CHAPTER 4

THE FACE OF ZION IN THE CAPE FLATS

Poverty has its own religion

– Anna M Louw

‘Iziyoni yingwe emabala-bala’. This popular song tells us that Zion is a leopard with many spots. The truth of these words became apparent after I had taken the very first steps into the field of Zionist research in the Cape Flats.

There are, for example, numerous and significant differences between the large and well-known Zion Christian Church and the much smaller urban churches of Zion in the Cape Town area. These dissimilarities are by no means merely superficial. Both types would, for example, claim to be the more authentic kind of Zionist church. They are critical towards each other and do not engage in mutual fellowship. It is obvious that much more than just the form and colour of the Zionist ‘spots’ differ significantly.

This chapter presents a profile of some of these spots of the Zionist leopard, namely those living in the Cape Flats (see chapter 2 for a discussion of the choice of sampling for this part of the project). For the current profile a survey was made involving 50 Zionist leaders, mostly the heads and often the founders of their churches. The focus was on the outward shape and appearance of Zion. Therefore, in the present chapter, which is mainly descriptive, the face of Zion in the Cape Flats is brought forward while in the following chapter the spirit of Zion is attended to.

Names of the churches

The choice of a name is not a casual matter for the Zionists of the Cape Flats. The names, which are for everyday use usually reduced to a single keyword such as ‘Nazareth’, ‘Holy’ or ‘United’, are taken to reflect the identity and in many cases the origin of a particular church. The proud manner in which names are given on request bears witness to the importance attached to them. The names are either chosen or revealed to a leader through a dream or a vision.
An analysis of the 50 names (cf. table 1) brings a number of noteworthy aspects to the fore. Nearly all the names include the word 'Church'. One of the two exceptions uses 'Mission' and the other, 'City of God'. They will be discussed below. All the churches are Zionist and 88 per cent include 'Zion' in their names. By this means they establish their identity as being different from mainline churches and even from other kinds of AICs such as Ethiopian, Sabbatarian, Apostolic, and Church of Christ offshoots. More than half include 'Apostolic' in their names and with one exception the combination 'Zion', 'Apostolic' and 'Church'. This joining of names is evidently an indication of the historical origins of most of the Zionist churches and in fact of the Zionist movement in South Africa as a whole. It was John Alexander Dowie (1847–1907) who established the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church and built his 'Zion City' to the north of Chicago in the United States of America from where missionaries were sent to South Africa (Sundkler 1976:30, 34–41, 66).

In a similar manner, denominational ancestry of some churches is included in their names, be it from larger (Methodist, Congregational or Pentecostal) or smaller churches (Apostolic Faith Mission, Sabbatarian or Church of Christ). Affinity to the churches of Ethiopia (or Kushe) is found in the names of two churches while two others use 'African'. 'South Africa' or 'RSA' appears in 22 of the 50 names. While only some of these churches have branches beyond the borders of South Africa, nearly half of them clearly indicate that it is expedient to locate them within South Africa. Rather importantly, one church has 'Southern' and not 'South' Africa – in spite of having only ten members and no branches beyond the Cape Flats.

'Christ' or 'Christian' appears five times and 'God' only once. In the light of the Zionist churches referring to themselves popularly as *uinkonzo zoMoya* (churches of the Spirit), it is somewhat surprising that only three have 'Spirit'/ 'spiritual' in their names. The same applies to the all important issue of 'Healing', which is included in only three names, and a further two which have 'Bethesda', as a leader explains, 'healing is our focus according to John 5:1–9'. Besides 'Zion' and 'Apostolic', proper names from the Old Testament (seven, including Jacob, Jerusalem, Paradise, Samaria and the more obscure Meribha – cf. Exodus 17:7) and the New Testament (14, among others Immanuel, Nazareth, Jordan and Smirna) are popular.

In seven cases the adjective 'New' is included with differing effect. It could denote opposition to, or reform of, a church from which the new one broke
away. In similar vein 'First' was added to the name of a former Zionist church that had a Sabbatarian background: 'Our church was established in 1926 by a black man, Ben Schoeman. He changed the day of worship to Sunday which is the first day of the week.' 'New' could also refer to the changed political dispensation in South Africa: 'People at Babylon were oppressed by Pharaoh [sic], now we are the new Babylon'; 'Our church was founded in the new South Africa in 1995.' Finally, the word can have a spiritual connotation: 'Israel was led through Jordan by the Holy Spirit to the Holy Land. We, the New Israel, are also led through Jordan or baptism to a new life.'

Apart from translations through slight modifications of biblical names, five churches use vernacular names such as *Lizwi* ('Word'), *Themba lobizo* ('Hope of His calling) and *Echibini eKuthuleni* ('At the quiet pools') in combination with English names. Only one, which perhaps shows the most originality, has an exclusively Xhosa name: *IZion Umzi kaThixo* ('Zion City of God').

One or two leaders did not know the meaning of their churches' names, since they did not establish their churches themselves. These exceptions aside, most of the leaders are very clear and outspoken about these meanings. A few issues are apparent from their motivations for giving meaning to the name of their church.

First and foremost, the names link up with biblical parallels and application. No fewer than a third quote verses from Scripture to motivate their names. For example, the idea of the rejected stone which has become the keystone is taken from either the Old Testament (Psalm 118:22) or the New Testament (Acts 4:11); with reference to Luke 23:43, the leader of the Paradise Voice of Prophecy Church comments: 'The ideal condition of Eden which was destroyed by the snake is restored for us by Jesus on the cross.' The founder of the Melita Apostolic Church in Zion applies the incident at Malta described in Acts 28:1-6 to his church's name: 'As people thought Paul would die due to the snakebite, many thought our church would fade away. But it prospered.' The names of two churches even have their origin from the appendix of the Xhosa Bible which explains and translates certain Hebrew, Greek and Latin words. For example, while the Hebrew name 'Meribha' was meaningless to an archbishop, the Xhosa rendering *Mbambano* ('strife', 'contention') made good sense.

In a few cases strong statements are encapsulated in names. Where 'Ethiopia' or 'Kushe' is involved, the explicit meaning that '[$t$]his is a church
for black people' is given. One respondent links this name of his church to the great Xhosa prophet who died in 1821: 'Our name is a confirmation of Ntsikana's prophecy that the whites will bring the Gospel to the Africans.'

The meanings attached to some other names point to an awareness of having undergone a transformation, either in terms of traditional Xhosa religion or regarding tendencies of this religion perceived to be present in a previous church. 'Our name is derived from the Samaritans who received the Word of God and who received the Holy Spirit – and not the spirit of diviners – after baptism,' says the founder of a church with reference to Acts 8:14–19. The founder of the Holy Nazareth Apostolic Church in Zion explains his church's name as follows: 'We branched off from the AmaNazaretha of Shembe, which is a church for the ancestors [inkonzo yezinyanya] and we now emphasise holiness.' The church referred to is the massive Nazareth Baptist Church established by Isaiah Shembe and the largest AIC among the Zulu-speaking people.

A clear tendency shown in the explanation of the meaning of names is a missionary awareness. In 16 per cent of the cases such awareness is explicitly or implicitly expressed, more than half adding Scriptural references. 'We are the ones sent by God, the apostles' and 'We are apostles, black people of Africa' are typical statements. With reference to Acts 13:4–5 the 'Salamis Church' accounts as follows for its name: 'As the apostles did when they were sent to Salamis by the Holy Spirit, we too preach the Gospel.' The fact that more than half of the churches includes 'Apostolic' in their names is significant. The analysis of some of these names indicates that these 'sent ones of God' did not blindly adopt the name 'Apostolic' as a meaningless word. (The meaning attached to 'Zion' is discussed in the next chapter.)

In sum, the names chosen by, or revealed to, Zionist churches are significant indicators of their identity, historical origin and characteristic features which founders wished to accentuate.

The churches' leaders

A few biographical notes on the respondents, seven women and forty-three males, will give some indication of who and what they are (see Table 1). The average age of these leaders is 53 years, the oldest being 76 and the youngest 29. The average level of schooling of the men is a Standard 5 (Grade 7) certificate and that of women Standard 7 (Grade 9). Forty per cent have had no
formal Bible schooling while the remainder received an average of 2.5 years, either by means of correspondence or part-time courses. Thirty-four of the fifty enjoy full-time employment. Seven were employed in factories, six in construction, six in domestic positions and four as caretakers. Besides these fourteen had a kind of white-collar job (drivers, health workers) and thirteen were manual labourers.

As 52 per cent of these Zionist leaders have telephones, 70 per cent fridges and no fewer than 86 per cent television sets, it cannot be said of them that they belong to the poorest of the poor – bearing in mind that poverty has many faces. My impression is that most of these leaders have a slightly higher standard of living than that of most of their followers.

The respondents have different clan names (see table 1): clans of Xhosa-speaking societies such as the Mfengu, Bhaca, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Thembu and Xhosa proper. I have assumed therefore that respondents most probably have their roots in these societies.¹

The respondents to the survey live widely scattered in the townships of the Cape Flats, stretching for some 23 kilometres from Langa in the west in a south-easterly direction to Macassar (see photograph on page xvi for a general impression of the locality of these townships within the Cape Metropolitan Area). Thirty of the fifty respondents have their homes in Khayelitsha, a cluster or conglomeration of villages which include Harare (2 respondents), Khwezi Park (3), Macassar (3), Mandela Park (1) and Site C (2), Site B (10), Town One (8), Town Two (1). Others live in Gugulethu (6), Langa (4), KTC (1), New Crossroads (4), Nyanga (1), Old Crossroads (1). Three reside beyond these townships, in Plumstead, Mitchell’s Plain and Nomzamo (Strand) respectively. Apart from two who live in rooms, twenty-eight live in serviced brick houses, nineteen in serviced shacks and one in an unserviced shack. An average of 6.5 people live in each of these dwellings.

As for religious descent: 76 per cent come from Christian homes and 24 per cent from traditional Xhosa religion (one’s mother was a diviner). Of the Christians 82 per cent come from the homes of members of mainstream churches and 18 per cent from various AICs, 10 per cent being of an Ethiopian type and 8 per cent belonging to one of the churches of the Spirit, which include the Zionists. Half of those who come from Christian homes grew up as Methodist. This reflects the tremendous strength of Methodism in South Africa. Pentecostal churches, from which the Zionist movement has its historical origin, are conspicuously absent as far as religious descent is concerned.
Another noteworthy aspect of this survey is the degree of denominational mobility among the Zionists of the Cape Flats. As the denominations in which they grew up are part of the history of individual church membership, they are included in this analysis. Yet, many of the respondents admit that their involvement at the time did not mean much more than nominal membership.

A few trends and their implications can be noted:

- All but nine of the fifty respondents had previously belonged to other Zionist churches (see table 1). One person was formerly a member of as many as five different churches. These figures suggest a fairly high measure of fluidity of membership as well as a preference to join another Zionist church if a change is made.

- Sixty per cent started off in mainline churches, of which thirty-eight per cent were Methodists, and 10 per cent in Ethiopian type churches, while for 30 per cent a Zionist church was the first to which they belonged. In this case the often-heard accusation that a lot of 'sheep stealing' takes place (members being coaxed away) is to a certain degree justified.

- Sixty-eight per cent of the respondents moved from their original non-spiritual type of church to join an indigenous spiritual type. This is an indication that the former type did not fulfil certain vital needs - in terms of spirituality - of these respondents.

- In all cases but one the movement was from mainline churches to AICs. This indicates that there was no shift from Zion to either mainline or Ethiopian churches. This, in turn, suggests that Zion does fulfil people's religious needs. A pull toward neo-Pentecostalism, which is prominent in other areas, did not feature in this survey.

- Only 6 per cent were originally members of mainline churches, then joined non-Zionist indigenous churches and eventually became Zionists - an interesting pattern of religious change.

- While a few interviewed leaders show a remarkable consistency in their denominational adherence - belonging for as many as 20 to 30 years to a single church - the average number of denominations a person belonged to, including the present church, is 2.8. Taking into account that the average age of Zionist leaders of the survey is 53 years old, this figure indicates a high degree of denominational mobility. It would be interesting
to compare this figure with mobility among leaders of other types of churches. Furthermore, if the mobility of their leaders is taken as a criterion, the perception that Zionists are generally notorious for changing their church adherence, is substantiated by the present findings. A leader who was concerned with the apparent ease with which his members sometimes change their church, commented: ‘They are like plastic bags blown and scattered by the wind.’

There are four reasons why respondents became Zionists (see table 1 – in the case of overlapping of reasons I have listed the main reason given):

- In 42 per cent of the cases physical healing was involved – this includes the cure of barrenness and undergoing in the *ukuthwasa* process of initiating into divinerhood.
- Thirty-two per cent were drawn by other Zionists’ witness – this includes their worship services, preaching, practices and exemplary conduct.
- Twelve per cent cite supernatural intervention: visions, dreams and physical rescue (in a mine).
- The remaining 14 per cent followed their parents, spouses or a friend to Zion.

Finally, whereas the phenomenon of black messianism among spiritual church leaders has been recorded by researchers elsewhere in South Africa (Sundkler 1961:323–337; cf. Sundkler 1976:308–310; Anderson 1992:113–114), I found no similar trait among the Cape Flats Zionists. The contrary is rather true: Some leaders are aware that the late Bishop Limba of the Ibandla likaKrestu was regarded as messiah by some of his followers. When discussing the issue their attitude is one of good-humoured banter.

**Organisation and sizes of the churches**

As for organisation, most of the 50 Zionist churches have a standard hierarchy: archbishop, bishop, president, minister, deacon, evangelist, steward and preacher. Parallel to these offices are the prophet, intercessor and faith healer. The English title *founder* is cherished by some, while *vice-arch* and *most-arch* are also used. These titles and the name of the person concerned are usually indicated on the official church stamp. Thirteen churches have the office of *leader* and only two that of *elder*. Sometimes
preacher is a specific office but the word usually refers to members of all ranks who preach.

