provision of relational care to those who are experiencing poverty. The effects of poverty may also be causes, as listed above, thus creating a "poverty cycle" operating across multiple levels, individual, local, national and global. Such structures affect the churches in the world in general and Zimbabwe, to be particular and the following fields are affected. Cited below are examples of issues affecting the Zimbabwean people in different forms.

Health

In Zimbabwe, those living in poverty suffer disproportionately from hunger or even starvation and disease and these facts affect the church as well. Those living in poverty suffer lower life expectancy. According to the World Health Organization, hunger and malnutrition are the single gravest threats to the world's public health and malnutrition is by far the biggest contributor to child mortality, present in half of all cases. In this respect, people seek healing in the religious circles to the extent that they spend all their income and resources there in the name of offerings. Mostly the Pentecostal churches are the ones that talk about the prosperity gospel much to the extent that the poor do not have room to enjoy the church.

Hunger

Poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. Rises in the costs of living make poor people less able to afford items. Poor people spend a greater portion of their budgets on food than richer people. As a result, poor households and those near the poverty threshold can be particularly vulnerable to increases in food prices. Women who have born children into poverty may not be able to nourish the children efficiently and provide adequate care in infancy. The children may also suffer from disease that has been passed down to the child through birth.

Education

Research has found that there is a high risk of educational underachievement for children who are from low-income housing circumstances. This often is a process that begins in primary school for some less fortunate children. Instruction in the US educational system, as well as in most other countries, tends to be geared towards those students who come from more advantaged backgrounds. As a result, these children are at a higher risk than other children for retention in their grade, special placements during the school's hours and even not completing their high school education. There are indeed many explanations for why students tend to drop out of school. For children with low resources, the risk factors are similar to others such as juvenile delinquency rates, higher levels of teenage pregnancy, and the economic dependency upon their low income parent or parents. Families and society who submit low levels of investment in the education and development of less fortunate children end up with less favorable results for the children who see a life of parental employment reduction and low wages. Higher rates of early childbearing with all the connected risks to family, health and well-being are majorly important issues to address since education from preschool to high school are both identifiably meaningful in a life.

Poverty often drastically affects children's success in school. A child's "home activities, preferences, mannerisms" must align with the world and in the cases that they do not these students are at a disadvantage in the school and most importantly the classroom. Therefore, it is safe to state that children who live at or below the poverty level will have far less success educationally than children who live above the poverty line. Poor children have a great deal less healthcare and this ultimately results in many absences from the academic year. Additionally, poor children are much more likely to suffer from hunger, fatigue, irritability, headaches, ear infections, flu, and colds. These illnesses could potentially restrict a child or student's focus and concentration.

Housing

Poverty increases the risk of homelessness in worldwide. Slum-dwellers, who make up a third of the world's urban population, live in poverty no better, if not worse, than rural people, who are the traditional focus of the poverty in the developing world. Research statistics has it that there are over 100 million street children worldwide. Most of the

children living in institutions around the world have a surviving parent or close relative, and they most commonly entered orphanages because of poverty. Experts and child advocates maintain that orphanages are expensive and often harm children's development by separating them from their families. It is speculated that, flush with money, orphanages are increasing and push for children to join even though demographic data show that even the poorest extended families usually take in children whose parents have died.

Violence

The economy of Zimbabwe has been affected largely by the violence that rocked the nation. This violence was political as well as social. It is a difficult task for the church to be neutral to the member since there are different party supporters within the same church. It becomes a challenge for a pastor to become neutral where such a mixture exists where some are more violent than the others. The church sees this as its task to uphold the social and religious dignity in the nation. Hence churches have been involved in the dialogues between parties, though this did not apply everywhere and in every church.

4. The Theology of Poverty in the Bible and the church' response

Poverty in Scripture can be both social and spiritual. The words "poor" and "poverty" cover a wide range of meaning, overlapping with terms like "widow" or "orphan," which underscores the expansive nature of the topic. In addition, because not all poor people are destitute, the meaning of these terms is heavily dependent upon context.

The Pentateuch emphasizes equitable treatment for the poor. Justice was neither to be withheld from the poor (Exodus 23:6) nor distorted because a person was poor (Exodus 23:3; Leviticus 19:15). Such equity is illustrated by the collection of ransom money from rich and poor alike (Exodus 30:15). As part of the covenant community the poor person was to be treated with respect (Deuteronomy 24:10-11) and supported, even economically, by other Israelites, since they were not to charge interest to the poor of their people (Exodus 22:25 ; Leviticus 25:35-38). Beyond direct legislation a number of institutions contained special provisions for the poor. Gleaning laws focused on the widow, fatherless, stranger,

and poor (Leviticus 19:9-10 ; 23:22 ; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). During the Sabbatical year debts were to be canceled (Deuteronomy 15:1-9) and Jubilee provided release for Hebrews who had become servants through poverty (Leviticus 25:39-41 Leviticus 25:54). During these festivals the poor could eat freely of the produce of all of the fields (Exodus 23:11 ; Leviticus 25:6-7 Leviticus 25:12).

Further stipulations to aid the poor included the right of redemption from slavery by a blood relative (Leviticus 25:47-49), support from the third-year tithe (Deuteronomy 14:28-29), and special provisions regarding the guilt offerings. This latter law illustrates the relative nature of the concept of poverty. If someone cannot afford the normal atonement lamb he or she can bring two pigeons (Leviticus 5:7) but further consideration, (substituting one-tenth ephah of flour), is made for one who cannot afford even two pigeons (Leviticus 5:11). Clearly, the Law emphasized that poverty was no reason for exclusion from atonement and worship! Motivation for such legislation was God's concern for the poor. God listened to the cry of the needy (Exodus 22:27), blessed those who considered them (Deuteronomy 24:13 Deuteronomy 24:19), and held accountable those who oppressed them (Deuteronomy 24:15). The Lord based this position on his relationship with his people; he was their God (Leviticus 23:22) and had redeemed them from slavery (Deuteronomy 24:18). Poverty is not a frequent subject of the Old Testament historical books but striking instances are recorded. Hannah's prayer reveals the plight of the poor along with their dependence upon the Lord (1 Sam 2:5-8), while Nathan's parable to David shows the nature of oppression, the relativity of poverty (this poor man was not destitute), and the concern of the king to provide justice for the poor (2 Sam 12:1-4). As the monarchy developed the economic policies of Solomon eventually strained the resources of Israel and increased the level of poverty (1 Kings 12:4). This situation was further accentuated by the influx of idolatry and increase of injustice during the divided monarchy. A striking example from the northern kingdom shows the predicament of an indebted woman who, having lost her husband, was about to lose her sons to a creditor.

There are critical questions the church needs to understand on the matter of the poor in their midst. What does it mean to respond to poverty in a biblical manner? Should believers address poverty within their own resources, within the Church body, with or without government resources? Is money the key to solving poverty? These are all questions

which are raised in addressing how Christians should respond to poverty. There are different responses to each of these questions within Christian circles, but I believe that the Bible points to the Church as definitely having a responsibility to care for the poor, physically, but also spiritually. If the government can work with the Church and allow the Church to function as commanded by Christ, then so be it. However, if the government hinders the Church from fully functioning as the Church should, then I think they need to work separately.

There are Christians, including Marvin Olasky, who feel that it is the Church's responsibility to address the needs of the poor, as the Church, and without the government which may hinder the Church's work (Westbrook, 2010:26). Other Christians, including Jim Wallis, won't deny that the Bible commands the Church to care for the poor. However, they also believe that the Church's resources are limited, and so the Church should work in conjunction with the government in order to have a greater resource pool from which to provide for the poor (Wallis 2008:45). Several issues are raised in response to this suggestion of the Church working with the government. It is true that resources to provide help can be increased with government assistance. But this raises the question of who is actually in control of what happens with that money or those resources. If the Church wants to use those government-provided resources in the name of Christ, the government may prohibit the spreading of the Gospel with government funds. Some argue that this is still acceptable because the poor are being fed and clothed.

However, others argue that this only addresses physical needs and does not address the ultimate issue beneath poverty: sin. Because we live in a fallen world, bad things happen. Sin affects our daily lives so deeply. Poverty is one of the effects of a sinful humanity, whether directly or indirectly. Some end up impoverished due to their own sinful choices, such as squandering their money on drugs, or engaging in pre-marital sex. This may lead to a single mother who has not the time or energy to look after her child and work at the same time to provide for her child, therefore, resulting in homelessness. Obviously not all sin results in such drastic situations, but one can see how one's choices could have a direct impact on their living situation (Proverbs 13:8). One might be incredibly lazy and refuse to work, again, directly resulting in poverty. This is directly due to one's choices. The Bible speaks over and over again about laziness resulting in poverty (Proverbs 10:4, 6:10-11, 14:3, 28:19).

However, there are times when poverty falls on one who has been wise with their time and money, and their poverty is not a direct result of their own wrong choices. One man's sin may affect another. For example, one may be robbed and so end up with no money to pay bills or buy food, even though they worked hard. Christ commands us to help the poor. He also said, "The poor you will always have with you" (Mark 14:7). Even though believers help the poor, the poor will always be present. Sin will always be present until the Day of judgement. No matter how much we help the poor, they will always exist. Does that mean we should not help the poor? Certainly not! But we need to address not only the symptoms of sin, (poverty) but the root of the issue (sin itself). People need Christ, not just a few extra dollars to pay for dinner tonight.

With that said, it can be seen that the Church needs to be highly involved in addressing the needs of the poor, and not just their material needs, but their spiritual needs as well. In the Bible, Christ commands believers to "defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Proverbs 31:9), and those who help the poor are shown to be righteous and good (Acts 9:36, Proverbs 29:7). The Bible also teaches of Christ preaching the Gospel to the poor (Matthew 11:15, Luke 4:18) Jesus Himself is an example of not only providing physically for the poor, but also spiritually. He is our ultimate example and we need to emulate Him. We as Christians, therefore, have a responsibility to minister physically and spiritually to the poor, by virtue of His example and His commands to help the poor. Marvin Olasky argues that true compassion fills the "hole in the soul," and only giving that is faith-based can offer that (Westbrook, *ibid*).

I think Jim Wallis was right in urging people, not to "restrict working towards social justice to people of faith," because non-faith-based groups can have a tremendous effect on helping people (Wallis, Change.org, 2010). However, that does not negate the Church's responsibility of caring for *all* the needs of the poor. The government has responsibilities outlined in the Bible, such as punishing the wrongdoer (Romans 13:4). The Church also has its responsibilities as outlined in the Bible, such as caring for the poor (Romans 15:26, Galatians 2:10, Luke 14:12-14). The poor need Christ, and the government is not expected to show Christ to them; that is the job of the Church. The Church cannot slack in its duty by only giving food or clothes to the poor and by denying them Christ. However, different opportunities to help arise if we work as a whole Church in the name of Christ, rather than just by ourselves, and so it is important that we work together. I don't think anyone has qualms with

believers functioning as a whole Church. However, now the question is raised as to whether the Church is to work with the government or not in caring for the poor. The government definitely has many more resources than the Church does. As long as the government is open to the Church's work as the Church, not just caring for physical needs, but also for spiritual needs, then I see no problem in the Church working with the government.

On the other hand, if the government agrees to work with the Church in caring for the poor, but with the stipulation that their resources are not used to preach the Gospel, then I see this as a problem. As we've discussed, part of the Church's job is to help meet the physical needs of the poor. But the root of the issue, and the more important part, is the preaching of the Gospel. Physical needs are very real, and to try to preach the Gospel without addressing physical needs is not seen as modeled by Christ. We cannot, nor should we, ignore physical needs. However, as the Church, we cannot ignore spiritual needs either. If the government is calling us to ignore the spiritual needs of the poor while addressing their physical needs, then we need to re-tune our hearts to the higher calling of Christ to address *all* their needs. What makes the Church the Church is that we are followers of Christ and we live to make Him known. We cannot allow a small good (government resources that meet temporal needs) to hinder our greater calling as a Church (making the Gospel of Christ known, often through meeting physical needs).

