

## Mantsopa: popular religion and the Anglican Church in South Africa

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I am glad of this opportunity to express my indebtedness to Inus Daneel. In 1970, when I had barely begun my studies on the history of Zonnebloem College, founded for the children of African chiefs in Cape Town in 1858, I read a book that profoundly changed my life. In this book was Inus's newly published essay on the Mwari cult in Rhodesia, entitled *The god of the Matopo Hills* (Daneel 1970a). Coming from an Anglican Church boarding school, I was ignorant of my ignorance in appreciating our African heritage in Southern Africa. Through Inus's eyes I discovered a whole new world. His lively descriptions of his experience in the Mwari cult caves of the Matopo hills, together with his incisive analytical insights, inspired my own explorations. Apart from the academic aspect of this work, which involved researching the African past and entering into a lived experience of the African present, these explorations have been for me a wonderfully enriching spiritual pilgrimage. The adventure continues, and I would like to express my profound gratitude to Inus as one who has journeyed alongside him over the years. His many publications have been a constant source of inspiration, continually offering radical new insights and challenging us to think anew.

### Spiritualities in conflict

By a strange coincidence, a cave is central to the story of the Sotho prophetess Mantsopa (Manchupa) and the cultic practices associated with her. But in this instance the cave, at St Augustine's mission at Modderpoort in the Free State, became the focus of a struggle for ownership of the symbolic sources of sacred power between three different Christian aggregations: an Anglican religious order, a popular African religious movement within the historic churches, and various groups of African Initiated Churches (AICs). Many different issues are involved here, including race, class, identity, authority in the church, and inculturation.<sup>1</sup>

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1 'Inculturation' is understood as a transforming dialogue between gospel and culture within the ongoing historic process of religious change.

This account is part of a wider study (Hodgson forthcoming) and revolves around the tension between a lived Christianity and a received Christianity, between a this-worldly salvation and an other-worldly salvation, between a people's hagiography and the hagiography of an English religious community, the Society of the Sacred Mission.

Over the years Mantsopa's followers have invested the places associated with her at Modderpoort – the cave chapel, her grave and the spring near her old home – with sacred meanings rooted in their African past. From the 1950s onwards, a growing confidence among black people in trying to integrate their Christian faith with African consciousness and express such an incarnated spirituality corporately in order to meet their immediate needs, led to the development of an informal Mantsopa pilgrimage movement. However, such an African initiated popular religion, both within and without the Anglican Church, was bound to conflict with the English missionaries' concern to maintain the integrity and authority of Anglican doctrine and practice in the name of St Augustine. This led to overt competition for the legitimate ownership and interpretation of a shared set of sacred symbols which, in turn, were invested with quite different patterns of meaning by the religious aggregations involved.

In the South African situation of the time, such a religious conflict had implications far beyond the 'gospel and culture' debate. On the one hand, the missionaries had charge of the mission farm and sought to control access of black pilgrims to their holy places, and to regulate the forms of worship allowed on mission property so that they conformed to Anglican norms. On the other hand, the pilgrims were searching for spiritual liberation and a sense of belonging in the midst of intense alienation, oppression and suffering. Their primary need was to be linked to the ultimately real whose characteristics would necessarily be determined by their socio-cultural and political experience. The cultic practices associated with Mantsopa offered them direct access to, and control of, spiritual power as they sought a healing that embraced the whole of their lives. For many, this was integral to their ongoing struggle for political liberation, a strategy for survival that incorporated the realisation of an African spirituality beyond white control. Symbolic power was intimately connected with political power.

## 'A child of the famine'

Modderpoort is an Afrikaans name meaning 'the gate of mud'. The Sotho name, *Le khalo la bo tau*, means 'the pass or cave of the lions', and referred either to the lions living amongst other wild animals such as rhinos, hippos and many different kinds of antelope in the *poort* or else to the lion totem of the Bautang who lived alongside the San (Bushmen) at Mekoatleng. San paintings depicting a hunt are found in an overhang of rock on the hill above the mission.<sup>2</sup>

Anna Selatile Mantsopa Makhetha settled at Modderpoort in the early nineteenth century. Koena-li-fule, as she was first known, was the daughter of Nkopane, elder brother of Makhetha, by his wife Sesilane. She was born around 1800 near Maseru at a mountain called Likotsi (or Ramakhetheng), and passed out of circumcision school in 1822 at the time of the *Lifaqane*.<sup>3</sup> Political upheavals along the eastern seaboard, caused by the formation of African kingdoms among the Zulu and others, set in motion a chain reaction of displacement that reached across the Drakensberg and into the heart of the highveld. Wave upon wave of refugees dislodged one independent African community after another as they each, in turn, sought new land on which to settle. At the same time small groups of trekboers moved into the Caledon River valley in search of new pastures, while the Griqua and the Kora defended their settlements north of the Orange River.<sup>4</sup>

Around 1820 Moshoeshe settled with his followers at Botha Bothe. Within a decade the Sotho kingdom had become the most powerful in the region, with the mountain stronghold of Thaba Bosiu as its capital. Moshoeshe extended his control by offering land, cattle and stability to refugees from different chiefdoms. In return, his followers were required to defend the

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2 Fr W A Norton, S S M, 'Bushmen and their relics near Modderpoort', *Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission (OBM)* 170 (25 October 1910):143-146, including a sketch of a San painting.

3 More recently under the jurisdiction of Chief Tsiame Matsoso, Fr Norton, S S M, obtained information from Mangsopa at Modderpoort, as 'a very decrepit old woman'. [Norton Papers, University of Cape Town Libraries, including ms of 'Tales of a grandmother or a centenarian in Arcadia', as well as published articles, 'A description of the Modderpoort neighbourhood one hundred years ago', *South African Journal of Science (SAJS)* (January 1910); and 'Modderpoort, Orange Free State', *Mission Field* (October 1911):295-300.] Family information was given by Mantsopa's grandson, Samuel Joel Selatile, to the Very Rev Israel Qwelane, Dean of Maseru, in 1982.

4 *The land of the Basotho lost* (Pietermaritzburg: Sached Trust, Centaur Publications, 1992).

expanding kingdom, the boundaries of which were defined by those who recognised his authority (Sanders 1975; Thompson 1975). According to African custom, the land belonged to the people, there being no concept of individual ownership, but the principal chief had the power to apportion its settlement.

As an old woman, Mantsopa recalled how her people, the Mokoena of Monaheng, suffered the horrors of famine during the *Lifaqane*.<sup>5</sup> They were unable to sow crops at Mekoatleng because of the constant raiding. The 'children of the famine' had to be fed on game instead of *mabele* (millet porridge) as soon as they were weaned, the San showing the Koena how to trap wild animals in branch-covered pits lined with sharp stakes. Mantsopa had been taken captive by 'the Mankoane, who swept down the country in pursuit of Pakalitha and his Mahlubi (Hlubi)', scattering her people northwards. As the famine continued, her Zulu captors and her own people began to eat human flesh. Mantsopa's father was eaten by people of the Crocodile clan, the very family into which her grandson Nteke later married. After six months, some of her people came to trade animal skins for corn with her captors. Her master overcame his wife's objections to her meeting them, saying, 'Let a Mosuto visit a Basuto'. On the second visit she fled. Her earlobes were forever distended from wearing huge Zulu earrings.<sup>6</sup>

There is a Sotho proverb, 'Marry me, my uncle's son, that the cattle may remain in the kraal'. Accordingly, it was proposed that Lekote, son of Makhetha, should marry Koena-li-fule (Mantsopa), his uncle's daughter. But Lekote died shortly after the dowry cattle had been handed over and so his elder brother, Selatile, 'married her for the grave', allowing her children to take Lekote's name.<sup>7</sup> After the murder of Makhetha by younger brothers of Moshoeshoe, Selatile was given prime land at Lehlajoeng (Lekhalong) on the west side of the Caledon River (later called Modderpoort). Koena-li-fule's children were born here and she took the name Mantsopa ('MaNtsopha), mother of her firstborn, Ntsopa. Her other children were Motsielehi, Tsiu and Sebilane.<sup>8</sup>

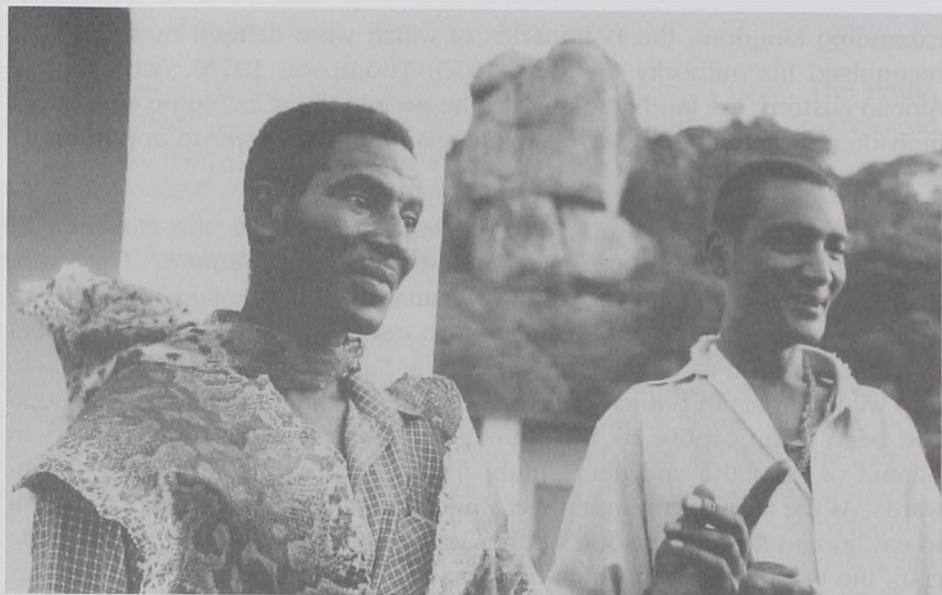
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5 The children had cried in fear when they heard the lowing of the invaders' stray cow; they thought it was a jackal which had come to get them – so unaccustomed were they to having cattle around.