Two churches have completely done away with this standard structure. One has only ministers and abaveleli, shepherds or overseers (they refer to Acts 20:28), another only an archbishop together with a prophet, intercessor and faith healer. One archbishop does not have the office of bishop as 'they are a threat to unity because they tend to break away'. However, two do not have the office of archbishop at all.

An interesting relationship can exist between the head of the church, usually an archbishop, and those referred to as prophets (abaprofeti), intercessors (abathandazeli) and healers (abaphilisi). The exercise of authority could lead to precarious situations. This is especially so when the leader is a man and the other a woman with a strong personality. Most respondents agree that the intercessor and the faith healer are one and the same. In this context a prophet is a person who has the special gift of perceiving that which is not observable to the senses. Prayer, fasting, purification and temporary withdrawal are important to the prophet who, through a dream or a vision, can, for example, see a problem or illness in a person or where a lost object can be found. An archbishop who reserves the function of the prophet/healer/intercessor for himself is exceptional. Usually a person of any rank can fulfil these functions. They are taken as gifts granted by the Holy Spirit to certain people.

In half of the churches a ruling committee takes the initiative to choose leaders of the different ranks while the whole congregation gives its approval. In most of the remaining churches a general meeting is the body which considers and appoints candidates. Only in one case does the head of the church choose all the appointees. The conduct, experience, wisdom, talents or gifts of the candidates is taken into account.

Can women fill any one of the ranks of the hierarchy? Seventy-two per cent deny such a possibility and simply position a woman in the office corresponding to the rank of her husband (even if he dies or they are divorced). 'It is not written in the Bible that women can be over men.' However, an archbishop argues: 'We realise that having women in all ranks is not biblical, but the Holy Spirit's gifts should be used by women too.' The fact that twenty-two per cent acknowledge women in this regard indicates a significant development. 'The old law that a woman has her place is no longer followed strictly.' The feeling is that her gifts and not her attachment
to her husband should decide the issue. One archbishop is educating his church to realise that women have exceptional talents.

Practically all churches have governing bodies, usually called a committee. Some are re-elected each year. The gender issue again comes to the fore. While 90 per cent have both men and women representatives on their committees, a fifth have separate committees for men and women. Only 10 per cent have an exclusively male committee. The youth normally have their own committee.

Special interest groups are popular with the Zionists. Every one of them has a women's *manyano* while most have a similar society respectively for the men (amadodana), youth (ulutsha) and a choir for young people. The glaring deficiency in this regard is the lack of Sunday schools to nurture the Zionist children. 'Sunday schools are not something which the spiritual churches have.' While there are only six Sunday schools and a few churches have tried and failed to keep them going, the need and ideal of having one is strong. The standard answer to the question whether a church has a Sunday...
school, is 'not yet'. This indicates their felt need for the religious teaching of their children.

As for church size, Zionist churches are relatively small (see table 2 – figures include all branches, also those beyond the Cape Flats). They certainly do not have 'the tendency to form large, incorporative movements, focused upon theocratic centres' as in the case of the Zion Christian Church and certain Zulu Zionist groups (Comaroff 1985:256). An average of 751 for the 50 churches of the Cape Flats could be somewhat misleading, as the sizes differ significantly. The largest, founded in Pondoland in the 1940s, has 5 000 members scattered over Cape Town and other Xhosa-speaking regions. A third of the churches have more than 800 members, which means that the remaining 33 have an average of only 184. The smallest was established in 1990 and has a following of 10. Taking into account the fact that they are separate denominations, these churches are indeed very small when compared to congregations of the mainline churches situated in the same geographical areas. Nevertheless, their effect on the townships lies in their collective rather than their individual influence.

**Recruitment of new members**

Zionists of the Cape Flats have various ways of attracting new recruits to their churches (see table 2).

*Public preaching* is the main method used to draw people to the Zionist churches according to 60 per cent of the respondents. Most preach on the street or at stations, ranks, hostels, work and funerals, in tents, or on trains. Once a month after a conference or revival service, or once a year at Passover, members will leave their 'temple' at sunrise, move in procession with singing and drums and preach on the streets of their neighbourhood. For this the metaphor of a wagon (*inquelo*) is used: 'The Gospel loads all people onto the wagon and they ride on it.' These evangelistic campaigns are akin to the form that some mainline churches use, called *uhlase lo*, an attack or appropriation. People are inquisitive and are invited to a service. In addition, members commonly address friends and associates, inviting them to services.

*Healing* attracts many outsiders according to 32 per cent of the respondents, who mention it as the main or additional method of recruitment. The Zionists' signs of healing (cure from ailments, other afflictions, barrenness,
mental illness or demons) become known and draw newcomers to the churches who, in turn, value the healing experiences and witness to others. The figure above is slightly lower than the one (42 per cent) pertaining to the reason why the leaders of the sample actually became Zionists.

Worship services and choirs too draw many towards Zion. At these services newcomers can observe that each person enjoys dignified acknowledgement and at times is even the focus of attention. The joyful excitement and warmth of the occasion attract many. An archbishop compares the services to the traditional intlombe (a party for singing and dancing). He is, however, aware that people who merely come for the intlombe experience are not likely to become committed members. Choirs have their own attraction: either the experience of listening to them or the possibility of participation with one's own age group.

Obviously there is a degree of overlap among the various recruitment methods. A person might have been attached to a church as a result of a healing experience, but when questioned, projects the ideal of recruitment through public preaching. Very often Zionist preaching, publicly or in services, includes healing testimonies so that the percentage mentioning preaching as prime factor, underscores the great significance of healing.

Another way of drawing people is found at both the homes of members and non-members. Non-church people, who have problems such as with their health, marriage or faith, or with alcohol and unemployment, are invited individually to the members' homes or visited at their own homes. The problems are discussed, people are counselled and often referred to the local congregation: 'We discover people's needs and bring them to the healers.'

Different Zionist practices such as prophesy, the wearing of special attire, isiwasho (the use of a mixture of water with ash, salt, soap, etc) and umjikelo (fund collection through singing and dancing) attract outsiders. However, the conduct of Zionists within and outside the church is the major witnessing factor: 'In the city public preaching does not have much fruit. All people in my neighbourhood should rather know us and our Christian living, and we their living.' In other words, new recruits are seldom attracted through formal missionary procedures. Instead, spontaneous, witnessing lifestyles have the greater impact.

New members have to be instructed in the Christian faith and in the rules of the church. In many cases this is done just after baptism, sometimes before.
The novices, and in some cases new members from other churches, are seated in a specific row of chairs during a special service. They are taught what is expected from them as well as certain sections from Scripture such as, in the words of a respondent, 'Paul's letters to young Christians'. In addition, they are given further instruction at the respective societies for women, men and youth.

A woman who seeks membership on the bench for converts
Where the churches congregate

The majority of churches have their headquarters within the Cape Flats. While 26 per cent conduct their church activities from only one locality, the rest have an average of three branches in Cape Town and the Boland (an area stretching some 200 kilometres from the city). A quarter have more than five branches in this region, the highest number being ten places where they worship on Sundays and weekdays. Two churches have no main locality and are invited to members' houses on a rotation basis.

In the wider areas in which Xhosa is the dominant language spoken by black people, mainly the Eastern Cape, it is noteworthy that 84 per cent of the respondents' churches have branches there. One third of them have branches (or the headquarters) in regions beyond the Xhosa-speaking areas, three even in neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

This wide geographical scattering of branches brings about a high frequency of travelling, be it for the sake of church administration, funerals of members or the annual festivals such as the popular Easter gatherings. As indicated in the previous chapter, these Zionists are travellers, locally in Cape Town as well as further afield.

A small number of churches have their worship services in the open air, weather permitting. This has the advantage of attracting outsiders. However, when asked where they have their regular church services and other meetings, the usual response is 'in our houses'. Close to half will add that they rent a classroom or community hall whenever large events take place and when other churches or members from their other branches participate. Normally the largest room of a house is used as living room but also as place of worship. It is in these modest localities that the Zionist's faith experience is realised. Quite often a room is reserved as 'temple' and exclusively used for religious purposes. One archbishop proudly leads the visitor to his temple which he refers to as a 'large shed' (ihoko enkulu). Another leader is building a church construction with reject cement slabs on a squatters' plot.

An archbishop, asked if his church has a site, gives poignant comment on the socio-economic situation in which Zionists are living: 'We have no place of our own. We, the Zionists, are not distinguished people.' The hard fact is that not one single church of the 50 has a church site in the Cape Flats. A few do have sites – but no buildings – in towns elsewhere. Here the expression
'We do not yet have a site' indicates that the ideal to have a place of worship of their own is certainly alive. An aged female respondent affirms: 'Zionists do not have church sites, but I am desperate to get one. If I could only build a building for our church, I will be happy when I die.'

Yet, despite the lack of church sites or buildings, there is a wider perspective as Chidester, writing on sacred space in Cape Town has shown. The AlCs in particular have redefined the meaning of urban space:

According to a recent review of South African architecture, African-initiated churches have practised their religion in the 'leftover spaces in the city', establishing their own 'cosmological centres' in open lots, under motorways, or on a beach, where a 'line on the ground is often the only edge between sacred space and the city' ... an ordinary home is transformed into a sacred space, the sacred centre of Zion (Chidester 2000:25; cf. 9).

The churches practising their faith

A vitally important part of any church is its practice. How it puts its faith into action will decide what capability it has to maintain the membership and to draw outsiders. A church's very witness depends upon its performance. Ideally, what a church believes in should be complemented by what it does.

How do the Zionist churches of the Cape Flats put their faith into practice? The question is partially answered by an account of a number of the most common ceremonies, observances, objects and practices that have become customary for them. It is significant to note that some Zionists deviate from certain practices and also why they have altered or abandoned them. What follows is a sketch of some outstanding Zionist practices. In the next chapter I enter into details about certain issues here raised.

Congregations assembling

The Sunday morning service starting at 11 o'clock, the so-called inkonzo ka-11, is generally observed and is the heartbeat of Zionist worship. These weekly gatherings provide the opportunity to come together as a congregation, experience fellowship, and to attend to healing, preaching and organisational matters, and generally to make provision for emotional, social and psychological needs. Much of this likewise applies to the all-night
service (*umlaliso*), in which preaching, singing, witnessing and praying are alternated. This is also the case regarding the healing service, which could be part of the Sunday morning service.

The ritual face of Zion comes to the fore in the striking way in which the sacraments of Christianity performed most often, namely Holy Communion and baptism, are observed. The tremendous importance of especially baptism in the lives of the Zionists can scarcely be overemphasised. Both sacraments have great significance in terms of members' participation in, and celebration of, their faith. It is in these and other ritual actions that Zionists find the opportunity to create a feeling of togetherness and solidarity, experiencing the communion of the saints while appreciating a sense of being cared for. Here they communicate with God and their fellow-believers through the visible and tangible objects and actions of the rituals.

Barring one, all churches celebrate the Lord's Supper, with an annual average of three times. Two churches have these services seven times a year. The custom of hosting Holy Communion at night 'as the Lord instituted it' is universal, although seven churches also have daytime communion.

Appropriate Scripture reading and preaching typically accompany the ritual. Communicants are admonished not to use the Lord's Supper in an unworthy way – only members in good standing are allowed to take part in the actual ritual. Then follows a part of the liturgy that is quite untraditional, in both the broad Christian tradition and in Xhosa cultural terms: the washing of feet. A group of senior male communicants are seated on a bench in front of the congregation. The most senior official present, with a towel around his waist, takes a dish of water and starts washing the bare feet of the communicants while the relevant words from John 13:3-5 are read repeatedly. He then dries their feet with his apron-towel. Once the group's feet washing has been completed, other groups of men then the women, depending on the number of communicants, follow.

The whole process of usually two or three small groups adopting this position is then repeated, this time to receive the 'bread' (a wafer) and the 'wine' (usually grape juice) from the person ministering them. He continually repeats the words used by Christ during the first communion (Mark 14:22-24). I have never seen a chalice being used, merely small glasses.

It is difficult to assess in which way the Communion and its celebration is interpreted and experienced by the rank-and-file members. Probably the
water, and not the bread and wine, has become the primal ‘visible sign of invisible grace’. Yet, it is clear that the Holy Communion is a significant link within the ritual chain the Zionists provide to strengthen the life-enhancing participation of their members.

Nearly all Zionist churches practise baptism of adults through total immersion. In sixty per cent of the cases of the survey this service takes place either at a river or at the sea. Thirty-two per cent use only the river seeing that ‘this is according with John the Baptist’ or ‘the Bible teaches us to use the Jordan’. That baptism implies a death risk is confirmed by a respondent who mentioned that three people were drowned in 1988 during baptism at a popular spot, namely Faure at Eersterivier. In October 2000 a minister drowned at Princess Vlei when he unsuccessfully attempted to save a submerging member. Other common baptism sites are at Swartklip, Zeekoevlei and at the False Bay coast, all fairly close to some of the townships.

Three churches baptise exclusively in the sea, and in one church even branches in the inland have to visit the coast. A single church has abandoned both sacraments with the explanation that ‘we are not baptised with water but with the Holy Spirit’. Since adult baptism is customary, all churches have a special ceremony to bless the children.

The ritual of baptism has a stronger impact and is emotionally more evocative than that of Holy Communion. It is closer to Xhosa cultural tradition in which it finds some parallel, for example, the ukuthwasa emlanjeni ritual in which a person undergoes initiation into divinership through the agency of the river people (abantu bonlambo) (cf. Pahl 1989:338). Immersion, with its obvious likeness to perceptions of traditional initiation, is not entirely new to the Xhosa Zionists. On conversion a person is baptised and thus initiated into a church and into a new religious environment. Zionists see this as a vital event in the life of a newly born Christian, a sacrament with its expressive water symbolism, and a sign of the washing away of sin. I have the impression that baptism is sometimes understood as the literal washing away of sin and that if one is not baptised, one is not rid of one’s sin and therefore not saved.

