

Bishop Moses, The Earthkeeper

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The composition of a genuinely representative and authentic biography of a person like Bishop Moses in the context of Zirrcan¹ is indeed no easy task. Even a brief account for that matter is somewhat daunting. A properly recorded life of someone is almost as rare as a well-spent one. Without doubt it is hard to 'reconstruct', as it were, the life of someone so close to me, someone I know and with whom I have so much in common.

Professor Daneel's valuable work and contributions are for me both transparent and shrouded in mystery. By choosing as my title 'Bishop Moses, the Earthkeeper' I intend to portray him as someone who is the architect and the personification of a unique and one of the greatest religio-environmental movements in the history of the traditional people and the AICs in Zimbabwe.

In addition, it seems vital to me to highlight the importance of this man, who is the embodiment of this grassroots movement, particularly at a time when the impact of his work is being widely acclaimed by both friends and foes. It is indeed essential to make people the world over aware of the rich contribution he has made to the life of African grassroots society and to briefly highlight what I believe to be the secret of his success. I shall attempt to convey to the reader the historical significance Bishop Moses holds for us, his close associates, the grassroots people. Through religion, he has motivated communities of people who hold different beliefs and worldviews into a 'single and united front' for them to achieve self-development.

Testament of a man committed to serve

A man of middle age, Bishop Moses sat beneath the shade of a *Muchecheni* (wait-a-bit thorn tree) in front of his house, to protect himself from the

1 Zirrcan (Zimbabwe Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation) is an environmental education organisation which was initiated by Prof Daneel in Zimbabwe. It has enlisted the participation of grassroots communities.

scorching heat of the African sun. He contemplated, uninterrupted, on how to render himself more useful to his own countrymen. It took days, weeks and months to assess and conclude whether or not, and to what extent, the services he has already rendered to his African counterparts through Fambidzano² was all that was required of him. This preoccupation effectively halted the progress in his other life-task – the writing of books. On his regular 500 mile 'trek' from Pretoria, South Africa, to Masvingo, Bishop Moses was often disquieted to view the ever-escalating destruction of the once lush forests of acacias, mahogany, kiaat and many other trees.

Acting on the conviction that the grassroots communities are capable of curbing this environmental malignancy, and as someone who had established a wide network of contacts with the grassroots people, Bishop Moses undertook interminable journeys to meet and consult with them. He often wondered how to alleviate the most pressing needs of the people. In Zimbabwe the war of political liberation was just over, yet new problems were emerging; the ever-growing and uncontrolled human population had its effects surfacing. The demand and pressures on the limited natural resources became intense. Everyone witnessed the depletion of forests, the extinction of wild animals, big and small game, the degradation of once fertile farmland and the dwindling of once perennial water sources.

At that time when fellow academics of similar standing were preoccupied with theoretical issues and the promotion of their careers, Bishop Moses was different. He was committed, busy composing and redefining his mission mandate with the grassroots people: the non-Christian community and the AICs. He had already submitted his 'will and testament', part of himself, to his African friends in the form of intensive service. In this will the Bishop's design and vision was to empower the helpless and poor to shape their own destiny. He conceived of God's salvation as being comprehensive and encompassing all of God's creation. Earlier perceptions of God's salvation were limited to soul winning, targeting human persons alone, but the extension of salvation suggests that the entire earth-community (humans, animals, trees, the land, water, etc) has a share in the event.

It was clear that Moses' perception of salvation encompassed all creation, with a strong emphasis on the responsibility of human beings in erecting the signs of such salvation in the here and now through earthkeeping.

2 In 1972 Prof Daneel founded Fambidzano as the first ecumenical body of AICs in Africa.

Consequently, Bishop Moses pledged his undying allegiance to his fellow-earthkeepers: traditional chiefs, spirit mediums, bishops and all grassroots communities. To him the underlying principle and basic philosophy of development work among these people is to work through their religious convictions.

A man with a name and connections

Bishop Moses' early childhood period at the Dutch Reformed Church Mission, Morgenster, laid the foundation for his initial contacts with black Zimbabweans, as he freely interacted with their children. Later in life, when he lived abroad for studies, he established new networks with prospective partners in the as-yet-unknown work with the grassroots people. Further down in history, his work at Fambidzano earned him an international reputation with financial support for a unique ministry in Africa as a result. For over a decade the bishop had directed the operation of the grassroots movement, Fambidzano, showing full accountability in the use of all funds pledged by the partners. Thus he earned himself a good name and became well known the world over. Many regard him with admiration. In the rural areas of Zimbabwe/Masvingo, ears prick up at the mere mention of his name – Bishop Moses. His person provokes passionate, sometimes amusing, discussions and fervent narration of events. I personally admire him. He stands to this day upon a summit, commanding respect and an enigma to many. One fact is certain: the bishop maintains his prominence and a vast following, no matter what he does. Whatever he undertakes impresses even doubtful onlookers by his ardent commitment. Can anyone guess the secret of his formidable stature? Yes, the Bishop is not only admired by friends, but he has become the common man's 'idol'. For the grassroots communities, Bishop Moses has become something of a cult figure, a man endowed with prophetic vision, one who never deviates from his principles: unity, liberty and progress. He has remained the great man of AIC history because of his readiness during the liberation struggle to risk his own life at the height of his popularity and his professional/academic status to ensure the survival and future of formerly obscure African communities with vast potential. As a man with a name and connections Bishop Moses plays a very significant role among the various actors in the environmental liberation struggle: the grassroots people, chiefs, spirit mediums, churches, donor partners, government officials and others.

The missionary with a new conviction

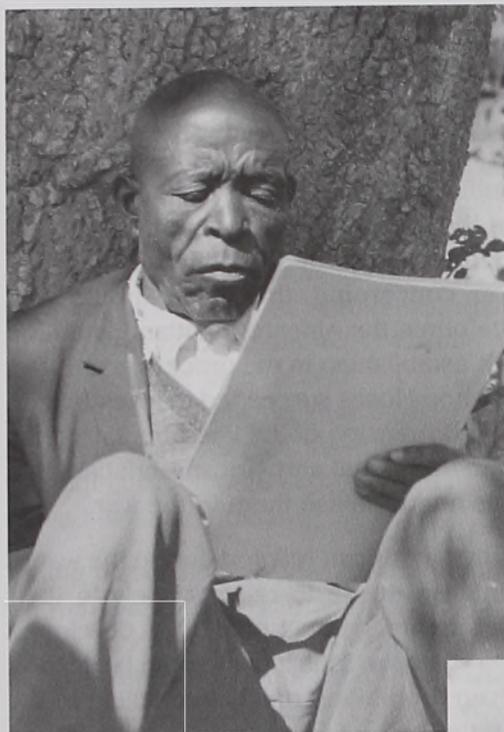
Himself an ardent believer, Bishop Moses has displayed singular commitment to conventional missionary work – that of going to a geographically distant land to win souls for Christ. He continues to attend church services of the Dutch Reformed Church, and he has retained membership in that church in addition to his participation in AIC ceremonies.

His work at this stage is motivated by what he himself termed 'the extension of God's salvation' to all of creation. Who else could have championed this comprehensive dimension of God's salvation and fulfilled the responsibility required of an earthkeeping steward? Certainly not the conventional missionary of the foreign land, whose preoccupation with soul-winning sometimes tended to obscure the richness of God's salvation and grace, and to limit understanding of the mission mandate.

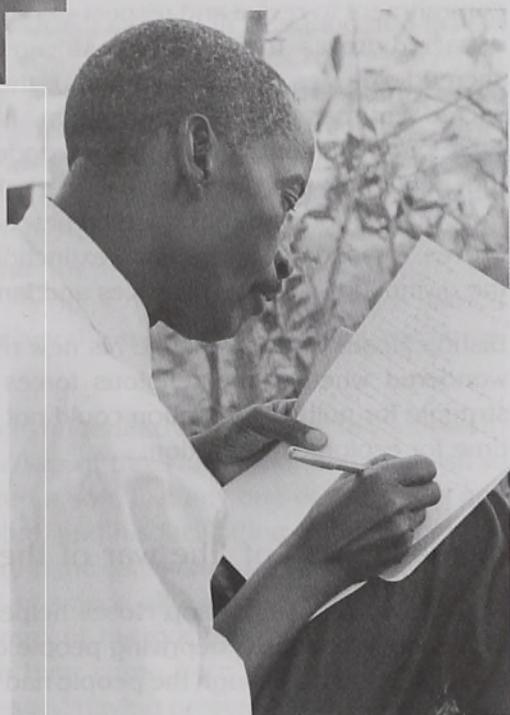
In dialogue with African traditional religion

Through his networking Bishop Moses established strong bonds with the non-Christian traditional people in order to understand the beliefs and practices of this age-old religion. In his book, *The god of the Matopo Hills*, he clearly relates how he made his entry to the high-god cultic centre at Matopos, one of Africa's most sacred shrines. Following his acceptance by the traditional spiritual leaders, the Chokoto family, Bishop Moses was the first white to write extensively about this unique oracle from inside. He was accepted, and he probed shrine activities during his bout of fieldwork in the late 1960s.

After the political liberation struggle, Bishop Moses conducted another field research programme to assess the role played by traditional religion in motivating the grassroots people to fight the war. This involved travelling into the rural areas to meet and converse with the community elders, the chiefs, spirit mediums, rain messengers and people with similar responsibilities. The study gave him valuable insights into the cosmology of the people: the land as an economic resource upon which human activities depend, and soil as a religio-cultural phenomenon upon which relations between the living and the ancestor spirits are sustained.



Fambidzano's theological education for AIC leaders. Bishop Forridge attends TEE class in the shade of a *muchakata* tree (top). Revd Chwara writes TEE exam at open-air extension training centre



Earthkeeping and ecumenism

It is to men like Bishop Moses that religion is indebted not only for uniting people but also for motivating the masses to engage in self-help programmes. In his field study conducted in the mid-1980s, Bishop Moses found that religion played a very significant role in mobilising the masses to rally behind the liberation forces. On the one hand the ancient institution of the spirit medium closely collaborated with the bushfighters, giving guidance and passing information concerning the whereabouts and positions of the enemy forces. On the other, the African Christian Institution of AIC prophets collaborated similarly, establishing in the process an entirely new pattern of vibrant ecumenism. Bishop Moses succeeded in investigating and giving exposure to this fascinating dimension of the liberation struggle: how the forces of religion, both African traditional and African Christian, had been harnessed to unite the peasants and mobilise them in the war.

