

THE SPIRIT IN ZION

The terms for 'salvation' in many languages are derived from roots ... which all designate health, the opposite of disintegration and disruption. Salvation is healing in the ultimate sense

– Paul Tillich

If the face of Zion has many forms, the manifestations of the spirit in Zion are even more diverse and fluid, less clear and therefore more difficult to research. Here one moves into the field of the supernatural, where phenomena are not directly observable by the senses, and cannot be explained and controlled by physical tests. One cannot see, hear, smell, taste or touch that which is transcendent, or prove it to someone who does not believe in it. In other words, transcendent reality does not lend itself to scientific verification.

How does one then gain access to these phenomena seemingly without reality but which are nevertheless manifested in reality? Joining the angels, themselves 'ministering spirits' (Hebrews 1:14), this is a terrain where one should fear to tread.

Sam Keen (1994:53–54) sounds an appropriate warning: 'Spirit is the universal solvent that cannot be contained in any social or psychic structure ... authentic language about spiritual experience of the world is necessarily highly imaginative, poetic, and inexact. In speaking about spiritual matters, we are always beating around the bush, albeit a burning bush.'

The complex theme, *the spirit in Zion*, can be developed along many avenues. The approach I have chosen is to reflect briefly on the concept *spirituality* as it presents a useful tool to gain insight into, and to describe, the theme. I also comment on related concepts such as *worldview* and *ethos* before examining the chosen theme in depth.

In the classical sense, pneumatology is the theological discipline concerned with the Holy Spirit. As used here, spirituality is closely connected to, and even embraces, pneumatology. It is simply not possible to study the spirit in Zion without including Zionists' understanding of the Holy Spirit, in theological jargon, their pneumatology, which is indigenous to Africa. Zionist churches' favoured reference to themselves as 'churches of the Spirit' underlines the point.

Spirituality in this context includes, but also goes beyond, that aspect of the word which was emphasised for long periods of church history: piety, devotion to God. For centuries, reference to spirituality or piety was practically a synonym for inwardness or for forms of mysticism and asceticism. Furthermore, the practice of a personal, mostly inward communion with God was usually separated from ethics, as opposed to the New Testament, where, I presume, spiritual life includes the entire conduct of life.

Dirkie Smit (1989) provides valuable guidelines on the methodology of describing spirituality. I now use his ideas in an attempt to unravel the complex phenomenon which spirituality presents. He notes that the word '*spirituality*', used in a non-technical sense, became quite popular during the last few decades. Different elements of spirituality have been distinguished and emphasised. In the study of spirituality there has been a shift away from traditional understanding, namely that of personal inner piety, which, in the final instance is not accessible to others for observation, description and evaluation. It is, however, much more possible, though still very difficult, to investigate spirituality viewed as the manner in which the Christian way of living is given form and becomes visible in a particular Christian community. Spirituality is thus seen as communion with God and the living up to this relationship in everyday life (Smit 1989:85-86).

The very fact that spirituality takes shape within a certain Christian community implies that within the Christian tradition there is a variety of forms of spirituality. Moreover, this means that a certain tradition's spirituality can never be placed on an equal footing with what is supposed to be the only Christian, normative, biblical or whatever kind of spirituality (Smit 1989:88). This suggests that there is no normative spirituality that sets the standard against which different forms of spirituality should be measured.

Smit poses certain presuppositions regarding the approach to describe spirituality. In the first place, spirituality is a universal phenomenon that is not significant only within the Christian religion. Different forms of spirituality exist in different religions far beyond the bounds of Christianity.

Another presupposition is that each type of spirituality should be seen against the backdrop of the socio-historical circumstances from which it arises and in which it flourishes, the *worldview* with which it coheres, and the *ethos* with which it is coupled (Smit 1989:91). In this regard the so-called non-theological factors are important. While I have already paid attention to the socio-historical milieu of the Zionists in the Cape Flats, the relationship between spirituality, worldview and ethos will also have to be explored.

Specifically for the African context, a useful description of spirituality is that of Gordon Wakefield who sees it as 'those attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate peoples' lives and help them to reach out toward the super-sensible realities' (quoted by Kalilombe 1994:115). When attempting to understand African spirituality, the role of the ancestors – as part of the 'super-sensible realities' – should be a key issue (Skhakhane 1995:47). Siphon Mtetwa, who complains that African spirituality was marginalised by missionaries, agrees with this view but also emphasises that this spirituality should be placed within the context of modernity (Mtetwa 1996:21).

Luke Pato has affirmed that, despite a diversity in detail, traditional 'Africa has a distinctive worldview, a cultural ethos, a spirituality, which is not necessarily better, or superior, or for that matter inferior to those of other people' (Pato 1997:53). Indeed, spirituality is a basic dimension, not only of traditional African religion, but also of black mainline churches and of AICs.

How the three entities mentioned by both Smit and Pato – worldview, ethos and spirituality – relate to one another, requires further attention. Spirituality is based on a worldview, it is a factor operating in such a worldview which, in the case of Africa, has been described as 'African maps of the transcendent world' (Walls 1996:191). Keen has portrayed a worldview as a handle 'that allows us to grasp and manipulate the baffling complexity of our world'. While no worldview can finally be verified or falsified, it does satisfy, or fails to satisfy the minimum requirements of reason (Keen 1994:99). Moreover, according to David Chidester, a worldview is not simply a way of seeing, or a way of thinking – it is 'a multidimensional network of strategies for negotiating person and place in a world of discourse, practice, and

association'. He stresses the changing nature of worldviews: worldviews are processes, not things, 'open-ended processes of negotiation and renegotiation – changing, in flux, in transition – with no closed, permanent, substantial essences' (Chidester 1989:16, 20). In this regard I conclude that a plurality of worldviews exists in South Africa.

An example of the changing nature of worldviews is appropriate. Referring to the former rural Transkei, Jacques de Wet traces the development and disintegration of the worldview of what he calls the Abantu Babomvu or Red People as opposed to the Abantu Basesikolweni or School People. (In the present study the former are referred to as Xhosa traditionalists. The regular forms that refer to the two groups are *abantu ababomvu* and *abantu besikolo*). The latter responded in a different way from the former to Western Christian civilisation with the expansionism of white colonialism (De Wet 1994:139). De Wet arrives at the following conclusion that has a direct bearing on the discussion that follows:

The rise, adjustment and decline of the Babomvu worldview . . . and the attraction of a Zionist-Apostolic type worldview can be interpreted as the renegotiation of identity, triggered by changes in the socio-cultural experience of its adherents. The changes were brought about primarily by the increasing presence of Western values and symbols in indigenous socio-cultural experience (p. 154).

However, it should be noted that due to this westernisation the dichotomy between the Red and School People is increasingly becoming more difficult to sustain: 'Both have given way to a secular, urban influence, and the old School folk-culture has more or less disappeared' (McAllister 1991:131). Despite this development the Zionists of the Cape Flats are still quite aware of the differentiation.

With reference to the larger African context, Kwame Appiah (1992:118) refutes the idea that the traditional worldview is not reasonable:

The evidence that spirits exist is obvious: priests go into trance, people get better after the application of spiritual remedies, people die regularly from the action of inimical spirits. The reinterpretation of this evidence, in terms of medical-scientific theories or of psychology, requires that there be such alternative theories and that people have some reason to believe in them; but again and again, and especially in the area of mental and social life, the traditional view is likely to be confirmed. We have theories

explaining some of this, the theory of suggestion and suggestibility, for example, and if we were to persuade traditional thinkers of these theories, they might become skeptical of the theories held in their own culture. But we cannot *begin* by asking them to assume their beliefs are false, for they can always make numerous moves in reasonable defence of their beliefs. It is this fact that entitles us to oppose the thesis that traditional beliefs are simply unreasonable.

In the Introduction I described the ethos of a people as their moral values, ideas or beliefs. One could add the unwritten rules by which a group ought to live. Ethos has thus suitably been interpreted as 'the underlying, taken-for-granted patterns of moral behaviour' (quoted by Robinson 1990:157). Clifford Geertz (1975:129, 131) has drawn attention to the tendency to synthesise worldview and ethos: 'It is only common sense because between ethos and world view, between the approved style of living and the assumed structure of reality, there is conceived to be a simple and fundamental congruence such that they complete one another and lend one another meaning . . . [A people's] ethos is distinctive not merely in terms of the sort of nobility it celebrates, but also in terms of the sort of baseness it condemns'. Smit's reminder (1989:91) that a people's ethos is coupled to their spirituality should be taken into account here.

Robert Schreier (1985:24) advances the theological view that a certain spirituality is created among believers by the movement of the Holy Spirit and by the power of the Gospel in a community: 'That spirituality, lived out over a period of time, provides in itself a kind of history or heritage, which helps to orient the community, like the ancient Israelites, to make its decisions in the current situation'.

Turning now to an investigation of the spirit in Zion, it should be noted that much anthropological, theological and specifically missiological reflection has been done on issues related to this theme. The final chapter deals with some of these invaluable contributions, which include the general situation in mainstream churches. The scope is limited to mainly an interaction with selected literature on South African urban Zionists. Although the focus of this book is not on the mainstream churches, they and the Zionists, together with other churches of the Spirit, will continually be compared in the discussion. This is done in an attempt to enhance an ecumenical approach – which is essential to the missiological framework of the whole book.

As described in chapter 2, the Grounded Theory Approach, which, as in the case of the present study, does not necessarily lead to a particular theory, was used as a guideline for the investigation of the spirit in Zion that follows. I trust that the value of this approach will be evident from the results presented. Six concepts have emerged from the data: Zion, life, threats to life, countermeasures, animation, and conversion. In the *analysis* section of each concept discussed I systematise the data while remaining close to what is said by the respondents themselves. A selection of their responses is given in English. In the *interpretation* I provide meaning to the concepts by, among other things, discussing them within their context and by bringing relevant literature into the argument. In each case I then present a *résumé*.

Zion

Analysis

This section is guided by a few questions.

- What is the Zion phenomenon in the perception of the Zionists themselves?

Zion is there where God is present, where He lives, his holy homestead (*unzi*). It is a place to meet him, where He is worshipped (*uyanqulwa*) and served (*uyakonzwa*), hence it is a religious service or denomination (*inkonzo*).

Historically Zion was established by David as depicted in the Old Testament and eventually brought to South Africa from America.

Zion is the church of God in which He pours out (*uyathulula*) his Holy Spirit: 'I found the Zionist church to be a church that is guided and led by the Holy Spirit, a church that uses the Spirit [*esebenzisa uMoya*], that prays for and baptises people. The central issue of Zionism is the Spirit of God. When you are in the Spirit, Christ is above all.' Zion is, furthermore, a healing church (*inkonzo ephilisayo*), a refuge (*ihlathi*: forest; *igwiba*: sheltered corner).

Together with the churches of the law (*iicawe zomthetho*), mainstream and Ethiopian, Zion is part of Christianity. Here a basic Christian credo can be heard:

Although we have never seen Christ with our eyes, we do see Christ's signs – when I encounter problems I pray in faith and I get solutions in my prayers. Whatever difficulty I have I direct to God, to Christ and to the Holy Spirit. But I do not see them with my eyes of flesh; I see them with my spiritual eyes.

- How do outsiders perceive Zion?

It is not treated on a par with mainline churches: 'People like to look down upon Zionists as if they do not reveal the Bible, merely like to dance in circles and do all kinds of strange things.'

- Which people are to be found in Zion?

'You are not a Zionist because you worship in a certain way and wear a white robe. You are a Zionist because you believe in Jesus.' Zionists are believers (*amakholwa*), people with faith (*ukholo*) in their hearts similar to believers of other denominations, churches of the law, including Ethiopians. 'Xhosa-speaking people prefer to use the word "believer" to "Christian".'

Zionists are also people of a certain social standing: 'Zion is the church of the people who are illiterate, people who are poor and of a low rank, people who are struggling, the church of those who are shunned as inferior. A Zionist takes a plastic bag and puts his uniform in it as we have no money for briefcases.' Zion is indeed a 'church of the poor' (*inkonzo yamahlwempu*). Yet, in spite of their own position, Zionists are altruistic toward the needy:

We give them whatever we have. As believers we say that we are pain-sharers (*singamabelana ngentlungu*), one needs to help someone who is in pain. There are words that say, 'If you have fed someone who is hungry, if you have clothed someone, you will go to the house of the Lord in peace.' I think that we live with this saying.

Also diviners and people who are going through the process of becoming diviners (*ukuthwasa*) are found in Zion.

- What distinguishes Zion from other churches?

Zion offers worship in the right manner and heals through prayer.

When you come to Zion you will find the Word of God and his Spirit at work. When there are people who are in pain or ill, I open the Bible and

find something that is related to the situation of the people for whom we have come to pray. Zion thus reveals, it teaches.

This 'revealing' (*ukutyhila*) 'whatever the Spirit shows a person' is not permitted in mainline churches:

Here in Zion it is permitted that if I see something in someone that could injure her and of which she is unaware, I am free to stop the service and ask to purify whatever I see. You explain the matter [*uyachaza*] and then we pray together that the person will see what the matter is, even if it is something bad. For instance, if I see through the Holy Spirit of God that you will have or already have a difficulty, the problem will there and then be disclosed to me [*ndityhilelwe lo nto*]. Zionist churches work in this way, but the mainline churches, although they do have the Spirit of God, have confidence in prayer alone.

Therefore prophets function in Zion: 'In Zion you will find prophets which you will never find in other churches.'

As for external features: baptism done by way of immersion (and not by 'a cross on the forehead' as some churches do); long, white attire (*ingubo*; *isambatho*); liturgical intercession for illness, problems of life and the disabled (in a wide sense). Women are allowed to preach the Word of God.

- Within which context does Zion exist?

Among people of a low social standing, in urban areas (as seen from examples of problems given) that do not exclude rural interaction; and a context in which strong links with traditional Xhosa culture is maintained (examples: introduction to a church by dreams; communication with ancestors; practices seemingly similar to those of diviners; identifiable attire; purification).

- Which results flow from Zion?

Zion gives support for this life and hope for the next.

Zion provides a religious home and some material assistance for people of a low socio-economic standing. It purifies (*iyahlamba*) and changes a person: 'Zionists' teachings can change a person from bad behaviour to a person who devotes himself to God and allows God to use him.' Zion furthermore heals people and gives hope for eternal life: 'Zionist churches give us hope that when we die we will have everlasting life (*ubomi*

obungunaphakade). There is a difference between a believer and a non-believer: We know that we will die, but when we die we will enjoy a Christian life (*sodla ubomi bobuKrestu*), which one who dies as a non-believer will not have'. Former diviners are, furthermore, accommodated in Zion.

Interpretation

Zion considered

Respondents trace the origin of Zion to the Old Testament and in particular to David. Although Zion is mentioned no fewer than 121 times in this Testament and five times in the New Testament, their reference to it in the biblical context is somewhat vague. Zion's introduction to South Africa from the United States of America is gratefully acknowledged but details are not known or considered to be important. Although this also applies to the historical link with Pentecostalism, the preponderant emphasis on the Holy Spirit of this world-wide Christian movement is shared by Zion – albeit within an African and specifically Xhosa worldview.

The paramount importance of the *umzi*, the homestead, in the existence of the traditional Xhosa has been noted:

Ancestor religion and the worldview of the relatively close-knit, face to face communities revolved round the *umzi* or homestead. The *umzi* is the pivot of religious life and the continual establishing of the *umzi* in successive generations is of vital importance to religious continuity. The practice of ancestor religion revolved round the *umzi*. Sacred space within the confines of the *umzi* marked the presence of the ancestor shades (De Wet 1994:146).

A significant religious change has taken place in the lives of Zionists: whereas the *umzi*, where the head of the household and his family lived and where the ancestors were buried, was once the centre of religious orientation, it is now Zion, there where God lives, his 'holy homestead'. It is here in another sacred space – Zion – that God is worshipped, where He is served.

However, *umzi* can also have the meaning of an assemblage of houses, a town or a city (Pahl 1989:657). Hence the name given to a church of the Cape Flats, IZion Umzi kaThixo ('Zion City of God'), perhaps represents the

meaning of Zion better than any other does. This interpretation concurs with the conclusion arrived at when I discussed the profile of Zionists of the Cape Flats. The Zionists use the concept in figurative sense: Zion, established by God, is the holy place where He is worshipped (cf. chapter 4, 'The essence of Zion').

Zion is seen and experienced as a refuge, a place giving shelter from or protection against trouble, danger or pursuit. The traditional Xhosa hiding place in times of strife and war – the forest – is an apt example. This place of refuge is, however, not understood merely in terms of natural threats. The importance of healing (*ukuphilisa*) is stressed in this regard: 'Zion is a healing church.'

Zionists' indication of what Zion is, is therefore expressed symbolically and metaphorically and is applied to their reality with its spiritual and physical dimensions. As a religious metaphor it helps them to understand the meaning of their lives and of the world in which they live. Since no other comprehensive description of the essence of Zion emerges from the data, and taking the discussion in the previous chapter into account, I conclude that the concept *Zion as refuge* denotes the dominant metaphor of the Zionist faith.

Zion elsewhere

Do these ideas of what Zionists say about Zion agree with the findings of researchers who have reported on Zionists in other South African environments?

First of all, I have the same finding as Jean Comaroff (1985) who reports that she never encountered a single Zionist adherent, leader or follower, 'who was able to offer an explicit account of the history or theological charter of the movement' (p. 199). It should be noted that virtually no researcher has specifically reported on precisely what the Zionists whom he or she has studied view as the meaning of the concept *Zion*.

There are two exceptions. The first is based on interviews with two Zionist bishops in the Cape Town area. Zion is understood here as the two stone tablets on which God inscribed the Ten Commandments and which are contained in the Ark of the Covenant. This interpretation proceeds to the New Testament where Zion refers to Jesus 'who is the 'one who brings the good message' (Van Zyl 1996:226-228).

The second exception is Bengt Sundkler, the major pioneer of the study of black indigenous churches in South Africa. His impressive and authoritative research and fieldwork was done toward the middle of the twentieth century and conducted among Zulu and Swazi Zionists, both part of the Nguni group to which the Xhosa also belong.

This author makes a distinction between Zion in a specific and in an all-embracing sense: 'The former refers to churches which in some way regard themselves as genealogically related to Zion City, Ill., and to "John Alexander [Dowie], First Apostle". Very often, however, the term is used in a wider sense, for churches which emphasize their guidance of uMoya, the Spirit, and healing as central concerns' (Sundkler 1976:68; cf.92). The last mentioned includes the apostolic churches.

Sundkler, quite aware of the difference between city-orientated and rurally based churches, sees Zion as a new Christian settlement or community: 'For Zion was to stand, not only for lively worship and colourful garments, but also for the Utopia of a place of their own. They were to seek that city' (Sundkler 1976:28, 317; 93; cf. Kiernan 1990:148-149). He also emphasises *Mount Zion*: 'Ordinary Zionist preachers discover anew the Holy Mountain in their Bible. They know that the holy words refer to them and to their church. "Remember ... this mount Zion wherein thou hast dwelt" (Ps 74:2), (Sundkler 1976:314).

Finally, Sundkler also relates the concept of Zion to the for Zionists poignant *political and racial* aspects: 'A sacred place, a Zion, as in the Old Testament – this was what they were longing for, in the land of the Whites where they no longer had any right to possess land' (p. 315). In his previous work he likewise discusses 'The reversed colour-bar in heaven' and 'The Separatist Church in the age of apartheid' (Sundkler 1961:290-291; 302-310).

In considering Sundkler's views on the meaning of Zion I am struck by at least four major differences – besides the similarities – between his interpretation and that which can be given from the data on the Cape Flats Zionists. In the case of the Zionists the Apostolic churches, such as the large St John's Apostolic Faith Mission Church, will not be included in the category of Zion; there is no question of establishing separate, fairly large and relatively isolated Christian settlements in rural parts of the country; a connection between Zion and racial, political and economic dispossession is scarcely expressed; in contrast to the situation in rural KwaZulu-Natal, and in

spite of the surrounding mountains, visible from the Cape Flats, the concept of Mount Zion is usually limited to the biblical vision. Could this be the case since the spectacular Stellenbosch–Hottentots Holland–Table Mountain chain all belong to the world of the privileged? Admittedly, the expressions *siya entabeni* ('we are going to the mountain') or *sinyuk' intaba* ('we ascend the mountain') are used when individuals or groups do occasionally worship on a mountain or a hill. Respondents are aware that 'the older Zionists', that is, those of days gone by regularly worshipped on mountains. Today the two expressions above commonly mean: we are going to a (Zionist) service.