A characteristic scene of baptism would be a congregation at the break of day, finely dressed in their church attire, gathered at a stream of flowing water. The standard pattern of a service includes a sermon on repentance. The baptiser wades into the stream testing the depth of the water with his
staff. When the water is chest deep, he plants the staff into the mud and returns to fetch the first of the baptismal candidates. With a white rope around her body he leads her up to the staff. Here she is totally immersed three times after he has invoked each of the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He then leads her back to the bank and other candidates follow one after the other.

Baptism has diverse functions in Zion. Although initiation and the sign element are important, this ritual goes beyond baptism in the traditional Christian sense of the word. Purification (ukuhlambulula), which can either mean cleansing thoroughly or clear from guilt, is often the focal point rather than initiation in, and dedication to, a new life in Christ and a new community. The significant healing factor should likewise be taken into account.

In addition to the sacraments, practically all the churches have special services, which include the following (roughly in order of importance): funerals and the preceding vigils; instruction or exhortation of new members, usually before or after baptism; individual requests are put to God in petitions (inkonzo yezicelo), often held with candles (inkonzo yamakhandela) or in the open veld: 'Each person writes his own problem on a piece of paper. We then pray after the candles have been lighted'; the dressing with church attire (inkonzo yokunxiba/yezambatho); memorial services honouring the day of the founding of the church; gathering of tithes; services to wish those who are travelling to Xhosaland well. Less frequent are the revivals for members only, services for the senior brothers and others for purification, normally at a river, after circumcision. To this list could be added the service of renewal (inkonzo yomnqophiso), held in February for members to prepare for Easter by dedicating themselves anew to God.

Some churches also have the inkonzo yesifuzu in which a revelation by a prophet of a certain church is ‘tested’ by invited prophets of other churches. The name is probably derived from the Afrikaans sif ('sieve'), here with the meaning that the truth is sifted out. A cloth, about the size of a towel, is typically tied at its four corners with ropes that are attached to the ceiling of a temple. It then hangs as a kind of canopy under which the service is held. The woman who does the sewing fasts for as long as it takes her to make the cloth. A prophet indicates its shape and colour. The function of the cloth is not limited to its use for this particular service.
Only two churches do not have conferences, while all have other meetings such as weekday prayers or where administrative, financial or other practical matters are attended to.

The atmosphere at these congregational meetings is serious. The churches provide an outlet for emotional release. Amid the harsh realities of urban life, members do not come to these assemblies for the sake of pleasure seeking. Yet, in spite of this earnestness, the mood could, for a short while, change to one of light-hearted amusement. The element of entertainment is especially apparent when some of the adult members participate in the dancing part of the service. This could be quite comical while a measure of showing off is not out of bounds. Besides the encroachment of the television, these sober Zionists generally evade the normal entertainment of township life such as drinking, smoking, parties, gambling, womanising, sport or the use of drugs.

In sum, Zionists have a great variety of reasons to congregate, be it to worship and pray to God, to attend to the sacraments, to serve members' health, pastoral or other spiritual needs, or to encourage and equip them, to integrate new members or to address more mundane issues.

Holy objects

Many practices of the Christian faith, such as that of congregating, money management and dealing with sensitive situations, is part and parcel of all churches. A discussion of holy objects and usage brings some of the most distinctive features of Zionism to the fore.

As in Africa generally, the Cape Flats Zionists do not dance (see discussion below) without music and rhythm. Singing and clapping provide the natural accompaniment for dancing while African percussion music is predominant. A number of musical instruments, mostly home-made, complement the occasion: the double-headed drum (made out of a petrol, paraffin or paint tin covered with the skin of a cow, bullock or ox or even a horse or a donkey); the tambourine (a tin or a drum with loose stones inside – one does see modern versions); rattle (a bent wire with cooldrink bottle caps strung together); the bell; the trumpet (the horn of a beast and less often that of a goat) and the whistle (metal, or cut out of reed). When these instruments are sounded together, the outsider might experience cacophony but to the insider there is harmony and balance. It is noteworthy that the musical bow
(uhadi), one of the most important traditional Xhosa instruments, is not used at all.

Most churches do make use of the full range of instruments in spite of one conspicuous exception: the whistle. Why do 28 per cent of the churches not
use this easy-to-come-by instrument? The answer that it cannot be heard amidst the din of the other instruments does not satisfy. Such statements as 'The spirit of a person is raised (unyuswa) by the whistle', 'We use it only when an insane person is to be cured' and 'The whistle is used when a person who is becoming a diviner is to be helped' all indicate that the whistle is seen in an ambivalent light. Four of the respondents explicitly state that the possession by evil spirits is involved when it is used. Two of them even name these spirits as the amafulunyana. 'We do not like the whistle. It is not in the Bible and can mentally disturb some people.' A single church does not use any instrument at all.

The majority of churches, with three exceptions, all use holy staffs, cords and ropes. The staff (umsimi lelo) can be 'silver or gold', that is, chrome or bronze, metal or else preferably made of ironwood. A palm branch decorated with wool or a spear (umkhonto) is also used. Although these spears are primarily carried for pragmatic reasons, such as a walking stick as a sign of authority or to measure the depth of the water when baptising ('as Moses did'), they do have further connotations. The spear is particularly used as weapon against evil powers and, more rarely, for healing.

The same applies to the cords, normally made of white or coloured wool worn around the neck, wrist, waist or ankles – 'the various points of the body where evil can enter'. 'We wear these when we feel weak. We do not use them as adornment but when praying. They have an effect (ziyasebenza). Cords, somewhat thicker than those just mentioned, are worn visibly across the chest, for prophecy and to 'bind the spirits'. Larger ropes, also coloured, often span the interior of the spaces used as temples. Both cords and ropes are holy objects that offer protection: 'They protect against magic arts [zikhusile imilingo]. Sometimes they are used for prophecy.

The churches that do not employ staffs and ropes feel the same about candles. All the others light candles, commonly used with different shapes of the menorah or seven-branched candlestick. Candles are lit during worship or when people are engaged in forms of healing or pastoral assistance. Leaders warm their hands over the flames while praying before performing certain functions.

Three major types of church attire can be distinguished among the Zionists: the ijoin (derived from the English: in the sense of 'connect'), indicates that the wearer is a full member – each church has its unique colours and patterns; the baptismal robe is made of white material; prophets have their
special dress. The toga-like *ijoin* is a long, loose-flowing garment with cords around the waist and chest, and is worn over ordinary clothing. Women and archbishops respectively have their own headgear. Besides the fact that the church attire is colourful and attractive, it acts powerfully as a visible sign of identity and possibly has mystical connotations. Although their religious dress is normally not worn apart from church activities, a Zion woman retains some aspect of it, perhaps a cord around the wrist or a distinguishable type of headgear. Characteristically, men grow beards to the same effect. A small metal badge worn on the lapel of a jacket or on the breast is a popular sign of membership of a particular church.

**Practices**

Besides the holy objects described above, the Zionists have a number of practices that relate to their particular form of spirituality. I now attend to a few of these by way of example. To a certain degree all of them reflect ways in which the Zionists express and celebrate their faith in and through ritual. In this regard Clarissa Estes (1992:197) has expressively said that ritual 'is one of the ways in which humans put their lives in perspective'.

Dancing is not only a source of amusement but also has deep religious significance. While all of the churches do dance during certain gatherings, the manner and degree of movement differ. In the popular *ukujikeleza* participants go round in circles with a great variety in step, tempo and bodily posture. Three churches have only the *ukuxhentsa* dance, in which the body is thrown into contortions while keeping time to the singing and clapping of the bystanders. The *ukududa* form, a modification of a traditional marriage dance, is a third possibility, practised by only two of the churches since 'the Psalms do not say that we can dance in circles but only that we can move our bodies in the *ukududa* fashion'. Dancing with accompanying music helps to bond those present together as a celebrating and healing community.

Another usage is known as *isiwasho*. Eighty-eight per cent of the churches use water, pure or mixed with other substances such as ash, salt, pepper, soap or vinegar, for certain purposes. When used for an individual as a purgative or emetic, *isiwasho* is believed to purify or to heal. Life's hardships and afflictions are addressed in this way. Sometimes it is used before a person goes to a funeral or for the birth of a child. In a quarter of the churches that use it, it is employed to sanctify or to bless a temple or a house. In all churches *isiwasho* is prescribed by a gifted person such as a
prophet to whom it will be revealed as the solution to a certain problem. An archbishop comments: ‘Even if this does not happen regularly, the Holy Spirit might instruct me to sprinkle a temple or to cast out demons in this manner.’

Speaking in tongues, practised by 72 per cent, is reminiscent of one of the main features of Pentecostalism from which black Zionism in South Africa originated. Glossolalia does not happen regularly, ‘only when the Holy Spirit descends’. Certain members speak in tongues and then solely ‘when they are in-the-Spirit [basmoyeni]’. A number of respondents are quick to remark that translation of the speaking into Xhosa is always done, as all present should understand the given message. Glossolalia has no parallel in traditional Xhosa culture.

My impression that speaking in tongues is not a regular feature in Zionist services was confirmed by a group of Zionists who discussed the very subject. The group’s consensus was that they do not have a high regard for glossolalia and that it is not a standard practice in the churches of the Cape Flats. It seems that most of the Zionist churches are aware of the phenomenon and do encounter it from time to time, but that this is not an important element of their religious experience.

The casting out of demons is an ancient Christian usage. In the Cape Flats it is practised by 94 per cent of the Zionist churches interviewed. That demons exist and imply a serious threat is never doubted: ‘No one with a demon can enter my gate,’ says a female leader. The source from which the ability springs to drive out demons is clear: ‘God blesses us with the power to do this.’ As in the case of speaking in tongues only certain members can cast out demons, ‘those that have the Holy Spirit’. As to the origin of demons an archbishop makes the following discerning observation: ‘There are evil spirits which arise from Xhosa culture, for example the amafufunyana, which can not tolerate our drums.’ Mental retardation, epilepsy and barrenness are sometimes ascribed to demons.

The frequency and urgency of casting out demons in the township environment is vividly illustrated by the following incident. While I interviewed an archbishop and two of his church’s leaders, he was called away. The questioning continued for half an hour without him. When he returned and I asked as part of the questionnaire whether his church drove out devils. He replied: ‘This is the very thing I have been doing during my absence!’
Unlike speaking in tongues and the casting out of demons, the final practice dealt with here does not have prominent antecedents in the Christian tradition of the West. The same does not necessarily apply to Christianity in Africa. The practice is known as *isihlabelelo* in which the ritual stabbing of an animal is involved. Eighty-four per cent of the churches practise this ritual whereas an important minority rejects it. As a result of the very interesting and revealing data on *isihlabelelo* that came to the fore during the survey phase of the research, I decided to explore the concept more thoroughly in the next stage of the research, which deals with the spirit of Zion.

**Money management**

Finances are an indispensable part of most organisations, including churches. Well-managed funds do not only increase the amount of money available for different purposes, but also create a sense of wellbeing, unity and security regarding the affairs of a church. However, the knowledge or suspicion that funds are not well utilised, could be the cause of frustration, lack of confidence, disharmony and even schism.

The Cape Flats Zionist churches have a number of ways to generate money. In rising order the following were mentioned by respondents: public collections (56 per cent); offerings, monthly or quarterly; fixed fees or tithes; donations; collections during services; *imijikelo* (92 per cent). *Imijikelo* is a method of collecting funds by means of contributions placed on a table while contributors sing and dance in a circle. The various congregations of a church strengthen their bonds (and funds) when they 'play' with one another. A 'bag' carries a local collection to another branch of the church, which then tries to surpass the previous effort. This method with its strong social functions is extended to other churches. Even mainline churches are sometimes invited to participate. A few Zionist churches join in and decide on an amount and how to collect it' or else 'they might be invited to bring a bag of say R200 along.' A respondent complains that her visits to others are not returned 'as I am a woman'.

The Zionists are part of a community that is generally poor, which has burdensome commitments to the extended family and where unemployment is common. Under such circumstances donations and gifts from within the community are highly appreciated, particularly at times of special need such as illness, travel to the Xhosa heartland in rural areas, funerals, when a dwelling is destroyed by fire or in cases of unemployment. On more joyous
occasions gifts are given for an archbishop’s attire, when he is consecrated, for newly born babies (on the eighth day) or birthdays as well as at initiation into adulthood. Special donations are made for the candles of the temple. Whereas practically all churches have treasurers, 82 per cent have bank accounts. Less than half give financial reports to their committees while more than half include the congregation in this reporting.

Handling sensitive situations

In any church a particular state of affairs can arise which, due to its sensitive nature, can lead to much dissatisfaction, discord and even dissension. Such situations should therefore be managed with great care. There should be clarity on the course taken if they do develop. The following two such situations have actually caused serious problems for Zionist churches, as the discussion of the stated reasons why churches broke away from their parent bodies will later illustrate.

When the head of a church dies, does a family member succeed him or her? With two exceptions, all the respondents agree that succession is not a family concern but a church affair: ‘We established this church as a church for the people, not for our family.’ Normally a bishop will be chosen to take the place of the late archbishop and it is consented that merit is decisive. Repeatedly respondents state that ‘there is no such a thing that a church can be a matter of inheritance’. It is, however, admitted that succession by a family member often leads to breakaways.

The widow of a late archbishop may keep her title and a few leaders express the view that she can be elected if the leadership so decides. One of the respondents is a case in point. In one of the two special cases mentioned above, the founder is determined that his wife will succeed him. The other exception is an archbishop who is grooming his daughter to follow in his footsteps. She was a final-year theological student at a local university at the time of the survey.

Church discipline is an even more sensitive issue. As could be expected, all the churches therefore have predetermined ways and means of dealing with disciplinary cases. Within Zionist circles, among others, ‘punishment’ (isohluwayo) is the word conventionally used instead of ‘discipline’ (ingqequesho), an unfortunate expression probably taken over from mainstream churches.
Depending on the seriousness of the transgression, such punishment will be meted out after an examination of the case. Punishment could range from a fine of matches or candles for arriving late at a gathering, to a reprimand, privately or publicly, or even to suspension or being 'cut off' (ukusikwa). In the case of being 'cut-off', church attire may not be worn and the disciplined members have to remain passive when it comes to church activities. This could last from three to six months during which time they are expected to be present at services. Those who hold church offices could be demoted.

