

# Healing in the Zion Christian Churches of Southern Africa: Daneel's research in Zimbabwe compared with the South African Movement

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## Inus Daneel as research supervisor *par excellence*

At the end of 1996, at about the same time as my invitation to contribute towards this *Festschrift*, I was asked to speak at a staff meeting at Selly Oak on my personal pilgrimage in mission. It was then that I began to reflect seriously on the profound impact that Inus Daneel had had on my own life and thinking. Like Daneel's parents, my parents (and my grandparents) were missionaries in Zimbabwe. When he took up his appointment at Unisa in 1981, I was a struggling part-time, third-year BTh student and a Pentecostal Bible School teacher in Soshanguve (near Pretoria), trying to climb what seemed like an insurmountable mountain of studies. It did not take long for me to become fascinated with his grassroots approach to research and theology in Africa. I began studying for my first degree at Unisa in 1976 and I remained there until I completed my thesis in 1992. From David Bosch I had learned that 'mission' was *missio Dei*, the whole mission of God in the whole world, and a much greater project than I had ever conceived it, almost indefinable but intrinsic to Christian faith, and, in addition, the very reason for the existence of the church. I began to appreciate that every manifestation or definition of mission had to be rigorously scrutinised, and that this was the central task of missiology. I could no longer separate the 'spiritual' dimension of the missionary task from God's involvement in the whole of life (Bosch 1991:9–10).

But it was from Inus Daneel that I learned to treasure the vast riches in the African religious and cultural heritage, and the need to be sensitive to that in mission in Africa. I also learned from him the enormous missiological

relevance of the African Initiated Church (AIC) movement and the potential resources of this movement for academic research. Daneel had admitted his 'Westernness' in 1974 (Daneel 1974:311), and his sympathetic approach to questions like 'syncretism' and 'heathenism' further influenced my own approach to AICs. I became his protégé, especially after registering for my honours degree in 1983, and he supervised my two research degrees thereafter. His unique embodiment of the best qualities in the Afrikaner Reformed tradition and his scholarly rigour as a Zimbabwean African missiologist provoked me to strive, as best I could, for academic excellence and meaningful missiological reflection. Daneel constantly extended my horizons and stimulated my desire to probe ever more deeply by sharing his own profound observations and practical experiences. His academic output was already legendary and I eagerly absorbed and sometimes unconsciously reproduced, as many of his ideas as possible, as this article will reflect. So much of what he had written about Zionists and Apostolics in Zimbabwe I could understand from my own Pentecostal perspective, and I began to realise that there was far more in common between these AICs and western pentecostalism than most would care to admit. His own passionate defence of 'spirit-type' churches, of which the Zion Christian Church is one, and penetrating criticisms of those misinterpretations that had been so common since Bengt Sundkler's ground-breaking *Bantu prophets* (1961), coming as they so often did from misunderstandings of African cosmology, were to profoundly influence my own writing and the direction of my subsequent research (Daneel 1974:347; cf Anderson 1991:59; 1993:113).

My interest in African pentecostalism and AICs grew out of the varied experiences of many years and the stimulation of Inus Daneel. During the eighties my studies naturally gravitated towards what interested me most and what would have a most direct bearing on the people with whom I was working. After a year in Unisa's Department of Missiology, I began to work as a part-time researcher in Unisa's Institute for Theological Research, while holding the position of principal of Tshwane Theological College near Soshanguve. In 1991 my first published book, *Moya*, appeared; it was based on my master's dissertation for which Daneel had written the foreword. His trenchant critique of Martin and Oosthuizen's views of African prophetic approaches to the Holy Spirit (Daneel 1974:347-353), for example, was to have a major influence upon the theme of this publication (Anderson 1991:58, 70, 85). He encouraged me to engage further in field research, and I was able to do this under the auspices of the Pentecostalism Project of the

Institute for six years. The results of this period of research formed the foundation for the books *Bazalwane* (1992) and *Tumelo* (1993). My doctoral thesis, entitled *African Pentecostalism in a South African urban environment: a missiological evaluation*, was also completed in 1992. That work benefited from Daneel's incisive comments and supervision, generously relayed during long hours of discussions. Daneel's work thus became the pattern for my own studies, born in Africa, about Africans and our Christianity. In this article, I shall attempt to reflect on Daneel's contribution to the study of AICs generally, tracing similarities between his enormous research in southern Zimbabwe, as presented in his three volumes of *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* (1971, 1974, 1988), and my own comparatively minute research in Soshanguve, with particular reference to the major attraction of healing in the Zion Christian Church. Finally I shall offer some challenges, as I have recently understood them, to current AIC research.

### The growth of Zion Christian Churches in Southern Africa

Daneel has written a considerable amount about Samuel Mutendi's Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Zimbabwe, but there was little information on the much larger ('star') ZCC in South Africa, which has not been the focus of Daneel's research. These two churches, as well as the St Engenas ('dove') ZCC in South Africa, are each today organisationally distinct from the others, but all have common origins in the movement that originated with Engenas Lekganyane (Daneel 1971:291; Anderson 1992:41). The ZCC movement in Zimbabwe developed quite separately from the ZCC churches in South Africa, especially after Engenas Lekganyane's death in 1948 (Daneel 1971:299). Although these are two quite different contexts, with different countries and languages, and although Daneel's research was conducted mainly in rural areas while mine was conducted in an urban context over twenty years later, there are nevertheless many parallels between the ZCC in Zimbabwe and that in South Africa.

In the 1991 official South African census (CSS 1992:122), almost 10% of the black population who had given their religious affiliation were members of the ZCC. This accorded with the survey conducted in the same year in Soshanguve, where the ('star') ZCC was found to be the largest single denomination. If the census figures for ZCC membership in 1980 and 1991 are accurate, then this church had multiplied threefold during this decade,



Apostles in prayer, preparing a pool of water for a 'Jordan' baptismal ceremony

and might indeed have a South African membership in excess of three million, but accurate statistics are hard to come by (Anderson 1992:11-12).

Like Daneel (1974:101), my research in Soshanguve sought to establish the causes of this astonishing growth (Anderson 1993:16). We asked members of the ZCC (among others) why they were attracted to their church. The answer was often based on an appreciation of the 'African' nature and orientation of the church. ZCC members referred to the African liturgy of the church, especially the singing and dancing. Their church was specifically geared to fulfil African aspirations and to meet African needs. Daneel (1974:103) has given invaluable and comprehensive details about the adaptations made by southern Shona churches to traditional customs – a factor which remains a significant source of attraction. Sometimes, in our research in Soshanguve, there was evidence of continuity with African traditional ideas, and there is no doubt that this continuity is attractive for people searching for their cultural roots in an urban society where everything is in radical turmoil. The role of dreams in revelation, for example, a respected and visible practice among ZCC members in Soshanguve, is a feature which members find particularly attractive. Daneel observed that God's messages in these churches are often transmitted through the ancestors – something that I was able to confirm in my own research (Anderson 1993:18). Some ZCC members in Soshanguve said that they were in the church because it was the one revealed to them by an ancestor. So too Daneel (1974:151) observed that 'the manifest content of dreams leaves little doubt as to the Church which a person is supposed to join', and this was particularly true of 'spirit-type' churches.

### Prophetic healing in the ZCC

Daneel (1974:186) observed that prophetic healing was the single most frequently mentioned reason which people gave for joining 'spirit-type' churches, particularly the ZCC. Because of the significant number of second-generation Christians now in this church, the ongoing healing offered to these members and to new recruits makes healing one of the most important factors in its continued expansion. In our research interviews too, healing was the most frequently mentioned reason for having joined the ZCC, and it is still one of the main activities of the church. Members often related stories that usually fit into a pattern of period of prolonged sickness, unsuccessful visits to diviners, medical doctors, and other prophets, and

then some revelation (often through a dream) that conveyed instructions to go to the ZCC. Healing followed, and that was why they were still members (Anderson 1993:22–23).

In the ZCC the prophets are people of immense importance. They are the messengers who hear messages from God and who proclaim his will to people, and they are the seers who have divine power to receive the revelations from God pertaining to the complaint of the enquirer, especially sicknesses. Like diviners, they are usually expected to 'see' the complaints before they are uttered by the sufferers. They are healers *par excellence*, but also the ones to whom the faithful must go when they or their loved ones are afflicted in any other way. Many respondents in our research obviously understood healing to be the primary function of a prophet. Their healing practices were expected to be effective and to bring actual healing to the patients. They are the ones who must pray for the sick and dispense holy water and other symbolic healing objects as the need arises. They are also people who are expected to give direction and counsel for all kinds of problems, and, in a few instances, they are believed to declare the will of the ancestors. The prophet is expected to be available to fulfil this comprehensive prophetic function at any time. Furthermore, in the ZCC the Holy Spirit will descend in an extraordinary way during church services, so that the prophets are anointed to operate when that happens. They will then single out people for prophetic therapy, and the problems of these people will then be revealed and advice will be given to them about what action they should take or refrain from taking. We observed several instances of this procedure during ZCC services we attended in Soshanguve, and also participated in prophetic healing rituals there (Anderson 1993:127).

The prophet would usually manifest some sign that the spirit has taken control; thus the prophets would snort, cry, whistle, pant, jerk, and contort their bodies in different ways. Some would bend over as they walked, wringing their hands behind their backs. Others would be completely silent and behave 'normally'. The people being singled out were pointed at by the prophet; and they then had to follow. Sometimes the prophet clapped hands together to get someone's attention, and then pointed with the hands held together in a praying posture. The status or rank of the person being singled out made little difference; a young unmarried woman can command one of the church leaders to follow her to the prophetic enclosure for counsel, and he must follow, as we observed several times.

Prophesying is an essential aspect of the ministry in the ZCC. As Daneel (1988a:25) puts it: 'It is the accepted way in which the Holy Spirit reveals His will for a specific situation'. In this sense it forms a part of the pastoral care given for the many different problematic situations which are encountered by African people and which they bring to the prophets for their assistance. Prophets make known the will of God for a particular situation; thus, through the Holy Spirit, they mediate relief. In these churches 'it is taken for granted that this form of communication between God and man belongs to the essence of Christianity' (Daneel 1988a:27).

Prophets also often exert moral restraint on people. One ZCC respondent, for example, told of how a prophet had revealed that he was stealing from his workplace. He would have to stop immediately, or he would land in prison, he said. He immediately obeyed.

One particular case, described in *Tumelo* (Anderson 1993:125), illustrates the dilemma facing African prophets. This incident resulted in a woman receiving prophetic counsel to place the blame on her neighbours when her daughter was struck on the head by a stone thrown by her son. I suggested that if the ZCC prophets had initiated a process of reconciliation, such as Daneel (1974:307) had observed in Zimbabwe, in which both the afflicted and the ones accused of afflicting were counselled within the church fold, then the prophetic advice might have been the beginning of a truly African solution. Finding the cause of the suffering is very important in this context, and this type of prophetic diagnosis may not always be wrong. The diagnosis may produce a psychological catharsis that benefits the afflicted who have a real fear of witchcraft. The spirit world of African traditional thought constructs in its own cosmology the built-in fears and threats that demand a Christian response. The African Christian prophet attempts to give this response, particularly in the healing sessions, when the nature and the cause of the disease are given at the same time. Diagnostic prophetic activity is probably the most common type of prophecy in the ZCC.

