

## Even hunters can change: a personal appraisal of Inus Daneel and his work

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In the course of my relatively long 'scientific' life I have attended quite a lot of academic sessions at which candidates presented their theses in the hope of obtaining a doctorate. None, however, has impressed me more than Marthinus Louis Daneel when he defended his thesis, *The background and rise of Southern Shona Independent Churches*, at the Free University, Amsterdam, on Friday 25 June 1971. Most, if not all, candidates seem to be utterly exhausted by the time they reach this point and, if married, they (so to speak) humbly beg to be allowed to be reinstated in their families by their wives and children, whom they have neglected for such a long time (at any rate longer than anticipated), and they implicitly promise to return to 'normal', that is, they hint that they will never again in the future undertake any similar such arduous project. But Inus surprised everybody present when he announced that his thesis (already 527 pages) was only volume I out of a series of three. This self-confident statement was no empty boast, and it has been realised – although it took longer than he expected at the time (volume II was produced in 1974, and volume III followed in 1988).

My acquaintance with Inus Daneel thus stretches over a period of more than thirty years. The last time we met was on the occasion of the ninth IAMS Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in April 1996. At this conference we presented papers that dealt with a missiological approach to 'Earthkeeping' (Inus) and 'Land, development, and ecology' (myself).<sup>1</sup> The background of both papers was to a great extent the situation in Zimbabwe, where I had been since 1989, having accepted a post in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe. I had thus

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1 Both papers were published in *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* (IAMS), XIII, 1996.

entered Inus's 'hunting ground', namely Zimbabwe (though the missiological field there is so varied that we could easily give each other a wide berth).

I feel honoured to have been invited to contribute to Inus's *Festschrift* as I feel deeply appreciative of him personally and of his work. This will not exclude some critical remarks which should, however, be considered an expression of genuine friendship.

## Winning people's sympathy

One of Inus's great gifts is undoubtedly the charm with which he wins over and mobilises people for his plans. He achieved this, for instance, by inviting people to come and obtain first-hand experience of his work with Shona Independent Churches in Southern Zimbabwe. At that time I was doing research in Zambia in 1973 on new relationships of the Roman Catholic Church while my late wife, Gerdien, was engaged with her research into the history of the Reformed Church in Zambia (Verstraelen-Gilhuis 1982). We were both invited by Inus to visit his work in Fort Victoria (now Masvingo). I still have a vivid memory of his hospitality; we met a number of different AIC leaders, and Inus even lent us his Landrover to explore the environment of Great Zimbabwe. Many Dutch and other people have enjoyed similar visits that introduced them – often for the first time – to that important and intriguing phenomenon of church independency. Though Inus's hospitality was quite genuine (he is the most hospitable of men), he was also no doubt motivated by his (apparently inherited) 'merchant instinct' (Daneel 1995:197) and a deep desire to obtain moral and financial support for his work.

In that respect he was extremely fortunate in his relations with Protestant missionary and diaconal organisations in the Netherlands. For instance, the 1976 *Annual Report on Fambidzano* states that Dutch sponsors donated more than half of the funds for that year, namely R\$18.232 (DF1 67.920), while sponsors from other countries donated (altogether) R\$17.750. This indicates the extent of Inus's impact on circles concerned with mission and development since he obtained his doctorate in theology *cum laude* from the Free University in 1971.

There already existed an extensive corpus of knowledge about new and independent religious movements in Africa when Inus began to publish, beginning with *The god of the Matopo Hills* in 1970. Northwestern University in 1966 produced a comprehensive bibliography of modern African movements



Field researcher at work. Interviewing ministers of Bishop Mutendi's Zion Christian Church at Zion City (top); and typing out field notes in rural research camp (bottom)



with 1 313 items, and the *Journal of Religion in Africa* continued this bibliography in 1968 and 1970 with 614 more items – 1 907 items altogether (Verstraelen 1973). It remains beyond doubt, however, that Inus Daneel has made an important contribution to describing in great detail the Southern Shona Independent Churches. And I am not overstating the case when I say that it was Inus who created great interest in the AIC movement in the academic world of my own country, the Netherlands, especially among missiologists and anthropologists. It is worth noting that two outstanding representatives of these categories graced Inus's 'promotion' in 1971: Prof Bishop Bengt Sundkler of the University of Uppsala (the pioneer researcher and author of *Bantu prophets in South Africa*, London 1948), and Prof J F Holleman of the University of Leiden and director of the Afrika Studiecentrum (author of *Shona customary law*, London 1952). Inus also saw to it that copies of his thesis found a wide circulation within academic circles. I myself (attached at the time to the Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research (IIMO) at Leiden) was one of the beneficiaries, with a copy signed by and inscribed with the compliments of the author. When in 1973, in the context of an IIMO project on mutual assistance between churches, I wrote an article on assistance to and from AICs, I could refer also to Daneel's Fambidzano project in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) (Verstraelen 1973).

## Achieving something remarkable

Most academics remain safely within the academic sphere while trying to gain some kind of recognition from their peers. But Inus used his study as a starting point for instituting a very special form of assistance: the setting up of a theological training centre for Shona Independent Churches, coordinated by Fambidzano *yemakereke avatema* (Conference of Churches of Black People).

To do this rather than aspire to an academic career was, of course, wholly in line with Inus's character. He is and has remained a roaming 'hunter' who cannot really settle down in one place. Later he accepted a post in missiology at Unisa, Pretoria, but that was out of mere necessity. When I once met him there in his office (his desk was completely covered with scripts which he had to mark), I felt as though I was meeting a caged bird that was desperately looking for an opportunity to escape to freedom. True to his nature, Inus succeeded in coming to an agreement with this busy correspondence university that allowed him annually to return for some months to his

'hunting grounds' in Zimbabwe, where I met him several times in Harare. And of course, Inus, in the meantime has, not surprisingly, once again found sponsors for a new project, 'Earthkeeping', and this has liberated him from the cumbersome constraints of his university post.

And yet we should acknowledge that Inus stayed on with Fambidzano for a long time, serving as full-time director for nine years and subsequently as a part-time honorary director (consultant) for another eight years. Nor should we minimise the difficulties and tensions surrounding the founding and operation of Fambidzano. By reference to *Progress Report no 1* (4 August 1972) and a personal letter from Dr Daneel (11 October 1972), I am able to refer to three problems which faced the realisation of Fambidzano and its theological programme: the government officials of the UDI government of Ian Smith were suspicious of AICs as 'political danger in embryo'; the established mission churches were, if not negative, then at least dubious and reserved at the time, and they did not fully recognise the Independent Churches as fully Christian churches; and within the Independent Churches themselves there were leadership wrangles and tensions between Zionist and Ethiopian-type of churches.

Then a new factor that aggravated the situation was the war occasioned by the black liberation struggle for independence. Travelling to and from the stations where the theological lessons were given became extremely dangerous because of the ubiquity of landmines, and at the time there was a growing distrust on the part of government representatives towards *any* kind of black meetings – even meetings for religious-theological instruction. Inus, in this confused and dangerous situation, had to keep Fambidzano going, by among other things, keeping regular contact with the district officers so that he could obtain permission for the Fambidzano staff to continue moving around (*Fambidzano Annual Report* 1976:11).

Helpful contacts with Rhodesian government officials were facilitated because Inus, though born in Zimbabwe, was still a white South African Afrikaner, although he did not express himself on the policy of the government of the day. He sometimes even used government language by referring to freedom fighters as 'terrorists'. At any rate, Inus never publicly became a fighter against the apartheid system. In the 1976 *Fambidzano Annual Report*, Inus mentions a discussion between Roy Wyatt, then District Commissioner of Gokwe, and Dr Luuk Wieringa, a Dutch theologian who visited Fambidzano in July 1976. I quote from this *Report*:

Needless to say that the widely divergent backgrounds of a dedicated District Commissioner (who is spending much time promoting African Education) and a well-intending Dutch theologian who comes from a country where the iniquities of a race-discriminating Southern Africa are consistently (and all too often, one-sidedly) highlighted, provided the setting for interesting and lively discussion (*Fambidzano Annual Report* 1976:21).

