

The church as a healing/Ecumenical
institution

PART 1

Environmental ministry
and changing images of
the church

The church as a healing/liberating institution

To understand current ecclesiological developments in the AICs participating in the AAEC's earthkeeping programmes one needs to look at the development of AIC images of the church since the inception of these movements in Zimbabwe early this century. First, a background of *Western denominationalism* and poor *theological training* within the AICs has led to a somewhat fragmented, superficial ecclesiology, lacking in accurate, dogmatic formulation and historical perspective on the development of the church through the ages (Daneel 1987:269f). Second, African culture and social structures naturally left their mark on AIC ecclesiology. Customary law and kinship codes gave rise to legalistic trends, so that many Independents saw their churches primarily as new '*tribal*' communities with essentially modified codes of conduct. Sundkler (1961:310-323) observed a growing tendency among South African Independents to turn religious groups into new 'ecclesiastic tribes'. Oosthuizen (1968:82) in his turn judged that ethnicity had corrupted the AIC perception of the church: 'The whole tribe is the church without any idea of personal decision. Its basis is purely ethnic, ie based on blood relationship.'

I argue, however, that if tribalism dominates to the extent suggested by Sundkler and Oosthuizen, there could be no question of a Christian ecclesiology among the Zionist and 'messianic' churches, and these movements would have turned into modern versions of tribal religion. The qualifications 'family churches' and 'tribal churches' are misleading insofar as they do not adequately recognise the Independents' insistence on a *new Christian identity* for their institutions and the *transformation of traditional beliefs, social structures and customs* which marks their enacted theology. My argument against one-sided generalisations of this kind is as follows: 'We do not deny that the old tribal

system conditions and even subtly dominates in certain important areas within the (Independent) church, but this does not justify unqualified generalisations which assume that adaptation and indigenisation (in AIC ecclesiology) imply no more than a simplistic reversion to the old order' (Daneel 1987:271).

There can be little doubt that the prophetic movements – numerically the biggest component of all southern African AICs and of AAEC membership – are popularly perceived as *healing/liberating institutions*. This perception relates closely to the holism of African religions, in which both liberation (ie expulsion of destructive and unwanted powers) and healing (ie restoring wellbeing) feature prominently. It also evolves from prophetic concern with individual and societal maladies in the African context, in the form of a distinctly African interpretation of the healing ministry of the biblical Christ – an interpretation which, as we shall see, is reflected in the establishment and periodic redefinition of healing colonies at prophetic church headquarters.

I will now trace briefly the development of healing liberation, a major theme in AIC ecclesiology, in relation to changing needs and historical contexts in Zimbabwe. This will help to clarify the subsequent discussion of the AICs' perception of the attributes of an earthkeeping church.

1.1 Historical perspectives

1.1.1 Faith-healing 'hospitals': a major attraction

The first phase of rapid AIC growth in Zimbabwe, from the 1930s to the 1960s, was characterised by a process of *religiocultural liberation*. This process (Daneel 1998:36–42) involved emancipation from the tutelage of mission churches, a re-evaluation of indigenous culture and religion in AIC worship and ceremonial life, and the introduction of faith-healing practices which offered Christian therapeutic solutions to sickness and affliction as experienced in terms of African worldviews. It was during this phase that the image of prophetic churches as 'hospitals' emerged. The AICs' replacement of both traditional African healers (*nganga*) and mission church doctors by prophetic faith-healers represented a significant breakthrough at the rural grassroots by instilling the perception of the church as a healing institution. The centrality of this image is illustrated by the fact that faith-healing became their most potent recruit-

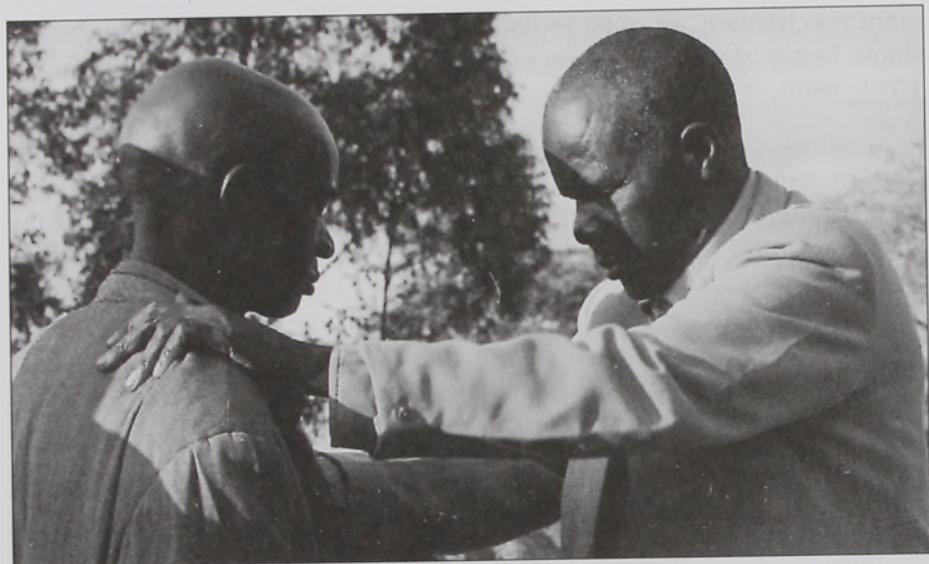


Plate 1 The late Bishop Samuel Mutendi, founder of the ZCC in Zimbabwe, laying hands on a patient in Zion City, Bikita, 1965 (bottom)



ment mechanism, an outstanding attraction which, more than any other single factor, drew thousands of people into the prophetic fold (Daneel 1974:186f).

Healing colonies were established at the 'holy cities' of the larger AICs, such as Mutendi's Zion City, Johane Maranke's Apostolic headquarters and the 'Jeruselems' of influential *Ndaza* Zionist leaders like Bishops David Masuka, Andreas Shoko and Moses Makamba. In the 1960s Mutendi's ZCC (Zion Christian Church) 'hospital' comprised some 200 huts for patients from all over the country. Here, as in the other colonies, the principal leader – the 'man of God' – was the main healer, supported by a number of subordinate prophetic healers, men and women who practised their healing ministry throughout the day.

This ministry consisted in diagnosing illness or misfortune, with the prophet representing the revelatory and protective powers of the Holy Spirit. Healers took into account the traditional causation of illness, be it wizardry, vengeful *ngozi* spirits seeking retribution, displeased ancestral spirits, afflicting demonic spirits or some other spirit agent operating in collusion with one or more living enemies of the patient. Once diagnosed, the afflicting power would be exorcised or neutralised through a host of ritual ceremonies, including water purification, tying with holy cords, laying on of hands, burning of holy papers and prodding with holy staves – all symbolically illustrating the protective and liberating powers of God. Healer-prophets operated both in the privacy of the 'hospital' and during church services.

Thus the entire church was kept constantly aware of its healing ministry, not only by the ever-present healer-prophets at services, but also by the testimony sermons of healed patients reinforcing belief in a compassionate, responsive God.

The main image of the prophetic church that arose during this period was that of a safe *refuge* in a troubled world: a place where a strong, communal sense of protection and belonging prevailed, where evil was overcome and health restored both in individual lives and in society at large. The destroyer of human life – qualified as 'satan' or 'demon', but personified by the traditionally familiar and threatening images of *muroyi* (witch or sorcerer), hating enemy, afflicting spirit, etc – was experienced as being vanquished by the superior, liberating power of God. Despite the preaching of eternal life in heaven, the emphasis was

Plate 2 Bishop Krinos Kuudzerema of the Zion Apostolic Church lays hands on and prays for mother and child at Ndaza 'Jerusalem', Gutu 1965



Plate 3 Blind prophetess Mai Febi, of the African Apostolic Church of Johana Maranke, sprinkles children and new-born babies with holy water as protection against evil forces. At Mfararikwa, Maranke, 1965



decidedly on ecclesiastic mediation of tangible salvation here and now. In a very real sense salvation meant pastoral and psychological liberation from oppressive evil at African Mount Zions or Jerusalems. Here the men or women of God, the founders of churches, together with their bands of faith-healers, embodied for their followers a truly inculturated incarnation of Christ the healer – a visible and understandable manifestation of a caring divine power.

In the struggle against evil these churches developed ritual ceremonies in which the ideal of cleansing and holiness became prominent. The church community could only worship and partake of the sacraments in a state of preparedness and forgiveness in the presence of a holy God. Thus elaborate systems of *public confession of sins* for all baptisands and communicants came into being. These systems enabled prophetic healers to establish strict control over sacramental participation, all in the name of the revealing and cleansing powers of the Holy Spirit. As a result the church was envisaged as a holy community of believers in a perpetual state of being healed and cleansed by the Spirit of God, and as a holy place – be it a mountain, church building or open-air meeting place – where the pervasive presence of God the Father, Mwari the Creator and Christ the protector and healer could be felt.

1.1.2 The church as sociopolitical healer/liberator

Because of African holism the interpretation of a prophetic healing ministry was inevitably very wide. Illness was viewed not only as individual psychosomatic afflictions but also as sociopolitical conflicts and crises which had to be resolved in terms of a very real – if somewhat vague in theological definition – perception of God's expanding kingdom. Thus in AIC ecclesiology the prophetic churches' ministry of healing quite naturally came to be extended to burning social and political issues.

As indicated in chapter 2 of volume 1 (Daneel 1998:38–40), this shift of focus was already latently present in some of the prophetic movements at an early stage. Reference was made, for instance, to Bishop Mutendi's ZCC providing disgruntled chiefs with a *halfway house* between the opposing and stressful demands of the colonial local government and radical African nationalist factions (Daneel 1998:40). This kind of tribal political involvement gave rise to serious clashes between AIC leaders and colonial government, as evidenced by Bishop Mutendi's

prominent role in the Rozvi-Duma boundary dispute in 1965. Clashes with the colonial authorities over land issues and attempts to 'heal' related societal conflicts stimulated the enactment and verbalisation of AIC liberation theologies, in which principal prophetic leaders started featuring as Moses figures to help solve the problems caused by discriminatory land allocation, or started preaching a scripturally based legitimisation of black nationalist political aspirations (Daneel 1998:40–41).