One might argue that the Church may have more opportunities to meet the spiritual needs if they can better meet physical needs. I agree. Therefore, if the government resources can help the Church meet more physical needs, we should utilize those, that we might increase our opportunities to witness. If the government allows us to use its resources and preach the Gospel, I believe we should use those opportunities. My point is, however, that if the government provides the Church with resources to help the poor, but hinders the Gospel, the Church should not be a part of that. We should then work with the resources the Church has, with the faith that God will use those resources to make Himself known. I do want to stress, however, that God can make Himself known even without the Church directly preaching the Gospel. Therefore, it is not right to say that God cannot or will not use government resources to bring glory to Himself. Individual believers or small groups of Christians may be in a position to use resources from the government to help the poor, even if they cannot preach the Gospel directly. However, the

Church, by its very nature, is the Body of Christ, and needs to represent Christ in what it does. Therefore, I think it is imperative that the Church operates under that name of the Body of Christ, ministering to the whole person, and not under the name of the government. Although believers are part of the Body of Christ, they do not carry the title of the Church, and therefore, can be in different positions to minister than the Church as a whole can.

If the purpose of the Church is to love Christ by obeying His commands (1 John 5:3), and to glorify His name, making Him known (Matthew 28:19), and drawing others to Him, then I believe that what the Church's response to poverty should be is clear. The Church *must* address poverty. However, addressing poverty as the Church, in the name of Christ, meets physical needs, as well as spiritual needs. If the government can help provide the Church resources to minister both to the physical needs and the spiritual needs of the poor, then glory be to God, and let the Church work with the government. However, if the government is willing to provide resources to only meet the physical needs of the poor, and hinders the Church from functioning as the Church in spreading the Gospel, then the Church should not accept those government resources.

5. *The issue of Discipleship in the mission of Jesus*

This part of the paper examines the mission of Jesus Christ on the issues of discipleship and examines the sayings and attitudes of Jesus about the poor people. The school of Luise Schottroff (1978:2) argues that it is almost futile to attempt to prove the historical "authenticity" of any of the sayings of Jesus that are transmitted in the Gospel tradition. Jesus spoke to His disciples of a mission that He deemed the purpose of their following Him besides other issues pertaining the poor people of the society. In Matthew 28:19 Christ taught His disciples to "*Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" (New King James Version). M R Spindler (1978) cites some focal points in this discussion among scholars; the imperative word "make disciples" (Greek - *matheteusate*) suggests pedagogical action, transmission of knowledge, possibly transmission of wisdom. This phrase includes emphasis on teachings of Christ particularly Sermon on the Mount and to some, this has been labelled as the practice of the mission yet He had not yet sent

them out on a Great commission. R M Gunda (2010:2) cites a question by James Kugel (2007:10) that, “do the words of this ancient prophet or that ancient sage have any implications for our present situation?” Another clean question needing answer is whether the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe are using mission in this vein.

A Zimbabwean television musical chart show displays both Pentecostal musicians singing “Gospel music” sharing the stage with secular musicians. A challenge would be how the Pentecostal “makes the secular musician a disciple” given the challenges of secular sponsors of the programme due to their position of wealth. The believer tends to be compelled to follow secular life style and alternatives in a way of getting their music to the public. However, Gunda (2010) adds that without taking anything away from western biblical scholars, African biblical scholars must also engage with the question: how do we put into practice the teachings of the Bible? This question is necessitated by the realization that “even though the books of the Bible were written a long time ago ...carefully analyzed, the words of these ancient texts might reveal a message about how people ought to arrange their affairs now and in the future.”

The churches may also hide behind “cell groups” or “home groups” or house churches as means of trying to reach to everyone in their society. Does the church have structures that meet this challenge, would be another question? The word “nations” (*Gk-ethne*) has occasioned an unfortunate commingling of mission with all sorts of political theories concerning the essence and nature of ‘people’ and ‘nation’. On such a confusion, J C Hoekendijk (1998) has labelled the fanatical concern for national character as “ethnopathic” in which ethnic units are presented as target groups that at some time in the future will act as national churches. This view prevails currently in one of the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe not meaning where it takes place but could go down to the assemblies of the churches in the country. In Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe, e.g. the use of totems is very much respected in that relationships of members in the church, including the clergy, are based on totems. It could be inevitable to see the church run by people of the same totem and currently the top office bearers of the church are of the same totem. Segregation and racial discrimination might end up being the norm in the church to the extent of affecting the biblical form of discipleship of Christians. For missions to work Pentecostal churches must understand the fact that mission is the universal and unrestricted

opening of the new covenant by Jesus Christ and acceptance of such covenant implies an ethnical obligation.

6. *Understanding the Apostolic Commission in light of the mixed class of people: a critical survey.*

Luke 10:1 reads, “*After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come*”. We are not told in this text of the gender or class of those whom Jesus sent out. But assuming that the Jewish culture segregated women, we may conclude that only the men were sent; and the feminists have a case to raise here. J Kugler (2011) reiterates that “being Church in itself means to serve those in need. And not serving those who suffer is equivalent to not being Church. Our faith in God’s love and justice urges us to ask what we can do to share in solving the problem of poverty.” And Ruether (1986) argues that as one contemplates on the total history of patriarchy and begins to see all the ramifications of evil done by it, one necessarily goes through experiences of rage in which one concludes that males are to be avoided altogether.

There is need for people from all levels of life, including women, to rise to the leadership position in the church to defend their position in the presence of the androcentricism. According to Reuther (ibid) women should delegitimize the theological myths that justify the *ecclesia* of patriarchy and begin to form liturgies to midwife their liberation from it. The Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches today have a ratio of about 90% women and 10% men but less than 10% of the women’s percentage occupy leadership positions in the church. This form of liberation needed by women may end up segregating the uneducated due to poverty and maintaining the same problem by their male counterparts than solving them. Women may fail to disciple each other from an equality stand point and end up groping themselves depending on how wealthy they might be and the poor people still suffer. There is need of the explanation of the statements said in Pentecostal church world, eg. “Poverty is a curse and everyone must be rich”.

7. The mission of Pentecost on the poor and the rich: A Contextual Challenge

Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 leaves a great challenge to the African Christian lifestyle – “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” Observe in this verse here, How Christ, instead of gratifying his disciples curiosity, acquaints them with their own duty; he tells them, that although they had received his Spirit before, in some measure, yet very shortly the Spirit should be poured forth upon them in a plentiful manner, to confer the gift of tongues, prophecies, and miracles upon them, for rendering them fit to preach the gospel throughout all nations, and also to testify and bear witness unto the truth of what Christ did and said in Judea and Samaria, both to Jews and Gentiles, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. It shows too that what motivates them is not their cultural values but Christ's commands.

In the commissioning of Christ to his disciples it must be noted that what the special work of the ministers of the gospel is; namely, to bear witness unto Christ: ‘Ye shall be witnesses unto me’. This they do three ways: “By the purity of their doctrine, by the piety of their lives, and by their patience under suffering, both for Christ, and from Christ.” What it was that enabled the apostles thus to bear witness unto Christ, namely, the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit upon them was perhaps the words: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me”. According to Maxwell (2006), throughout the twentieth century Pentecostals have been animated by two impulses: the primitive and pragmatic. The primitive represents a powerfully destructive urge to smash all human traditions in order to return to a first-century world where the Holy Spirit reigned supreme. In this miraculous signs and wonders are the daily norm and spiritual issues like dreams and visions becomes the authority of daily Christian affairs. In such realm the Bible is untouchable and immune to higher criticism.

The pragmatic impulse is in contrast. It reflects a desire to do whatever it takes and is necessary in order to accomplish the movement's purposes (ibid). For some Pentecostal churches this view has distracted the believer's full response to the mission of God upon their lives. This pragmatic way can reject the technological gains and modernity yet the primitive might. The coming in of the Prosperity Gospel may answer the

problems caused by the two stances but if not looked at properly, it may cause much destruction than building the members lives. As Scot Mcnight (2006) put it, the prosperity gospel has some explaining to do. For him, the problem that must be explained by proponents of this gospel is how most Christian adherents of the gospel are still sacked suffering. The gospel of prosperity teaches that God desires the material, spiritual and physical prosperity of His people and to become prosperous one has to believe, receive and act upon God's promise. This may leave God as the "Vending Machine" put in faith and out pops the money, marriage, cars etc. For the prosperity gospel humans are the Happiness Machine; receive the blessings rely on the blessings act upon God's commandments and you put a happy face (ibid). The problem this could cause to the churches to day is that of laziness and people expect things to come just by faith. There is need for this kind of gospel to answer the issue in James 2:17; where faith without works is dead. Therefore, some measure of ministerial gifts and sanctifying graces from the Holy Spirit, is absolutely necessary to enable the ministers of the gospel to bear their testimony unto Christ with faithfulness and success.

The word 'earth', or land, in the commission is sometimes taken to denote only the land of Palestine. But here there does not seem to be a necessity for limiting it thus. If Christ had intended that, he would have mentioned Galilee or another place, as being the only remaining division. But as he had expressly directed them to preach the gospel to all nations, the expression here is clearly to be considered as including the Gentile lands as well as the Jewish. The mission of church therefore must reach all believers irrespective of their economic status.

8. *The rich and poor in the congregations: an exegetical survey*

This part of the symposium utilises the Reader Response method of interpreting the texts. According to M.A Powell, the reader response criticism is a pragmatic approach to illustrate on the role of the reader in determining meaning. This part of the symposium selects but a few of the biblical texts on how finances are used in the Pentecostal church systems. In addition to this survey, Joachim Kügler (2012) analyses the beatitudes of Jesus with much emphasis on the term "poor". He concludes that "for a semantic understanding of the beatitude of the poor it

is important to understand that the three makarisms (“poor – hungry – weeping/mourning”) form a unit. The first explains the second and the third beatitude. And the last two makarisms help understanding the first one.” The beatitudes highlight the importance of the poor in the Jesus traditions. It is also ideal to survey how these people would manage to fit in the following sampled wealth scriptures and below is a discussion of the few issues that are dealt with in the Pentecostal church to castigate the issue of poverty.

Tithes

Tithe is a Christian practice and the term is defined as the tenth of the whole income. The following scripture explains the reason of the tithe. **Malachi 3:10**; “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house.....if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

The concept of tithes in the Zimbabwean economic crisis is a challenging phenomenon prevailing even in the churches. Illegal forms of multiplying wealth prevailed with a common feature of “money burning”. The challenge would be finding faithfulness to God among the Pentecostals who have once been taught of the prosperity gospel. It left even church leaders engaging in these evil dealings with some having problems in attending church services. They had so withheld tithes that the priests had not food enough to support life, and the sacred service was interrupted, as in **Nehemiah 13:10**. *And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled everyone to his field.* What one gives to God shall never lessen their store. Give as ye should, and see whether I will not so increase your store by opening the windows of heaven-giving you rain and fruitful seasons-that your barns and granaries shall not be able to contain the abundance of your harvests and vintage. This is the message of the tithes but it seems it has gathered a different twist among the Pentecostals leading to the clergy finding it easy to “disciple” and visit the houses of the greatest tithers in the church. The poor or less tither rarely gets a visit by their shepherd.

Somewhat Scriptural Gymnastics on Tithing: A Critical Analysis

The biblical interpretation (the plain meaning of Scripture) is utilized in this work to examine the most common scriptures used to defend modern teaching. The interesting things that are done to scriptures com-

monly used to support a "thou shalt tithe" doctrine are actually quite abusive. These abuses stem from either an ignorance of basic interpretive rules, or a perceived need to manipulate people. I'm sympathetic to the *ignorance* that often comes with tithing doctrines but not the outright deceit that comes with *manipulation*. According to Christopher Hill (1968:77) Manipulating people into following modern tithing doctrines seems to be motivated or inspired by one or more of the following: 1) greed; 2) the financial obligations or poor management of a given church or ministry; 3) the pride, ego, or need for recognition of the teacher (usually a pastor), e.g., the "kingdom building" sometimes associated with bigger buildings and flashy programs, and; 4) misplaced faith, i.e., faith in money or faith in a clever teaching to accomplish certain goals rather than faith in God.

For Walter A Elwell (1996), one thing that seems common regarding the matter of tithing is that people who have been manipulated into following modern teachings have the most difficult time adjusting to biblically liberated stewardship. This is generally because they have been manipulated or persuaded into believing something that has no scriptural support. Sadly, the manipulation or persuasion often comes from people they respect who utilize poor Bible interpretation, and weak-but sometimes clever--arguments. Incidentally, those who have been truly manipulated into practicing a tithing doctrine won't know they've been misled, but if they come to realize it, sometimes anger results. This is understandable and is true for the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe.

