

**THE NEED FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION IN INTER-CULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION OF THE GOSPEL**

**by**

**FANNUEL MASHOKO**

**submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of**

**MASTER OF THEOLOGY**

**in the subject**

**MISSIOLOGY**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR: PROF J N J KRITZINGER**

**NOVEMBER 2005**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	1
Acknowledgement	4
Abstract	6
Key Terms	6
Abbreviations	6
<b>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Aim of Dissertation	7
1.1 Mission and Contextualization	9
1.2 Developing a working definition of contextualization	11
1.3 Efforts of Contextualization among the African Independent Churches	15
1.3. Independent Churches, Contextualization and Syncretism	19
1.4 Motivation for this Study	19
1.5 Relevance of this Study	21
1.6 Limitations of this Study	22
1.7 Method of this Study	23
1.8 Literature Review	23
1.9 Overview of the dissertation	29
1.10 Terminology	31
<b>CHAPTER TWO: Need for Identification</b>	<b>33</b>
2. Introduction	33
2.1 Definition of Identification	33
2.2 Need for Identification in Christian Mission in Zimbabwe	35
2.3 A Brief History of Mission in Churches of Christ/Christian Churches in Zimbabwe	37
2.4 Need for Identification in Methods of Mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe	41
2.5 Evaluating Ways of Doing Mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe	41
2.6 The Need for Identification in Mission in the Epworth Community	45
2.7 Conclusion	46
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Context Analysis of Epworth</b>	<b>47</b>
3 Introduction	47
3.1 Contextualization and Contextual Analysis	47
3.2 History of Epworth	48
3.3 History of Christian Mission in Epworth Community	49
3.4 The Dynamics of the Epworth Context	51
3.4.1 Cultural Plurality of Epworth	51
3.4.2 Denominational Plurality of Epworth Community	51
3.4.3 Spiritual Needs of Epworth Community	52
3.4.4 The Socio-economic Situation in Epworth	57

<b>3.5 Conclusion</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: Contextualization and Theological Reflection</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4 The Definition of Theological Reflection</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>4.1 Old and New Testament Evidence</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>4.2 The Early Church and Contextualization</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>4.3 The Pauline View</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>4.4 Scripture and Vision for the Epworth Community</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: Strategies for Mission in Epworth</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>5 Definition for Strategies</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>5.1 How the Church Can Address the Socio-Economic Situation in Epworth</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>5.2 How can the Spiritual Needs of the Epworth Community be met</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>5.3 How the Church Can Meet Psychological and Emotional Needs of the Epworth Community</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>6 Evaluation and Conclusion</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>6.1 Recommendations</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES</b>	<b>84</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to begin by acknowledging the truth of God's word when he says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15: 5). All honor, glory and praise go to my Heavenly Father God, who made it possible for me to get into this study and sustained me through all the hardships I endured to the completion of this project. Indeed He met all my needs according to his riches in glory and supplied all the mercy and grace in times of need.

My sincere thanks to my supervisor, Professor Karecki, for a job well done. Her patience, professionalism and exemplary academic excellence are unprecedented in my educational pursuit. I thank her for her exemplary academic excellence that has left an indelible mark in my life. She encouraged when I could have given up.

I thank my family for their understanding while I was working on this dissertation. My two cheerleaders, Caleb and Judith, always inspired me when they asked, "Mava pachaputa ani Baba?" (What chapter are you working on now Daddy?) or "Tinoenda liini kugladiation yenyu Baba?" (When are we going for your graduation ceremony Daddy?). My wife Musa's prayers each evening for the completion of my dissertation always gave me courage and confidence to go on. I thank my understanding family for allowing me to be away from them for many hours while I was working on this dissertation.

I thank my mother in the faith, Mrs. M.Z. Mlambo, for her guidance and constant proof-reading of my drafts. She contributed immensely to the quality of my dissertation. In spite of her busy schedule, she made time for my dissertation and put up with my amateur writing.

I thank Dr. O Ngundu for contributed to my success by the encouraging comments of he always made about my studies when we met. He made me feel that I could achieve anything.

Erwin van der Meer gave me confidence and helped me to formulate the outline of my dissertation.

Dr. R. Musasiwa deserves thanks for helping me to decide on the topic on which I finally wrote. All through the study he was a great encouragement to me.