After repentance and a trial period, reinstatement takes place in a service and the transgressors are again allowed to dress in their church robes. These are prayed over and blessed in front of the whole congregation. Some churches have a special baptism (occasionally with sevenfold immersion) or else a purification service to restore members to their former privileges. One church merely sits down and talks to members who have offended.

The Zionist churches are apparently practising the Christian faith in a manner which is relevant and satisfying to their members, and which has the effect of attracting and recruiting outsiders. All these and other practices contribute to the consolidation of existing members and to gaining new members. Zion is thus maintained and expanded.

Co-operation with other churches

Paradoxically, Zionists, who generally have a tendency to separate, also clearly show that they are alive to inter-church co-operation. A respondent's words reflect not only the general stance taken by them but also a major guiding idea of mainstream ecumenism - unity amidst diversity: 'God gave Christianity many hands [denominations] to do his work.'

Their type of ecumenism is much more practical than theoretical, rather 'life and work' than 'faith and order'. This applies to the grassroots level as well as regionally. Individual churches are simultaneously aware of their unique identity as well as of diversity amidst other Zionists.

Thirty-nine of the fifty Zionist churches of the Cape Flats are affiliated to at least one of the more than nineteen associations aiming at promoting co-operation among churches. Usually a church joins such an organisation but sometimes the leader becomes attached on an individual basis. These bodies represent quite a variety as far as type, size and influence are
concerned. The majority is local, three have their headquarters in other provinces and five operate on a national level. In the latter category are included the well-known Reformed Independent Churches Association and the African Spiritual Churches Association. Only rarely are the Zionists connected to ecumenical bodies such as interdenominational fraternals or the Transkei Council of Churches to which mainstream churches are also affiliated. Only one belongs to the Interdenominational African Ministers Association of South Africa (founded in 1915). There is generally very little awareness of AIC ecumenism in Africa in general. An exception is a women Zionist president who in 1998 attended a Nairobi conference hosted by the Organisation of African Instituted Churches as representative of the Sokhanya Bible School.

Leaders complain that some of the nationwide associations do not deliver the goods. For example, a few hundred rands might be forwarded in good faith by a local group responding to promises of drafting a tailored-made constitution, theological training or government recognition. Quite often nothing materialises and the group has lost a lot of money. In this regard large-scale misunderstanding seems to be prevalent. Church registration with the government, which implies legal recognition, has a long and frustrating history in South Africa. Such registration is highly sought after and some Cape Flats Zionists have paid large amounts to agents, themselves indigenous church leaders, who 'have them registered with the government in Pretoria'. However, a government circular issued on 28 February 1990 by the then Department of Planning and Provincial Affairs states clearly that churches are not registered but merely given a reference number. This number is mistakenly prized by many as a government registration number. These remarks are not aimed at nullifying the otherwise valuable work that some of the national bodies are doing.

The local associations with the largest membership among the churches of the survey are the following: National Christian Council of Independent Churches (8), Isibane Christian Community Service (7), Peace Indigenous Fellowship Revival Churches Association (4) and its rival, which added the word 'Reformed' to the original name (2); Senator House Ministers Zion Foundation Churches in Africa or Indlu Yengwevu (4), which broke away from the Parliament (2). The Ministers' Forum of South Africa is a more recent addition. The activities of the associations include mutual participation in members' fund collecting, solving of disputes (usually only individual members of an association are involved as advisers), attending to disciplinary cases of leaders and involvement in the
conveyance of corpses to distant places of burial, as well as in funerals and burial societies. More than one of the associations aspires to become an umbrella council.

Cultural identity is a basic social factor. Furthermore, the formation of group boundaries is a principal component of identity. Schreiter (1985:63; 105) has asserted that 'the basic group boundary is one that distinguishes ourselves from others: the us vs. not-us boundary'. The Zionists of the Cape Flats are conscious of this identity, both as a group of churches and as individual churches: 'We are different churches, but Zion is one.' They are therefore aware that certain factors make their churches similar to other Zionists churches – implying and often even stating explicitly that a dissimilarity with non-Zionist churches exists. At the same time each church is alert to the fact that it has certain peculiarities which distinguish it from other Zionist churches. These distinctions and peculiarities can be seen as boundary markers that are formed to establish or to affirm identity. I now examine some of these markers.

In answer to the question 'What makes your church similar to other Zionist churches?', a senior archbishop puts the matter in a nutshell: 'Zionists all have the same pattern.' According to the Zionists, their most conspicuous distinctive feature is their attire. Two thirds will agree with the affirmation: 'You will never find a Zionist without his attire.' The next attribute mentioned frequently is their liturgy. In this context the use of instruments, and in particular the drum, as well as songs and dancing in a circle (ukujikeleza) is seen as typical. Features mentioned by about a fifth are their way of baptising, use of prophecies, their manner of prayer, specific practices, and the use of purification. Only two Zionists mentioned an outstanding way of preaching, while only one cited the opposition against traditional Xhosa practices (amasiko). Nobody spoke of the common Zionist name (88 per cent include it in their own names) and the widespread fellowship among themselves. These factors are probably taken for granted. A bishop voiced what he sees as the great distinctive mark among Zionists: 'We don't go to school but we know the Bible by chapter and verse because we see the Bible through the Holy Spirit'.

These then are the most conspicuous markers of Zionist identity that the Zionists themselves bring to the fore. Besides this awareness of themselves as a group with distinctive boundaries, individual churches are also conscious of their own unique characteristics. An analysis of these
characteristics is important, not only to discover what they see as markers but also, in a negative sense, to identify both variations and deviations perceived within other Zionist churches. In fact it is here where respondents felt free to expose aspects of the churches which they feel might be precarious and even damaging to the good name of Zion generally.

Although one respondent feels that 'Zion is simply Zion', he does admit that his church is different in the sense of having special colours, patterns and decorations (stars, crosses and hands) as far as attire is concerned. Close to a quarter highlight the same point. A tenth do not see any differences and would agree that 'Zion has one law'. Some mention the obvious fact that their names differ. While a single church disagrees with the whole of Zionist practice, many state that numerous differences between practices do exist. Some are minor ones which involve liturgy: wearing shoes in the worship service or not; the use of grape juice as sacramental wine (in fact, this is a widespread practice among Zionists); three or twelve candles instead of the usual seven; one or three immersions during baptism. Others have to do with organisation: different constitutions (generally a scarce article); having or not having respectively an archbishop or bishop; having many Zulu members. Other minor but noted differences include ways of healing, keeping the Sabbath on Saturdays, the use of ribbons instead of wool, the use of wool only for ropes under the ceiling and not for bodily cords and the support of unemployed members.

With a few churches there is an awareness of difference in gender issues: women are allowed or not allowed to be preachers or leaders. Two or three see their uniqueness in the use of mainstream practices such as the 'ticket system' (receipts for regular contributions) and Sunday schools. Two start their services in a Methodist way 'to make the many people with Wesleyan backgrounds feel at home'. Minorities of Zionists take pride in having 'deeper' preaching and more thorough instruction than the average: 'Our Bible interpretation is exceptional. We practise and teach according to the Bible.' Such statements indicate perceptions as to what is lacking or neglected in other churches.

All in all it is the responses regarding interaction between the Christian faith and the Xhosa tradition that raise the most interesting and illuminating issues. The discussion will return to this subject in the following chapters.

Working together for a common purpose implies that churches are prepared to associate with those churches with which they can identify. As far as the
Zionists of the Cape Flats are concerned, this applies to both Zionists and non-Zionists. Yet, as I shall indicate, co-operation with Zionist churches has its limitations.

Without exception the Zionist churches under scrutiny co-operate with one another at funerals. This does not only include the actual burial service and preparations for the communal meal after the ceremony, but also vigils and weeklong daily prayer meetings at the house of the deceased. With a few exceptions co-operation also generally takes place in the following fields: of the mutual attendance of worship services, the solving of problems (such as quarrels, representation to authorities or help when shacks have burnt down), ordination of senior officials, money collecting (*umjikelo*) and where community matters such as the AIDS issue, fighting against drugs or participation in tree planting is involved. It would not be exceptional for a leader to 'hand over the service' to a visiting counterpart.

A few churches distance themselves from collaborating with others regarding the collection of money as they feel that they 'do not always reciprocate according to expectations' and that this could create tension. But generally the co-operation is cordial and constructive: 'I build friendship with other spiritual churches by cooperating with them.' For practical reasons combined efforts of several groups are usually limited: 'We work together as a cluster of churches though the ideal is that all Zionists should co-operate.' The picture that emerges is that of a local organisation of Zionists which serves mutual interests.

An unusual form of co-operation, compared to mainstream Christianity, deserves further attention. As mentioned earlier, some churches have a service to examine whether a prophecy is true or not: *inkonzo yesisefu*. A respondent gives the following description: 'Prophets from other churches will confirm the truth of a prophecy although they do not know the circumstances. A prophet, for example, sees a red cloth with a star and explains it to the congregation. Prophets from more than one church are invited to reveal [*ukutyhila*] the same prophecy. They will confirm the given meaning.' A further example: 'A prophecy for *isihlabelelo* [see discussion in chapter 5] has to be confirmed by two other prophecies.'

The question 'Are there reasons why you will not co-operate with a certain Zionist church?' provides illuminating and important answers. Although I did not intend to elicit such responses, the question apparently touched a nerve that gave rise to outspoken and even emotional replies. Some respondents
were quite vocal on specific cases within their own experiences. For methodological reasons the responses are significant: whereas the respondents will naturally tend to describe the positive and constructive side of their own churches, the criticism of fellow Zionists gives an insider's impression of the other side of the coin. I do not regard these disclosures as a matter of whashing dirty linen in public, but the putting into words of issues that trouble, and at times even confuse and frustrate, Zionists about certain aspects of the Zionist movement in general. As could be expected, some respondents have stronger feelings than others about why they should not co-operate. At the same time, the responses to the question on such reasons highlight the great variety in Zionist belief and practice as well as confirming the outsider's observations about some otherwise inconspicuous aspects which deviate from wider Christian traditions.

The readiness with which all church leaders responded gives some indication of the importance they attach to the issues involved. Only a very few of the 50 see a reason that could prevent co-operation. The majority have the attitude that 'we are flexible and tolerant about trivialities and don't interfere with the private lives of other churches' leaders'. Where churches have no knowledge of teachings and procedures of others, they will not co-operate with them.

Zionists see misconduct as the main reason why co-operation is avoided. Different kinds of misbehaviour in or beyond the worship service are mentioned: lack of respect, order and discipline; drinking; adultery or the taking of a second wife; quarrelling; fraud or unfairness regarding money matters; cunning; or the use of vulgar and insulting language (*ubukrwada*). As for the last example: 'We will not co-operate with those churches where undisciplined language is used and where a woman is grabbed and shaken under the pretence of being controlled by the Holy Spirit.'

Less pressing, but nevertheless a good-enough reason for shunning co-operation, is presented by dissimilar practices, some trivial, others essential: manners of baptism; where Communion wine is to be bought (at a bar, shebeen or at the Methodist bookstore); the Sabbath; aspects of church attire; the exclusion of women from leadership; the absence of 'tickets' and stipends; the lack of leadership training. There are serious misgivings held about preaching and the use of the Bible. Some Zionists distance themselves from a fellow Zionist church when they feel that 'although the service lasts from 11 o'clock to 4 o'clock there is no preaching but only
running around in circles', and when the sermon is 'meaningless' or 'sounds like fighting'. They will also shun working together where 'the Bible is used as a stick to beat others'. To some the love of preaching and the use of the Bible are most important: 'Churches which have no desire for the Scriptures are mastered by the spirit of Baal.'

Still, misconceptions and different church practices do not present the most striking reasons to avoid co-operation with other Zionist churches. Sharp dissimilarities among Zionists and strong feelings emerge when their dealings with traditional practices are mentioned. Twenty per cent voiced their misgivings about the synthesis between traditional Xhosa and Christian elements found in some Zionist churches. A number of reasons are cited for Zionists dissociating from other Zionists: the fact that supplication to ancestral spirits is made, dealing with malicious spirits such as the amafufunyana, the use of isiwasha and in some cases even of traditional medicine, the way in which diviners are accommodated and services conducted in their style (ukuquba inkonzolo ngobugqirha), the use of the whistle (as described earlier) as well as certain magical arts (imilingo). A respondent stated: 'I will not co-operate when they cut a person with a blade to bleed and in so doing let the evil out' – a statement implying a strong rejection.

Another respondent said: 'When we retain faith in our parents who are no longer with us, we are outside the Christian faith. Christ is our scapegoat – we can no longer sacrifice a goat with two horns.' An archbishop summarises the feelings of some of the respondents: 'Many churches belong to the diviners and herbalists. When their members accuse fellow members of witchcraft, they treat the accused badly and even expel them.'

The complexity of the situation among Zionist churches as regards traditional practices is shown by the fact that while some see the use of the isihlabelelo ritual as a reason to co-operate with a certain church, others have the very opposite view: 'We do not work together with people who follow Xhosa culture in church matters such as the wearing of beads and slaughtering, those who have the isihlabelelo.'

Responses differ when churches do not agree with others' ecclesiastical or traditional conduct and practices. Some respondents will simply dissociate themselves, some will distance themselves without despising anyone, while others will discuss the fly in the ointment and, if no resolution can be found, withdraw. Unlike Kiernan (1990:124, 214), I did not observe the sharp distinction among Zionists themselves as 'Christian Zionists as opposed to
others, whom they labelled New Zionists with the pejorative meaning of being upstarts and pretenders'.

A few respondents emphasise that religious change takes place by degrees: 'Old habits are to be left little by little [kancinci kancinci] and gradually converted through a person's prayer and through those of the church.' A bishop is quite critical of certain of his fellow Zionists' traditional practices and beliefs, and yet he says: 'One discovers what is essential. My relation with Christ does not depend on red or yellow cloth. People feel that traditional things must be included, as in Moses's time. Their whole world is one of fables, nearly like that of Alice in Wonderland. Theirs is a tradition of spirits and spooks. So what are we to do? Gradual preaching of biblical principles and continual accentuation that Christ is not in the wool, dance, wind or sticks. So let us tolerate and teach.'