Seeding

The word is derived from the agricultural concept of sowing and harvesting. It is applied in the Pentecostal Christian ideology to get wealth when one give wealth to the Pastor. **Gen 8:22** -*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

There is something very expressive in the original, "until all the DAYS of the earth"; for God does not reckon its duration by centuries, and the words themselves afford a strong presumption that the earth shall not have an endless duration. Seed-time and harvest. It is very probable that the seasons, which were distinctly marked immediately after the deluge, are mentioned in this place; but it is difficult to ascertain them. Most European nations divide the year into four distinct parts, called quarters or seasons; but there are six divisions in the text, and probably all in-

tended to describe the seasons in one of these postdiluvian years, particularly in that part of the globe, Armenia, where Noah was when God gave him, and mankind through him, this gracious promise. This is a very merciful promise to the inhabitants of the earth. There may be a variety in the seasons, but no season essentially necessary to vegetation shall utterly fail. The times which are of greatest consequence to the preservation of man are distinctly noted; there shall be both seed-time and harvest—a proper time to deposit the different grain in the earth, and a proper time to reap the produce of this seed.

Thus ends the account of the general deluge, its cause, circumstances, and consequences. An account that seems to say to us, Behold the goodness and severity of God! Both his justice and long-suffering are particularly marked in this astonishing event. His justice, in the punishment of the incorrigibly wicked, and his mercy, in giving them so fair and full a warning, and in waiting so long to extend his grace to all who might seek him. Such a convincing proof has the destruction of the world by water given of the Divine justice, such convincing testimony of the truth of the sacred writings, that not only every part of the earth gives testimony of this extraordinary revolution, but also every nation of the universe has preserved records or traditions of this awful display of the justice of God. A multitude of testimonies, collected from the most authentic sources in the heathen world, I had intended for insertion in this place, but want of room obliges me to lay them aside. But the state of the earth itself is a sufficient proof. Every part of it bears unequivocal evidence of disruption and violence. From the hand of the God of order it never could have proceeded in its present state. In every part we see marks of the crimes of men, and of the justice of God. And shall not the living lay this to heart? Surely God is not mocked; that which a man sows he shall reap. He who sows to the flesh shall of it reap destruction; and though the plague of water shall no more destroy the earth, yet an equal if not sorer punishment awaits the world of the ungodly, in the threatened destruction by fire.

In the modern Christian world the issue of seeding is used much when people are asked to seed for huge sums of money (called out to come with it to the pulpits to be blessed by laying on of hands of poured anointing oil or holy water, as they give it). The same blessing they are receiving is also needed by the poor person in the congregation who gets a general blessing (not called to the pulpit but shouted out generally). As

people “seed” the highest of them all at times is elevated to higher levels of leadership in the church while the poor is left to be a follower until their time (when rich) comes. In this case the desire for fellowship of the purpose of the Cross and Pentecost then needs an explanation. “The more money syndrome” is one of the causes of certain coercive measures people use to amass wealth. The drive to amass ever more wealth can become an irrational reflex that detracts from charitable-giving decisions. Some donors may have trouble adjusting their giving upward even when their wealth is rising. The desire for more money comes from many sources. Few financial advisers at even the most sophisticated levels suggest to a client the personal and societal advantages of reducing their net worth, even to those who have more than enough money to live on, retire on, and pass on to their heirs.

9. The poor believer’s need for fellowship amidst the wealthy

The stress in the meaning of sending out of disciples by Jesus is not in listening to Him only but is perhaps on the fellowship. Fellowship can be taken here to mean creation of relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It must be noted with concern that churches may abuse the desire for fellowship by converts and concentrate on wealth prosperity alone. If that becomes the case, the gospel becomes crippled. When mission is conceived and practiced as the schooling of the nations, and pedagogies at the same time favour the intellectual side of schooling, the danger exists that mission will degenerate into didacticism and pedantry (M R Spindler, 1978).

Color bar is another issue that affects the need for fellowship. A critical explanation needs to be made when God choose Israel over Edom (Esau) and Jesus’ story of the Rich young man and Lazarus. These stories seem to be presenting God as one who began with the issue of fellowshiping with some and distancing others. Would this be the cause of the differences people are finding themselves now in yet in one church? This seems to be the reason why women in Africa and particularly Zimbabwe call for equal right which end up happen in churches. The purpose and voice of the church then becomes shadowed by the irregularities inequality in the church.

Of late from the 1980s missionaries came to Zimbabwe particularly Reinhard Bonke with his Christ for Nations crusade. Politics of the time

affected his mission for he was seen to be gathering much people than the politicians did and he was banned. Politicians also desired the masses of Zimbabwe to remain poor so that they can be able to control them and such a trend is now prevailing in the church today. Zimbabwe has seen many local evangelist preachers rising and preaching the gospel of salvation and such celebrated ones are Evangelists Phaniel D Chiweshe, Paul Saungweme, Hilda Bvunzawabaya, and now rising up with great ministry Immanuel Makandiwa. The change of time has seen these preachers oscillate to new levels due to modernity while some remain in their old coats. Most of them have raised ministries with too large groups of people that only the financially sound can prevail to be known personally. A believer may be poor but this state of poverty does not mean they must consistently work in the church and all to recognise them as such.

Even on judging who gets into the Kingdom of heaven or not does not make the poor one obviously vulnerable and the victim. I agree with J Kügler (2012:6) who argues that, the kingdom of God does not belong to those who dedicate to the temple and its cult, but to the poor. God's kingdom does not belong to those who can afford doing philosophy instead of working, but to the poor. By explicitly connecting God and the poor in an unconditioned makarism Jesus implicitly disconnects God and the upper class (emperor, high priests, rich and powerful families). The poor are encouraged to understand themselves in a new way. They are not the worthless and powerless, ignored by God, scum of the earth, but they are those the kingdom of God belongs to. They are no *quantité négligeable* but are in the centre of God's attention in taking over control of his world. This spiritual empowerment of the poor is paralleled by a second message which goes to those who are seeking God. All those honestly seeking God and his kingdom are directed to the poor (Kugler 2011:7). It is proper for the general populace to understand the real position of the scriptures on the poor people.

10. Summary and Conclusion

Following this work it is evident that discipleship needs a balancing from the biblical position. Hence it can be noted with concern that what affects proper discipling of believers is not only on wealth or financial status but also on totem and other human behavioural trends. The writer

advocates for a new hermeneutical solution to this effecting trend in Christendom. Pentecostal churches must take the preaching into practice thereby making relevant the gospel to the daily reader and user of the Bible. A balanced mission of the Gospel must be put into cognisance by the clergy bearing in mind of the Commissioner's purpose for sending them into His field. All classes of people must be cared for equally avoiding social stratification. At the same time the church must be taught to be hardworking for laziness will not enrich them. Ministers of the gospel must be aware of the impact and implications of segregating and discriminating believers. And as R M Gunda (2011) puts it "African reality can be seen as soaked by religion and the role of religion for the further development of African society can hardly be overestimated." It may mean that the classes are equal before God and have a share in His Kingdom.

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IN THE COBRA'S BACK

WHY IT WOULD PERHAPS BE BETTER TO READ THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE *

Joachim Kügler

*Reading the Bible as literature
breaks down any bridge between text and practice – that is true.
It may, however, teach the reader to swim.*

1. Why would anybody put a venomous snake on his head? A short excursion into the history of religion

The cobra is a very dangerous animal. Her poison is lethal. If the cobra bites you, you are doomed to death. Of course, old Egyptians knew that. Still, the Egyptian king¹ is depicted with the uraeus, a cobra in the state of aggression, at his forehead in a vast number of reliefs, statues, and paintings (conf. figure 1 below). Usually, we tend to flee any being which might be dangerous and may even threaten our life, but not so the Egyptian king. Instead of fleeing from the cobra, he's looking to get close to it. He puts the venomous snake on his head. He puts it on his chest and even bears it at the belt of his royal loincloth (view figure 2 below). And the cobra is always depicted in the state of aggression: upright, menacing with flared neck, ready to attack. In many cases, the cobra is not just located at the forehead of the king, but its body covers the whole top of the king's head (conf. figure 2 and 3 below).

* This article is the extended English version of a previously published German text: Joachim KÜGLER, Im Rücken der Kobra. Warum es vielleicht besser wäre, die Bibel als Literatur zu lesen, in: id./ E. Souga Onomo/ S. Feder (Eds.), *Bibel und Praxis. Beiträge des Internationalen Bibel-Symposiums 2009 in Bamberg* (bft 11), Berlin: Lit 2011, pp. 105-132.

¹ I avoid labeling the Egyptian king as "pharaoh", as this expression (deriving from Egyptian *pr* 𓂏, "great house" = palace) was only used as title of the king in Late Egyptian time.

For most of us, wearing a dangerous snake on our head would be quite an uncomfortable idea, but in the case of the king, there is logic in his close relationship to this dangerous animal.

Of course even the king has to soothe the aggressiveness of the dangerous snake with special songs and incense offerings, but neither the snake's poison nor her fire-emitting eyes can really harm the king.

Modern people would perhaps think that the reason for that lies in the fact that the cobra at the forehead of the king is, of course, not alive but just an artificial piece of art. This explanation would, however, be simply too modern and a sheer anachronism. Of course, pieces of art in modern cultures are mostly understood as mere aesthetic signs. Egyptian icons, images, and even Scripture, however, are much more. They have a kind of sacramental character. Egyptian pieces of art and also Egyptian Scripture are performative signs. They not only show something, but do something. Signs create reality; they are not just depicting it or pointing to it. That's why people in old Egypt would not have made a big difference between a depicted cobra and a living one. Both are dangerous. The uraeus at the forehead or at the chest of the king does not just depict the bodily shape of a dangerously powerful being, but it shapes a body in which the powerful being can inhabit.² Therefore an artificial cobra is as dangerous as a natural one. So the reason why the king does not fear the cobra lying on his head cannot be found in the fact that it is only an artificial one. The real reason is that he is on the right side, which means in the cobra's back. The snake is not looking at him, but is facing the same direction as the king. That means that any person who encounters the king gets in front of the dangerous cobra at the same time. Any potential opponent of the king will immediately be intimidated. So it is precisely the dangerous quality of the cobra that gives effective protection to the king and adds to his power. When he bears the cobra at his forehead, the king shares the dangerous power of the cobra. He himself also shows "cobraness" and the message is clear: The king is also mighty, powerful and dangerous! One had better not be his enemy! He is as dangerous as a cobra as he has the power to kill like the cobra. From that perspective, the cobra is only dangerous for those who get in front of the king, but for the king himself the cobra is not dangerous but helpful. It increases his power and protects him. In this logic of using

² As to the Egyptian understanding of signs see: Jan ASSMANN, *Stein und Zeit. Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten*, München 1991, pp. 88-90: 88.

the cobra as an apotropaic means one even can say: the more dangerous the cobra, the better!

This apotropaic use of the cobra had a religious dimension from the beginning.³ Due to her dangerous power, the cobra was regarded as a divine being. Because in the understanding of Egyptian culture and religion, power in itself is something divine, it is clear that an animal which is so powerful that it can destroy life must be a divine phenomenon.⁴

Furthermore the apotropaic symbolism surrounding the cobra has been theologically rationalised since oldest time. Already in the Pyramid Texts⁵ of the Old Kingdom (ca. 2700-2200 BCE) a kind of uraeus theology can be found. The snake is interpreted by the royal theology⁶ as the eye of the sun god, but it can also be related to several (mostly feminine) deities.⁷ The cobra can often be found in combination with a vulture. A very famous example for this combination is the well-known gold mask of Tut-ankh-Amun (conf. figure 3 below). The combination of cobra and vulture refers to the two crown goddesses of Egypt, namely Nekhbet, the crown goddess of Upper Egypt who appears in the shape of a vulture and Uto, the crown goddess of Lower Egypt who appears in cobra shape. The combination of Nekhbet with Uto shows the king as

³ Cf. Manfred LURKER, *Lexikon der Götter und Symbole der alten Ägypter*. Handbuch der mystischen und magischen Welt Ägyptens, Darmstadt 1987, pp. 218 f.; and also: Karl MARTIN, Art. „Uraeus“, in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* VI, col. 864-868.

⁴ It plays no role at all that the power of the cobra is a destructive one. There is no “ethics” for deities in Egyptian religion. The only important point is their power. A powerful being which is harmful and destructive can be as much divine as a friendly and helpful one.