## The relationship between prophecy and divination

Daneel has consistently pointed out the similarities and in particular the antitheses between Zionist prophets and traditional diviners. This he often did in reply to Western critics who had said that the prophet and the diviner were one and the same. The similarities that exist between the two explain

why 'the diagnostic prophecies have such an appeal for the afflicted Shona' (Daneel 1974:224). The parallels can be seen in the preliminaries, whereby in the warming-up atmosphere of singing, clapping, dancing and stamping, a state of trance is sometimes induced. Because the prophecy is seen in terms of an African's own traditional orientation, this activity is very meaningful. Daneel (1974:224–225) points out that the difference between traditional divination and prophetic diagnoses lies in the 'medium through which the extraordinary knowledge is obtained'. The diviner relies on divinatory slabs, bones or spirits, or some other means, whereas the prophet invokes and speaks on behalf of the Holy Spirit. The important point is that both concentrate on 'the personal causation of illness', and thereby answer the questions foremost in a person's mind. The prophet seeks to witness to the power of the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit, thus providing a remedy more effective than traditional rites. Daneel (1974:228) argues that the prophetic diagnoses and prescriptions point to confrontation and change rather than to a preservation of the old order. Shona prophets 'ultimately emphasize their dependence on the Holy Spirit as the real revelatory agent' (Daneel 1974:232) and they often *confront* the ancestors. This fundamental difference, which has been brought out by Daneel's research, shows that any similarities of method between prophets and diviners remain outward forms concealing radically differing meanings.

I found significant differences between Daneel's observations of ZCC prophets in Zimbabwe and those in South Africa with regard to the identification of prophetic activity with divination, at least in the perceptions of ordinary members. Many of our ZCC research respondents freely acknowledged the similarities between the prophet and the traditional diviner. For some members in Soshanguve, the offices of prophet and diviner merged, and sometimes the prophet was the agent not only of the Holy Spirit but also of the ancestors. Many members saw the functions of prophet and diviner as interchangeable. A person who was not baptised would become a diviner, and a person through baptism could convert the spirit of divination into the spirit of a prophet. Slight variants of this view were repeated many times by ZCC respondents. One told us that a prophet had the power of God or of the ancestors (she saw these two powers as being the same). A person with this power could use it to function as a diviner at home, and could use the same power to prophesy in the church. In both cases the person was a channel for God or for the ancestors, and told people what God or the ancestors wanted them to do. The implication was that the ancestors

spoke the word of God to people, and there was no perceived contradiction between the two. Another member said that a prophet was a 'spirit' in a person inherited from his or her ancestors or parents. Not everybody, it was said, had this spirit; it had to be inherited from parents in order to be available for use. One member said that a prophet was a person with a gift received 'from his own ancestors', a gift that enabled him to see things and prophesy 'by the spirit'.

Similarly, it is believed that in many cases people may go to a prophet for healing but fail to receive it because of disobedience to the ancestors' instructions. The prophet then gives the word from the ancestors, telling the patients what they need to do in order to be healed. A childless couple, for example, may have failed to do certain traditional things at their wedding, thus incurring the wrath of the ancestors. The prophet will instruct them to perform the necessary traditional rituals, without which they will continue to be childless. One ZCC member told us that he had one day heard a voice telling him to look up, and he saw a vision of his father, long since deceased, weeping. He went to the prophets, who advised him to make a ritual killing for his father, who felt that he was being neglected. The prophets in this instance did what any diviner would have done, and they played an identical role, at least in the perception of this member. Nevertheless, because many ZCC members were found to reject the observance of the ancestor cult this probably means that the cult has been confronted by at least some leaders and prophets, although probably not as consistently as Daneel found in Zimbabwe.

## Symbolic healing methods

Healing from illness undoubtedly plays a major role in the life of ZCC members in South Africa, as indeed it does in Zimbabwe. The use of healing symbols is one of the central and most important features of the church's life, and, in the Zimbabwean context, as in the South African one, the Zionist healing methods bear 'direct parallels' to the practices of traditional diviners (Daneel 1974:232). In the South African church, there is not the same identification of the symbol with the bishop, as there was in Mutendi in Zimbabwe, and this may be because, as a result of the enormous growth of the church in South Africa, the bishop has had to delegate control to other ministers. The most commonly used symbol is that of water, which is 'blessed' or prayed for by a minister or prophet for use by the congregants, either as a healing potion itself or else in large quantities to induce vomiting.

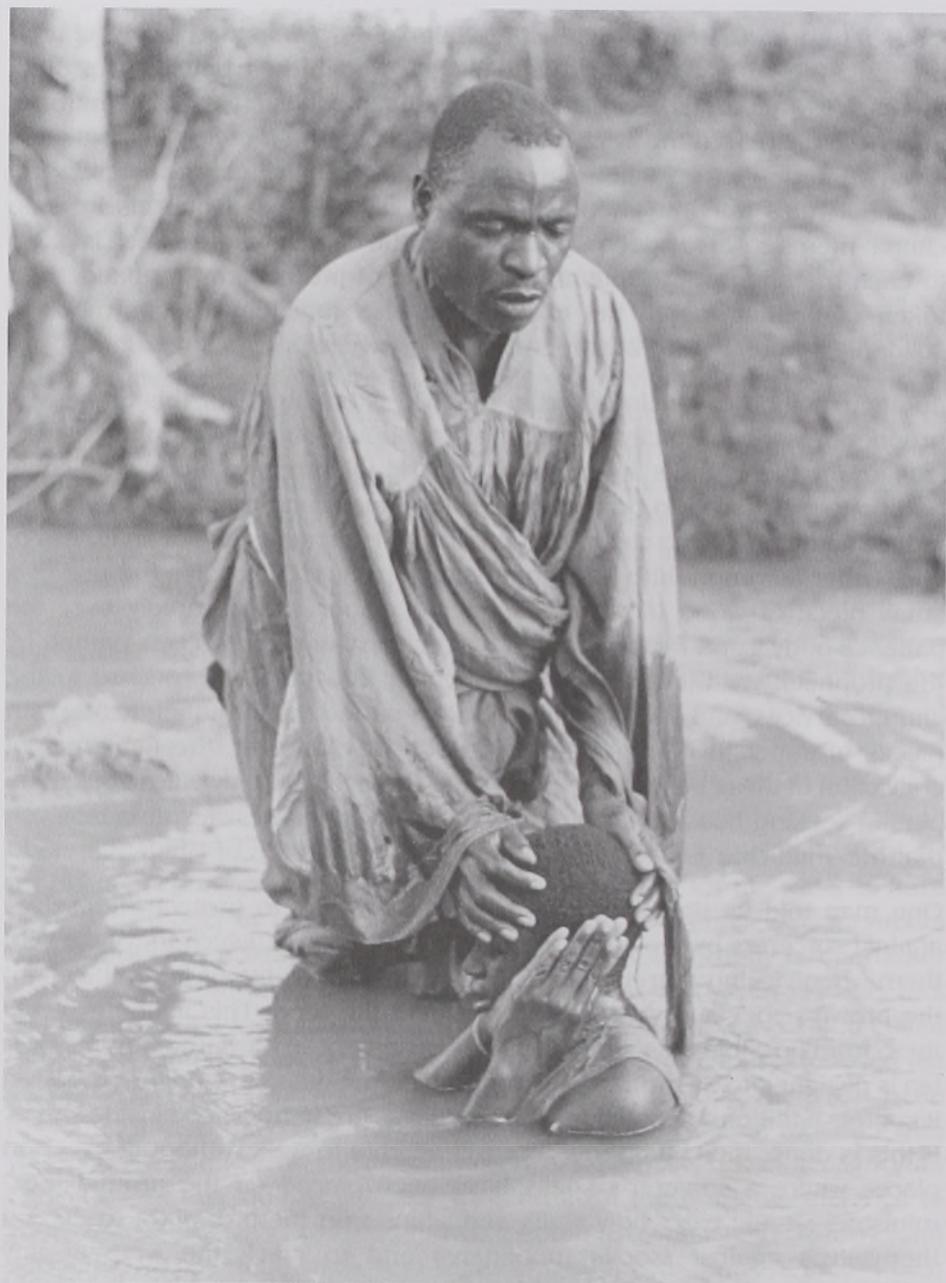
It is only the prayer that makes the water efficacious. As in traditional healing methods, a patient must expel the 'death' that is in the stomach before he or she can be healed. The vomiting is believed to get rid of both physical sickness and spiritual defilement. The water is seen to represent cleansing and purification from evil, sin, sickness and ritual pollution (these are concepts carried over from traditional thought). Members receive holy water, which is then taken home and sprinkled as a ritual of purification or protection or is drunk or washed in for healing purposes. The water may be sprinkled on people, cars (it is even put into the radiators of cars for protection), houses, school books, food, and a variety of other objects. The use of this water is justified from a biblical point of view by reference to God's promise to cleanse his people from all their impurities by the sprinkling of clean water (Ezekiel 36:25); the practice in the Torah of sprinkling water on a person polluted by contact with a corpse (Numbers 19:11-12); and the fact that the Spirit of God 'hovered' over the waters (Genesis 1:1). It is therefore believed that the Holy Spirit is present in water that has been blessed, or in the water of the river of baptism (Dzivhani 1992:16).

In the ZCC, the 'blessed water' (in Sotho, *meetse a thapelo*, which means 'water that has been prayed for') appears to be used more for a protective and cleansing ritual than for a healing one. Blessed water has many different uses. It is used to purify people or objects after they have become contaminated (such as after a funeral); to welcome visitors; for protection against sorcery and misfortune; for obtaining employment; for obtaining abundant harvests; for cooking and washing; and for the 'gate test' by prophets at church services. It is not always necessary for the water to have been prayed over by a ZCC prophet or minister. Sometimes ZCC members may themselves obtain water and pray over it. The testimony of one father tells how, after he had prayed over a cup of water and given it to his sick children to drink, they recovered. The ZCC also uses special tea and coffee that has been manufactured for healing purposes. In Sotho it is labelled tea *ya bophelo* ('tea of life'). One informant told us how his child had been healed of a deformity after the child had been given this tea together with water from a spring. The use of symbolic healing objects is known as *mohau* ('grace'), and this kind of usage is justified from the Bible by reference to Paul's use of articles of clothing to heal people (Dzivhani 1992:18). Walking sticks blessed by the Bishop, and ropes and strings or strips of cloth which are worn around the body, are also believed to have protective powers. Strips of blue cloth known as *khutane* have to be worn in a secret place in the

clothes to protect wearers against assaults and lightning. Similarly, church members tie copper wires across their gates or in their houses to protect themselves against sorcery and lightning. Almost every church member interviewed stressed the importance of observing the *ditaelo* ('instructions') given in order to be safe. These *ditaelo* are individualised secret and personal rules that the member may not divulge to anyone else. Some church members also attach significance to the church badge, which is given to each member after baptism, as a source of protection. The badge is a token of faithfulness to the church and also functions as a symbol of solidarity and unity with ZCC members everywhere.