During the *chimurenga* years (1965–1980) the latent image of the prophetic church as a sociopolitical healer/liberator came to the fore quite dramatically as the AICs were drawn into large-scale, if secret, participation in the struggle. Increasingly the prophetic healers and their followers were called upon to help 'heal' the land allocation problem by supporting the guerrilla forces in their struggle against what were perceived as alien and intruding land usurpers. Although prophets still devoted attention to threatening mystical forces in individual lives, as described above, the focus had shifted to the fight against a twofold enemy: first, the white oppressors, who had to be pressurised into surrendering land rights and political domination; and second, the enemy within – black collaborators who backed the white regime and army and therefore threatened unity of purpose and action in the rural resistance movement.

The diagnostic and therapeutic thrust of many prophets had a direct impact on guerrilla field strategy, for the Holy Spirit was felt to respond positively to black demands in the liberation struggle. As a kind of 'land guardian' the warring Holy Spirit was considered to be inspiring and directing guerrilla activity, at the same time curbing internal destructive powers to preserve life in a torn society as in the activities of Bishop-prophet Musariri (Daneel 1998:66–71). Here, too, the outstanding characteristic of the Spirit-type churches as confessing and cleansing communities acquired new significance. During secret nocturnal *pungwe* meetings prophetic elicitation of confessions from suspects became instrumental in determining both their guilt or innocence of 'wizardry' and the nature of their opposition or loyalty to the cause. Consequently the procedures for cleansing and motivating the church in spiritual and related matters were extended to a war-torn society – providing mystical sanction in the name of the Holy Spirit for cleansing the community of unwanted elements, preserving life against unwarranted penalties by the guerillas, and generally contributing to a united stand by peasants and freedom fighters against a common enemy.

Plate 4 Bishop Mutendi addresses Zionist-affiliated chiefs during a church service at Zion City, at a time in the sixties when the Rozoi-Duma boundary dispute came to a head

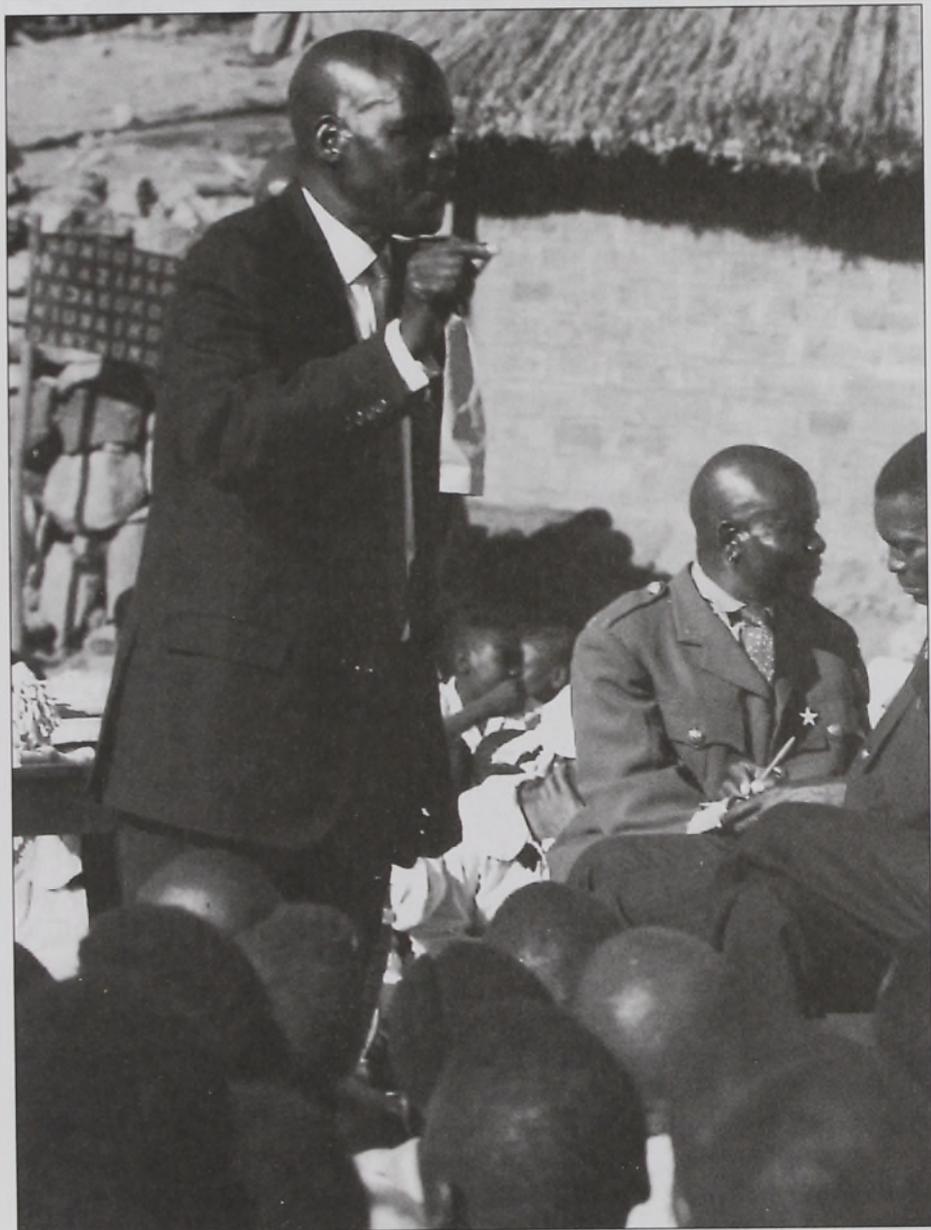
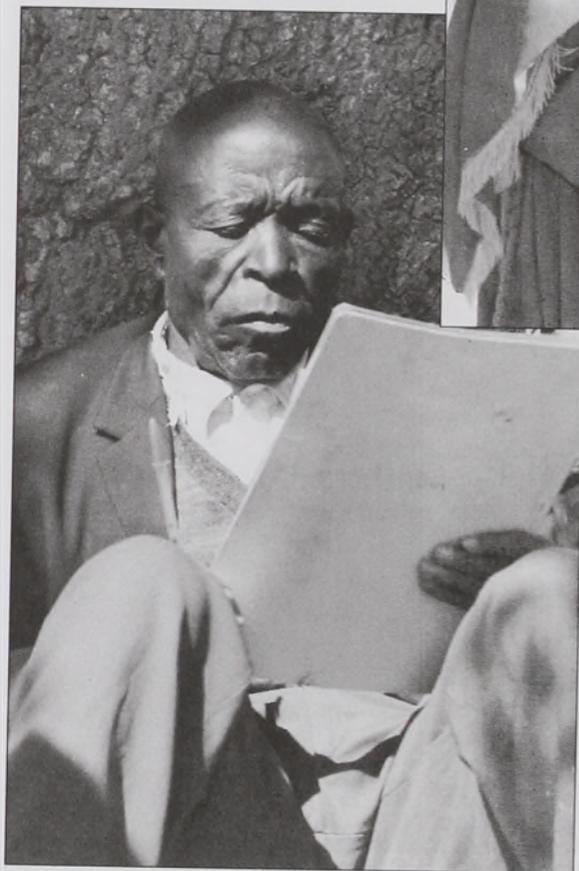
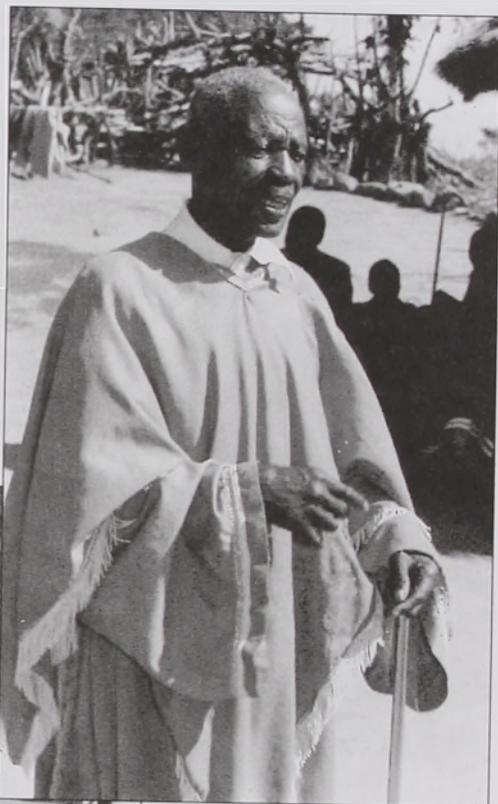


Plate 5 The late Bishops Musariri of the Zion in Patmos Church (top) and Forridge of the ZCC (offshoot of Mutandi's church) (bottom) – two prophetic leaders of the Gutu district, known for their active support of guerrilla fighters during the *chimurenga* struggle



Church development was certainly not a homogeneous process during the *chimurenga* years. Instances are known of Zionist church buildings being burnt down by guerrillas who considered the church leaders concerned to be uncooperative or defiant. Yet in many cases prophetic church headquarters acquired a new dimension of offering protection and relative safety in life-endangering circumstances. God's presence at the African Mount Zions and Jerusalems translated into provision of food, faith-healing services, moral support through prayer or Spirit-inspired revelatory sessions, caring for wounded or mentally disturbed fighters and the like, enabling both harassed bush fighters and suspect or threatened members of society to survive and find some meaning in life in the midst of suffering and deprivation. By identifying with people traumatised by war, the 'men and women of God' in their holy cities contributed actively to the political struggle. On the one hand, their 'war pneumatology' gave them a significant, if at times only advisory or indirect, role in military operations. In this way they often unwittingly upheld the image of the church as the church militant and the church triumphant in the midst of adversity. They became latter-day African Moses figures who defied the colonial enemy by repeatedly leading their followers, the church itself, through 'Red Sea' situations. On the other hand, they mirrored the life of a suffering Christ, giving substance to the perception of Christian discipleship in terms of a *church of the cross*, as their earnings, livestock and crop yields were consumed by ever-present bush fighters and displaced people (cf eg the impact of *chimurenga* on Bishop Musariri's Zion in Patmos, Daneel 1998:66-67), and as their participation in the struggle subjected them to the same risks, fears and sufferings as those under arms. Embattled and scarred by the ravages of war, the black 'holy cities' nevertheless stood out in the countryside – where most of the battles were waged – as signposts of hope: hope in complete deliverance from political bondage, and hope in a new dispensation where 'salvation' meant land ownership, economic progress and improved standards of living.