⁵ The Pyramid Texts (PT) are a collection of religious texts written on the inner walls of royal pyramids (esp. 5th-6th dynasty). Classical edition: Kurt SETHE, *Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, 6 vol., Leipzig 1908-1922; reprint: Hildesheim 1969. A small selection in English can be found with Miriam LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Vol. I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, Berkeley 1975, pp. 29-50.

⁶ The expression “royal theology” does not only mean the conception of the divine role of the king (usually labeled as “royal ideology”). I mean the entire Egyptian theology which originated in the context of the Egyptian kingship and was characterized by an understanding of the royal state as *sacramentum salutis*.

⁷ Prominent are Hathor, Bastet and Sakhmet, but also minor deities are connected with the Uraeus, e.g. the friendly goddess Renenutet, who protects harvest and guarantees food supply. Cf. Christine BEINLICH-SEEGER, Art. „Renenutet“, in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* V, col. 232-236). Even Amun, the king of the gods, can embody in cobra shape (cf. Mohammed EL-SAGHIR, *Das Statuenversteck im Luxortempel*, Mainz 1992, pp. 52-54 with fig. 110-113).

incorporation of the two goddesses and as the one who unifies Upper and Lower Egypt through his powerful reign. In this manner, the uraeus is part of a larger performance which shows the king as *ntr nfr* (“visible⁸ God”) who has power over life and death.

We can easily imagine that this “God on earth” impressed his subjects a lot. A literary testimony can be found in the Sinuhe novel, one of the classical texts of Egyptian literature: The novel tells the story of Sinuhe, a high-ranking court official who was involved in a failing coup d’état against Amenemhat I and had to flee. He finds a new and successful life abroad, but is later called back to his home country by the new king (Sesostris I).⁹ Full of fear, Sinuhe encounters the king at court:

When it dawned, very early, they came to summon on me. Ten men came and ten men went to usher me into the palace. My forehead touched the ground between the sphinxes, and the royal children stood in the gateway to meet me. The courtiers who usher through the forecourt set me on the way to the audience-hall. I found his majesty on the great throne in a kiosk of gold. **Stretched out on my belly, I did not know myself before him, while this god greeted me pleasantly. I was like a man seized by darkness. My ba [= kind of soul] was gone, my limbs trembled; my heart was not in my body, I did not know life from death.**¹⁰

Even when friendly, the divine king scares his subject to death, but he is soothed by a song of the king’s children:

Your hands upon the radiance, eternal king,
Jewels of heaven's mistress!
The Gold gives life to your nostrils,
The Lady of Stars enfolds you!
Southcrown fared north, northcrown south,
Joined, united by your majesty's word.
While the Cobra decks your brow,
You deliver the poor from harm.

⁸ The semantic range of *nfr* is very broad. Basically the word means something that is well defined. By being defined a thing is perfect, good, beautiful, and visible. I prefer the translation “visible” as it refers to the main difference between the king and other deities: He is the visible representative of those other gods who cannot be seen – at least not by ordinary Egyptians – but are present through the king.

⁹ The origins of this text are dated to the 20th century BCE (12th dynasty), but the novel was copied again and again in the New Kingdom since it had the status of a classical text. Cf. William K. SIMPSON, Art. „Sinuhe“, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* V, col. 950-955; also Erik HORNING (Ed.), *Gesänge vom Nil. Dichtung am Hofe der Pharaonen*, München 1990, pp. 181-184.

¹⁰ Cf. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* I, p. 231 (**bold** writing and explanation [in brackets] by JK).

Peace to you from Re, Lord of Lands!
Hail to you and the Mistress of All!
Slacken your bow; lay down your arrow,
Give breath to him who gasps for breath!
Give us our good gift on this good day,
Grant us the son of northwind, Bowman born in Egypt!
/.../ He left the land in dread of you!
A face that sees you shall not pale,
Eyes that see you shall not fear!¹¹

Of course the cobra is not the only factor that makes the king so impressive, but it is an important part of the royal appearance which is meant to communicate a clear message: there is a fundamental gap between the king and his subjects. The king is the shepherd and his subjects are his flock. The human shepherds, by being human, are different from their flocks that consists of animals; and in the same way, the king, being a divine shepherd, differs from his flock that consists of mere human beings. As a powerful being, the king belongs to the family of the gods and represents the other powerful members of this family on earth.¹² This is the reason why encountering the king is always an intimidating and extremely scary experience; It means encountering the supreme power of the gods: *Fascinatum et tremendum!*

2. *The Christians' magical Uraeus: how the Bible is used as a fetish*

Already a superficial look at how the Bible is used in World Christianity can teach us that the Bible is often used as something like a Christian uraeus. Like the Egyptian cobra the Holy Scripture is a powerful sacred thing. The majority of global Christianity looks upon the Bible as God's revelation.

¹¹ Cf. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, p. 232 (**bold writing by JK**).

¹² Cf. Joachim KÜGLER, *Willenlose Schafe? Zur Ambivalenz des Bildes vom Guten Hirten*, in: W. H. Ritter/ J. Kügler (Eds.), *Gottesmacht: Religion zwischen Herrschaftsbegründung und Herrschaftskritik* (bft 4), Münster: Lit 2006, pp. 9-34; esp. 11-20.

The Word of God; the Bible is eternal, infallible, and unchangeable and requires unconditional obedience. The sacredness of the Bible, however, does not necessarily lead to people actually reading it.¹³

Sometimes reading the holy text is even the last thing that comes to mind, as its content is not always regarded as the most important aspect when it comes to a sacred text.

This has to do with the fact that a sacred book is looked upon as something that has the power to cause certain effects by itself. Sacred books are something like an embodiment of the divine.

That is why sacred books easily lend themselves to be used as a kind of fetish. This makes the sheer materiality of the book more important than the content of the text of this book. Of course, content and book belong together because if the text of the Bible were not inside the book, the book itself would not be sacred. But on the other hand, it's not necessary to read a sacred book; you can also use it without even opening it. The book is simply a sacred thing with a large magical potential. When the Bible is used as a magic tool, it becomes part of the large and universal tradition of fetish religion.¹⁴ I only want to give some examples on how things work if the Bible is used as fetish.

In Cameroon – as Eric Souga Onomo states – there is a ritual called *faire la Bible* (= “to do the Bible”). This ritual is done in order to get (more or less) supernatural information on important things of daily life. One can use this ritual to learn if your wife is betraying you, or who stole from the common money box, or whose witchcraft is causing your bad luck.¹⁵

¹³ Cf. Joachim KÜGLER, *Der ungelesene Bestseller oder Warum man die Bibel nicht lesen muss*, in: id./ W. H. Ritter (Eds.), *Auf Leben und Tod oder völlig egal. Kritisches und Nachdenkliches zur Rolle der Bibel* (bft 3), Münster: Lit 2005, pp. 123-136.

¹⁴ Cf. Gerardus van der LEEUW, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, Tübingen 41977, pp. 19-27. I do not share, however, van der Leeuw's differentiation between fetish and amulet, as in my point of view this leads to underestimating the significance of amulets. Cf. Thomas STAUBLI, *Amulette ... am roten Faden der Geschichte*, in: *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel*, pp. 2-7; also: Christian HERRMANN/ Thomas STAUBLI (Eds.), *1001 Amulett. Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie*, Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk 2010.

¹⁵ Cf. Joachim KÜGLER, *Hände weg!? Warum man die Bibel nicht lesen sollte ... und warum doch*, Würzburg: Echter 2008, p. 38.

Obvious Vengeyi reports¹⁶ that the Bible in Zimbabwe is often seen as a weapon which not only conquers the power of the devil but any problem, be it poverty, disease, HIV/AIDS or others. Any negative power is overwhelmed by the power of God which is inherent in the Bible.

Some believers sleep with the Bible under their head; and in West Africa people also put the Bible into the beds of small children to protect them against the harmful influence of evil spirits. To sleep on or with the Bible is said to attract sweet dreams and to protect against evil or scary ones.

The Bible is also used for exorcisms during which it is laid on the head of the patient. Some exorcists even “go as far as beating the head of the sick with the Bible”¹⁷.

Many Zimbabwean Pentecostals put the Bible into their car to receive an effective protection against accidents. Many believers will never make a trip with their car without having the Bible in it.

Western readers might tend to mock such magical, superstitious conceptions.¹⁸ Before doing so, they should remember that fetish use of the Bible is also common in the European tradition.

Of course, Catholic liturgy always knew that you can do much more with the Bible than just read it. For example, you can decorate it with gold and diamonds, you can carry it around in ceremonial processions, you can offer incense to it, you can kiss it, you can lay it on the head of somebody or kneel down in front of it.¹⁹

And even beyond liturgy, the Bible is used as a sacred object: if, for example, somebody lays his hand on the Bible to swear on it, it is not important at all whether this person reads or understands the Bible. It is even better not to read it in that context. Imagine what could happen if you opened the Bible and started reading it and came to the Gospel of Matthew where you would be told that swearing should be avoided alto-

¹⁶ Obvious VENGEYI, ‘The Bible equals Gona’. An analysis of the Indigenous Pentecostal Churches of Zimbabwe’s magical conception of the Bible, in this volume pp. 80-107, here: pp. 103-109; see also: Lovemore TOGARASEI, The Use of the Bible in HIV and AIDS Contexts. Case study of some Pentecostal churches in Botswana, in this volume, pp. 19-37, here: p. 21.

¹⁷ VENGEYI, ‘The Bible equals Gona’, p. 89.

¹⁸ Even the word „fetish“ (deriving from portuguese *feitiço* for „witchcraft, sorcery“; cf. LEEUW, *Phänomenologie*, p. 20), was originally meant to be a pejorative. Like van der Leeuw, I also use it, however, in a neutral phenomenological sense.

¹⁹ Cf. KÜGLER, *Der ungelesene Bestseller*, p. 127.

gether (cf. 5:33-37) – that would be quite awkward in the context of a public swearing ceremony.²⁰

Of course, the use of the Bible as a fetish is much more readily found in those denominations that belong to the Protestant family and therefore assign a supreme status to the Bible according to the Lutheran principle of ‘Sola Scriptura.’ A Catholic bus driver in Ecuador, for example, would certainly not put the Bible into his bus. He would prefer to decorate his windscreen with stickers of powerful Madonnas or the Divino Niño (“Divine Child”). His pentecostal boss – and the combination of social status and denomination is not incidental! – would instead prefer to put the Bible into his car as he, as a born again Christian, of course deeply rejects the veneration of Saints as a pagan act. Both of them, however, protect themselves against the unforeseeable risks of the street jungle with the help of a powerful object. The form of this object is different due to their different denominations, but their purpose is the same and therefore the function of the object they use is also the same.

In either case, one would hope that the confidence in the powerful protection these sacred objects are believed to provide would not rule out careful and responsible driving. But this is precisely what is often the case, whether the sacred object is the Bible or the Virgin of Quinche. This occurs because the fetish religion is usually not interested in ethics. Fetish religion belongs to the huge realm of votive religion²¹, which is usually fully concentrated on securing the welfare of the individual person by means of a powerful blessing.

Somebody who uses the Bible as a protective means for driving his car is not very interested in the ethical dimensions of the Christian message, at least not any more than somebody who offers candles in holy places like Lourdes, Fatima or Guadalupe for the sake of his/her ill grandchild. To avoid any misunderstanding, one has to say that of course somebody who uses fetish religion may also try to lead his/her personal life in accordance with the high standards of Christian ethics. I just want to stress that within the context of fetish religion, ethics are not relevant. Even a pious Mafioso can use amulets of powerful Madonnas. And, to use an extreme case, a professional contract killer, knowing that he is doing a dangerous job, might use the Bible as a protective fetish.

²⁰ Cf. KÜGLER, *Hände weg!?*, p. 38.

²¹ For ancient cultures cf. Walter BURKERT, *Antike Mysterien. Funktionen und Gehalt*, München ³1994, p. 19-34.

3. “Even the Bible says ...” – How the Bible is used as the ideological Uraeus of Christianity

The magical use of the Bible as a powerful sacred object clearly shows the same structures as the apotropaic use of the cobra (and other items/images) in Old Egypt. This is what makes it so interesting and attractive for a historical comparative analysis. But the history of religion and theology are not the same and from a theological point of view, the magical use of the Bible is not the most interesting as it is not the most dangerous.

Magic as a simple form of personal religion is usually very closely linked to the individual life of a person; a major potential of violence is only rarely linked to it. As mentioned above, the fetish use of the Bible is usually not normative and in itself ethically neutral.