Another method of healing used in the ZCC is pricking. For this process, a prophet prescribes exactly where a patient should be pricked on the hands, legs or in the nostrils in order to get rid of 'impure blood', which is traditionally believed to be the source of sickness and pain. Salt is used to induce vomiting and so clean the stomach of its contents and of an excess of bile. Other common faith-healing customs in the ZCC involve the use of a small piece of wood (*kotana*), a sheet of paper waved rapidly over the patient's body, sand from a certain river or dam, or other objects named by the prophets. We witnessed people coming forward to be blessed in the church services, and saw how the ministers patted them on their heads with pieces of paper. It is important to emphasise, however, the fundamental conviction of these believers that all these practices are only efficacious if the person seeking healing has already confessed his or her sins. It is believed that the 'medicine' is useless without a prior confession of sins.

One man told us that the ZCC helps its members to protect themselves against sorcerers by providing them with brown paper, which they take with them when visiting non-members. If they are offered tea or food, they light the brown paper and wave the smoke over the food. This action protects them from possible poisoning by means of sorcery. In the same way, the ZCC tea is designed to be drunk every morning before going to work or school, as it confers additional protection. The tea leaves are to be placed inside shoes. If this is done, the church member will be able to walk without ill effect on places where a sorcerer's spells have been placed on the ground. ZCC ministers should carry holy staffs and whips with them at night to defend themselves against *tsotsis* (hooligans) and to crack the whip at any *tokoloshe* (a particularly troublesome, hairy goblin) which he might encounter. A crack of the whip apparently renders the *tokoloshe* powerless.



*Ndaza* Zionist minister about to baptise a new convert in a shallow 'Jordan' river

ZCC members believe in the importance of healing by the use of symbolic objects, but some point out that the healing does not come because of any intrinsic power in the objects themselves, but because of a person's faith in God (Anderson 1993:79–80). So too, Daneel (1974:233) observes that the similarities between the symbolic healing objects and those of traditionalists are similarities of form and not of content, and they are 'primarily the visual symbolic concretization of the Divine Power, which in itself has no medicative effect'. Nevertheless, we must not overlook the possible danger of misinterpretation, to which Daneel (1974:233) has also alluded, noting that in some cases this is because 'the inclination of the Shona to identify the symbolic object with that which it represents in the ritual context' (Daneel 1974:338). To some people in the Soshanguve research, the healing symbols become something other than symbols of God's power, and are seen as having magical power in themselves. This is particularly the case (as is true of all varieties of Christian expression, both inside and outside Africa) when, with the passing of time, members observe certain rituals because they have become traditions of the church and not because they really understand their symbolic significance. In these instances the forms remain unchanged while the meaning becomes obscured. But this problem is by no means peculiar to the ZCC. All types of church member throughout the world tend to attach magical interpretations to symbols, thereby changing their meaning.

## The legacy and the challenge

I approach this final section with some trepidation, partly because Inus Daneel does not suffer fools gladly (and I may be one of them), and partly because, to parody the prophet Jeremiah, the pot cannot say to the potter, 'Why have you made me like this?' These concluding comments are made, in the first place, as self-criticisms that may sometimes touch on aspects of Daneel's influence. Daneel remains (as I do) a sympathetic *Western* and white observer of African phenomena and, as such, an outsider, no matter how sympathetic (Sundkler 1961:16). More recently, he has encouraged greater African involvement in AIC research, since the lack of such research has been a major weakness in the subject, especially in Southern Africa. The study of AICs, as Tinyiko Maluleke (1993:190) points out, is 'still by and large confined to white missionaries and academics with blacks playing the familiar field-worker role'. It is therefore necessary for AICs to cease to be the subject of a largely white debate. My work (and that of other AIC scholars in

South Africa) has been thoroughly scrutinised by Maluleke (1993:186; 1994:61; 1996:34), whose fundamental and penetrating challenges are highly significant in the light of past and future AIC research. I will outline and comment on a few of these observations in conclusion, since some of them are relevant to the legacy of Inus Daneel.

The first has to do with methodology and the claim that 'insiderness' ('participant observer') and 'empiricism' validate AIC research in the absence of a lucid theoretical framework. As far as I know, Daneel did not fall into that trap. Empiricism, Maluleke (1993:186) says, is 'ultimately functional, and therefore neither necessarily a helpmate to objectivity nor clarity'. Although it is sometimes difficult to analyse Daneel's theoretical framework because of the sheer volume of his case studies, it nevertheless exists and is clearly discernible to the painstaking reader. Daneel's most abiding legacy may lie in the persistence of the theme that runs through all his writings on AICs: the process of indigenisation which he calls 'adaptation and transformation'.

The prophetic healing practices of the ZCC are therefore the outer layer of this deeper causative factor which 'largely contributes to the attraction of the Independent Churches for rural Africans ... Herein lies the secret of the unique appeal' (Daneel 1974:309). My own findings in Soshanguve show that this observation is as true in an urban context as it is in a rural one. And yet, with Maluleke (1993:191), we must ask ourselves whether the African traditional/rural worldview is the 'only searchlight through which the complex forest of AIC praxis can and must be examined'. Is the presupposition, reinforced by 'empirical studies' such as Daneel's and my own, that AICs are primarily the result of *religious* factors completely sustainable? Furthermore, we must also ask whether, in 'empirical' case studies we are in fact seeing AICs through the eyes of the author of the study who is 'analysing, sifting and prescribing' (Maluleke 1994:61). Are the numerous case studies cited by Daneel in his works and based on extensive tape recordings and transcriptions, as well as on his personal observations, not also the product of his own subjectivity? Peter Reason (1994:11) suggests that objectivity is actually impossible, as 'the observer is inseparable from that which is observed'. Without the inevitable subjectivity of empirical research, no human knowledge is possible, and yet a claim that our research lets AICs 'speak for themselves' is idealistic and misleading. Maluleke (1996:41) may be right when he says that the voices of researchers 'are actually drowning the sources' and that 'the sources can speak for themselves only before we lay our hands, eyes and minds on them'.

A second and equally justifiable criticism levelled at my second book, *Bazalwane*, was the negative theological evaluation I gave there to African traditional religions, particularly from the perspective of African Pentecostals who rejected most forms of traditional religion (a rejection which Maluleke (1993:187) considers 'shabby treatment'). Although Daneel is at pains to avoid this impression, I think at times he may have placed any 'mixing' of AIC beliefs and traditional ones in what is for him the rather negative category of 'syncretism'. Often, even in his more recent writings (as in, for example, Daneel 1988a:403 and Daneel 1989:165), he emphasises the discontinuity and distance between Christian faith and African Traditional Religion, particularly with regard to ancestors. His conservative Dutch Reformed theological background is sometimes the grid through which he views these departures from 'orthodoxy'. For example, AIC prophets are viewed from the perspective of the 'Reformed sense of the Word of God being preached . . . and in the Old Testament sense of revelations and divine communications being transmitted' (Daneel 1988a:25).

Another possibility from a Pentecostal perspective is that in the New Testament these two senses are combined and find expression in AICs. Daneel's research findings are largely directed to the Western missiological and academic world, as indeed are most AIC studies. As students of AICs, particularly as white ones, we must ask ourselves whether we appreciate that the AICs are intrinsically *sui generis* worthy, or whether we study them as a backdrop against which we might conceptualise our own concerns and our 'own mission' failures (Maluleke 1996:23). There may be nothing wrong in such an approach so long as we admit it. A related admission is that of advantage. For whose primary benefit are AIC studies conducted: for those being researched or for the researcher? In most cases (including mine), it is the latter. These studies (like most other academic studies) do not fundamentally empower the communities being studied, although they may facilitate mutual understanding and cooperation.

A third, and related issue to which Maluleke (1996:41) draws attention is the danger of categorisation. In his review of *Tumelo* he pointed to the possibility of a continuous rather than a discontinuous relationship between the so-called mission churches and AICs (1994:62). He develops this theme in his later article (1996:41) where he suggests that in 'growing[,] sections (eg worship) of traditional Black churches . . . are becoming "AIC" and "Pentecostal" in both theology and praxis'. I have discovered, since my contact in Selly Oak with African 'mission church' leaders, that this

development is true throughout Africa. This is an area where comparative studies urgently need to be done. There is a danger that AIC scholars may romanticise the AIC movement and unconsciously place it in a cocoon without acknowledging the considerable historical, phenomenological and theological continuities between AICs and 'mission churches'. In addition, the whole area of typology and categorisation probably needs to be revisited, as the AIC movement has moved considerably from Sundkler's (1961:53) Ethiopian/Zionist dichotomy that most of us have followed in various forms ever since, and even the term 'AIC' with all its variations is now being questioned.

In conclusion, I might venture to say that Inus Daneel's natural curiosity has made his unparalleled and unique research the quintessence of all AIC studies today. His holistic love for rural Africa and its environment and his pursuit of excellence for himself and his students, undergirded by his evangelical faith, will always be, for this disciple at least, both daunting and inspiring. For this I thank him from my heart.

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# You shall have no other gods before me

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## The problem

In Gokwe, in Western Zimbabwe, the sun is still hot at four in the afternoon. The thirty or so people who kneel in the dust behind the church try to keep in the shade. They have been there, sitting or kneeling, for much of the day. They have come to be healed of physical illnesses or exorcised of spirits that possess them. On the wall above them, a mural depicts a huge black devil bound in chains by an angel of light. There is also a cross, and a picture of the Good Shepherd. A priest comes and begins to lay hands on the people. He prays, sometimes aloud, sometimes silently. From time to time he will command a spirit to leave. He lays hands on an attractive young woman. She writhes, sneezes, falls over. She has been waiting for this for a week. She is a well-spoken, gentle person, who holds a secretarial job in town. But she is possessed by a spirit who demands her for his wife and who will not let her marry. Another woman is a state registered nurse, articulate but highly strung, whose family have brought her somewhat against her will. Two epileptics, both bearing hideous scars from falls into fires, are also there, hoping for release. It is in many ways reminiscent of scenes in the Gospels.

Throughout Zimbabwe, Christianity appears to be flourishing. But the old religion dies hard. In Gokwe, it is easy to see why. The land here is hard and dry, fertile when the rains come, but desert-like after six months without rain. Malaria is widespread and there are only a few hospitals. The Aids virus has added to the apparently inexplicable illnesses that afflict the people. The people in the area are from different tribes; many Ndebele or Shona have come here, seeking fresh land. Christianity is relatively new. Anglicans have been a significant presence for only twenty years. Roman Catholics have been there longer but have only twelve priests spread over an area the size of Wales. When sickness comes, it is natural to turn to the local village *n'anga* (diviner, herbalist) or (for those who have a bit of money) to travel to a more famous and more expensive *n'anga*. These herbalists speak the same

language as those they heal, inhabit the same thought world, and give psychological reassurance.