1.1.3 The church as deliverer from poverty and agent of socioeconomic progress

The establishment of the ecumenical AIC movement *Fambidzano* in the early 1970s brought radical changes for its member churches. With

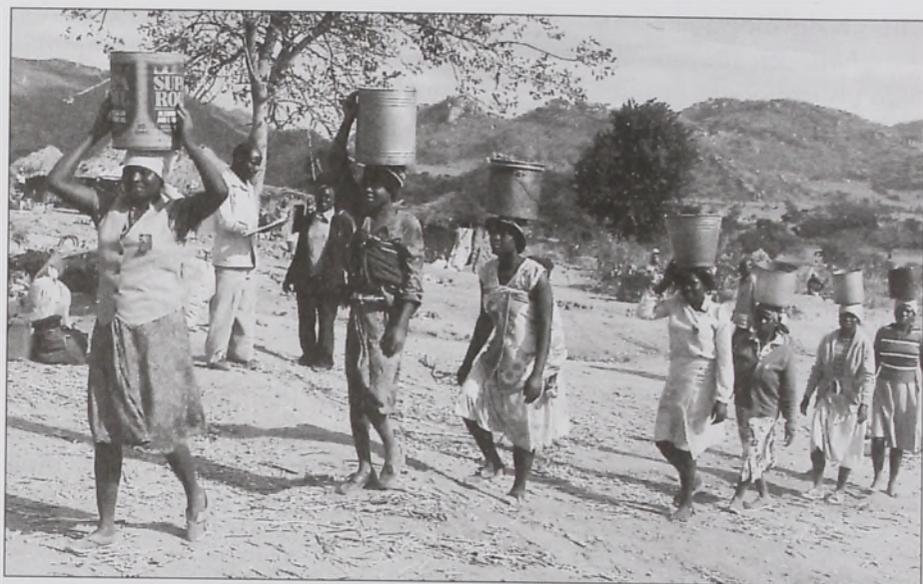


Plate 6 ZCC women carry water for building the community development centre at Bishop Ruben Mutendi's headquarters (top). Primary school at Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi's ZCC church headquarters at Mbungu (bottom)



their ecclesiastic isolation broken and their leadership's progress through some basic theological education patently manifest, the AICs felt themselves increasingly empowered and encouraged to deal with educational and economic development issues. For the first time they were able to capitalise on a united ecumenical front in development planning, fund-raising and project implementation. Whereas *Fambidzano's* ecumenical focus during *chimurenga* was mainly on the development of TEE (theological education by extension) programmes, it shared the nation's concern for social restructuring and economic upliftment in the aftermath of the war. During the 1980s, therefore, the image of black churches as *liberators from poverty, economic stagnation and agricultural unproductivity* started to predominate.

This was not an altogether new development. Just as an established AIC tradition of anticolonial involvement in tribal politics culminated in an enacted liberation theology during the war years, so holistic immersion of AICs in the subsistence economy of peasant society (to which the bulk of AIC members under consideration belong) paved the way for a more comprehensive, all-absorbing concern with socioeconomic upliftment. In earlier years many bishops participated in government-initiated master farming schemes to encourage their followers to improve agricultural production. Mention was made of the ZCC's mutual aid schemes, based on interaction between the healing colony at church headquarters and the agricultural performance of outlying congregations. Church ceremonies, moreover, were adapted to secure 'mystical safeguards' for favourable rainy seasons and abundant crop yields (Daneel 1998:38, 1974:104–109).

But it was only in the 1980s that foreign financial assistance and some degree of systematised ecumenical control brought these trends to fruition in income-generating endeavour. Now the black Jerusalems and Zion cities expanded their healing colonies to incorporate a wide range of community development programmes. Newly built community halls became centres of vocational training and small-scale industries such as clothing manufacture and sewing, carpentry, bread-baking and soap production. In some cases such ventures were augmented by agricultural projects like irrigation schemes, piggeries, poultry farming and the like. A few AICs built modest shelters for elderly people, widows, orphans and disabled people. Through the introduction of a Women's

Desk *Fambidzano* advanced the process of female emancipation, particularly in rural society. Not only did talented women achieve prominence in theological training, income-generating small industries and farming, they also started running their own antenatal and postnatal care clinics and launched family planning clubs. The largest AIC headquarters in the country, Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi's Zion City in Bikita district, includes an impressive multimillion dollar complex of primary and secondary schools, hostels and a large college (Daneel 1989, chapter 8).

All these socioeconomic and educational projects were closely interwoven with church life. In a sense some of the larger AIC headquarters started resembling the mission stations of Western-oriented churches, whose mission policy makers had all along adopted a *comprehensive approach*, integrating evangelism with education, medical services, agriculture and industry. The introduction at AIC 'holy cities' of a wider range of professional workers than before, particularly in the educational field, did not, however, lead to fragmentation of purpose, as if farming, teaching and commerce belonged to a more secular realm than worship and spiritually oriented church ceremonies. On the contrary, all farming and irrigation activities were surrounded and supported by Christian ritual. School communities were drawn into the daily Bible reading and prayer sessions of the holy cities and women could preach about problems and successes in their industrial projects during the main church services. *As a result, the AICs' socioeconomic liberation programmes became integral to their healing ministries.* This reinforced the holistic outreach of the church and the characteristic notion in the prophetic movements that Christ the healer-liberator looms large in all sectors of life through his bands of black iconic leaders, both men and women, who concretely mirror his concern for all humanity. Even though not all the needs of participant church members could be met, the holy cities became beacons of progress and relative security in a struggling subsistence economy which, after Independence, suffered crisis upon crisis as a result of severe drought. Although individual salvation and eternal life in a future heaven were still being preached, the good news increasingly included economic realities and opportunities, prospects of material improvement which to many people came as a gleam of hope in their overgrazed, eroded areas with diminishing farm produce.

Plate 7 Zionist woman engaged in a clothing-manufacturing project



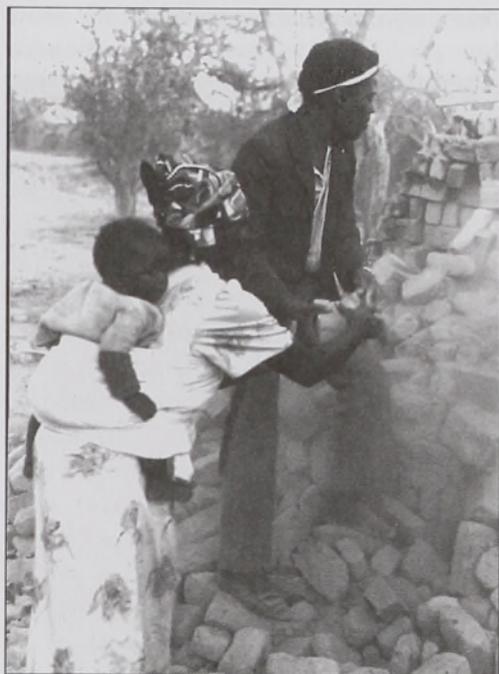
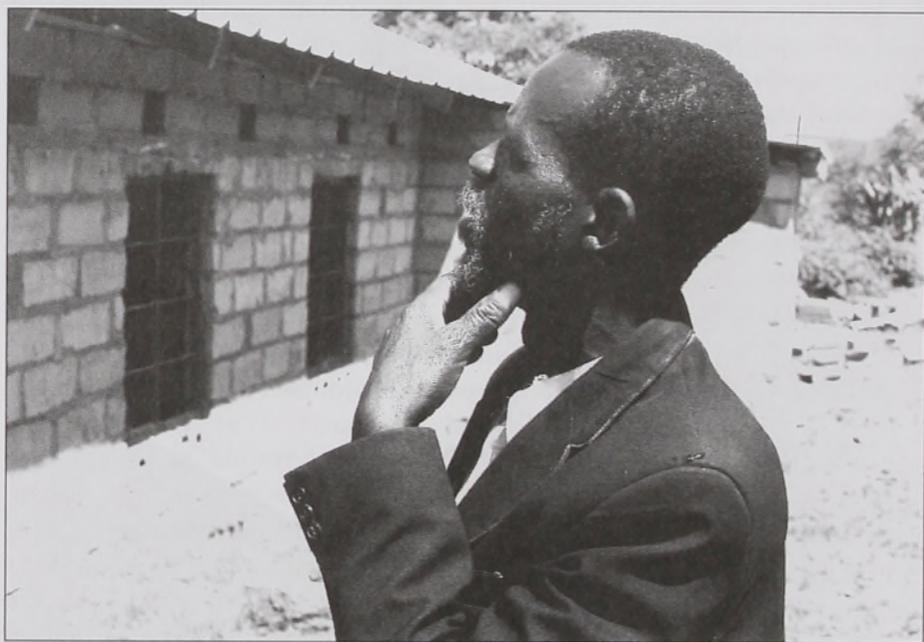


Plate 8 *Ndaza* Zionist workers carrying bricks for the construction of their development centre (top). Bishop Darias Shoko, successor to the late Bishop Andreas Shoko – founder of the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission – admires the new building which is both church and community development centre



To those peasants who benefited and still benefit directly from *Fambidzano's* development programmes, the church certainly appeared as a sure sign of God's reign here and now. The church was not only a protector against evil and psychosomatic affliction. It also combated poverty, enabling the deprived and the oppressed to realise for themselves something of that 'kingdom of God' which the economically privileged appeared to have already enjoyed for so long. Despite that, the image of the church as an economic liberator and facilitator of prosperity included serious flaws. For one thing, there were insufficient funds to accommodate all the needs of any particular church, let alone the needs of all member churches of the Conference. Expectations were generally much higher than the available development funds warranted. Inevitable disappointment at frustrated expectations and strained ecumenical ties caused a few churches to drop their *Fambidzano* membership. Foreign development funds, moreover, were a mixed blessing. Economic progress exacted a price: a new type of 'bondage' in the form of dependence on overseas sponsors whose requirements, European development scenarios and need for acclaim did not and could not in all respects harmonise with the world of the Independents. In some quarters the spontaneity of freedom and self-determination made way for a 'project syndrome': pressures of project writing, anxiety while waiting for a response, uncertainty about the continuation or discontinuation of newly launched development structures, dependence on the approval of foreigners – 'benefactors' who came jetting in to assess and/or 'judge' the projects ...

On the positive side, development interaction brought a new dimension of ecumenical awareness, a sense of meaningful service by the sponsoring churches abroad, and inspiration and dignity in the AICs born of the knowledge that they belong to and are recognised by the world church.