People experienced a resurgence of the old African religion during the war of political liberation. There was an intense desire to relate closely to their ancestors, to national and territorial spirits. In so doing they developed commitment to revive and respect old customs. This included the protection of sacred groves, the customary African prohibition of any tree felling in the sacred territories (*marambatemwa*), the protection of certain animals (the sacred emissaries of the ancestors), birds and water sources. The land therefore still contained thickly wooded forest sanctuaries. Soon after Independence the situation changed. People's genuine desire to satisfy their hunger for land introduced a new set of problems: desecration of holy groves, forest depletion, animal extinction and disrespect for taboo animals, the dwindling of water resources and land degradation.

Bishop Moses had to redefine his new mission mandate in this context. He wondered whether the religious forces that had been harnessed in the struggle for political liberation could not be reharnessed to fight again, this time for ecological liberation.

The launching of 'the war of the trees'

As the chief catalyst Bishop Moses helped the traditional people to identify new enemy forces still depriving people of their right to a meaningful life. It was evident that although the people had won back their land politically, they

still had to liberate it from ecological destruction. Then the bishop mobilised traditional conservationists, the chiefs and spirit mediums to form the new front of cadres in this extension of the war of liberation. People may wonder why Bishop Moses initiated another environmental movement, where there were so many already operating. This latter one was unique. It developed a different identity by taking the local culture and religion of the people as its point of departure. The local culture and the indigenous knowledge of the people are always valuable as key factors in operating in the field. In Shona traditional culture, trees symbolise the presence and protection of ancestors to both people and animals. Certain tree species are protected against felling because they belong to the guardian ancestors. Under their shades significant rain-making rituals were conducted, because it was held that ancestral spirits inhabit these trees. Clusters of wild fruit trees, for example the loquat trees, were protected on behalf of senior ancestors, for they were viewed as sacred trees.

Taking these views as the starting point, Bishop Moses initiated discussions with chiefs and spirit mediums on the issues of ecological conservation. These discussions crystallised in the formation of the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (Aztrec) in 1988 in Masvingo at 8 Acacia Avenue (Professor Daneel's residence) (Daneel 1998). The association consists of spirit mediums, chiefs, senior headmen and ex-combatants. The major objective is to promote the redirected liberation struggle in terms of the sustainability of the natural resource base: trees and forestry, wild animals and water resources. As with the political struggle for self-rule, much of the motivation to undertake programmes to 'liberate' nature derives from the guardian ancestors of the land (owners of the soil) and from the traditional oracular deity, Mwari of Matopos. The movement, which started on a modest scale, today counts several hundred chiefs, spirit mediums, headmen and excombatants.

Each year the traditional earthkeepers undertake a pilgrimage to Matopos to consult the Oracle on issues on 'the war of trees'. In 1990, during a visit to the cave, Bishop Moses was declared a son, like any one of the chiefs and spirit mediums. He was fully accepted, and his facilitating role endorsed by the voice of Mwari. At around midnight, the usual consulting time, the priest, Chokoto, and priestess, in a state of trance sitting at this African temple addressed Mwari, using praise names of the creator God, '*Tovera, Dziva, Shoko, Babamukulu*, your children have come from Masvingo. This white man is facilitating their programmes . . .' Having presented gifts of snuff and

money, amidst reverent, slow handclapping, the response was transmitted from the oracle. From the dark interior came the voice, 'This white man is our son, inspired by us to promote your work'.

During the rainy season the traditional people conduct *mafukidza nyika* tree-planting ceremonies to re-clothe the now-barren land. These ceremonies have been adapted to traditional rituals. Finger millet beer is brewed, then ritual dances are performed, and appropriate incantations are chanted by the senior elder or the spirit medium. The beer is then offered to the ancestors, and when saplings are planted, the beer is also used to moisten them. Snuff is sprinkled on the ground to honour guardian ancestors of the land. Tree seedlings are paid as restitution to the ancestors for the millions of trees destroyed. The ancestral spirits are asked to send rain and to protect the trees.

Bishop Moses also realised the significance of the AICs for sustainable utilisation of the natural resources base. Firstly these churches represent a significant proportion of the country's Christian population. They have a far-reaching mobilisation potential among grassroots people. By their very nature they are independent people, a movement for liberation: spiritual and cultural freedom. They have freed themselves from the religious impositions of mainline churches. During the political liberation, most prophets from these churches supported the bushfighting cadres and helped to determine battle strategies on the battle front. In addition their theology is enacted in practice rather than formulated in written doctrines. In their spirituality human persons, animals, trees, plants, water are closely associated, and are all viewed to stand in some relationship to God. They baptise in river waters, they fast on mountains, receive their spiritual renewal in the wilderness and conduct important church festivals in the forests. Thus they have in their possession a rich treasure of enacted theology of the environment. They hold their worship services in the open air and under trees. Like the traditionalists discussed above, they live close to nature and share an awareness of their bondedness to the earth.

New forms of Christian witness emerging

In 1991 Bishop Moses initiated the formation of a body of African churches to undertake earthkeeping projects as expression of a contextualised and holistic theology of the environment (Daneel 2000). The member churches

of the AAEC (Association of African Earthkeeping Churches) proceed from genuinely African premises in their theology and worship. Their theology is both otherworldly and thisworldly: thisworldly when the ugly experience of poverty and political impotence leads members to seek solace in a kingdom of justice yet to come, and otherworldly when members recognise the present and very real lordship of Christ over all creation. The AAEC started with about 20 churches in Masvingo. It spread to Matabeleland, Midlands and Manicaland Provinces. To date it comprises a very large membership of some 150 churches, representing an estimated 2 million adherents.

Bishop Moses has urged the AAEC to reflect more on its theology of the environment. Bishop Marinda, one of the employees of Zirron, has written a text in Shona, entitled *New theology of environment*, which is used in ecological conscientisation workshops.

Within the Christian circles new forms of communion service are being established, as are new concepts of sin, reconciliation, salvation and confession. In practice what happens is that a congregation goes into the bush to collect seeds from indigenous trees, and then to church, which more often than not is simply and appropriately a large tree. In their colourful robes, crowns and staffs, they offer up the seeds collected in the bush and in return each communicant is given a seedling to go and plant.

Tree-planting eucharist

Preceding the tree-planting eucharist, and in preparation for it, is the event known as 'ascending the mountain', where members of AICs go into secluded places to make supplications to God for rain. From several holy mountains petitions for rain go up. Each pilgrim has an opportunity to confess his or her sins.

The AAEC conducts tree-planting ceremonies to heal the earth; the event combines with the eucharist. On the day in question, the leader first preaches from a selected biblical text. Then the congregants move into queue towards the communion table. Each confesses his or her sins, which include ecological sins. Sins confessed are not just moral misdeeds committed against other fellow human beings but particularly those against other creatures such as the soil, trees, animals. After confession, singing, drumming and dancing to make the spirit strong, people receive the

eucharist. Each celebrant accepts the sacrament in one hand while holding a tree seedling in the other, expressing the new unity between man, nature and God. The tree-planting eucharist is one of the most powerful ways to show that the redemptive work of Christ not only liberates human people but also heals and protects nature. Tree-planting eucharists inspire environmental restoration in a very practical way. During these ceremonies the celebrants dialogue with plants as they place them into the soil. Each person makes the following statement: 'You my fellow-creature, today I place you in the soil; may you grow to provide me with fresh air, with shade, fruit and fuelwood. Take care of the soil. In the meantime I also take care of you, by watering you and protecting you against destroying animals.' This statement seals the bond of reconciliation.³

With the assistance of Bishop Moses, the two groups (Aztrec and AAEC) run twelve tree nurseries in the Masvingo province, producing between 600 000 and 750 000 saplings every year. The emphasis at the nurseries is on indigenous tree species such as *brachystegia spiciformis* (*msasa*), *julbernardia globiflora* (*mutondo*), *brachystegia glaucescens* (*muuzhe*), *kiaat*, *pterocarpus angoliensis*.

This religiously motivated programme does not intend to stop at trees. In collaboration with WWF (World Wide Fund), Campfire and National Parks, Bishop Moses already has advanced plans to have the reforested holy groves fenced off and restocked with small wild game such as klipspringer, duiker and steenbuck. Like Campfire, these new game sanctuaries will be used as indigenous environmental education centres for the benefit of local communities. In addition, women's clubs (over 70) and youth clubs (over 100) have been formed to benefit from these projects. In all these attempts the traditional people derive their inspiration from the ancestral world and their traditional high-god cult. They recognise the validity of their African-ness, the presence of the ancestors in nature in the soil, land, trees, animals and water, as they exercise responsibility over these. Bishop Moses has helped to found groups with distinct religious identities and convictions who are now working jointly on environmental projects. Each of the groups is entirely motivated by its own worldviews and belief systems. There is no doubt that the churches are working from Christian commitment to restore

3 Daneel has written numerous articles that describe and analyse tree-planting ceremonies. For example, see Daneel 1996c.

the dignity and lost sanctity of God's creation, while traditional guardians of the land earnestly endeavour to liberate the politically regained, but environmentally still lost, land of their supratribal ancestors.

From Muchakata to Bishop Moses

Professor Daneel received these two names, Muchakata and Bishop Moses, from the traditional and Christian wings respectively. As in the political liberation, cadres at the battlefront were given war names, so the same line of thinking was maintained in the struggle for ecological liberation.

To express their total acceptance of Professor Daneel traditional people renamed him 'Muchakata' – cork tree. Muchakata is a sacred tree belonging to the senior guardian ancestors. It has a dense evergreen foliage. It does not shed its leaves, and therefore provides shade to people when they drink beer or when they perform ancestral rituals. Of particular significance is the rainmaking ritual called *mukwerere*. Muchakata bears fruit which is edible. People and animals all favour the fruit. From the fruit some brew a kind of drink. Strict rules prohibit any felling of muchakata trees.

Traditional people regard Muchakata as a 'sacred' figure like the cork tree in that they are convinced that the spirit of Mwari, their traditional high-god, is the inspiration behind his work. His presence in environmental reform, symbolised by the *muchakata*'s dense evergreen foliage, is always required. He should not be 'chopped down'. People can bring their pressing needs to him, the evergreen symbol of ancestral care and protection, just as the communities bring forth their requests to their ancestors 'through' the muchakata tree.

For the AICs the name 'Bishop Moses' was more fitting to bring out the Christian dimension of his work. His work is perceived as that of promoting the liberation of the AICs from social, spiritual, economic and other forces of enslavement, isolation and seclusion, and to empower the grassroots people to exercise self-determination. Whereas the AICs were formerly isolated by the mainline churches, he became the bridge person between the local churches and world Christianity.