6 Norton, *SAJS*, p2. Moshoeshoe's grandfather was also eaten by raiders. Mantsopa described how a victim was cooked alive in a pot, one joint of a finger being cut off. Fr Norton was taken aback when she asked him, 'You, did your folk eat men?'

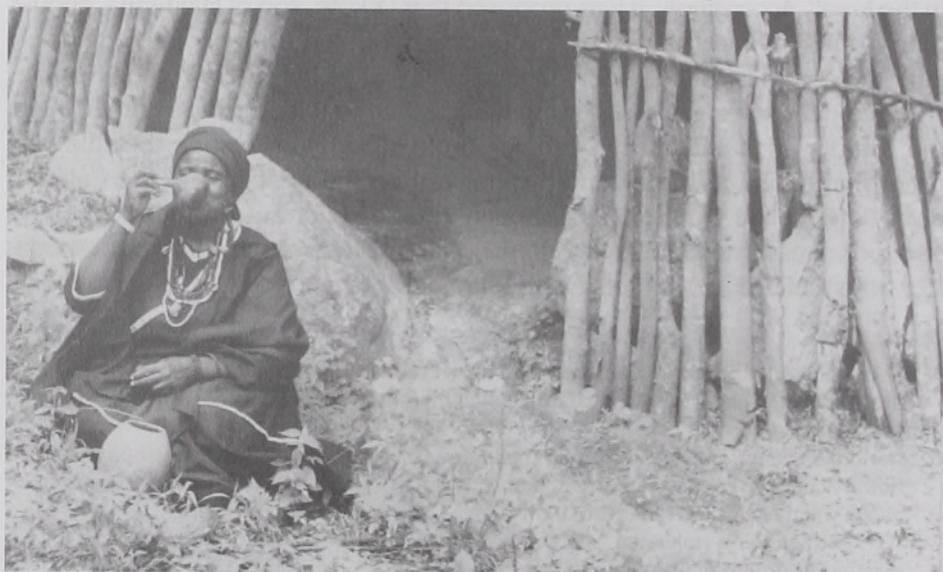
7 For information on Makhetha, see Thompson 1975:45–46, 57–58.

8 Personal information from Samuel Joel Selatile, 1982.



Oracular shrines of the Shona high-god, Mwari, in the Matopo Hills. High-priest George Chokoto (wearing python skin) and younger brother with the Zhiro shrine in the background (top)

Priestess Gogo Itombiyamazulu (*'young woman of rain'*) drinking sacrificial beer in front of the Vembe shrine (bottom)



## Mantsopa as a seer and war doctor

After Mantsopa settled at Modderpoort she began to foretell future events. Her authority in doing this seems to have been legitimated by her inheriting the spiritual gifts of her uncle, Mohlomi. Mohlomi, son of Monyane, served as a much-revered seer, traditional doctor, and political adviser to Moshoeshoe, there being no distinction between the sacred and the profane in the African worldview.<sup>9</sup> As war doctor, he was credited with the power of prophecy as well as being able to influence the course of battles. But Sotho tradition remembers him as a 'messenger of peace', who said, 'It is better to thrash the corn than to sharpen the spear'. Moshoeshoe is believed to have followed Mohlomi's advice to 'govern only by peace', this being the crux of his success. Mohlomi was thought to have a special relationship with *Modimo* (God). He travelled widely and won renown as a healer and rainmaker (*Moroka-pula*).<sup>10</sup> On his deathbed, around 1816, he fell into a trance in which he supposedly met with his ancestors. He later prophesied that after his death 'a cloud of red dust will come out of the east and consume our tribes. The father will eat his children'. This was fulfilled in the *Lifaqane* a few years later.

In 1833 Moshoeshoe moved decisively to obtain some measure of protection against his enemies. In a diplomatic move, he sought the foreigners' power in education and technology by inviting members of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society to become established within his kingdom. These missionaries could not avoid political involvement, since border conflict with the Boers continued to escalate over the next thirty years, and land disputes were settled by a succession of British officials at the Cape according to ever-changing political alignments and government policies. Moshoeshoe was determined to keep Britain as an ally. In spite of this, and even though the Sotho remained undefeated in 'wars' against the Boers and the British, their territory was systematically whittled away in peace settlements as the

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9 L B J Machobane, 'Mohlomi: doctor, traveller and sage', *Journal of Southern African Historical Studies*, 2 (1976):5-27. See Thompson 1975:24-27, and Sanders 1975:21-24, for a critique of the Mohlomi tradition.

10 For information on Basotho 'doctors', 'diviners' and 'seers', see A T Maboe, *Modimo: Christian Theology in a Sotho Context*, ed B Domeris and J Hodgson (Lumko, 1982); G Setiloane, *The image of God among the Sotho-Tswana* (Rotterdam: A A Balkema, 1976), 46-63, 205-206.

border was repeatedly 'redrawn' to satisfy the land-hungry demands of black and white newcomers in the fertile Caledon valley.<sup>11</sup>

Well-documented sources record that Mantsopa now came into prominence as war doctor to Moshoeshoe and gained immense prestige when her prophecies regarding successive wars were fulfilled. The French missionary Eugene Casalis recalls how, in anticipation of conflict with Major Warden's forces in 1851, Moshoeshoe's only uncertainty was whether to await the enemy or to commence the attack.

Manchupa, a woman till then unknown, informed the chief that she had fallen into a trance, and that a being whom she designated in no other way than by the words *He, Him*, had charged her to tell the whole tribe to stand upon the defensive, that the enemy would come, and would be almost destroyed in a contest so sharp, and of such short duration, that it would be called the *Battle of Hail*, and that after that there would be a long interval of repose, the rains would be abundant, and that the seed might be sown and the harvest gathered in without fear.<sup>12</sup>

Warden's assault three weeks later ended catastrophically when his warriors were killed by being driven over the precipice at Viervoet Mountain. Moreover, despite expectations of speedy retribution, Warden was unable to muster reinforcements and the Sotho were able to gather in a good harvest following steady rains. In the same year Moshoeshoe consulted Mantsopa about the millennial movement initiated by the Xhosa prophet Mlanjeni which was inspiring anti-white fervour and a reinforcement of African customs as it swept through his country (Thompson 1975:150-151). In 1852 Mantsopa gave a detailed prediction of Sotho victory against the British at the Battle of Berea, and again in 1853 foretold triumph over their old enemies, the Tlokoa, led by Sekonyela, in the north of the kingdom. Two years later Mantsopa correctly prophesied an extended period of peace and

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11 Boundary lines negotiated between Moshoeshoe and the British include the 1843 Treaty with Governor Napier, the 1845 Toufontein Agreement with Governor Maitland setting aside land for white settlement, the 1849 Warden Line (Major Warden being British Resident of the newly annexed Orange River Sovereignty), the founding of the Orange Free State in 1854 and the settlement after the first Sotho-Boer war negotiated by Sir George Grey at the First Treaty of Aliwal North in 1858.

12 E Casalis, *The Basutos* (London: James Nisbet, 1861), 286-287. Warden's forces included British troops, Boer farmers, Rolong, Griqua, Newlanders, Kora and Hlapi (Sanders 1975:172-179).

harmony for the Sotho (Thompson 1975:165–166, 207 note 3 for primary sources, 212).

Before the war of 1865–1866 with the Free State, Mantsopa and other diviners confidently prophesied victory, but this was not realised. Mantsopa's directives were supposedly ignored.<sup>13</sup> The anguish of the Sotho, already suffering from the scorched earth policy instituted by the Free State, was exacerbated by the loss of two-thirds of their best arable land in the peace treaty that followed, and Moshoeshoe now sought to come under British rule. Initially this was refused, but continuing conflict finally led to annexation by the British in 1868 and the establishment of 'Basutoland' as a Crown Colony. The border with the Orange Free State was finally fixed along the Caledon River, as in present-day Lesotho, giving the Boers the 'conquered territory' to the west. Mantsopa and fellow Sotho residents were threatened with expulsion.<sup>14</sup>

### Mantsopa as a transitional figure

At this stage Mantsopa became a transitional figure. While continuing to function according to past traditions, she also sought to incorporate the spiritual power of the incoming culture, but on the Sotho's own terms. For her, the *Modimo* of Sotho belief was supplemented by an intercessory divinity, the 'He, Him' of her prophecy, who became identified with the God of the missionaries. Also, rather than using the customary divining bones, she was inspired by visions (Thompson 1975:207). Joseph Orpen, sometime adviser to Moshoeshoe, notes that in 1862 Mantsopa augmented her considerable authority by claiming 'to have been to heaven to see God'. She and a blind boy called Katsi now professed to preach 'the God of the missionaries', except that, whereas the missionaries received inspiration second-hand from a book, they were directly inspired and could identify the missionaries' mistakes. They taught that

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13 Thompson 1975:233. Fr Norton, SSM, records that Sotho chiefs got into difficulties through failing to follow Mantsopa's advice to 'leave the cattle alone and only fight the owners'. 'What does the woman with short skirts know?' they rashly argued. 'The War of Sir John Brand (1865–1866)' (parallel texts in Sesotho and English), Norton Papers, UCT Libraries.