1.1.4 The church as environmental healer/liberator

The formation of the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC) in March 1991 brought an even deeper understanding of the church's healing ministry in the ranks of the AICs. This time the focus shifted to the healing of a suffering creation, in which God's initiative manifests itself in human care for the environment. A new partnership

in the divine-human encounter, with an overriding emphasis on Christian stewardship of nature, was taking shape. In the same way that the church's socioeconomic liberatory task had been clarified and broadened in the ecumenical context of *Fambidzano*, its earth-healing ministry – the plans and afforestation programmes – found its definition and impetus in the ecumenical context of the AAEC.

Considering the historical links between *Fambidzano* and the AAEC, one can say that the two ecclesiastic perceptions – the church liberating humankind from poverty and deprivation, and the church healing an abused earth – are integrally linked. Even at an early stage of *Fambidzano's* socioeconomic development programmes I was already raising questions about how we could offset the exploitive dimension of improved agricultural production by ploughing back into nature what we were taking out for the advancement or progress of human beings. Christian environmental stewardship, by its very nature, should provoke such questions and seek to strike a balance between legitimate use and altruistic environmental management, or service rendered to the environment. The value of reflecting on such issues in an ecumenical context is that new insight and planned action influence a much wider cross-section of church communities than would happen otherwise.

When looking at interacting views of the church and diversification of church activities, it should be kept in mind that by presenting the four distinctions of ecclesiastic developments and/or perceptions as coinciding with phases in the country's history we are in no way suggesting compartmentalisation or exclusive substitution at the expense of earlier ecclesiological notions. In other words, during each of the historical periods mentioned above the essential characteristics of the church were retained, the new conceptions and action programmes serving to *elaborate or modify existing ecclesiologies* in direct response to changing contextual demands, rather than as sweeping reforms or radical change. At no point during the *chimurenga* years, for instance, did the prophetic churches scale down their original healing activities because of their preoccupation with the demands of a military struggle. Neither do the proliferating agroeconomic or environmental activities at church headquarters obscure the ongoing significance of healing the psychosomatic afflictions of human beings. Instead of contextualised ecclesiastic innovations gradually crowding out or obscuring the existing

praxis of faith healing, the entire healing ministry was enriched and meaningfully extended to its multiple foci.

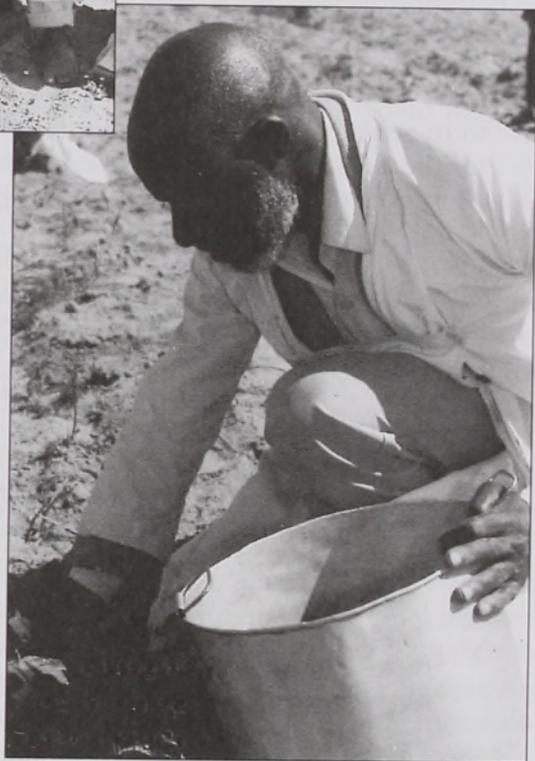
How, then, is the earth-healing ministry of the AAEC churches interpreted by the key role players themselves? Tree-planting sermons provide illuminating clues. AIC leaders use these occasions as 'teaching sessions' to instruct and mobilise their followers. Their spontaneous expositions of what could be called an emerging theology of the environment probably provide the most accurate data for interpretation at this stage. In January 1991, for example, Bishop Kindiam Wapendama, leader of the Sign of the Apostles Church, and as an AAEC executive member one of the most ardent advocates of a Christian green movement, preached as follows at a tree-planting ceremony at his church headquarters in Zimuto district:

Mwari (God) saw the devastation of the land. So he called his envoys to shoulder the task of deliverance. Come, you messengers of Mwari (ZIRRCON/AAEC representatives), come and deliver us. Together with you, we, the Apostles, are now the *deliverers of the stricken land. Let us go forth and clothe (ie heal) Mwari's stricken land.* This is not a task which will enrich you. No! The deliverers were sent by Mwari on a divine mission. He said: 'You go to Africa, for the land is ravished!' Peace to you, people of Mwari!

Deliverance, Mwari says, lies in the trees, but in the first place the people have to obey. Mwari therefore sends his deliverers to continue here on earth with his own work, with all the work that Jesus Christ started here. Jesus said: 'I leave you, my followers, to complete my work.' *And that task is the one of healing! We are the followers of Jesus and have to continue his healing ministry.* You are the believers who will see his miracles in this afflicted world. *So let us all fight, clothing the earth with trees!* Let us follow the example of the deliverers who were sent by Mwari. God gave this task to a man of his choice. Because this man responded, the task is proceeding as you can see for yourselves today.

It is *our* task to strengthen this *mission* with our numbers of people. You know how numerous we are. Sometimes we count ten thousand people at our church gatherings. If we work with enthusiasm we shall clothe the entire land with trees and drive off affliction (evil) ... Just look at the dried out and lifeless land around you. *I believe that we*

Plate 9 Bishop Kindian Wapendama, leader of the *Signs of the Apostles Church* (left on picture), and followers prepare for the planting of *makamba*, red mahogany, seedlings



can change it. Because of our repairing the damage, because of our doing penance for our guilt in land destruction, God will heed our wish and give us plentiful rain ... (my italics; appendix I).

Bishop Wapendama's exposition is representative of viewpoints frequently expressed in the tree-planting services of fellow AIC earth-keepers. God takes the initiative to restore the ravaged earth, but the responsibility to deliver the stricken earth from its malady lies with the Christian body of believers, the church. The deliverance of the earth takes the form of *kufukidza nyika* (clothing the land) with trees. *This mission is clearly seen as an extension of Christ's healing ministry, which his disciples must fulfil in this existence.* That it is a communal obligation is highlighted by Wapendama's reference to the large church meetings (usually at paschal celebrations) which, in his view, should serve as a large platform, a liberating force for the deliverance of nature.

Wapendama's confidence that the army of believers can repair the damage as an act of penance, whereby God's wrath at human guilt of earth destruction will make way for renewed benevolence – to be revealed, for instance, in God's breaking of the drought – also reflects a positive attitude commonly found in the ranks of the earthkeeping churches. This attitude probably stems from both biblical notions of God responding to the actions of his people and ingrained traditional beliefs about reciprocity in the divine-human encounter (eg gifts of the right-minded complementing rain requests at the oracular shrines of Matonjeni and eliciting a positive divine response in the form of ample rains). The assumption of a new divine-human partnership is all too clear in the Bishop's understanding of nature's deliverance. True to prophetic perceptions of salvation as human wellbeing secured through healing in this existence, the earth itself is to be salvifically restored under directives from Mwari – a new order which is not unilaterally ushered in by God, but which also depends on being 'worked out', even 'brought about', by human endeavour.

As a full participant in AIC earth-healing programmes, I have used preaching opportunities at tree-planting eucharists to point out the integral link between the church's ecological healing ministry and Christ's presence in creation. In 1991, for instance, my sermon at the Topia headquarters at Norumedzo, Bikita, included the following message:

You have congregated here to participate in holy communion. This is the occasion where you use bread and wine in remembrance of the death of Christ on the cross. In this commemoration the body of Christ is central. 1 Corinthians 11:29 emphasises the importance of recognising this truth ... Hang on to the idea that we should know the body of Christ. In Colossians 1:15–17 the body of Christ is explained in a special way. He is the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of all creation. All things were created in him and for him, the seen and the unseen. Because of this *all things hang together in Christ*. Through Christ's death and resurrection all power in heaven and on earth has, moreover, been given to him (Mt 28:18). From all this we conclude that Christ is not only Lord of creation, but that his body is all of creation. All created things are part of his body. The implication for us as stewards of creation is that if we fell trees indiscriminately we are actually 'killing' the body of Christ.

In Colossians 1:18 we read that he (Christ) is the head of the body, the church ... Two main points therefore emerge in these texts from Colossians: first, the body of Christ is the entire created world; second, his body *is* the church, the body of believers. In the past when we celebrated holy communion we tended to remember only the one aspect of this twofold truth, namely that we celebrate our unity in Christ's body as the church. We neglected the other aspect of Christ's body. So I wish to remind you here today that whenever you celebrate holy communion, be mindful that in devastating the earth we ourselves are party to destroying the body of Christ. We are *all* guilty in this respect. Both the whites and the blacks are exploiters of the environment ...

(Then follows an explanation of how, through tree-planting, the eucharist can also accommodate the abused part of Christ's body.)

What we have done in the eucharist in the past is still there. It is good and not wrong. It is just that we are reminded these days of something we have neglected. We are healing and restoring that part of Christ's body which we have unwittingly abused. That is the message I leave with you today: *Clothe the barren earth! Heal the earth! It is fully part of our lives as Christians ...* (appendix II).

This Christological interpretation of the church's earth-healing ministry is fairly widely accepted and propagated in AAEC circles. Said Revd

Davison Tawoneichi of Bishop Mutikizizi's Evangelical Ministry of Christ Church at a tree-planting ceremony at that church's headquarters in 1995:

Earthkeeping is part of the body of Christ. It is so because we as humans are part of his body and the trees are essential for us to breathe, to live (ie part of us). So trees are really part of Christ's body. Our destruction of nature is an offence against the body of Christ. Christ's body suffers as a result. The random felling of trees hurts the body of Christ. Therefore the church should heal the wounded body of Christ. Tree felling is only justified when there is a sound purpose aligned to God's will. Otherwise God is angered and will punish us. One of the signs of such punishment is the continuing drought. No trees, no rain! Mwari is disturbed.

Tawoneichi's comments, much like the sermon of Wapendama, illustrate an understanding of the close correlation between ecological stewardship and God's response to such stewardship. Environmental abuse is sinful. It causes Christ to suffer and Mwari to judge, in retaliation, through drought. By its very nature the church in this context is or should be both protector and healer of the environment, ministering by implication to the 'wounded' body of Christ. Closely monitored by divine power, the church, in a situation of environmental affliction, is called upon to confess its own sinful contribution to the malady (as shall be illustrated below), to recognise the unity between creator-saviour, humanity and all creation, and to heal the earth through constraints on deforestation and affirmative afforestation programmes.