Moses of the Old Testament gave the law of God to the people of Israel. Bishop Moses of the AAEC is known for bringing a new law to the AICs: the law of unity and ecumenism, in contrast to rivalry and isolation that existed

before. This moved further towards a broadened ecumenism. Within the Christian fold the AAEC emphasised its Christian identity and the desire to strengthen ecumenical bonds between its member churches in the joint task of healing the land. Ecumenical ties were therefore primarily aimed at a united front of Christians on scriptural grounds. It soon became evident, however, that isolation from the other environmental wing was untenable. Therefore inter-religious contact and intensive interaction between Aztrec and AAEC for joint activities in the field were undertaken without forfeiture of religious identity. Formal patterns of interaction in this broadened ecumenism were established. Today there is spontaneous interfaith dialogue at the village level, as well as at many other levels. Thus from Muchakata to Bishop Moses signifies environmental care through appealing to Mwari, the traditional African deity, as well as the deity of the Bible.

Impact on the lives of grassroots people

In my view, Bishop Moses' earthkeeping ministry, that of facilitating the religio-environmental work among the grassroots communities and creating a platform for inter-faith dialogue between religions which could not interact at a formal level in the past, represents an advanced form of Christian witness compared to his former work among the AICs. Through his efforts the age-old religious tolerance that characterised religious practices in the old days has been restored. The antagonism prevalent among Christian groups, as well as between Christians and non-Christians, is giving way to reason and a deep quest for mutual understanding. Christian witness has taken new forms: not alienating confrontation but sympathetic discourse, not rejection but respect, not imposition but understanding, not condemnation but tolerance.

Moses appears to be promoting the traditional religion by facilitating the pilgrimage of Aztrec chiefs and mediums to Matopos for consultations with the oracular deity. This is true viewed from one side, but from another, one can already trace elements of Christian influence at the sacred shrine. The oracular cult-priest, Chokoto, could be heard addressing Mwari, the Shona high-god, as *Babamukulu* – the 'great father', a concept reflecting Christian background. Bishop Moses' witness and influence as a Christian is felt even at the Matopos shrine.

Among the AICs, there has also developed a remarkable tolerance of traditional religion, especially among the spirit-type churches. In the past the spirit-type churches viewed ancestral practices simply as heathen, to be condemned outright. Ancestral spirits were regarded as demons to be exorcised in the name of Christ. Christians had nothing to do with these. They would not even associate with traditionalists. Today it is somewhat different. Although they still do not accept ancestral practices, they no longer reject people practising the old faith, as the majority have ceased to be judgmental. They can listen to these people and enter into dialogue. In other words their current witness shows more respect than the old condemning witness. At some of the tree-planting eucharists the churches have administered the holy communion to those chiefs and spirit mediums who consider themselves Christian, a practice unheard of in the past.

The traditionalists in the past often viewed Christians as people who are simply trying to copy the white man's culture. African Christians were taken as prodigal sons who would one day come back to reality. Christ was viewed as the white man's ancestor. No white man honours the ancestors of the black people, but the black Christians not only honour but pay homage to Christ.

The chiefs did not allow Christians to climb mountains for fasting ceremonies in their chiefdoms, alleging that this practice would anger their ancestral spirits. Yet, at the cave Bishop Moses was declared 'our son' by the voice, although he is white. This has affected traditional people's perceptions about the 'white man's religion', and the whole scenario of white ancestors and black man's ancestral spirits.

I admire Bishop Moses as a great ecumenical figure of our time. He has shown loving care to all people irrespective of religion. Traditionalists begin to realise that Bishop Moses' love comes from Christ, so he loves the black people. A staunch adherent of legalist Zionist teachings, I have over a period of many years come to appreciate the work and life of Bishop Moses. I can now easily relate not only to other Christian groups but treat with reverence adherents of traditional religion. I can be among them when they hold traditional rituals, such as the rain-making ceremonies, listening, observing and trying to understand them without feeling that I am defiled, as I would in the past.

Bishop Moses has had a remarkable influence on the religion of the grassroots people. In the past, we witnessed a war of words between traditional people and African Christians, but now people think that religion can bring about peace among our people. Through the Bishop's words and deeds many have come to realise that religion is a powerful force that can inspire fulfilled living and meaningful service in God's creation.

Bishop Moses and the trees

Larry L Rasmussen

Sunday afternoon worship at the Zionist congregation in Mucheke Township, Masvingo, Zimbabwe, was vivid. Strong, solid colours; robed figures circling to the beat of drum and jangle of tin rattles; time for instruction, hosted by a reader of scripture and an expositor of the same, verse by verse; more song and more dance and more bright sunlight through the canopy. Not too far into the praise, Bishop Marinda welcomed Bishop Moses, whose own green robe carries a logo between the shoulders across the back. The logo of the AAEC (African Association of Earthkeeping Churches) is an African farmer kneeling, planting a tree in this corner of the African continent, above the words of Col 1:17: 'In Christ all things hold together.'

'Bishop Moses' is a conferred title, not self-chosen. It is the recognition of extraordinary leadership. 'Moses' himself, Inus Daneel, would be the first to say that the AAEC and its sibling partner of traditional Shona religion practitioners, the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (Aztrec), are grassroots peoples' liberationist movements. And he is right. These are remarkably rooted earth-healers who call up what they know best in order to do what they must to keep the creation in the places they live. Theirs is no 'voluntary organisation' or 'NGO' of the usual sort, but alliances of peasant farmers whose subsistence is at stake here. At the same time, their designation of Daneel as 'Bishop Moses' is the acknowledgement that a peoples' movement, no less than any other, requires visionary leaders and organisers and a resolute founder. For the AAEC that is Bishop Moses, a title uttered with full respect and affection and the kind of easy transfer of biblical heroes into the present that these congregations practise without reservation.

So Moses brought a spoken word to the gathered in Mucheke Township, a short homily on the logo itself, and then stepped into the circle of dance and

drum. What was written about other such congregations lifting praise from earth to heaven is the bright energy of this scene as well.

*Heeding earthkeeper's call
they came –
Black multitudes
Churches of the poor:
billowed swirl of garments ...
red, white, blue, resplendent green
armed with holy staves, cardboard crowns.*

*Cursed descendants of house of Ham
rejects of white mission
lift fallen banner of Spirit
kingdom's cornerstone
where souls of people, green leaves, meet.
(Daneel 2000:1)*

Daneel's accomplishment with the people of Masvingo runs along two lines, at least to the eyes of this outsider. The grateful recipient of AAEC hospitality in 1999, I came away with deep respect for local accomplishment and the conviction that, in the wider scheme of earth issues, these good people were doing better than they themselves knew. I take each – local and global accomplishment – in turn.

The plague of many environmental and eco-justice ministries is, ironically, the failure to be truly rooted in place, and to draw upon the deep traditions of home. In fact, eco-theology and ethics are often so discontinuous with the theologies and moralities that reign in a given locale that to choose the former is *ipso facto* to reject the latter. Local Christianity and its habits are named 'problem' and only rarely, if ever, 'solution'.

All the more remarkable, then, are the AICs in Masvingo Province and their extension of the earlier War of Independence. Now, however, the struggle is to deliver the stricken land and 'fight', 'clothe', and 'heal' the earth with trees.¹ To do this, as well as work for (still-frustrated) land reform and recovery of the 'the lost lands', the ancestor-related sense of place and the

1 From the words of Bishop Wapendama of the Signs of the Apostles Church, recorded in Daneel 2000a:534.

eco-spiritual ways of Shona culture still alive among traditionalists needed to find expression as comprehensive earth guardianship. This was a task accomplished, with the leadership of Bishop Moses, through the chiefs, headmen, and spirit mediums banded together in Aztrec. At the same time, Shona earth-honouring ways also needed to find genuinely Christian content in AIC churches. That task, with leadership from Daneel, was accomplished in the AAEC. So the primordial ties with earth still felt in these granite hills (the fighters for independence called themselves 'sons of the soil') and the cosmology of the whole community of life in this place found Christian and traditionalist voice in Zirrccon (Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation), the umbrella for AAEC and Aztrec work.

Yet this transformed and transforming work would be no simple extension or transplant or application or even contextualisation. It is a profound reinterpretation, a reinterpretation of both inherited culture and inherited Christianity, a complicated conversion to earth that drew from the wells of these villagers yet sunk new boreholes as well. Jesus Christ, the peoples' Saviour, would become Earthkeeper and Healer of the land, just as Mwari (the Shona high-god) would instruct traditionalists about a more active guardianship of the land, in keeping with ancestral duties. People-oriented salvation would come to encompass all the earth within reach and the tradition itself would reform the tradition. A new earth ecclesiology took form in the face of compelling need and a genuine love of land under siege by its very stewards.

Yet the point is this: the form transformation took was wholly resonant with the ways of this place. No one called a gathering of the official keepers of thought to render a viable eco-theology and ethic. Rather, the sacred myths, rituals and ceremonies that are the religious practices and substance of this particular African sacred order were enacted by the whole community in its regular efforts to keep the universe from cracking apart. And since local plants and animals and the tan soil itself share the same ontological status with human beings, no abyss needed to be bridged in order to take in the whole community of life as the realm of restoration. No one needed to learn about 'sustainable development' from multilateral institutions riddled with expertise.² One can simply pour libations and consult Mwari and dance and

2 In fairness it must be said that international donor agencies remain indispensable to the enterprise, and the combination of local knowledge and international assistance is utterly necessary.

sing and pray one's way into the necessary conversion to earth and earthkeeping. Ritual and ceremony, as natural as breathing and planting and herding, are the pathways to both the sacred and the practical here. The theology and ethics are implied and enacted and given voice in community that is largely ritualised.

At least to this outsider, this accomplishment is remarkable. This is a liberationist environmental ministry that is bone of these people's bones and flesh of their flesh, a transformation of their own ways fitted to their own place, an ancestral reciprocity with the animate earth that seems almost genetic yet is genuinely new. I can only conclude that Zirrcan is a teacher for the rest of us in its interfaith efforts, and the AAEC a teacher of the churches.

Yet the nagging feeling remained that these practitioners of local Christianity as an earth faith, in which fidelity to God is lived as fidelity to the earth, do not realise their own accomplishment, if the measure of that is taken from a global point of view.