14 This was at the Second Treaty of Aliwal North. Basutoland finally became a separate British Protectorate in 1884.

.. polygamy is *not* forbidden, but lawful and practised by God himself, Jesus being his child by one wife, and the Holy Spirit by another! – that the way to heaven is not a *narrow* road, that the missionaries are ridiculously mistaken in saying so, but that God is really the Supreme Chief, and that of course the road to his town is very broad indeed and constantly full of crowds of people going to court.<sup>15</sup>

Such pronouncements supported Moshoeshe's ambivalent attitude towards missionary preaching, offering him the best of both worlds, and his patronage of Mantsopa may well have shaped her teaching so that it accorded with his needs. Over the years Moshoeshe had warmed to certain tenets of the Christian faith, but his power and authority were legitimated by Sotho customs, such as polygamy, and he could not risk alienating his ancestors' goodwill.<sup>16</sup> Although, with the coming of Catholic missionaries in 1862,<sup>17</sup> the competing claims of rival church traditions provided him with a ready excuse to postpone conversion, he was in fact preparing for baptism when he died in 1870 (Sanders 1975:270ff; Thompson 1975:318–323).

Sotho tradition relates that initially Moshoeshe was very sceptical of the young Mantsopa's gifts as war doctor and seer. The chief was won over when she correctly recalled his concerns while travelling to their first meeting. 'I heard him saying that isn't it a strange thing that a man of my status is coming to see a woman of my age'. From then on 'Moshoeshe never went anywhere without first consulting Mantsopa'.<sup>18</sup> Mission records agree (Sanders 1975:275–276). The chief was responsible for the ritual invocation of rain, engaging doctors for this purpose. Mantsopa had also become famed as a rain-maker, although her use of water differed from customary

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15 Orpen to Burnet, September 1862: G McTheal (ed), Basutoland Records, vol 3 (Cape Town, 1883) p181. Mantsopa is said to have been close to Mopeli, who lived at Mabulele (Clocolan). He was one of the first significant converts but later rejected the missionaries, if not their message (interview with Mr M Damane, Head of the Department of History, National University of Lesotho, Roma, 30 August 1983).

16 By 1864 he had 150 wives, this being a significant means of making political alignments. See Sanders 1975:275–276.

17 The Oblates of Mary Immaculate led by Bishop Allard established the mission station of *Motsi va Ma-Jesu* – the village of the Mother of Jesus – near Thaba Bosiu, which became known as Roma.

18 Interview with Dr MaSechele N C Khaketla, Maseru, 8 February 1986. Mantsopa's daughter had married Moshoeshe's son, Georg Tlali, who had received schooling, sponsored by Anglican Bishop Robert Gray, in Cape Town.

practice, possibly showing Zulu influence. During the severe drought of 1862 she travelled throughout Lesotho at Moshoeshoe's behest.<sup>19</sup> Such was people's reverence for her that they swore by her name, as they were accustomed to do with the name of a chief, 'Tsetle nkhono Mantsopa'.<sup>20</sup>

Mantsopa's role as adviser to Moshoeshoe ended abruptly with the British take-over in 1868. Significantly, she was baptised that same year by the French missionary Theophile Jousse, and given the name Anna (Annah).<sup>21</sup> The missionaries had been expelled from 'the conquered territory' three years earlier, and had only just returned. Meanwhile, a revival led by Sotho evangelists swept through the country, resulting in many converts being made (Ellenberger 1933:18–21). The withdrawal of the French Protestants to Lesotho coincided with the coming of the Anglican missionaries to Modderpoort, and Mantsopa joined the new church. But her relationship with the spirit world was 'in her blood', and she continued as a rainmaker. She was apparently stopped from practising 'black magic' (medicines for incisions, etc), but she still used herbs. Because 'her spiritual gifts were used to help people, and not to make herself great', her reputation grew and people came from afar to consult her.<sup>22</sup>

Professor Gabriel Setiloane describes Mantsopa's rainmaking practices as they were experienced by his maternal grandmother as a child:

Little girls of pre-puberty age used to be sent to go and beg her for rain. She would fill their pots with water from a creek nearby, and send them home with an injunction not to look behind them, but to hurry to cross the Caledon to the side on which their home was because then 'rain would be following hard on their footsteps', and, if they tarried, the river would fill up and be uncrossable. Sure enough, as they arrived at the river the first drops of heavy rain would begin to fall, and by the

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19 For information on Sotho rainmaking, see P Bereng, *I am a Mosotho* (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 1982), 33–35; C Murray, 'Ritual belief and practice', in *Transformations on the Highveld: the Tswana and Southern Sotho*, (ed) W Lye & C Murray (Cape Town: David Philip, 1980), 122; J Secheho, *Customs and superstitions in Basutoland* (Roma, n.d.), 16–17; Setiloane 1976:74–76.

20 Khakhetla interview.

21 Thompson 1975:207 note 3, 316. The Taung chief Moletsane was the other notable convert. Mantsopa's son Tsiu had four wives, but all his children became Anglican Church workers.

22 Interviews with Dr Khakhetla, Maseru, 8 February 1986, and Mr M Damane, Roma, 30 August 1983.

time they reached home at Mokgethwaneng [near Berea] they would be soaking wet with rain (Setiloane 1976:208).

Mantsopa died on 11 November 1906. She was then over a hundred years old, and she was buried in the mission cemetery at Modderpoort. Her funeral attracted large numbers from near and far.<sup>23</sup> Over the years, Mantsopa's prophetic powers acquired mythic proportions extending over space and time. She is credited with foretelling the rinderpest epidemic after Union, and World War I, warning Africans against involvement. The sinking of the *Mende* with the huge loss of African life is attributed to their disregard of this warning, as was an increase in ritual murders in Lesotho at the time. Her other prophecies included the coming of the motor car (people would travel sitting down), and the aeroplane (birds would fly between the earth and the sky).<sup>24</sup>

As with all prestige myths, there is an ongoing need to increase the value of the symbol so that it can function more powerfully to achieve its goal. The growth of the Mantsopa tradition not only added to her prestige as a prophet, but also released a dynamic which had a spiralling effect on her symbolic importance. Furthermore, the greater the distance from the historical reality of Mantsopa, and the consequent fading of her symbolic importance in her original context, the more her importance to later generations came to be represented in a thaumaturgical manner.<sup>25</sup> This the mission church found increasingly difficult to understand and accept. There was an unbridgeable gap between different universes of power.

## The founding of St Augustine's Mission at Modderpoort

In 1863 Edward Twells was consecrated bishop of the new Diocese of Bloemfontein, which incorporated the Free State and Basutoland. Eager for closer British ties, Moshoeshe and Moroka (Rolong chief at Thaba 'Nchu)

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23 When she was very old, Fr Norton, SSM, would give her the customary Sesotho greeting, 'Do you still live, grandmother?' (Are you well?') She would reply 'Do I still live?' *The Mission Field* (October 1911):300.

24 Setiloane 1976:208–209 and family testimony of Samuel Joel Selatile, January 1982; interviews with M Damane, 1983, and the Rev C Kokoli, Cape Town, 1 September 1982.

25 For further discussion see J Hodgson, 'Ntsikana: history and symbol: studies in a process of religious change among Xhosa-speaking people', (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1985), 366–368.

welcomed the bishop's promises of Anglican missionaries despite the vehement protests of long-established French and Methodist missions (Hinchliff 1963:77–80; Sanders 1975:271, 273, 276). But priests were not forthcoming and so Twells, a staunch Tractarian, tapped into the newly restored Catholic life in the Church of England and established a monastic order, the Missionary Brotherhood of St Augustine of Hippo (SSA), to serve his diocese as a self-supporting community.<sup>26</sup> With Canon Beckett at their head, five brethren left England in 1867 to become the first Anglican religious in Africa.<sup>27</sup> Because of continued unrest in the 'conquered territory', they were unable, until April 1869, to settle on the farms at Modderpoort which had been bought by Bishop Twells.<sup>28</sup> Canon Beckett describes the move:

After unloading our wagon we turned our attention to the ordering of a cave, in which we have made our temporary abode. By building up a wall of stones we have contrived to enlarge the area, so as to get a room 12 ft. by 14 for a chapel, besides a small sleeping room, screened off by a large detached stone. Both rooms we have much improved by digging away the floors, so that I can now stand upright in the chapel and *sit* upright in the bedroom. We are now preparing to make bricks with which to build up the exposed side of the cave, and make it proof against the cold weather, which we begin to feel. As yet

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26 Whereas St Benedict founded an order for laymen to live apart, St Augustine, as a bishop, founded the Augustinian Order of Canons to train clergy to work amongst people. Similarly, the SSA would live simply, holding all things in common, their daily rule of life consisting of prayer, study and manual labour, with fasts; and festivals being strictly observed. They would do any kind of mission work at the bishop's behest. See the confidential 'Letter to the English Committee promoting the mission to the Orange Free State', *Bloemfontein Occasional Papers II* 1865:7–23. The SSA Rules were later published in the *Quarterly paper of the OFS Mission (QOFS)* 18 (October 1872):4–5.

27 The group consisted of Henry Beckett ('a Cambridge man' like Twells and a Canon of Cumbrae), John Williams, William Crisp (ordained later), a carpenter and a bricklayer. A surgeon had gone ahead. See the unpublished 'Account of St Augustine's brotherhood, Modderpoort, 1865 onwards', by Father Carmichael, SSM (Diocese of Bloemfontein archives (DBA), fAB207). In 1874 Bishop Webb founded a women's community in Bloemfontein, the Community of St Michael and All Angels.