Much more dangerous is the use of the Bible as uraeus when it is linked to *reading* the Bible and therefore exhibiting “Cobraness” on a *semantic* level. This is the case in a power oriented use of the Bible as canonical text. In Christian communities the Bible is usually both a sacred text as well as a canonical text. This is not the same. While sacredness is linked to magic and cult, canon is linked to corporate identity, delimitation, and organization of power. Canonical texts are primarily powerful instruments of groups and only in second line power tools of individuals. Canonical texts have a specific message which serves to build up collective memory and corporate identity.²² Canon propagates the norms and formative values of the specific community and in this manner influences the thinking and acting of the individual members of the group. That is how canonical texts create a link between individual identity and collective identity. That means that canonical texts always have a clear ethical dimension, which of course is even more true of the biblical canon which contains large parts of outspokenly normative texts.

The origin of the canon is usually connected to the process of constituting collective identity by delimitation. Once a canon is constituted, it continues to exercise this function of delimitation. In the case of the

²² On the realation between canon building and corporate identity cf. Aleida ASSMANN/ Jan ASSMANN (Ed.), *Kanon und Zensur. Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II*, München 1987; Jan ASSMANN, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München 1992, pp. 87-129.

biblical canon, it goes first against “the peoples” in order to constitute the identity of “Israel”²³ and later it goes against the “pagans” (lat.: pagani, i.e. those living at the countryside) to constitute the identity of “Christians” (living in the cities). The biblical canon, like any canon, does not stop its delimitative function once the corporate identity is established, but continues to delimitate – now within the group. The canon originates out of semantic polarization, but it does not finish this polarization. On the contrary, the canon fosters continuous polarization. This is highly precarious as there is a rather straight way from delimitation to elimination.

Denn wir können und müssen eine historische Linie aufzeigen, die von der Scheidung zwischen dem Kanonischen und dem Apokryphen (zunächst nur ein Wertakzent zwischen dem Wesentlichen und dem Unwesentlichen) zur Trennung zwischen Orthodoxie und Häresie, also nicht nur Eigenem und Fremdem, sondern Freund und Feind geführt hat. Mit der Richtschnur des Kanons, nicht mehr nur auf Gegenstände und Sachverhalte, sondern auf Menschen angewandt, hat man immer wieder über Sein und Nichtsein, über Leben und Tod entschieden.²⁴

We can and must point to a historical line which leads from the difference between the canonical and the apocryphal (which in the beginning was only an evaluative accent between the essential and non-essential) to the separation between orthodoxy and heresy, i.e. not only between ‘self’ and ‘other’ but between friend and foe. With the canon as guideline-now not only applied to objects and concepts, but applied to human beings-time and again decisions to be or not to be, decisions about life and death were made.²⁵

It is of course not simply the canon itself which showed this eliminative, lethal power against non-believers, sinners and heretics. Just as the uraeus needs the king to function as an apotropaic sign, the biblical canon also needs a group of users to show off its separating effect. This group of users was rarely the church as a whole. During a major part of church history the canon was in the hands of certain groups within the church. That seems inevitable because the biblical canon, like any canon, needs interpretation. As the text in itself cannot be changed anymore, a canonical text needs interpretation in order not to lose its relevance for

²³ Cf. Klaus BIEBERSTEIN, Grenzen definieren. Israels Ringen um Identität, in: J. Kügler (Ed.), *Impuls oder Hindernis? Mit dem Alten Testament in multireligiöser Gesellschaft*. Beiträge des Internationalen Bibel-Symposiums Bayreuth 27.-29. September 2002 (bft 1), Münster: Lit 2004, pp. 59-72.

²⁴ ASSMANN, *Gedächtnis*, p. 125.

²⁵ English translation by JK.

contemporary life. That's why the biblical canon always required a group of skilled experts which concentrated on the interpretation of the canonical text. With the existence of this group of experts, the canon fosters separation within the community whose identity it is defining. The more the interpretational work of these experts is needed, the more their power grows within the community. The experts for the canonical text have the power of interpretation and are therefore delimited from those who lack that power.

In church history, the line between the powerful interpreters and powerless recipients is often identical with the line between clergy and lay people. There was also a clear gender bias as the status of clergy was strictly reserved for men only (as is still the case in many churches all over the world – also in Africa). Those who have power decide on the interpretation of the formative texts and by doing so gain more power.²⁶ The authorized interpreters carry the Bible as a uraeus at their forehead.

Comparing the use of the Bible by its privileged interpreters with the use of the cobra by the Egyptian king implies that the power of the Bible was only used against others and that the users of this power at the same time avoided being confronted with it themselves. This clearly goes against how the clergy wants to see themselves. Christian theologians and church leaders always understand themselves not only as preaching the gospel but also as listening to the biblical message.

I nevertheless think that the comparison with the cobra is quite convincing as it is a fact that despite the humble self-understanding of the clergy, the Bible was almost always read in a way that legitimized the power of the powerful. Those who read it in a way that might have threatened this power were eliminated. And this even seems inevitable. One has to read the Bible in a very specific way if one wants to legitimize anti-judaism, crusades, slavery, the burning of heretics, racism, and the exploitation of the poor. With love towards the enemy (Mat 5:44) and strict non-violence (Mat 5:39), one cannot easily do that.

²⁶ Therefore the reading of the Bible (and sometimes even owning one) was strictly forbidden to lay persons during long times of church history. Those who referred to the Bible against the clergy often had to pay with their life, as can be seen in the case of Peter Waldo (ca. 1140 CE – ca. 1218 CE). Cf. Peter SEGL, *Auf Leben und Tod! Bibel und Ketzer im Mittelalter*, in: J. Kügler/ W. H. Ritter (Eds.), *Auf Leben und Tod oder völlig egal. Kritisches und Nachdenkliches zur Rolle der Bibel* (bft 3), Münster: Lit 2005, pp. 25-48, esp. 42-46.

How reckless and unscrupulous the Christian experts were in subjugating the biblical texts to their own intentions can easily be seen from what they did for example with Luke 19:27. Ulrich Berner refers to Humbert de Romanis, who was a General of the Dominican order in the 13th century. At the Council of Lyon (1277) he argued against Christian pacifists by pointing out that Jesus himself used violence against his enemies. He quotes: "As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence" (Luke 19:27 NJB), intentionally ignoring that in the text it is not Jesus who speaks these words, but a fictional king within the framework of a parable narrated by Jesus. These 'minor' details had to be left aside in order to win Jesus as the ultimate authority for the use of violence by the church and the Christian state.²⁷

Unfortunately, using the Bible as an ideological uraeus is not merely a historical phenomenon. Taking the Bible as an ideological fetish continues to this day. Of course the users of the cobra have changed. Clergy means something different in African Initiated Churches than it meant in catholic medieval church. Also, the use of the biblical text by Christian politicians in public debates is something quite new, a kind of lay-theology which the medieval church didn't know. In postmodern times everyone is his/her own pope and anyone can take over the role of Grand Inquisitor, if she/he wants to.²⁸ But whoever is wearing the biblical uraeus nowadays, the fundamental apotropaic structure didn't change: take good care that the cobra threatens and frightens only the others and never bites its user. Therefore, the biblical message must be read and interpreted in a highly selective way in order to make sure that in the end the divine word strengthens one's own position and endangers that of the others.

²⁷ Cf. Ulrich BERNER, *Die Bibel in der mittelalterlichen Diskussion um Ketzer und Muslime*, in: J. Kügler/ W. H. Ritter (Eds.), *Auf Leben und Tod oder völlig egal. Kritisches und Nachdenkliches zur Rolle der Bibel* (bFT 3), Münster: Lit 2005, pp. 11-24, esp. 17 f.

²⁸ Since the New Kingdom there is a similar phenomenon in Egypt: the cobra could then be used as an apotropaic amulet (cf. figure 4) by non-royal persons also. Cf. Anna STEVENS, *Domestic religious practices*, UC Los Angeles: UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology 2009, pp. 9.11.17 and 20. [URL: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/7s07628w>].

To give only one example, which is now very well documented²⁹: In the Zimbabwean debate on homosexuality one can often find the wording “even the Bible says”³⁰. The little word “even” is very important and very meaningful in this context. It indicates that those who say that knew what is right and what is wrong before they were reading the Bible. To find a legitimation for one’s own view in the Bible is a second step: Look, even the Bible is against homosexuals! One’s own position (views, concepts, attitudes and values) is usually derived from non-biblical sources like family tradition, education, culture, dominant societal mainstream, political correctness, personal preferences or deformations and so on. The Bible only serves for finding a confirmation of one’s own view later in the Word of God: “I always hated green tomatoes and look, even the Bible ...”

It is hard to escape from this mechanism as long as the Bible is read in a context of power. In times where we are all entitled to use the Bible, this mechanism shapes how all of us read. Christians of any gender, social position and denominational context are doing more or less the same violation to scripture. Gunda shows in a most impressive way that not only the conservative-homomisian party reads the Bible in a highly selective and ideological way, but the gay-rights movement does so as well. The difference is, however, that the gay-friendly interpretation is usually only pro-gay and not anti-heterosexual. That means a gay-friendly reading of the Bible may also be highly ideological but it is self-defensive and not trying to aggressively eliminate other sexual orientations. There simply is no such thing as “heteromisia”.³¹

Obviously the context of power by which every normative reading of the biblical canon as a text of power is determined makes it impossible to avoid the cobra structure. Most Christians, and I include myself explicitly, are not really open for conversion as they are already Christians. That is why we tend to avoid any encounter with the Bible that might pose uncomfortable questions to our life. When we read the Bible as Christians, we usually do that in the firm conviction that we and the Bible belong to the same side, i.e. the right one. Remember, the cobra always looks into the same direction as the king. If we were to encounter the Bible as a text that tells us something new and unexpected, than we

²⁹ Cf. Masiwa Ragies GUNDA, *The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe. A Socio-historical analysis of the political, cultural and Christian arguments in the homosexual public debate with special reference to the use of the Bible (BiAS 3)*, Bamberg: UBP 2010. (<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn/resolver.pl?urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus-2522>).

³⁰ Cf. e.g. GUNDA, *Bible and Homosexuality*, pp. 472 f., Appendix 26.

³¹ Cf. GUNDA, *Bible and Homosexuality*, pp. 154-157; as to the term “homomisia” cf. loc. cit., pp. 64 f.

would have to admit that we, our thinking, and our living are not in full accordance with what the Bible says; we would then also have to admit that perhaps we ourselves belong to the non-believers and sinners. Only religious masochists (or holy people like Francesco of Assisi, Mother Teresa and so on) love to do so. We, as regular people, usually try to avoid that. Why should we seek the danger of learning that we have to change our life completely? That is why we usually admit being criticised by the Bible only in minor things: I should be more polite to my neighbours, I should drink less, I should donate more for the poor, I should pray more intensively and more often, and so on. In fundamental things which are really relevant for our whole existence we don't seek the confrontation, because we know that the biblical cobra is dangerous. If we look at it from the wrong perspective, it might cost us our life; at least the life we are used to. Avoiding that is reasonable, and that is why most of us are using the Bible as a critical norm for others but not for ourselves. The life and behaviour and thinking of others are in contradiction to the Bible and must be given up. Our own practice, our own life, our own thinking, however, need some minor correction and improvement at most.

4. *Stop fearing the snake: reading the Bible as human literature*

If we try to escape from the framework of power with our reading of the Bible, we have to realise that there is no outside of power. The Apostle Paul already knew that,³² and we post-modern people know that again, at least since reading Foucault.