It is clear (to me) that at the time Inus identified more easily with the Rhodesian district commissioner dedicated to promoting African education than with the Dutch theologian critical of the system of apartheid in South Africa and Rhodesia. Inus dedicated himself to the theological training of the Shona Independent Church people, but without analysing the political situation and context in which that training took place, and which resulted in offering a more or less acontextual type of theology.

### EXCURSUS: Fambidzano's programme scrutinised

In 1989 Daneel published *Fambidzano: ecumenical movement of Zimbabwean Independent Churches*, which describes the history and role of Fambidzano, and its theological training programme in particular (Daneel 1989). I wrote a review of this book in the Dutch missiological Journal *Wereld en Zending*, from which I take the following few points that illustrate my evaluation of Inus's major activity (Verstraelen 1990:279–281).

Fambidzano's theological programme contained ethics, but nothing is mentioned about a reflection on the political context. When Inus deals with the liberation struggle (as already mentioned, often referred to as 'terrorism'), he speaks about the problems and/or impossibility of pursuing theological training in the various centres. However, there is no word about theology of liberation, to which the situation no doubt gave rise. This leads to the question, 'What type of theology was presented in the programme?' Daneel definitely had great influence in conceiving and filling in the courses. He candidly describes his contribution as 'teaching them about *Western theology*' (Daneel 1989:10. Emphasis added). Although Inus was aware of the danger of imposing a foreign, colonial-oriented type of theology, he nevertheless remained fixed on Western theology, without apparently taking or finding time to link the programme to the theological developments in the South, the Third World theologies that were emerging during that period. In

this book there are no references to African theologians, while the emerging black theology of South Africa was trying find an answer to the 'white dominance' within the theological programme of Fambidzano, that planning for and writing African theology were viewed as a challenge for the future (Daneel 1989: 502–503).

Fambidzano, after the political independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, felt compelled to engage in development projects. This was motivated by sociopolitical reasons and not (yet) from a holistic understanding of salvation. The book refers to the tension between theological formation and development programmes as if there is no intrinsic relationship between the two (Daneel 1989:418, 275).

The theology produced within Fambidzano seemed to correspond to a great extent with what the Kairos Document called 'church theology'. The challenge of a prophetic theology was missing. However, we have to acknowledge that Daneel (in chapter 9 of the book, which deals with future challenges) does criticise himself (although in a rather *post facto* manner) as he examines the deficiencies and gaps in his Fambidzano theological project.

### A 'bridge builder'

Other aspects of Inus Daneel's life throw more light on the kind of person he is and how he operates. While there are no indications of active opposition by Inus to the apartheid system in South Africa and Rhodesia, he had no problems about mixing with and befriending Africans. In the preface to his thesis he acknowledges the assistance received from African people. He does so not in general terms (as so often in this type of publication), but specifically. He mentions every collaborator by name, and he calls Daveson Njarava, a former DRC evangelist, his 'trusted friend and counselor throughout the entire project' (Daneel 1971: viii).

Inus belongs to the Dutch Reformed Church in which his father was a missionary who 'dwelt on the holy mountain near Great Zimbabwe for more than forty years' (Daneel 1995:197). It was here that Inus's cradle once stood and where he inherited his reformed Calvinistic orientation (Daneel 1989:1–4). But Inus did not wish to become an official representative of the DRC; he preferred to be 'a lay missionary, qualified but never ordained, who then

traded the history of white missions for the uncharted territory of Black Independent Church missionary work' (Daneel 1995:197).

And yet Inus has been unmistakably influenced by the ideological stances taken by the DRC in South Africa. For instance, although Fambidzano had contacts with the Lausanne movement, they had none with the World Council of Churches (Verstraelen 1990:280). In one of the propositions (which in accordance with Dutch academic custom have to accompany one's main thesis), Inus echoes DRC criticism of the World Council of Churches while at the same time inviting his church to reconsider affiliation with this council on theological grounds.<sup>2</sup> The latter may be explained, I think, by Inus's exposure to a number of church and theological developments in the Netherlands during the period of his study there (1965–1971). De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) had become a member of the WCC in 1968, while the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) was one of the founding members of the WCC when it was officially established in Amsterdam in 1948. Inus must also have been aware of a breakthrough in relationships between Catholic and Protestant missionary and ecumenical institutions, and particularly between Protestant and Catholic missiologists. In this new atmosphere of openness and responsiveness to the influence of Vatican Council and WCC Assemblies, the creation of the Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research (IIMO) was realised in 1969 when state, Protestant and Catholic universities and theological colleges (together with missionary and ecumenical bodies) cooperated in reflecting on common issues and challenges for mission *in loco* and *in globo* (Verstraelen 1995:432–437).

Although Inus was already open to 'others', he was certainly further strengthened and encouraged in his attitudes by what he saw and experienced in the Dutch ecclesiastical and missio-theological field. We find an expression of Inus's openness in Fambidzano's 1976 *Annual Report*. In it he refers to the 'outstanding experience' of having spent three days with the Bethlehem (Catholic) Fathers at Driefontein Mission (Zimbabwe) in November 1976, lecturing and answering questions on the Shona Indepen-

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2 'Despite the questionable resolution recently taken by the World Council of Churches in connection with financial aid to resistance movements, it is of importance that the Reformed Churches of South Africa consider affiliation to this ecumenical movement on theological grounds' (Proposition XIII to Daneel's PhD thesis, 1971).

dent Churches. 'The sharing of thoughts on certain biblical truths and spontaneous prayers reminded me of the spiritual fellowship we are used to in Protestant mission circles' (*Fambidzano Annual Report 1976:21-22*). Indeed Inus has made his own personal contribution to improving relationships between Catholics and Protestants in Zimbabwe.

He has also been a bridge-builder between different types of Shona Independent Churches. He managed to bring together Zionist and Ethiopian churches in Fambidzano – although some Zionist or Spirit-type churches found it almost impossible to be trained together with and by people who did not give a central place to the Holy Spirit in their churches. He was also able to remove the fear that the ultimate aim of Fambidzano was to bring the AICs under the control of established mission churches and hence cause them to lose their own identity by, for instance, discarding polygamy as a legitimate option.

From the beginning of the 1970s the concept 'mutual assistance' became an expression of new relations between the so-called younger and older churches. I myself was involved in an IIMO study project on the 'mutual assistance of churches' (1970-1976) by making a case study on new relations of the Catholic Church in Zambia (published under the title, *From missionary dependence to mutuality in mission* Leiden 1975).<sup>3</sup>

Though this IIMO project limited itself to 'older' and 'younger' churches (ie churches born out of the missionary activity of the older churches), there was a strong feeling among many missiologists at the time that 'mutual assistance' should also be applied in the relationships between the so-called established churches and the African Independent Churches (Verstraelen 1973).