In spite of mainstream churches' popular belief to the contrary and genuine disregard and even contempt for Zionists, co-operation between the two types does take place in the Cape Town townships. The outstanding example concerns funerals. Without a single exception the Zionists work together with the mainline churches in this respect, arguing that 'I don't favour any church'.

It should be added that this kind of ecumenical co-operation is more spontaneous than official. Besides funerals, it finds expression, for example, in common social action during disasters, such as the destruction of shacks by fire, or in the use of universal Christian hymns as well as the expression of a communal sense with other Christians in their prayers.

Mainstream members are always welcome at Zionist services and one respondent even says that, if necessary, he will baptise a visitor 'in their fashion'. However, Zionists as a congregation will visit mainstream churches on certain occasions, such as the welcoming of a new minister. They will even take along a 'bag' (of money). It is, however, more common that individual Zionists visit mainstream services.

Yet, there is a clear feeling that the larger churches stigmatise the Zionists and discriminate against them. When asked about co-operation in terms of solving problems, money collecting or community matters and even ordination, the standard answer is: 'If they invite us we co-operate.' In spite of such invitations, Zionists often do not feel accepted: 'They have apartheid and we do not feel at home. Even if they invite us, we hesitate to go.' The Zionists' manner of worship is seen by members of other churches who consider themselves to be of higher
standing, as a sign of a low social rank. Some complain about being excluded from leadership positions, for instance in community committees. A respondent’s statement epitomises the common feeling about Zionist co-operation with mainstream churches: ‘Although we are interested in them we sense that they are not interested in us.’

These sentiments mirror a phenomenon which has for a long time been typical of mainstream churches and ecumenical councils throughout the African continent: ‘The century-long history of all such attempts to win acceptance from mainline churches has been one of almost complete frustration’ (Barrett & Padwick 1989:12).

The churches verbalising their faith

The significance of oral theology can scarcely be doubted, since the normative texts of the Christian tradition (both the Old and the New Testaments) were founded on oral traditions that in some instances took centuries to be reproduced in written form. As is the case with most, probably even all, black African cultures, the Xhosa traditional culture is an oral one. This might be the main reason for the fallacy that Africa has no theology or history, a belief held for a long time but which has subsequently been discarded: ‘[O]ral theology and oral history may be said to be the stream in which the vitality of the people of faith in Africa, illiterate and literate, is mediated’ (Pobee 1989:89).

This section deals with dimensions of the Zionist churches’ faith which could be seen as the nucleus of an oral Zionist theology. Here, both orality and literacy come into play. There is no point in comparing the two in order to deprecate either. Their nature is complementary, both having a definite part to play when considering a local Zionist theology (cf. Pretorius 1995:75–76). The fact is that while orality is predominant in Xhosa culture, there has been a definite shift towards literacy. The 50 respondents have an average of more or less Standard 5 (Grade 7) as far as schooling is concerned and can indeed be said to be literate in spite of the strong oral tradition of their culture. When they express their faith in words, one must therefore expect an interplay and interaction between orality and literacy (Pretorius 1995:56).

The verbalisation of the Zionist faith includes the presence or absence of published texts, as well as the use of words and formulations inherited from the Christian tradition and their own authentic and creative articulations of
their beliefs. It is here where the Zionists' implicit narrative theology could be discovered. In this discussion, different sources are tapped to investigate this vibrant side of the profile of Zionists in the Cape Flats. Because the entire research project reported in this book is set in a missiological frame of reference, this section includes an inquiry into Zionist perspectives on what their particular mission is.

Songs

'The song, like the drum, creates a non-ordinary consciousness, a trance state. All humans . . . are susceptible to having their consciousness altered by sound' (Estes 1992:160–161). Throughout Christian history singing has been the most common manner in which God was praised and one of the best ways in which the scriptural passages and messages were inculcated in the hearts and minds of believers. How do the Zionists under discussion fare in this regard?

When asked what the most popular hymns and choruses that are used in their churches are, 72 different songs were given by the 50 respondents (see Appendix C). The following analysis of these songs is admittedly superficial. A thorough examination would have to include aspects such as music, theological content and the complexity of the energising forces that are produced by physical movement, emotional expression and musical vibrations. Nevertheless, a few noteworthy trends do emerge.

First is the predominance of songs from the musical tradition of the mainstream Protestant churches, especially as recorded in the Amaculo AseWesile, the official Methodist hymn book. No fewer than 43 per cent of the most popular songs sung by these Zionists are printed in this hymn book. The same applies to five of the seven songs that have a score of 10 per cent and more. The four most popular hymns are 'Thixo akunangqaleko' (God, you have no hidden enmity – 22%), 'Nkosi, sihlangene' (Lord, we have gathered – 14%), 'Hosana enyangweni' (Hosanna in the highest – 12 per cent) and 'Wakrazulwa ngenxa ngemini' (He was torn apart on my behalf – 12 per cent), all songs sung universally by Xhosa-speaking mainstream and indigenous congregations.

A second feature is the singing of words directly quoted from the Bible (24 per cent). These include four from the Psalms, two from Isaiah, the Lord's Prayer and such quotes from the New Testament as 'Today I shall be with you
in Paradise' (a slight variation of Luke 23:43) and 'Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Mark 11:9). Usually only one Bible verse is sung but as many as eight can be included in a song.

The most interesting trend in terms of indigenous originality is the Zionist self-made songs (32 per cent). Such songs do exist, in spite of a respondent's remark that '[w]e do not have our own songs, our songs are to beat the drums'. These songs are mostly not long, normally a few words or a sentence sung repeatedly. In this manner a powerful statement is voiced which consolidates the feeling of unity. At the same time the group is conscious of, and consonant with, a single theme which mobilises its dynamics. Examples of such songs are: 'Limnandi iVangeli' ('The Gospel is pleasant'), 'UYesu unamandla, Amen Amen, Nkosi yam' ('Jesus has power, Amen Amen, my Lord') and 'Siyabulela' ('We give thanks').

With the exception of three, all these songs are in the vernacular. They are sung not only during services but also on other occasions such as prayer meetings, fundraising, and vigils, and at the elaborate greeting process at the conclusion of some gatherings.

The final trend I mention is the emergence of theological traits expressed by the chosen songs. The popularity of the tune, and not necessarily that of the content, is often decisive for the choice of a song. Besides, the songs listed are not to be taken as comprehensively representative of Zionist singing. Therefore, these trends are sometimes difficult to discern. Nevertheless, I found the following indicators:

- The most songs are about Christian spirituality, intercourse between God and the believer, and how this relationship moulds the believer's life. While belonging to God ('Mna ndinoYesu wam' – 'I have my Jesus'), the pilgrim ('Apha emhlabeni ndingumhambi' – 'Here on earth I am a pilgrim') follows Jesus ('Somlandela somlandelo uYesu' – 'We will follow Jesus'). God is trusted amid life's troubles. Characteristic is the words:

  Ewe, kany' ubomi bam
  bunxanelwe uThixo
  ... kodwa uThixo, Mhlanguli,
  wondenzela inceba
  Ndothemba yena ndiphila
  ndimbulele ngeculo

  Yes, for sure my life
  longs for God
  ... Yet God, the Deliverer,
  will show me mercy
  I will rely on him for my life
  I give him thanks through song

83
Prayer takes central position within this spirituality: 'Ndinendawo yam yokuthandaza' (I have my place of prayer) can be understood literally or figuratively. Apart from what is requested in the Lord's Prayer, God's presence, blessing, guidance and benevolence are sought: 'Ndikhangele ngobubele, o Nkosi yam' ('Behold me with benevolence, oh my Lord'). God's kind words and the salvation of the nations are implored.

- A large number of songs express the praise of, and gratitude to, God: 'Bawo, siyakudumisa' ('Father, we laud you') and 'Siyabonga, Amen' ('We give praise, Amen'). God's tributes are, furthermore, celebrated: his presence, protection, uniqueness and benevolence. By far the most popular hymn perhaps mirrors the main emphasis of the Zionists' theological stand better than any other does:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thixo, akunangqaleko} & \quad \text{God, you have no hidden enmity} \\
\text{Thixo akunangqibeko;} & \quad \text{God, you are infinite} \\
\text{Ukho eendaweni zonke,} & \quad \text{You are present at all places} \\
\text{Ukho ngamaxesha onke.} & \quad \text{You are present at all times} \\
\text{Phaya ezinkwenkwezini} & \quad \text{Yonder among the stars} \\
\text{Ukho Wena, ezulwini;} & \quad \text{You are present, in heaven} \\
\text{Wab' ukade sel' ukhona} & \quad \text{Yet You already existed of old} \\
\text{Xa zingekabikho zona.} & \quad \text{Before the stars were created} \\
\text{Zoda zigqibeke zonke,} & \quad \text{They will pass away at last} \\
\text{Kuthi tshabalala konke;} & \quad \text{gone completely} \\
\text{Ube Wena ungapheli,} & \quad \text{but You never come to an end} \\
\text{Ube Wena usahleli.} & \quad \text{and You still live on}
\end{align*}
\]

- A third theological trait is the attention paid to Jesus. The singer's appalling condition is brought to the Lord:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ndililhwempu, ndiyimfama} & \quad \text{I am poor, I am blind} \\
\text{Andiphili ngeenza zonke} & \quad \text{my life is wholly miserable} \\
\text{Ngwee onokundanelisa} & \quad \text{It is you who can satisfy me} \\
\text{kungoko ndizayo, Nkosi} & \quad \text{therefore I come, Lord}
\end{align*}
\]

The cross of Jesus and his sacrificial death are quite prominent in this regard:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Noba kunyuka} & \quad \text{Whether an ascent} \\
\text{noba kuyehlela} & \quad \text{or a descent} \\
\text{sizobambelela esiphambanweni} & \quad \text{we will cling to the cross}
\end{align*}
\]
Ingozi ingaphela yonke
ityala lihlawulwe lonke
izono zixolelu le zonke
emnqamlezweni

All danger is terminated
all debt settled
all sin forgiven
all at the cross

Most of these songs of salvation through Jesus are taken from the Methodist hymn book.

- Less prominent but still notable are the songs concerning afterlife. One tells of a believer’s condition when the Lord returns: ‘Xa athe wabonakala thina sofana naye’ (‘When He appears we will resemble him’). There is a clear awareness of a promised life after death, variously indicated as ‘Paradise’, ‘Heaven’, ‘Eternal Canaan’, ‘Zion City’ or ‘Jerusalem, my home which I love’. The last two songs can be interpreted as having both present and future dimensions. Two choruses could imply that good works earn one a place in heaven: ‘Izulu wolingena ngokulisebenzela’ (‘You will enter heaven by working for it’) and ‘Unalo na itikiti lokungena ezulwini?’ (‘Do you have a ticket to enter heaven?’).

Yet, the overall theme is: Christians have the great consolation of knowing that they are on their way to being relieved of their earthly difficulties while looking forward to their homecoming:

Boph’ umthwalo sigoduke
siy’ ekhaya ezulwini

Pick up your pack
we are homeward bound to heaven

- A few songs are related to the church or God’s children. The most revealing is a quotation from Isaiah 26:1, ‘Yinqaba umzi wethu thina’ (‘This city of ours is a stronghold’), and ‘Zion City’.

Some of the theological themes one would expect to appear in Zionists’ songs are either only indirectly implied or totally absent from the 72 chosen songs. Conspicuously lacking are themes in which the Holy Spirit and the wider world of spirits appear.

When considering the words sung by the Zionist churches to express their faith, it seems justified to arrive at the following preliminary conclusions: the Zionists share with the Xhosa-speaking part of the mainstream churches a rich and well-used treasure of songs, mostly imported and translated, but some indigenous to Africa. Besides these hymns and choruses, they have created a number of simple but authentic songs, some much in accordance
with the sentiments that inspire all Xhosa Christians, a few expressing the uniquely Zionist contribution to the songs of Africa.

Rules of conduct

As is the case is with all communities, the Zionists of the Cape Flats take for granted that certain rules guiding and controlling behaviour are to be honoured. Rules are laid down which decide what should or should not be done. A probe of those rules of conduct which are, within the Zionists' perspective, the most important, highlights a rudimentary ethic for living. These rules are their verbalisations of what Christian behaviour should imply. They are at the same time part of the Zionist churches' expression of their faith.

First of all it is noteworthy that the number of positive and negative rules is practically similar – as responses to the question 'Which are the three most important rules in your church?' indicate. This implies that the Zionist churches are not only concerned to counter immorality in the wide sense of the word, but also to encourage and to foster the living according to Christian virtues and moral principles.

As far as negative injunctions are concerned, four issues are outstanding (mentioned by between 20 and 28 per cent of the respondents): drinking, food taboos, smoking and illicit sexual affairs: 'A person who has the Holy Spirit must not allow his body to rule him.' Where 'pure and impure animals' are at stake, pork is clearly forbidden while the Cape snoek (sea-pike) is much more contentious – is it fish or (snake) flesh? Leviticus 11:9–12, which prohibits the eating of fish without scales, is quoted in this regard. Human relations feature prominently in the next two rules: no gossiping, which includes encouraging rumours and creating of suspicion, and refraining from fighting by word or action. Matters mentioned by only a few respondents are the introduction of undesirable elements to the church such as superstition and the whistle (compare the previous discussion), stealing, telling lies and the attendance of discos and parties.

As for the positive rules of the 50 Zionist churches, two major categories can be distinguished. The first covers those rules that deal with the practical organisation and smooth running of the church. Adherence to the prescribed regulations and practices, together with obedience are the most important. More specific issues mentioned include being on time, assistance with
problem solving, proper church clothing, honesty in money matters, propagating the church, attendance and co-operation with other churches. A single respondent mentioned contributing money to the church.