Macht ist für Michel Foucault „keine Substanz“ repressiver Natur, die maliziös an verborgenen Schalthebeln des Bösen sitzt, sondern vielmehr ein spezifischer „Typ von Beziehungen zwischen Individuen“, dessen Dispositive als ein „produktives Netz“ die gesamte Wirklichkeit überziehen. Nach Foucault gibt es kein Außen von Macht, und es kann schon

³² The Apostle conceives liberation not as annihilation of power per se, but as a change of domination. Christians are free as they have changed from the mortal power of sin to the life giving power of God. Cf. Joachim KÜGLER, *Die Würde der Freien. Konzeptionen menschlicher Freiheit bei Paulus und in der Jesustradition*, in: R. Bucher/ O. Fuchs/ J. Kügler (Eds.), *In Würde leben. Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Ehren von Ernst Ludwig Grasmück* (Theologie in Geschichte und Gesellschaft 6), Luzern: Edition Exodus 1998, pp. 35-48: 43-48.

gar keinen herrschaftslosen Diskurs à la Jürgen Habermas geben – einen solchen machtfreien Raum zu postulieren, ist vielmehr selbst wiederum eine Form diskursiven Widerstands im endlosen „Agonismus“ der Mächte und Gewalten: „Politik ist Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln.“³³

For M. Foucault power is not a substance of a repressive, malicious nature, but rather a specific type of relationship between individuals. The circumstances of this relationship span reality in the form of a “productive network.” According to Foucault, there is no outside of power, and particularly no discourse that is free of power as Jürgen Habermas pledged for. Postulating such a space that is free of power is itself a form of discursive resistance in an endless struggle of powers and forces: Politics is the continuation of war with different means.³⁴

If that is true, it does not make sense to even try to escape the influence of power completely. The only thing we can do is to organise a play of checks and balances. In relation to reading the Bible, this would for example mean that we strengthen ourselves, the readers, in a way that allows us to overcome the fear that seduces us to use the power of the Bible against others instead of daring to confront ourselves with it. We need to learn how to avoid the dichotomy of either being the victim of the cobra or being the one who uses it as a power tool to dominate others. We have to learn, so to speak, to look at the cobra from the side.

The first step to learning this approach from the side could for example be to treat the cobra with the attitude we already usually apply to the uraeus of the Egyptian king. None of us would really be frightened if he or she encountered the royal cobra in an Egyptian Museum, an exhibition, or in a photo in a catalogue. We don't get scared, first, because the mythical framework of Egyptian royal theology is no longer the framework of our own life. Therefore we do not fear the Egyptian king and we do not believe that he really is (was) the representative of divine powers. The second reason why we are not frightened is that we have learnt to see this uraeus as a piece of art. We look at it from an aesthetical point of view. We do not conceive this uraeus as a ‘sacramental’ sign which performs the presence of divine powers, but we conceive it as a merely aesthetic sign, which points to a reality outside itself, but of course does

³³ Christian BAUER, Macht und Gnade. Versuch einer Klärung der Begriffe angesichts von Ohnmacht und Gnadenlosigkeit heute, in: R. Bucher/ R. Krockauer (Eds.), Macht und Gnade. Untersuchungen zu einem konstitutiven Spannungsfeld der Pastoral (Werkstatt Theologie 4), Münster: Lit 2005, pp. 45-60: 53.

³⁴ Free English translation by JK.

not perform the presence of this reality. That means that we approach the uraeus with an aesthetically relaxed attitude. We enjoy its beauty; we admire its golden brilliance, the quality of its craft, the elegance of design, we analyse its meaning in the context of old Egyptian royal theology and so on.

I would now like to propose applying this attitude to the Bible as well, not as the only way of reading it, but as a good way of reading it -at least, if we try to avoid the fatal collusion of power and fear which seduces us to use the Bible as ideological uraeus and produce violence, first of the verbal and then of the physical kind.³⁵

Reading the Bible with the same attitude we use for literary-fictional texts (like novels or poems) seems very much preferable to me than the normative reception which shows all the negative effects that the victims of church history have experienced in the past and continue to experience in the World Christianity of today.

- First of all, a literary-fictional reading goes very well with individual reading. All those who are able to read today can take the Bible and read its texts without being bound to the public reading of a lector in the assembly of the community. Of course, reading the Bible publicly will most likely always be a part of Christian service, but in former times when the majority of Christians was illiterate, this was the only way getting to know the biblical text. This is no longer the case today.
- Today, individual readings of the Bible is much more important than it was then. Being alone with the Bible, studying the text was a privilege of biblical scholars in former times. Now, this is something everybody capable of reading can do. Nothing stands between text and reader in private reading, especially not a speaker or a lector. What happens is

³⁵ In the following paragraph I come back to some ideas already uttered some twenty years ago. Cf. Joachim KÜGLER, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte. Literarische, theologische und historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte* (SBB 16), Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk 1988, pp. 44-61. – I meanwhile, however, changed my position slightly, as my view of reading the Bible as literature with the time has become even more positive. One of the reasons for this change of view is that I am speaking here about ordinary reading and not about professional scientific biblical studies, which was the topic in my thesis of 1988. – And of course I am not the first to propose reading the Bible as literature. Cf. e.g. Edgar V. MACKNIGHT, *The Contours and Methods of Literary Criticism*, in: R. A. Spencer (Ed.), *Orientation by Disorientation. Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literary Criticism*, Pittsburgh: Pickwick 1980, pp. 53-69; R. Alan CULPEPPER, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design*, Philadelphia: Fortress 1983.

direct and uncontrolled interaction between text and reader.³⁶ Private readers can do with the text whatever they want (and the text can do with the readers whatever they allow it to do).

It is therefore no coincidence that in the history of reading, the emergence of individual reading and the discovery of the positive value of fiction are so closely linked. In the fourth century BC, Aristotle developed the theory that it is not the task of poets to tell what really happened, but to tell what might have happened. According to his theory, literature is something more philosophical than historiography. Fiction even exceeds history as it reveals universal truth, whilst history sticks to details.³⁷

▪ Another strong point of reading the Bible as literature is that this kind of reading is a “textpetal”³⁸ one. I would like to introduce this new word to express that literary-fictional reading is not moving away from the text to an extra-textual reality. Just on the contrary, this kind of reading will never be done with the text; will permanently care for it in all its details and read it again and again.

That is a huge advantage in the context of theology and church. Contrary to this type of reading, non-fictional reading is usually “textfugal”, meaning it relates the semantics of the text to an extra-textual reality in a quite straightforward fashion and leaves the text behind in order to get to this reality.

An extreme example for such a textfugal, non-fictional reading is a technical manual: you read it to get information on how to run your PC, for example. Once you have read it and know how to manage your machine, the text is no longer of any interest. Once the transfer of the text’s information to the extra-textual reality is complete, you can forget about the text. You can, however, also forget about it if you notice that the manual is providing information for a machine you don’t have. If the transfer to extra-textual reality is not possible, you will also forget about the text.

The textfugal structure of reading the Bible like a manual, i.e. with a non-fictional attitude, can lead to severe conflicts, especially when it is not possible (or at least very difficult) for the reader to relate the informa-

³⁶ Cf. Wolfgang RÖSLER, Die Entdeckung der Fiktionalität in der Antike, *Poetica* 12 (1980) pp. 283-319.

³⁷ Cf. RÖSLER, Entdeckung der Fiktionalität, p. 309.

³⁸ As it is about the relation to a text and not to any centre, I prefer textpetal/ textfugal to centripetal/ centrifugal, which is used by Stierle to express the difference between fictional and non-fictional reading. (Karlheinz STIERLE, Was heißt Rezeption bei fiktionalen Texten, *Poetica* 7 (1975), pp. 345-387: 348-377).

tion provided by biblical texts to extra-textual reality. In western culture, this is the case when it comes to the miracle stories which tell of things that are simply not possible according to our post-enlightenment concept of reality. That is why these stories caused historical criticism and all the debate around that since the 18th century. And even ordinary western readers have problems reading these texts as non-fictional as it is so difficult to decipher the narrated events as facts to an extra-textual reality.³⁹ I can well imagine that many African readers do not have this problem. I am however not sure how long it will be possible to keep African minds free from the influence of western rationalism. Already now, those who are in contact with biblical studies on an academic level will not easily ignore the problem that most of the stories told by the Old Testament as the “history” of Israel are shown to be fiction by modern archaeology.⁴⁰ And what about the poor Africans who study theoretical physics and learn that the universe needed a bit more than six days to come to its present state? Will they be able to read mythical texts like the cosmogonies in Gen 1 f. as non-fictional texts? Do they have to dismiss the biblical texts as their information is simply not “true” on the level of scientific facts? Or are they forced to become schizophrenically double minded persons with a biblical and a scientific cosmology in their heads? One mind for the church, one for the office? Perhaps it might be helpful to at least some Africans to read the Bible as literature. They could then ask for the truth of the texts even if some or even many “facts” are wrong and many stories are just that – stories, not history.

▪ Another point: a textpetal, literary-fictional reading of the Bible never gets done with the text and therefore is very much appropriate for those texts in the Bible which speak in metaphorical terms, like for example

³⁹ Western biblical fundamentalists usually solve the problem by creating a second, fictional reader in their mind. This reader lives in a “biblical” world where all the narrated miracles really happened. More often than not, the consequence is, however, that this fictional reader has nothing to do with the rest of the readers mind. The rest of the reader is not living in this magical biblical world, but (e.g.) cares very much about her/his economic survival, (s)he is firmly convinced that in the world of radical capitalism there are no such things like miracles or even coincidence and of course (s)he will defend her/his property with a gun and not with a prayer.

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Israel FINKELSTEIN/ Neil A. SILBERMAN, *The Bible unearthed. Archaeology's new vision of ancient Israel and the origin of its sacred texts*, New York [et al.]: Simon & Schuster, 2002; EIDEM, *David and Solomon. In search of the Bible's sacred kings and the roots of the Western tradition*, New York [et al.]: Free Press 2006.

the synoptic parables or the Johannine Christology. When the Gospel of John⁴¹ portrays Jesus as the way, truth, life, temple, resurrection, light, bread, shepherd, vine, son, king and so on, these metaphorical expressions can only be understood if one does not read them as facts. Only a literary-fictional, or in this case, poetical approach can derive sense and meaning from this kind of metaphoric language. I think it is no coincidence that in the history of Christian theology, only the expression ‘son’ played a major role. It did so because it was the only one of these metaphors that could be understood in a non-metaphorical way. That the gospel is not speaking about facts when it calls Jesus a lamb, a door or a vine was clear as no human person can be any of those in the sense of a “fact”. But of course a human person can be a son, and so it was easy to ignore the metaphoric character of calling a human person the son of God. Consequently, the whole Christology concentrated on this category of sonship, whilst the other metaphors were left aside. They played absolutely no role in systematic Christology, but were left to spiritual meditation. Reading the fourth gospel as literature and conceiving in this manner the metaphorical character of all its Christological terms⁴² would help us get out of the fruitless discussions nowadays which arose throughout church history about secondary questions like for example if Jesus Christ had only one will or two, or – more recently - what kind of chromosomes Jesus had). A poetic way of reading, which is not bound to so-called facts, but concentrates on what this text wants to say with all these metaphorical terms, will understand the message of the fourth gospel’s metaphorical Christology much more easily.

▪ As I tried to show above, a normative approach to the Bible easily falls into the double structure of fear of power and threatening with power. This double structure almost makes it impossible for the ordinary reader to really confront his/her own life with the biblical message. My impression is that fear is the most important reason why we try to avoid direct confrontation. A literary-fictional approach offers the big

⁴¹ When I use this traditional term I do not want to say anything about the real author of the fourth gospel, who according to my opinion was a later Anonymus, neither identical with John, the son of Zebedee, nor with the Beloved Disciple. Cf. Joachim KÜGLER, *Das Johannesevangelium*, in: M. Ebner/ S. Schreiber (Eds.), *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2008, pp. 208-228.

⁴² Cf. Ruben ZIMMERMANN, *Christologie der Bilder im Johannesevangelium. Die Christopoetik des vierten Evangeliums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Joh 10 (WUNT 171)*, Tübingen 2004, esp. pp. 22-26.

advantage to be perfectly free from fear. If we encounter a literary text, we are interested; we are curious about what it has to say, but we are never frightened. We may perhaps be scared when we read a novel by Stephen King, for example, but that is only a game we play with the text. Usually, we read literary texts with an attitude that Weinrich once called “Heiterkeit der Kunst” (i.e. serenity of art).⁴³ This serenity has a lot to do with the fact that reading literature does not necessarily have consequences for our lives. We know that, and that's why we are relaxed and not frightened in any way. Landwehr, another German scholar in literary sciences, stated that the readers' attitude of serenity is closely linked with a mechanism which can be described as building up a “fictional reader”. In a certain way, we are not ourselves when we read literature or watch a drama at the theatre or at the cinema. Landwehr uses the example of the famous Austrian play “Publikumsbeschimpfung” (1966) by Peter Handke.⁴⁴ People would not go to the theatre to be abused by the persons on stage if they really felt that they were being personally and directly offended. Only masochists would allow themselves to be abused like that; ordinary people would not. The audience of Handke's play, however, does not feel offended as they do not relate the “offending of the audience” on the stage to themselves. They relate it to a fictitious audience which is not present.⁴⁵ If we were to apply this kind of attitude to reading the Bible, we would experience a tremendous change in our reading.