Daneel hinted at this possibility of 'mutual assistance' in one of the propositions attached to his thesis of 1971. In it he implicitly refers to assistance emanating from AICs when he suggests that their 'typically African way of expression' could provide assistance to the 'sober liturgy' of the Reformed Mission Church: 'experimentation with traditional music, dancing,

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3 For a summary and evaluation of the project as a whole, see E Janse Schoonhoven, *Wederkerige Assistentie van Kerken in Missionair Perspectief: Samenvatting en Evaluatie van een Studieproject, 1970-1977*. Leiden: IIMO, 1977. (A shortened English version was published under the title, *Mutual assistance of churches in missionary perspective*. IIMO Research Pamphlet no 1, Leiden, 1979).

drumming, hand clapping and ululating might lead to the introduction of adapted and more properly safeguarded practices'.<sup>4</sup> Inus, more than a decade later, speaks explicitly of the contribution of AICs to African theology. In a 1984 article he comes to the conclusion, 'if theology is to be relevant and contextual in order to be regarded as theology, there can be no doubt about the vital contribution of the Independent Churches to a *theologia Africana*' (Daneel 1984d:64–89; cf Verstraelen 1973).

### A missionary 'merchant-pirate'

While writing this contribution I was reminded of a sentence in *Sounds* by Vladimir Nabokov. The protagonist, on meeting an old friend, says: 'I started scrutinizing him, and had the feeling I was really seeing him for the first time, even though we were old acquaintances' (Nabokov 1995:18). Something similar happened to me when I tried to take a close look at Inus Daneel's personality and work. In this I have been greatly helped by Inus himself and his self-revelation about his own roots.

In the Epilogue of his novel, *Guerilla snuff* (1995), Inus mentions 'two sets of dreams dreaming me' (Daneel 1995: 196) that is, two genealogies, one African (in the 1960s he had been adopted by the Gumbo Rufura people of Gutu) and the other Western. Without denying Inus's closeness to the Shona people, one may say that he is also deeply rooted in his European ancestry: Flemish ship-owners and merchants, one of whom settled at the Cape and whom Inus sometimes thinks of as a pirate. But there were also distinguished clergymen and missionaries who went to the North. It is interesting to read how Inus identifies himself within this merchant-pirate-missionary genealogy:

This ancestral tide of merchants and pirates, ministers and missionaries, eventually deposited me in Zimbabwe. It seemed as if the heavy weight of all those ordained ministers was pulling the ancient genealogy slightly skew. *A new merchant pirate* was needed to restore equilibrium. So Zimbabwean soil obliged with a *lay missionary* . . . who then traded the history of white missions for the uncharted territory of black Independent Church missionary work (Daneel 1995:197. Emphasis added).

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4 Proposition XIX, attached to Daneel's thesis of 1971.

So here we have Inus – in his own words – thinking of himself as a merchant-pirate-missionary. He was indeed a pirate, and has remained so, although ‘pirate’ in but one of the many meanings of *peirao*: one who is not afraid of new experiments and adventures. After his experiment with Fambidzano, followed by an intermezzo of ‘captivity’ in the Department of Missiology of Unisa, he more recently embarked on a new experiment: Zirrcan (Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation). This institute took up responsibility for initiating and developing two sister organisations, one for traditionalists and spirit mediums in particular (AZTREC means the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists), and the other for African Independent Churches (AAEC means the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches). Both associations have a practical common goal, namely *hondo yemititi* – the now-famous ‘war of the trees’. Apart from their concern for reforestation, they are also interested in the protection of water resources and wildlife conservation. And our merchant-pirate was once again able to find sponsors to finance this new type of ‘piracy’, following his well-developed ‘hunter’s instinct for where to find the needed ‘prey’ (Daneel 1996a and 1996c).

All this may sound a bit cynical and as though I wished to portray Inus as a profiteer. But the opposite is true. Being a professed lay missionary points to an orientation in the opposite direction; his role is basically one of service from a holistic understanding of mission. For the multi-gifted Inus could easily have become the successful owner of a shipyard or of an airline company. Yet he deliberately chose to be a lay missionary with a special mission, indeed one beyond the usual understanding of what mission entails, but nevertheless a genuine type of mission: Fambidzano–Zirrcan. And, of course, as he developed these Daneelian forms of mission, his ancestral skills, so evident in admiration for his ‘merchant-pirate’ ancestor, came in very useful indeed.

## From Inus Daneel to Mafuranhunzi Gumbo

Almost twenty-five years after his dissertation on Southern Shona Independent Churches (1971), Inus Daneel published *guerrilla snuff* (1995) under the name of Mafuranhunzi Gumbo. *Mafuranhunzi* (literally, ‘you shoot the fly’) is used as nickname for a sharp-shooting hunter. Anyone who knows even a little about Inus knows that he is a ‘sharp-shooting hunter’ who won the confidence of Shona people through his dexterity in hitting the hunted

target. *Gumbo* is Inus's name – after the Gumbo Rufura people adopted him in the 1960s. By using his African name, Inus apparently wishes to indicate that he belongs to African people and as such that he can understand and describe (more or less) from within how the liberation struggle revitalised many African ancestral beliefs and rituals.

It would be interesting to know whether Inus has come closer to the traditional African worldview during the past twenty-five years, including African traditional religion, not only strategically or phenomenologically but also spiritually, in the sense of a new evaluation and appreciation. In order to obtain a full and adequate answer I should have to make a systematic analysis of *all* Daneel's publications. Yet I want to share briefly *my impression* that Inus has indeed changed his evaluation and appreciation of African traditional religion.

In the 1970s Inus became an advocate of the idea that Independent Churches in Africa are Christian and form part of the Church Universal.<sup>5</sup> However, in this period he seemed reluctant to take a positive approach to African traditional religion as such. In an article, written in 1973 on 'The Christian Gospel and the ancestor cult', Daneel states, with reference to Romans 1:18ff, that 'there is no element in the traditional religion which is of itself "pure" or "good" and [which] can without further ado be incorporated in the Shona Church' (Daneel 1973:69). Here he undoubtedly is influenced by a Free University-Barthian type of dogmatics.

From the mid-1980s he seemed to show a more positive approach to African traditional religion – compared with his previous position. He has apparently moved away from theological dogmatism towards a science of religion approach, strengthened by a new, positive theology of religions. This move has become visible since the launching of Inus's environmental offensive through Zirron (founded in 1988).<sup>6</sup> Zirron (above) mobilised two sister groups, one for (mainly) spirit mediums (Aztrec) and one for African Independent Churches (AAEC). The latter group did not join without opposition. The Rev Peter Makamba, successor to Inus Daneel as director

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5 See Daneel's proposition IV, against G C Oosthuizen, *Post-Christianity in Africa* (London 1968) and proposition XVI, agreeing with J F Ade Ajayi and E A Ayandele's position in their 'Writing African church history' in *The church crossing frontiers*, Beyerhaus P, Hallencreutz, C F (eds) (Uppsala 1969). These propositions belong to Daneel's dissertation of 1971.

6 Daneel gives two different dates for the founding of Zirron: 1984 in Daneel 1996c:134, and 1988 in Daneel 1996a:216 (see note 28).

of Fambidzano, was initially of the opinion that association with traditionalists in Zirrcon would be detrimental to the Christian identity of AICs. But in the end large numbers of churches affiliated to Fambidzano and joined the 'war of the trees', on the condition that these churches maintained their membership in both movements.

The close cooperation and interaction of Independent Church leaders with traditional spirit mediums have resulted in a more positive evaluation of the guardian ancestors than before. In Daneel's words:

The role of the Holy Spirit is related to the world of the senior ancestors more positively than Zionists and Apostles generally allow for. Instead of the *varidzi venyika* (guardian ancestors of the land) being branded as 'demons', fit only to be exorcised or disassociated from by Christian prophets, a certain reverence for them is observed by the Christian tree planters (Daneel 1996c:163).