28 They had two disastrous years at Springfield, a hired farm near Bloemfontein, but successfully built up the new Anglican mission at Thaba'Nchu, as detailed in the unpublished 'Journal of William Crisp 1867–1900' (copy in my possession). See also *QOFS* 2 (May 1868):2–11; and C Lewis & G Edwards, *Historical records of the Church of the Province of South Africa* (SPCK: London, 1934):401–404.

no natives come to work, though several have come to see what we are about, and to barter corn and pumpkins.<sup>29</sup>

The inside of the cave was rearranged by the monks in such a way that eventually there were three curtained chambers, including a one-room annexe of sun-dried bricks with a porch. A tiny nook held the portable altar, and space was found for a harmonium. Shelves were cut into the rock wall to hold iron plates and cups. Two rondavels nearby housed a kitchen and a storehouse. According to Father Crisp, 'the miserable cave, romantic though it might have been, was never better than a rat-trap'. After every 'good' rain, the floor was flooded two feet deep and the chapel became unusable.<sup>30</sup> The damp seriously affected Beckett's health before the monks moved into the priory buildings in 1871.<sup>31</sup>

Burgher commandos had dispersed the local population and the brethren found it arduous to itinerate over a vast area which included Maseru. Nevertheless they undertook many 'toilsome journeys' over bad roads. They ministered to a scattering of English settlers in farmhouses, stores, new villages and towns, and also to some Sotho and Dutch-speaking coloured farm workers. They also cultivated their land 'somewhat indifferently'.<sup>32</sup> 'Christianise and you will civilise' epitomised their mission policy, and they attended to worship, language studies, and religious education as priorities. The cave became the first home of a 'native' school, and the brethren in black cassocks led the singing of Gregorian chants and French missionary hymns. Services were also held in the cave, and St Augustine's feast day was kept in September. A bell in a wooden frame crowned the rock above and it was rung from behind the altar wall.

Hymn-singing apart, such few Sotho people as remained living there showed little interest in the mission's concerns. They were in 'a state of transition' and

29 *Bloemfontein Quarterly* 1:291. Canon Beckett died in 1885: obituaries in *BQ* 68:66-67.

30 Crisp 'Journal', 7 January 1871; Fr J T Carmichael, 'Modderpoort: the year at Thaba 'Nchu'; Fr Fowler's account *DBA*, fAB369; *The Church Chronicle* (24 April 1930):131-132.

31 Funds from Britain had been spent on the mission house at Thaba 'Nchu, hence the delay. The new buildings included a small Gothic stone church, consecrated in 1872. See *QOFS* 14 (October 1871):16, and *QOFS* 20 (April 1873):6-7.

32 Canon Beckett represented the SSA's claims to Modderpoort at Aliwal North in 1869, and had trouble in securing the farms because they had not been involved in the fighting. Paulus Mopeli, Moshoeshoe's brother, had been chief at nearby Maboela, and Moholobela at Modderpoort. They moved to Witzies Hoek and Lesotho respectively: *ibid.*; *QOFS* 9 (January 1870):2-5.



As rain starts falling during rain ceremony at Vembe shrine, Matopo hills, priestess Itombiyamazulu symbolically enacts with calabash the creator-God's apportionment of life-giving water to creation (top)

Drenched in the downpour the priestess thanks Mwari for a prompt response to her rain request (bottom)



were not yet settled after the war.<sup>33</sup> Evangelism was defined as personal conversion. No thought was given to the socio-political reality of Sotho dispossession, while African culture and traditions were regarded as heathen. Ethnocentrism was already deeply entrenched in mission praxis.

A new superior, Canon James Douglas, took over in 1879, and mission work was extended. Twenty years later, however, with no 'home' base, few new recruits, and a fading English support group, the last three Modderpoort brethren could no longer continue.<sup>34</sup> On St Augustine's day in 1902, the SSA was disbanded and the mission was handed over to the Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM), later known as the Kelham Fathers.

## The Society of the Sacred Mission and Mantsopa's cave

The SSM had been founded by Father Herbert Kelly some ten years earlier to test men's vocation for missionary work. South Africa was their first major undertaking.<sup>35</sup> Their continuation of a high church mission tradition at Modderpoort reflected the Oxford Movement's concern to take 'the Catholic revival out of the study and into the streets'. A deep devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady at the Cross was incarnated in the daily offering of the mass, the recitation of the Divine Office, personal devotions, and public recitation of the rosary, together with a self-sacrificing commitment to minister to the 'heathen'.<sup>36</sup> The problem was that, even after years abroad, the cultural values and points of reference for these monks remained unashamedly British, with nostalgic thoughts of pubs and cricket on the village green. The liberal education provided by public schools and Oxbridge were other culturally defining factors, even though the SSM had a significant working-class intake. Anglican church practice remained culture-bound within its original packaging, and church discipline was forever confronting

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33 QOFS 11 (nd):6.

34 For the names of six brethren professed, see *Cape to Zambezi* XV, no 1 (February 1948):52–53. A number of later SSA belonged to the Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity, a religious society at Oxford, while Fr Douglas had his own Society of the Holy Spirit. See Charmichael MS for a history of SSA; and Lewis & Edwards 1934:411–416, 424–434.

35 Kelly's original Korean Missionary Brotherhood was renamed SSM to reflect a worldwide vision for mission. SSM withdrew from its first work in Korea in 1904. See M Dewey, *SSM: an idea still working* (SSM, 1980), 1–18.

36 Notes on Fr William Wrenford, SSM, by a fellow priest, 30 March 1979.

local marriage customs which necessitated confession and public penance, if not excommunication.<sup>37</sup>

Initially, the SSM was asked to specialise in 'native work' (thus reinforcing racial segregation in the local church), and developed the mission field in Lesotho, Thaba 'Nchu and the northern Free State. Later on, white parishes were added to their care.<sup>38</sup> Part of their large holding of land was leased to local farmers and this provided some income. Perhaps the SSM's most significant contribution was to establish Modderpoort as an educational centre for African and coloured people, offering a range of education from primary schooling through to teacher training.<sup>39</sup> The government legislation in 1954, however, precipitated the schools' closure. Between 1957 and 1965, the buildings housed a Test School for African ordinands, preparing them for theological education, but apartheid legislation was again enforced. Since then Modderpoort has been used as a conference and retreat centre (Hinchliff 1963:236–239).

The SSM attempted to stimulate African vocations to the religious life, but when the first group of postulants was professed in 1932, it was into their own order, the Community of the Servants of Christ (*Mothaka oa Bahlanka ba Krestu*, the MBK), that they were inducted, and they wore brown cassocks instead of black. Racial discrimination was excused on grounds of their not having received a classical Kelham training. Father Patrick Motsemoholo Maekane made his life vows in 1942 and, as sole survivor of the community, had a gifted if somewhat eccentric ministry in indigenising the religious life in Lesotho.<sup>40</sup>

A widespread network of readers and catechists formed the backbone of the SSM's work in Lesotho, and they would gather at Modderpoort for the greater festivals.<sup>41</sup> The cave became the focus of special services in honour of the

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37 See *St Augustine's Mission Journal*, 1910–1932, and regular published SSM reports.

38 By 1945 SSM was looking after three quarters of the Orange Free State Anglicans, with 71 mission churches under its care.

39 These included a coloured school, an African primary school, and a co-educational high school and teacher training college for black people (opened in 1929) with a practising school. See Fr Firkins, SSM, 'Modderpoort', *The Church Chronicle* 6 (1930):361–362.

40 See Hodgson, 'Ecclesial communities', and Sr Theresia Mary, SPB, *Father Patrick Maekane, MBK* (Lesotho: CPSA, 1987). Fr Patrick founded a Sotho women's order, The Handmaidens of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Mother of Mercy.

41 The rebuilt priory church was consecrated in 1903 and the large mission church in 1937.

founding fathers, often accompanied by confirmation. Processions, plainsong, and the censuring of the cave all contributed to the 'holy and proper veneration of a very holy place'.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the SSA had used the cave as a dairy and a pumpkin store before preserving it as a chapel – 'unspoilt, unadorned and beautiful in its simplicity'. During the Anglo-Boer War, Modderpoort was occupied by British soldiers and the cave used to stable horses. Stone wall redoubts, like 'eagles' nests', were built on rock ledges above and sandbagged against snipers from the Boer encampment across the Poort at Viervoet. When the SSM restored the cave, they had to dig out two feet of manure before 'smearing' the floor and carving out steps to lead up to the present stone altar. Ventilation was added together with a door and window.<sup>43</sup>

The St Augustine's Day celebrations became popular in the 1950s during the time of the Modderpoort schools, but really took off with the mission's centenary in 1969, attended by the Archbishop of Cape Town. Since then a great open-air Sung Eucharist has been held annually on the Sunday nearest St Augustine's feast day (28 August). An altar was usually set up either at the cave's entrance or across the field, perhaps with a semi-circular altar 'rail' of tightly bound bundles of lucerne flanked by rows of wooden benches.<sup>44</sup> The white group, comprising SSM brethren, the diocesan bishop and a few local farmers, see it as a thanksgiving service for the mission's founding in the name of St Augustine, whereas the thousands of African pilgrims are there to honour Mantsopa and to seek her blessings.

The pilgrims call it Mantsopa's Sunday or Cave Sunday and come from throughout the Free State as well as from Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, travelling on foot, by bicycle, horse-drawn vehicle, tractor-drawn wagon, car, lorry, bus and train. There is no great following in Lesotho, for they have Mhloimi. More significantly, though, they have not had the same need for a saintly black figure to bridge the African-Christian divide within the historic church as in apartheid South Africa. Former black teachers and Anglican ordinands played a key role in popularising the Mantsopa tradition

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42 'The cave at Modderpoort', Fr Fowler's undated account (*DBA*); *The Mission Field* (October 1911):295 *SSM Quarterly Paper* II, no 7 (October 1903).

43 *SSM Quarterly R/Paper* I, no 3 (October 1902), and no 4 (January 1903); Fr Carmichael's and Fr Fowler's unpublished accounts. A fort was built atop the Platberg and was garrisoned in turn by the Black Watch and the Northumberland Fusiliers. The mission buildings became a hospital for wounded soldiers.