A helpful perspective on the larger frame is offered by Thomas Berry. Each epoch, Berry contends, has its 'great work'. The great work of Israel was to convey a new and dramatically influential experience of the divine in human affairs; the great work of the classical Greek world was to create a strong Western humanist tradition; the great work of Rome was to knit the peoples of the Mediterranean basin and those of Europe into a civilisational *oikumene*; the great work of India was to lead human thought into subtle and unsurpassed experiences of time and eternity in philosophical and religious modes; the great work of the native peoples of the Americas was to establish a rapport with the natural powers of these continents in ways that effected integral relationships with those powers (Berry 1999:2-3). Berry's thesis is that we now stand between the great work of the modern epoch – manifest in dramatic achievements of science and technology, industry and commerce, medicine and finance – and another path, one demanding a different 'great work'. The crisis that calls for a new great work is this: 'commercial-industrial obsessions' have so disrupted planetary life systems that life is unsustainable on modernity's terms. The great work ahead, then, is to effect a transition from a period of 'the human devastation of Earth to a period when humans [are] present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner' (Berry 1999:3).



Zionist Bishop Forridge receives a certificate for completion of two year course from Fambidzano's director of theological studies at TEE graduation ceremony. Not only did Bishop Forridge negotiate with the guerrilla fighters in the Gutu district for the safety of Inus during the *chimurenga* years, but he also co-opted eight Christian guerrillas for several months to help him distribute TEE lessons among local students when regular classes were no longer possible owing to the war

Such great work will mean, in most places, changed cosmologies and moral universes and changed institutions and habits. It will mean a comprehensive conversion to Earth in understanding and practice, together with commitment. Religions themselves may be key to an effective transition but cannot be so without their own conversion to Earth. In any event, the coming great work will take decades, perhaps centuries.

Moreover – and this is the point for the Masvingo model – the great work will need to be tuned to each place at the same time it is communicated to other places. It will need to be culturally specific as the very means of becoming a common earth ethic. Diversity itself is valorised here, as is joining hands to raise the same kind of protest against shared causes of Earth's distress. The threats to life and the liberative struggle against them become the 'universal' discourse, but the effective battles can only be fought in a plethora of distinct cultural expressions. And Zirrcan has shown us how to do its part of 'the great work' in this manner.

There is a fitting close to this tribute to Bishop Moses and his tree-planting people. It comes from my colleague Delores Williams (Williams 1993). She once suggested an alternative to the crucifer heading the clerical entourage that leads the procession at the outset of High Mass. Now and again, Williams says, the cross should be removed from the large staff that has all our attention and the top of the staff should instead bear a single mustard seed. Utterly invisible to the rest of the world and even to those directly on the aisle, it nonetheless bears the future, the tiniest sign of the reign of God that grows to a remarkable sight, even home to the birds.

AAEC, Aztrec and Zirrcan – the mustard seed we should be lifting high in procession. Modest as it is, it seeds the coming great work.

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Chakarakata and Chimurenga: stories of the Zimbabwean War of Liberation

Greg Cuthbertson

The Matopo Hills have always dominated the spiritual and symbolic landscape of Zimbabwe. They have framed the country's history and culture, and the mountain voices have long spoken of political and religious freedom, from the days of the Ndebele uprisings in the 1890s to the confrontations between Zapu and Zanu guerrillas in the 1970s. The Matopos have religious and political meaning for both the white and black population; they are the site of Cecil Rhodes's grave and the shrine of the African high-god, Mwari, and the burial ground of the nineteenth-century Ndebele paramount chief, Mzilikazi.

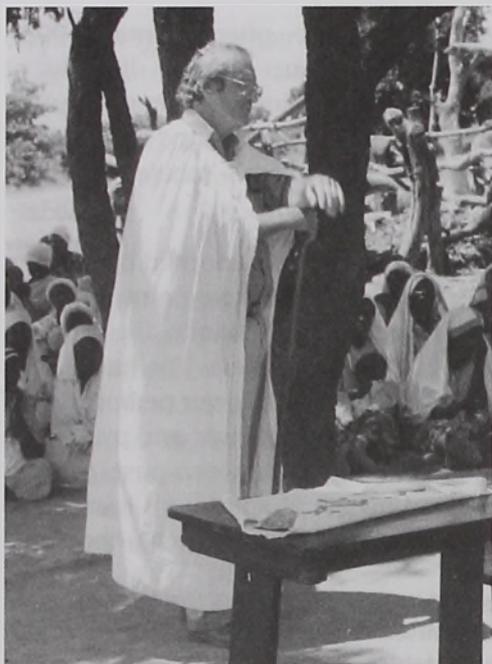
The hills have also profoundly shaped intellectual discourses, especially the histories of Terence Ranger and the missiologies of Inus Daneel. It has always struck me how the work of these two scholars has converged and intersected, each drawing on the powerful ancestral orality of ancient Zimbabwe in the construction of their accounts of more recent religion and politics. There is, for example, a symmetry between Ranger's *Voices from the rocks* (1999) and Daneel's *African earthkeepers, volume 1* (1998), each located in nature and the struggle for land and political rights in a postcolonial setting. Their careers have spanned four decades and their interpretations have been complementary, notwithstanding different disciplinary methodologies and approaches to evidence. They have debated with one another at many colloquia, have agreed and disagreed in numerous forums, and have supervised various influential theses on Zimbabwe. In fact, they have profoundly influenced a whole generation of students and scholars in the fields of African and religious studies and their contributions have been recognised by their peers in *estschrifts*.

Daneel and Ranger have both focused on religion in the broad sense, away from narrow theologies or hegemonic epistemologies. There has always

been a certain rebellion in their books and articles, challenging the limits of missiology and historiography respectively. They have run their research against the grain of nationalist ideologies incubated in a modern guerrilla war, whose effects still take freedom hostage, but have both been willing to recognise nationalist achievements against colonial rule. Their focus has been on ordinary people and issues that affect their survival. Their researches have concentrated mainly on conservation and land rights, on environmental initiatives and the restoration of communities displaced by colonial policies and modern warfare. Both have written about the horrors of the Zimbabwean War and how spirit mediums strengthened the ties of Marxist guerrillas to the land. They have examined settler racism which was the background to brutal counter-insurgency tactics and a guerrilla terror against those on behalf of whom they claimed to be fighting.

In 1995 Ranger and his co-editor, Ngwabi Bhebhe, explored the relationship between African religion and Christianity during the war. This is explained in terms of the deep trust between the local community and church leaders. Where ties were strong, guerrillas and the church shared a symbiotic relationship; where weak, the church was attacked. The most accomplished part of their book is the section on religion and the war. David Lan's pioneering study of spirit mediums and the war (Lan 1985) was also a historiographical landmark and is inextricably linked to Ranger's different focus on mission Christianity and African religion. These studies each demonstrate the importance of religion in helping civilians and soldiers deal with the trauma of war. Ranger was one of few African historians to write copiously about the influence of religion in the social history of modern Zimbabwe, which is why his work has featured so prominently in the writings of missiologists, anthropologists and theologians. His specifically historical approach to religion, however, gives his research a particular place in the literature on religion in Zimbabwe.

Daneel's contribution has been rather different, but no less important. He has brought different intellectual and methodological strands together in his academic and fictional work. The overriding characteristic of his writing is its concern to show the continuities and commonalities of mission Christianity and African religion through the prism of colonial and post-colonial experiences in Zimbabwe. His ecumenical and environmental preoccupations have shown the complex interaction among AICs, mission Christianity and African spirit mediums as Zimbabweans theologised their experiences of war in the liberation struggle. Nowhere is this more vividly captured than



Teacher-activist at work: Bishop Moses proclaims the salvation of all creation in Christ (Col 1:17) to fellow Apostolic earthkeepers during a tree-planting ceremony (top). Muchakata addresses traditionalists – chiefs and spirit mediums – about the directives of the ancestral guardians of the land for earth-care (bottom)



in his fictionalised account of the war in Masvingo, *guerilla snuff* (1995), which he wrote under the pseudonym Mafuranhunzi Gumbo. It looks at popular myths about ancestral guidance and the links between freedom fighters and spirit mediums, birds and animals. The natural and spiritual are harnessed to political and military goals as guerrillas inhaled snuff in recognition of the protective powers of the spirit world.

Daneel lived among the Gumbo people of Gutu and was adopted by the clan leaders. He tells a story of their war from the vantage point of Great Zimbabwe and its residual spiritual influence through Nehanda, the medium who summons all *Chimurenga* fighters of past colonial wars. The narrative is infused with Shona idiom and presents a participant-observer perspective of the struggle for independence. The imagery of hunting, war and prayer are woven into a description that keeps the continuities between past, present and future tightly entwined. The Bible and ancestral spirits are invoked to inspire Robert Mugabe, Tongogara and other important figures in the Zanla war council (Daneel 1995:20).

Guerilla snuff is not only about Zimbabwean guerrillas, it is also about Daneel's own private war, a war against his own prejudices and colonial heritage as a Protestant theologian whose 'Western shadow' falls on his African world. His historical novel represents a personal intellectual and theological struggle to acknowledge that 'if Christ is king, he is lord of the ancestors also' and to recognise that 'the African way to Mwari and the Christian way to God are the same' (Daneel 1995:39-40). It allows him to expand his own spirituality, formed simultaneously in the prescriptions of Reformed theology and the cosmologies of Shona religion. *Guerilla snuff* permits him self-consciously to debate the connection between African and Western faiths, beyond the critical (scientific) gaze of the academy. It also allows an honest search for his roots in Zimbabwe and of a way to reconcile a 'self' constructed in colonialism and Afrikaner identity with a postcolonial 'self' straining towards African political liberation. There is always the hint in Daneel's writing that he is willing to problematise his own relationship with Africans while still believing in his right to enter their world. Nowhere is this better captured than in his fiction, which releases him from the conceits of academic research to examine his own personal encounter with Zimbabwean prophets and their followers. The war of liberation provided the crucible for such self-examination and self-reflection.

Significantly, Daneel understood Mugabe's obsession with the land, an issue hotly debated in Zimbabwe today. In his novel, he recounts the political leader's visit to Gutu and notes how for many of his supporters the land binds generations together and guards the bones of the ancestors, which makes it the 'substance of liberation' (Daneel 1995:42). But the message of Mabwazhe, in Daneel's view, places limits on how the land should be reclaimed:

A warrior has little to say about the killing he has to do. Each war has its own madness. But the same law applies. You have to respect Mwari and his creation! That includes the life of your enemy. We will fight the white man because he has stolen our land, because he oppresses us. Our cause is just. That does not mean just killing all whites. Whichever butchers the other for lust of blood, in defiance of Mwari, is slaying themselves. They snuff out the light of their own spirits (Daneel 1995:60).