Inus seems to have evolved with them in this positive approach by posing the question as to 'whether these ancestors do not represent a theologically accepted form of African *praeparatio evangelica*?' (Daneel 1996c:163). And in this context Christ is interpreted by Inus as 'the fulfillment of all ancestorhood, as the true *muridzi venyika*, guardian of the land, the "Ancestor" of all universe, commissioned and empowered by the Godhead to introduce new life to all creation' (Daneel 1996c:164). This positive interpretation of Christ as 'Ancestor of all the universe' is quite different from the cautious warning voiced by Daneel in 1971 against Christ being misunderstood as a kind of mediating *mhondoro* (tribal ancestor).<sup>7</sup> It should, be noted, however, that this cooperation and interaction, made possible through a more positive evaluation than before, does not lead to theological relativism because 'in AAEC theology Christ's ancestorhood and his communication with the guardian ancestors in no way detracts from acceptance of his lordship (Mt.28:18) over all creation' (Daneel 1996c:164).

Daneel has characterised himself as 'a somewhat pragmatic man' (Daneel 1995:x) and he therefore might have been careful not to upset the missiological fraternity of IAMS for which he prepared the paper on

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7 See proposition XVII, in Daneel's thesis of 1971. It is perhaps interesting to note that the Rev Collis G Machoko, an Anglican priest and one of my PhD students at the University of Zimbabwe, has just finalised a thesis on contextual Christology in which Christ figures as the *Mudzimu mukuru* (Great Ancestor) par excellence.

'Earthkeeping in missiological perspective' (1996). I do believe, however, that Inus fundamentally has remained the same: a Christian lay missionary confessing and even witnessing to Christ's Lordship over all powers and religious traditions. Yet I also think that Inus more and more has been captivated by the power of the traditional worldview and its religious components. This comes clearly to the fore in his novel *guerrilla snuff*, in which he is not required to take into account theological interlocutors and in which he feels free to express his real feelings. This can be clarified by the following event. After Inus had interviewed Chakarakata, former Zanla detachment commander of the liberation struggle, he discovered that the tape in his recorder was blank. Inus reports:

I was embarrassed. This had not happened to me before. But never before had a *chimurenga* horn of ancestral snuff been leaning against my recorder . . . Perhaps this was an ancestral warning, one given to a somewhat pragmatic man, which meant that he should not trifle with unseen powers. Perhaps Mabwazhe [the common ancestor of the Gumbo Rufura people of Gutu by whom Inus had been adopted. FJV] was sending his white kinsman the message, 'Tread carefully with respect, Mafuranhunzi. For our *chimurenga* [liberation struggle. FJV] ground on which you are standing is holy' (Daneel 1995:x).

## Change and sameness

The last sentence of Daneel's *guerilla snuff* reads, 'Even hunters can change' (Daneel 1995:198). It refers in its context to Inus as a hunter who has been 'converted' from killing animals to being a guardian of them. Inus came to this conclusion after he heard the voice of *Zenda*, the hunter's *shavi* spirit whispering in his ear, 'Mafuranhunzi, we shall become the guardians of the animals . . .'. Indeed, Inus Daneel has changed but, paradoxically, he has remained a 'merchant-pirate'. What has also remained is his missionary orientation: mission, not in general sense of 'task', but in the unambiguous Christian sense of representing the Good News in Jesus Christ. Inus, even in his earthkeeping enterprise proclaims that 'the entire tree-planting Eucharist testifies to Christ's lordship in heaven and on earth' (Daneel 1996c:164). Yet Inus's Christian missionary orientation has nevertheless undergone a change in that he, through a more positive approach to African traditional religion, has discovered Christ in a new light: 'Christ as the fulfillment of all ancestorhood' (Daneel 1996c:164).

While all people are unique, Inus Daneel is unique because he has changed by remaining the same. Yet this very 'sameness' has undergone change under the influence of intercultural and inter-religious experiences and new insights – while he himself has remained firmly rooted in the same faith that he inherited from his merchant-pirate, clerical-missionary ancestors. What better can we do than to commend Inus Daneel, the missionary merchant-pirate, to the 'Ancestor of all the universe' to keep him as he is, because that will guarantee that he will become involved in new enterprises of the same sterling relevancy.

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### My friend Mafuranhunzi

*Willem Saayman*

With this book we are actually honouring more than one Inus Daneel, because there are various sides to his personality. There is Professor Inus Daneel, the painfully meticulous empirical researcher of Southern Shona African Initiated Churches (AICs),<sup>1</sup> who sometimes irritates and frustrates us by his unwillingness to generalise and extrapolate in theory formation about the Independents in the rest of Africa. Then there is the white Shona who identifies with the Shona Independents to such an extent that he is accorded the status of an independent bishop. And then there is the African bushman, known far and wide in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe as *Mafuranhunzi*, 'the one who can shoot the fly'. It is not my responsibility (rather fortunately, I think) to reconcile Inus's very unorthodox sympathy for the Independents with his somewhat rigid Reformed orthodoxy. My task is to introduce you to my friend and fellow-bushman, Mafuranhunzi.

We discovered our affinity as lovers of the silent, lonely places of the African bush when we became colleagues at Unisa. When the crush of people, the frustration of peak-hour traffic, and the continual hustle and bustle of a big university became too much for us, we knew that we would find a sympathetic hearing in each other's company. Very soon we departed on our first trip to the silent places in the kingdom of the wild together, and shared many a profound missiological discussion while travelling the thousands of kilometres it took us to reach our favourite places. As we shared words and silences, we began to understand each other's missiological concerns, which were often quite divergent.

Born at the well-known DRC mission station, Morgenster, in southern Zimbabwe in 1936, Inus is of traditional missionary parentage. He is a white African through and through – a person who would shrivel away and die if he

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1 The terms, African Initiated Churches and African Independent Churches, are both used in the literature. I will refer to the Independents when I am writing about the members of these churches.

were to be removed from his Zimbabwean context for too long. It is only necessary to accompany him once on a visit to his beloved Zimbabwe to realise how deep and irreplaceable are his bonds there. I first met him when I was a theology student at Stellenbosch in the early 1970s and he came to lecture to us. He came across then as a typically dry and careful Reformed theologian, and nothing in the public persona of the well-dressed professor gave away any secrets about the African bushman I was to discover in later years.

It is generally accepted in missiological circles today that Bengt Sundkler's serious study of Zulu Independents in the forties and fifties is responsible for the sea-change in Christian attitudes toward the Independents, which has revealed itself so clearly since the seventies. I would venture to say, though, that the acceptance of Sundkler's views owes much to Inus's more precise and thoroughgoing field work. His ease in communicating with traditional, rural Africans (for which he often gives credit to his mother), his patience and willingness to let them tell him exactly what their rituals signified, and his ability to bring together teams of talented field researchers all contributed to his success in his chosen field.

It is a fascinating paradox that these same qualities are also, in my opinion, responsible for some of the blind spots in his work. Inus is somewhat impatient with and dismissive of the more radical and more urban black theology than he is of the more instinctive, enacted African theology of the rurally based Independents, although both have arisen in the same geographical area. This, as I see it, is symptomatic in Inus of a streak of all-consuming exasperation which the self-sufficient bushman typically feels when confronted with the folly and pomposity of effete city dwellers. How often have I heard him whisper while one of these 'city folk' lectured with great authority, 'I would like to see what he does when a buffalo charges!'

Of course it is easy to dismiss such an attitude as romantic and out-dated. But Africa is nothing if not romantic, and the stories of individual missionaries to Africa often contain all the dimensions of a romantic saga. I say this while fully aware that rational modernity has 'destroyed' all our romantic illusions and demoted them to the level of superstition, and that postmodernism pokes fun at the kind of human commitment which so often lies at the root of romanticism. Of course, white missionaries committed terrible crimes on the basis of their romantic delusions and the harsh realities of devastation in Africa today can destroy romantic delusions in an

afternoon. But I would like to say that I know that my friend Mafuranhunzi's romanticism is not grounded in a hazy, make-believe concept of the realities of Africa today. He knows both the material poverty and the spiritual riches of the Independents of Africa; he knows the horrors committed on both sides of the liberation war; he knows the human greed and hypocrisy generated by the present era of 'economic aid' to poor, benighted Africa.