It is not only pagans who turn to the *n'anga*. Many Christians do the same. As Temba Mafico (1986:400) writes,

The majority of Christians in Africa affirm faith in God but still ardently believe in such superstitions as witches, witchcraft, sorcery, magic and the like. Most African Christians believe in faith healing in the name of Jesus while at church, but are quick to consult a *n'anga* for effective medicines when faced with an illness in the family before they go to hospital or to the revival prayer meeting for healing. Generally the African Christians play it safe by holding fast to African tradition for mundane practical matters and to Christianity for eternal life (Mafico 1986:400).

## Christian reactions

### Early missionaries

To start with, the Christian churches preached a clear message. There could be no mixing of Christian and pagan religions. Christians were drawn out of their pagan environment and settled on mission farms. They were encouraged to marry Christians and to send their children to mission schools. Often the break with family and tribe was total and heroic. As the numbers of Christians grew, it became harder to insist on a separation of the two societies. Christians and non-Christians intermingled, and it became progressively easier for people to keep a foot in both worlds without drawing too much attention to themselves.

Missionary thinking on this point also began to change. Political changes in Africa brought about a new desire for authentic African identity. Christianity was criticised for destroying African culture and devaluing African religions. Christian studies of African Religion began to suggest it was a lot more 'Christian' than people had at first thought. Much was made of the links between, for instance, the commandment to 'honour your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12) and Shona respect for their departed relatives. Catholics and Anglicans found it easier than some others to replace Shona customs of honouring the dead with requiem masses and other prayers for the departed. Drums began to make their appearance in church, greatly

enlivening the worship in the process. New translations of liturgies, new vestments, new liturgical styles began to show a greater 'Africanness'. Traditional religion and the diviners were described in a much more friendly way, not only by amateur and professional anthropologists, but even by missionaries themselves.

### The search for authenticity

But how much had thought patterns amongst the Shona really changed? Young people naturally enjoyed the more exciting and lively 'Africanised' worship and, in seeking to establish their cultural identity, wanted a greater respect to be shown for their Shona tradition. Drums, music and dancing certainly do seem to resonate deeply with African consciousness, but it is not all that clear whether their use in church exorcises the fear of spirits and challenges the belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, which are endemic among African people. It is equally likely that their use in church may give the impression that witchcraft and spirit possession can exist in church and that the church therefore provides no protection against this evil. Another important question remains: can the church meet the other great need of Shona society – the basic and overriding need for rain?

### St Agnes Mission, Gokwe

In 1972 Fr Lazarus Muyambi arrived to find only a house for himself and a school. Today the mission has a church, which the people are planning to rebuild, a healing centre, a community of 25 sisters and five friars, a Red Cross centre, an orphanage of 60 children, a primary school, a nursery school of about sixty children, three orchards, three vegetable gardens, a herd of cattle and goats, and many acres of crops. Development is a key concept, but the difference is that the development has always been undertaken entirely by Africans, who have been almost always inspired by Fr Muyambi. When this work began, a civil war was raging, and so it was important to show a real awareness of the need to be authentic in the Shona political and cultural world. That Fr Muyambi survived and that his work flourished showed that his concern for development was not simply part of a European veneer. He is thoroughly Shona in both his ways and his thought.

At first sight it may appear that Fr Muyambi, despite being a Christian priest, is operating as a *n'anga*. Certainly many people, both black and white, have accused him of this. There are, however clear differences:

- In his preaching, he is consistently opposed to every form of compromise with traditional religion. There is no suggestion that a judicious and happy mix can be created between Christianity and traditional religion.
- The methods which he uses for his healing are centred wholly on prayer, the laying on of hands, fasting, holy water and the sacrament of penance. He does not (as do some Zionists, for instance) use methods similar to those of the *n'anga*.
- Unlike the *n'anga*, his diagnosis is solely focused on identifying the nature of the illness. He never attributes the cause of illness to witchcraft, bad family relationships, or the dishonouring of family spirits. It is only the illness that is identified or the possessing evil spirit. Likewise the only thing that he asks patients to do after they have been healed is to keep praying. There are none of the complicated rituals, payments or taboos which follow *n'anga* healings.
- Although he has contact with heavenly beings, who assist him, this is carefully ordered, and not at all secretive. Although only one other person in the community shares this gift, all the senior members of the community are consulted and act in a supervisory fashion, testing the spirits, and seeking, together with Fr Muyambi, to understand the nature of the heavenly contacts.
- Unlike a *n'anga*, he works very happily with hospitals and doctors, and will always refer patients to them if the nature of the illness seems to require it. He himself tends to concentrate only on those disorders for which Western medicine has no remedy.
- Fr Muyambi's ministry has been tested and examined by bishops and priests, both African and European, and, although not all are equally enthusiastic about it, all seem to agree that he is operating wholly within acceptable Christian parameters.

## Discussions at the mission

Discussions about the relationship between Christianity and Hebrew religion centred on the commandment, 'I am the Lord your God: you shall have no other gods before me' (Exo 20:2,3). It was pointed out that, while Moses was up Mt Sinai, the people of Israel rebelled and worshipped a golden calf, and many of them died as a result. This was seen as a metaphor for those Shona Christians who visit a *n'anga*. It was also said that Genesis shows humankind's disobedience and, once again, a comparison was seen between the disobedient Israelites of Genesis and those disobedient Christians who go to *n'angas*.

The story of Naaman (2 Kings 5) was cited with approval because Naaman was charged nothing for his healing. A prevalent criticism of *n'angas* is that they charge a lot for their services. Another person cited Isaiah 8:19 as an example of God criticising people for consulting mediums when they could simply consult God. Even today, he said, God speaks through angels. Another brother picked out the book of Kings as a favourite of his because it depicted the conflict with the Baal prophets and in the end demonstrated God's power and oneness. Deuteronomy 18:9 was often referred to because it forbids people to go to spirit mediums. And Daniel was cited by two people, first because of the three young men who were faithful and who were therefore not harmed by the fiery furnace and, second, because of Daniel, who was also faithful to God and who thus came unscathed out of the lion's den.

One interesting point that emerged was that there was a kind of spontaneous acceptance of natural religion amongst the people. It was felt that the Shona people had discovered such good commandments as 'Honour your father and mother' for themselves and that the names given to God traditionally – *musikavanhu* (creator of the people) and *mudenga* (the heavenly one) – prepared people for Christian revelation. Likewise it was felt that the old Shona religion which involved sacrificing to ancestors and consulting spirit mediums was not totally evil, but was the best that people could manage before Christian times, when God seemed very far away and could only be approached through intermediaries. But now that Christ had been revealed, such practices were forbidden, and were both useless and dangerous.

## The fundamental opposition

All the people at the mission were adamant that Shona religion and Christianity could not be combined. Their convictions in this matter were based on the following reasons:

- For many, the fundamental question was one of loyalty and trust. On whom do we rely for protection? On God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, or on our ancestors? It makes no sense to rely on both. The Gospels ask us to serve one master. The nature of love is that we should love only the one protector. Turning to the ancestors tacitly compromises this love.
- A second reason concerned the Christian Shona person's understanding of spirits. In one way, Shona people accept a world of spirits, and regard them as perfectly natural. At the same time, the presence of angels is also widely accepted, particularly at St Agnes Mission. But many of those who shared in our discussions held the Christian view that, at death, all human spirits depart from this world. 'God is a God of order, not of disorder' (I Cor 14:33), insisted Fr Muyambi. 'He does not leave souls hanging around the world to trouble people.' This means that any spirits which are experienced in this world are either angels or demons who are thoroughly evil. What is intended as ancestral veneration is nothing of the kind. Unknowingly people simply offer sacrifice to evil spirits, and not to their ancestors at all.
- Christians also maintain that Shona veneration of ancestors is founded on fear and not on love. Shona society is based more on authority, hierarchy and obedience than on love. This is even more true of the spirit world. It is believed that if people fail to honour their ancestors, they will send sickness and even death. In the same way, people behave well towards relatives and neighbours, not out of love for them but out of fear that they will retaliate through witchcraft, or that the ancestors themselves will punish behaviour that they perceive as being destructive towards the family. Good behaviour in a Shona society appears to be largely prudential, and the power of the ancestors to send sickness and death, or to allow others to bewitch, is the ultimate calamity. Such a perception of the world cannot really coexist happily with the Christian understanding that God is a God of love and that worship of God is fundamentally (or at least ideally) disinterested and unselfish.

- A fourth reason for not combining Christianity with traditional religion is the perception that real evil lurks within traditional religion, a point that the early missionaries certainly saw and that a large number of African people continue to see to this day. Although traditional religion and the office of the *n'anga* have received much friendlier treatment in recent years, one must remember that there is a dark side to African religion which was clearer in the earlier years of this century and which, to some extent, has been forgotten or glossed over by Western civilisation and Christianity. The dark side, however, remains, and is visible to the percipient observer. It has not been expunged. African religion may at times seem benign, but the witchcraft which is part of it remains intact and provides a justification for abuse. In January 1959, for example, in Mtoko, Zimbabwe, a young child was stolen from his mother. The child was found shortly afterwards with his throat slashed and his penis cut off. This is no isolated incident. Every year such cases are reported. In January 1995 two boys were abducted. One escaped. The other was never seen again.

It could be argued that these are only the evil manifestations of a primitive life that Shona religion and the *n'angas* are there to prevent. Whatever one may think of this argument, it cannot be denied that even areas of African religion which are not part of witchcraft can be immensely destructive. Madziyire gives an account of a Christian woman who was ill for seventeen years, and saw almost all her children die. The cause was found to be a tribal spirit (supposedly a good *mhondoro*) who wished to manifest himself through her (Madziyire 1975:79). It is easy, then, to see how traditional religion slips into evil practices.

- Zimbabwean Christians tell us that the Bible itself insists again and again that God alone must be worshipped and that no other gods, no other spirits, or no other religions may coexist with the Christian God. This God is a jealous and singular God who will not tolerate any kind of compromise in this regard.

## Hebrew religion

Before contextualising the attitudes of Christians in Zimbabwe, it is necessary first to look briefly at the history of the Yahweh cult, as we understand it from the books of the Old Testament.

## The problem of history

From the Book of Exodus onwards the historians, prophets and psalm writers make it clear that for Israel there is only one God. Other gods exist but they may not be treated as part of the Hebrew pantheon. Yahweh is a jealous God who will tolerate no worship of lesser or evil deities. A simple reading of the Old Testament gives the impression that this belief was established at least at the time of the Exodus and was consistently maintained by the religious authorities, though not always observed either by king or people. The following considerable difficulties stand in the way of sustaining this point of view:

- The dating of the early books of the Old Testament is exceedingly complex. Many of the features on which an account of Hebrew religion relies are probably from later redactions and represent an ideal point of view from a time several centuries later than the events in question.
- The history of the Hebrew people is more complex than a superficial reading of the books may suggest. The received idea that twelve tribes united as one people, entered the land of Canaan from Egypt, and gradually took it over by force of conquest, has long been perceived to be an extravagant oversimplification. That some group of escaped slaves, possibly constituting one or two tribes, came in from Egypt and added their stories to those of others, may be accepted. Other groups came from different directions and mingled with the Canaanite or Aramaic people who were already there.
- History is usually told by the winners, and this is particularly true of the Israelite people's history. The winners in this case were the Davidic monarchy centred in Jerusalem. Their historical narrative favours the centralisation of the country and its religion in Jerusalem and the authority of their king.
- That the people of Israel are so often admonished not to worship other gods shows quite clearly that they were doing so in large numbers. Also, that worship of Yahweh continued at shrines throughout Israel long after the supposed centralisation of the cult at Jerusalem shows that the Jerusalem religious authorities were by no means as well accepted and accredited as they liked to pretend. The considerable social variety among practitioners of the religion (there were, for example, established townspeople in ancient cities like Jericho, well-established farmers, and

new migrants from rural areas) makes it inevitable that the Hebrew religion was more complex and less 'tidy' than the Deuteronomic redactor would have the reader believe.

