

**THE APPROPRIATION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL HEALING BY THE
ZIONIST CHURCHES: A CHALLENGE TO THE MISSION CHURCHES IN
GABORONE “BOTSWANA”**

by

SHALE SOLOMON MATSEPE

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SUPERVISOR : MR M J S MADISE

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I declare thatis my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of the complete references.

SIGNATURE:.....

DATE.....

(REV S S MATSEPE)

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Preface

Much has already been said and written in Southern Africa about the African Initiated Churches. However, very little is said and written about the serious challenge which these churches present for the Mission Churches since their inception. The former cannot be a match to the latter when it comes to the following areas, administration, finance, worship, teachings or doctrines etc. But, when it comes to the area of healing the latter cannot be a match for the former. This is an area of speciality of the African Initiated Churches, particularly the Zionist Churches. This is a distinct feature of these churches which has placed the former on the religious map of the world. It has attracted thousands and thousands of the African Christians from the latter to the former churches. This study attempts to show comprehensively that the appropriation of African traditional healing by the Zionists has affected the Mission Churches. Therefore, this study deals with the concept of healing as broadly as it is understood in the African cultural context. This study also demonstrates the dynamics and holistic approach of the Zionists to the healing ministry. Furthermore, the study analyses the impact of the movement of the African Christians from the Mission Churches and the implications thereof: the paradigm shift in the latter churches as a result of such a loss of members.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the publication of Bengt Sundkler's pioneering study, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, in 1948, the African Initiated Churches have become a subject for serious, sustained research by theologians. This study likewise, examines critically the reasons for the movement of African people from the mission churches to the African initiated churches particularly the Zionist Churches in such big numbers. This in itself has resulted in rapid growth and proliferation of these churches. In fact, this has resulted in the multiplicity and consolidation of these churches that it is even perceived, from other circles, as ecclesiastical over-production. While on the other hand, the leadership especially the African Ministers of the losing churches are adversely affected by this movement. Because this movement has created the impression that these ministers are failing in their pastoral ministry hence the large number of Christians leave the church. This in itself questions the competence of these ministers in their pastoral responsibility and the practices and theology of the churches they serve. And the reasons for this movement is found to be the failure of the mission churches to practice healing ministry. This implies that healing in the African initiated churches is the cause of this movement. Therefore, this study is basically dealing with ministry in African initiated churches particularly the Zionist churches. However, there are fundamental questions which necessitated this study.

For instance, questions such as, why the mission churches are not practicing healing Ministry, which is intrinsic aspect of Jesus ministry? Are they not capable of healing or are they deliberately neglecting this central and crucial aspect of Jesus ministry and the Early church? Will they continue to claim to be the true church of Christ while neglecting this essential part of the church's mission? Will the perception change and accept their limitation and failures as time goes on? All these questions are adequately addressed in this study which deals comprehensive with the concept of healing in the African initiated churches particularly the Zionists. This study in essence deals with healing as understood in the Africa context. This implies that it deals with every aspect of healing from the African perspective thereby showing that African culture enables the African initiated

churches to be competent and successful in this field. In broader terms, it shows that this cultural background enables these churches to have a dynamic and holistic approach to healing. From this study it becomes abundantly evident that healing to a great extent has placed these churches on religious map of the world. The multiplicity, consolidation and sustenance of these churches emanate mainly from healing. This is appropriately justified by Sundkler's observation of a Zulu prophet (quoted in Daneel 1971 : 192) whose said during a church gathering, "this is not a church but a hospital". And such remarks are often made by the prophets and bishops of the Zionist Churches. And it is on the basis of this understanding that West wrote (1975; 2) that the African initiated churches are really a religious force to be reckoned with.

At the same time the study critically examines the way in which healing as a cornerstone, so to speak, of the African initiated churches has caused disputes and divisions among the church leaders. For instance, there are many bishops and prophet-leaders in these churches who are quarrelling about the money raised from healing. Some leaders use this money for their personal reasons claiming that they make a living out of the Spiritual gift of healing that God has blessed them with. Some are saying that the money raised from healing must be equally shared among church leaders. Some claim that they are entitled to more money than others. There is no church law regulating this money in most of these churches, hence there are disputes and schisms which led to formations and existence of countless churches in Southern Africa. I have personally experienced this during my research expedition for this study in Botswana. I have even interviewed a number of leaders whose churches were formed as a result of schisms which emanated from quarrels about money raised from healing. In this context, it is evident that healing is also responsible for continual formations and consolidation of these churches and attributes the problem to a great extent, to healing. He maintains that the African initiated churches are healing churches and their leaders make a lot of money through healing activities. He asserts that in most instances the leadership cannot account for this money. While on the other hand, some leaders claim to be more gifted in healing than others and this is done with the aim of attracting more patients to their churches for healing. This clearly shows that healing negatively or positively plays a significant role in the ministry and mission of

these churches. The Holy Spirit, likewise plays the significant role in the life of the African initiated churches.