But he also knows the incredible richness inherent in the spirit of the traditions of Africa, traditions which are still alive in mud and wattle huts as well as in city skyscrapers; he knows the miracles of material and spiritual healing worked by the honestly human religious belief alive in Africa; and, above all, he knows the reality and honesty of human communion in Africa, the community of the living and the living dead, the community of the human and the natural environment. For this reason he can communicate at the graves of his missionary father and mother and under the tree where his beloved sister lost her life. This kind of romanticism, the hard romanticism of present-day Africa, the invigorating romanticism of the African bush, will long outlive modernity and postmodernism – because it is an essential dimension of human existence in Africa.

What I have written so far should in no way be read as an unqualified praise-poem to our friend and colleague Inus Daneel. As his beloved Reformed faith makes so abundantly clear, all of us are born sinful, and none of us can claim perfection in any way. So we are celebrating Inus, not because he is without faults or because he embodies all missiological wisdom. We celebrate him rather by recognising that he is as incomplete a human being as any one of us, and for this reason we take his contribution seriously by emphasising both the good and the bad in it. Given his wonderful talents and opportunities, he should have done much more to situate AICs within the totality of Southern African Christianity. His impatience with a more Marxist-oriented Southern African black theology, which often bordered on a dismissiveness of black mission churches, hampered, in my opinion, our theological progress toward a truly holistic Southern African Christian theology. In some respects, he was blind to the weaknesses in Southern African Independency, and he too easily dismissed critical questions raised by (especially younger) black theologians.

But Mafuranhunzi, my colleague and friend, you taught me many things which helped me to make peace with my Afrikaner/African/Christian identity. Your unconditional love for the African bush resonates in my heart, which



Healing as life-style: healing people in 1965 – Inus treats trachoma of the eyes in Chingombe chiefdom (top); healing earth in 1995 – as earthkeeper, Muchakata assists chiefs and spirit mediums with tree planting (bottom)



loves it equally unreservedly. The humour and joy in which your community with African people is grounded will continue to inspire us and give us hope that a truly human mutual existence is possible for God's dark-skinned as well as for his pale-faced African children.

# Mudavanhu: the one who loves the people

## *Bishop Reuben Marinda*

### Introduction

Why the use of the name Mudavanhu? It means 'the one who loves the people'. It is a symbol of vision for unity amongst AICs and care for the people involved.

The son of missionary parents, Daneel grew up among the African people at the former Dutch Reformed Mission, Morgenster, near the impressive Great Zimbabwe in the vicinity of Masvingo.

During his youth he used to play with the African children. He used to go to the mountains together with these children to look for wild fruits such as *matobwe*, *tsviru*, *mutunduru*, and *maroro*, and used to hunt birds with a catapult. These early contacts with Africans caused him to be closer to African people than many other children of missionaries. Because of this, he speaks the Shona language very nearly as well as the Africans themselves. In many ways he has been formed by and identifies with the rich Shona cultural heritage. Though forced by circumstances to live in several 'worlds', it is among the Shona Independent Christians that, according to his own witness, he found a place to feel at home. There his life acquired meaning, a 'sense of belonging' (Daneel 1987:15).

Through his close ties with AICs during a three-year period of research among them, Mudavanhu observed the need of these churches for ecumenism and theological advancement. So he followed up his research by helping the AICs to form an ecumenical conference called Fambidzano. During these years of close involvement with the AICs he was nicknamed Mudavanhu – 'the man who loves the people'. The new ecumenical conference enabled the AICs to break through their rural isolationism, to obtain some recognition from the mission churches and to develop their own means of theological self-interpretation in relation to the rest of Christianity.

Mudavanhu is regarded by the AICs as their Moses because they were regarded by the established churches as separatists and sects who were

preaching heresy to the people. His role as a liberator derived from his willingness to champion the cause of the AICs. As a result they became recognised as genuine Christian churches and missionary institutions in their own right.

Although the Shona Independents to whom he related during his research did not clearly or consistently articulate ecumenical ideas, he guessed that a united front was required if they were to launch successful theological training programmes of their own. This insight gave birth to his personal ideal of AIC ecumenism. Having established a wide network of contacts with the Shona Independent Church leaders, Mudavanhu realised that, given the opportunity, he could play a meaningful role as contact person and bridge builder among the widely scattered and doctrinally diverse church groups.

Mudavanhu accepted the ecumenical challenge in observance of the traditional Shona principle of reciprocity in kinship and wider social relations. This meant that he could plough back into the AICs something of the goodwill and friendship which he has always experienced among them. He was fully aware of the frustrating, often disheartening experiences of members of the Christian Institute in their dealing with AICA (African Independent Church Association in South Africa) and had no illusions about the hazards involved in such a venture.<sup>1</sup> Some of his friends and observers of the Independents elsewhere in Africa actually tried to persuade him not to get involved. They argued that the whole history of ecumenical attempts in Southern Africa, none of which seemed to have succeeded or lasted, indicated the futility of such attempts. Even in Zimbabwe the early attempt by the leaders of Ethiopian-type churches to form an ecumenical movement had failed. Nevertheless, once the challenge was there it could not be ignored.

When Mudavanhu returned to Masvingo Province from the Netherlands, where he completed his studies, he started his ministry amongst the AICs. He developed a theological training programme from within the AICs on a self-help basis. Right from the beginning it was emphasised that in spite of Mudavanhu's own involvement and also foreign financial support, theologi-

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1 Here Bishop Marinda is referring to the ill-fated attempt by Beyers Naudé to organise a self-sustaining ecumenical movement (AICA) among South African indigenous churches in the late 1960s (Editors).

cal training was to be a project of and for the AICs without any interference or control by the local mission churches.

## The birth of the Independent Church ecumenical movement

Over a period of several months, Mudavanhu made numerous visits in the rural areas to all the AICs leaders whom he had come to know in earlier years. At the various church headquarters his proposals were discussed at length, both at individual and at church council level. In the course of those visits he was able to distribute some of his publications on Independency among the church leaders. Their response to what they regarded as a form of recognition of their movements was highly significant. Mudavanhu's books on the AICs gave them a sense of common achievement. As one bishop said when he saw his picture on the page opposite a historic account of his church: 'Now I can die in peace because I will never be forgotten by the coming generations.'

Mudavanhu is a missionary to and for the AICs. His vocation became the promotion of AIC ecumenism and the improvement of mission church-AIC relations. He is the first son of missionaries who responded to AIC needs for recognition by the mission churches and for theological training.

It took the AIC leaders some time to grow used to the idea of close co-operation among themselves. Yet, as they started to relate to each other more regularly they embraced Mudavanhu's proposal for church unity enthusiastically. In the context of the new movement, the names Mudavanhu and Moses, as indicative of the uniqueness of Daneel's ministry, obtained meaning.