Very few of the respondents are aware that South African Zionism has its historical roots in the Pentecostal missionaries who arrived at the turn of the twentieth century from Mount Zion to the north of Detroit from where the modern use of the name is derived. As regards global perspectives on the Pentecostal movement after it had existed for a century, Allan Anderson has described Zion in a way that fully agrees with the view of the Zionists of the Cape Flats: 'The concept of Zion, the new Jerusalem, the holy place that is not in some far off foreign land at some distant time in the past, but is present here and now, is a prominent theme' (Anderson & Hollenweger 1999:216).

Zionists and other churches

Returning to the Cape Flats Zionists: Zion is conspicuously referred to as an *inkonzo* ('a religious service') or *inkonzo yoMoya* ('a church of the Spirit') and not as an *icaawe yomthetho* ('church of the law') as, among others, the mainstream and Ethiopian churches are designated by Zionists. The churches of the law are those perceived to be recognised by the government – recognition which the Zionists and other indigenous churches sought in vain for many decades (cf. Claasen 1995:15–34; Sundkler 1976:287). Zionist churches do recognise an affinity with non-Zionist churches of the Spirit, which are numerous in the townships of Cape Town.

Zionists are aware of their ambivalent relationship with the mainstream and Ethiopian-type churches. On the one hand, they are conscious that they have a common faith with these churches; all are *amakholwa* ('believers'), a Xhosa word used universally for Christians, people who have put their trust in Christ. The idiomatic sense of the word implies 'that the faith of the individual is produced in his mind by the trustworthiness, excellency and all sufficiency of Him towards whom the faith is exercised' (Kropf 1915:190).

Zion shares with other believers a common hope for life beyond the grave. Together they will live an eternal life with Christ (*sodla ubomi bobuKrestu*). Zionists therefore readily agree that together with other Christians they form part of Christianity. The striking Trinitarian credo quoted above bears witness to this.

On the other hand, Zionists are aware that they are unique among Christians and that they have exceptional attractions. They make provision for the fulfilment of religious needs for which other churches usually do not cater.

First, *worship* in the 'right way', in a manner that is believed to be according to the Bible. The word *ukunqula* is used which denotes either calling on the departed ancestors as well as worshiping God or praying to him and calling upon his blessings. The second factor is *ukuphilisa*, to restore to health, to cure, to heal. This goes hand in hand with *prophetism* of a type that differs decidedly from the biblical concept in which a combination of proclamation and prediction, besides the use of symbols and intercession, was the main feature (Douglas 1992:975). The Zionist prophet primarily has a diagnostic and healing function – in this regard the key concept is *ukutyhila*, revelation, which, among other things, means to reveal a secret, expose a plot, explain something clearly that was not understood (Pahl 1989:455). Another matter is a form of baptism that is dissimilar from that of most mainstream churches. The 'cross on the forehead' in mainstream churches is in striking contrast to the rich symbolic and purificatory significance of the Zionist ritual. Intercession in Zion liturgy is done in an emotive, elaborate and participatory manner while the intercessors pray for those troubled with the problems of life. Finally, there is the attire – here in the city the special clothing is clearly a mark of recognition, of identity. This mark reminds one of the ochre (or light blue in the case of the Pondo) blanket which, on a massive scale, was for decades the sign of traditionalists in rural Xhosa-speaking areas.

Zionists are thus keenly aware of their otherness in terms of the broad diversity of Christian churches. They are also alert to the fact that they are stigmatised and held in contempt by some outsiders as well as the reasons for this discrimination. Some of these reasons touch the very heart of Zion's uniqueness: the rejection of the manner in which they understand revelation is an implicit invalidation of their vital practice of prophetism; the rebuke of their dancing in circles and the use of the drum implies their closeness to

traditional proceedings; the 'strange things' they do suggest deviation from both Christian and so-called civilised modes.

One can appreciate that Zionists have much reason to feel belittled and unaccepted by non-Zionists and that this makes them unhappy. A respondent's wish expresses the general feeling: 'I hope people will treat Zion fairly and equally with the mainstream churches.' This sentiment is in agreement with the situation in the broader South African context. More than a decade ago a prominent Zionist leader stated: 'We are a thorn in the flesh of some mainline churches for various reasons' (Makhubu 1988:3). More recently another spokesperson alluded to the discrimination against and the despising of AICs:

For many years these churches were subjected to abuse by the so-called mainline churches and the powers that be. They were called many derogatory names, so the attitude towards them was very negative. This negativity still prevails . . . Since the inception of the AICs, the non-AIC churches have debased and humiliated the AICs (Ngada 1999:1, 4).

If Zionists have the perception that most non-Zionists regard them with contempt (*indelo*), do they, in turn, hold other Christians in high or low esteem? They are condescending: without arrogance or generally seeking confrontation, and while giving other churches their due, their attitude is one of self-confidence: in their particular context *they* are the churches which the Lord uses pre-eminently as a place where people can feel culturally at home in the manner in which they worship God and in which they find refuge from life's threats. I found no indication that the Zionists of the Cape Flats 'regard themselves as the sole and true heirs of the Christian message' as the Zionists of KwaMashu do (Kiernan 1990:214).

The uniqueness of Zionist compared to mainstream churches, however, is not fully highlighted by the matters just mentioned, which are all identified by respondents themselves. A vital element of this singularity is the unique manner in which Zionism relates to traditional Xhosa culture, as has already been suggested by some of the examples given above. This theme requires further exploration. In this respect I intend to deal in detail with former diviners who have been accepted in Zion, since I regard their position as of significant importance.

Zionists in the modern city

Traditional culture is one vital element of the context within which Zionists of the Cape Flats exist. Their socio-economic position in the modern City of Cape Town is another. Despite their realisation that precisely these factors draw people to them, they are aware of their obviously low social standing, relatively low standard of literacy, their poverty and resultant struggle to improve their quality of life as well as the fact that they are treated as inferior. These perceptions of the Cape Flats Zionists about themselves concur with those of other spokespersons of the indigenous churches in general and the urban Zionists in particular, and also agree with the findings of scholars in the broader South African context regarding both Xhosa-speakers and other ethnic groups (Pauw 1975:303; West 1975:8; Makhubu 1988:99; Kiernan 1990:31–32, 37, 52; Anderson 1992:60–61; Chidester 1992:113, 138; Anderson 1993:136).

Urban Zionists have to cope with the environment of modernity. They live amid the uncertainties of city life, the bustle of the township, the recreational temptations, the risks of public transport and crime, and, in some cases, the limitations and dangers of a shack existence. Yet, it is paradoxically here where Zion in a unique manner provides a 'forest', a refuge from or a shelter against natural and supernatural dangers (as I later elaborately illustrate). Zionists with limited material power are more likely to beseech divine power to help them than those who have other forms of assistance. Yet, within this religious home, Zionists are willing to, and actually do, assist on another materially, despite their own relatively low level of prosperity. In this respect a beautiful and telling expression is used: 'We believers are pain-sharers' [*singamabelana ngentlungu*, literally: dividers of pain among themselves].

Zionists' moral and religious change

The lives of Zionists are changed lives. This does not only apply to their religious orientation. Theirs is a spirituality in which their relationship to God calls for the living up to this relation in ordinary life. Serving God in his 'holy house' has major implications for everyday and eternal life. Besides the purification of the blemish of sin and the healing of all kinds of disorders of life, a certain ethos, a pattern of moral behaviour is induced in Zion as a sign of a life devoted to God.

What does this self-perceived improved moral behaviour imply? I have concluded that Zionists' marriages have been lifted to a higher level (cf. chapter 4). Add to this the fact that their men in particular do not participate in the usual – and in the long run very costly – entertainments of township life and

it becomes clear why Zionists see themselves as people who have a more sober and pure lifestyle than many others among whom they live. The situation should, however, not be romanticised. For example, quite a number of senior leaders leave their wives for younger ones, a practice that elicits strong disapproval. Nevertheless, within the context of the Cape Flats townships the Zionists, together with their counterparts in other South African cities, can be characterised as being 'poor and puritan' (Kiernan 1990:38).

As for life hereafter: though the inevitability of death is accepted as it is in traditional religion, hope for eternal life is alive in Zion. This is novel to the Xhosa way of thinking and a departure from the traditional belief that only certain people become significant ancestors after their death (Pauw 1975:132) and in which eternal life is not an issue.

Zionist identity

Schreier (1985:105; cf. 63 sq) has drawn attention to group boundary as one of the principal components in identity: 'Group boundary gives one of the most basic forms of identification by dividing the world into "us" and "not us". That boundary appears in roles, in status markers, and in the line between publicly discernible behavior and privately held truth. Such markers, of varying strength within a society, form a prime source of identity.'

Jim Kiernan (1990:211–215) has taken the matter a step further by indicating six markers which formed the source of Zionist identity, that is of the Zionists of KwaMashu township near Durban (based on research done in 1968–1970). They were black people who, in common with the great majority of South Africans, were racially stigmatised and who were subjected to a politically subordinate and voiceless position. Ethnically they were predominantly Zulus with a distinctive cultural heritage of their own. Linguistically they spoke the Zulu language. Residentially they had previously been migrants who became permanent urban settlers. In terms of the socio-economic stratum they were regarded by their fellow-urbanites as low-class people. Finally, they designated themselves religiously as being Zionists – this marker subsuming, dominating and taking precedence over all others, acting 'as a mold which reshapes and redesigns the other layers of identity'.

How do these identity markers of the KwaMashu Zionist compare with those of their namesakes of the Cape Flats? Responses to the deceptively simple question posed to respondents, 'What is Zion?', provide texture to the fabric of Zionist identity.

In some cases the marking of the boundaries is virtually similar: in terms of ethnics and linguistics they belong to two large, homogeneous groups of Nguni people, the Zulu and the Xhosa; residentially both can be described as once-migrants-now-settled urban people – though the Cape Flats Zionists stress the strong link with the Xhosa heartland (*emaXhoseni*); their socio-economic status as being low class is alike. The boundaries certainly have shifted as for their political identity: the political climate of the oppressive apartheid era that reigned thirty years ago (when the research was done) and the transformation to democracy since differs drastically. Yet, despite the restoration of their human dignity, the ambivalent attitude of the Cape Flats Zionists to changes in South Africa as described earlier should here be taken into account.

How do the KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape Zionists compare regarding their religious identity? The latter primarily affirm that they are *amakholwa*, Christians or followers of Christ who, despite their differences, share much with non-Zionist believers; the former emphasise their distinctive identity as being 'the sole and true heirs of Christianity' as referred to above. These are, however, distinctions of lesser importance. The dominant issue is that in both cases it can be said that their religious identity is primary and also total: 'It permeates and shapes every aspect of the Zionist's life; there is no situation to which he or she will not react primarily as a Zionist. The Zionist is at all times first and foremost a Zionist and only secondarily a Zulu or a migrant or a worker' (Kiernan 1990:215). In this respect, an underlying pattern of moral conduct, in other words a certain ethos, is taken for granted.

Furthermore, identity – especially a religious element that was chosen voluntarily – is not static, it is continually in the making: 'The acquisition of a religious identity must be seen . . . less as an event or an act than as a dynamic process, in the course of which the identity may wax or wane' (Kiernan 1990:211). It should thus be expected that important steps would be taken by a Zionist group to secure and to strengthen its identity (cf. Kiernan 1990:217–222).

How do the Zionists of the Cape Flats identify themselves, who do they include in their 'us'? The clear markers that come to the fore when comparing them, for example, with their KwaMashu counterparts, are the following: they are poor people of a low social standing, urbanised Xhosas with a strong attachment to rural tradition, politically free, but with an ambivalent attitude to the changing South Africa. Religiously they identify themselves as Christian believers, particularly as part of the churches of the Spirit. The markers which form a

main source of their identity include such publicly distinguishable conduct as the wearing of characteristic attire, unique forms of worship and baptism, improved moral behaviour, and an affinity for traditional Xhosa culture. In addition, these are privately held truths such as that they are believers in Christ, churches of the Spirit with singular forms of prophetism and healing, sharing with other Christians the novelty of hope for eternal life in Christ. Finally, their role in society: because they are held in contempt they ironically draw the marginalised as members and offer them a ministry which advances life in their difficult to endure township environment. Zion thus presents a religious home to people of a low socio-economic rank, it offers a measure of empowerment to otherwise disempowered urbanites.

The following description of the interplay between traditionalism and modernity regarding Zionist identity in South Africa generally, or what de Wet (1994:154) interprets as the 'renegotiation of identity', summarises the position of the Cape Flats Zionists appropriately: The smaller Zionist churches face a new dualism, 'namely the world of the modern industrial centre and the known world with its traditional emphases and orientation. This causes a schizophrenic condition in many blacks from the rural areas – mentally and ethically – but such people receive healing in the Zionist orientated churches' (Oosthuizen 1993:99). This healing takes place, week after week, when believers of all the townships in the Cape Flats come together in hundreds of Zionist temples, 'sheltered corners' in an ever-changing urban milieu.

Ashamed of a name?

A strange aspect that I observed during the research project is the fact that Zionists are not particularly fond of using the name *Zion*. This was confirmed in many interviews and during their services. The question is: Why is this the case?

Can it be that the name is more of a useful tool for the person writing about the Zionists than for the Zionists themselves? This possibility is countered by the fact that so many of these churches use the word in their own names. In the Cape Flats I have counted 194 names which include the words *Zion* or *Zionist*, 53 per cent of the total of all AICs (cf. appendix E), while 88 per cent of the 50 churches of the survey (see chapter 4) also use it. The latter figure approximates the one for South African AICs of which 80 per cent are said to have the word 'Zion' in their church names (Johnson 1994:171).

The fact that with one exception all these churches use a non-vernacular language in their nomenclature, namely English, indicates that they use Zion as identification for public purposes. Here one has to take into account that to use English in the black community is synonymous with being educated. For internal use they prefer to refer to themselves as 'churches of the Spirit' (*inkonzo zoMoya*), thus associating themselves with a wider group of related churches which are not Zionists.

Could this limited use of Zion be due to their feeling of being despised by the mainstream churches, by part of the general community, and even by other churches of the Spirit? In the meantime, they quietly, confidently and successfully heal thousands of township inhabitants each year.

Does the fact that very few Zionists have the means and opportunities to enter the literary world have anything to do with the apparent neglect of their name? Only a minute part of the massive literary output on AICs (see Landman, Pretorius & Rykheer 1997) have been produced by Zionists themselves. This lack of Zionists 'speaking for themselves' could create the false impression that no significant developments in South African Zionism have taken place during the last few decades. Yet, in spite of such efforts at gaining insight as the present one, the more inclusive story of Zion has still to be told by Zionists themselves articulating their perspectives to outsiders, church people, academics and the general public.

Résumé

Zion, the metaphor of God's holy homestead (*umzi kaThixo*), is a sacred space, a new centre of religious orientation: here He is worshipped and served. Hence the Zionists' self-appellation of *inkonzo* ('church', literally: 'service') or 'church of the Spirit' and the disregard of the conventional name 'church' (*icaawe*). Zion is a place of healing and refuge where one finds protection from natural and supernatural threats. Zion is also part of Christianity – all believers (*amakholwa*) of the various Christian denominations have much in common, among others their hope for eternal life.

However, a changed ethos and certain religious practices in Zion present uncommon attractions to outsiders. Here lies the Zionists' strength, but ironically also their weakness in the eyes of their co-religionists in the mainstream churches. Yet, besides the fostering of dignity and self-esteem, Zion offers an unequalled place where people can feel culturally and socially

at home in the way in which they worship God and take refuge from the threats to life. Zionist spirituality therefore makes provision for communion with God in a manner which has a certain way of living as a result. Zion addresses the adherents' spiritual, emotional and physical needs while it provides a measure of moral certainty.

Finally, certain markers form a prime source of Zionists' dynamic identity. While they are clearly distinguishable from non-Zionist churches, the Zionists, in comparison with traditional Xhosa religionists, are changed people. Their mode of healing includes support to cope with the dualism of traditionalism and modernity.

Life

Analysis

When Zionists talk about this theme, three closely related Xhosa concepts of the English word *life* are raised: *impilo*, *intlalo* and *ubomi*: 'To me it looks as if *intlalo* and *impilo* are the same because in the olden days when one asked people about their health, they start talking about their happiness and their condition of living [*intlalo*]. They say: We are living [*sihleli*].'

Condition of life (*intlalo*) includes incidents that one experiences, both good and bad, such as the shooting of a child in his classroom or devastating fires. It is used in connection with conflict, for example a husband-wife quarrel, or dissatisfaction, but also to indicate contentment, happiness and prosperity.

Health (*impilo*) is an indication of someone's current state of health, and what this state makes the person feel like. Health is important and asking about people's health helps one to know what their condition is, whether they feel good or not.

The word *life* is also used in connection with the state in which a specific church finds itself. It can be healthy or not: 'In a healthy church you can find spiritual or bodily health. If there are problems in the church we say it is not healthy [*inkonzo ayiphilanga*].'

There is an alternative way of expressing good health, namely that someone is enjoying life as such (*udla ubomi*). Both Christians and red blanket people explain their health with reference to God (though *uThixo* and *uQamata* are

respectively used): 'I cannot differentiate between the two. The old people never allowed the young to point a finger at the sky because they had respect for God although they did not have his Word.'

'Christian people usually prefer to use the word *life* [*ubomi*] to explain their health.' They have added connotations to the word. The message of the (Xhosa) Bible, which uses both *life* and *health*, leads to a renewed and fuller life: 'When a person meets God or Christ, he is a new being and parts from the way in which he used to live.' 'When you have this life [*usebomini*] you are in a different mode of living in the world. Your condition of life [*intlalo*] changes and you can feel your life's burdens which were painful and full of problems, become light.'

Christians' concept of life, furthermore, includes a future aspect, they have the hope of enjoying eternal life, one could say, personal immortality:

When you have life [*usebomini*], you have Christianity, you have eternal life, something that does not end. Whatever your condition of life [*intlalo*], health [*impilo*] or life [*ubomi*] were like, your end will be death. But when you die as a believer you will arrive at a new life which is not this life on earth. This new life is eternal life.

Life therefore has more than one dimension, reflected in Zionists' use of different Xhosa concepts. Although they have the concepts of *intlalo*, *impilo* and *ubomi* in common with red blanket people, their idea of life – which concurs with that of other Xhosa Christians generally – has changed in two significant respects: they no longer live as they used to live, that is in everyday life; they believe in a future life beyond the grave which will last eternally. This changed idea of life is the result of an encounter with God.

Interpretation

Life circumscribed

The most common Xhosa way of inquiring about a person's wellbeing is to follow up the greeting 'Molo!' with the question '*Usaphila na?*' ('Are you still well?'). A similarly popular alternative is '*Usahleli na?*' ('Are you still living?'). After an answer which could be brief or elaborate, depending on circumstances and the sustained interest of the inquirer, the same or a similar question will be asked to the latter. These questions have a ceremonial-like regularity and are usually not simply acts of courtesy: they echo the deeply seated interest in another person's state of existence as an individual human being. These remarks apply to the

majority of Xhosa-speaking people, to both Christians and the adherents of traditional religion (referred to above as 'red blanket people'). In this regard the Zionists do not differ from their co-religionists or from traditionalists.

A person's wellbeing and happiness (*ukonwaba*) depend on both *impilo* and *intlalo*. The former implies life in a biological sense, good physical health, vigour, but also means sustenance, food and living, in short, general wellbeing. When a person says '*Ndisaphila*' he or she enjoys health, is recovering from sickness or has the means to maintain life (cf. Kropf 1915:333). A medical doctor has shown that *impilo*, a much more comprehensive term in the African context than the plain translation suggests, is a focal concept in Xhosa culture: 'The central value of life to the Xhosa is the vital force [*amandla*] which is manifested in a healthy condition [*impilo*] . . . The possession of this vital power [*amandla*] is crucial for the well-being of the Bomvana' (Jansen 1973:38, 185 – the Bomvana is one of the Xhosa-speaking chiefdoms). *Impilo*, which goes beyond bodily health, is therefore the main precondition for human existence.

For the discussion which follows it is important to note how one's health relates to other people living with and around one. Health is primarily an intensely personal, individual matter. Yet, the experience of health – or the lack of such health – should be understood in terms of the community, it has strong communal significance. Most likely this is especially the case where people, as those of the Cape Flats, live in close proximity to others and that in a limited space (in chapter 4 we noted that Zionist leaders have an average of 6.5 people in their mostly small houses). Under such circumstances dissatisfaction and even conflict are virtually inevitable. In this regard B A Pauw (1975:323) has observed the following: 'In Xhosa tradition unimpaired health is the major proof of one's living in harmony with society . . . Good health, therefore, signifies healthy social relations.' The reference above to a church as a congregation of believers that can be healthy or unhealthy should be understood in this context.