Not all AIC leaders in the movement agree with a Christology which identifies Christ's body with creation and defines earthkeeping as a form of mending his body, the earth. Bishop Farawo, leader of the Zimbabwe Zion Apostolic Church and a leading light among AAEC nursery keepers, for instance, defined his views as follows:

The earth we abuse is not Christ's body, for it is the creation of Mwari. Yet creation is like a person, the image of the body of Christ. Look at the trees. They breathe like humans. So if we fell them we hurt the Spirit of God, because his Spirit is in the trees ... Earthkeeping is like an expression of Christ's body. Tree planting during the eucharist is *not really part of Christ's body* (my italics), but it pleases Christ because we are clothing his earth, remedying

the barren areas and gullies which have been caused by abuse.

Bishop Chimhanga of the African Zion Apostolic Church, again, qualified the church's environmental work in a sermon at a tree-planting ceremony as *a ministry of reconciliation between human beings and all creation*. He said:

We are planting trees to redress the situation, to compensate for our wrongdoing ... All of us are guilty of the crime of deforestation ... So today we plant trees as an act of *reconciliation* between us and all creation, in Jesus Christ. We thank him for his atonement, whereby this act of reconciliation is made possible ... (appendix 1).

Here, too, we find a strong Christological basis for earthkeeping. Christ's salvific work is conditional for reconciliation between human beings and their environment. Although not specifically stated, ecological healing assumes salvific dimensions. The intuition behind these words suggests a widening perception of salvation: the realised presence of God's kingdom encompassing all creatures in this existence, rather than a narrow focus on a purely future salvation of human souls.

Diverse as AAEC views of an eco-related Christology may be, there is general agreement about the church's environmental liberatory and earth-healing mission throughout the movement. True to the AIC tradition of developing an *enacted* rather than a systematic *written* theology, this conviction finds its most consistent expression in church praxis. Two illustrations will suffice.

First, tree-planting ceremonies – as developed by member churches within certain broad AAEC guidelines which leave ample scope for improvised experimentation – all bear the stamp of a contextualised healing ministry. The theme of curing the earth's deforestation malady keeps recurring. As is evidenced in the tree-planting eucharist discussed below, environmental degradation is compared to the havoc wrought in human life by a vengeful *ngozi* spirit. The seedlings represent the modern equivalent of the *mutumbu* (literally 'corpse') offering traditionally given to the family of the *ngozi* to appease the destructive spirit. Planting the seedlings is an act of reconciliation between creator-God, humankind and creation. This, therefore, is the ecological parallel of the prophetic church's faith-healing practice, in which exorcism or appeasement of life-threatening spirits has always been prominent.

Consider in addition the eucharistic liturgy (see below) for tree-planting, which consistently underscores the church's therapeutic responsibility for an over-exploited environment. When, for instance, the leading bishop sprinkles holy water over the 'Lord's acre' (the plot allocated for the establishment of a new woodlot) he says:

This is the water of purification and fertility.

We sprinkle it on this new acre of trees.

It is a prayer to God, a symbol of rain,
so that the trees may grow,

so that the land will *heal*

as the *ngozi* we have aroused withdraws.

It is no coincidence that water, the age-old symbol of purification, of healing and life itself, should feature so prominently in the ritual preparation of the acre to be 'healed'. Sprinkling holy water over infants protects them against the onslaught of evil spirits. Sprinkling cleanses the sick of contamination; liberates unwilling hosts from plaguing spirits; and generally prepares barren women for childbearing and all those suffering affliction for spiritual, physical and mental wellbeing. Holy water, prayed over by the prophet-healer, is the most potent symbol of God's reign, a divine rule capable of healing and restoring all of life. Thus the sprinkling of holy water over the seedlings and the 'Lord's acre' signals the casting out of the soil's denuded barrenness, of the vengeful spirit which provokes drought (in a sense this spirit also corresponds with the wrath of God, who punishes remissness in nature stewardship), and prepares the soil for full recovery under the cover of new trees.

In the second place, and probably the most convincing sign of an expanding and changing theological praxis, there is the *impact of an earth-healing ministry on AIC headquarters*. The shift in the focus of healing was reflected in the political and socioeconomic programmes and activities at church headquarters during the historical phases mentioned above. In the same way current earthkeeping is causing the evolution of yet another type of healing colony. In a sense the new and trend-setting model of an earthkeeping centre is the ZIRRCOON-AAEC headquarters in Masvingo town. Without any pretence of representing a kind of super church headquarters which controls or dominates an extensive ecological 'strike-force' of some 150 participant churches, the ZIRRCOON-AAEC administrative centre nevertheless figures as a cen-

tral earthkeeping nexus. This is where ecumenical church conferences take place, where ecological policy and project implementation are planned, and where AAEC officers are employed full-time to reflect and write on earthkeeping, develop training materials for conscientisation courses, and provide infrastructure for nursery development, woodlot monitoring, wildlife management, etc.

Taking their cue from this development and operating within an expanding network of earthkeeping churches, several prophetic leaders are becoming acclaimed earthkeepers in their own right. They are extending the existing healing colonies at their headquarters into '*environmental hospitals*'. The 'patient' in this instance is the denuded land and the 'dispensary' (ie the faith-healing 'medicinal' arsenal of holy cords, holy water, staffs, paper and other symbols of divine healing power) becomes the nursery where the correct 'medicine' for the patient, in the form of a wide assortment of indigenous, exotic and fruit trees, is cultivated. The entire church community – both at headquarters and in outlying congregations, residents and visiting patients – now becomes the healing agent under the guidance of the church's principal earth-healer. Consistent aftercare of budding woodlots provides proof of the church's dedication, the woodlot itself becoming the focus of testimony sermons and a source of inspiration for an expanding ministry, as the testimonies of healed human patients in the past contributed both to a reaffirmation of belief in God's healing powers and to the church's recruitment of new members in its expansionist drive.

Consider, for instance the escalation of earthkeeping activities at Bishop Wapendama's Sign of the Apostles Church. The Bishop has developed a model nursery at his headquarters, where the nucleus of his church's leadership are engrossed in pot-filling, seed-germination, and watering and nurturing the seedlings. Drawing on the resources not only of the AAEC but also of his followers, the Bishop has modernised his nursery equipment, which included the installation, at his own expense, of an expensive water pump. Having established woodlots of red mahogany and other indigenous trees in his outlying congregations the Bishop's annual itinerary now includes numerous ecologically motivated visitations to ecclesiastic outposts to monitor expanding afforestation projects. Far from interfering with the pastoral care of his flock and preaching appointments, the Bishop's earth-healing ministry appears to stimulate the spiritual lives of his followers and to trigger

new recruitment of members as the church is seen to strive valiantly and concertedly in the war of the trees. There are similar indications of intensified growth in the Zionist churches of Bishops Machokoto and Marinda, former AAEC president and general secretary, as a result of their high profiles as earthkeepers in rural society, where subsistence farmers are increasingly appreciative of environmental reform.

The person whose private and church life has probably been the most drastically affected by AAEC developments is Bishop Farawo of the Zimbabwe Zion Apostolic Church. Having moved from his church headquarters in Bikita district to Chivi district's local government headquarters to take control of the AAEC's largest nursery, the Bishop and his family have turned the nursery complex with its dwellings and toolshed into a veritable little 'Zion city of the trees'. Bishop Farawo ministers to the members of his church in the district and at his new headquarters, but afforestation has become focal to his entire ministry. He collaborates with Forestry representatives and land extension officers on a regular basis. He mobilises school communities to help collect seeds for the nursery and establish woodlots at their schools. Apart from becoming expert at germinating a wide variety of indigenous tree seeds, the Bishop also oversees numerous tree-planting ventures throughout the district during the rainy season. He supplies seedlings not only to AAEC members but also to other churches, associations, clubs and even traditionalist elders associated with AZTREC. Thus a distinctly Zionist Christian ministry of afforestation serves a religiously pluralistic society, in the process contributing not only to a growing network of ecumenical ties amongst churches but also to cooperation and goodwill between Christians and African traditionalists. On one occasion the Bishop even presented President Mugabe with AAEC seedlings for special tree-planting ceremonies during the president's visit to Chivi district.

That the process of transition from a predominantly faith-healing to an earth-healing ministry is uneven and complex is highlighted by the periodic complaints of Bishop Farawo's two wives, Miria and Sophia, who complain that their husband no longer finds time to attend sufficiently to pastoral visiting and the collection of church funds. Nevertheless, they, too, are proudly and enthusiastically involved in the new earth-healing ministry, knowing that their 'tree hospital' is vitally important for the restoration of Chivi district's ruined farmlands. They also sense

that their husband has become a leading earthkeeper, a living example of the eco-ecclesiological trend that the AAEC wishes to establish.

1.2 Emerging attributes of the earthkeeping church

From tree-planting sermons, interviews and new patterns of activity within the AAEC's participant churches, one gets some idea of what the leading AIC figures consider the most significant attributes of an earthkeeping church to be. I shall give only a brief profile of what in the long run could develop into a full-blown environmental ecclesiology.

1.2.1 An ecumenically rooted ministry

Against the background of *Fambidzano's* ecumenism as well as the geographically wide scope of earth-healing envisaged, it was evident from the outset that ecclesiastic endeavour was not intended for just one or a few environmentally interested churches, but for a massive Christian movement operating from a common ecumenical platform. From the outset the first AAEC president, Bishop Machokoto, propagated the need for strong ecumenical foundations in our common ecological struggle. 'What I asked of God,' he said, 'is a true sense of unity amongst us. We have to work together to avoid all forms of confusing conflict. Our unity must rest on convincing work ... The basis of our work, according to God's Word, is love, a love which reveals itself in works ... We, the (AAEC) churches will have to make sacrifices for the cause to which we have pledged ourselves. Therein lies our unity ...' My own expositions of a *divine mandate* for our work, with reference to Isaiah 43, as well as its christological basis (Daneel 1998:101-102), implied wide ecumenical interaction.