To give just one example: We are used to identifying right away with the addressees of Jesus when we read the Sermon on the Mountain in the gospel of Matthew. We are those to whom Jesus speaks. In the context of literary-fictional reading, we would not immediately proceed to that identification. On the contrary, we would apply the distance of serenity of art and read the text as something which Matthew tells about a narrated, i.e. fictional⁴⁶ Jesus, who speaks to a narrated audience.

⁴³ Cf. Harald WEINRICH, *Literatur für Leser. Essays und Aufsätze zur Literaturwissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1971, pp. 12 ff.

⁴⁴ Peter Handke (* 1942) is an avant-garde Austrian playwright and novelist. His “Publikumsbeschimpfung” was published 1971 in English also: *Offending the Audience/Self-accusation*, London: Methuen.

⁴⁵ Cf. Jürgen LANDWEHR, *Text und Fiktion*, München 1975, pp. 168 f.

⁴⁶ “Fictional” does of course not mean that Jesus did not exist. I just want to express that in fictional reading we are not communicating with the historical Jesus, but with a person narrated by Matthew, who calls this person Jesus and thus links it to the historical Jesus.

Reading the Bible like that quite certainly has the big advantage that any question of power or abuse of power is excluded. The text is primarily an aesthetic phenomenon which does not have anything to do with me directly or my fellow Christians today. There is no need to fear possible consequences of its message, nor is it possible to use the text as a power tool to discipline others.

But exactly this, at the same time, seems to be the weakest point of the literary-fictional approach. When it comes to the question of how to relate the Bible to practice, this approach seems to know only one answer: there is no relation between biblical literature and practice! I would however try to come up with a kind of defence for the literary-fictional approach by pointing to two aspects that are usually overlooked.

- First of all, we already use this kind of approach in relation to many texts in the Bible. A quite good example for that is the vast number of juridical texts found in the Old Testament. Usually, Christian readers do not relate the rules given in these texts to themselves but to a fictitious audience which no longer exists. Of course it is true that in some African churches people try to obey certain rules of the Old Testament which have always been regarded as no longer valid in traditional Christian denominations. But even those African churches will not care for all Old Testament prescriptions. I have for example never heard of Christians, be it in Africa or elsewhere, who understand the rules given for the ashes of the red cow (Num 19:1-10)⁴⁷ as an order given directly to themselves that they would have to comply with. The same is true for many cult rules in the Old Testament. Either they are not read at all by Christian readers or they are read only with the attitude of relaxed distance (in accordance with “Heiterkeit der Kunst”), so that all practical consequences are suspended.

- Furthermore, one has to point out that a literary reading is not a reading without any consequences. As especially Wolfgang Iser stated, reading a text as literature also has its consequences.⁴⁸ These consequences cannot be seen in direct orders given by the text. Only fools would read “Open the window and jump!” in a novel and then do so.

⁴⁷ Ulrike BECHMANN, *Die Asche der roten Kuh (Num 19) oder: die Transformation vom Tod zum Leben*, in: A. Wagner (Ed.), *Abfallmoderne. Zu den Schmutzrändern der Kultur (grazer edition 4)*, Wien: Lit 2010, pp. 133-158.

⁴⁸ Cf. Wolfgang ISER, *The act of reading: a theory of aesthetic response*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1980.

Literature is not a manual for action, not even in those parts that give direct orders or pretend to do so. The consequences of literary-fictional reading would be better understood as special kinds of effects. Iser⁴⁹ explains that literary texts are not vessels containing a certain message, but are half-open structures which lead the reader to a certain kind of “making sense.” Literary texts don't make sense in themselves; it is the reader who in the act of reading makes sense of the text. At first glance, this theory seems to declare the reader to be a dictator who absolutely dominates the text. This, however, is only true for readers who do not really want to read the text. All those who want to read, want to understand, and want to learn something new, will very sensitively observe the appealing structures⁵⁰ of the text which guide the act of reading, i.e. the act of making sense. Through this process of making sense, the attentive reader is very much involved in the world of the text – so much that the reader is transformed by reading. Not only does the reader do something with the text, but the text also does something to its reader. The process of making sense will have its effect on the reader. This effect, however, is something completely different from what happens when we read a normative text and fulfil its orders. The changing effect of literary-fictional reading can hardly be planned. It is individual and open. The text has only as much power as the readers gives to it, and so the text can change its reader only as much as the reader allows himself or herself to be involved in the text's world. Those readers, however, who do so to a greater extent, will not only be involved in a process of making sense. They will, in a second step, also ask what the meaning they have derived from their reading has to do with their lives. By asking this question readers will begin to realize the transformation they were undergoing by reading and will begin to reflect about this. This is – according to Iser – the way from sense (“Sinn”) to meaning (“Bedeutung”). As can be seen, reading the Bible as literature must not cut every link between (biblical) text and (political) practice. It is true; literary-fictional reading breaks down all bridges between text and practice, but it may teach the reader to swim or use boats.

⁴⁹ Cf. Jane TOMPKINS, *Reader-Response Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1980.

⁵⁰ Cf. Wolfgang ISER, *Die Appellstruktur der Texte. Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa*. Konstanz: Univ. 1970.

5. Embracing the cobra – Final theological remarks on Revelation, Bible and “Heiterkeit der Kunst”

Should we really dare to read texts like the Sermon on the Mountain, the creation narrative, and the Decalogue in the same way we read George Orwell’s “1984,” or Hemingway’s “The Old Man and the Sea,” or Dan Brown’s “Da Vinci Code”? Is that allowed for Christians? Many believers would deny this instinctively and would feel that applying the attitude of “serenity of art” to the Bible is equivalent to blasphemy. The tradition of reading the Bible as a manual for daily life, as a normative text, a collection of divine laws and orders, or as a spiritual book for imitating Christ is simply too strong. The normative approach to the Bible will of course be legitimate as long as readers really try to encounter the biblical message, allow themselves to be transformed by this message, and feel motivated to greater and greater love without using the Bible as a power tool against others.

My invitation to read the Bible as literature is really meant as that – an invitation. I don't think that the literary-fictional reading should substitute all other approaches, but I am sure that it might help to fight against the negative consequences which the normative approach to the Bible has had in history and still has until now. However, I don't prefer reading the Bible as literature simply for strategic reasons; it is not just a useful tool in the fight against violence motivated by religion. I appreciate reading the Bible as literature because I think that it is most appropriate to the Christian theology of revelation.

One has to remember that the meaning of the Bible to Christianity is not the same as that of the Quran to Islam. The text of the Bible is not identical with the divine revelation. God does not reveal a text; God reveals himself. God did that in the history of Israel, in Jesus Christ, and does so through his people today. The status of the Bible is that of the supreme testimony to revelation, but not that of revelation itself. That is why it is not heresy to acknowledge the human character of the biblical texts. I know that the Second Vatican Council is not a binding authority for other denominations, but as a Catholic I feel free to recommend its “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (*Dei Verbum*) as a possible source of theological insight to theologians and believers beyond the denominational borders of the Roman Church. The Constitution e.g. says:

In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvellous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature." For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men. (DV 13)⁵¹

That means that the council sees a structural equivalence between incarnation of the one eternal Word and the divine words becoming human text. Therefore it is neither heresy to call Jesus a human being, as – according to oldest Christian tradition – he is truly human and truly divine the same time, nor can it be a heresy to call the biblical texts truly human texts. And being human texts, they of course can be read as human literature.

This is true even for those texts of the Bible that don't want to be fictional texts. The best examples are perhaps the original letters of St Paul (i.e. Romans, 1 & 2 Cor., Gal., Phil., 1 Thess., Philemon), which were never meant to be literature. They were written by the Apostle as a kind of practical theology clearly related to a quite specific pastoral situation. Therefore they were clearly written as non-fictional texts. But already in earliest time, the Christian church was aware of the fact that these texts were much more than that. That is why one never stopped reading them although the Apostle was already dead and the critical situation which he wanted to manage with his writings had also stopped to exist. On the contrary, as they were continually read, they were copied again and again, and copies were handed over to Christian communities and the letters of St Paul were collected, forming the core of what we later called the New Testament. This attitude towards the letters of St Paul clearly showed that the Christian communities at the end of the first century A.D. didn't think that these letters were just non-fictional texts meant to solve a specific problem. If the Pauline letters would have been just that, one would have forgotten about them after the problem was solved. Instead they were treated as theological literature, not bound to a specific Pastoral situation, but applicable to problems and questions of Christian life in general. That means that, already at the end of the first century,

⁵¹ Cited from the official english version on www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

these letters were read as literature. We can speak of a discreet literary-fictional reading of the Pauline letters. It was discreet because one didn't call them literature or fiction; one simply treated them like that. And there was almost no alternative.

Those who say that they are nowadays reading the Pauline letters as non-fictional texts are deceiving themselves a bit. They are not reading Paul's letters in their entirety but selectively. They concentrate on those texts which can be quite directly applied to their own situation, while other texts are treated as if they did not exist.

For example, one of the main points treated in the letter to the Galatians is the religious status of circumcision. This discussion is nowadays usually read by Christians with the attitude of serenity of art. For female readers, Paul's phallogentric discussion does not apply to their own bodies and for many Christian men, circumcision is not an important topic because it would never occur to them to get circumcised. Other Christian men who are circumcised for cultural or hygienic reasons (as it is the case e.g. in the US and many African countries) read the discussion of Paul but don't feel bothered by it. They can do so because they look upon their own circumcision as something which is religiously irrelevant. So they do not relate Paul's arguments against circumcision to their own circumcision. They do not understand it as denying the salvific effect of Jesus' death. That means that they behave like the audience in the theatre when Handke's *Offending the Audience* is performed: the audience that is being offended is not "us". In the same way, circumcised readers of today form a fictitious ego when reading Galatians: the circumcision which Paul condemns so heavily is not mine!

The problem is that there is no room for a positive value of fiction in the attitude of reading the Pauline letters as non-fictional text. And therefore those texts that cannot be applied directly to the reader's situation are very much ignored. On the contrary, a literary-fictional reading in the attitude of "serenity of art" could even allow us to read those texts and simply ask what they mean. In a second step, one could ask: What happens to me when I read these texts, what are their effects on me? In the case of the phallogentric discussion in Galatians, a non-normative approach could even give female readers a chance to profit from this discussion. This is also true for the misogynous texts in the Book Ben Sira

(Ecclesiasticus)⁵². If they are not read as a manual on how to despise women, but as poetry on gender roles, then perhaps even feminist readers might not be forced to simply reject these texts. Reading them as poetry on gender conflicts might open a chance to construct a positive meaning of even these highly problematic texts.⁵³

The example of Ben Sira shows that a non-normative, literary-fictional reading in the attitude of “serenity of art” does not necessarily have to dismiss the authority of biblical text. The authority of the text, however, is no longer that of a law. It is the authority of a counterpart of the reader, who can transform the reader as much as the reader allows. The encounter of text and reader in this model is an encounter of equal partners. This equality is a problem for theological conceptualizations that regard the Bible as divine and the reader as purely human. Ottmar Fuchs and others, however, have pointed out that this perception of the reader is a denigration of baptism. If baptism is taken seriously, one has to regard the reader as well as the biblical text as being under the influence of the Holy Spirit. That means that an inspired reader encounters an inspired text. This basic equality seems much better expressed in a literary-fictional approach than in other approaches.

As a last argument to theologically legitimise a non-normative reading of the Bible I would like to turn attention to the fact that fictionality seems especially adequate to the biblical concepts of soteriology. Both parts of the Bible, Old and New Testament, favour soteriological concepts that are based on the tension between ALREADY NOW and NOT YET in the majority of their texts. The biblical God is not a thing of this world, but has to do with this world. S/He reveals himself in a human way but transcends all human ideas, gender roles, and expectations at the same time. God is, in the end, pure and absolutely secret, a *mysterium stricte dictum*. Getting in contact with this *mysterium* means experiencing something completely new, completely unknown, and perfectly different. As a

⁵² The book is not part of the Hebrew Bible. Being, however, part of the Greek Old Testament (LXX), it was accepted as part of the Christian biblical canon by Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and most Oriental Orthodox churches. Most Protestant denominations label it as “deuterocanonical”. Despite this lower status, Ben Sira always had a huge influence on the conception of gender roles in protestant churches also.