Closely connected to *impilo*, *intlalo* refers to one's staying at a place or, figuratively, one's manner of living, the prevailing conditions within which your life is set (cf. Kropf 1915:152). A person's *intlalo* is affected by social circumstances such as poverty, hard work, evil and other problems (Jonas 1983:98). When the leaders of Zionist churches of the Cape Flats are asked about their life (*intlalo* and *impilo*) in a new South Africa (see chapter 4), they mention issues such as human dignity, freedom of movement and speech,

racial discrimination and representation in parliament, but also vital matters such as housing and schools, employment, street vending and violence. Their stories are full of incidents and conflicts that they experience, some serious, some even tragic. These are indeed the major issues which condition their manner of living, decide their happiness and which to a large extent determine their wellbeing.

The third concept used by Xhosa-speakers to denote life, *ubomi*, complements *impilo* and *intlalo*. The word can be translated with 'strength', 'ripeness', 'happiness', 'prosperity', or simply 'life' (Kropf 1915:315). *Ukudla ubomi*, literally to eat life, is an expression widely heard among Xhosa-speakers. It is generally acknowledged that life is in the hands of the creator God, be He the *ulmanuweli* of the Christians or the *uQamata* of the red blanket people. While the concept of a supreme being was not highly developed in traditional thought, the idea of people appealing to such a being was apparently introduced by Christian missionaries (Hammond-Tooke 1989:46-47, 57-58; cf. Walls 1996:191-192, 196).

Janet Hodgson (1982:104), who has studied the traditional Xhosa concepts of the supreme being, has written the following about the contemporary use of the name *uQamata*: 'Most Xhosa Christians affirm a universal concept of the Creator. In addition, many argue that the *Qamata* whom they have always known is the same as the Christian God. There is a strong move today to replace the name *Thixo*, which is regarded as having been foisted on them by the missionaries, with *Qamata*'.

Currently this 'strong move' to replace *uThixo* with *uQamata* cannot be confirmed as far as the Xhosa-speaking Zionists of the Cape Flats are concerned. On the contrary: without having made a detailed inquiry into this theme, my impression is that the use of *uThixo* among Zionists is as frequent as can be. There is *uQamata*-talk in the townships, but the Zionists do not identify with it and even have a mocking attitude toward this usage and the deliberate recovery of past traditions and customs which are associated with it.

For Christians reference to the supreme being as *uThixo* goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement that life (*ubomi*) has a religious-ethical meaning: it does not only imply a changed way of moral behaviour and provide support to cope with life's problems, but also includes the notion of eternal life. Christianity has obviously introduced these non-traditional connotations. As for the first, I partly agree with Sundkler (1976:197) when he says that, in contrast to the realised eschatology of the second largest indigenous

church in South Africa, the Nazareth Baptist Church, Zionists have a futuristic eschatology: 'To the great majority of these churches, Zion is an object of longing, a projection of hope. Zion is not in Johannesburg, nor in Zululand. It lies far away and high above, in heaven.' Yet, my observations in this respect indicate that the Zion of the Cape Flats' adherents, does not lie 'far away and high above'. The future dimension is not prominent and is merely part of their vision. To them Zion is as close as life itself. Their eschatology thus has a *here-and-now* as well as a *hereafter* dimension.

What about the future dimension of the red blanket people? When discussing the concept of time in the African religions and philosophy John Mbiti (1969:17) insists that people 'have little or no active interest in events that lie in the future beyond'. In spite of this statement, I agree with Chirevo Kwenda (1999:2; cf. Mbiti 1969:26-27) that progress towards ancestorhood – which implies life beyond the grave – offers the possibility of personal immortality, 'that is, self-perpetuation through offspring who carry one's spark or imprint and remember one through ritual enactment'.

Piet Jonas has made the following intriguing suggestion: the distinction between *impilo* as the object of traditional Xhosa religion, and *ubomi* as the goal of the Christian religion, reflects the different roles which each of these two religious systems can have when the Xhosa-speakers evaluate the quality of their lives. After having discussed the meaning of and the relationship between the three terms used for life above, he defines quality of life as the individual's satisfaction with life in general, one which 'depends on the extent to which a culture provides for the satisfaction of needs and expectations' (Jonas 1983:98).

Such then is life that is sought and found in Zion. Together the three terms discussed present an indication of the Zionists' holistic view of life, holistic in the sense of regarding the whole of life and not merely the parts of it.

In drawing this discussion to a close I pose the question: How does life, and in particular the concept *impilo*, relate to Zionists' spirituality? I agree with Mtetwa's assessment: 'IMPILO ... what Nurnberger [*sic*] calls the 'comprehensive well-being' of African humanity, is among the central themes of African Spirituality. It accounts for the primacy of healing and communitarian oneness in the African Indigenous Churches and also accounts for the steady depopulation of the mainline churches' (Mtetwa 1996:23).

Résumé

The common Xhosa manner of greeting reflects the importance of health (*impilo*) and life's circumstances (*intlalo*). While *impilo* is the prime precondition for individual existence, it also indicates healthy social relations, within and beyond the church. *Intlalo*, signifying the conditions under which one is living, is decisive for a person's happiness, contentment and wellbeing. For Christians, including Zionists, a third element of the embracing idea of life (*ubomi*) has religious-ethical content: life is in the hands of God (*uThixo*) who offers to believers the hope of living eternally; in everyday life one has a changed mode of living, while life's painful burdens become lighter and your ethos is transformed to a higher level.

Impilo, *intlalo* and *ubomi*: these three concepts of life found in the responses of Cape Flats Zionists can be distinguished but should not be separated. Taken together, they indicate the Zionists' holistic concept of a life which addresses their needs and expectations, enhanced as it is by the christianised addition to the third notion, *ubomi*. If these needs and expectations could be fulfilled, their life would be one of satisfying wellbeing. Their quest for a life of gratifying quality is one which the Zionists have in common with all people. How they – within the bounds of their spirituality – go about in search of this life is a key issue.

Threats to life

Analysis

A life of satisfactory quality can evidently not be taken for granted. Zionists are aware that several factors militate against the fulfilment of such an ideal.

Zionists mention bad habits and behaviour, such as drinking, smoking and fighting, as factors which endanger the fullness of life. On a more serious level, problems identified by respondents and of which they have experience, for example difficulties with children and other distress, have the same effect. To this can be added physical danger and violence such as the hijacking at gunpoint of one's car.

Misfortune (*ilishwa*) is obviously a peril to life. The suspicion of foul play when misfortune does occur, raises the question of causation, as the following illustrates:

My brother had an accident on his way from home to Cape Town. They were three in a combi. When they were approaching Graaff-Reinet, he was sleeping on a back seat. Suddenly a kudu smashed through a rear window, fell onto the seat on which he was sleeping, stabbed him with a horn and landed on top of him. He died before they arrived at the Graaff-Reinet hospital. What amazed me most was that *he* was the only one who died. I asked myself: why he who was at the back of the combi? What was also strange was that it was a small wound that killed him. But I said to myself: even if it was an unclean spirit (*umoya omdaka*), if God has allowed it, there is nobody who could have changed it.

Different kinds of physical diseases are commonly experienced as endangering life. Invisible threats to life, which have visible manifestations, are a critical and regular concern.

Demons (*iidemoni*) and evil spirits (*imimoya emdaka*), for instance, *umamlambo*, *amafufunyana* and *uthikoloshe*, are mentioned as a source of such peril. Here witchcraft (*ukuthakatha*) comes into play.

The ancestral spirits are apprehended by Zionists as 'people who are troublesome' (*izinyanya zingabantu abanochuku*) and who at times could cause problems in the life of the family and therefore also in that of the individual. They have their way of punishing and can even seize (*ukuthimba*) a person. As for their relation to God, they are created by him and are both inferior and subject to him. Their powers over the living are limited. Some respondents grew up with the practice of the ancestral spirits being invited back home, being greeted or remembered by slaughtering. This went hand in hand with the keeping of the customs and traditions (*amasiko nezithethe*). Other Zionists were more vaguely aware of what 'the old people were doing for the ancestors'. In spite of different childhood experiences, visitations of ancestors through dreams often happen and are sometimes considered to be positive. Yet, such encounters could bring about a clash of loyalty as this case of a female Zionist shows:

I once dreamt about my father-in-law. We were in the house from which we buried him. In the dream he was a real person and he asked me to prepare traditional beer. I was a Zionist at the time. I woke up after the dream and told my husband and he told the members of his family. They said that it was compulsory that I make the beer because their father was a person who was drinking during his life. This gave me a fright. Eventually some of his daughters made the beer – they did not want me to make it.

The ancestors could also entice one to the 'beads', that is, to become a diviner (as I discuss later).

Zionists, furthermore, believe that ritual impurity (*umlaza*) has a negative affect on matters: this for example is the case when a child is born, at a funeral or when a corpse is touched:

According to the Book of Numbers a woman who has recently borne a child is unclean [*unobunqambi*] and not supposed to be amongst Christians or in the temple. Some people who have just become Zionists do not know what to do when they come from the grave to a service. When you as unclean person enter the service forthwith and restrict [*uze unobophe*] the Spirit of God, He then does not work freely among the people. You are not allowed to come closer to a [church] place when you have touched a dead body or something unclean. People usually say that a dead body brings bad luck or misfortune [*ilifu elimnyama*, 'literally a dark cloud'].

Ritual impurity is not limited to women:

Both women and men can be impure, because even in the Bible it is not stated that it is found among women alone or amongst men alone. Both can be impure because they both are made of flesh and blood. A woman in her period is not allowed to deal with [*ukuphatha*] anything in the church. I think that when you have this problem, people take you as someone who is spiritually or in terms of the church defiled [*odyobhekileyo*].

It should be noted that there are some Zionists who do not believe in ritual impurity and who therefore do not view it as a threat to life.

Interpretation

Threats to life in the traditional worldview

If life is perceived to be of paramount importance in Zionist experience, any threat to it will be viewed in a most serious light. To appreciate the logic of their perspectives fully, one has to take cognisance of the worldview from which it stems. The concept of life, and with it both the endangering and the promotion of life, should be embedded within the Zionists' broad frame of reference. The respondents and virtually all the Zionists of the Cape Flats share the traditional socio-cultural context of the Xhosa-speaking societies. I therefore now briefly attend to the question of how the Zionists' concept of

life and in particular threats to life relate to the traditional worldview from which their customs developed.

Human beings have an inherent need to explain life, to find a distinct manner of looking at life and of understanding it. A useful notion to discuss this issue is that of a worldview: the grid whereby a society decides 'what needs to be explained and how to explain it' (Schreier 1985:105). One can differentiate between a worldview as a set of explanatory concepts which forms part of a culture, and a private worldview of an individual person who draws from this range of theories that helps to make sense of experiences, to understand his or her life and the world: "Worldview", then, refers to all attempts to make intellectual sense of the world and of life, so that in the broadest sense it involves theories of *explanation*.' However, these theories go beyond intellectual statements, they include a strong emotional content (Hammond-Tooke 1989:33, 38). One is reminded of Chidester's (1989:16, 20) description of a worldview as 'a multi-dimensional network of strategies' and his insistence that a worldview is an open-ended process, always in transition.

As regards the theme 'fullness of life', the traditional Xhosa will ask: How do I explain the factors that are hostile to and which can even terminate life prematurely, in other words, misfortune and especially illness? The traditional worldview of the Xhosa can be broken down into four broadly defined sets of theories as likely explanations of the human condition: the supreme being, ancestors, witches and sorcerers, and finally, pollution beliefs (cf. Hammond-Tooke 1989:46-51). 'Serious misfortune usually raises the question of causation, and although "natural" causes are recognized, it is more likely that "supernatural" or "ritual" causes will be suspected. Witchcraft and sorcery, ritual impurity, and the ancestors are alternative possible causes, and are therefore related by their common causal connection with misfortune' (Pauw 1975:60).

In traditional Xhosa culture the existence of disembodied departed spirits is taken for granted. The importance of the ancestors in African religion generally can scarcely be exaggerated: 'The ancestors are a key to understanding African spirituality. For most Africans they represent a true fulfilment of life' (Skhakhane 1995:107). Traditional Xhosa religion is centred on the communication between the tribesmen still living and their departed senior relatives, the so-called living dead (Mbiti 1969:25). As the dead person is still alive in the memory of these relatives on earth, it is their religious obligation to be in living contact with their elders who have left them. This *ukukhumbula*, the respectful commemoration of ancestors by name, is an essential part of traditional Xhosa culture.

Vera Bührmann suggests that such reverent remembering of the ancestors should not be understood as ancestor worship or that they have a 'divine' image: The ancestors 'are too "human", and the relationship between the Black people and their ancestors is too personal. The rituals and the ceremonies are not primarily to appease and propitiate the supposedly wrathful ancestors, but to learn their wishes, to be guided by their wisdom and to have communion with them' (1984:27).

Still, it is believed that at times the ancestors become displeased when they are not remembered adequately and that they will remind their descendants that they want to be honoured by a celebration of an animal sacrifice (*idini*) or the rite of beer-drinking. This reminder can come to a representative of a family group in a dream, often repeatedly, or by the occurrence of illness or some other form of misfortune. The group will then consult a diviner to reveal the demands or claims of the ancestors and to find out which ancestor is responsible. The diviner will ascribe the cause of the misfortune and advise to appease the ancestors by offering a sacrifice. The incidence of illness and misfortune caused by ancestors is much lower than that of other causes. Misfortune is seldom as serious as that caused by witches and must be seen as 'a gentle nudging to remind people to perform the rituals of the home' (Hammond-Tooke 1989:64–65, 70–71; Jansen 1973:29; cf. Mayer 1971:29–30, 150–160).

In the traditional Xhosa worldview an alternative way of explaining misfortune is that sorcery and witchcraft (*ubugqwirha* and *ubuthakatha*) cause it. Within the mystical way of thinking, sorcerers (*amagqwirha*) are human beings who have power which they draw from the use of substances, actions and words. They use this power to manipulate or control their environment. Witches (*abathakathi*) are believed to harm others through mystical agents. However, forms of magic can be used for socially approved and valuable ends, such as protecting a hut from lightning or a garden from hail, increasing the fertility of people and animals, or causing good fortune in a soccer match or the seeking of employment.

On the other hand, it is the anti-social use of magic to harm or kill other people or to damage or destroy possessions which is believed to be one of the main reasons why misfortune and illness is suffered (Hammond-Tooke 1989:44; Pauw 1975:59–60). The practice of sorcery is done by employing medicines of plant origin, spells, charms or any bewitching matter such as parts of the body of people or animals (called *amayeza* or *imithi*) to harm

the lives or property of others. In witchcraft mystical agents, called 'familiar' (of witches) by anthropologists, are used. For example, *impundulu*, the lightning bird, *uthikoloshe*, the river sprite, *inyoka yabafazi*, the woman's snake, *umamlambo*, often identified with the *inyoka yamadoda* or the snake of men, and *imfene*, the baboon (Pahl 1989:262; for a comprehensive description of various familiars see Pahl 1989:116-121).

Among the Nguni witchcraft is feared more than sorcery. The intimidating aspect about witches or sorcerers is that they can be anyone. The essential malignity is that they tend to harm people close to them, kin and neighbours with whom, in any normal society, one usually has harmonious social relations. Anthropologists explain cases of accusation of witchcraft as the result of hatred due to tensions that arise in close community life, in particular general competition over scarce resources. Whether this is more prone to happen in overcrowded rural areas than in modern industrial and urban societies, is not debated here (cf. Hammond-Tooke 1989:48-49, 80). What leaves little doubt is that 'the belief in the agency of witches and sorcerers provides by far the commonest basis for the diagnosis of major illnesses and misfortunes' (Hammond-Tooke 1989:89; cf. Mayer 1971:150, 160-162).

Belief in witchcraft and sorcery seeks to explain the root cause of evil. In the African concept it is believed that there is no such thing as chance. Hence one of the most typical reactions to misfortune is to attribute it to the influence of witchcraft. When misfortune does occur, suspicions regarding the possible culprit immediately arise and questions are asked: What is behind this? Who is attacking me? Why me? Why now? Answers to these questions are then given in terms of the traditional worldview. 'This is possibly the reason why witch beliefs are still so tenaciously held even by educated urbanites. They provide answers that science cannot provide' (Hammond-Tooke 1989:84, 15).

The worldview of the Xhosa includes a further explanation of the cause of malaise, illness and misfortune: the belief in a form of pollution called *umlaza*. This ritual impurity is especially associated with sexual intercourse, certain physiological conditions in women and with death. People find themselves, often heedlessly, in a state of impurity. This for instance happens in the case of widows, women who have had an abortion or miscarriage, people who have touched a corpse, the birth of twins or, in some cases, those who have completed a long journey.

There is a crucial difference between such pollution beliefs and the other causes of misfortune discussed above. In the case of the former 'the illness is not "sent" by a person or spirit, but inheres in certain life conditions. It can thus be thought of as stemming from *impersonal causation* – and, indeed, in some ways it resembles western medical concepts' (Hammond-Tooke 1989:50, 92; Pauw 1975:59).

The traditional worldview therefore offers a set of explanations for misfortune and illness: certain mystical beings and impersonal forces threaten the fullness of life and are hostile to it.

In passing it is worthwhile to note the following interpretation of such explanations from the point of view of an analytical psychologist: 'I perceive the fantasies about the images of the ancestors and *abathakathi* [witches and sorcerers] as expressed in the Xhosa cosmology as projections from their unconscious, especially the cultural and collective layers. The ancestor and witch concepts are therefore archetypal' (Bühmann 1984:21).

Threats to life in Zionists' 'maps of the transcendent world'

To what extent does the Cape Flats Zionists' set of explanatory concepts regarding the causation of misfortune agree with or divert from that of the traditional Xhosa worldview? The analysis above, based on the interviews, provides a basis of comparison and interpretation.

Though the Zionists do acknowledge natural causes of misfortune, such as damaging ways of behaviour and physical danger, suspicion soon comes to the fore when misfortune occurs. The story of the accident and the respondent's reaction quoted above indicates that she asks concerned questions about the cause and expresses surprise at certain details. In line with the traditional worldview she considers the possibility of an evil force at work, and instead of fatalistically shrugging the accident off as 'one of those things', she submissively concludes that 'God has allowed it'.

The Zionists are continually anxious about the invisible threats to life. To them witchcraft and sorcery are realities. The example of the accident shows that witchcraft is suspected. In this case an 'unclean spirit' could be the mystical agent, but frequently other familiars of the Xhosa mythology are imagined. The *amafufunyana*, regarded as a more recent phenomenon, is a form of mental derangement which is identified with the cases of possession by evil spirits found in the New Testament. As their ancient counterparts,

these *amafufunyana* can speak and be spoken to (cf. Pauw 1975:251). In the survey of Zionist churches of the Cape Flats an archbishop's comment on the origin of the demons with which the churches have trouble is noted: taking the *amafufunyana* as an example, he remarked that they are evil spirits which arise from Xhosa culture.

The belief in witchcraft familiars as agents that cause misfortune is continued among the urban Zionists of the Cape Flats. A new element is that witchcraft and sorcery are related to the devils or unclean and evil spirits of the New Testament which are collectively referred to as *iidemoni* ('demons') and *imimoya emdaka* or *ekhohlakeleyo* ('unclean' or 'evil spirits'). This element is new in relation to Xhosa tradition, but not in terms of general belief among Xhosa Christians (cf. Pauw 1975:250–253). A respondent adds: 'Even when less serious sicknesses [*imikhuhlane*] remain obstinate, we suspect an evil spirit.'

Concerning the ancestors, the Zionists take communication with them for granted, while their ambivalent potential for both sound council and for trouble is a reality to them. This finding is confirmed by many examples throughout this book. In the ancestral dream cited above the respondent is 'gently nudged' into making beer for her father-in-law. In this instance there is no, or rather, not illness as yet: the dream of the ancestors' warning was heeded in time and it was not necessary to consult the diviner. The respondent's resistance to making beer and thus to acting in accordance with Xhosa tradition, represents a conflict of interests between her Zionist faith and traditional practice. However, the significant point is that the belief in the interaction between the living and those who have passed away is maintained. When observing how Zionists think and converse on this theme, it is scarcely conceivable that this interaction implies worship (*unqulo*), let alone worship on par with that of God.

As could be expected from people who adhere to the Christian faith, Zionists believe that the ancestors are subordinate to God – as all the rest of his creation is.