44 *Good Hope* xv, no 10 (October 1965); *The Star*, 22 August and 3 September 1969.

countrywide, as did black Methodist ministers. The Rev Andrew Losaba, former moderator of the Methodist Church, regards Mantsopa 'as a black prophet who was literally speaking to God and sending a message to God. This woman, and Ntsikana, are the most outstanding black people who proved to me that the blacks had contact with God all the time'.<sup>45</sup>

SSA records note that a Ladybrand farmer used the cave temporarily before them, as did a Sotho family. According to the Mantsopa tradition, the cave was hers; 'it was the place where she used to confer with the spirits of her ancestors. She gave it to the missionaries.' To Koena Christians, including her descendants, this was 'an acted parable of their handing over their sacred place to God, and they rejoiced always in the opportunity of worshipping in it when they happened to be in those parts'.<sup>46</sup> This folk tradition is strongly contested by the SSM, epitomising the struggle to interpret and control a shared set of sacred symbols which legitimate quite different needs. For African Christians, the cave tradition authenticates the prestige myth that

... Mantsopa gave the fathers the cave, and so she approved of the church. Therefore, people who follow after her must also approve of the church. They identify her as opening the way. Many of the things she prophesied came true after she died and so when the church came with its prophetic message, she was more and more believed.<sup>47</sup>

What is certain is that Mantsopa remained living in a house across the poort until her death in 1906. As a centenarian, stories of her early life were recorded by Father Norton, SSM, but he makes no mention of contemporary folklore. During the Boer War she is said to have advised the SSA fathers of an impending Boer attack, enabling them to build a fort and, while waiting for ammunition, to use a big tree to simulate a canon as defence. Tradition also credits her with healing the sick through prayer and with water, so authenticating the healing cult that has arisen around her spring, cave and grave.<sup>48</sup>

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45 Interviews with the Rev Chris Kokoali, 1982; the Very Rev Israel Qwelane, Dean of Maseru, at Modderpoort, 1982; four Methodist ministers including the Rev Andrew Losaba, Zwelitsha Methodist manse, 22 October 1978.

46 Selatile testimony, January 1982; Fr Fowler's undated account; interviews with numerous black pilgrims and local clergy, 1982-86.

47 Interview with the Rev Chris Kokoali, 1982.

48 Tradition from Leonard Botha's grandfather, Brightside, Ladybrand, 28 August, 1983.

## Cave Sunday

The Mantsopa movement has had no formal organisation or leadership and pilgrims from different language groups, especially Sotho and Tswana, come to Modderpoort throughout the year. Whilst Cave Sunday remains the highlight, Christmas, New Year and Easter are also special occasions which see busloads of pilgrims camping out for up to a week. In the 1970s Israel Qwelane regularly took parties of Anglicans from Thaba'Nchu and Onverwacht to Modderpoort on 16 December, the Day of the Covenant, as it was then called. Their pilgrimage became an enacted symbol of black spiritual liberation.

These people had no covenant of their own to celebrate so their covenant was to visit the grave of the prophetess, to come back to their roots so as to get help from her in finding their way forward. The church has not met the people's deepest spiritual needs: they are Anglican by day and Zionist by night. All the church has done is to discipline them, causing them to leave. We need to rediscover pride in our past. An African theology has to be done by the black people themselves.<sup>49</sup>

I visited Modderpoort on Cave Sunday for three successive years in the mid-1980s. During this time the eucharistic service was moved in stages from the cave entrance to All Saints mission church some distance away. Although the majority of pilgrims were Anglican, other historic denominations and African Initiated Churches (AICs) were always well represented. In 1986, while mass was being celebrated in church, a small band of Zionists (AICs) worshipped inside the cave. Having left their shoes outside, they gathered in a circle to sing choruses and pray while their prophetess went into a trance. She began to speak in a high-pitched voice, punctuated with sobs and gasps, and to throw herself around. The darkness was relieved by candles lining the altar steps and light filtering in through the window. Before leaving, the Zionists scratched their names on the cave roof, put coins on the altar, and collected soil from under Mantsopa's stone, a large sloping boulder next to the doorway. They smeared the soil on their arms and faces as well as collecting some to take away, to be swallowed or used as an ointment.

After mass, a long queue of mainline church pilgrims formed outside the cave. Many wore distinctive church uniforms, while others were wrapped in Basotho

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49 Interview with the Very Rev Israel Qwelane, Modderpoort, 1982.

blankets to ward off the cold. After a long wait, they filed slowly and reverently into the cave and up the rough candle-lit steps to the altar, while a number of self-styled ushers controlled the flow. After having knelt before the altar in twos and threes to pray, they left written notes and offerings of money on it. Like the Zionists, they collected soil from under Mantsopa's stone on the way out, marking their foreheads with the sign of the cross or rubbing it on their bodies. Small children were sent under the stone to scoop out soil to take away. Most people went directly from the cave to pray at Mantsopa's grave in the cemetery close by, placing a stone on the growing mound and possibly other offerings. The more sturdy then crossed the railway line to Mantsopa's Poort to collect water from the spring, as had the Zionists before them.

After lunch it was the clergy party's turn to visit the cave. After prayers in the priory chapel, they moved in procession to the cave, singing St Augustine's hymn in Sesotho all the way. A robed cross-bearer, an assortment of acolytes with candles, and a thurifer swinging generous quantities of incense were followed by the robed choir, a brass band of elderly uniformed scouts with trumpets and drums, the white mission priests and two bishops, all fully vested. Bishop Fortescue Makhetha, the retired suffragan bishop of Lesotho, was the only African cleric. The small bishops' party went into the cave and formal prayers were offered, including the Collect for St Augustine's Day, together with clouds of incense, I being the sole audience. Out of sight of the masses, this seemed to be a way of reinforcing the liturgical power of the church's authority over this hallowed place.

The diocesan bishop with attendant acolytes then climbed above the cave and, with drums rolling, blessed all those gathered below and the land beyond as far as the Maluti Mountains in Lesotho. Finally, the church party processed to the cemetery. There was a slight hiatus when women kneeling around Mantsopa's grave remained seemingly oblivious to the bishop's presence. More formal prayers were offered, including more at the graves of the founding fathers, but by now the African following had fallen away. The bishop's perambulation was an impressive attempt by the church establishment to take ritual control of all the sacred sites at the mission, together with the landscape beyond.

There was little sense of engaging with the outward expression of a peoples' spirituality. What was evident was, rather, a desire to suppress it. Paulo Suess argues that 'it is a constant fact of history that a non-inculturated Church always places popular religion in danger of paganism, heresy or syncretism'.

On the other hand, 'inculturation in the life of the people could be the Church's most significant contribution to their liberation' (Suess 1986:123–124).

## Mantsopa as a bridging link

The sacred symbols and holy places of the Mantsopa tradition provide her followers with a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging includes the need to belong to a community, living and dead, and the need to be linked to the ultimate so as to be plugged in to the source of power beyond the dominant white-led church's control. Mantsopa is a bridging figure, linking African Christians with their past, and with the above in the present. There is an overt seeking after 'blessings' to satisfy immediate needs – whether they are for healing, child-bearing, finding work, passing exams, material prosperity, overcoming misfortunes such as alcoholism, or being possessed by the spirit. It is the specific rites and practices of pilgrimage that mediate a sense of divine power being directed through Mantsopa to her followers. There is an expectation of miracles, as at Lourdes, and many claim healing or material blessings. These blessings authenticate this African mode of belonging to the ultimate, and offer alternative compensation in a continuing situation of alienation, powerlessness and deprivation (Cumpsty 1991:340–343; Heinau 1986:76–80).

Many of the pilgrims come regularly from the old 'resettlement' camps at Onverwacht and Botshabelo. For them, the foreign figure of St Augustine remains unrooted in their context, without spiritual power, and could even be regarded as a symbol of white domination, whereas they are looking for a communal symbol of black identity. Mantsopa is real to them because she lived and died at Modderpoort. (One informant solved the problem by claiming Mantsopa's baptism by St Augustine.) Popular religion has a liberating potential which gives coherence and a sense of direction in life, allowing for the creation and maintenance of individual and collective identities. But it can also be manifested as a symbolic protest against oppression, in church and society, this being 'the subversive potential of the Christian ethic' (De Kock 1996:64; Greinacher & Mette 1986:ix–xi).

The thaumaturgical works or 'magical' elements involved as pilgrims try to obtain blessings through Mantsopa are evident in the assortment of objects left lying on the altar and rock ledges in the cave, on Mantsopa's grave, and at the spring. Some, such as loose pieces of tobacco, plastic boxes of snuff,

and maize pits, would be typical offerings to an African *ngaka* (diviner, doctor or holy person) or to the ancestors as a sign of respect. Blue and white beads and prayer sticks are probably left by diviners or Zionist prophets in search of supernatural power. Other items such as coins, letters, race cards, photographs, certificates, and candles relate to new contexts with new meanings. In the past the slaughtering of animals was allowed as part of the celebratory feast to feed people from afar. But because of the association with ancestor rituals this was stopped and money is now offered instead. On Boxing Day the altar is piled high with cakes and sweets as gifts from children.

Because Mantsopa is believed to have slept on 'her' stone, the soil around it has become charged with her aura or *numen*, as in traditional belief. Through the soil, Mantsopa's sacred power is supposedly transmitted to her followers, as if they were able to own something physical of God, something which might confer healing, good fortune or protection.<sup>50</sup> Ash is also taken from the ash heap (*thuthubulu*) where she lived and it is used to mark a cross on the forehead, as is also done with soil. This usage links pilgrims directly to Mantsopa, and it is not a sacramentally mediated penitential rite before God, as is the signing of ash on foreheads by a priest on Ash Wednesday. People also claim to communicate audibly with Mantsopa by sleeping in the cave. One woman who had asked her for rain maintained that Mantsopa blamed the drought on lazy clergy who were not praying. (The father concerned says that he prayed with her and it rained!)