This expression of African religion mirrors the flowering of nationalism in Zimbabwe. Daneel regards the resurgence of indigenous beliefs as the glue which brought unity against white rule. Another metaphor, the 'voices of the rocks', heard in Ranger's history of the Matopos, is also echoed in Daneel's account of Matonjeni. He asks if spirits are not to African religionists what the Holy Spirit is to Christians, as he confronts the divisions between Zionists and African religion during the war (Daneel 1995:68).

Daneel does not shy away from the ravages of war (Daneel 1995:90-97). He draws on vast oral sources from years of research and fieldwork to assemble a version of the conflict from the point of view of the Zanu guerrillas. It is an angry war of fear and betrayal. But even in the cauldron of conflict, the Zionist prophet Mushereketo dares to interpret the battle of Musukutwa in spiritual terms. There is the laying-on of hands, the speaking in tongues and the palpable possession by the Holy Spirit as the prophet assures the personal safety of the cadres. The role of the AICs in their support of the guerrillas is carefully constructed in Daneel's rendering of the fierce military battles during the war.

Lydia Chabata provides the biographical conduit between the spirit world and the war in Daneel's *guerilla snuff*. Her father was a Zionist healer from whom she learnt various spiritual practices. Her story offers a gendered angle to the liberation struggle and portrays the spiritual power of women in

Zimbabwe. She joined the Zanla forces in 1976, faced trial as a witch, and was condemned to death (Daneel 1995:144–148). Daneel deftly shows eclectic religious forces at work as Chabata prayed to Mwari, not the ancestors, before her execution. Suddenly, a guerrilla standing near her was possessed by a woman's spirit, which saved Chabata's life because the spirits were deemed to have defended her from certain death. Daneel locates the encounters with spirit mediums, such as Chabata, within the context of the church by juxtaposing Lydia's experience of the Holy Spirit with her earlier prophetic role among the Zanla soldiers. The heroic portraits in Daneel's story celebrate freedom, which he sees as a reassertion of tradition, reclaiming the land and being worthy of the ancestors.

Again and again, Daneel returns to the Gutu Heroes Acre and its dedication by Mugabe. The many-sided spirituality of the war for political freedom is emphasised to underline the moral high-ground of the anti-colonial struggle. Guerrillas, priests, Zionists and adherents of indigenous faiths are surrounded and protected by the natural guardians of Zimbabwe's ancient past in order to liberate them from the oppression of Ian Smith's white government. This reflects the nationalist teleology of most of the writing on the Zimbabwean War, including Ranger's histories and Daneel's novel. This runs counter to Norma Kriger's more critical assessment of the history of Zimbabwe's War of Independence (Robins 1992:73–91), which anticipates the more critical evaluations of Mugabe's revolution that even Daneel and Ranger have reluctantly come to accept later.

The life of Zionist preachers during the war was often made difficult by the manic behaviour of the guerrillas who occupied their churches. Daneel describes the suffering and later collaboration of Bishop Musariri Dhliwayo, who was forced into blessing the warring cadres:

So there was no rest for the man of God. He prayed for the safety of the fighters. He prophesied about enemy movements and how these had been countered. He warned the guerrillas of ambushes. He sprinkled their AKs with holy water, declaring their campaign a holy war against oppression . . . Patmos became a kind of operational base from where the war of liberation was masterminded by the powerful Holy Spirit of Zion (Daneel 1995:170).

Patmos became a court and at the *pungwe* (sessions of cleansing) Dhliwayo was judge and executioner. His power was unbridled and led eventually to

the massacre of 150 villagers at Chimungoma. The Old Testament and the *Chimurenga* struggle melded in the rituals of Zionist worship; the battles of Israelites became the battles of the comrades. The judgments were therefore ruthless, full of retribution, and the price of political dissent, divined through religious ritual, was high.

Many insights into the life of Inus Daneel are to be found in *guerilla snuff*, especially in the epilogue, which offers a personal, reflexive view of the Zimbabwean war. The war created a spiritual space for Daneel, who was able to initiate dialogue and foster cooperation between spirit mediums and Zionist bishops in the Association of Earth-keeping Churches. This new religious configuration facilitated the recovery of *Chimurenga* memories and fostered an oral history of independent church prophets. Healing the land was the new reconciling emphasis. It focused on landscape and environment, and encouraged dreams and nurtured African cultures. This was how Daneel made sense of his own place in post-war Zimbabwe:

My western tradition, transplanted to African soil, merges with the dream directives of African ancestors. I can see Mabwazhe with his long bow and magical quiver standing on those high cliffs of Mount Rasa, beckoning us, his Gumbo descendants, to ascend the mountain (Daneel 1995:197).

His vision at the end of the book is of a restored and peaceful earth where 'even hunters can change', probably a reference to his own experiences of hunting, but also a metaphor of war and its effects on morality. Again, Daneel's own position is examined and his own life is subjected to critical scrutiny in the light of terrible violence and upheaval.

The significance of Daneel's *guerilla snuff* is that, precisely because of its novelistic approach, it does not appropriate the stories of Zimbabwe's heroes for academic purposes. It refrains from the authority of academic discourse and chooses instead to explore a popular consciousness through the fictionalised adventures of its main characters. Daneel has an acute political sense about Zimbabwe which is profoundly captured in this story of the war. Unlike many scholarly accounts of Zimbabwe's liberation, including Daneel's *African earthkeepers*, *guerilla snuff* gives the guerrillas their own (literary) voice, not muffled by theory or interpretation, but proclaiming lyrically African orality and triumphalist popular memory. For Daneel this is a cathartic device used to exorcise his own war trauma and explain the

dramatic impact of the conflict on the people among whom he lived and worked.

For those who have read Daneel's recent work on *African earthkeepers, volumes 1 and 2*, it is instructive to see the connections with *Guerilla snuff*. For instance, it was mainly the environmental devastation of the war which sparked Daneel's wide ecumenism:

Just as the national crisis of *Chimurenga* called for a united front across religious divisions, so does the environmental crisis in its national and global dimensions. Empowerment in such circumstances can indeed amount to Traditionalist spirit mediums and Christian prophets collaborating in evolving offensive green strategies against a common enemy, just as they cooperated in some of *Chimurenga's* political conscientisation and cleansing sessions (*pungwe*) in the war (Daneel 1998:9).

Tackling the environmental cataclysm caused by the ravages of war requires a multi-faith approach, in Daneel's view. Mission and Independent Christianity need to see the worth of indigenous belief in developing a viable plan for environmental redemption. Their accommodation of political resistance during the conflict had to be matched by a religious tolerance in search of environmental reconstruction after the war. Daneel's ecumenism, clearly exhibited in his novel, has not been fully understood by either religious ideologues or sceptical scholars, who have respectively interpreted it as a surrender to African Religion or subordinate to his alliance with AICs. *Guerilla snuff*, however, uncovers how integrated Daneel's ecumenism and environmentalism are in his portrayal of African responses to war, religion and the land, and how interdependent they are in achieving spiritual and material wholeness.

Such a multifaceted environmental ethic has, of course, led Daneel to see elements of truth and wisdom in all religions and to recognise that 'there is a sense in which God's mission (*mission dei* in Christian terms) to and in the world involves all humanity' (Daneel 1998:9). This insight was also the result of the resurgence of African religious rituals and the revival of the Mwari cult sponsored by the rise of African nationalism in Zimbabwe in the 1960s and 1970s. It explains Daneel's gradual acceptance that the 'Matonjeni cult and Shona religion generally are a manifestation of the concern of the Bible's universal Mwari for his people in Africa' (Daneel 1998:277). Here, Daneel

identifies with the Dutch theologian J H Bavinck, who regards religion as evidence of 'the biblical God's concern for all humanity and therefore a result of God's general revelation' and it accounts for Daneel's receptiveness to the Mwari cult:

I have found it more correct to treat my priestly hosts at the shrines with due respect, to conduct my inquiry with genuine interest in their beliefs to the point of learning from them, and to inform them openly about my conviction that in talking to their Mwari during oracular sessions, I was addressing Mwari, the Creator and Saviour of all creation as I have learnt to understand him from the Bible (Daneel 1998:282).

Daneel's eclectic theology has enabled him to work effectively among a range of different religious communities in Zimbabwe. This is mainly because he has set environmental redemption above particularistic theological creeds and because he sees the prospect of social healing as more important than religious orthodoxy.

Returning to my comparison of Daneel and Ranger, it seems that both are important scholars because of their anti-colonial and pro-Zimbabwean activities, Daneel as an accepted Zimbabwean prophet and preacher, Ranger as a white political activist and historian. Both are natural dissenters, often challenging authority or defending the marginalised and obscure. Because of their involvement in the unfolding of Zimbabwean independence, they have taken a positive, sometimes heroic, view of developments in the country, but this has never blinded them to 'the more nuanced analysis that study of twentieth century Africa requires' (McCracken 1997:183). There are, of course, differences as well: Daneel is a practical project developer and manager, while Ranger is more the public intellectual. Daneel has always insisted on detailed fieldwork, careful observation, linguistic accuracy and religious empathy, while Ranger has sought to historicise and interpret empirical findings and establish an expansive intellectual tradition for Zimbabwean studies.

Daneel has a suspicion of theory and a greater regard for recording empirical evidence, which makes his research valuable as a source. Ranger has perhaps been more interested in generating new ideas and is always ready to change them in the light of shifting historiographies. Daneel feels less comfortable employing postcolonial theory than Ranger and yet has

experimented with novelistic techniques that reflect a sophisticated openness to representational innovation. Their differences notwithstanding, neither Daneel nor Ranger has been keen to embrace grand theoretical models, preferring instead 'the role of the light-footed guerrilla to that of the philosopher king'. The hallmark of their combined, if different, approaches to understanding the nature of Zimbabwean society is a strong belief, in the words of John McCracken, 'that Africans must be studied primarily as agents rather than passive victims' (McCracken 1997:184).

Inus Daneel's remarkable contribution to our understanding of the role of religion and of African expressions of faith in the making of modern Zimbabwe is acknowledged in countless references to his published articles and books across a range of disciplines, from history and cultural anthropology to missiology and religious studies. His painstaking collection of oral sources and his prodigious observations derived from projects in poverty alleviation, literacy, environmental regeneration and evangelisation, have added immeasurably to the literature, but to fathom the dynamic of his work we need to read *guerilla snuff*, which puts aside academic conventions to explore the soul of a people and, in the process, of himself. Its autobiographical nature also discloses the constructedness of Daneel's own academic representations of African belief and worship and consciously exposes his life's work to critique by scholars and subjects in the spirit of debate and the exchange of ideas that has characterised his complex career.