Professor Daneel at first experienced some problems with his missionary friends. The project he was propagating was seen as the scheme of a freelance individual 'missionary' operating outside the control of any of the mission churches. In terms of the Reformed tradition he was regarded as a person 'doing his own thing out there with the separatist heretics'. This allegation illustrated a lack of understanding resulting from insufficient contact between the Mission and Independent Churches. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches both generally regarded the AIC as 'non-churches' or 'stray churches' whose members had to be re-baptised if they wanted to enter a mission church. In the Zimbabwe Reformed Church's Law



Zionist tree-planting eucharist. Bishop Moses and Mutikizizi prepare the table of holy communion. Bishops Marinda and Zvanaka in the background (top). The sacrament of tree-planting is concluded with celebratory song and dance (bottom)



Book it was explicitly stated with regard to the spirit-type and Ethiopian-type movements: 'We cannot co-operate with these churches at all . . . Members of these churches must attend catechism class for two years if they want to join our church. They are also to be re-baptised' (Daneel 1989:27). By contrast Daneel was convinced that 'in the Independent Churches we are on the whole confronted with admittedly limited, in some respects distorted (as indeed is the case with all empirically observable Christianity), but nevertheless Christian Churches. As a result a realistic objective would be co-operation with these movements rather than re-baptism of their members as if the entire IC movement was, by implication, considered the "object of Mission"'. Moreover he regarded his own involvement with the AICs in the fields of ecumenical co-operation and theological instruction as an attempt to assist these in moving from the periphery to the centre of Christianity.

In the early seventies the attitudes of government officials towards Mudavanhu's involvement with the AICs varied a great deal. Some of the commissioners in whose areas he operated were sympathetically disposed, while others were suspicious of political instigation. One senior official quite openly opposed the idea of someone working with what he called the 'sects'. He hinted that there was sufficient evidence of their members being increasingly involved in subversive political activities to justify his attitude. 'They are used by the political extremists', he said. It was also intimated that Mudavanhu's activities in the tribal lands would be closely watched.

The Fambidzano *Yemakereke Avatema* (Co-operative of Black Churches) was formed on 28–30 July 1972. The first meeting of about 150 delegates representing between 20 and 30 Independent Churches was held at River Rozva near Nyika Growth Point in Bikita District. Most major AICs were represented: the Zionists, a delegation of the Marange Apostolic Church and the Ethiopian-type churches. The main aim of this conference was to discuss proposals for the formation of an Association of Independent Shona churches and to assess the response of the delegates to these proposals in an 'experimental' ecumenical situation. As the initial discussion had taken place at the individual church headquarters, there was no way of predicting exactly how the delegates would respond in such a diversified ecclesiastical situation or context. Therefore high expectations, suspicion and occasional high tension prevailed.

In his introduction Mudavanhu stressed the need for Christian unity as a requisite for effective witness to Christ's good news in this world. John 17:

22–23 was always used as the biblical basis for bringing the participants together, with the inference that an Association of the Independent Churches could contribute to the realisation of the combined ideals of unity and mission. During several non-stop sessions the possible basis, objectives and organisation of an association were discussed. Consensus was soon reached on the need for establishing a representative body of the IAICs which set itself at least two basic objectives: promoting theological education for its office-bearers; and improving inter-church relations. Generally it was agreed that, in order to qualify, a church should be based on the word of God (both Old and New Testament); believe in God the Father, Jesus Christ his Son and the Holy Spirit; practise baptism in the name of the triune God; practise Holy Communion; and have a church council which deals with disciplinary issues. Some of the Zionist delegation wanted more clarification of the belief in the Holy Spirit, but the general feeling was that this should not be narrowed down by precise definition as it would leave insufficient scope for the diversity of beliefs.

From the discussions on this subject it was agreed that there was considerable concern for the genuinely Christian nature of the proposed association. Not just any group calling themselves Christians would be allowed to join. It was also stressed that the proposed administrative board would appoint a special committee to consider applications for membership in the light of these Christian standards.

Towards the end of the conference the delegates of twelve churches were in favour of immediate formation of an association. The remaining delegates wanted time to consider possible application. To avoid dissatisfaction it was decided that all churches which joined the association before the end of the year would be considered founding members. On Saturday evening 29 July 1972, the AICC (Fambidzano) was founded by the first twelve member churches.

One of the most important features in founding Fambidzano was enabling the leaders of numerous churches to meet for the first time. This helped terminate the isolation which existed amongst the Independent Churches in the rural areas. These leaders for the first time could meet, mix, preach, sing and dance together. The AICs now forged new bonds and relationships which helped them to see and experience a new life in Christian unity. The barriers of religious bias which formerly separated them were exposed and discarded. At meetings the bishops increasingly came out in strong support

of Mudavanhu. They counted him similar to those who fought colonial oppression and exploitation. In the new movement the AICs were being liberated from obscurity.

Rev Rainos Musasikwa of the First Ethiopian Church captured the mood of the formation of Fambidzano in his simple self-composed songs. His *Birth of Fambidzano* tells of a white man who was told by God to walk the black man's land and 'write everything' (about the black churches) and then to return to the black man's land from overseas. The chorus of this song had humorous touches to it:

*'See! We have a white man.  
Bishops we have  
Where now is the mission church  
God alone knows'.*

The song *Mudavanhu's praise* gave joy and celebration to the one who had founded Fambidzano and who had formed the miracle of uniting the Independent Churches in ecumenical co-operation. Many songs were composed and sung in praise of the new movement and its founder.

As 'the one who cares about the people' and as Bishop Moses, Daneel remains to this day integrated in AIC life in Zimbabwe.

## Muchakata and the war of the trees

The following interviews with Shona Chiefs Chikwanda, Chivi and Murinye were conducted in Shona in August of 1997 by Zirrcon staff members Farai Mfanyane, Taverengwa Chiwara, and Gladmore Charamba, who then translated them into English. Chief Murinye is the patron of Aztrec, and Chiefs Chivi and Chikwanda are active participants. All three chiefs are long-term supporters of the tree-planting movement begun by Inus Daneel in the 1980s. In the tree-planting movement, Daneel's tree name is Muchakata, or 'wild cork tree'. The chiefs interpret Daneel's place in African Traditional Religion as they discuss his role in the environmental movement. Chief Chivi, for example, speculates that Daneel was motivated by his ancestors to begin the tree-planting, and therefore functions as a *svikiro* or spirit medium who communicates the ancestral will to the living. The interviews also reveal the chiefs' interactions with Christianity and their adoption of Christian ideas despite their responsibilities as key figures in the traditional religion. All three express positive appreciation for the inter-religious cooperation that has come about through the tree-planting movement.

### Chief Chikwanda

Staff: Chief Chikwanda, you are involved in the 'war of trees' among traditionalists. Would you please tell us your experiences in this programme since you became involved?

Chikwanda: Daneel came up with this great idea of fighting the 'war of trees'. The purpose was to beautify the face of the earth by conserving and restoring all the natural resources that have been created by God. With this in mind, Professor Daneel introduced to us the idea of planting trees in those areas where grasses and trees had been burnt by reckless villagers. Zirrcon therefore began to establish tree nurseries. We also began to collect tree seedlings in our nurseries. As this programme has developed, the countryside has begun to

look better than it ever did before. We really appreciate such services.

Staff: Was it Professor Daneel who came up with this idea?

Chikwanda: I think it must have been because I had not yet come across any black people who were planting trees in that way. I would like to assume that God inspired Daneel, in some inexplicable way, to come up with such plans.

Staff: What do you think inspired him to come up with that plan?

Chikwanda: He had seen the obvious signs that are common in these areas – there were no more trees. The trees had gone. People had no firewood, and so they destroyed all the indigenous trees and then started to use gum trees as firewood. They did this out of ignorance. If you are given something and you do not know how to use it, you will definitely misuse it. But those people who have the know-how will preserve the things given to them in a sustainable way.

Staff: How do the chiefs feel about this idea of tree planting that was brought by Professor Daneel?

Chikwanda: We really appreciate this idea because chiefs are people who, in the beginning, were not voted into their positions. Chiefs were chosen by God. Similarly, trees were not made by people. They were created by God. And so, when Daneel came around, we observed that he chose to support God's plan that all God's creation should exist as it had been originally planned.<sup>1</sup>

Staff: As chiefs, you are the guardians of the land – the owners of the soil. How do you mobilise people to do this work?