As far as ritual impurity is concerned a basic tenet of the belief in the causation of misfortune within the traditional worldview is upheld. If ritual purity is not maintained, it is believed that matters will not function properly. Issues pertaining to female sexuality and death (in the case of both genders) are once again prominent although some forms of avoidance are given biblical motivation. In the quotation above reference is made to the Book of Numbers (chapter 19), though Zionists are aware that impurity is dealt with

much more elaborately in the Book of Leviticus. In Zionist church practice people believed to be ritually impure 'bring bad luck or misfortune' and can even 'restrict the Spirit of God' who then 'does not work freely among the people'. With reference to mortuary rituals, Pauw (1975:130) has concluded that to the Zionists of his research 'in terms of Xhosa tradition, death is more dangerous than to Xhosa Christians of the orthodox churches, involving perhaps a more lively consciousness of the Xhosa idea of impurity [*umlaza*]'.

Spirits, either benevolent or malevolent, are decidedly real phenomena in the traditional but likewise in the urban African context. To a large extent the unseen world has an influence on or even controls whatever happens in the physical world. The acknowledgement of this reality is taken for granted and also dealt with seriously by the Zionists of the Cape Flats.

Résumé

The vulnerability of humankind is universal. As all other human beings, the Zionists of the Cape Flats, have material as well as certain invisible obstacles in their quest for a life of gratifying quality. In their perception, the causation of illness, misfortune and premature death – which all sap life and hinder their quest – is ascribed to supernatural and ritual powers: besides the overriding influence of God, they explain the cause of serious misfortune in terms of witchcraft and sorcery, the ancestors and ritual impurity. This understanding of the causation of misfortune concurs fundamentally with that of the traditional Xhosa worldview, although Christianity has had a definite impact on the Zionists' beliefs.

If the Zionists' likely explanations of the human condition pertaining to the threats to life are closely related to those of the traditional Xhosa worldview, could the same be said regarding their beliefs about and strategies to manage or cope with these afflictions? I now investigate this aspect.

Countermeasures

Analysis

As I have shown, one of the meanings that Zionists attach to the word *Zion* is that it is a refuge. From what? Zion is a refuge from various threats to life. But what exactly do Zionists do to ward off such dangers? It all depends on the type of menace.

In this regard the management of *bewitching spirits* is of principal importance as the following instance indicates:

We are running away from violence, demons and evil spirits such as *umamlambo*, *amafufunyana*, and *uthikoloshe*. When I flee to Zion, I have the hope that all demons and evil spirits which I had will be rebuked [*ziza kukhalinyelwa*], prayers are said for me and I become healed. Without any doubt we can heal people who are suffering from witchcraft [*ukuthakathwa*]. To elaborate: there were many people here at Zion into whom *amafufunyana* had been cast and who have been helped. There was one unmarried woman who had *amafufunyana*. She came and joined the Zionist church and was healed until today. She was from Sigxabayi and she has been cured for many years. [The church mentioned is a well-known spiritual church of



Laying on of hands and praying for a diseased woman

another type than the Zionists, a Sabbatarian-Baptist group known as the Church of Christ, once led by a certain Sigxabayi – cf. Pauw 1975:304–305.]

What will a Zionist do if misfortune does occur? The mutual assistance of fellow-Zionists and in particular their leaders – prophets and intercessors – is sought.

As people who pray a lot, when misfortune happens we ask our leaders to assist us in prayers to overcome it. As believers we know that one person's injury is another person's injury. In other words, we believers are assisting each other.

The following quotation, in this case by a woman, gives some idea of what a prophet is believed to be like:

The prophet is a special person, chosen by God and called in a dream. In dreams and visions she can see where lost things can be found or even become aware that somewhere else a certain person is ill. A prophet is a person to whom the Holy Spirit has come as a gift. She will go in seclusion for a few days in which she attends to fasting, praying and purification. When this happens, even miracles [*izimanga*] can take place. There are also false prophets which damage prophetism. They prophesy with the spirit of medicine [*baprofeta ngomoya wesiphondo*].

It remains a problem to find out what the cause of someone's affliction is. A female respondent, herself a prophet, explains what happens:

When, through the Holy Spirit, I see something in someone that could injure her and of which she is unaware, the problem will then and there, right in the service, be disclosed to me [*ndisuke ndityhilelwe*]. I am free to stop the service and ask to purify whatever I see. You explain the matter [*utsho uyichaza*] and then it is prayed together that the person will see what the matter is, even if it is something bad. Zion churches work in this way, but the mainline churches, although they do have the Spirit of God, have confidence in prayer alone. It is not their way of doing things to allow one to explain a word that is spoken to you or a matter that you have seen.

God protects against both visible and invisible threats. All Christians, including Zionists, experience both types of threats to their lives against which they believe God shields them:

God has protected me against both the visible and the invisible. I used to drink, smoke and do things that are really against the laws of God. His power can save you from dangers [*ezingozini*]. God is also capable of saving you from evil spirits.

The same respondent gives the following example:

I really agree that there are enemies that can be seen and those that are invisible. I remember that in 1992 my mother in Transkei was running

mad, as it was said, having ants in her stomach or as they call it *amafufunyana*. When I heard the news, I said: 'If it is God's will my mother is going to die, but if it is not his will, she is not going to die.' I put all my trust in God's hands. White doctors healed my mother and she never died, even today she is still alive because of God's grace. Yes, we do have enemies, but my plea to God is to change them from their wicked ideas.

The Zionists use the metaphors of 'enemies' and 'weapons' (*izikhali* or *izixhobo*) to ward off these invisible enemies. Priority is given to prayer while the following weapons are used: prayer alone; 'living' (that is flowing) water which is prayed for; water mixed with substances such as salt, vinegar, pepper or ash (*isiwasho*); a lightened candle; attire; and cords.

According to a respondent, the cords are used, for example, when people have headaches: 'Before they can be put to use prayers must be said for these cords. When we pray for the cords we put them down and perhaps two or three people who are powerful in prayers will come forward to pray.'

Another respondent justifies this usage from the Bible and shows the difference between these cords and the diviner's beads:

We use woollen cords on the part of the body that is in pain and this I read in the Bible. In Philippians 1:13-14 Paul says that the members of his body were bound by ropes [*ngeentambo*]. So there is a similarity but also a difference. Even the diviner uses the beads on a part where he feels pain. The difference is that they do it in the Xhosa way. The diviners add some traditional medicines to strengthen the beads but we Zionists pray for the cords asking God to strengthen them.

The emphasis is not on the weapons themselves but on God:

There are many people who do have weapons [*izikhali*], but I put all my trust and hope in God because He is the One who has all the power. Those weapons which others are using, are used according to God's Word to chase the enemies away.

The warding off of familiars and rendering them harmless by charms (*ukukhafula*) are no longer done in the traditional way:

This is a Xhosa thing although we also find it, I think, in Exodus. *Ukukhafula* is done by the diviners. When someone has a nightmare or a bad dream, a diviner will bite off a piece of traditional medicine and then spit it out to drive away the unclean spirit of the dream, be it

umamlambo, *impundulu* or *uthikoloshe*. However, a Zionist will get up and light a candle and pray for whatever he has dreamt to go away.

A respondent makes the following remarks with regard to attire:

I got all three my garments through nightly visions, not through a leader who gave them to me. It was said by my grandfather in a dream: 'Use these garments to work, they are the weapons [*zizixhobo*] of Christianity.'

The belief is that God reveals the type of *isiwasho* used, which excludes traditional medicine:

Everything that has to do with this mixture depends on a prophet because everything a prophet does comes from God. What I want to say is that no matter whether water is pure or mixed, all comes from God – the important thing is that the prophet does what has been revealed to him by God.

Respondents are aware of, and concerned about, Zionists and members of other churches who continue with the unacceptable former practices such as beer making and the wearing of beads. Especially the old type of medicines used raises objections:

Diviners use roots, medicines that are dug up, and traditional medicines. Zionists do not use any of these. Yes, I have heard that there are Zionists who are doing what the diviners do, but to me they are not Zionists. They are covering their acts with Zion. The medicines of Zion are those I mentioned, not those which are dug up.

An alternative way in which the cause of serious misfortune is explained in the traditional Xhosa worldview is the influence of the *ancestors*. Zionists appreciate the alternative explanation they have when misfortune occurs and counter measures are called for.

A red blanket person will set his hopes on the ancestors [*kubantu bemveli*], people who have died, as interpreted by the diviners and herbalists. But a Christian knows that it is God who protects him. A Christian always gives thanks to God in everything. To a Christian God is his shield that protects him wherever he goes.

The ancestors' power over their descendants as well as their potential to help or to harm them is recognised. Communication with the ancestors is not discarded. What does a Zionist, for example, do when he dreams about an ancestor?

People quote certain parts of the Bible about the customs and traditions (*ngamasiko nezithethe*). If I meet the ancestors in my dreams I will see what to do when it happens. Traditions are traditions and they will remain being part of us. We grew up seeing all these things being practised in front of us. I do not want to lie about this: I will do the customs for example to greet my late father – although I am a Christian. These issues are not often discussed among Zionists but we take it that the prophets deal with them.



Purification in the living waters of the ocean

However, all communication is not experienced as positive and in such cases countermeasures are sought: 'We know that people are captivated (*bathinjwa*) by the ancestors. We pray seriously for power to solve this problem.'

If a prophet prophesied that an animal must be slaughtered for the ancestors, his prophecy will not be doubted or challenged. The matter is dealt with in another way:

If that happens, people of my church will come together and pray to God asking him to change the prophecy to be according to a Christian way. When people assist you in prayer God will listen and reply to your prayers.

We climb a mountain and pray seriously together. We do not do anything else besides using candles.

The possibility that the slaughtering will eventually take place is not discarded.

The third way in which misfortune can be caused according to Xhosa belief, is through *ritual impurity*. Zionists take action when someone becomes impure. If a woman Zionist has borne a child, she is not allowed to come to church until the senior and junior women members of the church go to her house for a purification service (*ukuhtambulula*). Leviticus 12 is read, a prayer is said to sanctify water and soap in a basin which is then used to sprinkle the woman, her uniform, the baby and the room. Sometimes incense (*umgquba*, dry cow dung) is burnt. The woman is allowed to say openly what she has done that was impure. Thus she is purified to return to church. If a member of the family has passed away, other members of the family do not go to church after the funeral without being purified.

Angels, referred to as messengers, play a very special role in terms of purification. The interaction with the Holy Spirit is to be noted in the following case:

The messenger of God unites us to have one spirit and purifies every person's heart. At the beginning of the service you kneel down and pray that the messenger from heaven will descend and be among you. When the angel comes, it casts out every person that is dirty or impure.

The early Zionists are said to have been using the customs and laws of the Old Testament but nowadays adherence to these customs is not as strict.

There are certain results following from the Zionists' dealing with counter-measures against threats to the fullness of life. First of all, within their perception the traditional belief in the causation of misfortune remains unquestioned. The main result of their efforts in this regard is that serious misfortune is managed or eliminated, that lasting cure from the effects of witchcraft becomes possible, and that members feel protected against potential and perennial threats of evil directed against them. A further result is that the specialists to whom such matters are taken have changed: the person is no longer the traditional diviner but now the Zionist prophet.

Old forms of protection and cure have likewise been transformed, while the belief in God as the final source of protection and healing has become very prominent. The traditional familiars are placed in a wider context and seen

as demons. There is no questioning of the ancestors' visitations in dreams. On the contrary, they are accepted as possible vehicles through which God can make his will known to individuals.

The relatively far-reaching accommodation of traditional medicine and some other practices have as result that some Zionists look askance at others. Finally, the analysis of interviews indicates that whatever the quality of their interpretation might be, the Zionists are keen to find biblical reference and confirmation of their beliefs and practices.

Interpretation

Countermeasures in traditionalists' view

The traditional Xhosa worldview makes provision for the explanation of what causes misfortune, but likewise it caters for the possible control of such misfortune. There is logic in this theory which attempts to explain the human condition: if a satisfactory life of quality is in any way threatened, the threat has to be managed, if not eliminated. The supernatural and ritual causes of misfortune are related, as will be seen, though the respective attempts to control them differ.

Pauw (1975:59–62) has described the essential elements of the affinity of various traditional Xhosa concepts related to the causation of misfortune. In this process a decisive role is taken by the diviner (*igqirha*) who has the power to discover hidden sources and to dispense traditional medicines (*amayeza*), also called *imithi* (trees, plants). It is the diviner who has special knowledge of how to 'smell out' witches that might be the cause of particular misfortune. Hence a diviner is also called *isanuse* (from *ukunuka*, to smell), although the distinction between the two is not always clearly drawn. Another role player is the herbalist (*ixhwele*) whose function is to treat, heal, and cure by medicine or by charms (*ukunyanga*).

The only protection against witchcraft and sorcery (*ubuthakatha*) is the use of strong, protective medicines and charms. To counter this misfortune diviners and herbalists work as specialists in the field of protection and cure. The greater part of their activities has as end the protection against witchcraft and sorcery or the overcoming of their effects. The diviner exposes the secret activities of witches and sorcerers. Treatment aimed at protection and cure could be against misfortune in general without reference to a particular cause. Such verbs as *ukuphilisa*, to heal (literally to cause to live), and *ukugcinisa*, to help to protect, are used in this regard.

As has been described above, the diviner has a further activity: when it is suspected that misfortune is due to the ancestors, the diviner is consulted to determine the details of the cause and to prescribe the action to be taken. There is therefore a close affinity between the diviner and the ancestors. Pauw (1975:62) concludes: 'Thus the concepts surrounding misfortune according to Xhosa tradition involve three clusters of closely associated concepts: the witchcraft-sorcery cluster, the medicine-healing cluster and the ancestor cluster.'

Ritual impurity is a further potential cause of misfortune within the Xhosa worldview. Because death and contact with a corpse are believed to be extremely contaminating, the washing of hands after a funeral is customary. One example of several of the mortuary rituals is the sacrificial home cleansing (*idini lokuhlantjwa komzi*), namely the homestead of a deceased kraal head, a wealthy man or a diviner. 'It follows the customary accompanying ceremony, *ukukhapha*, and is intended to cleanse the home and family from the pollution of death and to ensure the smooth flow of normal life and activities at the kraal. Should the observance of this ceremony be neglected, misfortune will plague the home' (Pahl 1989:744).

When I discussed the concept of life, I said that the central value of life to the Xhosa is the vital force (*amandla*) which is manifested in a healthy condition (*impilo*). What is stated here about the Xhosa corresponds with what is said in the wider African context:

[This] craving for power is the driving force in the life of African religion. It has its origin . . . in a feeling of incapacity and in an obstinate desire to overcome it; it is a search for help and comfort, a means of maintaining and strengthening life in the midst of a thousand dangers and a way of conquering the fear which shoots its arrows from every hidden ambush. Man is weak and what he needs is increased strength' (quoted in Jansen 1973:38).

Zionists' countermeasures

If the Zionists hold concepts of life and threats to life, and the cause of misfortune which, in spite of significant deviations, relate closely to the traditional Xhosa worldview, one could expect that the same pattern would be repeated in the case of countermeasures which are taken to deal with the misfortune.

Respondents' replies to the question from what they seek refuge, in other words, from what they believe to be the dangers, first of all remind the observer of people's difficulty to endure the real and serious threats of

township life. This is where their *intlalo*, conditions of life setting, and *impilo*, a healthy condition of wellbeing, are closely related.

The focal issue, however, is the invisible realities that literally and figuratively can bedevil their lives. Some of the same old bewitching spirits of the Xhosa tradition – *umamlambo*, *uthikoloshe*, *impundulu* and *amafulunyana* – are mentioned by name, and are believed to be cast on them by people of evil intent. Understandably these people are taken to be 'enemies' who are the fountainhead of the witchcraft and sorcery and thus the cause of their misfortune. Yet, the old spirits are given new collective names that are found in the New Testament: demons or unclean spirits, the very objects of part of Jesus' ministry of healing, among others by casting out demons. The Zionists share the belief in witchcraft and sorcery with other Xhosa Christians generally while 'the ideas of ... a full-scale integration of witches and sorcerers and witch familiars with Satan and his host of demons' (Pauw 1975:252) are prominent among the Cape Flats Zionists.

The Christian tradition

Zionists have their ways of managing this suspected or identified cause of misfortune. To outside observers it might be extraordinary to learn that the Zionists follow the route that the church has been taking for many centuries: exorcism. A sober historian defines the word as 'the practice of expelling evil spirits by means of prayer, divination, or magic' and adds that since the time of the New Testament (cf. Mark 1:25, Acts 16:18) until the present day, exorcism has been practised by the church. Especially within the Pentecostal movement, from which the Zionists historically stem, the casting out of devils is commonly practised (Douglas 1974:365). Exorcism in Zion, practised by 94 per cent of the churches interviewed, is done by rebuking, reprimanding or prohibiting (*ukuyikhalimela*) the demon and then casting it out or excommunicating it (*ukuyikhupha*) (cf. Kropf 1915:179,203).

The survey (as reported in chapter 4) shows that all the Zionists have intercessors and faith healers. They are said to be 'people who are powerful in prayer'. As in the case of church history, the Zionists of the Cape Flats have prayer, alone or augmented, as priority in cases of trouble with demons. The type of prayer is not an individual or private matter but rather communal prayers said for an individual. Mutual prayer assistance is a very regular practice of the Zionist service (see chapter 6). This obviously does not exclude individual intercession, as demonstrated by the quoted case of the

nightmare involving familiars countered by prayers with a burning candle. Zionists' prayers are not simply a matter of experiencing pious spirituality. This is shown by the following prayer, prayed by a bishop when the faithful were about to return home on the often dangerous streets of their township: 'Shut the mouths of the bears and the wild animals [*amarhamncwa*] we meet along the way, that they do not tear us to pieces.'

Still in accordance with what happened in church history, the Zionists use divination, here understood as the practice that seeks to discover or perceive the unknown intuitively or by supernatural means. This is precisely what both the traditional diviner and the Zionist prophet seek to do when people afflicted by witchcraft approach them. The 'smelling out' or diagnostic function is raised. The phenomena are similar, although the form and content differ. As the case of a respondent's mother who was cured of *amafufunyana* by 'white doctors' illustrates, the Western doctor could, under certain circumstances, fulfil the same function although the supernatural element normally does not come into play.

In contrast to the types of prophets who predict the future or challenge secular authorities on socio-moral issues, the Zionist prophet is believed to have special gifts granted by the Holy Spirit, gifts of perceiving that which is not observable by the senses. For instance, to see and to reveal an injurious spirit during a service and to advise what weapons are to be used as counter-measure. It is exactly this aspect which entices people to flee to Zion where the invisible causes of misfortune are managed. I have already observed that prophetism, which has an enormous attraction, is a vital practice of Zionism. Revelations (*izityhilelo*) come to prophets through dreams and visions.

One of the most important tasks of the prophet is then the diagnosis of the causes through which the illness comes to the fore, that is, in practice the detection and naming of those spirits that are believed to be responsible for the experienced threat to life.

The third classical Christian mode of expelling evil spirits is by means of magic, as church historian Stephen Neill informs us. Magic, ironically, was strongly condemned in the Christian tradition. In this regard he points out that magic is a word that is generally understood, but which defies all attempts to define it exactly. Yet, he offers a useful description:

In broad outline it may be said that, in magic, man believes that the world is governed by unseen powers, knowledge of which can be obtained by

those who possess the necessary secrets, and which can then be *controlled* in the interests of the operator; whereas in religion man *places himself at the disposal* of the unseen powers in order to carry out their purposes. But it is clear that there is a large overlap between magic and religion [my italics] (Neill, Anderson & Goodwin 1970:364).

To 'control' or to 'place oneself at the disposal of' the unseen powers seems to be the cutting edge between magic and religion. I return to this distinction in the next section.

Specific Zionist objects and practices

Instead of using *magic*, I shall use the related concept *mystic*, in the sense of hidden meaning or spiritual power, in my discussion of a few of the many objects and practices that are involved as countermeasures against witchcraft. The discussion will later return to the distinction between magic and religion.

If the Zionists have 'enemies' who are the source of witchcraft and sorcery and who are to be countered, they also have an array of 'weapons' at their disposal. While in agreement with the imagery of 'the armour of God' used by Paul in Ephesians 6:11-17, the Zionists have a clear preference for more concrete weapons than those mentioned in the New Testament. With reference to the report on the survey given in chapter 4, I now attend to the four aspects mentioned in the analysis above. It should be taken into account that the Zionists have many more 'arrows' in their quiver than here discussed.