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The three-self formula in light of the emergence of African Independent Churches

Stan Nussbaum

For more than a century Protestant missionary thinking was dominated by the three-self formula associated with Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson. In spite of considerable criticism since about 1950,¹ the goal of forming self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches still plays a very important role among those who see church planting as their mission.² It also is the assumed background for most current discussions on partnership in mission, including discussion of the kind of help that younger churches should continue to request and receive from older ones.

The three-self formula deserves careful missiological attention and, I suggest, some refinement in light of a development which Venn and Anderson could not have foreseen – the emergence of African Independent Churches (AICs) as a significant and still growing minority force in African Christianity.³ Because these churches were *self-founding* or *self-initiating*,

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- 1 Beaver alludes to this and attributes much of it to the Chinese government-sponsored 'three-self movement', which he says was 'a travesty of the concept'. See R Pierce Beaver, 'The legacy of Rufus Anderson', *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3(3) (1979):94–97. See also Peter Beyerhaus 'The three-selves formula: is it built on biblical foundations?' *International Review of Mission* (October 1964):393–407 and Melvin L Hodges, 'Are indigenous church principles outdated?' *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 9(1)(Fall 1972):42–46.
 - 2 The question of *what kind* of church to plant does not arise, of course, in the minds of those who no longer see it as their mission (or anyone's proper mission?) to call non-Christians to become Christians. Nor does it concern those who assume that the church has now been planted everywhere it needs to be. Such people are ignoring the large and growing number of missionary sending agencies in the non-Western world, most of which are focusing on evangelism and church planting.
 - 3 Late in his career Venn's thinking was greatly influenced by the closest thing in his experience to an African Independent Church. In Madagascar, the London Missionary Society baptised its first 21 converts in 1831, but Christianity was banned and all missionaries were expelled in 1836. When contact was again established in 1861, about half the island was Christian. See Wilbert Shenk, 'Henry Venn and mission thought', *Anvil* 2(1)(1985):38.

they were automatically self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. Although 'Independent' is their middle name, they have not often been looked upon by mission agencies as models of what young churches should be. Why are they not – since they embody the three goals that mission organisations say they set for the churches they are founding?

In this article I want to examine the ironic relationship between AICs and the three-self formula. On the one hand, their very existence proves that the formula had a great deal of truth to it. The failure of missions to apply the three-self formula frequently led to tensions that gave rise to AICs, especially of the Ethiopian type. Once founded these churches grew aggressively, proving that an African-led, African-funded church can thrive. On the other hand, by fulfilling and even exceeding the formula without becoming model churches, the AICs have exposed the formula as an inadequate goal statement. This paradox presses current missiologists to refine the formula.

Proving the value of the formula

As one who has carefully observed AICs for twenty years (sometimes with Prof Daneel looking over my shoulder to see how carefully I was observing), I am struck by the parallels between what I have seen and what Venn and Anderson saw only with their minds' eye.

When to start self-government

The Ethiopian-type AICs were basically an attempt to hasten the day of self-government. What they wanted did not call for many changes in theology or polity; they wanted black office-holders. Missions in the late 19th century, a full generation after Venn and Anderson had called for self-government, were still dragging their feet about handing over governing power to Africans. Venn saw self-government as an essential condition of the maturing process; later missionaries wanted to make maturity a condition of receiving self-government. This of course was a no-win situation for Africans, and the problem was not resolved in most places until the end of the colonial era in the 1950s and 1960s.

What kind of church governance to set up

Robert Speer (1902:63), a disciple of Anderson, sounded the following warning about church government,

'Ecclesiastical organization should not be developed prematurely or in excess of the real needs of the native church, or the capacity and demands of its spiritual life. And in no case should cumbersome and hampering institutions be established ... The ends of the work will best be attained by simple and flexible organization adapted to the characteristics and real needs of the people, and designed to develop and utilize spiritual power rather than merely or primarily to secure proper ecclesiastical procedure' (Speer 1902:63).

What Speer proposed is exactly what has happened in AICs. They are institutionally unencumbered and their organization focuses on 'spiritual power'. The AICs inherited nothing in terms of institutions and structures. They may have adopted or copied some structures they had seen, but they did not inherit them and they were not bound to support them in the way that a mission church is bound to support a school, a hospital or a denominational administrative structure set up by missionaries.

All this is not to say that AICs have no organisational structure. One of the churches I knew well in Lesotho had two archbishops in the same congregation of thirty people! It was not unusual for half or more of the members of a small congregation each to have an office. In many small Zionist groups, all the office-bearers and their wives are seated by rank. Has the governing impulse in such cases gone wild? I do not think so. The best analogy for explaining house church government is not as a government but as a house, that is, an extended family. The ranks and offices are not as much about power and control as they are about determination of relationships among members. They guarantee that every member belongs to the whole. Does an elder brother 'govern' a younger brother? Yes and no. It is 'government', but not as Westerners usually think of it.

Self-propagation as the most important criterion

The three-self formula called for all three elements to be worked upon, but practice often did not measure up to the theory. Beaver reflects, 'Too few held all three terms in proper unity and tension. Mission board executives usually stressed self-support; national church leaders emphasized self-

government; and too few put self-propagation in the first place that Anderson awarded it' (Beaver 1979:94–97).

AICs are essentially self-propagating. Many of them are literally 'living testimonies', tracing their origin to some act or revelation of God. They exist to tell the story of this encounter and to call people to join them in following this living God. Their Sunday collection may be a pittance, far below the level needed to support any clergy, and yet they continue to grow. Their system of governance may be a shambles, and yet they still grow. For them self-propagation is not a crowning achievement built upon self-governance and self-support. Self-propagation precedes and surpasses them both.

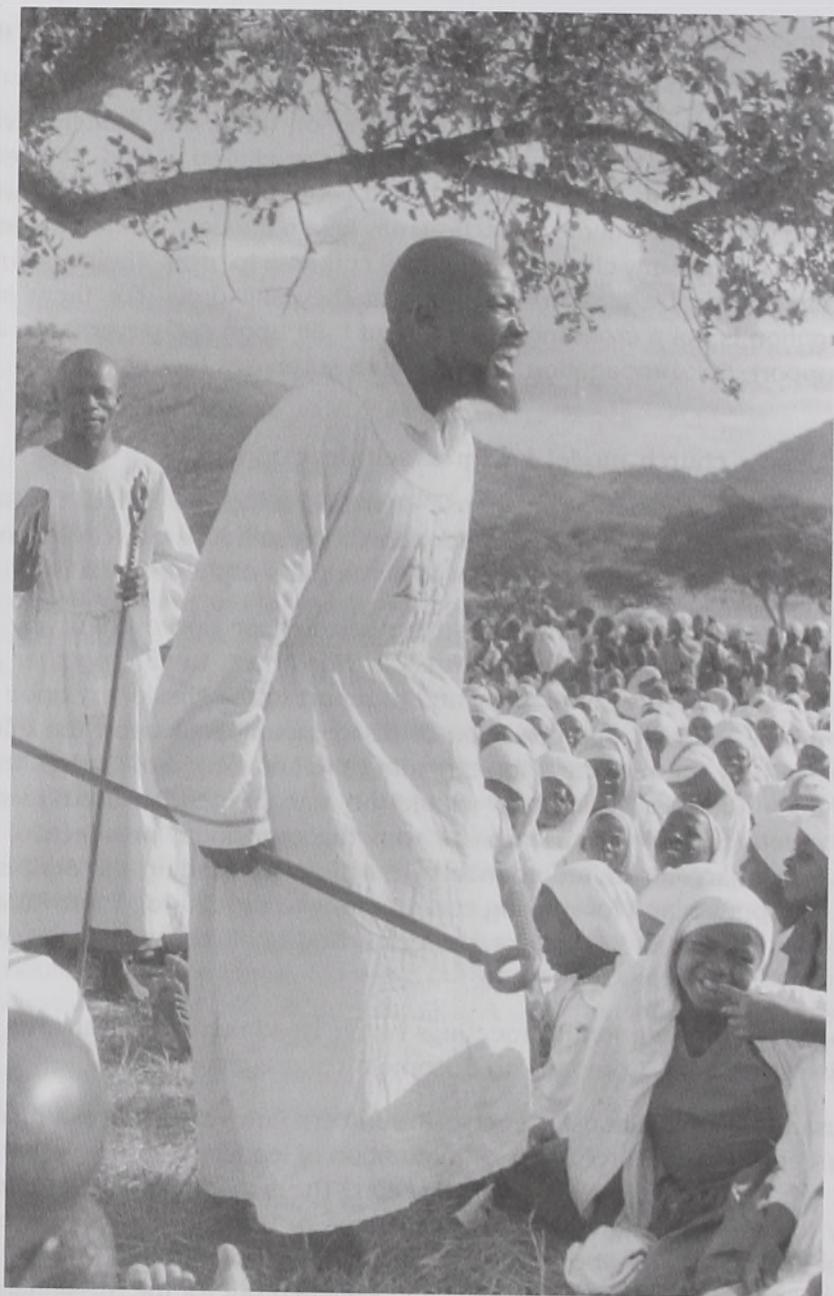
The house – church model for three-self development

Venn was quite specific about house churches (which he called 'Christian Companies') as precursors to congregations. These house churches were to be the locus for the development of all three parts of the formula.

One of each company should be selected or approved of, by the Missionary, as an elder or '*Christian Headman*', to call together and preside over the companies, and to report to the Missionary upon the moral and religious condition of his company, and upon the efforts made by the members for extending the knowledge of Christ's truth. Each Christian Company should be encouraged to hold *weekly meetings* under its Headman, with the occasional presence of the Missionary, for united counsel and action, for reading the Scriptures and prayer, and for making contributions to the Church Fund – if it be only a handful of rice, or more, as God shall prosper them (Venn 1971:69).

Venn also proposed monthly meetings of the 'Headmen' in a given area and precise steps for a 'Company' to become a congregation.

Thousands of Zionist house churches in southern Africa are living examples of Venn's proposal. All three kinds of maturation of leaders are going on at this level – governance, finance, evangelisation. The house churches frequently grow to become congregations, erect places of worship, and spawn other house churches, all the while maintaining a link with an AIC bishop somewhere who is playing the role Venn sketched out for the missionary.



Proclamation of the good news of Christ's salvific work is focal in AICs. Preacher addresses Maranke Apostles during open-air church service

Exposing the inadequacy of the formula

Would Venn and Anderson have rejoiced to see the rise of AICs? Perhaps, to some extent, they would have, for the reasons cited above. However, their successors did not rejoice. As AICs arose, they were often condemned by missions. The problem was not that they were not self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating; it was that they were not 'churches'.⁴ They were considered to be syncretistic and heretical groups, unfit for Christian company. They found themselves in the same position as a distance runner who crosses the finish line before all the competitors but is who disqualified because he was not properly registered before the race started – functionally in first place, officially in last.