This call for united action provides a key to interpret the ecumenism developed by the AAEC. Representing a predominantly peasant society which confronts the hazards and threats to subsistence on a deforested, overgrazed and overpopulated land, the AIC bishops and their churches did not join forces to realise some abstract ecumenical ideal or for the sake of church unity as an end in itself. It was rather an ecumenism shaped by churches sharing a newly identified and common commitment – that of healing the earth. In a sense, therefore, the realisation of a common quest, the action in the field, give expression to

the love in unity to which Bishop Machokoto referred. One can say that the escalating 'battles of the trees', the development of nurseries with many thousands of seedlings, as well as the preaching and ritual celebration of tree planting and tree watering in the newly established woodlots, ameliorate interchurch conflicts. *The earthkeeping church is purged from within of isolation and self-centred ambition as it bonds with other churches in an all absorbing ministry of environmental stewardship*

Not that all the differences and conflicts of the past have suddenly been resolved. The prophetic churches tended to accuse the non-prophetic movements that they were not fully Christian because they did not heed the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Ethiopian-type churches in turn accused the Zionists and Apostles that their prophecies were products of traditional ancestral or alien spirits, not of the Holy Spirit. It is rather that these old conflicts pale into insignificance as the green revolution unfolds, at the annual conferences, executive meetings and in the joint labour and ritual celebration of earth-healing ceremonies. Thus a new comradeship transcending traditional ecclesiastic divisions has started to evolve between creator-God, earthkeeping humanity and the trees, plants and wildlife. A new myth, arising from the common subconscious of Africa, blending with Christian perceptions of a realised, observable salvation for all creation here and now – and manifested in AAEC church life – is emerging.

Apart from being drawn into closer union with other AICs, the earth-keeping church is also challenged to participate in *spontaneous ecumenism* by interacting in a common cause with traditionalists, that is, with AZTREC. Once the AIC bishops felt secure about retaining their own brand of Christian identity in the green struggle, they were eager to promote wider religious unity, or at least meaningful cooperation, with their AZTREC counterparts, the chiefs, spirit-mediums and other traditional authorities. Said Bishop Machokoto, the AAEC president, in his key address at the inception of the new ecumenical movement:

We must be fully prepared to recognise the authority of our kraal-heads and chiefs. For if we show contempt for them, where will we plant our trees? A Christian attitude is required towards the rulers of the land. Let our Bishops in their eagerness to fight the war of the trees not antagonise the keepers of the land. If you are a church

member, yet try to place yourself above the laws of the land, you are not a true convert. Let us fully support our (tribal) elders in this struggle of afforestation, so that the ZIRRCOON-AAEC objectives may be realised in practice (Daneel 1998:109).

This plea certainly does not imply a sweeping compromise of the prophetic AICs' general confrontational approach to the ancestral religion represented by their traditionalist co-fighters in the green struggle, the chiefs and spirit-mediums. Yet the call for submission to the laws of the land and for cooperation with the chiefs reveals a growing tolerance and a preparedness to move beyond the stereotyped prophetic restraints of in-group dynamics in the interest of a stricken environment. *Instead of withdrawing from the traditionalist practitioners of ancestor veneration to demonstrate its rejection of 'heathenism', the prophetic earthkeeping church now underscores at least ecological solidarity with its traditionalist counterparts in the green struggle.* Such religio-ecumenical openness made it possible for ZIRRCOON to call the first combined annual conference of AZTREC and the AAEC in May 1993, comprising contingents of some 50 chiefs, headmen and spirit-mediums on the one hand and 50 AIC Bishops and prophets on the other. An interesting feature of the conference was interfaith dialogue and the Christian witness by some of the AIC representatives during plenary sessions. The mediums responded to this by conveying their ancestors' wishes in a state of trance.

Such interfaith encounter included both heated debates on highly divergent customary and Christian approaches to environmental projects, and agreement on common ground for future cooperation. On the issue of establishing game sanctuaries in communal lands, for instance, the traditional spirit-mediums pointed out that the guardian ancestors of the land could be provoked into mystical retaliation if the holy groves (*marambatemwa*) containing their graves were game-fenced. The AIC prophets for their part supported game-fencing provided they could have their own game sanctuaries, which they intended calling the 'Lord's acre' or the 'Lord's dwelling place' in contradistinction to the traditional holy groves. A common purpose between AZTREC and AAEC representatives to escalate the struggle in unison was described by both parties after the conference as a major earth-healing and religio-ecumenical breakthrough, the first they had ever witnessed in Zimbabwe.

In this kind of climate ecclesiological perceptions are bound to change, both in terms of an increased sense of belonging to, and playing a meaningful role in, the Christian household of God, and in terms of respecting the divergent faiths of all humankind so as to secure the widest possible front against environmental degradation.

1.2.2 An extended missionary mandate

The good news proclaimed and enacted by the earthkeeping church clearly extends beyond soul salvation and faith healing aimed at the wellbeing of human beings, as tended to be the case in the AICs in the past. As propounded by Wapendama (*supra*:39), the healing ministry of Christ remains focal to the church's mission but it now includes, more explicitly than before, the deliverance and salvation of Mwari's stricken land. The good news is that the barren land will be clothed, that is, be protected, by trees and plants. This form of salvation becomes manifest to the extent that the church fulfils its role as the *keeper of creation*, a mission in which its entire membership is harnessed as active agents instead of just a few specialised 'missionaries'.

Not that ecological specialisation is not appreciated in the church's environmental mission. Wapendama himself is an expert at germinating seeds of indigenous trees. His sermons (appendix I) reveal an extensive knowledge of trees: the correlation between healthy vegetation and proper living conditions for human beings, the importance of trees' 'perfume' for the breathing of all of nature, the interaction between trees and humans in seasonal change, the impact of boreholes and barren lands on underground water resources, etc. Thus, like Farawo, Wapendama is a specialist healer – both of humans and of nature – competently heading his 'environmental hospital' and mobilising his followers on the basis of knowledgeable and exemplary environmental commitment rather than empty calls to comprehensive service.

Despite the challenge to churches and believers to engage in the earth-keeping mission, a pervading sense of being mandated and sustained by God is noticeable at most AAEC tree-planting ceremonies. For all his vision and enthusiasm, Wapendama repeatedly reminded his audience that they were facing a formidable task, one which could only be accomplished in full recognition of dependence on God. 'I beseech

Plate 10 Bishop Farawo of the *Zimbabwe Zion Apostolic Church* emphasises eco-stewardship with reference to Scriptures as an introduction to a *maporesanyika* tree-planting ceremony



you,' he said, 'to place yourselves in the hands of Mwari. He alone can give us the strength to endure in this struggle' (appendix I).

In the Ethiopian-type churches one finds similar emphases on *Mwari's* initiative, *Mwari's* care for creation and *Mwari's* earth-care commission to his church. In concluding a tree-planting ceremony at Revd Zvobgo's African Reformed Church at Shonganiso Mission, Revd Mandondo claimed:

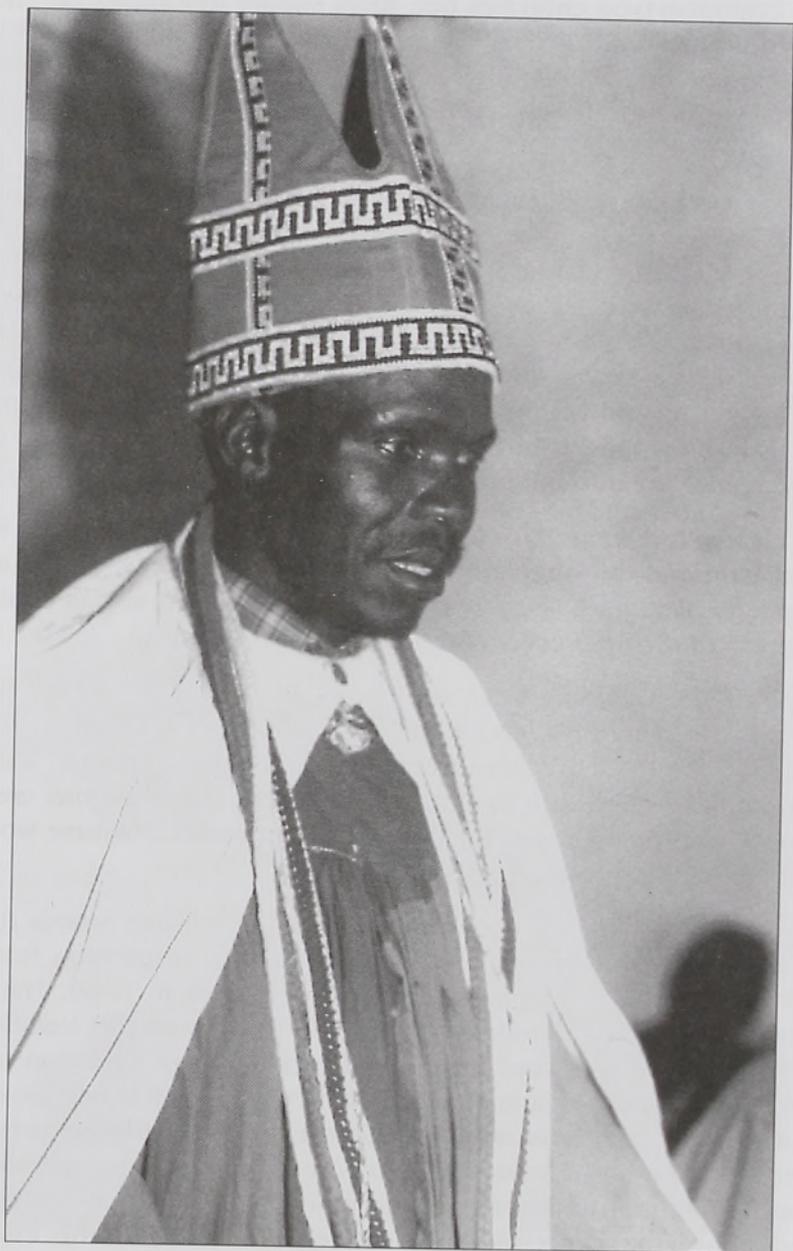
Today we have done God's work. You will see, in a short space of time the trees will grow tall. And we shall say: God surprises us. God exists. God does what pleases him. Today we have done his bidding. Today we have learnt that if we want to be God's children, we must do his work. We are the inheritors, existing by virtue of the inheritance – in this instance the fruit of trees. Today we did what God sent us and commanded us to do. It is not so much a matter of success or failure, but in the first place complying with God's will, giving him joy through our obedience (appendix II).

Here clearly the church's earthkeeping mission derives from God's commission and the obedient response of God's people to his divine promptings. It is verbalised by a church leader who shows profound awareness of divine presence in all of nature:

Up in the mountains I can see Mwari. In the rocks and the trees I see Mwari. There his strength and his works are revealed ... Whose strength do those massive trees (at Mount Selinda) reveal? Mwari's, of course ... His work is clearly seen in the things he has created. Follow the rivers and observe the running waters. Whose work do you think it is? Mwari's! (appendix II).