Close to 90 per cent of the interviewed Zionists view *isiwasho* as a purgative or emetic. Besides its pragmatic value, the mixture can be used by way of sprinkling to 'wash' or to bless a house or temple or to cast out demons. I presume the word is derived from the English 'wash'. (Kropf 1915 understandably has no reference to the word, but the fact that Pahl 1989 does not mention it, is inexplicable.) *Isiwasho* is always prescribed by someone who has the gift to perform it, for example, a prophet to whom it is revealed as the solution to a particular problem. These prophecies are often so important that a special service, the *inkonzo yesisefu*, is held in which the truth of a revelation to a prophet is subjected to a test by prophets of other churches (see chapter 4).

Colourful *woollen cords* are used protectively against witchcraft on the parts of the body where evil is believed to enter. They are used with prayers to add

power to them, to 'strengthen them' and are believed to have a certain effect (*ziyasebenza*). Thicker cords are used across the chest to enhance prophecy. The biblical justification for the use of cords offered by a respondent, Philippians 1:13–14, will impress exegetes more with its novelty than with its orthodoxy; some English renderings use 'chains' to indicate Paul's physical imprisonment instead of the Xhosa 'ropes' (*iintambo*). 1 Kings 20:31–32 is a similar case in point.

Another mystical means to get rid of bewitching spirits is the *lighted candle* together with indispensable prayer. Hence it is generally used during worship and other services when healing or pastoral engagement takes place. The warming of hands over the flames is an accompanying practice.

Attire is worn for the sake of identifying members of a certain church and also as colourful attraction. From the responses quoted above it appears that the attire furthermore has mystical workings and is thus taken to be 'weapons of Christianity'.

The activities that go hand in hand with the preparation and implementation of the weapons referred to above, as well as those not mentioned, take up a large part of the Zionist ministry in particular and practice in general.

Magic or religion?

The extremely difficult question to answer is: Must these protective and exorcising activities, in other words, the management of specifically the witchcraft threats to life, in Neill's terms, be attributed to *magic* – in which the unseen powers can be controlled in the interest of the operator; or to *religion* – in which a person places herself or himself at the disposal of the unseen powers in order to carry out their purpose?

One should spare a thought for the diviner who, after all, has the same aim and struggle as the Zionist prophet: to ward off and to protect against the life-threatening spirits and in doing so to ensure the health of his or her client. Phenomenologically the two kinds of specialists, together with the herbalist and the intercessor, have much in common: diagnosis of evil spirits through supernatural power; beads/cords as visible signs of identification and as charms with mystical power; the prescription of medicine, traditional/*isiwasho*; the removal of bad spirits in dreams by medicine spit out/prayer at a lighted candle (for reference to the respondent's mentioning of *ukukhafula* in the book of Exodus, see 7:11, 22:18 and Deuteronomy 18:10).

It is more difficult to decide on the influences beyond the phenomena. The identification between Xhosa familiars and the biblical demons can be explained in terms of the influence exerted on the Zionists by the tradition of Western Christianity. Are the mystical powers believed to be active in the respective cases something similar? At least in the regular language of the Zionists, and as far as my observation goes, a momentous change has taken place. Unlike the diviner who believes to *control* the unseen powers through possession of the necessary secrets and skills, the prophet places himself or herself *at the disposal of* the unseen power – believed to be God through his Holy Spirit – in order to carry out his purpose, namely to heal. Even when taking the approximation of the accompanying phenomena into account, the distinction between healing through divination and divine healing, in which prayer is the main element, coheres with the difference between magic and religion as described by Neill.

The Zionists of the Cape Flats' speech and discourse, not only in the interviews analysed above and the survey of the 50 churches but also in everyday life, are indeed full of God-talk which goes far beyond the superficial. More specifically though, when interviewed on countermeasures to the threats to life, the respondents' statements clearly indicate that the prophet is 'at the disposal of' God. That the emphasis on prayer – to God – is absolutely essential in countering the demons already demonstrates the point. The power of God to save from evil spirits, to indicate to the prophet what type of weapon is to be used, or to strengthen such weapons, is not attributed to an impersonal force or to the ancestors 'as interpreted by the diviners and herbalists'. A respondent says: 'He is the One who has all the powers. Those weapons which others are using, are used *according to God's Word* to chase the enemies away' (my italics). The appeal here is to a personal source of power. The Zionists do not use witchcraft to fight against witchcraft.

However, the large overlap between magic and religion should certainly be taken into account as far as Zionists are concerned. Often, while observing some of their activities, I have wondered: is this magic or religion?; is the expectation that certain results have to follow when certain acts are performed not rather an indication of control or manipulation and not of submissiveness?; are there not members present who tend to interpret this healing as a magical action in which mystical powers from a supernatural origin are released?

In this regard I conclude that variation of interpretation of individual Zionists could fluctuate considerably on the continuum between the two poles: magic

and religion (cf. Pauw 1975:12). In the Zionist process of expressing the Gospel in their own cultural terms, magical traits are bound to emerge despite distinct trends of reconceptualisation and conceptual change.

The consideration of the intricate matter of Zionist self-criticism, which might be a pointer to the direction in which part of the movement at large is tending, is of the highest importance. Before paying attention to this issue, I briefly look into the manner in which the Cape Flats Zionists manage, besides witchcraft, the other two causes of misfortune, namely the ancestors and ritual impurity. This is done to facilitate an overall interpretation of Zionists' countermeasures against misfortune, as well as a comparison with what the relevant literature indicates about other Zionists in South Africa, especially those of the cities.

The ancestors in Zion

I have already established that the Zionists generally maintain the traditional belief in the interaction between the living and their ancestors who have passed away, as well as the power of the latter to inflict misfortune on the former. So what is to be done when it is suspected or clear that misfortune or illness (death is not applicable here) is caused by the ancestors?

It should be appreciated that communication with the ancestors can be a delicate and even controversial issue among Zionists. Some respondents have an apologetic tone when relating their beliefs: 'I do not want to lie about this.' It also seems as if the matter is not often discussed in their circles but rather referred to the higher authority in this regard, namely that of the prophet. The example of the prophet who prophesied that a bloody sacrifice was necessary for the ancestors is a case in point. The whole congregation was gathered for prayer to God to change the prophecy 'to be according to a Christian way'. Here the problem of ancestors causing illness is not denied, but the usual solution to slaughter in order to placate or reconcile is no longer accepted forthright and an alternative – to pray seriously – is followed. The predominant belief among Zionists is that here, as in the case of witchcraft, God is the Protector.

Nevertheless, as the survey has shown, 84 per cent of the Zionist churches interviewed do practise rites that involve slaughtering for the ancestors. Even if these practices do not feature prominently or regularly on a church's annual calendar, the fact remains that the belief in ancestor causation of misfortune and the associated actions to deal with this misfortune, has powerfully survived conversion to the Christian faith. While it would be difficult to find a Zionist who would deny the influence of the ancestors on

their descendants, by far the majority of the churches believe that the problem has to be addressed in the traditional way, though in a manner which most definitely accommodates the Christian faith. An important minority have discontinued the traditional practice of dealing with misfortune believed to have been caused by the ancestors. Their alternative is to rely exclusively on God to deal with mystical causes of misfortune and illness.

Purity in Zion

One of the results flowing from Zion is the Zionists' changed ethos: a sincere regard for correct behaviour and a high moral standing. The encouragement to lead a 'clean life' according to what they believe to be the Christian virtues is frequently heard in their speaking (cf. chapter 6). Christ cleanses one from the blemish of sin and from moral impurity. This kind of purification is closely related to baptism that is done by total immersion, preferably in the flowing water of a stream. The ritual significance of rivers is well known in the Xhosa tradition.

The belief in the impersonal causation of misfortune in the form of ritual impurity has a huge influence on the practice of Zionist church life. However, it must be added that in some of the following examples it is difficult to distinguish between ritual and moral purity: certain food taboos (see chapter 4); the total abstinence from alcoholic drink and tobacco; adherence to purification after a long journey (especially in the case of the older generation of Zionists); compulsory beards for men; the abstinence of women, during their period of menstruation and after childbirth, from normal church activities such as the Holy Communion; avoidance concerning mortuary rituals which indicate that death is dangerous in terms of ritual pollution. A tendency toward legalism is possibly encouraged by some of these instances. I did not find any awareness of the serious threat of ecological pollution among the Zionists.

The smaller Zionist churches of the Cape Flats are not as strict as their Zion Christian Church neighbours who have a brief ritual which all members and visitors have to undergo before entering a church service: all entrants are sprinkled – heads and heels – with holy water. The same usage is known by some respondents to have been upheld by an older generation of Zionists.

Apart from avoidance and the maintenance of some customs, it does at times become necessary for Zionists to undergo purification (*intlambululo*). This could, for instance, be the washing of hands after funerals or the purging which

allows a person to return to church services after death in the family or the birth of a child. The role of the angel – alongside the Holy Spirit – to see and to deliver from 'bad things' within the context of a service is remarkable.

Zionists elsewhere compared

To what degree does the response of the Zionists of the Cape Flats to the various causes of misfortune that present threats to life agree with that of Zionists in other geographical areas of South Africa? Here I can obviously not present a full-scale comparison of these multifarious phenomena. I use a selection of some of the major published reports on research in the field of South African Zionist churches to provide a general impression.

The first researcher to open up the new branch of AIC study, Sundkler, was most likely also the first to use the metaphor 'weapons'. With reference to a strong section of Zulu Zionists he writes: 'As far as their attitude to Zulu religious heritage is concerned they combat the use of the *inyanga's* medicines and they fight against the diviner's demons of possession. But the weapons with which they fight the struggle belong to an arsenal of old Zulu religion' (1961:55; cf. 297). It should be added that Sundkler, who formulated these ideas in the 1940s (1961:302), later had a much more sympathetic interpretation that would have included the 'weapons' of Zion (1976:304-305).

Paul Makhubu offers a short chapter on the 'Weapons of the Spirit' in which items such as attire, drums and holy staff are cast in the same mould as I have been describing above. Of the staffs he, for example, says: 'They are said to possess supernatural power since they have been prayed over' (Makhubu 1985:85; cf. 85-88).

However, it was Kiernan (1990:111-120) who has profoundly analysed the weapon theme of the Zulu Zionists of KwaMashu, as metaphor. With reference to all conferred powers in these churches he mentions that 'they are employed in the manner of weapons. Because they are to be exercised for the good of the community whose members see themselves as an embattled minority under spiritual siege, their function is primarily protective and preventative ... [The weapons] are designed to ward off impending mystical attacks; to repel rather than expel. This weaponry resides in items of clothing, staffs and flags, and these constitute the media through which powers are transmitted.' These weapons are necessary because the world outside Zion 'is deemed to be peopled by humans, who freely employ medicine [*umuthi*] to bring about misfortune, and spirits [*indiki*] who are homeless, anonymous and harmful' (Kiernan 1990:104-105).

Without specifically referring to the weapons of Zion, Martin West (1975:99–104), who writes on AICs in Soweto, cites three typical accounts which clearly illustrate the similarity of the understanding of the causes of misfortune and the management thereof to those of the Zionists of the Cape Flats. The same applies to the churches of Soshanguve near Pretoria (Anderson 1993:82–93). Finally, Sundkler (1976:313) makes the remark that the Zulu and Swazi Zionists, on whom he reports, have an obsession with 'danger and purification, functioning as a modern movement of witch-finding, i.e., combating magic and witches'.

The examples above are an indication that the Zionists of the Cape Flats generally share their beliefs on the causation and management of witchcraft with their namesakes in other parts of the country.

Countermeasures relating to ancestors

Respect for seniors is one of the basic principles in African society. Pauw (1975:62) has observed the following development as far as Xhosa-speaking people are concerned: 'Under Christian influence we find that the ancestors are aligned with God – or at least more so than they were aligned with the supreme being in pre-Christian times – and witches and sorcerers with Satan.' My conclusion regarding the Zionists of the Cape Flats is that the second part of the statement – the aligning of demons sent by witches with Satan – is more prominent than that between God and the ancestors.

West (1975:183–184) has found that in Soweto there is still a strong belief in the ancestral spirits and their powers. He interestingly adds that Zionist leaders are flexible enough to accommodate this openly, while the mainline churches are not: 'Belief in the shades in the independent churches does not supplant Christian beliefs, but in many cases the shades are seen as intermediaries, and are propitiated by offerings and prayer.'

Though the Cape Flats Zionists might not be as articulate as some of their namesakes, I have the impression that the majority of them would wholeheartedly agree with the critical questions and explanation of their AIC brothers, 'speaking for themselves':

Our African society was held together very largely by our customary ways of showing respect for elders, parents and other ancestors. To us it makes no difference whether our ancestors are alive or dead. We still honour them and respect them. These and all our other customs must be clearly distinguished from religion. Whites do not always seem to be aware of this

very important distinction between religion and customs . . . Why could we not maintain our African customs and be perfectly good Christians at the same time? . . . [We] certainly do not worship the spirits of our ancestors. In our churches we worship God alone. (ICT 1985:22-24)

Not only regarding beliefs about the ancestors but also those pertaining to ritual impurity, the Zionists of the Cape Flats reveal close similarity with other Zionists described by researchers (cf. Pauw 1975:302; West 1975:188; Kiernan 1990:31; Anderson 1993:75). Writing on the Zionists of the Eastern Cape where the Xhosa tradition is the predominant African one, Pauw (1975:302) highlights a very significant factor which corresponds with the Zionists that I studied: 'On the whole Zionists seem to think of their taboos, prophecy, healing, baptism, and purification as based on the Bible, not on Xhosa tradition. These do not represent a conscious syncretism of the two traditions, but rather a reinterpretation of Xhosa tradition in terms of superficially similar ideas and behaviour patterns reported or prescribed in the Bible.' I consider this distinction to be crucial.

From these instances it is clear that the beliefs of the Zionists of the Cape Flats by and large fit into the general pattern of belief of urban Zionists elsewhere in South Africa. Their understanding of threats to life and the manner in which these threats are to be countered in Zion, is fundamentally the same.

In the light of the tremendous mobility of Zionists over many decades – apart from them moving after employment and their continuous travelling to conferences, Passovers, funerals and other church meetings all over South Africa – as well as the accompanying cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices, this finding is not surprising. It should be remembered that the Xhosa tradition is not the only source of what Cape Flats Zionists believe and of their ethos. Pauw (1975:300-301), for example, has traced the descent of most Zionists of the Eastern Cape to influence from Natal and the Witwatersrand:

From what we know of Zionists from diverse parts of South Africa it seems that there is a major form of Zionism which took on its essential features as a syncretization of Pentecostalist teachings with Zulu tradition, spreading from the Zulu to other peoples and other parts of the country . . . Among the Xhosa-speaking Cape Nguni, whose traditional beliefs and rituals are much more similar to those of the Zulu (Natal Nguni), the similarity between Zionist prophet and Xhosa diviner or between Zionist purification and certain Xhosa rituals cannot be missed. The historical details, however, point to the Zulu origin of Xhosa Zionism.

Admittedly, much more regional research will have to be done before a convincing picture of the spread of Zionism in South Africa – and to southern Africa beyond its borders – can be drawn. (For a brief description of the expansion of Zion to Zimbabwe, for instance, see Daneel 1987:54–59.)

Polarity in Zion

I next draw attention to an aspect of this theme that is reflected in the interviews: A component of Zion perceives a certain element of Zion as pseudo-Zion. To concerned Zionists it is disagreeable that such practices as beer-making, the wearing of beads and the use of traditional ('dug-up') medicine, to name only the few examples mentioned in the interviews, persist among Zionists: 'Yes, I have heard that there are Zionists who are doing what the diviners do, but to me they are not Zionists. They are covering their acts with Zion.'

Already in the report on the survey it was noted that some Zionists deviate from, or even abandon, certain typical Zionist practices. In general, they refer to practices that appear to emulate traditional Xhosa ones, in particular the manner in which witchcraft is dealt with. Some 20 per cent of the churches interviewed belong to this category. At the other end of the spectrum there are Zionists who are proud to 'maintain the Xhosa tradition' or who practise 'a kind of divination which is according to the Bible'. Ironically, they in their turn will see the 'purists' group as the insincere ones. In reaching final conclusions this polarity will have to be taken into account.

Interpreting Zionist countermeasures

Although this would go against the grain of Zionist spirituality, it is quite possible to interpret the data above in terms of secular factors. While understanding many of the evil forces that threaten Zionists as 'actually projecting socio-political problems', Oosthuizen has appreciatively referred to intercessors and prophets as 'primary health workers' who, with their holistic stance toward healing, include 'healing of human relationships on the individual and social levels, apart from psychosomatic issues. The AICs are, to their adherents, churches in the fullest sense of the word – and this means they are also hospitals and social welfare institutions' (Oosthuizen 1995:31–32).

Comaroff, who finds parallels between the two populations of the newly proletarianised dispossessed in South Africa and the United States, broadens the scope and affirms that in North America at the turn of the nineteenth

century the 'healing of affliction was the most pervasive metaphor of the culture of Zion' (1985:179; cf. 77).

In ending this section I concur with Schreier (1985:99):

Both exorcism and healing have long traditions in Christianity, but probably have never had the importance they now exhibit in many African cultures. The problem is not only admitting healing and exorcism rites into Christian liturgy, even on a small scale. One has to face the worldview that has made healing and exorcism a necessity; often this worldview involves sorcery, witchcraft, and trafficking with demons.

In accordance with this call to recognise the influence of the worldview, I arrive at the following conclusion: In terms of threats to life, Zionists draw heavily on the traditional Xhosa worldview. Their notion of healing is influenced by traditional perceptions. The belief that the spiritual realm underpins and controls what happens in the material world is a core element of the Zionists spirituality. If this spirituality provides for communion with God, it does not deny the existence of a spiritual realm that interacts with human beings. From the Zionists' perspective their Christian faith has to do with access to power to effect the desired changes in the spiritual world. This particularly applies when evil spirits threaten health, as a vital part of life and a highly treasured gift. To get rid of evil spirits, the healing of affliction can indeed be viewed as the essential component of Zionist salvation.

Healing – which is often more of a psychological than a biological nature – is consequently the most important part of the Zionists ministry in the townships of Cape Town. In the evenings, once they have returned from the world of employment, the pulsating heart and lifeblood of their leaders' ministries can be observed. A sign of this practice is a respondent's summary: 'People get life in Zion.'

Résumé

The traditional Xhosa have a feeling of impotence amidst the threats of life, but also an obstinate desire to overcome these threats. The main thrust of their 'religious activity is squarely in the direction of "salvation" from disease and misfortune in the here and now' (Hammond-Tooke 1989:46).

When they become Zionists, the quest to avoid or to eliminate misfortune and thus to enhance and strengthen a life of satisfying quality remains vital

for the fortune or the wellbeing of the Xhosa of the Cape Flats. For the management of misfortune, illness and in some cases premature death, presumably caused by witchcraft, the ancestors or ritual impurity, Zionists no longer consult the diviner to diagnose the cause of the affliction and to prescribe the necessary action. Neither do they maintain traditional pollution beliefs. Other than that of the diviners, Zionist healing is free of charge.

Zion is now the place of refuge, the place to grapple with the realities of the spiritual world and the sense of vulnerability that they often bring about. In consequence, change has taken place: the Zionists' belief is no longer that they have to rely on the *control* of the unknown powers through the intervention of the diviner. The prophets or other gifted church members place themselves *at the disposal of* God and appeal to him through the Holy Spirit as the source of opposition against all threats to life. Sometimes an angel is the agency through which the threats are eliminated. It is in this context that healing takes place.

Yet in some cases a petition could be directed to the ancestors who are to be appeased by a bloody offering. Here the appeal is no longer directed exclusively to God. Toleration and accommodation of traditional Xhosa beliefs take place and members feel at home, literally as well as in terms of their worldview: in accordance with their consciousness of the traditional worldview (even stronger in some cases than in others), numerous practices, activities or avoidance are part of their regular experiences and ministries.

In spite of the Zionists' references to seemingly similar ideas and practices that they find in the Bible, their explanation of Scripture can by no means be described as orthodox. (I return to some of their particular ways of interpretation in the next chapter.) Yet, the manner in which they deal with threats to life is in accordance with much of ancient and current Christian belief and practice. A sign of this is their clearly expressed theological motivation for their actions and for their specific spirituality, one which makes provision for interaction with the spiritual realm. The Zionists therefore recognise the harmful influence of unseen powers and offer Christian means as countermeasures.

An interpretation of Zionists' healing on the societal level views them as primary health workers with a notable role in the medical and psychiatric fields.