A certain degree of theological soundness, not explicit in the three-self formula, was always taken for granted by the missions before they applied the formula. Young churches were not supposed to be self-theologising or self-instituting. They were supposed to accept the theology that the missionaries brought and build on the ecclesiastical foundation which missionaries had laid.⁵

Theological deficiencies are part of the reason that AICs do not get much acclaim for achieving all three parts of the three-self formula, but only a part.

4 This view prevailed at least until the mid sixties when Harold Turner deliberately and provocatively put the title *African Independent Church* on his two-volume study of the *Aladura movement* (my emphasis) in *West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). The tide gradually turned but, as late as 1987, Prof Daneel still felt it necessary to include a substantial defence of the churchhood of AICs in the final chapter of *Quest for belonging* (Daneel 1987), especially pp 250–255 and 269–273). Among other things, he defends them against the charge that they are 'tribal churches', ie so 'self-governing' and 'self-supporting' that they are virtually self-contained, uninterested in any links with the global and historic Church. Both his arguments are taken further in an article by G C Oosthuizen, 'Indigenous Christianity and the future of the Church in South Africa', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (January 1997):8–12, which sees AICs not merely as 'churches' but as 'the most dynamic church movement in South Africa' (p 8) and 'examples of inter- and intra-ethnic harmony' (p 10).

5 Theoretically the local churches had latitude to develop their theology and polity. For example, Speer (1902:63, 67) criticised the Methodists for founding churches overseas that were 'organically connected with and subject to the American Methodist Church'. His alternative: 'I believe in one Church of Christ in each mission field. I believe all denominations should unite in establishing one Church.' See also Beaver (1979:34) for a fine summary of Anderson's similar view. In spite of these brave words, the missions too often looked like the spouse who wants to control a partner's behaviour without admitting to himself/herself or anyone else that any strings are being pulled.

In the area of self-government, they are better known for problems than successes. With their reliance on prophetic visions and dreams, there should be an open channel to criticize leaders.⁶ In fact, however, leaders do not always respond with apostolic humility. Critics may find themselves forced out and needing to begin their own churches. In other cases, no door is ever left open for any criticism at all of the founder-leader. When he dies, it is as if a lifetime of bottled-up criticism is suddenly let loose and criticism starts flying in all directions. The church splits. Self-government is not automatically good government.

In the area of self-support, the AICs have not yet applied their resources to provide systematic training for their leaders. They only support the institutions and programmes for which they see a need, and they do not see much need for theological study. Does this mean that, while being self-supporting in financial terms, they are also self-impoverishing in leadership development?

In their self-propagation, they have been accused of both sheep-stealing and of lowering the standards of church membership. They grow quickly, but then so do weeds. Their growth is suspect if it happens because they permit customs like polygamy or ancestor veneration while all the mission churches in their region prohibit these things.

The assumption of Venn, Anderson and others was that Western churches engaged in mission in other countries because they were mature, that is, healthy adults capable of self-propagation. Their daughter churches would begin as infants but would gradually mature according to the formula until they too could reproduce themselves through mission.

The AICs do not fit into this neat paradigm. If churches mature in the way that the three-self formula suggests, then AICs are idiot-savants, those rare individuals who even as children out-perform most adults in one or two special skills but rank with the retarded in some other areas. How is this possible? Psychologists conclude that everything we know about the function of the brain says that idiot-savants cannot exist. Since they nevertheless do exist, there must be something wrong with our understanding of the brain. I suggest the analogous point – since AICs exist, so

6 For a discussion of the delicacy of the matter of prophetic criticism of a church leader, see Daneel 1988a:131–132.

miraculously mature in some ways and so immature in others – there must be something wrong with the three-self view of the process of church maturity.

In one sense, they have fulfilled all three criteria of the formula, and yet they are not altogether shining examples of the new churches which Venn and Anderson envisaged. Let us therefore look again at this tried and not-quite-true formula. If it is a faulty yardstick for measuring church maturity, what measure should we use? What are the real criteria we should apply to AICs or, for that matter, to any maturing church?

Improving the formula for a new era

If we accept that making disciples and gathering them into churches is the heart and soul of mission (as Venn and Anderson did and as AICs do), I suggest that we take a fresh look at our statement of the goal for maturing churches in light of the African experience of the last century. I wish to put forward a new three-self formula which, however unlikely it may be to set the pace for the next century of mission, may make a small contribution to the issues of church planting and partnership in mission.

Self-governing or self-critical?

To begin the new formula, let us replace *self-governing* with *self-critical*. The new term is broader than the old one and yet more precise about the real standard of maturity. A church may be self-governing for decades without doing any self-critical reflection. It could tie itself in knots with disputes about its form of government or, more often, about which individuals should hold which positions in its government. It could stifle all criticism of the leadership by levelling charges of insubordination against critics and hounding them out of the church. Yet it would still be self-governing.

By contrast, a self-critical church would have to be more mature. It would have to try to open an ear to prophetic voices about the way in which it conducts its own affairs. It could not operate in a dictatorial manner or stagnate under one particular leader or group. Its concerns with mission would have to override its concerns about its government. From top to bottom, it would have to have the humility that is the mark of a mature church, although not always the mark of a self-governing church.

The model for a self-critical church is to be found in Acts 6. When criticised about their handling of the daily distribution of food to widows, the apostles responded, not by a high-handed, defensive use of their position or a counter-attack on the disaffected followers, but by calling a meeting, hearing the complaints and delegating power to persons nominated by the critics.⁷

We have to admit that there are few models of self-critical churches anywhere in the world to which the AICs can turn. Neither are there many models in African traditional culture. Churches will have to innovate more here than anywhere else if they are to make progress toward the three-self formula. Perhaps an Akan proverb can get them started in the right direction, 'Holding power is like holding an egg', that is, hold it too tightly and it breaks; hold it too loosely and it drops. Either way, the holder loses (Opoku 1996: proverb 577).

Self-supporting or self-motivating?

As the second part of a new three-self formula, let us replace *self-supporting*, which focuses attention on financial matters, with *self-motivating*, which includes financial matters and much more. Of the two terms, self-motivating is the better criterion of church maturity because it goes beyond the act to the attitude, the driving force.

We may contrast the two terms through two analogies, the first being a key analogy that Venn used repeatedly to communicate his theory. Venn said that the mission was like a scaffold and the local church was like a building under construction. The scaffolding never carries the weight of the building. It is a temporary structure that can be removed to reveal a 'self-supporting' structure. A preferable twentieth-century analogy could be that the mission is like a person trying to start a car by pushing it. As soon as the engine starts, he lets go, and woe to him if he finds his jacket is caught on the rear bumper! A self-motivating church will run to places to which the missionary could never push it and at speeds that his legs could not even begin to reach.

A self-motivating church may or may not appear to be self-supporting from an accountant's point of view. It is possible for such a church to receive some

7 Besides the one example of Acts 6, we have the whole tenor of the Bible which, unlike most of the world's store of nationalistic literature, sharply criticises its heroes. Abraham, Moses, David, Peter and Paul are all the subjects of very embarrassing stories that no Jewish or Christian editor expunged from the record. Only Yahweh and Jesus escape criticism.

support from overseas without being spoiled by such support because the church already knows what it wants to do. That is what it *will* do with any resources, local or foreign, at its disposal. It will not wait to see what money is coming from overseas before it sets about its mission. Its motivation *precedes* outside assistance and is sufficient to lead to action even if that assistance never comes. Where there is a will, there is a way. The assistance from overseas is not so much 'support' as it is endorsement, blessing, cheering and encouragement from people who are more spectators than coaches.

Where does a church get such self-motivation? In the AICs, it is grounded in the same place as everything else – in some specific act or revelation of God (a vision, a healing, a prophetic call). Many of these churches claim some such divine spark at their origin. Each church is a response to what God has done locally and recently, not only to a report of what he did long ago and far away. These are churches in the style of Paul's Damascus Road experience in Acts 9, an experience that motivated him for a lifetime.⁸ Many AICs are a dynamic expansion from some such original experience, spreading out like ripples from a stone thrown into a lake.

The revised goal of being self-motivating implies several new challenges, not all of which AICs have yet mastered. They need to integrate God's local action with his action in Christ and Israel and then to draw their motivation from both places in a balanced way. This involves teaching their own history about the success they have had in motivating – without such a history turning it into uncritical legends about the founder. They also need to reach out beyond their history in order to make new partnerships, as they are increasingly doing.⁹ They need somehow to communicate to the mission-founded churches that a faithful church is one which carries on the mission of the missionaries, and not merely or primarily the structures they put into place.

8 For two typical experiences of key founders in Zimbabwe, see Daneel 1971:289–293 on Bishop Mutendi and 316–321 on Johanne Maranke.

9 For example, in November 1995 the Organisation of African Instituted Churches based in Nairobi and the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership in Birmingham, Britain, held a conference on inter-church relations. Another, scheduled for August 1977 in Mombasa, brought about 30 AIC leaders together with about the same number of African leaders from WCC member churches. Several missions, mostly Mennonite, who developed partnerships with AICs in a few countries formed a loose association in 1986 called 'The Network on AICs and Missions'. I edit a small 'practitioners' journal' for the network called *The Review of AICs*, now in its eighth year. The network held its fourth continental conference in Nairobi in August 1998.

Self-propagating or self-fulfilling?

Instead of *self-propagating*, which focuses attention on numbers of converts, let us say *self-fulfilling*,¹⁰ which focuses on convert-making as the central aspect of the total calling of the church. As a plant 'fulfils' itself by propagating itself, a church fulfils itself by propagation, and yet there is more to it in the case of the church. Each church should become all God meant it to be, fulfilling all aspects of its mission.

This discussion takes us beyond the sheer number of converts to the quality of such disciples, and beyond propaganda to inculturation.¹¹ An imported form of the gospel may lead to huge numbers of professions of faith and/or baptisms, but these may only be very superficial. As a Zairean priest once observed about his people, 'The soul of the [Yombe] tribe looks like a stone, which is . . . [in] the river [Christianity] for a very long time, but the interior of which remains always dry!'¹² Inculturation gets the gospel into the stone. It goes to the heart of a culture and an individual's life. It is a fulfilment of the church's mission and not merely a first step in that direction.

Roland Allen, writing a generation after Venn and Anderson, deserves quotation at length on this point as he bemoans the failure of the missions of his day.