Because of the centrality of the Holy Spirit in these churches, the study shows its activities in regard to healing. However, it lays more emphasis on prophecy through which it manifests itself, it is for this reason that prophecy is perceived to be a hub of the ministry and mission of the African initiated churches. This is justified by the fact that healing in these churches begins with prophesying which is a process of detecting the problem or whatever the case may be. This prophecy and whatever it entails is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact it is the Holy Spirit through a prophet who reveals the things and diseases that befall other people. The spirit also tells him/her the remedy and how to overcome such things (Anderson 1991: 53). It is in the light of this that Amanze (1998:149) maintains that the prophets operate under the power of the Holy Spirit who calls them to that holy office to be Gods mouthpiece. This closeness of the Holy Spirit to prophecy, as indicated above, makes healing possible since the prophet is preeminently a person of Charisma and Spirit. It is therefore indisputable that the Holy Spirit, as shown above, plays a key role in the life, work and healing ministry of the African initiated Churches.

But, for the sake of good analysis this study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter attempts to reconstruct the history of the development of the African initiated churches in Southern African particularly in Botswana. It shows how colonization of the African continent and apartheid in South Africa influenced the emergence and development of these churches. It also shows that South African situation played the significant role in the formation of the African Initiated Churches in Botswana. It also endeavours to show the fierce opposition which the African Initiated Churches faced from both traditional authorities and the Euro-American missionaries in Botswana. The second chapter endeavours to show that healing is a distinctive feature of the African Initiated Churches. It examines the theological basis for healing from both the Old and New Testaments. The African culture in relation to healing and African perspective of the Western Scientific medicine. The various healing methods and the success thereof. It also evaluates the role

of the ancestors in the life and ministry of the African initiated churches in relation to healing ministry.

The third chapter shows the new phenomenon in the history of the Zionist churches in Botswana in the area of healing. Some churches have gone beyond what is known and accepted in the ecclesiastical circles, about healing ministry. They have employed the use of “ditaola” and natural objects, objects of art or human made objects and this has attracted hundreds and hundreds of members to these churches, not only the sick.

This appropriation of the traditional healing has made many Spirit-type churches to follow suite in order to command a large following. Again this shows the negative attitudes of the Euro-American missionaries towards African culture and its religious practices. It also examines theologically the reasons behind such negative attitudes of the people who claimed to be messengers of God’s unconditional love and peace. Furthermore, it argues that Christianity failed to adapt to the culture and situation of the African continent therefore its ambassadors knew nothing about contextual theology and enculturation. The fourth chapter shows that these churches in appropriation of the traditional healing use the natural places in healing and the significance therefore. It argues convincingly that the place at which healing is performed plays a crucial role in healing process itself. The theological premise employed by the Zionists for using natural topographical features for healing purposes. The contest between the Zionists and traditional healers for the use of natural sites for the said purpose.

The fifth chapter discuss critically the movement of Christians from the mission churches to the African Initiated Churches due to healing. The chapter analyzes this movement and show it in the form of graphs how practically it has affected the Mission Churches in Botswana. This is an evidence that healing ministry in the African Initiated Churches has always presented a serious challenge to the Mission Churches. This situation prevailed in Gaborone, Botswana for many years as anywhere in Southern Africa. But from 1993 to 2002, a period of ten years, this movement was unprecedented. And, it is on the basis of this evidence that the Mission Churches had to accept the reality of the situation in

Gaborone. Again it is on the basis of this evidence that the Mission Churches admit that for centuries they have been neglecting the needs of the indigenous people of this continent when it comes to healing. And, on the basis of this evidence the mission churches in Botswana are genuinely beginning to practice healing ministry. In this context, it can be said that there is a paradigm shift in the theology of these churches.