Historically, the church's ecologically liberating mission stands fully in the tradition of *chimurenga* and draws additional inspiration from the country's liberation struggle prior to Independence in 1980. The original motivation of the founders of the AAEC to draw on this tradition for mobilisation purposes and the natural inclination of Christian participants to do so anyway have blended to the point that it is no longer possible to trace the precise origin of the integral link between *chimurenga* and the church's extended mission. Key figures and lay members of the movement showed great unanimity in their appraisal of this fact. Asked about the church's earth-clothing mission and the erstwhile

Plate 11 Bishop Machokoto, first president of the AAEC, addressing an audience on the need for united earthkeeping endeavour between Christians and traditionalists



quest of *chimurenga* to recapture the lost lands, the following kind of responses were common in interviews conducted in 1995:

Bishop Farawo:

We are indeed engaged in the *chimurenga* of clothing the land. We heal the land because threatened species like the fruit-bearing *ndudwe*, which you can hardly find in our remaining forests, is being cultivated in our nurseries.

Revd Davison Tawoneichi:

We extend this second *chimurenga* to further liberation of the land. Through afforestation we fight the barren land and the gullies.

Bishop Chimhangwa:

This is truly the second *chimurenga*. We are showing our strength in this liberation struggle. Where there was nothing our trees are now growing, bringing cover and protection to the soil.

Bishop R Machokoto (first AAEC president):

There is absolutely no doubt about the connection ... I will go so far as to say that this is the most important battle, following the first *chimurenga*. We are all committed to this struggle to restore the vanquished land through afforestation. It cannot remain naked and destitute; this awful state to which we, the people, have reduced it ... In the past we did not realise how utterly important trees are for the ongoing existence of creation. But we have learnt a great deal since we started the AAEC ...

Trees draw the rain clouds and so contribute to regular rainfall. Trees provide medicine for the sick. Tree leaves clean the polluted air for us to breathe properly. *Trees are our lifeline!* They provide us with firewood for cooking, poles for building, planks for carpentry. Nothing surpasses the value of trees. Trees are our life. We say, 'a ward with dense forests knows no death'. Even President Mugabe and the government know that the earth cannot be the earth, and we cannot be people, without trees.

From these responses it is evident that the church's liberatory task is extended without hesitation from the sociopolitical to the environmental sphere. Without obscuring the futuristic dimension of people yet to be saved in the coming kingdom – as currently preached in AAEC churches – the earthkeeping mission focuses on salvation in this exist-

tence by materially improving the quality of life of all creation, protecting nature and curbing mindless ecological destruction at the behest of God him/herself. In addition identification with *chimurenga* tradition stimulates militancy, determination and pride of accomplishment. It also fosters peoples' sense of ownership of the process, in contrast to colonialist or postcolonial government programmes.

1.2.3 Ecological laws and discipline

In its application of what amounts to a new ecological ethical code, the earthkeeping church shows keen awareness of the need for well-defined church laws to prevent the wanton destruction of nature. Virtually all AAEC respondents concurred that such laws are necessary, that they should be drawn up and enforced by the church itself. Bishop Farawo proposed that ecclesiastic legislation should first of all *prohibit wanton tree felling*, because 'the trees mourn when you chop them down'. Disciplinary action, he claimed, had to assume the form of prophetic elicitation of tree-felling confessions, whereafter the church council should force wanton tree-fellers to plant and care for new trees as a form of punishment and recompense for the damage done. Tawoneichi claimed that new church laws should ensure aftercare of trees planted to secure a high survival rate. Reacting to the neglect in some AAEC woodlots, he stated: 'This law is necessary because it leads your heart in the right direction. If you ignore this law you are outside the Bible. Christ said, "without love you cannot obey my laws." So the church's tree-laws will be obeyed by those who love Christ.' Bishop Chimhangwa insisted that all church laws on earthkeeping should be written up in church books at once, thus reinforcing the gospel message of the earth's salvation. He considered many people still to be ignorant of the 'gospel of the trees' (*evangheri yemiti*). Consequently '*the threat of the destructive axe must be repelled*'. It was suggested that even earthkeepers in the AAEC league still kept special axes for tree felling hidden in their houses, which they used secretly whenever it suited them. Mrs Chimhangwa, the Bishop's wife, felt so strongly about unchecked deforestation through illegal use of the 'destructive axe' that she suggested the church should have trespassers thrown into jail until the urgency of environmental protection was fully understood.

The assumption underlying Mrs Chimhangwa's radical remarks was that

church and state should cooperate in bringing the earth-destroyers to book. Most AAEC key figures concurred on this point. Bishop Machokoto said: 'We need both church and civil laws to protect nature ... We shall ask ZIRRCO to tell the government about our churches' insistence on more effective legislation. Then it should be published for our people to be taught.' A variation on this theme was that AIC bishops and AZTREC chiefs should cooperate in meting out punishment to wilful tree fellers. The former had to excommunicate the culprits from their churches to give clout to the green ministry, while the latter were to expel them from their wards or chiefdoms.

The exercise of discipline by churches was most forcibly advocated by militant earthkeepers by requiring prophetic exposure of ecological sinners in various ritual contexts. This represents a contextualised reinterpretation of traditional evil, in terms of destructive wizardry perpetrated against the land – a subject to which we shall pay further attention below.

In contrast to the general consensus on the need for effective church laws and disciplinary measures against earth destruction, a few warning notes were sounded by individuals who saw the this-worldly emphasis of the green struggle as a threat to conservative other-worldly perceptions of spirituality. Said Mrs Miria, wife of Bishop Farawo: 'No! Tree-protection laws are the domain of the government. We do not go to a heaven of trees when we die. We leave the trees down here on earth. Prohibitions about trees apply only to the order of this world, the life of the flesh. If we care for the land we are merely concerned with the life of this world. Heaven has its own laws!'

1.2.4 Structural and liturgical change

Preoccupation with earthkeeping duties in some instances leads to a change in Christian group behaviour and individual lifestyles. Mention was made above of earth-healing colonies, which imply structural changes at church headquarters insofar as prophetic healers, together with their followers, become absorbed in ecological programmes. The demands of seed collection, full-time nursery care, liaising with schools and surrounding communities on issues like woodlot establishment, management and aftercare, and networking with staff members at ZIRRCO headquarters certainly introduce patterns of activity based



Plate 12 Spontaneous ecumenism; Revd Solomon Zvanaka – fourth from right (top) – represents AAEC Christianity during an AZTREC tree-planting ceremony. Revd Zvanaka and Principal Tarisai Zvokuomba – third and fourth from right (below) – attend a beer libation of chiefs. Christian earthkeepers do not drink sacrificial beer for the ancestors, but may receive the calabash and then pass it on to a participating traditionalist as a sign of respect



on, but quite unlike, those of the stereotyped prophetic faith-healing colony focusing mainly on human needs.

More significant than the outward changes in the organisation of some church headquarters is the willingness to adopt liturgical innovation, new symbols of salvation and patterns of worship that fully express the church's dedication to renewal in its neglected task of environmental stewardship. It may be too early to assess the full implications of such renewal for the processes of conversion, recruitment and baptism in the earthkeeping church. Yet significant developments in ritual procedures, such as public confessions of ecological 'sins' and the use of imaginative liturgies for tree-planting eucharists, are already in evidence. These reflect an awareness that theological redefinition should be manifested in green liturgies and worship if ecclesiastic reorganisation and successful implementation of earthkeeping ministries are to be effected. The nature of such rituals and liturgies will receive attention in the next chapter.

1.2.5 The church as vehicle of theological reorientation

Being engaged in ecumenical ecological programmes with an expanded missionary mandate, the earthkeeping church necessarily also has to monitor and assess this new activity. This is a spontaneous, reflective process relating to and emanating directly from praxis – there where tree planting and tree nurturing take place in a newly ritualised context. Instead of appointing theological committees or experts to theologise and produce written texts, as often happens in the West, the African earthkeeping church allows its key figures to relate praxis to scriptural truth, justification and inspiration at the point of action. Often the result is a kind of re-enactment and improvisation of biblical history, in which African church leadership or the Christian community identify with biblical figures and/or events.

Some of the details of an emerging environmental theology, particularly as it relates to the perceived involvement of a triune God, will be discussed in the following chapters. Here I merely sketch a few characteristic Old Testament themes as they feature in earthkeeping discussions and tree-planting sermons.