The burial place is sacred because the ancestor is 'sleeping' there. If a person has been absent at the time of burial, the time-honoured ritual involves taking a small stone, spitting on it, placing it on the grave, and saying, 'Please sleep well for us'. Mantsopa's followers might say, 'Rest in peace'. Because she is an ancestor to them all, her grave is piled high with stones. Potsherds found on the grave would retain their traditional use as containers for burning odorous herbs as incense to the ancestors in the ritual of asking for protection from evil powers or as a means of purification. Seeds of maize and corn would have been buried with the deceased to

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50 Soil around the grave at Roma of Lesotho's first Roman Catholic missionary, Fr Joseph Gerard, who died in 1914, is also thought to have miraculous properties. His body was exhumed twice, in 1940 and 1956, and was found to be perfectly preserved. For a discussion of the symbolic associations of the sacred (*numen*), see the interview with Dr Khakhethla, 1986; T L Manyel, OMI, *Religious symbols of the Basotho* (Mazenod, 1992), 80–90.

encourage the mediating role of the ancestor in being generous in feeding those left behind. The seeds are now sprinkled on the grave.<sup>51</sup>

In the past, the Sotho used water either as a symbol of purification or as a symbol of regeneration as in initiation rites. However, the 'living' water from Mantsopa's spring is again linked with her aura and is regarded as having the same power to transmit blessings. It is either drunk, added to bath water, or sprinkled inside and outside the home to ward off evil spirits and witches.<sup>52</sup> Lighting a candle is a Christian symbol of prayer. The extravagant use of candles by Mantsopa's followers supports her mediatory role with God. The letters left on the altar tell stories of intense personal suffering and requests for help, and they are commonly addressed to God, Mantsopa and the ancestors. Although, as with any popular religion, the boundary between faith and magic becomes blurred, these are all sacraments which link Mantsopa's followers to her.

## Popular religion and the church

The Cave Sunday mass and procession were obviously part of the enriching spiritual quality of the celebrations, but the attendant popular religion was an ongoing source of conflict with the SSM. In contrast, black clergy who came with parish groups were sympathetic and 'just turned a blind eye. If the people want to do their custom, let them do it. It's their own affair.' It was widely felt that the missionaries not only condemned the Mantsopa movement but anything relating to African beliefs and customs.<sup>53</sup>

Certainly there has been abuse of mission property over the years: sheep, goats and cockerels have been slaughtered on the cave altar, there has been theft from the farm, drunken behaviour, quantities of litter pile up all the year around, grass fires have been caused by candles left burning at the grave, and the heavy traffic churns up dirt roads. Many of these difficulties could have been alleviated by having caretakers, and their salaries would have been more than covered by the huge amounts of money which the mission has not been averse to collecting. Instead, the church's confrontational

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51 For information on death, burial and mourning, see Bereng 1982:62–65; Manyeli 1992:40–41, 105, 112; Secheho ND:6, 8; and Setiloane 1976:68–70.

52 Manyeli 1992:60–62.

53 The quotations in this section were all recorded on tape between 1982 and 1987.

response has meant that the deepening cleavage between popular religion and the church has had more radical implications. There has been no informed objective critique that might have assisted black Anglicans to explore a relevant African theology.<sup>54</sup> Field research in the 1980s has shown a hardening of attitudes, even among those SSM fathers who had initially been sympathetic to Mantsopa.

- 'We have been preaching the gospel here for 120 years and it still runs off like water off a duck's back.'
- 'Discussion in our clergy chapter has shown that the Basuto do not believe in redemption through the blood of Jesus, but in the protection of their ancestors, in salvation through family. This is quite contrary to the Christian gospel.'
- 'I appreciate that Mantsopa is mother to the Basuto and I don't object to people having a special person. I do object to them worshipping her as an ancestor. The faith in Mantsopa is overriding, stronger than their faith in salvation in Jesus. If anything is wrong in their lives they go to Mantsopa or the ancestors, not the church.'
- 'The Basuto go through life being protected from witchcraft whether this is for a car or a child. People don't say the Rosary. They wear it because it is a charm or a protection.'
- 'A native Roman Catholic catechist was found lying naked on Mantsopa's stone. I think he was looking for help at the wrong stone.'

The mission's earlier sympathetic approach is found in a framed photograph of an aged Mantsopa with her daughter on the cave wall. The text recalls her renown during her lifetime as a seer and bringer of rain, and how she retained her reputation 'as a holy woman with charismatic authority in prayer and healing' after her baptism. The text continues: 'Belief in the power of the ancestors to aid those who still live on the earth is typified by the devotion which many express when they come to Modderpoort to seek help in their daily life.' Other frames contain a photo of the founders' graves, histories of the SSA and the SSM, and a more recent notice signifying that the altar is at the heart of the cave:

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54 For a discussion of God and the African past, see A Walls, *The missionary movement in Christian history* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996) 94–100.

This cave remains a place of prayer and pilgrimage, a reminder that the call of Christ is to commitment and prayerful discipline, to courage and vision . . . Before you leave will you make a dedication of yourself or renew a dedication and commitment already entered into with Jesus Christ as Lord, to whose honour this cave is consecrated.

Further efforts were made to claim 'the hallowed cave' solely for Christ with a pamphlet providing information about the SSM's rule of life and its connection with the stable cave of the nativity at Bethlehem. A statue of Our Lady of Walsingham (Walsingham being an Anglo-Catholic place of pilgrimage as England's Nazareth) was also placed prominently on a ledge, only to be surrounded by snuff, tobacco and coins.

In the 1980s stronger measures were taken to reassert the mission's symbolic and physical dominance over the sacred places of Mantsopa. Stones heaped on the grave were regularly cleared away. In order to downplay Cave Sunday, the bishop and the SSM provincial were asked not to come. There was no liturgical pomp, and the service was moved into the 'mission' church, even though half the congregation could not be accommodated and the elderly had to make a long walk to the cave. Within the cave the altar steps were blocked by a large painted wooden crucifix, branches and arrangements of plastic flowers. These were soon removed by pilgrims. Finally, access was controlled by locking the cave door and the approach gates, and putting up a sign indicating that access was permitted to farm-users only.

Since their numbers were depleted, the SSM left Modderpoort in the early 1990s and plans were made to establish it as a provincial conference centre. With the support of local clergy, an Anglican concern to respect the role of popular religion in the inculturation process might yet lead to an integrated African spirituality within the church. As Professor Andrew Walls reminds us, the Christian message preached in Africa by the missionaries

... has had its own dynamic, as it comes into creative and critical encounter with African life with its needs and its hurts . . . Africans have responded to the gospel from where *they* were, not from where the missionaries were; they have responded to the Christian message as they heard it, not to the missionaries' experience of the message.<sup>55</sup>

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55 Walls, *Missionary movement*, 100-101.

This supports the argument that Africanisation in the church must come from a lived experience and not from preconceived plans from on high (Sempore 1986:51).

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Pamberi! Towards a pilgrim theology<sup>1</sup>*J N J (Klippiess) Kritzinger*

Inus Daneel is a traveller. Owing to his unique personality and the peculiar twists of his life he became a commuter between Afrikaner and African culture, between Zimbabwe and South Africa, between Reformed theology and 'African Independent Church' experience, between African traditional religions and Christianity, and now also between the United States and Africa. He has learnt to be at home in these different worlds without being swallowed by any of them. In this sense he is a pilgrim, living under the slogan 'Pamberi!' (Forward!), which characterised the Zimbabwean freedom struggle and more recently the 'war of the trees' in which he is engaged. In this contribution I honour Inus as a fellow traveller by developing the outlines of a pilgrim theology. This theology arose in my own experience of commuting between cultural and religious worlds in South Africa and is cast in the form of a meditation and a personal credo rather than a systematic discussion of theological issues.

Challenged by the *hajj*

Having grown up in the liturgically barren world of Afrikaner Reformed theology, I became fascinated with the notion of pilgrimage when I first encountered it in the lives of Muslims in those infamous 'Indian Group Areas' under apartheid. As I began to understand the deep symbolic role of the *hajj* in the lives of Muslims, this notion became more and more intriguing to me.

The *hajj* is much more than a journey to Mecca once in a lifetime. The annual *Eid-ul-adha* festival – in which all Muslims participate by slaughtering an animal and sharing the meat with the poor, as well as through mass congregational prayer – imprints the *hajj* into the consciousness of Muslims. But it is not only once a year that this awareness is reinforced. Many Muslim homes have artistic portrayals or photographs of the Great Mosque in Mecca

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1 This is a slightly revised version of an article (Kritzinger 1995) that was earlier published in Afrikaans.

hanging on the wall of the living room, thus acting as a constant reminder of where the centre of the world is. But it goes much further than that; the notion of *qiblah* or 'prayer direction' gives orientation to a Muslim family's entire life. Not only does it determine the direction in which to pray five times a day, but also how beds, toilets and graves are positioned. It provides the focal point towards which the whole life of a Muslim is oriented. It thereby expresses the particularism of Islam, since it implies at once the centrality of the Arabic language and the life pattern (*sunnah*) of the Arabic prophet.

I have always found the symbolism of *qiblah* and *hajj* fascinating, to the extent that it attracted me to become a Muslim. In this regard I often thought of the words of Walter Freytag, the well-known German missiologist:

... understanding involves a two-way traffic. For you do not 'understand' until you have been touched (affected) yourself, until you get a new insight into who you are yourself . . . In the study of other religions you can amass information about their scriptures and doctrines. But you have not understood them until you have been compelled to interpret your own Gospel in entirely new terms. You have not really understood another religion unless you have been tempted by the insights of this other religion (Warren 1961:164).