Summary

The Zionist type of churches under the African Independent Churches have proven to be a force to be reckoned with against the more organized ecclesiastical movements (in particular the Mission Churches). This can be seen in their emphasis around matters related to culture and its methods of healing. As a result this led to the migration of people from the mission churches to these churches and threatened their existence in Botswana. The mission churches have been experiencing the decline in their membership to the Zionist churches because of the lack of openness to the cultural and the value systems of Batswana in Botswana. Mission churches were left with an option of doing introspection and finally acknowledging their failures to contextualise their theology and Christianity among the people they serving. Mission churches ended up opening their doors to the needs of their members.

Key terms:

African Initiated Churches; Zionist Churches; Appropriation; African traditional healing; African Traditional Religion; Healing ministry; Prophecy; Methods of healing; Mission Churches; Euro-American missionaries; Multiplication of Churches; African approach to healing; Ancestors; Natural places; Divination bones; Paradigm shift in Theology

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INFORMANTS

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. Name | Bishop Bogatsu Kenneth |
| Date of Interview | 16/06/10 |
| Address | P.O. Box 487
Gaborone |
| 2. Name | Mr Boikanyo Thapelo – Chairman of the Botswana Dingaka Association |
| Date of Interview | 06/07/03, 14/ 07/03 |
| Address | P.O. Box 163
Gabane |
| 3. Name | Bishop Bolokwe Bethel |
| Date of Interview | 26/03/03 |
| Address | P.O. Box 77
Ramotswa |
| 4. Name | Archbishop Gabanamong Keabetswe |
| Date of Interview | 24/04/ 01, 19/04/03, 25/06/03 |
| Address | P. O. Box 2377
Mogoditshane |
| 5. Name | Mrs Kegomoditswe Seema |
| Date of Interview | 15/04/03 |
| Address | Taung, Gaborone |
| 6. Name | Bishop Lebamang Keoagile |
| Date of Interview | 14/04/03 |
| Address | P.O. Box 73
Gaboron |
| 7. Name | Mr Lempadi Ismael |
| Date of Interview | 14/04/ 03 |
| Address | Taung, Gaborone |
| 8. Name | Mr Loabile Molwantwa |
| Date of Interview | 09/04/03, 15/04/03, 05/05/03. |
| Address | P.O. Box 129
Molepolole |

9. Name	Rev Mabidikama Joseph
Date of Interview	27/08/01
Address	P.O. Box 328 Lobatse
10. Name	Rev Magasula Sello Solomon
Date of Interview	10/04/01
Address	P.O. Box 1216 Gaborone
11. Name	Mrs Meremeentse Onkabetse
Date of Interview	09/04/01
Address	P.O. Box 116 Mogoditshane
12. Name	Rev Moleko Alpheus
Date of Interview	21/02/01
Address	P.O. Box 423 Gaborone
13. Name	Mr Moseki Karabo
Date of Interview	18/06/01
Address	P.O. Box 317 Otse
14. Name	Mr Motlogelwa Charles
Date of Interview	09/03/03
Address	P.O. Box 66 Tlokweng, Gaborone
15. Name	Mr Motseokae Mokotedi
Date of Interview	05/06/03
Address	P.O. Box 61 Tlokweng, Gaborone
16. Name	Bishop Mpofu Johannes
Date of Interview	19/06/03
Address	P.O. Box 131 Ramotswa
17. Name	Bishop Ndeya Khubalo Joseph
Date of Interview	24/04/03
Address	Tlokweng, Gaborone

18. Name	Bishop Onkemetse Thuso
Date of Interview	12 /02/03, 21/07/03
Address	P.O. Box 11 Gabane
19. Name	Radiakgomo Tshenyego
Date of Interview	23/0703
Address	P.O. Box 16 Ramotswa
20. Name	Bishop Rampete Molwantwa
Date of Interview	17/05 03, 28/05/03
Address	P.O. Box 1109 Newtown Ward Molepolole
21. Name	Rev Sejakgomo James
Date of Interview	18/01/01, 25/ 09 01
Address	P.O. Box 111 Gaborone
22. Name	Mr Seleke Goitseone
Date of Interview	18/ 09 01
Address	P.O. Box 1744 Molapowabojang
23. Name	Bishop Sentle I. Given
Date of Interview	16/06/03
Address	P.O. Box 117 Lobatse
24. Name	Bishop Tlhabake Gaopalelwé
Date of Interview	11/07/03
Address	P.O. Box 9 Gabane
25. Name	Mr Xhobe Bayile
Date of Interview	26/03/03
Address	P.O. Box 129 Molepolole