Chikwanda: Together with our kraal heads, we choose places that are suitable for tree planting. We advise them to go and ask for

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1 Chief Chikwanda's support for the tree-planting movement as organised by Professor Daneel demonstrates Daneel's sensitivity to traditional Shona social structures. Chiefs find that the tree-planting movement enhances their own authority and ability to provide basic resources for their people (Editors).

tree seedlings from people running tree nurseries. After doing that, people will gather and start planting trees and that area will improve. Some villagers will come and learn from that kraal head's area. The following day another kraal head prepares the land, organises and invites everyone for tree planting. Trees are very useful because they provide roofing material, firewood, and so on. Some people in other parts of the country do not have firewood.

Staff: How do the ancestors mobilise people to care for the earth?

Chikwanda: Our ancestors are very helpful on water issues. There are some areas where we go to request rainfall. This area is on a farm and it is a sacred shrine (*mapa*) with a depression on it into which we place finger millet. When we have placed the finger millet there, the rain falls and soaks that millet so that, after a given time, it begins to germinate and can then be used for beer brewing for the rain-making ceremony. In that area there is a muchakata tree (cork tree) which we fence around in an African traditional way, using small droppers and tying them together with tree fibre (*kukomba norum-handa*). We sing and dance around the tree, singing some Traditional songs which are related to rain making. We prefer the muchakata tree because we want the rain to fall abundantly (the name 'Muchakata' after all suggests 'abundance'). We want a lot of rain to fall everywhere. That is why we chose 'Muchakata' as Daneel's name.<sup>2</sup>

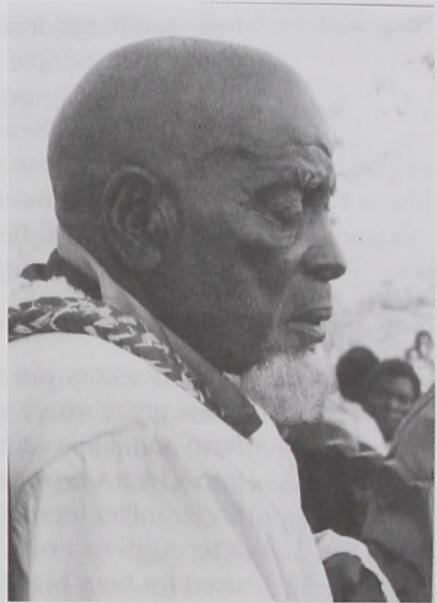
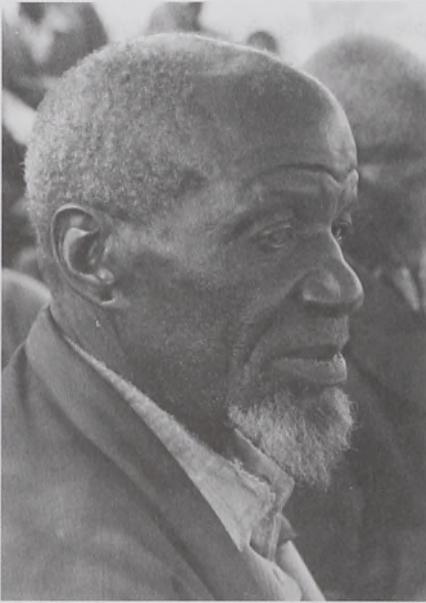
Staff: And so Professor Daneel was named 'Muchakata' because he brings many things?

Chikwanda: Yes. It's as though he was inspired by our ancestors' spirits to liberate the land.

Staff: Do you think Daneel is fighting to restore some of our long lost traditional customs?

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2 Each participant in the tree-planting movement is given or chooses a tree name for him- or herself.



Composer of *Fambidzano* songs, Revd Musasikwa (top left) and first patron of *Fambidzano*, Bishop Moses Makamba (top right). Key figures of the first AIC ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe outside their offices in 1972. From left to right: founder/director Inus Daneel; TEE tutors Revds Nyatoro, Jirrie, and Marinda; Bishop Kuudzerema, vice-president; Bishop Gavhure, president; and Peter Makamba, general secretary



Chikwanda: Yes! He is trying very hard. Situations are made good only through God's will – not through people. God tells us that we are all the same but unfortunately we practise racial discrimination by placing some in classes better off than others. But that is only human nature. If you look at cattle, some are black, some are white, others are brown, and some area a mixtures of colours. Surprisingly they all stay in one kraal. God tells us, 'That is how I created human beings'. We are staying in one world created by God. Thus everything is made possible by God.

Staff: If you look at our traditional religion, how do you see Professor Daneel's role/attitude?

Chikwanda: A-a. In (the context of) our African customs he is good. He is good. He wants us to stick to our traditional systems. God said, 'I am concerned not about your outlook, but about your heart'. God does not take looks or beauty into account.

Staff: And so you think that because Professor Daneel is opposed to the racial discrimination among us, he chose to abide by our traditional customs and mobilise people to respect one another?

Chikwanda: *Amen!* That is very good. You have given the answer that I wanted to give.

Staff: Does tree planting really liberate the land?

Chikwanda: There is always plenty of rain wherever there are trees. They also supply firewood. We are urging people to plant trees on barren lands, to use old gum trees as fire wood and to replace them with new trees. Some areas were made barren as a punishment. Once God sees the destruction of the land, he punishes so that we know that God exists. Sometimes we have a drought and then all trees dry up, as happened last year. We wondered why it happened. We realised later that God wanted us to go back to our customs.

Staff: So we are trying to save ourselves from this punishment through the 'war of trees'?

- Chikwanda: Yes, that is absolutely correct. We are trying to save ourselves from the burning fire. In some areas people are using cow dung as a substitute for firewood. There used to be trees in those areas. Because of our ignorance God has disciplined us.
- Staff: Non-Christians and Christians work together in this war? How do you see it?
- Chikwanda: I was talking to a certain chief and remarking that whenever Christians gather together, it is wise to take part in the gathering so as to see whether they are doing something that brings life or not. To the younger generation, I advise them not to ignore the chiefs when they doing anything that is connected to the old religion. Sit down and listen to us. When we all have died, you will remain with history and knowledge. If we have unity, we will definitely live peacefully. God said we must love rather than fight. We really have a great opportunity for Christians to network with African traditional believers.<sup>3</sup>

## Chief Chivi

- Staff: Who initiated this idea of the 'war of trees'?
- Chivi: Professor Daneel came up with this idea. It was after he observed the rate of environmental deterioration that he came up with the idea. It is difficult for us to figure out what really pushed him to come up with this idea and what pointed him to us, the chiefs, in pursuit of this noble cause. But we all attribute this to a vision that he must have been given by God. Perhaps he was inspired by his own ancestral spirits. He realised that he could not accomplish this on his own. As a young man, Professor Daneel grew up here – in

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<sup>3</sup> We see the influence of Christianity on Chief Chikwanda in his comments about God's discipline and God's will that people love one another. Many of the chiefs participating in Aztrec attend church services even as they uphold the traditional customs of the chieftancy, including religious obligations to the ancestors. Chief Chikwanda and other traditionalists have welcomed the inter-religious cooperation precipitated by Daneel through the tree-planting movement (Editors).