To begin to understand another religion is to be tempted by it, to come under its spell and to begin to feel in your own bones why it attracts its followers and keeps them loyal.

In the racist and divided South African society of the 1970s and 1980s the *hajj* radiated an egalitarian and inclusive message that spoke to me very strongly. The well-known Iranian Muslim scholar Ali Shariati expressed this message of the *hajj* as follows:

The scene is like the day of judgment. From one horizon to the other, a 'flood of whites' appears. All the people are wearing the Kafan [the white calico shroud in which Muslims are buried – JNJK]. No one can be recognized . . . Names, races, nor social status make a difference in this great combination. An atmosphere of genuine unity prevails. It is a human show of Allah's unity . . . In this desert all the nations and groups merge into one tribe. They face one Kaaba (Shariati:10f).

Personally I am delighted at this powerful symbol of unity in Islam, this 'treasure' of which Muslims are the custodians. But I am not jealous or

envious of them. I rejoice at its positive impact in counteracting racism and classism among Muslims. I am saddened by the ways in which even this talent is buried and abused by Muslims. But to be deeply challenged by the *hajj* means to reinterpret your own faith fundamentally in the light of it. John Dunne regards Mahatma Gandhi as an ideal 'holy person' for our time, since he is someone

... who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions, and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time (Knitter 1985:206).

When I started looking at my own Christian faith anew in the light of the challenge of the *hajj*, the following questions bubbled up in my mind: what is the centre of my world, the *axis mundi* around which it revolves? What is the destination of my pilgrimage? Where is my *qiblah*? Or ought I not to have a *qiblah*? Does the tearing of the temple curtain at Jesus' death mean that there should now be no more holy times and holy places for Christians? Does it mean that the notion of pilgrimage should disappear from our vocabulary, except perhaps in the highly spiritualised form of John Bunyan's puritan traveller (Bunyan 1953 [1678])?

## Inward to the centre

These questions kept on haunting me, as I rubbed shoulders with Muslims and tried to develop a Christian faith that made sense in the last violent years of apartheid. And then, one Sunday, in a communion service of a small Christian congregation in Lenasia where Indian, black and white Christians worshipped together and where we took turns to go forward to sit around a table to receive the Lord's Supper, I suddenly realised what the centre of my world was. I recalled the words of Jesus in John 12:32, 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself' (NRSV). Jesus on the cross – with his hands outstretched to all people – is the Centre of my world. And when I walk with fellow believers to the communion table, where his cross is made present, then I am drawn to the centre of the world where I find my identity. There we all sit with empty hands – poor and rich, men and women, older people and younger people, black and white, learned and

illiterate – being moulded into becoming one humanity, levelled by the grace of God. This is the most egalitarian and therefore the most subversive action in the church's repertoire. The Japanese American theologian Kosuke Koyama said during a visit to South Africa in 1983 that the reason that the Dutch Reformed Church could support apartheid and justify it theologically was that it did not have a well-developed eucharistic theology. Our pilgrimage towards the table of the crucified Christ unites us into a single humanity before the face of God. And that makes racism, sexism, snobism, capitalism (and any other form of apartheid on earth) strictly impossible.

But the Lord's Supper only becomes a pilgrimage when you are willing to get up from your seat and walk to the table with your brothers and sisters to eat bread and drink wine, and when you are willing to wait for all the others to finish eating and drinking. Such pilgrimage does not happen when people remain seated in their pews and are served communion where they are, as if they are bosses and madams. In terms of Victor Turner's ritual theory (Turner 1969), it is when participants become 'liminal', through being set apart from the surrounding society, that *communitas* develops among them and the ritual succeeds in 'doing its work'.

The Lord's Supper only becomes a pilgrimage to the centre of the world when the memory of Jesus is central to it; when a believing community re-tells the story of Jesus' life and death and re-enact his deeds until, through the mysterious working of the Holy Spirit, he becomes our contemporary. Then the walls of time melt away and the cross arises before us, so that we find ourselves standing at the centre of the world, before the very heart of God. This communal re-enactment of the words and deeds of Jesus, given its reality by the Holy Spirit, makes the Eucharist into a potent celebration of his presence, which dismantles the power of abstract and metaphysical thinking in the church.

During the *hajj*, pilgrims walk back and forth seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa, to commemorate the frantic search of Hagar for water to save the life of her child, Ishmael. They also throw stones at two pillars that represent the 'satans' who tried to prevent Abraham from offering his child in obedience to God. By ritually re-enacting the deeds of Abraham and Hagar, pilgrims become the contemporaries of those prophets and so experience the presence of God in a new way. In a similar way, by the Holy Spirit, Christians travel to the heart of reality through communally reliving the last meal and the death of Jesus.

But surely this cannot be all there is to Christian pilgrimage! If it were, the gospel of Jesus would be little more than a cosy inner-churchly ritual, creating a dangerous ghetto mentality.

## Outward to the periphery

One of the sermons that made the deepest impression on me was preached by Dr Markus Braun, a German minister who was working at the St Anskar's Lutheran Centre near Krugersdorp in the early 1970s. On Easter Sunday in 1971, shortly before his deportation from the country by the apartheid government, he preached on Luke 24:5 at a youth camp I was involved in. 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.' Markus Braun preached that we often look for Jesus in the wrong places. He has risen and gone to Galilee. We will find him there, among the poor and struggling masses of Galilee (or Soweto), not in the self-satisfied (tomb-like) celebrations of the church.

To say that Jesus is the centre of my world, to whom I am being drawn by the work of the Holy Spirit, also means to give attention to the *invitation* he extended, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28 NRSV). He invites suffering and oppressed people to find rest with him and adds, 'for I am gentle and humble in heart'. These words should not be misunderstood in a moralistic or sentimental sense ('Gentle Jesus, meek and mild'). What Jesus meant was: I am one of the humiliated ones; I stand alongside you in your suffering; that is why I am not judgmental; that is why I do not place new laws or burdens on your shoulders . . .

Shariati (24) gives a moving description of the symbolism of Hagar's 'house' close to the Kaaba, which stands in the centre of the Great Mosque of Mecca:

Toward the west of Kaaba there is a semi-circular short wall which faces Kaaba. It is called Ismail's Hajar. Hajar signifies lap or skirt. The semi-lunar wall resembles a skirt.

Sarah, the wife of Ibrahim, had a black maid (Ethiopian) called Hajar. She was extremely poor and humbled to the degree that Sarah did not object to her becoming a bed-mate of her husband, Ibrahim, in order to bear him a child. Here was a woman who was not honoured enough to become a second wife to Ibrahim yet Allah connected the symbol of Hajar's skirt to His symbol, Kaaba.

The skirt of Hajar was the area in which Ismail was raised. The house of Hajar is there. Her grave is near the third column of Kaaba.

What a surprise since no one, not even prophets, is supposed to be buried in mosques but in this case the house of a black maid is located next to Allah's house! Hajar, the mother of Ismail, is buried there. Kaaba extends toward her grave. As a result, Allah's house is directed toward her skirt!

There is a narrow passage between the wall (Hajar's skirt) and the Kaaba. When circumambulating around the Kaaba, Allah commanded that you must go around the wall (not through the passage) otherwise your *Hajj* will not be accepted.

Those who believe in monotheism and those who have accepted Allah's invitation to go to *Hajj* must touch this skirt when circumambulating the Kaaba. The grave of a black African maid and a good mother is now part of Kaaba; it will be circumambulated by man forever!

Allah, the Almighty, in His great and glorious divinity is all alone by Himself. He needs nobody and nothing. Nevertheless, among all His countless and eternal creatures, He has chosen one, mankind, the noblest of them.

From among all humanity: a woman  
From among all women: a slave  
And from among all slaves: a black maid!

The weakest and most humiliated one of His creatures was given a place at His side and a room in His house. He has come to her house and become her neighbour and roommate. So now there are two, Allah and Hajar, under the ceiling of this 'house'!

One finds this paradoxical identification of the Most High with the lowest of the low at key points in the biblical story:

I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians ... (Exodus 3:7f).

Thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are

contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the heart of the contrite, and to revive the heart of the humble (Isaiah 57:15).

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:35–36, 40).

So Jesus is the centre of the world – the Most High – by moving around on the periphery, among the lowliest of the world.

The danger of a pilgrim religion with a massive centre such as Mecca, Jerusalem, Rome or Moria is that it can so easily enter into alliances with the mighty of the world, to become itself a centre of power that excludes, humiliates and anathemises people.

For me Jesus is not such a massive and static centre, but a 'moving target' who turns the pilgrim process inside out as he invites us to leave our power centres (like churches and universities) to join him on the periphery where he is poor among the poor. The centre of the world moves around on the periphery, on the underside and the outside of history. So a Christian life is not centric but eccentric, going against the grain of every civilisation that enshrines power at the heart of history. We dare not nail Jesus to the communion table. If we do so, we crucify him all over again. He slips out of our pious fingers to do his work of humanisation outside the gate, among the suffering of the earth. The stone that the builders threw out of the holy city has become, *out there*, the cornerstone of a new sanctuary of *living* stones.

Our pilgrim journey is to go out there to him, to get to know him, to take his yoke on our shoulders among those who suffer injustice. This is the meaning of mission: a pilgrim journey starting at the Lord's table and following Jesus on his liberating path among the suffering. Mission is not aimed, in an imperialistic fashion, at conquering the world. It is not to bring Christ to people, but to discover how he is already at work among people. It is to sit down with him where he eats and drinks with people. It is to make every table in society like the table of Jesus – where everyone is welcome, where all are equal, where everyone has enough to eat, where all laugh together. Mission *does* also mean to extend the invitation of Jesus to those who do not believe in him, but only from this position of identification and comradeship.