⁵³ This is the way of reading proposed by Ursula RAPP, *Weisheitsbeziehung und Geschlechterverhältnis. Untersuchungen zu Texten über Frauen und Ehe im Buch Jesus Sirach*, unpublished habilitation thesis, Bamberg University 2010/2011.

consequence of this supreme divine quality, the salvation God grants to his/her people is nothing that can ever fully be realized in the present world, nor is it something that belongs only to the future or only to heaven. It has its proper place in between: between heaven and earth, between now and then. This soteriological IN BETWEEN which the Bible presents seems much better conceived by a literary approach, as the way in which fiction constructs reality is very much similar to this tension between the known reality and the unknown.

As Wolfgang Iser made clear, fictional texts do not depict reality but create reality. In doing so, they, however, have to use elements of the commonly known reality. Even the weirdest fantasy novel has to work with pieces of the old, well-known world. Even things which are perfectly new and never existed before combine fragments of the existing world in themselves. What is new is the combination, not the elements. This can well be exemplified by the unicorn, which combines the well-known body of a horse with the well-known horn of other animals. What is new is the combination of a horn with a horse, as well as that the unicorn has only one horn and not two like other animals, such as cows or rams.

The repertoire from which fiction selects the elements to create a new world contains all kind of things which are part of the extra-textual world: previous texts, social norms, religious traditions, historical concepts, technical achievements- in short the whole socio-cultural context from which the specific text originates.⁵⁴ It is, however important to realize that the selected elements are not simply depicted or enacted. They are taken from a specific cultural context and become part of a new game with its own rules. They of course still refer to the context they were taken from, but they are no longer part of this context. In the case of specific normative concepts, the consequence is that they are no longer norms in action, but narrated ideas that were formerly (or: extra-textually) known as norms. They lose their original, normative function and enter into new combinations and achieve new, intra-textual functions. Within the text they are part of a new game, with new rules, new combinations, but of course the reader knows where they come from and what their original normative function and meaning was. So, normative concepts (like all the elements of the text's repertoire) oscillate between old and new. Deriving from an old world, they share in creating a new one. That is why they have a kind of double identity: Any element

⁵⁴ Cf. ISER, *Akt des Lesens*, p. 115.

of the repertoire is neither exclusively identical with its extra-textual origin nor exclusively identical with its new literary use.⁵⁵

Although literature uses elements of the extra-textually known world, its prime interest is not the status quo. The things and ideas we are used to are just a means to construct something new, not yet existing. This new world or new state of mind cannot be expressed directly as the text itself is not part of this new world. Literature cannot depict something absolutely new, but it can try to get close to it by showing the status quo as something relative that can be overcome. By working with elements of the old world and pointing to a new one, literature is suspended between past and future. Its presence is performative; a happening which leads the reader to the insight that the Well-Known is overcome and no longer intended and the New is intended but not yet deciphered.⁵⁶

The basic structure of fiction is the tension between new and old and literature's truth consists in the capacity to talk about something which does not yet exist. Insofar, the truth structure of fiction is highly adequate to biblical soteriology, which is primarily eschatological in the Old and the New Testament. The tension between ALREADY NOW and NOT YET is one of its prime characteristics. God's redeeming self-revelation can only be conceived in the tension between the Old that is already overcome and the New that is not yet achieved. That means there is a theological affinity between the biblical soteriology and the truth structure of fiction. It is definitely no coincidence that Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God – already here and not yet fully realised – in parables, i.e. in a clearly fictional genre.

To sum up, I would like to say that from my theological point of view, there is no reason to condemn a literary-fictional approach to the Bible. It is not only a good alternative to the common use of the Bible as a power tool to threaten others, but it is also highly adequate to the truth structure of soteriology in the Bible and to the role of the Bible in the act of God's self-revelation. As readers who are called to salvation by God, we need not be afraid of the powerful Bible-cobra. We can come closer to it without fear, admire its beauty, listen to its message, feel free to accept it as an authority in which we trust, and we may even be capable of not using it against others.

⁵⁵ Cf. ISER, loc. cit., p. 116.

⁵⁶ Cf. ISER, loc. cit., p. 117.

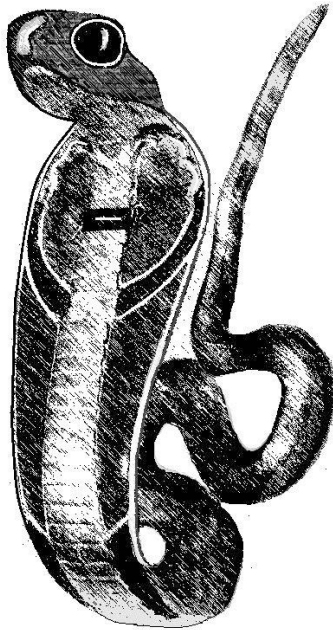
The question at stake here is whether our baptism is just a ticket to church membership or whether it really means something in our relation to God and His Christ. If through faith and baptism we really become Son of God in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:26-29), then we can say: God empowered us to read the Bible as friends, not as slaves; as inspired readers we can embrace the cobra, and who knows, perhaps it will transform into something as powerful and friendly as the Goddess Renenutet, who was venerated by old Egyptian people as a source of nourishment, fertility and protection (cf. figure 5).

*Then He said to me,
“Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.”
So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.
(Ezekiel 3:3)*

Illustrations

Figure 1 | Golden Uraeus of King Sesostri II.

Head snake, Egyptian Museum Cairo (JE 46694), Gold, Lapis lazuli et al.; H. 6,7 cm; Br. 3 cm; Middle Kingdom, 12th dynasty, 19th Century BCE; Reign of Sesostri II. Computer graphics by JK. Cf. Mohamed SALEH, *Die Hauptwerke aus dem Ägyptischen Museum Kairo*, Mainz 1986, Figure 108.



Originally the uraeus was only fixed to the royal Nemes- head scarf; from the Middle Kingdom (ca. 20th-18th century BCE) on however, it was combined with all kind of crowns. Later, the cobra is even used in the vulture-crown of the royal wife. Cf. the well designed overview given by: Kazimierz MICHALOWSKI et al., *Die ägyptische Kunst (Ars Antiqua VI.3)*, Freiburg: Herder ³2000, p. 577. A scientific introduction is offered in: Christine STRAUSS, Art. „Kronen“, in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie III*, col. 811-816.

Figure 2 | King Thutmosis III. Offering to the Holy Bark of Amen.

Wall relief in king Hatshepsut's "House-of-million-years" in Deir el Bahari (Middle Colonnade, southern wall), New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, 15th century BCE, reign of Hatshepsut. Computer graphics (reducing details) by JK based on: Edouard NAVILLE, *The Temple of Deir el Bahari, Part III*, London 1898; tab. LXXXII.⁵⁷



The king is wearing several cobras:
one at the blue Kheperesh-crown (< 1),

two on the royal pectoral (< 2) where the snakes protect his heart which is placed between them.

Two more cobras can be seen on the pendant of the royal loincloth (< 3).

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, I provided incorrect information in: J. KÜGLER, Im Rücken der Kobra. Warum es vielleicht besser wäre, die Bibel als Literatur zu lesen, in: J. Kügler/ E. Souga Onomo/ S. Feder (Eds.), *Bibel und Praxis. Beiträge des Internationalen Bibel-Symposiums 2009 in Bamberg (bfT 11)*, Berlin 2011, 105-132: 129. The King depicted is not Thutmosis II. and the plate in Naville's edition on which I based my computer graphics is not LXXII. I take the chance to give the correct information here and to apologise for the errors that have occurred.

Figure 3 | Golden mask of Tutankhamen (detail)

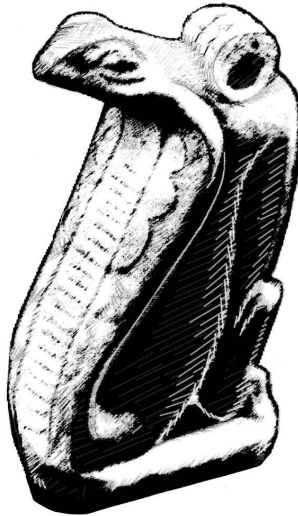
Golden mask, Egyptian Museum Cairo (JE 60672), Gold, Lapis lazuli et al.; H. 54 cm; Br. 39,3 cm; New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, 14th century BCE, reign of Tutankhamen. Computer graphics by JK. Cf. Jürgen SETTGAST (Ed.), *Tutanhamun. Ausstellungskatalog*, Mainz: Zabern 1980, pp. 162 f. with fig. 53.



The combination of vulture and cobra refers to the goddesses Nekhbet and Uto, the personifications of the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. The king is thus presented as “Lord of both lands”. According to the dual unity of Egypt, Upper and Lower Egypt do not melt but form a duality which has to be reunited by the reign of every Egyptian king. According to the Egyptian conception of state, unity has to be produced and achieved over and over. Unity – as well as other cultural achievements – is not something that is simply given. It has to be achieved.

Figure 4 | Uraeus Amulet

Uraeus amulet with eyelet, excavation depot Alexandria (SCA 552), Faience; H. 4,2 cm; B. 2,2 cm; T. 1,1 cm; Late Egyptian time. Computer graphics by JK. Cf. Franck GODDIO/ Manfred CLAUSS (Eds.), *Ägyptens versunkene Schätze, mit Fotografien von Christoph Gerigk, München u. a. 2006*, p. 187 (and p. 443) fig. 376; Note also the very similar pieces SCA 555 (loc. cit., p. 187 and p. 440, fig. 338) and SCA 557 (loc. cit., p. 443, fig. 377).



A broad transfer of royal theology to common people can be noticed in the time of Late Egypt. The royal uraeus is not among the most popular amulet motifs, but it can often be found on scarabs and sealing amulets. Uraeus amulets were found in Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Northern Africa, and Sardinia and at the southern and eastern coasts of Spain. Cf. Christian HERRMANN, *Ägyptische Amulette und Amulettmodel*, in: Id./ Th. Staubli (Eds.), *1001 Amulett. Altägyptischer Zauber, monotheistische Talismane, säkulare Magie*, Stuttgart 2010, pp. 14-160, here: 110-113 (with lots of illustrations!). Herrmann states that the frequency of uraeus amulets in Israel/Palestine is less than 1 % (loc. cit. p. 110). The comparative number for Isis lactans e.g. is 2,4 % (cf. loc. cit. p. 30), 4,4 % for Sakhmet(cf. loc. cit., p. 39).

Figure 5 | Shrine for Renenutet

Shrine for the goddess Renenutet, New Kingdom, found at Edfu; lost today, but still documented by DESCRIPTION DE L'EGYPTE, publiée par les ordres de Napoléon Bonaparte, Paris 1809-1830 (reprint: Köln: Taschen 1994), p. 516, tab. 47, fig. 8.



Renenutet was venerated as the “Goddess of the Double Granary” and the “Lady of Fertile Fields”, who nourishes with good tidings and gives food in abundance. From the New Kingdom on, Renenutet was of great relevance in popular religion. Under her greek Name of (Th)ermuthis she even found her way to Jewish historiography. Flavius Josephus tells about the princess, who saved Moses: Θέρμουθις ἦν θυγάτηρ τοῦ βασιλέως (Ant. 2,224; cf. 2,225.227.228.232.236.243). Later, Christian legends also know about Thermutis. Cf. BEINLICH-SEEGER, Art. „Renenutet“, col. 232.

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

This volume has been made possible through the contributions of the following established and budding scholars. There is a dominant presence for Zimbabwean scholars based in Africa and Europe. This has been complemented by the presence of Nigerian, Ugandan and German scholars who have taken a keen interest in African biblical studies.

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This volume is the second edition (expanded and revised) of BiAS 4. The contributions which already appeared in the first edition were revised and updated. The new edition also offers two articles more than the first one.

Following the Conference on Bible and Practice held in Bamberg 2009, Germany the thought of dedicating a volume to the same theme but with special focus on Africa was born. The articles in this volume are focused on shedding more light on the relationship between the Bible and Christian practices in African communities, African Churches and Christians. A wide range of historical and theological issues are raised throughout this volume. The reader will realise that obviously there is much more than one bridge from text to practise and at the end of the day one can even ask if the Bible suits as a manual for Christian life at all.

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