### The Yahweh cult: political problems and the persistence of indigenous customs

There are a few other important points about Hebrew religion that I should like to touch on before examining the similarities between the religious context of the Hebrews and that of the people of Zimbabwe today.

#### *Hebrews and Canaanites*

Old Testament writers are frequently at pains to emphasise the separate identity of the Canaanites and Israelites. In fact, Hebrew, as a language, is closely related to Canaanitic. By tradition, the people of Israel occupied the hills and pastures with their flocks while the Canaanites occupied the towns in the valleys. There must have been constant intercourse between them. Among the many things that the Hebrew people learned from the Canaanites were a knowledge of ancient fertility rites and the religious offerings that were appropriate for local deities.

#### *The ancient shrines*

It would seem likely that the Hebrews who came in from the desert brought with them a God called Yahweh. But they found the god El already in their new land and identified him with Yahweh. They also took over the shrines that had been holy to El. These shrines (Shechem, Bethel, Mamre and Beersheba) were already all ancient and holy places by the time the Hebrews established themselves as a significant presence in the land of Canaan. Stories were therefore manufactured that linked these shrines to the patriarchs.

#### *The Law*

The history of the shrines reveals that a complex syncretism was in place and it is this that both the priestly and the deuteronomic law try to redress. In Deuteronomy 12:13, for example, the law lays down that sacrifice may only be offered 'in the place that Yahweh chooses'. But it does not say where this place might be. In contrast, Judges and 2 Kings tell of three accepted sanctuaries at Mizpah, Bethel and Shiloh, and at the same time it is evident

that heads of families may offer sacrifice wherever they choose to do so. In contradiction to this, Joshua 22 allows only Shiloh as the legitimate place of Israelite worship.

### *The purification of the land*

Another complexity in the early history of Israel's religion is visible in the contradiction that runs through the Book of Joshua. The beginning of this rather violent book tells of the Hebrew tribes sweeping into and through the land of Canaan and utterly destroying the native peoples at the command of Yahweh. Chapters 2–11 specifically relate the total destruction of all foreign tribes. Later parts of the book, however (chapter 23, for instance), speak of other tribes that continued to exist quite happily among the Hebrews. In this context, one sees the ban on other gods and the total destruction of their images as a continuation of the war on other nations who lived within the land, the very land that Yahweh had promised as a part of the Hebrew Covenant with God.

### *The dead*

There was clearly continual tension between the demands of Yahweh, as they were relayed to the people through the law of the Covenant and ancient religious practices important to them. An example of such a practice (also one of particular importance in any discussion of African religion) concerns the place of the dead. Von Rad comments: 'The surprising number of regulations against the cult of the dead and the rites pertaining to it allow of the conclusion that a particularly bitter warfare was waged against it, as a cult which offered special temptations to ancient people' (Von Rad 1962:208).

In much of Scripture there appears to be little belief in any real post-mortem existence, since it was believed that God's promises are fulfilled in this life. For these people, life after death was a shadowy business, a falling asleep or a long rest. At the very most, they believed in an attenuated existence in Sheol. In contrast to this, the cult of the dead was widely practised. People who were able to make contact with the dead were variously called 'diviners', 'a woman who consults ghosts' (1 Sam 28:7–14), 'knowing ones' (Lev 19:31), 'seeker of the dead', and 'magician' (Deut 18:11). In Isaiah 8:19, the people are attacked because they 'consult the dead on behalf of the living', and in Isaiah 65:4 we hear of 'those who sit inside the tombs and pass the night in secret places', evidently consulting with the dead. In a curious kind of way, the dead were even thought of as being able to confer life, as one sees in the

corpse that revived upon contact with Elisha's bones (2 Kgs 13:20–21). Because the dead were also thought to be capable of vengeance, David, in an attempt to forestall their vengeance, had the hands and feet cut off the corpses of Ishbaal's murderers.

In spite of these widespread condemnations of folkloric beliefs and practices in the Hebrew Scriptures, the cult of the dead is not totally condemned. In Genesis 28:17–18, for example, we find Jacob offering ancestral sacrifice. In Deuteronomy 26:14, a person must declare that he has not fed the dead with tithed food, the implication being that the dead might be fed with other food. It seems that the cult of the dead was so deeply ingrained in the common people of Israel that even the Jerusalem priesthood did not feel able utterly to extirpate it. In a passage which could, without alteration, be used of the Shona people in Zimbabwe, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith writes: 'In Judahite culture the dead were an integral part of the social organization. Individuals believed that their descendants would nourish and care for them after death, just as they had provided for their predecessors' (Bloch-Smith 1992:132).

#### *Centralisation of cult and country*

One begins to see, then, the problem that faced David and his party when they set about attempting to unite the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel into one kingdom centred on Jerusalem. It was a problem that was not solved in David's reign but continued until the Exile. It was a problem that was neither purely religious nor purely political. Cult and court were inextricably bound together. The main problem was that there were other centres of power. The northern kingdom had its own political identity and, in the reign of Rehoboam, it split apart. Jeroboam knew that if his people continued to look to Jerusalem for the cult, his own kingdom would become divided in its loyalties. He therefore set up golden calves at Bethel and at Dan so that they could each become centres of Yahwistic worship (1 Kgs 12:26ff).

We must remember, too, that while Canaanite religion belonged essentially to the cities of the northern kingdom, Yahwist religion was a religion of the countryside. Thus the attempt to centralise all worship in Jerusalem met with two quite different kinds of opposition. The worshippers of Baal resisted it on religious grounds since they did not wish to see their ancient religion replaced by a foreign import. They also realised that an ascendancy of Yahwism would mean a subjugation of their towns to the Davidic city of Jerusalem, which of course is precisely what the Jerusalem officials

intended. The country Hebrews, on the other hand, saw no reason to abandon their ancient independence according to which sacrifices and worship took place within the family and the local community and not in a temple far away.

### *The high places*

This brings us to the problem of the high places. Throughout the Deuteronomic revision of the history of the Kings of Israel, we are reminded of the evil of worship in the high places. We have to remember that this was a revisionist view. In several places in the Old Testament (for example Exodus 20:21, Judges 6:19, and 1 Samuel 7:9), it is clear that Israelites could sacrifice anywhere and that anyone (and not only a priest) could perform the sacrifice. Some sacrifices clearly took place within the family because families (as is the pattern in Africa today) tended to constitute whole villages complete with their own priest. Deuteronomy 12 shows that much sacrificial activity and the joyful feasting that went with it would have to take place in people's own towns and villages (as it always had done) simply because 'the place which the Lord your God will choose' was too far away.

Mountains, however, have always been holy places. Yahweh could not be pinned down to any one sanctuary. Amos 5:25 appears to articulate a tradition that sacrifice began only in Canaan (cf Jer 7:22). One must therefore distinguish between those who worshipped Yahweh on the high places, places where he had every right to be (Deut 33:29) and where Yahweh participated in the sacrificial meal (Deut 32:13), and those who worshipped *other* gods in high places.

The political consequences of the destruction of the high places can be seen in the reign of Hezekiah, one of the few occasions when such destruction was really ever attempted. Here it would seem that his motivation was partly economic (to bring tribute to Jerusalem) and partly defensive. Because the cult centres in the hill country were places where food and money were collected for the service of Yahweh, the invading Assyrians naturally utilised these resources wherever they could. Destroying them cut off one of the sources of supply upon which the Assyrians relied. That the motivation was not simply to establish a pure Yahwist cultus may be deduced because the temple of Jerusalem itself remained a place where other local gods were worshipped, probably until the time of Josiah.

### *The holiness of Israel*

Israel was, from an early stage, in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, which made it holy. This set her apart from all other peoples and distinguished Yahweh from all other gods. The first of the Ten Commandments, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . . you shall have no other gods but me', (Ex 20:2), is unique in the history of religion. God describes himself as the one who delivered them out of Egypt. It was on this that the whole Covenant of Israel was based. God had performed a unique action for them. God had in no way favoured Israel because Israel was good or great or virtuous. God's motivation was purely his love. On every showing, the Hebrew people were a scattered, weak and unimpressive people until God delivered them (or some of them) from Egypt and took them for his own. It was this that gave him the right to demand that they should be exclusively his.

It was God's covenantal action that gave Israel its identity. The covenant, whatever form it took back in the days of Joshua and the Judges, was the thing that really bound this disparate people together. Without this common relationship with Yahweh, they would simply not have remained a unique people.

The need then constantly to reaffirm and protect this identity was present throughout the years of Israel's history. In the period until the Exile, Israel was constantly under threat of destruction and dispersion – from Assyria, from Egypt and from Babylon. It was their monotheistic faith and their ethnocentric application of it that enabled them to survive. It was therefore of supreme importance to Israel that people should be faithful to the covenant. We are therefore not surprised to find, in a passage such as Deuteronomy 13 draconian sanctions decreed against any person who should attempt to introduce foreign gods into Hebrew worship or seduce any Israelite into the worship of other gods.

### The two compared

How then may one compare the religions of this ancient, largely rural people and the Christian people of Zimbabwe today?

## Shrines

The Deuteronomist wished to establish, among many other things, that God alone is the God of Israel, and that the covenant relationship between God and Israel absolutely precluded worship of any other god. Although he condemned worship at any place other than Jerusalem as being of (at least) doubtful legitimacy, he was unable to deny the facts, which were the existence of several shrines, many of which were probably older than the Israelite cult that attempted to supersede them, and the provision in the law itself for sacrifice to be offered at places other than Jerusalem. How does this compare with the experience of the Shona?

The comparison is not exact. Hebrew religion had colonised the shrines and offered sacrifices there and elsewhere which were wholly legitimate in terms of Hebrew religion. The danger for them was that the Canaanite religion might at any stage be revitalised, perhaps because it had never ever been entirely displaced.

Although traditional shrines do exist amongst the Shona (the Mwari cult at Matonjeni in the Matopos is the most famous of these cults), there are hills, or trees, or pools of particular local significance that exist near every village. Christianity has made no attempt to extirpate these shrines. It has either ignored them, characterising them as objects of superstition, or has else forbidden them to Christians since they are incompatible with the worship of Christ. The problem then for the Christian country person is not whether he or she may offer Christian worship in a place other than a Christian church. Rather, like the Israelite peasant, he or she is conscious all the time of other spiritual forces, of places of significance, and of cults and powers all around and about the landscape. Can the Christian afford not to pay some attention to these places?