The other category covers the Christian virtues and the believer's new life in Christ. A respondent comments: 'When anyone is united with Christ she is a new creation; her old form [isimo] has passed. Faithfulness to Christ and to Christians is needed. All things are right, but not all things are good. Things of pleasure are works of the flesh.' Good behaviour is expected of a Christian and biblical exhortations are given in this regard: the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, Romans 13:1–7 and Galatians 5:22. Ephesians 4:17 is quoted: 'Give up living like pagans with their good-for-nothing notions.' Particular virtues are mentioned with respect to God, the church, family and fellow members being the most prominent. Others are love, perseverance, tolerance and prayer, while association with Christian friends and not with unbelievers is recommended. Only three respondents have rules of a doctrinal nature: the acceptance of Biblical teachings (which they do not specify) or the assurance of salvation.

I conclude that the 50 Zionist churches of the Cape Flats do have a high regard for behaviour that is regarded as being good and Christian. Positive and negative injunctions are equally balanced. Besides some forms that appear to be legalistic, namely the strict adherence to a few food taboos, and the prohibition of drinking and smoking (abstinence is called for without considering the moderate use), the encouragement to seek Christian virtues is striking. The foundations for Christian conduct are found in the Bible, and with very little mention of this source, the instructions of the second table of the Ten Commandments are well reflected in the rules of the churches. Rules are both concerned with virtuous Christian living as well as with worthy church membership. Zionist faith is to be accompanied by good works.

Preachers' choice texts

As is the case with other Christians, Zionists have come to know parts of the Bible by remembering the message of salvation through different acts of worship. Preaching from the Bible is usually a vital part of such worship, particularly in those churches that have their origins in the Protestant tradition.

Many critics have asked: Are the Zionists churches in the true sense of the word? Zionists themselves will find this very strange. Everything depends on
the criteria one applies. If the use of the Bible, the sacred writings and main source of the Christian churches, is taken as criterion, the Zionists will pass the test with flying colours. A more valid and complicated question would consider not only the physical use but also the understanding of the Bible, the hermeneutics that are involved. An archbishop states the matter in his own words: 'I translate certain verses in a certain way.' In addition to the analysis of a number of Zionist sermons (to be discussed in chapter 6), the texts that respondents named as most commonly used by them provide some indication of the sections of the Bible that preachers use most frequently and of specific texts that have the strongest appeal. (See Appendix D for a complete list of the texts chosen for preaching.)

The responses to the question 'Which three Bible verses are used most often for the sermons of your preachers?' indicate that close to two thirds (64 per cent) of the preachers favour the New Testament over the Old. The main accent is on the Gospels (38 per cent), with John (18 per cent) and Matthew (14 per cent) being the most popular books. The life and teachings of Jesus feature more often than the writings of Paul (12 per cent). Whereas Psalms is the second most used single book (16 per cent), all the prophetic books together are used moderately (9 per cent), despite the fact that prophecy plays such an important role in Zionist practice. John 15:1 (6 per cent) has the preference as far as individual texts are concerned. It is followed by John 14:15 and Matthew 11:28 (3 per cent) and Psalms 15:1 and 23:1, Matthew 5:13 and John 14:1 (2 per cent). Obviously these choice texts of the Zionist preachers do not reveal enough about the content of sermons to justify any major conclusions in this regard. The discussion of Zionist speaking in services that follows leads to more valid results.

Publications

To continue the discussion of Zionists formulating their faith and especially the aspect of literacy, the question is posed: Do the churches under consideration have the valuable aid of published texts to enhance their ministries and their theological thinking?

In sharp contrast to the situation over the last few centuries in the Western and Eastern traditions and, to a lesser degree, even most of their black mainstream counterparts in South Africa, these Zionist leaders are generally deprived of the advantages of using the printed word. A third of the leaders
have a few books on their shelves, Xhosa or English, to help them with their sermons. The type of literature and the relative age of the larger part of this small harvest are, however, not promising at all. Typically, one bishop takes pride in his library consisting of a 1937 publication by the Lovedale Press and a copy of the Apocrypha. Biblical commentaries are unheard of. Only eight churches have a written statement of belief, including two that simply use a Methodist one. One church has such a summary as part of its typed constitution. The closest that two others come to a written formulation of their faith, is the singing of the Apostles' Creed during worship services. Likewise, only six churches out of fifty use a manual for services or liturgy books, ranging from that of the Presbyterians to a *Watchtower* pamphlet. Two have created their own draft manuals.

All in all – apart from the Bible – these Zionists do not have a culture of reading. Their spirituality and equipment for their ministries are not based on books and printed matter, but on the experience of God’s presence in their lives and in particular in worship services. Given their general lack of education, their relative poverty and different mode of verbalising their faith, this lack of reading is understandable but, in terms of mutual enriching communication with Christians of other traditions, most unfortunate. Is this part of the legacy of decades of independence and isolation from the rich literary tradition of the mainline churches?

**Mission**

At the outset of this report on the project on Zionists of the Cape Flats I emphasised that sound missiology acts as an escort to the church to move beyond its familiar surroundings to ever-new positions. For centuries the churches in the West have been involved in this process. A large variety of missionary societies, church denominations and contemporary missionary organisations have, for example, been active in Africa. The question now arises: What initiatives have Africans taken in mission in their particular milieu? One of the aims of this project on Zionism in the Cape Flats is precisely to investigate what initiatives they have taken in this regard. Answers to this question will contribute to the larger study undertaken in southern and Central Africa on African initiatives in Christian mission.

Previously I attended to a few tendencies among Zionists: to show a missionary awareness in the choice of a name for their churches, to ways in which they attract new members to their faith and increase their member-
ship, the reasons why the 50 leaders became Zionists, and the circumstances and dissatisfactions which led people to leave their previous churches and to join or start new ones. All these issues embrace telling missiological dimensions. Mission, however, starts with motivation. Christians have to be urged towards missionary activity or witness by certain incentives. In this regard the understanding of what mission is has crucial significance.

It is therefore necessary to examine the Zionists’ understanding of their mission. Xhosa Christians usually use the word *mission* in a rather restricted manner: the missionary building or compound. For this reason the question ‘What is the mission of Zion?’ was amplified with: ‘For what purpose does the Lord send Zionists among the people?’

The Zionists’ response has much in common with conventional ideas of what the Christian mission is. To start with, a few have what could be described as a broad *world vision* for mission: ‘The name “Zion” implies a calling – we are God’s representatives to humankind’; ‘Our mission is to be the salt and the light of the world, to show the world the image of God’s love’; Zionists are to ‘disciple the nations’ or ‘light the lamp of Christianity’; ‘We have great means to look at world mission.’

With the exception of healing (to be discussed later), the response that occurs most often is that the mission of Zion is to *preach*. The Gospel, salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and conversion to Christ should be preached. The missionary mandate is quoted from texts such as Isaiah 6:8–9, Matthew 10:7–8, 28:19–20, Mark 6:7–13 and, remarkably, Romans 11:25–26, which includes the words ‘The deliverer will come from Zion.’ Zionists are to continue the work or ministries of the apostles, the sent ones. Appropriately more than half of the churches have the word *apostolic* in their names (whether the association with mission is made or not). A small number of the churches refer to the following as their missionary task: baptism, prayer, teaching, discipling, exorcism of evil spirits and peace ‘in the heart and in the country’. Only two respondents came remotely close to missionary motives akin to those of liberation theology: ‘God sends Zion to cater for the uneducated, the poor and the struggling’; ‘Zionists are Africans, the church of the poor. God sends prophets to collect these people as a suffering nation and they are therefore given hope to live by the mountain of Zion.’
Thus far all the expressed ideas of the mission of Zion might as well have been formulated by Christians all over Africa or even the world. We have not yet arrived at the Zionists’ unique view of, and contribution to, the mission of the church. Does their view of the purpose for which the Lord sends Zionists among the people differ from traditional Christian notions?

The most marked difference is their reference to healing when spelling out what they understand by the mission of Zion. More than a third explicitly include healing in their responses. A few attach a purely spiritual meaning to the word, ‘to heal the leprosy of sin’ but the majority talks of healing ‘the spirit and body’. Healing, a holistic kind of healing – in which the whole person and not just the symptoms of a disease are treated – can be seen as a leitmotif of Zionists’ mission. Although not quite conventional, they share this viewpoint with many other Christian traditions that have a missionary appeal because they accentuate faith healing.

Still, the uniqueness of mission in Zion, as verbalised by the Cape Flats respondents, has not been clearly stated. An archbishop’s remark that Zionists have a mission to heal ‘because diviners and [Western] doctors are unsuccessful’ gives a clue to their unparalleled perspective on mission. Together with this indication, one should read the response that these Zionists include prophetism in their view of what mission is. Yet to them prophetism does not have the usual meaning of foretelling the future or of addressing the human powers that be. It rather means that through the Holy Spirit prophets are given the ability to reveal the root causes of peoples’ problems, especially the powers behind illness and misfortune: ‘Prophets are sent to warn people. In other churches evil and dirty spirits in a person are not discovered because there is nobody to recognise them.’ A female faith healer adds: ‘We are sent to certain places and to certain people to find out what their problems are and how to heal. Through this spirituality of the Zion church it fulfils its mission.’

The solving of problems reaches beyond illness to include human relations that have gone wrong, suspicion of witchcraft, pending schism in a church, a child’s drug abuse and other forms of misfortune. But illness, of a kind that is specified in the following quotation, is most prominent: ‘It is our mission to heal people, especially those who are sick with Xhosa illness and who would have gone to diviners for help.’ At this point the ‘great adversary’ of the Zionists’ prophets is introduced: ‘Zionists are sent to curb by their preaching and healing the influence of such people as the diviners.’ A respondent even
goes a step further: 'We Zionists are sent to convert diviners, to change their ways and to become prophets.' In chapter 5 I indicate how this actually does take place and what far-reaching implications such conversions can have.

Prophetism is not limited to the diagnostic element: 'Zionists are given the Holy Spirit so when people are ill, the nature, the cause and the cure are revealed. I light a candle, pray and these things are revealed to me.' The missionary and in particular the church-growth aspects as well as the awareness of being different from the mainstream churches in this respect are shown by the following response: 'Zion is sent to increase its congregations. Other churches do not heal, this is our work. We help people who are not healthy and who dream about it. Their dreams are related to the ancestors who reveal if something bad, such as a split in a church, is to happen. We use the ancestors in such cases.'

The final part of this response is by no means typical. I have already shown that Zionists' beliefs and practices part ways on this sensitive issue. The following general view on mission in Zion as related to the traditional religion would, however, certainly be more characteristic: 'Our mission is to fulfil the plan of God to show people that the superstition (inkolo) of the Xhosa is not in order. To rectify such superstition, I use drums and other elements just as tradition does, but we draw people away from the traditional system to Zion which is close to God.'

Precisely here lies the uniqueness of mission in Zion: newcomers are attracted by, and feel welcome in, the manner in which Zion 'fulfils the plan of God'. Although traditional ways are used, people are led to the newness of Zion. Old forms are filled with a new content. The Zionists are quite conscious of what they have to offer and what the mainstream and other churches do not cater for. Besides preaching, which all missions do, they pay serious attention to those dimensions that address the needs of people who are in many respects still close to traditional Xhosa beliefs. The preoccupation with traditional beliefs manifest particularly in healing which is at the very heart of Zionist mission. In this regard, Zionists fill a missionary vacuum: they bring to the fore certain aspects of the Christian message which they find to be either lacking or absent in other churches, but which they believe to be present in the New Testament.

Earlier I described missiology as a critical reflection on the practice of Christian missions which aims to change people and conditions. In the reflection above I sketched the ordinary missionary activities that Zionists
share with other churches as well as their extraordinary missionary achievements which outsiders seldom appreciate to the full. Who will ever be able to measure the full extent of their missionary contribution when considering the following factors: the Zionists' successful recruitment strategies; their addressing of peoples' felt needs; their search for the transformation of elements of the traditional Xhosa religion; and their ability to help people cope with their poor and often insecure living conditions? By saying this I do not intend to turn a blind eye to their imperfections in terms of missionary witness.

More than a quarter of a century ago the authoritative Concise dictionary of the Christian world mission provided an overview of mission in Africa at that stage. In this survey it is said of the African Independent Churches that ‘today they form an important arm of the church's mission' (Neill, Anderson & Goodwin 1970:8). This detailed study of the Zionists of the Cape Flats confirms the dictionary's finding: at the beginning of the new millennium Mission Africa is still on track and the Zionists represent a living and probably the most dynamic part of this mission. What was once considered to be an embarrassment to the Christian mission, is now a vibrant alternative to it, one without special committees, coherent organisations, sophisticated training programmes, high finance and technology or helpful international contacts.

The essence of Zion

Hand in hand with Zionists' understanding of their missionary nature goes the ecclesiological issue of how they view the essence of Zion. With what is presented below, I do not claim to have arrived at a final description of that which makes Zion what it is. All such efforts will remain preliminary. However, the discussion will raise some of the most important qualities of Zion in terms of theological self-description. It will bring forward a matrix of ideas which can fruitfully be considered with complementary data from the present as well as other research results on Zionists.

Zion is first and foremost the City of God, a spiritual entity. Slightly more than half of the respondents express their view on the essence of Zion using purely spiritual terms which in their definition includes healing: ‘Zion is the church [inkonzo] of the Spirit. We are led and ruled by the Holy Spirit.’ Apart from this orientation to the Holy Spirit and spiritual power which emerges from it, 'the new Zion is the place where we praise and worship God'. In
addition to those just mentioned, another quarter indicates that a spiritual Zion has developed from an originally physical one. Respondents are aware that ‘Zion is a mountain, but also my congregation’ or that ‘Zion was an old mountain with a large building, but in the New Testament it is Jesus Christ’s body. It is the hearth of God’s worship [iziko ionqulo]’ – an allusion to Isaiah 2:1-4.