Our missions are in different countries amongst people of the most diverse characteristics, but all bear a most astonishing resemblance one to another . . . There has been no new revelation. There has been no new discovery of new aspects of the Gospel, no new unfolding of new forms of Christian life . . . There was a day when we rather . . .

10 'Self-fulfilling' unfortunately has the connotation of 'self-made', ie achieved by one's own efforts. Thus we speak of a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. I am using the term rather in the sense of the self-fulfilment one experiences when something turns out well, regardless of the amount of credit one can take for it. For example, parents may feel a deep sense of self-fulfilment when their child achieves a goal. That sense of soul satisfaction at having been well involved in something which God blessed is a mark of a 'self-fulfilling' church. See also section I under 'Four observations on the new formula' below.

11 I am following Hiebert in using *inculturation* as a term which includes and goes beyond the verbal and theoretical level of 'contextualisation' to include the level of living and modelling. Paul Hiebert, 'Missiologial education for a global era', in *Missiologial Education in the 21st Century*, J Dudley Woodberry, Charles Van Engen and Edgar J Elliston (eds) (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 39.

12 Pere Thamba Alexandre, personal letter of 13 May 1995, to Rev Joshua Kudadjie, copied to the author.

prided ourselves upon the fact that no strange elements had produced new and perhaps perplexing developments of Christian thought and life. But to-day . . . we desire to see Christianity established in foreign climes[,] putting on a foreign dress and developing new forms of glory and of beauty (Allen 1912:184–185).

Did he say 'new revelation'? 'Perplexing developments of Christian thought and life'? 'New forms of glory and of beauty'? AICs have certainly shown us plenty of all three. They have shown what Venn called 'specimens of the advantages which will be gained to the cause of Christianity, when the Native Church shall assume before the people the aspect of a national and not a foreign institution' (Venn1971:77). Venn and Allen are talking about fulfilment, theological and institutional fulfilment, as local churches become all that God intended them to be.

This concept of indigenous church 'self-fulfilment' rests on solid biblical ground. In Acts 15 we have a record of the once-and-for-all debate on the question, 'Should we inculturate or not inculturate?' That particular debate was concerned with whether a non-Jewish convert should become culturally Jewish in order to be a true Christian. The answer of the apostolic assembly was of course a resounding 'No!' – so resounding that one may suppose that it would have put an end to cultural imperialism among Christian missionaries for all time. The clear implication was that the church in each Gentile culture would be responsible for inculturating (expressing and fulfilling) the message faithfully in that culture, not for replicating the forms of Christian life and thought in Jerusalem.

To inculturate requires a great deal more theological maturity than merely to replicate the Christian message in exactly the form and style in which the missionaries originally preached it. One must have a very broad grasp of the biblical message in order to draw out its full potential and power for any local situation. One must also have a better understanding of local culture and religion than most missionaries ever attain, or than most Western-style ministerial training institutions in the Third World encourage.

Last but not least, one must be prepared to take risks about the response to the message. While an inculturated message may be less offensive than an imported one because it has less Western cultural baggage, it may also be more offensive because it is clearer about the gospel's demands. A church

must accept this risk. Self-fulfilment and faithfulness to a church's unique calling in its setting must never be sacrificed to self-propagation.

AICs are self-inculturating. During my years at the Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements in Birmingham, I often introduced visitors to the Harold W Turner Collection of thousands of documents about AICs and similar movements in other parts of the world.¹³ My standard explanatory phrase was: 'These are churches and movements which have inculturated Christianity without reading any books about how inculturation should be done.'

For example, I have more than once been staggered by the size and the desperate needs of poor sections of African cities. Where and how does one even begin to engage in mission in such settings? What form will the gospel take so it comes across as good news? That was my question from the window of the airport bus.

In a poor section of Nairobi I was introduced to one way in which the African Israel Church Nineveh does it. Before the service they go, dressed in their white church robes, on a joyous procession around the block where the church meets, accompanied by a drum and the beating of a metal ring which emits one of the most piercing sounds I have ever heard. Singing short repetitive Swahili phrases such as 'Salvation in Jesus' and 'Jesus is coming', they dance and smile their way past the street-side garbage, the mud, and the tumble-down houses. And what happens? All the children pop out to have a look, and some of them run along, calling their friends. I am told that in rural areas these processions sometimes sing and dance for 30 kilometres or more to a special event.

Think of the different impression that a child might have of Christianity if he or she were to associate it with an outdoor procession of robed singers and dancers going through the neighbourhood or the village instead of a solemn indoor meeting in a cathedral. The procession is credible to the neighbourhood because the members of the congregation live there. In fact, they stick out during the week because they wear the white hat from their church uniform all the time. These are examples of inculturation which are

13 Most of this gold mine of material on inculturation is available on microfiche from CESNERM, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham B29 6LQ. A printed index arranged by country is available from CESNERM in a series of seven booklets edited by Stan Nussbaum (1993). An electronic version of the bibliography is included on *The 20:21 Library Main CD #1* (Colorado Springs: Global Mapping International, 1995).

appropriate in Nairobi. No one who thinks in a European or American way would even imagine them. But for Independents who are thinking as Africans, processions and white hats are a marvellous part of their witness. The richness and effectiveness of AIC mission springs from this kind of thinking.

Much as the Independents have succeeded in self-inculturation, a number of challenges remain for them on their way to self-fulfilment. First there is the challenge that African culture is a rapidly moving target as the continent hurtles into modernity. If the AICs are only inculturated to harmonise with African traditional cultures, theirs will be a very unfulfilling future as they are left behind by the next generation which has been subjected (like it or not) to the processes of modernisation.

Secondly, there is the challenge of how to draw on historic liturgies and models of church life. Self-fulfilment is not reactionary; an African church does not fulfil itself by rejecting everything Western. But how does an African church select those features of mission-founded churches that can rightly be integrated into the life of a fulfilled African church?

Thirdly, there is the challenge of distinguishing inculturation (a theologically legitimate combining of Christianity and culture) from syncretism (a theologically illegitimate combining).¹⁴ The Independents have frequently and sometimes rightly been condemned for syncretism, the opposite of self-fulfilment as I am using that term. Their 'inculturation' needs some further discussion and sifting and it always will. A self-fulfilling church is a pilgrim church until the final fulfilment at Christ's return.

Four observations on the new formula

- *The new formula is not as focused on self as it may seem. Self-critical* means staying open to a prophetic, critical word no matter at which level or through which person in the church it may come. *Self-motivating* turns out to mean motivated by God strongly and directly enough that no one

14 The word *syncretism* is being changed by some missiologists from a judgmental term into a value-free synonym for contextualisation. I prefer to keep the distinction, or, if not to keep it, then for those who merge the two terms to coin some new term for what I call syncretism. Those who argue that we no longer need a judgmental term (since no mixing of Christianity and a local culture should ever be condemned on theological grounds) have never seen the American prosperity gospel presented on television.

else has to press us to act. *Self-fulfilling* means listening directly to God's voice in order to be and to express his good news in a particular cultural context. The Independent Churches' overt reliance on the Spirit of God is a healthy corrective to any over-emphasis on self implied by the formula.

The 'self' in these terms does not mean self-motivated as opposed to God-motivated; it means self-motivated as opposed to motivated by other people. This was true of the original formula as well. For example, self-propagating was never meant to convey the idea that the church rather than God was the power that led to conversions.

- *The new formula puts responsibility squarely on the church in each culture.* The old formula also did this. The difference is only in the definition of responsibility. With the new formula, the church in each culture realises that it has, and will always keep, primary responsibility for being self-critical, self-motivating, and self-fulfilling. Within the body of Christ, it is not the role of outsiders (cross-cultural mission workers) to take the lead in levelling the necessary criticism, motivating the church or inculturating the message. Missionaries often do these things or try to do them, but the new formula says they are primarily local responsibilities.
- *The new formula is never finally achievable.* This is the crucial difference between the new and the old versions of the formula. The old three-self formula was something which the Western churches *had* already achieved, while younger churches still had to attain it. The younger churches could achieve it in a clear and measurable way – by reducing the missionary presence and foreign funding.

The new formula moves the goalposts, calling all churches to achieve maturity at deeper levels and to be churches in mission as God wants them to be, each in its own cultural setting. As the churches in each culture take initiatives toward becoming self-critical, self-motivating and self-fulfilling, they discover that, on their own, they will never get more than part of the way toward each of the three goals. The new formula contains a deliberately built-in frustration, and this takes us on to our fourth and final observation.

- *The new formula requires intercultural partnership for all churches.* The old formula was aimed at independence; the new one drives churches toward interdependence. The old one answered the question: 'What kind of churches should we plant?' The new formula addresses the question:

- ❑ 'What kind of churches should we and they be?' Any church that has tried and failed to implement the new three-self formula on its own is ready for serious intercultural partnership, for giving and receiving the help which is both necessary and substantial, regardless of its relative economic position.

Self-criticism, the first criterion, may be the most difficult one to do alone. As the Oromo people of Ethiopia say: 'Unaware of its own bald bottom, the baboon laughs at the others' (Cotter 1996: proverb 998). The harder we try to find our own cultural blind spots, the more we realise our need for help from outside our culture. An outsider may pinpoint in five minutes something we would all overlook for a lifetime.

As for self-motivation, every church in the world needs more motivation and encouragement than it can ever muster from within its own ranks. Cross-cultural visitors can share news and motivating insights. They can never be a substitute for the primary self-motivation rooted in what God has done locally and recently, but they can provide some very welcome assistance.

Self-fulfilment, when rightly understood, turns out to be an awesome responsibility. A self-fulfilling church is a church with a destiny from which it dare not shrink back. It is daily a custodian of the gospel, answerable directly to Christ for how the message is interpreted, proclaimed and lived. No church wants to undertake such a staggering task in isolation from its neighbouring churches and the global Christian heritage. No church could ever be fulfilled alone even if it wanted to be.

Conclusion

The AICs have exposed the limits of the old three-self formula by achieving it without being complete models of mature churches. Their pioneering experiences after achieving it are experiments at the cutting edge of mission, which point us toward a restatement of the three-self formula: *self-critical, self-motivating and self-fulfilling*. This is the formula we need for a new era in Christian history and mission, the age of a non-Western majority, the age of partnership.

The ACs have not yet achieved this new kind of self-hood. Who has? But they press on. As we strive toward this same redefined target, we would do well to pay attention to what they have already done, to engage them in

conversation which may help them do even better, and to invite them to engage us and spur us on. In other words, we need to push further down the trail pioneered by people like Bengt Sundkler, Harold Turner, G C Oosthuizen, and, not least, Inus Daneel.

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