Alternatively, would the centrality of sacrificial worship in the Old Testament encourage Shona people to see an identity between Old Testament sacrifice and the traditional sacrifices of cattle and goats? Shona Christians in fact deny any meaningful link between the two, largely because Old Testament sacrifices were offered in worship of God. In traditional religion, sacrifices are offered, not to God, but to devils or to intermediary spirits, and such sacrifices are not made to worship God but in order to pacify the anger of spirits.

## The covenant creates the people

A closer relationship may be understood in the importance of the covenant in the lives of both peoples. For the Hebrew people, it was the covenant that ultimately constituted them as a people. If they worshipped Canaanite gods, they would forfeit their uniqueness as a people and would disappear among the surrounding peoples of Canaan. Their covenant also mediated to them an amazing truth about the nature of God, namely that he cared for them and had chosen them for no other reason than that he loved them. He owed them nothing, but gave them everything. Such a revelation of God's nature is common to both Jew and Christian. Not to trust wholly in God is to reject this love. The nature of God's relationship with Jew and Christian is that it is exclusive and does not allow for any kind of worship of any other god. What is more interesting to consider is to what extent Christianity itself, and therefore its God, may have constituted the Shona as a people.

'*Vasati varungu vasvika* – before the white men came'. Before the colonialists came, Zimbabwe did not exist as a country and the Shona did not exist as a unified people. The Great Zimbabwe state had come to its end in the seventeenth century. Unlike the Ndebele, who were centred on their king in Buluwayo, the Shona had had no king since the Rozwi Changamire or the Mwene Mutapa, and both had been gone for nearly a hundred years. They were a disparate group of tribes, speaking the same language but with clear dialect differences, and demoralised by the attacks of the Ndebele in the south-west and the Nguni in the south-east. They lived in great poverty and their lives tended to be hard, brutish and short. The coming of the colonialists changed all this. For all the faults of colonial rule, it did create a country. Missionaries and district commissioners created a written language, recorded customs and beliefs, protected the Shona, and legitimated the land on which they grew as a people. Christian Shona at least regard this as a gift from Christianity.

Without Christianity, white domination would have been wholly destructive. Christianity ensured that humane ideas triumphed in the end, and Christians provided the essential tools of education and medicine that made the growth of the Shona people possible. Even in the *Chimurenga* war, several Christian missions gained good reputations for helping the liberation cause (a point that might be compared with Gottwald's theory that Hebrew religion came into being as part of a peasant revolt) (Gottwald 1979:594ff). More importantly, perhaps, Christians gave Shonas the power to free themselves

from the whole system of traditional religion which at best only ensured the status quo and often had a destructive effect on communities.

With that in mind we can see that, for some, any movement away from the God of Christianity towards pagan spirits is not only a failure of love and trust; it threatens the very life of the people and could destroy the whole precarious fabric of civilisation and prosperity that has been created in so short a time.

### The evils of traditional religion

It is important, then, to see that to a committed Shona Christian, at least of the traditional type, worshipping other gods is not only a failure to love and trust in God's goodness, it is a turning towards that which is fundamentally evil and destructive. In this respect, Hebrew exclusiveness offers only a partial parallel. Aspects of Canaanite religion, such as child sacrifice and cultic prostitution, were perhaps seen as fundamentally and inherently wrong in themselves. The main reason for forbidding participation in Canaanite religion, however, was that it breached the covenant on which everything else depended. Committed Shona Christians have a profound sense of the evil in traditional religion and this realisation is reinforced by their conviction that the covenantal relationship with God and Christ must not be compromised.

We may speculate a little further here about the nature of identity. Identity in community is deeply important to African people. African Christians do not understand this as merely a personal option. They feel themselves to be part of a religious community with bonds and responsibilities towards all others. To some extent this replaces the identity they would have felt within traditional clan structures. It is therefore of even greater importance that the new communal identity should not be compromised. In Israelite religion it was often perceived that the wrongdoing of individuals brought disaster on the whole people (cf Achan in Joshua 8:19ff and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14:42). Similarly in traditional Shona religion, a witch was a danger to the whole village. A man who offended his ancestors brought sickness and death on his whole family. He must be made to conform and do what was right. Likewise in the Shona Christian communities, there are fears of such tainting. Other people's unfaithfulness and participation in the religion of other gods will corrupt the whole Christian community. Apostasy is not a private affair.

Whatever their private practice, Christians of mission and 'spirit-type' Independent Churches are clear that Christianity cannot mix with traditional religion. The Old Testament helps us to understand the nature of pressures on a country people to affect just such a syncretism and the struggle that a monotheistic, covenantal and ethical religion has always had to establish its God as the only possible focus of worship.

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## Issues of 'Catholic' ecclesiology in Ethiopian-type AICs

*Stephen Hayes*

With well over 7 000 African Independent Churches (AICs) in South Africa alone, it is impossible to generalise about the ecclesiology of AICs. Even when one tries to classify them, the classes are fluid and the boundaries overlap. Thus, in this chapter, I shall make a few observations about some of the features of the ecclesiology of some AICs.

Sundkler's broad classification of AICs into 'Ethiopian' and 'Zionist' remains a useful one, though it is somewhat imprecise. It corresponds roughly to the distinction made between different kinds of non-AICs (does one refer to them as 'non-African Independent Churches'?) - the distinction between 'Mainline' and 'Pentecostal'. Sundkler derived his terminology from the use of the terms 'Ethiopian' and 'Zionist' in the names of the various denominations, but nomenclature is not always a reliable guide. One of the denominations whose ecclesiology I will consider is the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion, which incorporates both words, but whose emphasis, in the minds of its founders at least, lay on the 'Catholic' part of the name. This essay is concerned primarily with the AICs that Sundkler classified as 'Ethiopian', and within that group, with some of those whose ecclesiology may be classified as 'catholic' or 'episcopal.'

Most published material on the AICs has tended to concentrate on the Zionist group. There are several possible reasons that one could suggest for this emphasis. One is that the Zionists, with their colourful robes, tend to be more visible. Another is that they have tended to make more obvious theological adaptations to African culture. A third is that they are largely the product of spontaneous growth, rather than schism. The Ethiopian group, on the other hand, has tended to suffer from scholarly neglect. Many of the Ethiopian denominations have been formed by schism from mainline denominations, and perhaps mainline scholars prefer not to discuss them because, in some cases, the wounds of the schism are still painful, or because they are still seen as rivals. Also, the Ethiopian group have displayed less overt theological

innovation. They have generally maintained the theology and ecclesiology of their parent bodies, and have sought to conserve them. I will try to illustrate this thesis by means of some case studies.

## The formation of the Ethiopian churches

The basic outline of the early history of the formation of the Ethiopian churches has been fairly well documented, and I shall only give a brief survey here to set the scene. In 1889 an Anglican evangelist, Khanyane Napo, formed the Africa Church, and in 1892 Mangena Mokone and others seceded from the Wesleyan (Methodist) Church to form the Ethiopian Church (Sundkler 1961:39). In 1896 a conference of AIC leaders was held to discuss the possibility of affiliating with the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in the USA. James Mata Dwane was sent to the USA, and was appointed by the Americans as the superintendent of their South African work. This action seemed to some in South Africa to be too much like an American takeover, and many felt that Mokone had been sidelined (Verryn 1972:24–25). In 1900 Dwane opened negotiations with the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), and this eventually led to the formation of the Order of Ethiopia in association with the CPSA (Verryn 1972:41). Samuel James Brander broke from the AME Church in 1904 and set up the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion (Sundkler 1961:42). In 1912 the Native Catholic Episcopal Church broke away from the Church of England when the Rev Joel Davids had a dispute over finance with the church authorities.<sup>1</sup> In 1924 the African Orthodox Church was formed, in secession from the African Church because of disputes between the leaders of that church.<sup>2</sup>

One way of examining the ecclesiology of some of these bodies is to consider some specific examples. I shall therefore use three case studies to illustrate the ecclesiology of these denominations: Samuel James Brander and the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion, Daniel William Alexander of the African Orthodox Church, and the journey of one group from the Ethiopian Church to the Church of Ethiopia via the Order of Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup>

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1 SAB NTS 1455 112/214

2 SAB NTS 1455 111/214

3 I use 'Ethiopian Church' to refer to the body started by Mangena Mokone in Pretoria in 1893, and the 'Church of Ethiopia' to refer to the body started by Frumentius in the Kingdom of Aksum in the 4th century.

## Three case studies

### Brander and the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion

Samuel James Brander was born at Colesberg in the Cape Colony on 26 September 1861. According to his own account, he was the fifth son of Jacobus Brander, a Mosotho of the Transvaal, and Lydia Brander, an African-American woman. He was brought up as a Wesleyan, and became a transport rider, and then a diamond digger at Kimberley, where he joined the Anglican Church in 1876. He then became an Anglican missionary in the Waterberg, but left the CPSA in 1890 after a financial dispute, and in 1892 joined Mokone in founding the Ethiopian Church.<sup>4</sup>

In 1904 he led a secession from the Ethiopian Church, which had by then amalgamated with the AME Church. The reason for the secession, according to the Rev S W Maeger, when applying for government recognition in 1926, was that the Americans had promised money for a school and it was not built.<sup>5</sup> In 1931, however, Surgeon L S Motsepe, who was renewing the application made by the late Samuel J Brander, said that the reason for the secession was doctrinal. The parent church was Methodist, whereas the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion (ECCZ) adopted Catholic doctrine.<sup>6</sup> While it is possible that this could reflect a later rationalisation of the original reasons for the schism, or a concern that developed later, or even a personal concern of Motsepe's, it seems more likely that it reflects some of the original concerns of Brander, which could have come from his period as an Anglican missionary.

The constitution and canons of the ECCZ were closely modelled on those of the CPSA, and in many respects were an improvement on the model. The 1918 edition of the *Constitution and canons* is a printed document, giving something of the history of the church and the founder. It makes provision for bishops, priests and deacons, and also deans, archdeacons and canons. It provides for the trials of priests and bishops, and it almost certainly reflects Brander's understanding of the church – a high church Anglican ecclesiology.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Biography of S J Brander, in the *Constitution and Canons of the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion*. SAB NTS 1420 2/214

5 Application for recognition of Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion, submitted by S W Maeger, 18 February 1926. SAB NTS 1420 2/214

6 Letter from Surgeon L S Motsepe to Secretary of Native Affairs, 3 July 1931. SAB NTS 1420 2/214

7 *Constitution and canons of the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion*. SAB NTS 1420 2/214

Brander, however, also had other interests. In 1917 he applied for permission to travel to Barotseland to search for Lobengula's buried treasure. Lobengula's secretary, Jacobs, claimed to know its whereabouts, but said that Brander was the only one he would be prepared to trust with this information.<sup>8</sup>

Brander died on 21 January 1928 in Pretoria. After his death, and possibly even before, the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion appears to have split into several factions, with the same name and constitution, but different controlling authorities. One of them, led by Surgeon L S Motsepe, joined the African Orthodox Church shortly before 1960. There appear to have been two main reasons for this: first, that the African Orthodox Church enjoyed government recognition, and second, that it appeared to have a better claim to apostolic succession.