Reference to the geographical Mount Zion, of which the glossary of their Xhosa Bible (1996 translation) soberly informs them that ‘it was a hill at Jerusalem where the house of God was built’, is not widespread. Only a very few are cognisant of detail on scriptural references to Zion. From these references, all provided by respondents, the following reconstruction is made:

Zion is the place the Lord chose for Israel to worship his name (Deuteronomy 12:5); when God talks to us of this place He refers to Zion (Isaiah 2:1-4); God indicated to David to capture the fortress of Zion, the Jebusite stronghold at Jerusalem, and it became the City of David (2 Samuel 5:6-7); David, in the Psalms, says wonderful things about Zion (Psalms 87 and 76:1-2 [neither actually attributed to David]; Zion was enslaved but its redemption promised (Isaiah 1:27); as prophesied by Zechariah (9:9), Jesus came in the place of king David; when the Bible speaks of Zion, it does not imply only those who call themselves by this name, but to all who believe in Jesus as mediator, all who are part of the city of God through faith (Hebrew 12:22-24).

A notion that indeed appears frequently is that, though they do not all know or appreciate the fact, all Christians are Zionists: ‘All believers of all denominations are Zionists. You are a Zionist if you have accepted the Word.’ Although one respondent sees Zion as ‘the house of the Lord which God loves more than other churches’, this is highly exceptional. A few simply equate Zion with Christianity, or see Zion universally as ‘the light of the whole world’. Only three are more specific and view Zion as ‘a church for Cush (or black people)’, ‘a church of the power of the Spirit, one for uneducated people who maintain the [Xhosa] tradition [isintu]’ and even more boldly, ‘a kind of divination [ubugqirha], but one which is practised according to the Bible’.

A minority of Zionists are fairly well acquainted with the geographical and historical location of Zion as found in the Bible. Yet, the majority uses the word in a figurative and even in a metaphorical sense: Zion is the holy place
established by God, where He is worshipped, and from where He empowers his people with the Holy Spirit. A few respondents mention Psalm 87 as main Old Testament reference: 'Glorious things are said of you, O city of God' (verse 3, New International Version). Hebrews 12:22 serves as the most popular New Testament reference: 'But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.' In the new dispensation Zion is the body of Christ, the 'church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven' (Hebrews 12:23), all true believers, whether they belong to Zionist churches or not.

The heart of a biblically based Zion theology of the Cape Flats can be found in the verbalisation of their faith as depicted above. This specifically applies to their views on the essence of what Zion means to them. I return to this issue in the next chapter.

The stories of the churches

It is beyond the scope of this study to relate the full stories of all 50 churches involved in the survey. Instead of describing past events chronologically, I have selected a few themes which give an impression of the churches' ages, their origins and how they have responded to the ever-changing socio-historical circumstances in which they are embedded (as sketched in chapter 3).

At the time of the survey (1996) the churches had an average age of 21 years (see table 2), that is, being in existence on a national level (which does not necessarily imply their presence in the Cape Flats). This seems to suggest a degree of stability but if one takes into account that 40 per cent of them have existed for only a decade or less, and that more than two thirds are younger than 20 years, the picture changes considerably. The fact that there were six churches aged one year, two aged two years and four aged three years is an indication that there is still a high rate of founding new churches on the Cape Flats.

The ages of some of the older churches were remarkable: eight of them are older than half a century and two are respectively 84 and 86 years old. The Cape Flats leader of the former claims an establishment date of 1912. Yet, his church is actually a branch of the one founded in that year by one that Sundkler refers to as the original 'African church fathers in Zion', Edward Tau Lion, 'the most spectacular of the Sotho Zionists of an earlier generation' (Sundkler 1976:56, 65–66). The oldest of all the churches represented in the
Cape Flats is said to have been established at Highflats, Ixopo in KwaZulu-Natal, in 1910. C Z Nkabinde, A Nene and S Khumalo were the leaders.

A recorded and published history of the origins of the churches included in the survey is extremely scarce. This fact reflects the general scarcity of literary sources of AIC history (Pretorius 1995:54, 56–58). In an admittedly not exhaustive search I was able to find traces of only two of them, the one being that of E T Lion referred to above. The other is a church that broke away from the well-known AmaNazaretha established by Isaiah Shembe in KwaZulu-Natal in 1911 (cf. Sundkler 1976: chapter 5). Seeing that the story as told by the current leader of this church has never been published and is unknown to outsiders, I include a few lines on the oral tradition that persists.

According to the respondent, there was a serious disagreement between the Zulu and Xhosa sections of the AmaNazaretha. According to the Zulus, all preachers were to kneel while preaching. The exceptions were the founder and the archbishops who were allowed to sit down. The Xhosa-speaking section was not content with this arrangement. They argued that only women should kneel! At a meeting in Bloemfontein in 1942 the Xhosa contingent left the church under Archbishop Nevana, who has since passed away. A new church was founded, which came to Cape Town in 1956 where the current leader has his headquarters. With more than 3,000 members this is the second-largest church included in the survey.

The majority of the churches (66 per cent) were established in the Cape Flats (see table 2). About half of them have been in existence for longer than a decade. Eighteen per cent of all the churches have their origin in Xhosa-speaking areas of the Western and Eastern Cape, ten per cent are from Gauteng (in the previous Transvaal), one is from Vendaland in the Limpopo (former Northern Province) and two are from KwaZulu-Natal.

Apart from the ages of the 50 churches or the churches of which they are branches, it is noteworthy when they arrived or were established in the Cape Flats. The first to arrive was the Zion City Apostolic Church of South Africa brought to this area in 1927 by a coloured Zionist, J W Louw (Pretorius 2003). The First African Apostolic Church of Zion in South Africa arrived in 1948, having been founded in Pretoria two decades earlier by an African, Ben Schoeman.

In 1945 the Ethiopian Church of Cush was the first of those established in the Cape Flats. In the 1950s three and in the 1960s three other churches were
added. Toward 1969, twenty per cent of all the churches under survey had been in existence. In 1970–1979 eight were added, in 1980–1989 there was a marked increase of 17, and in 1990–1995 15 were added.

As the survey of Zionist churches of the Cape Flats was conducted with a reasonably large sample, I draw the following provisional conclusion: starting in 1960 the number of Zionist churches has more than doubled each decade for two consecutive decades, while the tempo of growth since 1990 is still increasing. The relaxation of influx control during the 1980s most likely had an influence on these developments. Obviously these conclusions refer to the number of churches and say little about trends concerning the number of members.

Much has been written about the reasons why people break away from both mainstream and independent churches and form their own groups. Most of the publications on the issue focus on the broader, large-scale causation such as political, economical, sociological and historical factors besides religious and theological ones. When the question is posed, 'What were the main circumstances or dissatisfactions for the founding of your church?' one can expect that the immediate and personal reasons would be given. This is indeed what happened in the survey. I could therefore get a good idea of what caused dissatisfaction among members with their leadership. Evidently some respondents may tend to take a subjective and even a self-justifying stance when they relate the events that led to their schisms so that one can hardly expect a well-balanced story. I therefore have reason to be cautious and not to accept all stories at face value. Nevertheless, interesting and important aspects, including insiders' views on Zionist shortcomings, do come to the fore.

One can anticipate a degree of convergence of responses relevant to this discussion and those that replied to the question about the reasons why cooperation with other Zionist churches is not sought (as previously discussed). In both cases factors that cause disagreement and disturbed harmony are at stake, while issues that trouble Zionists are articulated by respondents.

'My parents were Methodists but I was a beer drinker. Since my conversion from beer drinking in 1966 I still belong to the same church which is a Zionist one.' This witness is indeed extraordinary. Only three of the respondents did not break away from their churches due to some dissatisfaction or other. All the others left the churches to which they belonged – which in not a single case, was a mainstream church – because they were discontented.
More than any other factor, dissatisfaction was caused by what is perceived to be bad behaviour by the leader of the church or his or her toleration of the immoral conduct of members. Outright dishonesty in money matters is mentioned, but misuse of church moneys and a lack of transparency seem to be the main stumbling blocks. Statements such as the following point in this direction: 'The archbishop ate the money' and 'The leader called for a lot of money but he was rich and highly esteemed so that the congregation lost interest and left. I then started a new church.' Often the congregation is not consulted about the use of funds. In one case the reason for discontent mentioned was that money was collected as donation for a bereaved family – a frequent and most helpful practice among these Zionists – but was never handed over to them.

Another category of misconduct concerns marriage and sexuality. Some instances are worse than others. Reasons cited include the lack of discipline of a minister who was divorced; a church youth who had love affairs; the leader not being legally married or his taking a second wife; 'The leader of the church committed adultery at a certain Easter gathering. It was reported but he defended himself from the Bible!' A further serious obstacle that leads many people to break away from a church is the fact that leaders sometimes tire of their spouses, get rid of them and take other women, particularly younger ones. A male respondent observes: 'This is our illness: we change wives.'

The presence or absence of certain practices go against the grain of members and cause discontent. A future leader dreamt about a drum and ukujikeleza (dancing and moving in circles with much drumbeat and rhythm) which was not a practice of his church. He left and started a new group. The mode of baptism had the same result: 'They said my teaching about river baptism is wrong. But I used the Jesus model.' Practices that were too similar to those of the Methodists gave offence: 'I was not happy about them. Besides, the word "Methodist" does not appear in the Bible, "Zion" does.' Practices that are 'different and unbiblical', such as isihlabelelo, weak preaching, a lack of discipline and neglecting to deal with sick people during services, all caused dissatisfaction.

An authoritarian or a weak style of leadership reaches a point when it becomes intolerable. One respondent gives an example: 'Our lady archbishop ruled badly. She would even stop preachers in the middle of a sermon or exclude the choir and youth from participation in a service. So I left the church, sat in my house, beat my drum and invited others.' A new church was born. The same can happen when rules are changed without
consultation and transparency, and where discipline is lacking, or when people feel that they are treated in a discriminatory manner.

A variety of other factors are mentioned that have stimulated discontent and which have actually led to a parting of ways. When members surpass the leader in such activities as ‘powerful prophecy’ or evangelistic zeal, he or she may feel threatened. The death of a leader may bring succession disputes while the same is true of family cliques ‘who want to make the church a family affair’. Money that is sent to headquarters in other parts of the country without the leaders ever visiting the Cape Flats also causes dissatisfaction. The same applies to a number of formal issues such as not being ordained as a minister; a leader who does not honour the church’s constitution or who has no schooling in administration; and the fact that the church is not registered with the government (such registration, in fact, happens to be a fallacy – see earlier).

It is not difficult to imagine that personality clashes take place (which are difficult to identify) and, when combined with one or more of the above factors, they can lead to a pattern of arguments and quarrels which sooner or later reach a breaking point. On the positive side it must be added that it often does happen that a person breaks away while maintaining an amicable relationship with the previous leader. They have amiably agreed to differ.

As has been described in the previous chapter, the Zionists of the Cape Flats live in an environment that has had more than its share of violence, be it caused by factors related to politics, crime, family or otherwise. How have these different waves of township violence since 1985 to the present affected the lives of the members and in particular the churches of Zion? Some of the Zionists’ stories respond to this question.

Although they lived through hard times, 60 per cent of the respondents had no personal experience of political violence. Neither are they aware that their members were exposed to it. The remaining 40 per cent were more directly affected to some or other degree (see chapter 3 for details on this aspect).

Instances of violence were not limited to the political upheaval of the mid-1980s. In 1991, for example, three children of the member of a respondent’s church were forced into a taxi at Gugulethu and later their bodies were found at Paarl (50 kilometres away). Another member had a close encounter in 1994 when he tried to prevent thieves from stealing the gearbox of his vehicle. A taxi driver was shot and killed in 1995. In 1997 three balaclava-clad youths shot and killed a pupil in a classroom in broad daylight. This happened a few hours
before a scheduled interview I had with a Zionist at the very school. Woman respondents in particular talk volubly about incidents of violence and abuse within their circles of acquaintances. One of them gave an emotional account of how she defended her young daughter against sexual assault by the child's father. The two were eventually divorced.

Perhaps the taxi wars indicate best how poverty and violence were, and still are, a regular part of the lives of township inhabitants, in particular those who depend on public transport. The following description interprets the situation in which, among others, the Zionists were, and are still, living:

> Amid the instability and volatility in townships of the Western Cape, poor blacks experienced violence on at least two distinct levels. One level is related to a general malaise and deterioration in the social web of relationships and the physical atmosphere of township life ... The second level, while related to the first, is somewhat different. A taxi war between two competing companies had a devastating impact on people who risked their lives to get to work and other places on the most reliable form of transport available in townships (Thomas, L 1999:40).

Depending on time and place, violence to differing degrees has become part and parcel of the lives and the stories of Zionists. Their regular prayers for protection against all evil that might befall them when travelling in the townships bear witness to this.

**Current issues**

In order to facilitate the effort to draw a profile of the Zionists in the Cape Flats, in which I take their historical circumstances into account, a few relevant questions on current matters were included in the questionnaire. Attitudes to political parties, experiencing the new South Africa, gender issues and community involvement are addressed.

**Attitudes to political parties**

Sometimes it is difficult for Zionists to accommodate politics in their church activities. This is illustrated by the following incident: At the well-attended funeral of a prominent Zionist leader, some tension arose when a comrade (a freedom fighter during the struggle) used the occasion as a platform for an inflammatory speech. A senior Zionist responded by holding out his Bible
and proclaiming ‘The Bible is my Freedom Charter’ (the African National Congress’ basic statement of human rights).

There used to be a widespread impression that Zionists and most AICs are apolitical in the sense that they show very little signs of interest in public affairs in general and in political activities in particular. Chidester has plausibly suggested how this state of affairs came about: ‘Scholars have often explained Zionist churches as a reaction to white conquest and domination . . . Rather than symbolically inverting the South African political order of white domination . . . the separate, sacred order created by Zionist churches addressed the more immediate social environment of the townships’ (Chidester 1992:138; cf. Thomas, L 1999:121).

Does the same state of affairs apply to the Zionist respondents living in the townships of Cape Town? To test their attitudes towards politics they were asked whether they allowed their members to join political parties. This was followed by a question on their community involvement.