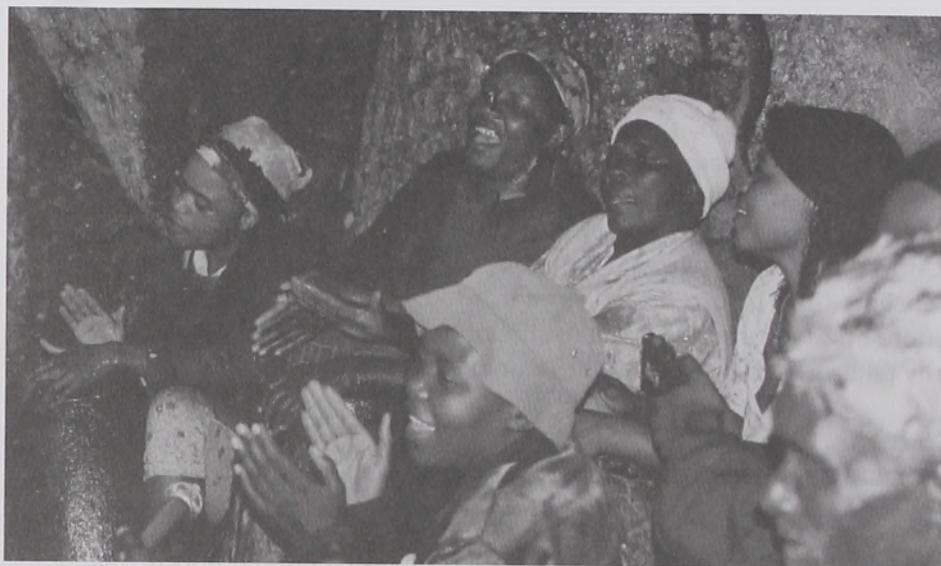
But mission also means to listen to people – so intently that their views force you to think about your own faith in a completely new way . . .

Does all this mean, though, that I eventually withdraw into my Christian cocoon, so that I can smugly tell Muslims, 'What you have in your religion, I also have in mine!' If that were so, this encounter would have changed little in my life, except perhaps to strengthen the spirit of competition between Christians and Muslims. That would leave me inwardly more closed to Muslims than before the encounter, while giving the impression that I am more open – immunised against the ongoing challenge of Islam. That is why my pilgrim theology has a third dimension, the journey into the *future*.

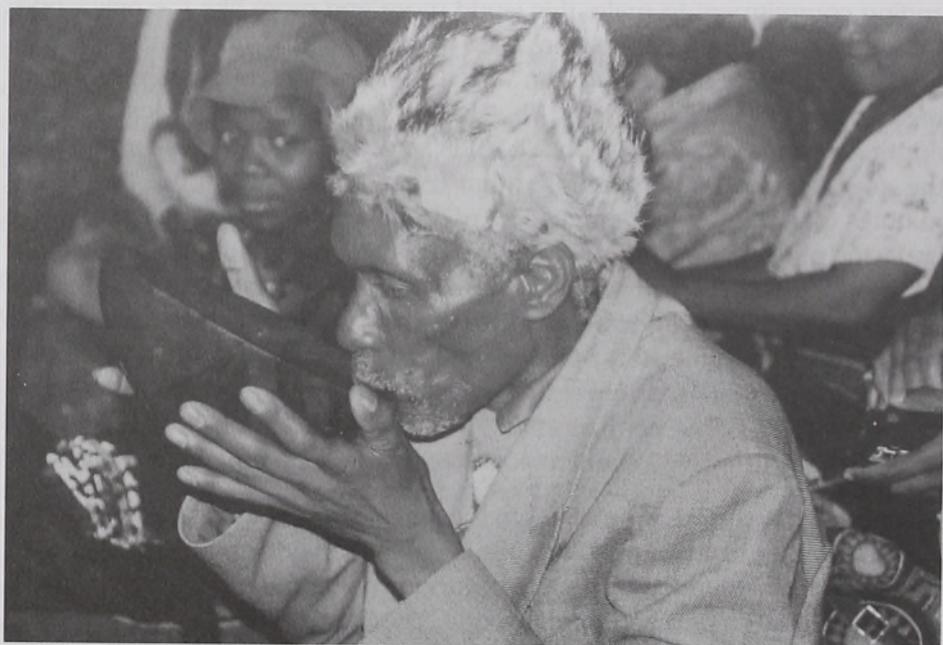
## Forward to the future

Christ, the centre of the world, not only moves around on the periphery of *society*, but also on the boundaries of *time*. The adapted apocalyptic of the apostle Paul – the dynamic overlap between the 'old age' and the 'new age' – means that we are also called and drawn *forward* to a *new earth*. This dream of a new world of justice and peace means that Christian pilgrimage is not an escape from the world but a journey into the future of *this* world. It is a never-ending commitment to make this world more and more like the new world: without tears, without oppression, filled with love and justice. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we sigh and groan with the whole of creation as we long for the coming of God's kingdom. That is why the metaphor of Jesus as the bright *Morning Star* (Revelation 22:16) is so attractive to me. He announces the new day and is the guarantee that it is coming. We do not live at five minutes to twelve, as some preachers of doom would have us believe. No, we are living at five o'clock in the morning – it is becoming light in the east and the morning star is shining. Christians are people who are awake in the early hours of the morning and aware of the day that is dawning. They are the ones who have received the Holy Spirit as the firstfruits and guarantee of the end. But time and again we discover that we are not the only ones who are awake. In the half-light of the early morning, where we can see only dimly – as in a first-century mirror – we meet all kinds of people who are already awake.

The future is therefore wide open. In the end we do not travel *to* the Morning Star, but *under* him and *past* him into the new day. And so we find ourselves on this road surrounded by people of various religions – and of no religion – moving towards a new and human world. The image of Inus Daneel planting



Celebration at Vembe shrine. Mwari's rain is welcomed with drumming, hand clapping and song (top)  
Chief Gwebu sips the fresh rain-water in recognition of Mwari, the creator-God's protective care



trees in Zimbabwe, together with members of African Initiated Churches (AICs) and followers of the African traditional religion is deeply etched in my consciousness and has contributed significantly to the shape of this pilgrim theology. Under the slogan '*Pamberi nehondo remiti!*' (Forward the war of the trees!) he is on his own journey, together with fellow Africans, to God's future. When Christ eventually relinquishes his role of mediator, and God becomes all in all (I Corinthians 15:28), the glory of the Morning Star will be swallowed by the sunshine of the day.

In the light of all this, the final salvation (or otherwise) of myself and people of other faiths and ideologies is not a central question in my pilgrim theology. Instead of asking the isolated question of what happens to people after death, I prefer to concentrate on the question of the *direction* or *quality* of a person's life here and now. In this I have been deeply challenged by insights from other religious traditions. The *Bhagavad Gita* says that we should do what is right without desiring a reward:

He who . . . abandons attachment, and thus acts, is not stained by sin, like a lotus leaf unstained by water (*Bhagavad Gita* 5:10).

Action which is enjoined and is free from attachment, and is done without passion and hate by one who does not wish for the fruit, is said to be of the character of goodness (*Bhagavad Gita* 18:23).

Like a lotus leaf, unstained by the water on which it floats, we need to do what is right without being stained by the desire for any reward. In similar vein the Muslim mystic Rabi'a of Basra said that a life of goodness should not be motivated by the fear of hell or the desire for paradise, but purely by love for God. Similarly, there are statues in which one hand of the Buddha has abnormal fingers: they are all of equal length, so that they touch the ground simultaneously, without forming a cupped (or 'grabbing') hand, expressing the fact that enlightenment means to overcome the desire to have and even the desire to be.

Faced by this evidence of authentic spirituality and humanity, it seems to me that the dividing line between the saved and the lost does not run *between* Christianity and other faiths but *through* Christianity as well as through all other faiths or ideologies. On the day of surprises some of the first will indeed be last and some of the last will actually be first. For this reason I gladly bear witness to Christ, in word and deed, to everyone I meet, and I gladly receive the witness of people from other faiths, allowing their

messages of salvation to challenge, unsettle, enrich and encourage me. In a relationship of mutual witness I journey forward, depending on the Spirit of God, who 'searches everything, even the depths of God' (I Corinthians 2:10).

So for me Christ is the Morning Star, my Guide and Lord, pointing the way to the new earth. It is more important to be on the pilgrim journey than to sit back and admire the beauty of the morning star. The story is told of a Jewish rabbi and his disciples who were discussing the exact moment on which the day began. The one suggested that it is day when one can distinguish a dog from a cat at a distance. Another thought that the beginning of the day was when you could make out the difference between a fig tree and an olive tree at a distance. And so the debate continued. When there was no consensus, the rabbi said, 'When one person looks into the eyes of another and can say "This is my brother" or "This is my sister", then the night is over and the day has begun.'

For me life is a pilgrim journey to the heart of reality: a journey inward to the centre – to Christ at the communion table; outward to the periphery – to Christ among the suffering and despised; and finally a journey forward past the bright Morning Star into the eternal Daylight of God. I would never have interpreted my Christian faith in this way if I hadn't looked into the eyes of Muslims and recognised them as brothers and sisters. Nor would I have interpreted my faith in this way if I hadn't looked into the eyes of African Christians and discovered with great humility and joy that somehow they recognised me as a brother. Finally, my pilgrim theology would have been much poorer had I not travelled some distance with Inus Daneel and discovered in him both a brother and a friend.

May all of us be there when the Day finally dawns!

*Pamberi!*

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