The creation story and Adam's ecological responsibility in the Garden

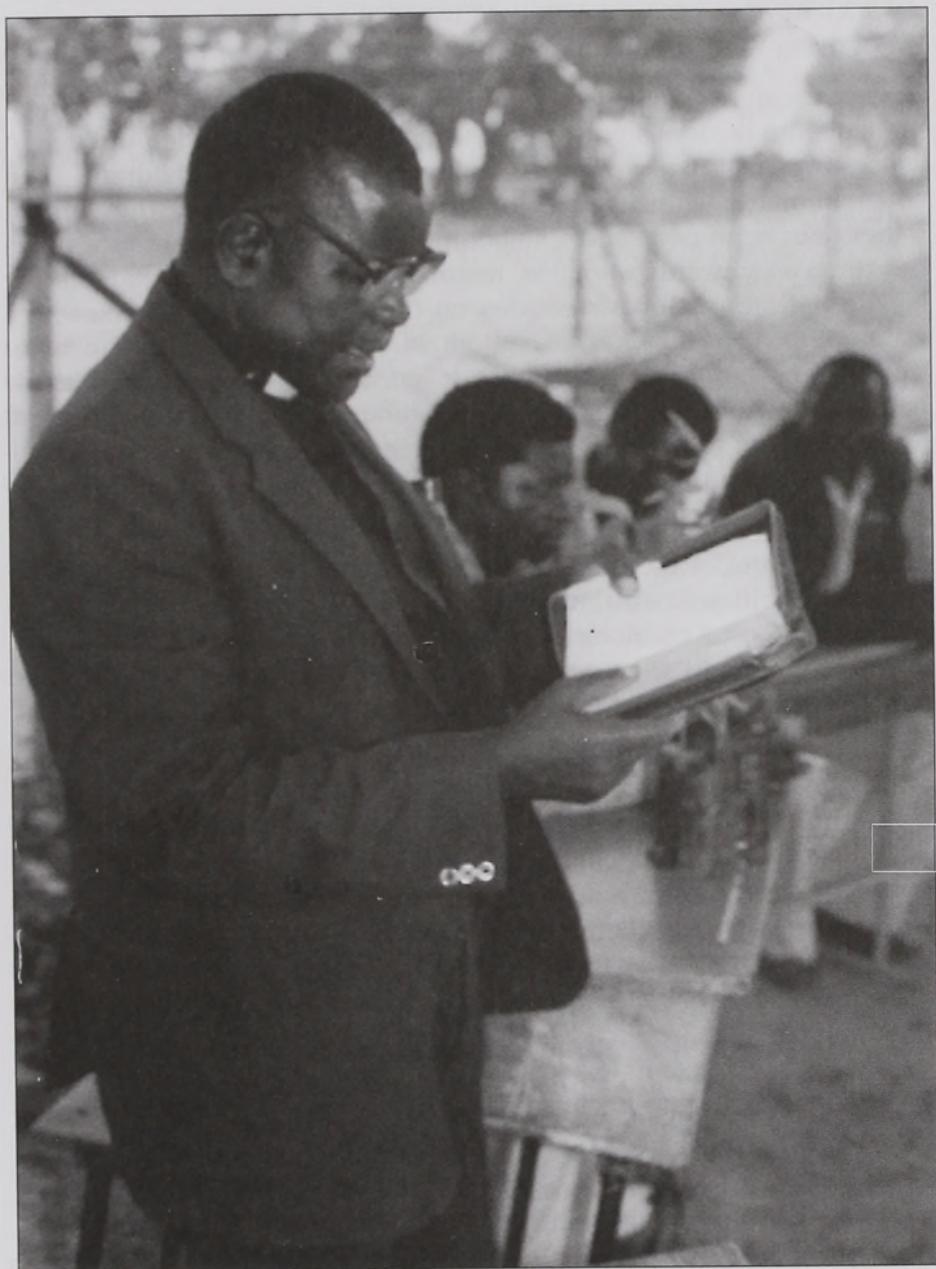
of Eden are virtually always given prominence in green sermons. Textual interpretation and contextual application vary considerably, yet common traits are noticeable. Revd Sauro Masoro's sermon (appendix I) was a classic example of the straightforward manner in which humanity's earliest perception of ecological stewardship as portrayed in Genesis 2 is directly linked with current AAEC preoccupation with trees. Preaching in the shade of a *muchakata* tree, the Zionist minister proclaimed that the people present and the tree under which they were sitting were one. Without the tree the people would not be able to breathe, a fact which he considered to be underscored by God's first creating the Garden of Eden as a necessary condition for living before he could create a human being to inhabit it. God's act of creation, therefore, implies total interdependence between humans and vegetation, something which was not sufficiently recognised in the past. Genesis 2:9 was given immediate relevance when he insisted that 'the *muchakata* fruit we eat from this tree you see here is medicine which heals us. The *matamba* fruit we eat is medicine which heals us. Even if we eat a mango, guava, or orange, it is still healing medicine to us.'

In this AIC 'Garden of Eden' theology Adam and Eve do not figure as the crown of creation, or as rulers over nature, but as the equals of animals and birds and fully identified with their life. In conversation, Zionist Bishop Machokoto even went so far as to say that 'human beings were created for the purpose of caring for all of creation', thus interpreting the meaning of human existence basically in terms of ecological stewardship, service to creation. Seen thus, there is a joyous relationship between humans and plant life, which Machokoto described in terms of communication and mutual respect. The trees, being addressed as brothers and sisters by tree planters during tree-planting ceremonies, now acquire a sense of dignity and value, knowing that they are no longer objects of mindless destruction by humans.

In his sermon at Shonganiso Revd Mandondo of the ARC embroidered on the same theme along slightly different lines (appendix II). God features as the first 'tree-planter':

He made the trees his children. We human beings, in our turn, are the inheritors of this garden, this *kingdom of God* consisting of trees and animals. Inheriting this kingdom means that we are responsible for the continuation of the work God started. We say that as

Plate 13 Revd Mandondo of the *African Reformed Church* exhorts fellow earthkeepers to observe God's strength and presence in creation



Christians we are the inheritors belonging to God. If we are serious about this claim, it means that we, too, are children of God and as such have to proceed with the task of planting trees and taking care of living things. Genuine inheritors are stewards of the land.

Here, once again, plant life and human beings feature as equals. In fact, the kingdom of God is portrayed as starting with the Garden of Eden in which trees and (by implication) animals are all 'God's children'. Then come humans, who happen also to be God's children. They inherit rather than reign over God's kingdom, and their very inheritance qualifies them as stewards who give, restore and protect rather than take or invade the life of God's creatures on this earth. In this earthkeeper's view the imagery of God's kingdom is not spiritualised in the inner world of individual believers, but is concretely observable in all of nature. Far from the triumphalist attitude of the technological age, which purports to conquer and reign over nature, the appropriate position of God's earthkeepers is one of humble respect for the fellow 'citizens' of God's kingdom, the trees and the animals.

Another feature of the earthkeeper's 'Garden of Eden' theology which is gaining prominence is that Adam's original sin is given contextualised African ecological connotations. Bishop Farawo suggests, for instance, that because God planted the first trees of creation, he was and remains particularly jealous and protective of all his trees. In a near pantheistic, immanentist perception of the presence of God's Spirit in trees Farawo literally considers God to be hurt and anguished whenever trees are felled. It is this love of God for his creation which Adam disregarded and offended when he first sinned against God. Said Farawo:

When there was harmony between God and Adam, God was happy to observe the wellbeing of his animals and trees. But when Adam sinned everything was spoilt. *Mwari's disappointment caused him to withdraw and become remote.* Even today we are still far away from Mwari because we sin against him much more grievously than Adam did. Take, for example, Masvingo province, especially Chivi district. The land is barren because all God's trees were felled. So God is absent. (My italics.)

In Farawo's views one is struck by the parallel with traditional African creation myths, which invariably feature the theme of the creator-God's anger and withdrawal from creation because of some mishap or human

misbehaviour. To the present-day earthkeeper the cardinal sin against God is disrespect for his presence in nature and mindless provocation of his protective jealousy of his forests – contemporary symbolic extensions of the Garden of Eden – as evidenced by the deforested regions of the Chivi district where Farawo himself leads the church's war of the trees. The Bishop does not judge and reject Adam's sin, moreover, but identifies with it, giving it particular poignancy in a rural context where environmental destruction reflects God's anguish and withdrawal. Absolution and deliverance, it seems, relate directly to restoring Mwari's creation, thus restoring harmony and closeness between Creator and human beings.

Adam's sin also becomes the focal point in defining the earthkeeping church's task of restoring creation. Zionist Bishop Nhongo illustrates this point as follows:

In the garden of Eden God only forbade Adam to eat from the tree of life. But the snake got into that tree and tempted Adam to transgress Mwari's law. As a result of Adam's sin the garden of Eden was destroyed. Likewise, nature was destroyed by greedy human beings over the entire earth. ZIRRCON and the church's objective is to restore the earth to what it was originally in Adam's time. The entire land is to be clad in green vegetation once again and wildlife will abound.

Somewhat naive as this view may seem in continental or global perspective, it provides a theologically understandable point of departure in the world of dispossessed peasants, where planting and nurturing a single woodlot represent a tangible, meaningful signpost of a better future. Once again the common guilt arising from Adam's transgression and subsequently compounded by the sins of all humanity is asserted. Hence the somewhat utopian ideal of restoring creation to its original unspoilt state.

Other frequently mentioned Old Testament figures are Noah and Moses, both of them liberators and 'men of God' in their own right. What virtually amounts to a new Africanised mythology is developed around Noah's ecologically salvific work. His ark, in the earthkeeper's view, contained *all* animals and seedlings of all plants. ZIRRCON or the AAEC churches are likened to Noah's ark in that they become the protectors of Mwari's creation in the deluge of environmental destruction.

The uniqueness of Moses's call to liberate Israel is seen to derive from the fact that God addresses him from a burning bush and gives him a wooden staff as symbolic affirmation of his task. Great importance is attached to God's choice of a tree as a symbol of divine presence and power during Israel's exodus (Mandondo, appendix II).

In some interpretations God's presence in a tree signifies equal status between humans and the rest of creation, the implication being that both are equally dependent on divine liberation from enslavement. Said Revd Masoro (appendix I):

The Israelites complained to Moses that he alone was conversing with Mwari. They, too, wanted to communicate directly with God. So God said: 'Let them wash and prepare themselves before we converse.' But God did not speak out in the open plains. Whenever he spoke he was hidden in a *denhere* (clump of trees). And the people had to lie prostrate in his presence. This shows that the tree and the human being are one (in status and need of deliverance).

From the ecological significance of the Old Testament figures Adam, Noah and Moses, the attention often switches directly to Christ, the true source of all life and guardian of all creation. Union with Christ (Jn 15), poignantly expressed in the imagery of the vine and its shoots or the *muchakata* tree with its branches laden with fruit (suggestive of the original harmony between God and humans in the garden of Eden), provides life and, to the earthkeeper, empowerment to heal creation. Said Revd Masoro in concluding his tree-planting oration: 'We cannot bear fruit if we are not in Christ, the true vine. If we do not go and ask for trees to plant we shall not have the trees which heal and clean us' (appendix I). Pragmatic as this motive for tree planting may seem, it nevertheless flows from new life in Christ. Obedience to Christ inevitably implies Christian responsibility for all creation, especially tree stewardship (Mandondo, appendix II).

Having considered some of the characteristic features of the African earthkeeping church, one can say in *summary* that prophetic healing colonies are extending their ministry to incorporate earth-healing. In the process some church headquarters acquire the features of 'environmental hospitals' with built-in healing responsibilities for the entire church community. In its new mission the church propagates salvation for all of creation, with a clear emphasis on the realised eschatology of

a revitalised creation here and now. Individual spiritual growth is directly related to, measured and fed by participation in earthkeeping programmes. Ecclesiastic unity acquires a new dimension as churches overcome isolation on account of the common cause of serving God's creation. New laws and disciplinary measures against earth destruction strengthen their resolve, which in turn finds expression in green liturgical innovation. The accompanying process of theological reflection is spontaneous and fairly straightforward, if subtle and intuitive in some respects. New theological insight crystallises in the action of church people as they trace their own response to God's inspiration to ecological figures and/or events in the Bible. Through a growing perception of human guilt in environmental destruction people's position in creation is reappraised as one of humility and complete identification with all creatures rather than of triumphalist subjection.