Animation

Analysis

A central theme regarding spirituality is that of animation or spiritual actuation. (For reasons I explain later I do not use the concept 'possession' in this context. I make use of the hyphenated term 'in-the-Spirit' for the Xhosa concept *usemoyeni*.)

Zionists believe that a person can be raised up (*unyukelwa*) by an external spirit, sometimes while even being aware of what is happening. When in-the-Spirit one sees things that others do not see. This experience includes the phenomenon which Zionists call prophecy (*ukuprofeta*) in which revelations are made to such a person:

We pray and someone stands up and tells any person her problems without knowing these problems, or else tells any person from what she suffers without any prior information. A person who reveals such things is in-the-Spirit.

The subject of the animation in this case is the Holy Spirit of God. Yet, other benevolent spirits can be involved: 'The spirit that leads a person to be in-the-Spirit is in line with the Holy Spirit [*uhambelana noMoya oyiNgcwele*].' In this regard an angel has a significant supplementary role:

In Xhosa an angel [*ingelosi*] is a messenger [*umthunywa*]. It comes to some people in different ways and we refer to it in different ways. Sometimes when you are in a church service, you alone will see something which others do not see. It is an angel that is working. Everybody has her own angel and when you are in an evil mode, it delivers you [*xa usebubini ikuhlangule*] because you always walk with it. Here in the churches of the Spirit we call the angel a messenger. In the service, when we are in-the-Spirit, the angel comes down to us and is among us. The Holy Spirit is always with you but also the angel is at your side and protects you. The angel works during the service because it is among us as the Holy Spirit is. The Holy Spirit continually breathes within our hearts to keep them clean and peaceful. When you enter the house of prayer [*kumnquba wokuthandaza*, tabernacle, the angel comes down and sees bad things that would happen and prevents them from happening.

The Holy Spirit is to be distinguished from the spirit of the traditional Xhosa practice of divination (*umoya wobugqirha*) which is associated with the wearing of white beads. The spirit of an ancestor can be raised in a person,

especially by a drum. In contrast, in Zion the Holy Spirit primarily animates a person to prophecy. The Spirit does not say anything shameful and is controlled. In this respect the Spirit differs from the spirit of the diviner, which talks disrespectfully, speaking publicly about confidential matters: 'Someone who has the Holy Spirit will in such cases rather create an opportunity to speak privately to a person.'

The objects at whom the animation is directed are certain people who are gifted by God: 'Prophets are not self-made, they are sent by God.' Another respondent says: 'It is difficult to bring the Holy Spirit to yourself. It is necessary to pray for the Holy Spirit to come to you. In other words, the Holy Spirit is a gift of God through prayers.' Another agrees: 'Bend down and pray. You will sense him when He is present [*uyamva xa ekhoyo*], and you will feel when He is absent.'

Although all believers have the Holy Spirit, it can descend in a special way on anybody during the service, even on young children. Normally this happens where people hear the sounds of drums or congregational singing, when people go round in a circle, light a candle or simply by entering a Zionist church: 'Here in Zion hands are clapped, you dance until you sweat and allow the Spirit to work.' Another respondent adds: 'If a church does not light candles, it is not a church of the Spirit.'

In this connection the drum has a special inspiring effect:

People who are not used to drums do not like them because they upset their stomachs, especially if they have an evil spirit. There is a great difference between the way Zionists and the diviners beat the drums. A person may be marked to become a diviner. Here the drum is used, but it is beaten to sound differently than the Zionist drums (*likhatshwa ngokwahlukeneyo namagubu amaZiyoni*). At times a church member is influenced by a drum in a way that raises a spirit in him, right inside his body. It can be a spirit of his ancestors who wants to use him to become a diviner. For this reason some Zionists do not use the drum. But the majority likes to hear its sound in the worship service.

However, some Zionists believe that 'accessories' are not essential, as a respondent explains: 'A true prophet does not need to be filled by the Holy Spirit through drums or dancing. He can prophesy spontaneously.'

A singular atmosphere prevails when someone is in-the-Spirit. People who are the objects of animation have exceptional sensations and feelings and often

display unusual behaviour. When in-the-Spirit, they appear to be ill while the experience can include a form of suffering and a sense that one is being used. Nevertheless, people have feelings of happiness, an extraordinary sense of wellbeing or euphoria, realising that the Holy Spirit is working through them. They also have a feeling of power and concentrate on what they are doing. Sometimes someone engages in continuous prayer, knocks objects over, jumps up and down, grabs a person and prays for him or her if an evil spirit is seen in that person, or acts in a strange but not frightening manner.

A respondent who herself has had the experience of being in-the-Spirit adds: 'The surprising thing is that while you are explaining what was revealed to you, you are unaware of what you are doing. Later others tell you what you were saying.' Another, who states that she actually saw angels during a service, remarks on the feeling of great happiness she experienced. When bad personal feelings, preoccupation with problems or a lack of confessing sin bedevils the atmosphere, the Spirit is restrained.

In the Zionists' perception the reason why the Holy Spirit animates certain people is to reveal important personal or congregational matters. These include a person's illness, personal problems, some or other form of evil in a person or the church, but also details about objects used in the church such as candles, ropes and attire. In a service a person can, for instance, intuitively feel that something is amiss with someone who is not even present.

Finally, someone being in-the-Spirit can see certain results. It does happen that while a person is in such a state no revelation about any particular problem or anything else is given. The main effect is, however, that the Holy Spirit is believed to reveal things that are made known through prophecy. In this respect illness and its causation is prominent. After the experience of being in-the-Spirit a person is obliged to tell the congregation what has been revealed. The Holy Spirit's will in particular cases becomes known in this manner while evil is exposed. During a service time is given for the prophecy to be explained and when necessary, opportunities are created to speak to individuals privately and with discretion.

Interpretation

Encounter with the spirit world

Previously I noted how the Zionists understand the concept 'prophecy'. I now elaborate on the theme within the context of animation. This is a reflection

on efforts by the respondents to describe, within their own spirituality, an encounter with the Holy Spirit of God by way of a mystical experience.

The underlying belief in Xhosa tradition is that spirits can animate human beings to become mediums of communication. The principal task of the diviner is to determine the cause of misfortune by divination. This can be done in different ways: firstly, through the *ukuvumisa* ritual (literally: to assent (to a diviner's suggestions)) performed by the diviner and a party that has come to seek divination, determining the cause of a mystery. In the second place, divination can be performed through the diviners communicating with spirits (*oonomathotholo*) who reveal the causes to them directly, that is without any ritual. Finally, others divine by throwing bones (Pahl 1998:522).

Prophecy found among the Zionists of the Cape Flats appears to be of the same kind as the second type of divination cited above, although a ritual element is included with the first. (I use *ritual* as a standardised series of acts performed in ceremonious manner and concerned with the supernatural). In the case of the Zionists, a prophet has a special and personal connection with the Holy Spirit and is granted the ability to perceive specific problems or threats, along with their causes, and also to advise remedies. Obviously such knowledge or insight is of great value to the Zionists: troubled people have a means of discovering the source of their affliction – the first important step to solve their problem or to cure their illness.

Throughout this discussion I use the concepts *animation/animate* to signify: 'give life to', 'make lively' or 'inspire'. An alternative would be *spiritual actuation*: 'to put into' or 'incite action'. The concept normally used in this context is *possession* (*ukuba needemoni*). Yet, usually in English and always in the case of Xhosa-speaking Christians this word implies to be controlled by an *evil* spirit. Given this connotation, to speak of possession by the Holy Spirit would be a contradiction in terms (admittedly, in other African traditional contexts different connotations might be attributed to the concept).

The respondents clearly indicate that the Holy Spirit of God is the subject of the animation, along with or without the workings of other benevolent spirits or an angel. The responses show that the latter are in harmony with the Holy Spirit. As prayer for the gift of the Spirit is predominant in Zion, manipulation of any of these spirits normally does not seem to be prevalent.

The appearance of an angel is certainly nothing new to the biblical as well as the Christian and particularly the Catholic traditions. However, that an angel

appears from time to time to communicate with an individual during the service is far from the regular pattern known in church history. The data show that the angel is believed to be benevolent, that it creates unity and peace, purifies the hearts of members and the congregation in general, delivers from evil, protects from and prevents misfortune.

It is important to note that the Zionists believe that an angel does not act independently. None other than God sends it – hence the synonym ‘messenger’. The angel descends during the service when people are in-the-Spirit and after they have prayed for its presence. It works in concord with the Holy Spirit.

Divination and prophecy compared

When comparing traditional diviners and divination with Zionist prophecy and the prophet, there are obvious discontinuities alongside the continuities. For example, white beads are the insignia of the former, white or any of the basic colours of wool of the latter, while in both cases the belief that people communicate with spirits is applicable. To complicate matters some Zionists do use white beads.

Some elements of the phenomena are indeed alike: agents of unseen powers are animated to communicate and to reveal the cause of people’s troubles. In both cases the happening is accompanied by group singing, hand clapping, emotional cries, rhythmic bodily movements, circular dancing, repeated percussion music – especially the drum – which Zionists say are all conducive to being in-the-Spirit. In the townships of Cape Town I have often seen groups of Zionists in action with these accompaniments. The similarity of this to the performance of groups of initiates into divinership in the Xhosa heartland, impressed me. In both cases the colour white predominated.

What can be perceived by the observer’s senses might be quite similar. However, the respective spirits believed to be the animators, as well as their behaviour, diverge significantly. The words of a respondent capture the contrast eloquently: ‘There is a great difference between the way the Zionists and the diviners beat the drums . . . the [diviner’s] drum is used, but it is beaten to sound different from the Zionist drums.’ Already on the sound only, even without being aware of under what circumstances the drums are beaten, any Zionist in the township will be able to tell the discordance between the beats. As a respondent says: ‘The sound of the drum [*ukukhala kwegubu*] is a distinguishing mark of Zion. When a drum is beaten, you experience the Spirit descending.’

The difference in drumbeat is meaningful to the Zionists of the Cape Flats. Despite the fact that in both cases spiritual feelings are awakened, the dissimilar experience of the drum – different drumbeats – most likely epitomises the distinction between the Xhosa diviner and the Xhosa Zionist more clearly than anything else. The origin of the drum in Zion is attributed to both the Old Testament, which mentions it in Psalm 150:4 and Jeremiah 31:4, as well as to traditional Xhosa practice. Yet, David Dargie (1997:453 note 24) found that the Xhosa traditionally did not make drums and that today both those of the diviners and the Zionists are made according to the example of the British military bass drum. In either case the word *ingqongqo*, a hard dry oxhide, is used while the music – typically of Africa – is mainly expressed in rhythmic patterns, unlike the Western musical tradition where melody and harmony dominate.

The Zionists are aware that prejudiced non-Zionist churches are against drumming and that their drumbeats in the service are one of the indications of their low social standing. Dargie (1997:323) explains the wider context:

The use of the drum and other rhythmic instruments, such as rattles and bells, has long been, for conservative mission Christians, the most objectionable characteristic of Zionist worship, one that puts the Zionists in the camp of the diviners or 'witch-doctors', too close to pre-Christian African religion for comfort.

The closeness between the phenomena is an embarrassment and even a stumbling-block to a minority of Zionists who have deliberately abandoned certain practices that correspond to Xhosa tradition. This is also the reason why the Apostolic churches, although being churches of the Spirit, do not use drums at all and contemptuously refer to Zion as 'churches of the drum'. In comparison with other types of spiritual churches, the Zionists have generally been more innovative musically, joyfully embracing African rhythm and ignoring the missionary taboo on drumming (Dargie 1997:323).

Hans-Jürgen Becken has profoundly reflected on what he calls the 'sounds of the double-headed drums'. When discussing its various roles, he refers to the drum's supernatural function: 'It builds bridges between the visible world and the other invisible one to influence the spiritual beings, who ordain the human fate, in a positive way, so that they may be favourably disposed to the people' (1995:231). The early missionaries were afraid that drums would evoke 'heathen associations' and were thus to be regarded as un-Christian or sinful. Yet most

AICs, and I here include the Zionists of the Cape Flats, adapted some of the traditional ideas about the drum and used them to meet their Christian aims.

Becken then places the drum within the broader AIC context: AICs 'have grown up to be the religion of the people in the course of the last few decades. This movement made the Christian message at home in Africa by translating it into the mentality of the Africans in word and deed; in this process, they took in the fundamental ideas of hereditary religious conceptions, and this includes, of course, the drum – especially in the communities of the so-called "Zionists"' (Becken 1995:235, 237, 239).

Observing and experiencing a Zionist service reveals that the drumming induces the congregation to lose their inhibitions and to enter into a compelling and coalescing solidarity.

If the drum is not acceptable in all Zionist circles the whistle is even more controversial. The fact that the diviners use the whistle and that some Zionist churches explicitly state that the animation by evil spirits is implied when it is used, indicates the ambivalent nature of the instrument in terms of animation (see discussion in chapter 4). Although one actually seldom sees the use of the whistle in Zionist services, 72 per cent of the leaders interviewed in the survey state that they do make use of it. In Xhosa two words were traditionally used for 'whistle': *impempe*, a boy's whistle, and *umlozi*, of which a diviner makes use in his or her proceedings (Kropf 1915:329, 220), hence *igqirha lemilozi*. Although the same cane or reed (*ingcongolo*) is used to make both instruments, the Zionists use *impempe* exclusively – another indication of distinguishing themselves.

Comparisons with other Zionists

Do the beliefs and the experiences of the Zionists of the Cape Flats who are in-the-Spirit match similar Zionists churches elsewhere? To respond to this question a few examples from the literature describing Zionists in other South African contexts are discussed.

First of all, a vivid account that contrasts the service of rural Tshidi Zionists with their Methodist neighbours:

The pounding drum not only declares the onset of the special 'work' of ritual time and space; it also dramatizes the gulf between the children of Zion and the followers of Wesley. The drum is *the* aural signal of Zionist identity... its sonorous beat infuses the air with a sense of vibrancy, of power and control,

which contrasts with the decorous, almost ethereal bell that calls the Methodists to Sunday service, its sound not designed to elicit a physical response or to resonate with indigenous musical forms. To the orthodox, the drum can signal a smouldering threat, just as to the Victorian missionaries it conveyed the challenge of pagan ritual and Satanic power ... In the Zionist churches, its mere beat is sufficient to induce the first signs of possession in the congregation (Comaroff 1985:230).

The drumming is usually accompanied by dancing. In this regard Comaroff (1985:233) draws attention to a fine example of the mutual influence exerted by Zionists in different South African regions: '[The] Zionist tradition has drawn heavily upon the polyethnic forms synthesized in the South African mining compounds.' The study of such a presumed mainstream Zionist tradition in South Africa, southern Africa and the continent in general, is obviously a highly complicated but fascinating enterprise.

Returning to the local comparison, Pauw reports on the Xhosa-speaking Zionists of what is today the Eastern Cape. He finds that they have a distinct Pentecostal basis, emphasising the gift of the Holy Spirit and including speaking in tongues (72 per cent of the Cape Flats Zionists also speak in tongues). There is, however, a deviation from traditional Pentecostalism:

They believe they have received the Spirit which is the source of true knowledge and power. Through the Spirit they have direct access to and the monopoly over, the knowledge hidden to other people – manifested in prophecy, visions and dreams – and to the power by which the spirits and forces that impair, destroy, or prevent life are overcome, and health, life and children are assured. This knowledge and strength associated with the Spirit are increasingly possessed by the Zionists, and fully controlled by the Zionist prophet. Such manipulation of mystical knowledge and power implies that it has a magical orientation (Pauw 1975:303-304).

Pauw's differentiation between magic and religion that refers to belief and ritual is helpful to this discussion. They have in common 'faith in the supernatural or mystical effectiveness or ability of things, words or actions' (p. 12). He continues:

The distinction between *magic* as implying a belief in mystical impersonal forces which are compulsively manipulated, and *religion* as concerned with superhuman personal beings or spirits who are

supplanted or with whom the believer communicates in an attitude of complete dependence, is useful only as a starting point to define the extreme 'pure' poles on a continuum. Most magico-religious phenomena fall somewhere between these extremes (p. 12 – my italics).

It is obviously difficult, if not impossible, to assess where on the continuum a certain church is to be found. A more thorough study of the issue was beyond the scope of this project. Suffice it to say that my research of the Cape Flats Zionists leads me to conclude that as far as the 'poles' are concerned they would tend to the extreme of dependency rather than that of manipulation. It is likely that both orientations are found in most churches. Yet, it is difficult to conclude that their common accent on prayer is merely a ritual to coerce or is considered to be automatically effective.

As in the case of the present research, Pauw (1975:301) did not find any evidence of the close association or even identification between the Holy Spirit, the angel, and the ancestral spirits as Sundkler did among the Zulu Zionists (Sundkler 1961:249–250). Both authors though found that continuity with Nguni traditions is clearly reflected in Zionist rituals of prophecy, which are patterned to traditional Nguni divining (Pauw 1975:302; Sundkler 1961:253–257, 350–352). The authors note that a biblical basis is claimed for such prophecy or that prophesying is 'divining, in a supposedly Christian form' (Sundkler 1961:256).

As for the Cape Flats Zionists, I have already commented on the parallels between the diviner's divining and the prophet's prophecy: they are distinctly similar phenomena. What the outside observer in this case perceives and how the perceptions are interpreted is interesting and useful to note, but not of primary importance. The vital matter here is the shift that has taken place in the perception of the Zionists themselves. *They* see a great difference between what is happening in the two respective cases. Having said this, and taking into account the views of those Zionists who are critical of certain practices among fellow Zionists, I admit that some Zionist groups do fall close to the pole of 'compulsive manipulation', to once again use Pauw's terminology.

West's description of the relevant issues in the Sowetan Zionist churches with their greater ethnic diversity generally agrees with what is found among the Zionists of the Cape Flats. This applies to such elements as the dancing in a circle, believed to ensure the presence of the Holy Spirit, parallels between the diviner and the prophet, and why the prophet is prominent in these

churches (West 1975:27, 93;184–186; 59, 98). As far as they are concerned, he quotes a female respondent: 'The prophet has the power through the Holy Spirit to see what is happening, why it is happening, and what remedies should be employed' (West 1975:100). One variation is that while female prophets seem to be preponderant in Soweto (cf. pp. 59, 104), this is not necessarily the case in Cape Town. Here even children can be prophets if, as is said, they 'keep pure by not using abusive language and by fasting'.

A marked difference between the description of respectively the Soweto and the Cape Town Zionists is perhaps a dissimilarity between the interpreters, that is the researchers, than between the respondents themselves, but nevertheless noteworthy. While I have avoided the word *possession* and even see possession by the Holy Spirit as a contradiction in terms, West, who unfortunately, does not provide the vernacular equivalents, concludes that possession by the Holy Spirit is viewed in a different light by the Zionist churches he studied:

Spirit possession occurs most frequently among women, particularly during dancing, or during emotional services. The Holy Spirit is believed to enter the person, who is caused to stagger and palpitate and sometimes to cry out. Possession is approved by the church, as it is believed that it helps the one possessed as well as showing the effectiveness of the church. The phenomenon here is possession and not mediumship ... in that no messages, visions or interpretations result from the state of possession (p. 29 note 5; cf. 177).

In his investigations at KwaMashu, Kiernan (1990:101) has identified who or what the Zulu Zionists believe to be the subject of the animation that takes place to combat evil forces: 'Zionists oppose sorcery by mobilizing the communal fervor inherited in the band, the source of which is conceived to be Spirit, either as divinity or as refraction of divinity. The source of these powers is acknowledged, therefore, to be the universal God'. The Zionists of Durban, as is the case with their counterparts in Cape Town, do therefore recognise God as the animator.

Kiernan pays further attention to the concept 'spirit' or *umoya*: 'The mainstay of Zionist healing power is their control of spirit (*umoya*) which is identified with the Holy Spirit of Christian belief' (p. 105). Does this 'control' imply manipulation of the Holy Spirit instead of dependency, in other words, a *magical* instead of a *religious* orientation? Kiernan's description of *umoya* indicates that the concept reaches much further

than merely the identification of a particular spirit: 'Umoya therefore stands for a whole "technology" of mystical powers and represents an array of capacities, skills and instruments without which the work of Zion could not be accomplished' (p. 105). As for the Cape Flats Zionists – especially since reference is made to *mystical* and not to *magical* powers – I agree with this broader view. It helps to make sense of the often repeated expression *usemoyeni* with reference to a person who is in-the-Spirit – this is also the reason why I have chosen this manner of writing. Yet, the distinction between *uMoya* and *umoya* should not be discarded.