#### Alexander and the African Orthodox Church

Daniel William Alexander was born in Port Elizabeth on 23 December 1883. There are conflicting reports of his parentage, but in his application for a French passport he declared that his father was a French subject from Martinique, and his mother an African.<sup>9</sup> He was brought up as a Roman Catholic, but later joined the Anglican Church.<sup>10</sup> He was a catechist at St Cuthbert's Anglican Church in Pretoria when he met and married his wife Elizabeth on 29 August 1902.<sup>11</sup>

At some point after that he joined the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion, though he does not appear to have referred to this much in his correspondence. A photograph in the ECCZ synod proceedings shows him to have been present. In about 1920 he joined the African Church of Khanyane Napo, but left it in 1924 as a result of quarrels between the leaders, which resulted in money being spent in litigation instead of extending the church. At that time Alexander was based in Kimberley, and was being called upon to travel to Johannesburg frequently to attend meetings called because of the quarrels. It seems that he read in some

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8 Ibid.

9 Letter, British Consul General, New York, to HM's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 5 October 1927. SAB NTS 1455 111/214

10 Letter, Alexander to Secretary for Native Affairs, 16 October 1924. SAB NTS 1455 111/214

11 Synopsis of Synod Proceedings, 1958. African Orthodox Church. SAB BAO 7263 P 120/4/58.

publication about the African Orthodox Church, under Patriarch George McGuire, which had been formed in the USA. On 15 September 1924, a meeting of clergy and lay representatives of the African Church in Beaconsfield, Kimberley, resolved to form the African Orthodox Church. They appointed Daniel William Alexander as its head to supervise the church, to ordain fit persons, to negotiate with government departments about recognition and the appointment of marriage officers, and to seek affiliation with the African Orthodox Church in America.<sup>12</sup>

The last of these aims was fulfilled when Alexander was consecrated as a bishop in the African Orthodox Church in Boston, Massachusetts, by Patriarch McGuire, assisted by Bishops Robertson and Trotman (Anson 1964:267). Alexander apparently received financial assistance for his trip from Mr Ernest Oppenheimer, the mining magnate, through his secretary, Mr Hodgson.<sup>13</sup> The British Consul General of New York noted that 'it is generally understood that the consecration of clergymen by McGuire is part of his scheme to cause dissension, together with the Marcus Garvey association, among negroes of the British Empire'.<sup>14</sup>

On the recommendation of the American branch of the African Orthodox Church, Reuben Spartas of Uganda made contact with Alexander in about 1928, and announced the formation of the African Orthodox Church in Uganda in a letter to the government secretary in Entebbe early in 1929.<sup>15</sup> Closer to home, the Native Catholic Episcopal Church (also known as the African United Church) amalgamated with the African Orthodox Church, and Alexander sent in a fresh application for government recognition.<sup>16</sup>

In October 1931 Alexander travelled to Uganda to meet Spartas and set up training arrangements for clergy of the African Orthodox Church in Uganda.<sup>17</sup> On Trinity Sunday 1932 Alexander ordained Reuben Spartas and Obadiah Basajjitalo as priests (Welbourn 1961:81). Shortly thereafter, Spartas and Basajjitalo made contact with a Greek priest in Tanganyika,

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12 Resolution passed at Conference, 16 September 1924. SAB NTS 1455 111/214

13 Open letter to the citizens of South Africa, and especially those of Kimberley, signed by James Z Mdatyulwa. SAB BAO 7263 P 120/4/58.

14 Letter, British Consul, New York to Foreign Office, London, despatch no 295. SAB NTS 1455 111/214.

15 Letter, Sparta to Chief Secretary, Entebbe, 17 Jan 1929. SAB NTS 111/214.

16 Application for registration. SAB NTS 1455 111/214

17 Report of CID superintendent, Uganda. SAB NTS 1455 111/214

Archimandrite Nicodemus Sarikas and, at his suggestion, applied for recognition by the Patriarch of Alexandria (Zoe sa:378). On his way back to South Africa, when he went to post letters in Mombasa, a postal clerk, James Beauttah, asked him to make contact with some educational associations in Kenya, which were seeking to establish schools and churches outside European control.

In May 1935, therefore, Alexander wrote to Archbishop Isidore, of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Johannesburg, asking for a letter of introduction to Fr Nicodemus Sarikas, and also to the Patriarch of Jerusalem (Githieya 1992:158). Archbishop Isidore replied in September 1935, giving him a letter of introduction to the priest at Moshi, Tanganyika, and to the Patriarch of Alexandria. Isidore suggested that he visit the Patriarch of Alexandria. He also noted that Alexander's churches in Uganda and Rhodesia were attempting to merge with the Greek Orthodox Church, and suggested a discussion about their future (Githieya 1992:159).

Alexander arrived in Kenya on 18 November 1935, and founded a seminary with eight students at Gituamba (Githieya 1992:160). Though he had originally intended to stay longer, Alexander ordained two of his students priests and two deacons on 27 June 1937, and left Kenya to return to South Africa ten days later (Githieya 1992:167–168). His activities caused some consternation among missionary organisations in Kenya, who wrote to the South African Institute of Race Relations, saying that Archbishop Alexander claimed to be recognised by the Greek Orthodox Church, and asking if he had any connection with the Watch Tower movement, a question that seems to show a remarkable ignorance about church history and Christian organisations!<sup>18</sup>

In 1938 a large schism occurred in the African Orthodox Church in the USA. Patriarch George McGuire had died four years previously, and was succeeded by Patriarch James I, and two groups subsequently seceded (Anson 1964:266). In South Africa, however, Alexander's work continued to prosper, and the membership grew to 17 000, compared with the 420 when it started in 1924. He again applied for government recognition, and for the appointment of more marriage officers (he was the only one, though a

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18 Letter, South African Institute of Race Relations to Secretary for Native Affairs, 25 March 1936. SAB NTS 1455 111/214

temporary marriage officer had been appointed during his absence in East Africa).<sup>19</sup>

In October 1941 the African Orthodox Church was officially recognised by the government. Recognition brought benefits such as appointment of clergy as marriage officers, railway concessions and easier applications for church building sites. After World War II, however, the African Orthodox Church did experience some minor secessions, and Alexander found it necessary to point out to the Secretary for Native Affairs that it had 'no connection with any of the other so-called Orthodox churches organised by the Bantu later'.<sup>20</sup>

In April 1948 the National Party came to power, and introduced its apartheid policy. Within six months the African Orthodox Church was moved to protest against the prosecutions, banishments and deprivations it had caused.<sup>21</sup>

The 34th Synod of the African Orthodox Church, held in October 1958, was something of a triumph. There were parishes in all four provinces, and in all the major cities of South Africa. Although the East African offshoots had by then long since amalgamated with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, there was a Diocese of Ghana. Several of the clergy who had been ordained in breakaway bodies had been received back into the African Orthodox Church.<sup>22</sup> The work had grown to such an extent that Bishop Alexander felt he needed some episcopal assistance, and also some bishops who could take over when he retired. He invited the African Orthodox Church in the USA to send two bishops so that, together with Alexander, they could consecrate new bishops. Two archpriests were selected as candidates for the episcopate – Ice Walter Mbina and Surgeon L S Motsepe. The latter had recently joined the AOC with a fairly large contingent of members from the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion.

The American Patriarch James I (W E Robertson) and Bishop R G Robertson came to South Africa in 1960 to consecrate Motsepe and Mbina, which they did, together with Daniel William Alexander, on 26 June 1960. But soon afterward things went sour, and a few months later the Americans had suspended Alexander, and appointed Motsepe as 'administrator pro tem'. On their return to America, they tried to keep tight control over the South African

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19 Memo, KW to Mr Smuts. SAB NTS 1455 111/214

20 Letter, Alexander to Secretary for Native Affairs, 14 January 1947. SAB BAO 7263 P 120/4/58

21 Synod Resolution, 15 October 1948. SAB BAO 7263 P 120/4/58

22 Synopsis of Synod Proceedings, 34th Synod. SAB BAO 7263 P 120/4/58



Faith healing: a major focus and recruitment device in AICs. *Ndaza* Zionist prophetess and prophet diagnose ailment of patient under guidance of the Holy Spirit (top). ZCC ministers exorcise demon from convert during 'Jordan' baptism (bottom)



branch of the AOC, and there was a succession of 'administrators pro tem', each one lasting a couple of years before hiving off with disgruntled followers who were irked by the American interference.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the African Orthodox Church in South Africa dissolved into several factions. Alexander died in May 1970, and was succeeded by his godson, Daniel Kanyiles. Some of the other groups have suffered further splits. In 1993 one of the groups united with the Coptic Orthodox Church, and since then another has asked to be united with the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria.

As most of Alexander's papers are now in America, it is difficult to research his life from within South Africa, but he certainly deserves a more ample biography than has been available up till now. Although the denomination he established disintegrated after 1960, many of the scattered fragments still exist, and I will deal with some of them later. The work he started in East Africa continues to flourish to this day, partly under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, and partly under the African Independent Pentecostal Church.

### The way to Ethiopia

I have already mentioned how James Mata Dwane had played a major part in bringing about the union of the Ethiopian Church with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA, but had later led a group called the Order of Ethiopia into association with the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican). Their concern for 'catholic' ecclesiology may be seen from a resolution passed at their 1914 conference, censuring the Anglican bishops in Kenya and Uganda for their willingness to dilute the principles of catholic order for the sake of ecumenical cooperation with non-episcopal bodies. In part the resolution reads, 'The fundamental principle of the Order of Ethiopia, and the reason that the Ethiopians united with the Church of the Province of South Africa in 1900 was their conviction that the Apostolic Succession of the Historic Episcopate was a necessity of Church life, and that without it there could be no true priests and no true sacraments.' (Verryn 1972:89).

One of the original promises made to the Order of Ethiopia by the CPSA was that it would have its own bishop. There was considerable opposition to this

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23 SAB BAO 7263 P 120/4/58

at the time, and nothing was done about it when the order joined the CPSA. It was raised occasionally at conferences, and the Anglican bishops raised the objection that a bishop for the Order would be a breach of Catholic order, as a bishop must be the bishop of a place, and cannot have a non-territorial jurisdiction. Eventually, however, the CPSA Provincial Synod of 1979, meeting in Grahamstown, agreed that the Order could have its own bishop. The discussions there produced the same objections that had been raised before about 'catholicity'. A bishop for the order would mean a bishop whose jurisdiction overlapped that of an Anglican diocese, and that would be ecclesologically unsound. Bishop Frederick Amooore of Bloemfontein cited an Orthodox precedent for this, pointing out that in places like the USA and Australia, there were many Orthodox bishops with overlapping jurisdictions, catering to the needs of different national groups who had immigrated from places like Bulgaria, Syria, Lebanon and Greece. This argument seemed to overcome the resistance of some to the measure, and the synod voted to allow the Order of Ethiopia to have its own bishop. Canon Hopa, the Provincial of the Order, and Bill Burnett, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, embraced each other in front of the synod, and all seemed well.