Three basic attitudes emerged from the responses: positive acceptance of members’ joining of political parties (52 per cent), tolerance or the acceptance of the inevitability of political involvement (22 per cent) and outright rejection (26 per cent). Two of the respondents themselves belong to political parties explaining that ‘Africans have received their freedom’ and ‘the people’s interests have to be represented worthily’. An archbishop motivates his involvement religiously: ‘Also politics require Christian influence.’ However, some respondents in this category express the need to be cautious as politics can cause trouble: ‘One should not openly choose sides; churches should not become too deeply involved in politics; deaths could occur, as, for example, during strikes.’

The middle group – more or less a quarter – have many reservations about their members’ active involvement in party politics, since ‘politics has its own ways’. Some argue that this is against their constitution or the Bible. Others stress pragmatic factors: the risks of members differing and clashing due to their political stance; the attendance of political rallies at the expense of services of worship; the fear of people toyi-toying in the church; time spent on political activism reduces members’ availability and energy to work for the church. Sometimes there is simply no choice for a church leader such as an archbishop who had to bury some comrades during the political struggle. Generally speaking the attitude is one of tolerance and non-encouragement: ‘I fear that when people return from a political gathering they want to run the
church like a political organisation. I would prefer to prevent this but I do not have the power to do it.'

Roughly another quarter of the respondents does not allow members to participate in political parties at all. But even in this group there are those who realise the importance of politics in spite of the risks it implies. They recommend prayer instead of activism and reason that members should exercise their vote, but if they were known to be political activists they would not be able to function as reconcilers. 'Our members should not join parties but they should exert their Christian influence.'

It can therefore be concluded that these Zionists of the Cape Flats are most definitely not apolitical: whether positively or reluctantly, 74 per cent of them accept their members' wish to belong to political parties. Besides, some of those who have a negative attitude in this regard do encourage political involvement of a less visible and active kind.

The new South Africa

'In which ways did the new South Africa change your means and manner of living?' This question tried to gain an impression of how the respondents experience the changed dispensation, the demise of apartheid and their newly won freedom.

Here I cannot indulge in a debate on the validity of the reply by a 75-year-old archbishop: 'If you are a believer, the king who rules does not make any difference.' A few respondents related the question to the churches' position. They could not see much change in the way the Zionist churches are treated. A bishop with a Reconstruction and Development Programme contract to paint a school building is disappointed that, as was the case with the previous government, the indigenous churches cannot be registered officially. Another leader regrets that the sites of worship are not as yet available to Zionists and has the impression that mainstream churches are still favoured in this regard. A third appreciates the freedom to preach on trains and to play drums during open-air worship without being silenced for 'making a noise'.

What are the feelings about the radical changes that are taking place in South Africa? In terms of percentages 57 per cent are positive, 33 are negative while the rest adopt a wait-and-see attitude. The greater freedom of movement, absence of 'whites only' signs, representation in parliament, improvement of
housing and schools, the reduction and official elimination of racial discrimination, creation of jobs, permission to vend on streets, freedom of speech – all these aspects are valued highly. As for the last-mentioned example: one archbishop wrote a letter to the president at the time, Nelson Mandela, requesting him to intervene in the Holomisa issue (a prominent leader who did not toe the party line) 'before ANC blood flows'. More than a quarter specifically mentions that the identity document replaced the notorious *dompas* ('pass book'). To many this was the symbol of harassment, restriction, discrimination and disregard of human dignity. Being issued with an identity document is to them an indication of their freedom.

The changes in the country have, according to some, brought about a degree of reconciliation between black and white people, workers and managers and even between mainstream and indigenous churches. Other Zionist leaders appreciate the fact that wives and children can now legally live in Cape Town with their husbands and fathers. 'They are no longer given only five days to visit. We are now together.' 'Our children are spared many things due to the improved conditions.' With high expectations one respondent showed me a document of the Ndabeni Land Redistribution Committee, which seeks compensation for people evicted from Ndabeni (see chapter 3). His family was removed from this township in the 1930s.

The reverse side of the coin is that close to a third of the respondents are negative or sceptical about the new South Africa. While having a high opinion of some aspects of the new dispensation, one says: 'I have not seen changes. I have rather seen bad things happen. It is not easy in the new South Africa.' Another adds: 'I don't want to tell a lie. We see freedom there, far away, it has not yet arrived at us.' Seventeen per cent of the total bemoans the mistrust and lack of toleration, which lead to taxi wars and other forms of violence. It is strange that nobody mentioned crime – or is this no exceptional part of hard township life in any case?

In summary: although the Zionist church leaders of the Cape Flats appreciate the elimination of discrimination and the greater degree of freedom they enjoy, there is a strong feeling of ambivalence, yet also expectation, about the new South Africa. Perhaps the response of a 49-year-old archbishop who can only find part-time employment, mostly collecting litter, well summarises current attitudes: 'I don't see any liberation. When you release a hen of which the legs were tied by a rope, it sometimes does not even notice that it has been set free. This is how I feel.'
Gender matters

Has the Christian faith in the experience of the Zionists – both female and male – noticeably improved the manner in which husbands treat their wives? To get an idea of this aspect the respondents were asked in which ways women are treated differently among Zionists than they are among unbelievers. It should be taken into account that both women and men were deeply steeped in a tradition that can be described as that of a ‘male-dominated society’.

All the respondents agree that in their perceptions the treatment has improved and 44 per cent of the men explicitly ascribe this development to the Christian faith. ‘The Bible guides us to mutual respect.’ Scriptural references such as 1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5:22–3 and 1 Peter 3:7 are
quoted in this regard, the words that husbands should treat their wives ‘as the weaker vessels with respect’ being the leading response.

According to Zionist men, their own attitude is contrasted with that of unbelieving men whose attitude is much more assertive, critical and unloving. This attitude is reflected in speech: Zionists’ ‘soft talk’ differs from their counterparts’ rude, rough and vulgar language. Unbelievers call their wives *mfazindini* by which they insist on obedience or the more formal *nkosikazi* as opposed to the Zionists who address them with a much more affectionate name, *mama*. Zionists ask their wives’ opinion on everyday issues.

Beyond attitudes and talk, Zionists’ perception is that their behaviour is much more agreeable compared to that of unbelievers. Female respondents agree with males that the unbelievers tend to fight when they have been drinking and resort to force; they have the right to take sticks and beat their wives – according to the [traditional] Xhosa manner [*ngokwesiXhosa*]. A Zionist does not do this. As for sexuality, Zionists know how to control their desires and even have times of abstinence: ‘They will sleep together as a couple according to mutual agreement and not only whenever the male desires to’; ‘Before Easter we have twenty days of abstinence, including not sleeping together.’

A quarter of the respondents mention that with them, in contrast with unbelievers, the husband takes an active part in domestic and other chores: ‘We are not the same. We help with everyday practical things in the house such as making tea and so forth. They follow the law of the flesh [*umthetho wenyama*] and wait until the woman serves them.’ If a woman is busy with needlework the Zionist husband will attend to a crying child. He will pay attention to the cooking and ironing if his wife is tired. ‘Our women are highly respected. They are vulnerable and need to be treated with consideration. We help them with their burdens, such as their parcels and their frustrations.’ Money matters are also dissimilar. A fifth of the respondents mention that their income is shared: ‘When I receive my pension and she her char money, we sit down and decide how to spend it.’

In their own view much has therefore changed in terms of how Zionists treat their wives compared to the ways of unbelievers. Yet, the Zionists do not have romanticised ideas in this regard. Their experience of real life with their peers, both fellow Zionists and those that adhere to traditional Xhosa religion, keeps them realistic. A quarter of the respondents realises that people of both groups differ as far as the treatment of wives is concerned. A female respondent says:
'Some Zionists do treat their wives well, others do not' and a male adds another dimension: 'Some unbelievers treat their wives well, some archbishops do not!'

Given this realism, there is reason to conclude that, according to the respondents, Zionist men generally treat their wives in a more tolerant and accommodating manner than their unbelieving counterparts. Their marriages have been lifted to a higher plane. Their Christian ethics – and most likely modern city life – have changed their behavioural patterns as far as their spouses are concerned. A middle-aged bishop summarises the situation: 'Some Zionists also beat their wives. But we remember that here in the house the mother is the father’s blanket [umama uyingubo katata endlwini]. The treatment of their wives will depend on how obedient men are to biblical teachings.'

Involvement in community affairs

If close to three quarters of the respondents, whether positive or merely tolerant, accept the fact that their members join political parties, one could expect more or less the same result when inquiring about their involvement in community affairs. Do their responses regarding such participation confirm the expectation?

With only two exceptions, all the respondents allow their members to belong to street committees – perhaps the most basic form of democracy in the townships. Large areas such as Khayelitsha are controlled by these committees who even track down thieves and other evildoers and get even with them. A few of the Zionist leaders serve as elected members of such committees. The general attitude seems to be 'when a person lives in a certain place he must live peacefully with others'. The believer has a role to play in his community: 'A Christian should be neutral and able to reconcile differences.' Some respondents have mild reservations such as that community involvement must not interfere with church activities or time. An archbishop only participates when the discussions are constructive and, furthermore, simply keeps quiet.

Practically all respondents permit their members to belong to burial societies. In a few cases the church or a church society fulfils this function. Ninety-six per cent allow members to belong to health organisations (e.g. Red Cross, societies for the handicapped). A bishop explains that 'this does not clash with our way of healing'. Then follows partaking in civics (90%) such as the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) and the Western Cape United Squatters Association. A respondent feels a responsibility in this field: 'In most cases the civics are formed by non-Christians who underestimate church
matters.' Another gives an example of his critical involvement: 'I refused to contribute R10 towards buying a gun to defend our neighbourhood against the people of another section.' This comment goes hand in hand with that of a bishop who does not associate with civics at all: 'SANCO can lead one to violence.' An archbishop adds: 'I attended a funeral at which the civics with their ANC box [coffin] were so intrusive that the whole family of the deceased left!'

The significance of kinship ties in Xhosa society has already been noted. It is therefore worthwhile to ascertain whether the influence of clan membership is maintained in the ever-changing urban milieu of the Cape Flats. This does to a certain degree seem to be the case, as 80 per cent of the respondents state that their members do belong to clan societies (members of certain clans which form organisations to further their interests in the city). The motivations for belonging differ: 'You should not leave your family because you are a Christian. You have a role to play there'; 'I like to keep in touch with my family'. From the responses it is evident that the following activities are part of the societies' functions: the collection of funds for the transportation of corpses, funerals, a kind of stokvel (monthly contributions divided at the end of the year), and the performance of customs such as circumcision.

Some who are involved in clan societies do have reservations: 'I distance myself if they use the traditional kind of circumcision. This should be a Christian occasion', and 'We must be careful not to discriminate against non-clan members in the church.' Voices against partaking in clan societies include statements such as 'We do not have tribalism in our church', and 'These societies have passed away, democracy has now set in.'

Participation in sport clubs is less frequent, although still considerably high (72 per cent). Such involvement provides the opportunity to preach, witness and to draw outsiders to the church. One bishop does allow the youth to exercise their sport but 'they must be aware that they can lower their dignity, for instance, a preacher who plays football'. A negative respondent is unhappy that sport 'disturbs church activities and gives the young men a place where they meet the girls'.

Enough has been brought to the fore to conclude that the majority of members of the 50 churches under consideration are intensively involved in community matters and thereby contribute to civil society in the townships. This applies both to issues to which they have been exposed for a long time (such as their clan membership and burial societies) as well as more recent urban phenomena (civics, street committees and sport clubs). The great majority are not
strangers to the ways of the world. On the contrary, even more than in the
sphere of political parties, which is seen as a national issue, it is at the grassroots
level that their participation, and thus also their influence, is highly pertinent.

In this manner the Zionists of the Cape Flats have made easier for tens of
thousands of members the difficult passage from a rural existence and
orientation to a modern urban situation.

Conclusion

In this chapter some of the most striking features of the face of Zion in the
Cape Flats have been described. The Zionists have a notable presence within
the townships; they are part of many networks of human interaction, both on
the ecclesiastical and societal levels. Their unique manner of organising
themselves and of practising and verbalising their faith attracts large
numbers of people, mostly relatively poor and disadvantaged. Whatever
else can be said of the Zionists, their religion inspires them to cope with the
harsh facts of life; it provides a means of living in an unfriendly reality – an
existence motivated and supported by Christian hope.

Commenting on the sociological explanation of the growth of South African
AICs generally, Hendricks has emphasised their success at the level of
primary socialisation:

[People] move to a church that is small-group oriented where their basic
needs can be met. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that Christianity
prospers when functioning well at grassroots level. A church leadership
which lives with its people at grassroots level, addresses their needs,
helps them to face and deal with realities confronting them, despite
tough measures and difficult decisions, thrives (Hendriks 1999:89).

This description clearly fits the Zionists of the Cape Flats.

Note

1 The traditional socio-cultural context of this study is predominantly that of Southern Nguni
societies, where an exceptionally high degree of linguistic and general cultural uniformity
prevails. The value of data on clanship is that, although not conclusive, it provides an indication
of the cultural orientation of respondents. The use of clan names also offers a useful alternative
to pertinent questions about ethnicity and tribal identity that may offend some respondents.
The survey data further lends tentative support to the assumption that magico-religious beliefs
and practices encountered during the research are either rooted in Southern Nguni worldview
or in mainstream Zionist tradition. Data on clanship therefore serve as a provisional point of
reference when investigating the degree of synthesis between general Zionist and specifically
Southern Nguni worldviews achieved among Cape Flats Zionists.
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<th>Years of Bible training</th>
<th>Current employment</th>
<th>Number of previous churches</th>
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<td>Self-Bhetesda Apostolic Church in Zion of SA</td>
<td>Cape Town*</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>worship service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Congregational Apostolic Church in Zion of SA</td>
<td>Transkei</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Church of God Sabata</td>
<td>Cape Town*</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apostolic Faith Mission – the Voice of Zion</td>
<td>Pretoria</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1 000</td>
<td>preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Church of Christ</td>
<td>Cape Town*</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>preaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates a place in the Cape Flats.

** Where respondents mention more than one method, the predominant one is listed.