Allan Anderson has reported extensively on the doctrine of the Spirit, or pneumatology, adhered to by Zionists in the ethnically heterogeneous Soshanguve near Tshwane. His survey (1991:41–46) of studies of manifestations of the Holy Spirit in Southern Africa and even further afield in the continent is useful. He also discusses the debate on whether the Holy Spirit has become a manipulable force not unlike the concept of 'life-force' or 'vital-force' as conceived by African traditional religion, and whether there is confusion between ancestor spirit and the Holy Spirit in among others the Zionist churches (pp. 70, 91 sq). Anderson rejects both possibilities, suggests that researchers clearly distinguish between the *form* and the *content* of the relevant phenomena, and then reaches the following conclusion:

Thus it would seem to me that the alleged confusion . . . is (or at least was) a storm in a teacup which has no real foundation. Quite to the contrary, many of the spirit-type independent churches have challenged the ancestor cult with its orientation to the traditional spirit world by their message of the power of the Holy Spirit to liberate from the oppression of malevolent and capricious spirits that daunt the African person's everyday life. (p. 96)

In the last comparison I refer, by way of exception, to a non-Zionist but still a spiritual church, the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission Church. Linda Thomas (1999:73–74), writing on a congregation in a township of the Cape Flats, has accentuated the communal aspect of animation that is typical of what happens in Zion:

The feeling accompanying the presence of umoya kept St. John's members bonded together against the difficulties of life . . . When the Holy Spirit possessed one person during a worship service, the experience affected the entire worshipping community . . . At the conclusion of the service, when others told the person who had been

possessed what had occurred, he or she faced the reality of having participated in a drama in which a powerful force had created an altered state of consciousness. Both for the individual and for the worshipping community, the experience validated the power of umoya and strengthened belief in the Spirit.

I have already indicated that many of the Cape Flats Zionists have, as Anderson says, challenged the orientation to the traditional spirit world. This, however, applies to a minority. To assess the pneumatology of the majority calls for greater nuance: it no doubt does contain a challenge, but also implies accommodation of the Xhosa tradition.

Animation in historical perspective

David Hammond-Tooke has placed the issue that I have called animation in the broader context of historical development regarding the age-old worldviews of the Bantu-speaking peoples of South Africa. He says that the forces of change, such as missionaries, administrators, Western medicine and colonialism with its capitalist penetration, have brought about a transformation which has had a profound effect on traditional worldviews. There are two major indigenous adaptations to the problems of modern life and especially ideas about healing: possession cults, by which possession by alien spirits is meant, and the healing ministry of the Christian church. As for the healing ministry he specifies its Pentecostal element which is a major one in the Zionist churches with their strong emphasis on faith-healing and the power of the Spirit. He (1989:50-52) concludes: The 'healing work of the Holy Spirit ... [has] been added, as it were, to the worldview of many present day Africans', a non-scientific worldview within which many South Africans seek help and happiness.

The same emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, and in particular healing, is prevalent among the Zionists of the Cape Flats. As the Spirit's revelation takes place within the context of a small group, knit together by common interests and beliefs, meaningful and rich liturgical and pastoral possibilities come to the fore. Amidst the natural and supernatural threats and the hardship and tension of township life, the Zionists become a stream of communal support in which the Spirit of God is believed to reveal and protect against evil and thus to maintain life and to satisfy their deepest needs.

That God through his Holy Spirit animates members of a congregation for the common wellbeing, is a major characteristic of Zionist spirituality.

Psychological exposition

The data discussed in this section clearly broach the subject of altered states of consciousness which presents an additional and illuminating perspective when attempting to understand animation in Zion.

Such states have been ascribed to, among other things, certain brain mechanisms discovered by scientists in the early 1970s. Substances were found that occur naturally in the brain. A psychologist explains: 'in certain exceptional circumstances, when pain and fear would likely be maladaptive, the brain activates a mechanism that dramatically reduces them and in some instances produces EUPHORIA and altered states of consciousness instead' (Wulff 1997:88; cf. Platvoet 1999:8).

Certain effects of ritual sound, such as music or rhythmic beat, which possibly induce altered forms of consciousness, have been analysed. A number of researchers have suggested that loud and rhythmic music, and especially the beat of drums that often accompanies ecstatic practices, may directly affect neural functioning. Alan Daniélou, for example, argues 'that the frequency ratios in music have a precise effect on the psychophysiology of the listener'. Through repetition, he continues, sounds can 'transform our sensibility, our way of thinking, the state of our soul, and even our moral character' (quoted by Wulff 1997:85).

Even if one were to explain the signs of animation as psychologically stimulated actions, a theological interpretation should acknowledge that it is quite possible that God could use these psychological manifestations to support and improve the quality of the lives of Christians. The great emphasis placed here on intensely personal religious experience – one could even say salvation – is certainly significant in terms of spirituality.

Résumé

What I have said above about animation is evidently related to the countermeasures that Zionists take against threats to their lives and wellbeing (see the preceding section of this chapter). The Zionists have a lively awareness of the Holy Spirit of God. Through special communication with the Spirit the prophet is animated to reveal by way of prophecy the cause of affliction together with its remedies. Even though the phenomena involved do have parallels with traditional divining as understood within the Xhosa worldview, this prophetic function in many ways corresponds with the age-old Christian custom of divination. The primary animator is believed to

be the Holy Spirit who animates within a complex whole – hence the expression *usemoyeni* (she or he is in-the-Spirit). This concept implies an entire dynamic, including such elements as the emphasis on the importance of prayer, the presence of an angel, the use of 'weapons', the drumming as well as purification – all intricately related. Kiernan's 'array of capacities, skills and instruments' is an apt description. Generally speaking, there is a strong orientation to dependence on the Holy Spirit, but one in which compulsive manipulation cannot always be ruled out.

Zion is indeed a place of refuge, one of discovering the sources of peoples' affliction, dealing with them and healing them, a place where people *through the Spirit* have access to the power by which life-threatening powers are overcome and through which their deepest needs are met and satisfied. Small wonder these churches commonly refer to themselves as 'churches of the Spirit', (*iinkonzo zoMoya*) – much more frequently even than the self-reference *amaZiyoni*.

Conversion

Analysis

Conversion of a diviner is probably the most drastic form of this phenomenon and Zionists pay special attention to it.

Diviners are highly regarded but often feared people in traditional Xhosa society. They are believed to have special powers to understand the wishes of the ancestral spirits and to be able to identify causes of and to prescribe remedies for misfortune and disease. They are therefore able to counter the threats to the health and lives of their clients. However, diviners do experience conversion to the Christian faith.

The questions as to why diviners are converted and how this happens draw forth different responses from Zionists. Some respondents vaguely refer to God's calling. Here I relate the case of a respondent who himself had gone through the conversion process.

For three years from 1949 onwards he had trained to become a diviner. He experienced divinership as being very painful, at times acting badly towards people, becoming mentally disturbed and even violent. Although he had never seen his grandfather while alive, his grandfather frequently appeared to him in his dreams in a supportive way: 'While sleeping I used to see

everything about pounding medicines and going to the forest to dig up medicine.'

He became a Christian in the following manner:

When I was sick the doctor found that I had high blood-pressure. But through a dream my grandfather said that it was not high blood-pressure: 'You are filled with the spirit and you need to use it. Because you have the spirit, it is necessary that you use the spirit.' None of his children followed in his footsteps as a minister of the Methodist Church in Ciskei. So he wanted me as his grandson to be his successor. He said to me: 'To continue in this way of being a diviner is wrong. Accept God's Word as He himself is in it. No one has bewitched you, it is we, the ancestors, who have locked the gate of divinership so that you could be firmly convinced about the Word of God.'

According to my grandfather the reason why I had to join a Zionist church was that it is a church of the Spirit where they clap hands and they use the spirit to heal. Because I was a diviner and we were clapping hands, using the drums and shaking, my grandfather wanted me to join a Zionist church. I was familiar with some of the Zionist practices. So his view was that I become a Zionist where the things I was used to are done, but now in a Christian, a godly, fashion.

He then discarded divinership and was told in a dream in which particular Zionist church he was to be baptised. After his conversion, his grandfather continued his visitations and directions:

Even now he still appears to me. When he appears we communicate very well, he tells me what to do and I ask him questions. His word comes to me and I am not able to dispute it. I got all three my garments through nightly visions. He said: 'Use these garments to work, they are the weapons of Christianity.'

Other respondents agree that the process of a diviner becoming a Zionist commences with a visitation from the ancestors through a dream or a vision: 'Some diviners have visions in which they see themselves as no longer digging roots for traditional medicine, but rather as wearing the white garments of the church or the mixed coloured robes of prophets. Others see themselves as using only pure water and are sometimes given a Bible to use.'

A diviner who has made a decision to be converted is not accepted forthwith in Zion:

When a diviner comes to and joins our church, there are things that we need to do before accepting him. Sometimes we go to the ancestors and apologise. We ask them to release this person peacefully and for their blessing for him to join the church. The reason why we ask permission from the ancestors is that ancestors are known to be people who are troublesome. Some people usually slaughter [*badla ngokuxhela*] perhaps an ox or a cow when an ex-diviner joins Zion.

As I have noted previously, the normal practice in a Zionist service is to invite non-members who have been impressed by the preaching of the Word of God to come forward. They are seated on chairs, their names are recorded and they then witness to their conversion. But what happens in the case of a diviner? A minister responds:

If a diviner comes forward we never quarrel with him to take off the beads around his neck and legs or from his ears. God will relieve him of the beads in his time. What he will have to discontinue is the use of traditional medicines [*amayeza*] because in my church we don't use such medicines.

Sometimes the prophet of a church reveals that slaughtering (*isihlabelelo*) is necessary:

We will slaughter if the prophets see that it is advantageous for a diviner who is now to be powerful in Christianity. Through the slaughtering his case becomes known to the church and the ancestors are at peace. When the slaughtering is performed, it is said that the Lord's angel is also present. Perhaps a service will be held with the slaughtering.

Some Zionists disagree with this slaughtering while others cannot understand or appreciate such opposition:

Some of them lack knowledge pertaining to slaughtering. They probably know it, but they do not do it properly. Sometimes it comes in a form of prophecy and I do not think we can even question the prophecy because the prophets have the Holy Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit that reveals these things. If there are people who are against this slaughtering, I really do not know what they mean.

In some instances established Zionists become aware that their ancestral spirits want to communicate with them in order to become diviners:



An urban diviner sporting his paraphernalia



The same diviner – now converted – leading his Langa flock

As soon as a person perceives the signs of divinership in her [*akuziva impawu zobugqirha*], she grasps that she should flee to the side of the Spirit so that things are revealed to her in the manner of the Spirit.

Joining Zion does not necessarily exempt a person from becoming or being a diviner. A woman Zionist prophet, who by way of exception wears beads instead of woollen cords, says the following:

Sometimes when you run away from the beads to join Zion, you are converted from the beads and you become a prophet who no longer uses the beads. You try to run away from this illness, from the beads, but you realise that throughout your childhood you had the signs of divinership. Even if you have joined the Zion church the beads will always follow you. Occasionally when you are asleep, you will dream that you are wearing the beads. You will even go as far as feeling that the beads are right in you, in your blood. You do not make these beads for yourself; they are given by the spirit of our ancestors – not by the Spirit of God, because the Spirit of God works when one prays. In the case of the ancestral spirits it happens through a vision while you are dreaming. What is needed is that when the ancestors are talking, one has to react to the voice calling [*kufuneka usabele*] because we as Xhosa people do have this belief [*sinenkolelo*].

The general pattern, however, is that diviners who become Zionists discard their beads: 'They leave their divination and come and join the Zionist churches. They leave the beads which they were using.' Yet, their belief in, and experience of, spiritual communication and empowerment usually remains. The significant change concerns the spirits that are involved: 'There is a difference between a diviner's spirit and God's Spirit. When the diviner's spirit is removed, then God's Spirit enters and rules.'

This ideal situation, from a Zionist viewpoint, does not always prevail. To some of them the diviner's spirit is still to be reckoned with. This means that there are Zionists that are at different times animated by two different kinds of spirits. A respondent explains:

Some are used to be double-minded [*badla ngokubambaxa*]. They say such a person is a diviner but also a Christian. The mainline churches are usually against this and keep it at bay. But in the churches of the Spirit it is still practised. People sit on two chairs. For when church people mix traditional medicines, blend it with water and then pray, they are healed.

Some people, like myself, keep the traditional medicine while not using it until a word comes. This is because there are people who come and request prayer and living water.

Interpretation

The conversion of a diviner

The conversion of people is one of the main aims of mission. It has been, since earliest Christianity, and today still is, also a point of great controversy. Nevertheless, the changing of allegiance to a religion which is implied by conversion, is a happening that occurs continually. These general statements on conversion apply to the people of the Cape Flats who, as I have noted, have their roots in the traditional socio-cultural context of the Xhosa-speaking societies.

The influential role of the diviner in traditional African society has been described by Hammond-Tooke (1989:103): the diviner 'is a highly respected, indeed an indispensable, member of traditional society, whose activities are closely linked to the benevolent ancestors and whose role is quite specifically that of combatting the forces of evil that constantly threaten the lives and wellbeing of his patients'.

To be converted from being a religious specialist within one's religion and a fairly prominent personage in one's community is a drastic action. In the first case described above – which contains many typical elements of such conversions – the convert had undergone the *ukuthwasa*, initiation into divinership through the agent of the ancestors, which calls for a long period of apprenticeship (Pahl 1989:338). While still a diviner, his grandfather regularly communicated with him in his dreams. When he became ill, both the doctor's diagnosis and the suspicion of bewitchment were rejected in favour of the explanation that his ancestors want him to discontinue his divinership and become one who accepts God's Word, in other words, a Christian.

The convert's exceptional spiritual position and capacities are acknowledged when his deceased grandfather, who, acting for his ancestors, encourages his diviner grandson to convert. Guiding the convert to a form of the new religion in which practices and a spiritual atmosphere familiar to him are found mitigates this radical step. Hence he becomes a Zionist and not a member of his grandfather's mainstream church. The minister's wish to

perpetuate his standing in a Christian church through a descendant is characteristic, though I would not like to speculate on the motive of the implied ancestors' approval. After his conversion he continued to have the benefit of his grandfather's guidance.

Zionists of the Cape Flats commonly consider some dreams and visions to be meaningful. They believe that ancestral dreams or visions draw diviners, apart from ordinary non-Christians, to Christianity in general and to Zionism in particular. The reverse is also possible: established Zionists can be called through ancestral dreams to become diviners. In terms of their belief this would constitute a relapse. They consider it fortunate that such a person could 'flee to the side of the Spirit' as soon as the signs of the call to divinership become apparent.

There seems to be a fixed sequence when a diviner is converted to Zion: illness, revelations through ancestral dreams or visions, a decision to approach a church, a ceremony in a church service and baptism. In cases where, for example, the ancestors did not initiate the conversion in the first place, a ritual slaughtering is usually called for. This *isihlabelelo* takes place at the time of the convert's joining the church. In this case an apology to avert the wrath of the possibly offended ancestors and a request for their blessings is the motive. Also, in this way, the matter of the person's conversion becomes publicly known. The slaughtering could likewise follow a prophet's direction when converts who have lapsed, once again return to the church.

A controversial ritual

When discussing the Zionists' countermeasures against the threats to life, I indicated that in certain cases they direct their petitions to the ancestors. It appears that one of these cases is when a diviner is converted. The *isihlabelelo* is then called for. This ritual is a penetrating example of the highly controversial theme – both for Zionists and for missiologists – of how Christians respond to traditional Xhosa practices that involve the ancestors. It also points towards a major difference between the mainline and the African spiritual churches, Western and indigenous Christianity as it were, regarding the manner in which such practices are officially dealt with. It consequently requires serious attention and can well serve as a point of departure in the relevant debate. For this reason I describe in some detail the practices regarding the conversion of a diviner. It should be noted that a diviner's conversion is not the only reason why *isihlabelelo* is used.

In the interpretation that follows, I use both the analysis above and other data collected during the survey part of the research project (see chapter 4). The survey shows that *isihlabelelo* is indeed a bone of contention among Zionists. The presence or, on the other hand, the absence, of this practice in a church causes discontent, while those churches which do practise it are shunned by other Zionists as far as co-operation is concerned: '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* ritual.' During the period of research, at least one church to which a respondent belonged experienced a break-away directly due to disagreement on the *isihlabelelo* issue.

Given the worldview in which communication between the still living and their departed relatives is central to their religion, what happens when a Zionist has a visitation by an ancestor that implies a slaughtering? There is no reason to expect that Zionists do not have such encounters as the typical example above illustrates.

A Zionist archbishop responds to the question: 'When a member of ours receives a message from an ancestor, the people concerned have a problem. What must they now do? The matter is not dealt with by the family, but by the church. The prophet will explain what the problem is. In the case of our church the dream is related at a meeting. The church will collect money, buy a sheep and oversee the slaughtering.' In some churches such prophecies have to be confirmed by two other prophets. 'The matter is not to be dealt with lightly, only when the Holy Spirit so reveals.'

Respondents who do perform the *isihlabelelo* ritual agree that a goat will never be used as in the traditional ritual. A sheep is utilised or else a dove or a chicken. An archbishop explains: 'The blood of a dove is caught up in a saucer, part of it is used to sprinkle [*ukufefa*] the house and the rest burnt as incense [*liqhunyiswa*].' A senior female respondent gives the assurance that prayer and fasting are done beforehand and then draws the following clear distinction: 'We do the *isihlabelelo* not to save us from sin, but only from sickness and problems.'

Scriptural references such as Leviticus 3:8 and Exodus 29, which deal with a detailed description of the offerings of the Aaronic priests, are cited to justify the practice. The prophet's role of revelation is vindicated with reference to 1 Samuel 9:6.

Some of the church leaders view *isihlabelelo* merely as a thanksgiving: after recovery from illness, at Passover, at the church's birthday, when anointing an official or else after baptism and the ceremonial dressing of a convert from traditional religion. Others say it is taken as an occasion for making requests or for purification, and especially to attain the Lord's blessings, for example, when a new church building is completed. They stress that this is not an *idini*, the word used for a traditional animal sacrifice to deceased ancestors. To confirm this they point out that traditionally an ox or goat is used which has to bellow or bleat (*ukukhala*) as an essential sign that the message from the living to the dead has been carried over (cf. Hammond-Tooke 1989:68). A respondent states: 'A goat can tempt and draw one to the diviners who heal in this manner.' The Zionist ritual, on the other hand, is named *isihlabelelo* which is derived from the root *hlabelela*, to stab, pierce or slaughter on behalf of. Some Zionists claim that this is a new or non-traditional word created by Zionists for their own special use. *Isihlabelelo* indeed does not appear in standard Xhosa dictionaries.

It should be noted that Zionists do not always understand the *isihlabelelo* in the same way. Some perform the sacrifice for the sake of the ancestors, as will always be the case when the conversion of a diviner has to be managed successfully. One respondent's explanation is typical: 'We do not want to chase people away from the church. We do the ritual by which the "old things" are then settled.' Others direct their attention to God to seek his blessings or favours or to thank him in specific instances. This distinction is suggested by the assumed association of the angel of the Lord, the accompanying prayer and fasting, the reference to the Old Testament parallels, but above all by the use of alternative sacrificial animals: the sheep, dove or chicken, which as it were, die silently, over against the ox or goat which have to bellow or bleat to validate the sacrifice as having been accepted by the ancestors.

The different ways of understanding the *isihlabelelo* emerge distinctly in the following account of an archbishop:

There are two types of *isihlabelelo*, one done alone, and the other with the congregation. When a diviner leaves his divining and enters the church, he will first slaughter a goat to appease [*ukuzixolisa*] the ancestors about the step he is taking. This goes together with [ritual – author] beer-drinking. Then a second slaughtering takes place at the church, which excludes beer and a goat. A sheep is used. What happened

at home, is now repeated. The family will be invited to attend the service. All this is done because not even a diviner can be turned away from the church.

Another respondent confirms this distinction. When asked who is addressed in this ritual he answered: 'The goat represents the ancestors [*imela izinyanya*], the sheep God'. Perhaps the biblical metaphor of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God', *iMvana kaThixo* and never *itakane* (a lamb or a kid), which is most popular with Xhosa-speaking Christians, plays a role in this regard. It is possible that this distinction is made implicitly.

When discussing these matters one obviously has to allow for diversity in the perceptions of the Zionists. Such diversity and selection is demonstrated by the different degrees of tolerance shown towards what 'baggage' a converted diviner is allowed to bring into a church and what is forbidden. In one of the references above, there is no controversy about the beads, trusting God to bring about the desired change in his good time. But when it comes to traditional medicine, there is no accommodation at all.