When it came to the election of a bishop for the order, there were problems. The elective assembly failed to agree on the election of a bishop, and no candidate could get the required number of votes, and so the choice of a bishop for the order was delegated to the synod of bishops of the CPSA. The Episcopal Synod chose the Rev Siqibo Dwane, a grandson of the founder of the order, James Mata Dwane. He was not, however, acceptable to some members of the order, partly because he had not served as a priest in the order (since he had been a priest in the CPSA). He had been overseas for most of his ministry, and his theology was shaped by British and American theological ideas, many of which did not appeal to members of the order.

As a result of this controversy, a group led by the former Provincial of the order, Canon E L M Hopa, broke away from the CPSA and those members of the order under Bishop Dwane who remained associated with the CPSA. These events happened in 1983. The break-away group formed the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in South Africa (EOCSA), and made contact with Archbishop Yesehaq, the Archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the western hemisphere.

In 1990 the EOCSA invited Archbishop Yesehaq to visit South Africa (after raising the money to pay his fare). On 12 August of that year he formally

received the group into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and ordained 12 of its leaders as deacons. He returned in December 1993 and ordained several priests. The former Canon Hopa is the leader of the group, and functions as a kind of 'chorepiscopus', without the power of ordination. He wears Western episcopal robes.<sup>24</sup>

The members of the EOCSA now regard themselves as Orthodox, but continue to use the Anglican liturgy and Western-style vestments. With a bishop living in New York, and little opportunity for Orthodox theological training, their situation has been somewhat anomalous – although in 1997 a couple of Ethiopian Orthodox deacons, immigrants living in Johannesburg, began undertaking regular visits to the EOCSA in Port Elizabeth.

It was contact with Anglicans that convinced James Mata Dwane and his followers of a need for apostolic succession in the historic episcopate. Those who followed E L M Hopa have, after a long and somewhat roundabout pilgrimage, found themselves under the wing of the original Ethiopian Church of Ethiopia, and a link to a historical episcopal succession far more ancient than that of the Anglicans. Yet at the same time their ecclesiology has perhaps drifted away until it is different not only from that of the Anglicans but also, in all probability, from that of the Church of Ethiopia. According to Hopa, the Ethiopian Church, which became the Order of Ethiopia in 1900, was not an order but a denomination. It entered into a relation of tutelage with the Anglicans in order to gain three things: a valid episcopate and priesthood; arrangements to include their body within the fold of the Catholic Church; their independence.<sup>25</sup>

The difficulty in the relationship with the Anglicans was caused by the clash between (2) and (3). If the Anglicans had done what the Ethiopians had asked in 1900, and ordained the Ethiopian leaders as bishops of an independent denomination, they would in effect have been deliberately creating a schism in terms of their own ecclesiology, which might be 'independent' but would not be 'within the fold of the Catholic Church' as the Anglicans understood it. Hence the negotiations that led to the compromise of an 'order', which would function in semi-independent fashion.

The difficulties caused by such an arrangement would be even more apparent in the case of Orthodox ecclesiology. The Orthodox 'precedent'

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24 Interview with the Rev Diliza Valisa of Port Elizabeth, July 1997.

25 Undated paper signed by E L M Hopa.

cited by Bishop Amooore to justify this – the case of parallel Orthodox jurisdictions in the USA – is not a good example of Orthodox ecclesiology, and most Orthodox theologians would agree that the situation there is distinctly non-canonical, and that it causes a problem that needs to be solved. The idea of denominations is not part of Orthodox ecclesiology, in terms of which a denomination cannot be part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It can only become part of the Church if it ceases to be a denomination and joins the Church.

In 1990, when the Church of Ethiopia received the Ethiopian Orthodox Church of South Africa, there was less of a problem. From the point of view of the Church of Ethiopia, it was not creating a new denomination but starting a new local church in a new territory where it had not been active before. The arrival of a Coptic bishop in South Africa in 1992, and a later influx of Ethiopian immigrants, could complicate the situation, however, and could give rise to the problem of the overlapping jurisdictions that the Anglicans were so concerned about. Much will depend on whether the EOCSA sees itself as a denomination *vis-à-vis* the Church of Ethiopia, to the same extent as it saw itself as a denomination in relation to the Anglicans.

### 'Catholic' ecclesiology in AICs

The three examples I have given show that there was a tendency among certain AICs towards a 'catholic' form of ecclesiology, and that this is manifested most clearly among churches of the Ethiopian type. At this point, however, it is perhaps worth observing that Sundkler's Ethiopian category was a fairly broad one. Sundkler (1961:43ff) himself provides some genealogical tables of representative churches, giving examples of both Congregational- and Methodist-type AICs. What is interesting, however, is that there is little connection between the Congregational-type churches and the Ethiopian ones as such. The Ethiopian-type churches, in a narrower sense, are of Anglican or Methodist background, rather than Congregational or Presbyterian.<sup>26</sup> Their leaders have quite complex interrelationships with one another, and they move from one denomination to another within a

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26 For example, in a list of over 7 000 AICs held by the Department of Physical Planning, 346 have 'Catholic' in their name, 210 have 'Ethiopian', 179 have 'Congregational' and 58 have 'Presbyterian'. Not one has both 'Ethiopian' and 'Presbyterian', 2 have 'Ethiopian' and 'Congregational' and 24 have 'Ethiopian' and 'Catholic'.

fairly restricted circle. Jantje Mtoto Gqamana, for example, of the Ethiopian Catholic Church of South Africa, claimed that Nehemiah Tile appointed him as his successor, and that Mokone's Ethiopian mission joined Tile's Church, which then affiliated with the AME Church. This in turn became the Order of Ethiopia, from which the Ethiopian Catholic Church of South Africa broke away. In addition to the idea of an apostolic succession of the historic episcopate, there is also therefore a kind of apostolic succession within the Ethiopian movement itself, traceable back to Tile.<sup>27</sup>

The National Church of Ethiopia of South Africa in its constitution likewise recounts how Saint Tila [sic] ordained Gqamana on his deathbed, and how the latter joined the AME Church, but the National Church of Ethiopia of South Africa had broken away from it in 1914 because of too much American control, and their first church building was Saint Tila's Church in Benoni. Its doctrinal statement is an abridged form of the Anglican 39 Articles.<sup>28</sup>

It was the churches of this Ethiopian, Methodist and Anglican tradition that showed the tendency towards 'catholic' ecclesiology. In the 19th century the Church of the Province of South Africa developed strong links with the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Anglican Communion. This was partly because the first Anglican bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray, held high church views. As a result of the Colenso controversy, the Anglican Church in South Africa became associated in the minds of people in England with its stand for 'Catholic truth', a feature that attracted large numbers of Tractarian clergy from England to work in South Africa (Hinchliff 1963:137). Thus many Anglican clergy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries held a catholic ecclesiology, and this had influenced many of the early leaders of the Ethiopian movement. Brander had been an Anglican missionary, and said explicitly that he had broken away from the AME Church because he preferred the Catholic to the Methodist doctrine.

The difficulty faced by independent church leaders who held the catholic ecclesiology was in obtaining valid episcopal consecration. Dwane hoped to gain this by affiliating with the Anglicans. Daniel William Alexander hoped to do it by affiliating with the African Orthodox Church in the USA. Many of the others did not achieve it at all. The importance of the apostolic succession through the historic episcopate for leaders like Alexander can be seen in the

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27 Constitution of the Ethiopian Catholic Church of South Africa. SAB NTS 1422 8/214

28 Constitution of the National Church of Ethiopia of South Africa. SAB NTS 1446 61/214

pamphlets on the subject produced by the African Orthodox Church in South Africa. In addition, when Alexander was old and looking for a successor, he waited for two of the AOC bishops from the USA to come to South Africa to join him in the consecration of Mbina and Motsepe. His action shows the importance he attached to the catholic principle that it takes three bishops to make one bishop. Once Mbina and Motsepe had been consecrated, the African Orthodox Church in South Africa would have been able to ensure its own episcopal succession, independently of the American body, had the American bishops not decided to depose Alexander and take over the reins themselves. In the chaos that followed, there were some bishops-elect, but there is no evidence that any of them received any form of episcopal consecration at all. The leaders of several of the fragments of the AOC eventually assumed the title of archbishop or bishop, but those who joined the Coptic Church or the Orthodox Church recognised that they could not retain the title, and were prepared to give it up in order to have the 'catholic' connection. In the East African churches established by Alexander, which subsequently joined the Orthodox Church, some of the early leaders did become bishops. Reuben Spartas eventually became a bishop, and Theodore Nyankamas, who was one of those who had travelled to Alexandria to meet the Patriarch in the 1940s, was Archbishop of Kampala when he died in 1997.

Daneel (1987:215) notes that, in many AICs, the death of the founding leader often causes problems with the succession, and this is true of many of this particular group of denominations as well. The founding leaders, such as Brander or Alexander, have a strong vision of the church and, as founding leaders, they are able to hold it together. When the founding leaders go, through death or deposition, things tend to fall apart and the vision tends to become diluted. Brander, for example, had a clear idea of what he meant by 'catholic' doctrine in the Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion. After his death, however, when a later leader was applying for government recognition, he explained the reason for separating from the parent body as being a preference for 'catholic' over Methodist doctrine, but acknowledged that he had no clear idea of what it meant; it was merely what he had found written in the preamble to the church's constitution.

When Simon Mhlonyane's group of the AOC was seeking to join the wider Orthodox Church, they explained their position as believing in the teaching of 'seven sacraments and seven ecumenical councils', but mainly because those had been mentioned in the constitution. They could not name the

councils, much less what was taught at them. Indeed, the group from which they claimed their apostolic succession actually traced itself through the Syrian Jacobite Church, which recognises only the first three ecumenical councils. But Alexander himself had a clear idea of what was meant. Mhlonyane's group eventually joined the Coptic Church, which also only accepts the first three ecumenical councils.<sup>29</sup>

Since the 1960s the importance of apostolic succession has been decreasing among Anglicans in South Africa. There has been a trend towards intercommunion with non-episcopal churches. It was largely the Anglican insistence on the importance of apostolic succession that led some of the Ethiopian-type churches to make some effort to defend their claim to have it. When the Anglicans placed less importance on it, there was a lessening of the emphasis on this point among the AICs that used it as a claim to legitimacy. This may be why many of the bishops in the successor groups of the African Orthodox Church have not recently emphasised their claim to apostolic succession. One factor that has brought it to the fore again among some of the Ethiopian-type AICs has been increased contact with the Eastern churches, whether Greek Orthodox, Coptic or Ethiopian.

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The primary sources used have been indicated in footnotes. SAB refers to the central government archives depot, and the archival groups used have been mainly the correspondence files of the Department of Native Affairs (later Bantu Administration and Development) with the various AICs, mainly about recognition for the purposes of appointing marriage officers, railway concessions, permits to buy wine for communion, and exemptions from the Pass Laws.

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