Masvingo province. He knew that in all these districts in which he wanted to undertake environmental programmes there are people who are traditionally responsible for them, and so he started talking to the chiefs. The result was the formation of Aztec by the chiefs. The chiefs have adopted Professor Daneel as one of their own children. As is the custom in African culture, Professor Daneel was given his own clan name. He first approached Chief Murinye with the idea, who extended this invitation to me. In the invitation to join the 'war' he told us that he had seen the need to engage in a war different from the liberation struggle – a 'war to liberate Zimbabwe from a pending ecological disaster'. (*'Uyai vana sekuru tatanga imwe hondo kuno'* – literally, 'Uncle, come here, we have started another war'. *'Hondo yekusima miti'* – literally, 'the war of trees'.) We welcomed the idea and now we see that our natural vegetation is reviving. We are leaving a wealth of natural resources for our grandchildren. We are really happy about this initiative.

Staff: Can you please explain to us the role that Professor Daneel is playing in this 'war of trees'?

Chivi: Professor Daneel is the nerve centre of the programme. In fact, if we could look at him from an African perspective, we would consider him to be a spirit medium, *svikiro*, inspired from above. We are all left wondering how he managed to bring chiefs and bishops to work together for the environment – despite the fundamental inherent differences between the two religious groups. In fact, from what he has achieved, one is tempted to think that he is an inspired prophet. In fact, there are those among us chiefs who think that he is at times possessed by his own ancestral spirits. We think this because the way in which he works sometimes makes us wonder what his source of inspiration is. At the end of the day we conclude that he is inspired by his own ancestral spirits who told him that he should work hand in hand with African communities and live happily among African people. He was very receptive to this advice and is assisting us to implement our environmental projects. As you will appreciate, those whites who did not realise the need for

mutual respect and love have left the country. And those who are not inspired by Professor Daneel's life experiences do not even spend a single day with us.

Staff: Do you think that Professor Daneel is playing a unifying role in our work?

Chivi: Yes! But he is doing much more than that. As far as we are concerned, he is inspired and is giving direction to our work. Imagine a white man reminding us to visit the oracular God at Matonjeni to request a good rainy season! He understands our ways and is one of us.

Staff: Is Professor Daneel doing a good job?

Chivi: From the very time this work began, Professor Daneel has never looked back. What really assures us of his dedication is that even when he is out of the country, he tries as much as possible to keep in touch with us and always wants to know how much progress we are making. He always wants to know how much ground we have covered in the 'war of trees'. He could have kept his knowledge to himself but, instead, he opted to share what he knows with us. In fact he has opted to stick with us through thick and thin in this 'war of trees'.

Staff: Professor Daneel has been named 'Muchakata' in the 'war of trees'. Is this name related to his role in the movement?

Chivi: Yes. Muchakata, 'the hissing tree', is a big tree and it is very important in traditional African religion. Even in the past, before the white man was here, this tree was of great religious importance in African culture. In most places, rainfall ceremonies were held under this tree. It was under these trees that the intonations for ancestral veneration were made, and a response would be instantly received from the ancestors. This tree is sacred and, because of its outward appearance, this tree enabled one to predict the rainfall for the coming year. Because of the important role that the professor plays in the organisation, we feel he should remain in the organisation. He is as important to Zirron as the muchakata tree is important to traditional African religion.

**Staff:** From your understanding of our traditional religion, how do you see Professor Daneel fitting in?

**Chivi:** Professor Daneel does not in any way have a bias toward one of the two religions. In the Christian world he is known as Bishop Moses because of his role in the church and the 'war of trees', and in Aztrec we also have a name for him. This name is 'Muchakata'. His dedication in the 'war of trees' can be summed up in his preparedness to respect sacred places: at Matonjeni he removed his shoes; when traditional dances are held, he participates just like one of us. When one needs to clap hands as a sign of respect, he also claps. He has a level of commitment that is rare in people. He is acceptable even in African religious circles and is accepted as one of our own.

**Staff:** Chief Chivi, I realise that in our work to re-green the environment there is an element of inter-faith dialogue. On the one hand, we have traditional African religion [Aztrec] while, on the other hand, we have the Christian element [AAEC]. How do you perceive this, considering that there are profound differences in religious principles among different religious groups?

**Chivi:** The two religious followings complement each other. In fact, neither of the two followings has a more important position than the other. When we held our Aztrec tree planting ceremonies, we invited the AICs' bishops. We even invite them to our village courts and always make a point of praying before we start any meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting we also close with a word of prayer. In fact, although the bishops are Christians, their African cultural background enables them to realise the need for mutual respect between the two religions.

**Staff:** So we can conclude that a good relationship exists between these two religions in the 'war of trees'?

**Chivi:** Yes, because neither of the two religions claims superiority at the grassroots level over the other. So we accept the concept and are amazed that Professor Daneel had the foresight to

bring the two religions together in this movement. That is why I said earlier on that Professor Daneel should be considered a prophet – because his works reflect prophetic power. The fact that he brought the two religions together reflects great skill and – to an average mind like mine – some level of supernatural intervention.

## Chief Murinye

Staff: I understand that you started this movement together with Professor Daneel. What inspired you to start this organisation of which you are the patron?

Murinye: We saw that the land was shaken. The land is now looking bad. Sometimes the Chiefs' Council exerts its authority over the land, and at times the Agritex extension officers do, and then one finds that the chiefs, who are owners of the land, are side-stepped. That is why we decided to start a chiefs' movement to deal with natural resource management and conservation.

Staff: Chief Murinye, who came up with this idea of fighting the 'war of trees'?

Murinye: It was Professor Daneel who mobilised us all.

Staff: He is a white man. What do you think inspired him to start a movement with the African chiefs?

Murinye: That is not the only thing that the African chiefs and Professor Daneel wanted to do together. We wanted to build a church. I will show you the site sometime. We located the site exactly in the middle of Lake Kyle. Professor Daneel came to me with his two white colleagues so that we could plan the construction of that church. It was meant to be a venue for all the ecumenical meetings (*mubatanidzwa*) that would be held. We failed to make any progress because the war was then at its worst. If that had not been so, that church would have been there right now.

- Staff: If you consider our African customs, how do you perceive Professor Daneel's role/attitude?
- Murinye: He mobilises. Even on the ancestral side, he does the same. With the bishops, he does the same. Had it not been for Professor Daneel, we would have had no recognition.
- Staff: Do you relate to Professor Daneel because of his appreciation of African norms?
- Murinye: If he had not been playing a good role, we would not have given him the name of 'Muchakata'. We noticed that we (the chiefs) were losing power and so we decided to work hand in glove with him because he was helping us to conscientise our people.
- Staff: In the planting of trees, Christians work together with traditionalists. How do you see their cooperation?
- Murinye: When we were working separately there was no development. We are happy about the churches taking the lead. Therefore, whenever we hold tree planting meetings, we ask them to lead us with a prayer. In this way, everyone tackles the work enthusiastically. Even though Christians work with traditionalists, we find that churches are our avenue to the Creator. Christians send our prayers and requests to God.<sup>4</sup>
- Staff: Bearing in mind that Christians are your children and that they are under your authority, do you see it worth working with them because of their leadership?
- Murinye: That's it. We are proud of them because they help us to discipline cruel people in the villages. If you attend their church meetings, they feel greatly honoured. They preach good news which proclaims that the church has no tolerance for cruelty.

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<sup>4</sup> In Chief Murinye's comments, we see that although chiefs are the upholders of traditional ways, they are often also sympathetic to Christianity. As community leaders, they are responsible for the wellbeing of all their people, traditionalists and Christians alike (Editors).

Staff: Do you have anything to add to what we have discussed – especially in connection with the man called Professor Daneel?

Murinye: Yes! He is a son to be proud of. I looked at him and was *satisfied*.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Chief Murinye and Inus Daneel came first to know each other in 1972. Although Chief Murinye did not officially adopt Daneel, he has taken the role of his father on ritual occasions (Editors).