Diversity is likewise shown in the case of the prophet who continued to wear white beads. As the quotation above shows, beads are a symbol of the link with the ancestors. The respondent's remarks, indicating that the beads have a certain compulsive influence, culminate in the words: 'What is needed is that when the ancestors are talking, one has to react to the voice calling because we as Xhosa people do have this belief.' Probably better than any other example, these words show that to some Zionists the ancestors are not only a reality but one with which even a converted person continually has to reckon. This is most likely true of the majority of black mainstream members, the difference with Zionists being the manner in which the issue is understood and dealt with.

There are, however, other Zionists who have gone beyond this point. As is evident from the data, not all Zionists are content with the *isihlabelelo* ritual – although they might recognise the reality of the ancestors. A minority of 16 per cent who do not perform the *isihlabelelo* are sceptical about the 84 per cent who do practise it: 'This only happens when the spirit of divination takes over'; 'They do *isihlabelelo* when the angel of the church leaves because they quarrel with one another. They believe the ritual will make the angel return.' A respondent states: 'We no longer depend on the cattle of the ancestors. Some Zionist prophets advise people to slaughter at a river or to conduct a service at their own houses where they call upon the ancestors. But these

things are not found in the Bible.' To some the lingering influence of the diviners in the Zionist context is apparent: 'Diviners will try to control the Zionist affairs.'

However, some of those who do practise the ritual cannot appreciate the problem – due to their unquestionable faith in the working of the Holy Spirit who animates the prophet to reveal whatever is necessary.

One can appreciate that not only a minority of Zionists but also the mainstream churches do not accept traditional practices such as *isihlabelelo*. This is, in fact, one of the reasons given why Zionism in general is rejected, at least in the perspective of some respondents. As one poignantly remarks: 'There is apartheid between us and the mainline churches. Zionists are looked down upon [*ajongwa phantsi*], Zionist churches are despised [*zisikelwa phantsi*]. People enter Zion because of such things as the initiation into divinership [*ngenxa yezinto zentwaso*].'

In the perception of some respondents it is possible to be a Christian in a Zionist church and at the same time virtually a diviner who 'does evil things' and even 'buys bewitching charms'. The respondent quoted above, who refers to the 'double-mindedness' of 'people who sit on two chairs', admits that he himself belongs to this category through keeping traditional medicine in reserve. According to him there are patients who have needs in this regard.

Accommodating conversion of diviners

Zionists are aware that the use of *isihlabelelo*, in the case of a diviner's conversion and otherwise, is not acceptable to certain Zionists (see chapter 4), let alone mainline churches. As this is the case, what compels them to continue the practice? (One wonders how mainstream churches will respond when a person called to become a diviner, or a diviner himself or herself, is converted.) A respondent offers the following remarkable comment: In Zion 'we cannot chase such a person away as if she has a bad spirit that brings misfortune. Whatever she brings into the church will be overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit.'

The last statement contains two fundamental missiological principles: the Christian religion is open to all who believe in Christ – the case of Simon Magus related in Acts 8:9–24 is a relevant example; the power of the Holy Spirit transforms and renews human institutions and customs – Pope Gregory the

Great's famous letter to the missionaries in Britain (dated 18 July 601) is classical in this regard. Besides the application of these principles, whether spontaneously testified or well formulated, there is in the Zionists' perception further merit in accommodating converted diviners: as former specialists in traditional Xhosa religion who were familiar with and were able to work in the realm of the spiritual world, they have a certain potential to use their spiritual capacities, experiences and gifts within a Christian environment. As one respondent says: 'We will slaughter if the prophet sees that it is advantageous for a diviner who is now to be powerful in Christianity.'

Apart from these missiological considerations, Zionists also mention a pragmatic one of considerable importance to people who mostly belong to the lower income group of society: 'We, the Zionist healers, are not similar to the diviners who have moneybags. We heal penniless people for free.'

Many questions still remain about the *isihlabelelo* ritual as part of the Zionists practices. For one, is the ritual simply a continuation of Xhosa custom? The fact that a sheep and not an ox or goat is usually used, cautions one not to draw hasty conclusions since, traditionally, the use of oxen or goats is essential. Does this fact imply a mere modification or a real transformation, in other words, is it only a change in the shape and appearance, or is it also in the nature or qualities of the ritual?

I would argue that in the perspective of some Zionists – those who direct the ritual to God and who address only him – a transformation has taken place. Yet, it does not seem possible to conclude decisively whether the ritual is necessarily derived from the traditional environment or not. The wider Zionist background could be an important factor as well. It would be interesting to know what role Zion elsewhere in southern Africa plays as far as the form and meaning of the ritual among Xhosa-speaking people is concerned. I presume that interaction between Zionists in various parts of the country over the decades constitutes a significant factor in this regard.

Other Zionists compared

Comparative literature does not offer much on the theme of the conversion of a diviner. While Sundkler (1961:350–353) and Pauw (1975:301–304) in their respective fields of research, do discuss the analogies between the diviner and the prophet, they do not specifically record the conversion of diviners to Zionism. Hammond-Tooke (1989:139) also refers to the striking parallels and

asserts that there 'are many cases of diviners being converted to Christianity and joining a sect [sic] in which they ultimately rise to the status of prophet'.

Reporting on a survey done in the metropolitan Durban area and on the Rand, especially Soweto, Oosthuizen (1992:169-172, 177) finds that besides a range of similarities between the diviner and the prophet, and despite a variety of Zionists' views regarding diviners, the latter could be converted to become prophets. In fact, 40 per cent of the Soweto prophets, who subsequently held the office of 'diviner-cum-prophet', were first called as diviners. It is notable that in such cases a goat – the very animal that the Cape Town Zionists avoid – is normally slaughtered as 'apology' to the ancestors.

Oosthuizen adds an important observation concerning the mainline churches where none of the church offices compensate realistically for the loss of the diviner who acted as the traditional prophet, healer and adviser: 'In the churches established by missionaries, diviners were looked upon as nothing but agents of the devil, but in most of the African independent/indigenous churches their traditional significance in the community is taken seriously' (Oosthuizen 1992:184; cf. 165).

It is West (1975:185) who offers the most detailed description of the relevant phenomena. In Soweto he observed the 'considerable parallels between the tribal diviners and the independent church prophets'. He even gives an account of the analogous call by the ancestors, period of illness, training, purification and eventual initiation as prophet who is then able to predict, divine and heal (pp. 98, 104, 184).

Diviners, in West's case referred to as *sangomas*, may be Christians, clandestinely belonging to either mainline or independent churches. If found out to officiate as such, expulsion is the normal result in the mainline churches, but in the independent churches an attempt is made to convert the diviner into a Christian prophet. This is done by suggesting that a diviner who works exclusively with the powers of the ancestors is not, so to speak, working at full potential. If he can accept the power of the Holy Spirit, which can be channelled through the ancestors, 'his power will be greater – in fact all he will need to be able to heal is prayer and holy water; the herbs and potions of the diviner will not be necessary' (p. 186). If the diviner accepts the argument, he undergoes a second initiation that begins after an offering has been made to his ancestors to ask for their approval for the change. The belief in the ancestors remains, 'similar complaints are treated, and

divination and prediction continue – but a different source of power is admitted, and healing methods are changed' (p. 186).

West concludes with an important observation: 'One of the central problems in all these cases is to be able to distinguish *form* from *content*: although a modern rite may look substantially the same as a traditional rite, it is not necessarily seen in the same light *by participants*' (p. 188; my italics). A comparable instance in the Cape Flats is a form of initiation (*ukungenisa*) of prophets practised by some Zionists. As in Xhosa tradition, the religious specialists of Zion are initiated. Once their gifts of prophecy have become apparent, they are anointed with oil and then blessed during a special service. For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that not all converted diviners become prophets.

In her study done in urban and rural KwaZulu-Natal, Margaret Johnson (1994:165) sheds further light on the subject in her attempt to focus on a 'cross-cultural change from a psychological point of view'. She finds that 'one should not think about the healers, isangomas and prophets, as two distinct groups that can be compared and contrasted. Rather, the data suggests that the traditional healers and the prophet healers are two extremes of a continuum that has a considerable range of mixtures between the poles' (p. 177).

Johnson arrives at this conclusion from the analysis of the replies to the question: To whom does the *isangoma/umprofeti* pray, who gives them visions and power? The responses show that either the ancestral spirits, the Holy Spirit or, in the majority of cases, both are said to guide and help the healers (p. 174). Her study is a reminder that it is not always easy to distinguish clearly between West's 'form and content'.

Functional substitutes?

Schreier (1985:47) has referred to functional substitutes that he describes as 'the replacing of one ritual or myth or magical practice with an empirical correlate from the Christian tradition'. Is the *isihlabelelo* simply a functional substitute? The problem is, as Schreier points out, that empirical correlates do not guarantee the same correlation on the non-empirical level.

From the Zionists' responses I would contend that, on the non-empirical level, a significant transformation has taken place in many groups and individual instances. When asked what the mission of Zion is, for what

purpose God sends Zionists among people, a respondent replied: 'Zionists are sent to curb by their preaching and healing the influence of such people as the diviners.' This mission is not only defensive but also offensive as another affirms: 'We Zionists are sent to convert diviners, to change their ways and to become prophets.' The practices that the diviners used to perform are still performed when they are converted. But now, with the use of familiar practices and in a well-known atmosphere, they are done 'in a Christian, godly fashion'. More generally, another respondent stated that a believer does have boundaries as far as the traditions are concerned.

Résumé

The management of the conversion of a diviner or an apprentice diviner needs to be placed within the context of countermeasures that Zionists take against the threats to life. The person who is converted goes through a process to be fully accepted by, and integrated into, the church, a process in which the reality and the involvement of the ancestors is usually assumed. In this regard the *isihlabetelelo* is a highly illuminating, though within Zion itself, controversial ritual. This ritual is practised in a variety of ways that appear to alternate between presenting the sacrifice to respectively the ancestors or God, in some cases to both.

Much ambivalence accompanies the management of the conversion of a diviner. Still, the majority of Zionists view such conversions as advantageous to the church: an exceptional convert, well equipped with relevant spiritual experience, capabilities and a consciousness of being used by supernatural powers, is added to the ranks of the church as a potential bulwark against the unseen threats to life. Therefore, they do not only tolerate diviners, but appreciate and welcome them in their midst. In the meantime, the mainline churches offer no realistic compensation for the loss of such a traditionally significant figure in the community.

The conversion of a diviner, the religious specialist in traditional Xhosa society, is of singular importance in Zionist churches. The management of such a conversion epitomises the change from the traditional to a new religious orientation, a transformation which is apparent on the empirical level, and, inasmuch as can be assessed, in many cases corresponds on the non-empirical level. In any case, the arrival of the convert in the Zionist church enhances its spirituality in that he or she is able to interact powerfully with the spiritual realm on behalf of the congregation.

Conclusion

As part of Christianity, the metaphor Zion offers a sacred space, a haven of support, moral certainty and even a measure of amusement – primarily though, a new centre of religious orientation to people with a traditional yet ever-changing and widening worldview. Zionist churches manifest certain characteristics that not only link them to, but also distinguish them from, traditional Xhosa religion. To the Xhosa, Zion has therefore many attractions for which mainline churches do not make provision: a particular spirituality or a way of communion with God, a changed ethos, a unique way of grappling with the realities of the spiritual world, a manner of managing threats to their lives, and coping with modern life in the city. Zion therefore presents some answers to basic questions of life asked by its members. They have a holistic notion of life that reflects their needs and expectations. Their quest for a life of gratifying quality, a quest that is basically similar to that of the traditional Xhosa, is of paramount importance. This quest is, among other things, hindered by obstacles caused by supernatural and ritual powers, a causal explanation that fundamentally concurs with that of the traditional Xhosa worldview.

However, the management of illness and misfortune believed to be caused by the powers mentioned has changed: Zionists no longer seek *control* of the powers through the mediation of the diviners; in accordance with much of traditional Christian belief and practice, their prophets and intercessors rather place themselves *at the disposal* of God, relying on the Holy Spirit to counter the threats to their lives. A departure from the Christian tradition does nevertheless take place in most Zionist churches: the traditional worldview is accommodated and this gives rise to beliefs and practices (such as petitions and even sacrifices to the ancestors) deviating from those of a minority of Zionists as well as from those advocated officially by the mainline churches.

The practice of divination – in many ways corresponding with the age-old Christian one – has as primary animator the Holy Spirit who animates a complex dynamic. The Zionists have a predominant orientation to dependency on the Holy Spirit, despite being one that includes elements of manipulation reminiscent of traditional divining.

The conversion of a diviner is generally viewed as a gain to a Zionist church, one that requires the necessary accommodation and distinctive management.

In this regard the *isihlabelelo* ritual goes hand in hand with much diversity and consequently with controversy among Zionists themselves.

This then is where the spirit, the characteristic quality of the Zionists of the Cape Flats is to be found: *the animating principle of their spirituality is a quest for a gratifying life of quality – the advancement, protection and restoration of different dimensions of life through supernatural and ritual means.* Such life is sought and partially found in Zion. The quest for fullness of life and wellbeing is a lasting process that is understood and articulated in concepts drawn from both Xhosa tradition and Christianity. The Zionists have chosen and blended indigenous and exogenous elements in creative, diverse and rigorous ways to form religious groups that understand themselves to be Christian churches alongside other churches of the same faith. They are basically orientated to the Christian tradition, yet they do deviate in some respects and that to the advantage of a closer affinity to the traditional Xhosa worldview, but with the disadvantage of a deficient relationship with mainline churches which represent the conventional Christian tradition.

How do these conclusions relate to those reflected in the broader literature on Zionist churches, churches of the Spirit and AICs in general? I have widened the scope of inquiry to include views that refer to areas beyond South Africa. It is essential that the mainline churches – which after all adhere to the same faith – be taken into account. The overriding issues here are, simply stated, life, spirituality and worldview.

In the case of the Zionists of the Cape Flats, I agree with Pauw when he states that Xhosa Zionists have a more lively consciousness of the Xhosa tradition than the Xhosa of the mainline churches. Beliefs and practices typically reflect continuity with Xhosa tradition. Yet, as with the Cape Town Zionists, there is a certain selection: 'Adherence to the syncretistic beliefs and rituals is often accompanied by the emphatic rejection of those aspects of Xhosa tradition they resemble so closely.' In the main Zionists seem to think that their beliefs and practices are based on the Bible, not on Xhosa tradition. These represent to them a reinterpretation of Xhosa tradition within biblical provisions and not a conscious syncretism of the two traditions (Pauw 1975:302).

West arrives at a similar conclusion regarding his research in a much more heterogeneous field than that which Pauw studied. He says the following about the synthesis between the Western and the African traditions: 'The

independent churches draw on Christianity and on tradition; the movement started from a Christian and not a pagan base, but it drew on African as well as western tradition. The resulting synthesis has succeeded – where the mission churches have not – in meeting the needs of many of the people of Soweto' (1975:189).

Regarding these 'needs' there is undoubtedly nothing to surpass the matter of *life*, irrespective of how the concept is extended. With reference to South African Zionists Hammond-Tooke (1989:136, cf. 46) asserts that their 'main characteristic is a view of salvation as primarily concerned with health and vitality in the here and now'.

All churches of the Spirit – including the Zionists of the Cape Flats – present to their followers a Zion, a sacred space where their quest for life can be satisfied:

In a world of disintegration, danger and disease, they all claim to function as refuge of health and wholeness. Healing is the need of their fellow-men, and this they all attempt to provide. With this they give to uprooted and lonely men and women the warm fellowship and loving concern – not seldom by way of tactile expression – which they are seeking (Sundkler 1976:307).

At this refuge 'a separate domain of healing, purity and protection' is created while a Zionist spirituality is cultivated (Chidester 1992:134).

Writing on spirituality in the African perspective Mtetwa (1996:23) affirms that life (*impilo*) in the wide sense of the word 'is among the central themes of African spirituality'. Patrick Kalilombe (1994:128) agrees: African spirituality 'seems to be based on the conviction that the community of the living is involved in a dramatic struggle between life and death, and that the outcome of this struggle depends on how successfully the human community can avail itself of the help of the invisible world'.

Referring to the statement of the 1992 Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians Declaration, Cornel du Toit (1998:47) has placed the spirituality of African Christians – presumably both mainstream and AICs – in a wider perspective:

- African spirituality as expressed by black theologians is the experience of the Holy Spirit moving us and our communities to be life-giving and life-affirming. We celebrate our spirituality in songs, rituals and symbols

which show the energising Spirit animating the community to move together in response to God. Our way of life as Third World peoples is spiritual.

Robin Horton gives an account of a particular feature of African religious history. Authors, he says, writing from a variety of perspectives and approaches, have shown consensus about the key feature of the churches in which decisive forms of 'Africanisation' have taken place: the central preoccupation of African Christians is 'with the active control of sickness and health, fortune and misfortune. It is in this respect, they suggest, that African Christian ideas show maximum continuity with the pagan religious heritage and minimum continuity with the missionary worldview' (Horton 1976:174–175).

Horton continues by suggesting that all over the continent thousands of Africans were drawn to churches by the missionaries' emphasis on an active, morally-concerned Supreme Being – an aspect of the Christian message that was widely and completely acceptable. However, there was another vital aspect that was ignored to the disillusionment of the converts:

Once inside [the churches] . . . they found they had been misled. For they were used to a cosmos of spiritual forces whose powers could be tapped to improve man's lot in the here and now; and it soon became clear that nothing of the kind was on offer in the churches. So, before long, many of the thousands who had poured into the churches began to pour out of them again, taking away the new message of an active, morally-concerned supreme being, but using it as a basis of a comprehensive scheme for the explanation, prediction and control of events in the space-time world. Hundreds of new 'spiritual' churches were founded to provide the institutional framework for the resulting worldview. Today, it is these churches rather than the missionary foundations that constitute a growing point in African religious life (pp. 175–176).

With reference to South Africa, Oosthuizen (Oosthuizen & Hexham 1992:181) holds a similar opinion:

It is clear that African cosmology cannot be erased overnight in the minds of those who were nurtured in it. About four million traditionalists have entered the African Independent Churches during the last decades. Others continue to enter the Indigenous Churches or establish their own Churches. Many Black members of the mainline Churches would

appreciate pastoral attention being given to those among them who feel plagued by sorcery, witchcraft and Spirit possession. Unfortunately, many ministers are conditioned to ignore these issues as being below the dignity of advanced people. Yet, life, health and wholeness are vital issues in the African context and forces working against them have to be counteracted.

Discussing 'spirit possession' on a broader level, Jan Platvoet reminds the reader that in ancient Greece a medium was termed a *prophetês*, the 'mouthpiece' of a god. With reference to, among other things, prophetic movements in Africa, he asserts that their 'believers are in constant need of pragmatic revelations from the unseen. They need to be in continuous touch with the a-empirical, both as a means of improving the quality of their lives in the here-and-now, and for warding off disease, disaster, dissent, death and other evils' (Platvoet 1999:10).

The conclusions above and Horton's remarks have implications for missiology. In terms of the Zionists' alternative mission attended to earlier: any church which hopes to advance in the Cape Flats has to present its message in terms of a worldview that articulates the crucial points of that of potential members, and consequently makes provision for a spirituality which caters for their felt needs.

If the Zionist worldview regarding life in all its fullness 'fits' the Xhosa tradition, the implication is that conversion of traditionalists to the Christian religion does not require a drastic shift in the concomitant worldview. This continuity of a basic worldview does not imply that it is static – the changing nature of worldviews, and as a case in point, that of the traditional Xhosa, has been noted (De Wet 1994; cf. Chidester 1989:20). A further implication is that a shift to the worldview of the bearers of the Christian message, primarily the missionaries, was and is not necessary. These preliminary conclusions will be followed up in a later discussion.

As for the link between mission and Zionist ethos, a similar sensitivity is called for when attempting to understand the situation. With reference to the complex position of the moral world of the earliest Christians, the Jewish and the Greco-Roman world, Wayne Meeks has sounded this perceptive warning:

If therefore we are looking for some 'pure' Christian values and beliefs unmixed with the surrounding culture, we are on a fool's errand. What was Christian about the ethos and the ethics of those early Christian

communities we will discover not by abstraction but by confronting their involvement in the culture of their time and place and seeking to trace the new patterns they made from old forms, to hear the new songs they composed from old melodies (quoted by Robinson 1990:159).

In the case of the Zionists, I would add: to hear the new drumbeats sounded on old drums.