I also want to acknowledge the wonderful contribution made by Mr. Chisale in editing my dissertation. and by Miss M. C. Rukanda for editing the final draft of my dissertation

My twin brother Francis contributed very much to my success by continually asking me how far I was and also by editing my draft paper at every level.

My appreciation also goes to the late Mr. Jack Pennington and Mrs. P. Pennington for raising funds for my studies. Mrs. Pennington also helped in doing the final editing before I submitted the dissertation. I also thank Zimbabwe Christian College for allowing the Penningtons to channel the funds through them.

The UNISA library staff is to be thanked for their friendliness and help. Mrs. Thirion was very helpful in providing guidance and direction in the use of the library.

I also want to thank my oral examiners for the understanding and empathy they showed during the examinations as well as the ideas they shared with me. Their ideas have contributed to making this dissertation better than it would have been.

Finally, I thank Professor Kritzinger for taking me as his student after my supervisor resigned from UNISA.

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores the need for contextualization from a missiological perspective. It seeks to validate the needs for contextualization in the Epworth Community near Harare, Zimbabwe, where a number of cultures are represented. The subject of contextualisation is first explored in a general sense, i.e. relating to how it has been presented in key missiological publications and in different contexts, particularly in Africa and Zimbabwe. The dissertation explores the need for identification in intercultural communication, and also analyses the context of Epworth and the history of the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe. A chapter on theological reflection surveys the issue of contextualisation in the Old and New Testaments. The study concludes with practical recommendations on how the issues raised in the study can be applied to a field wider than the Epworth Community.

## **KEY TERMS:**

Epworth, Zimbabwe, Church of Christ, Missiology; Contextualization; Intercultural Communication; Identification; Culture; Pastoral Cycle; Missionary Methods.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AIC	African Independent Churches
ZAC	Zion Apostolic Church
DRC	Democratic Republic Of Congo
UNSGTF	United Nations Secretary General's Task Force
WCC	World Council of Churches
ZAOGA	Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1. Aim of the Dissertation**

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate the need for contextualization of the Gospel so that it is proclaimed in a way that is appropriate and meaningful in a particular context. I have used Epworth Community outside Harare, Zimbabwe, as the focus for my study, but I draw out implications that are applicable to other similar situations, both in and outside Zimbabwe. I chose this community because of its proximity to my home and also because of its cultural plurality.

The mission methods used in the past and present by both expatriate missionaries and by local witnessing community are no longer appropriate for the situation today. There are a number of reasons for this. One of the reasons is that over the years there have been changes in the conception and methods of mission. Another reason is that people have become more and more aware of the importance of culture and finally there has been an expansion of knowledge among citizens. Whereas in the past they would have accepted the Gospel from expatriate missionaries without question, now they question before they accept things. Mbiti (in Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:99) raises a critical point when he says, "...the starting point must be to develop a theology for the African church that accommodates African culture better than the Western theology communicated by missionaries (sic) in the past." This view shows that there is need to apply new methods of mission relevant to the present situation. It is nonetheless noted that expatriate missionaries have, despite their limitations, done good work which we should build on. They should be given credit for laying a good foundation. The church in Zimbabwe, and particularly in the Epworth Community, needs to realize that the Gospel has been, for the most part, presented in an African context but from a Western perspective. There would be no need to start over again, but something should be done to improve the methods now. One should try to understand why this was so in Zimbabwe. The expatriate missionaries had a limited knowledge of African cultures and therefore had not contextualized the Gospel. The church today has an opportunity to continue the good work started but to present the Gospel in a way that will be able to speak to the

cultures of people.

While I am a Black Zimbabwean minister of religion, I hesitate to admit that my presentation of the Gospel, from 1988 when I graduated from Bible College to 1991 when I began my studies with the University of South Africa, has been in the most part from an American perspective and hardly contextual. I did my pastoral training in Zimbabwe but all my lecturers were American expatriate missionaries. Almost all the textbooks we used came from the United States of America. I am saying this to point out that my situation and that of the church need revisiting from an African perspective.

The main issue I am dealing with in this dissertation is the fact that communication of the Gospel is more effective when it takes into consideration the context of the recipients. The church is present in Epworth and all seems to be going well, but I maintain that the church could have been much more effective if it had contextualized the Gospel in the Epworth community. I will attempt to show the difference, as I perceive it, between contextualizing the Gospel and just presenting it regardless of context.

In my presentation I use the cycle of mission praxis which is also referred to as the pastoral circle (see diagram below), formulated by Holland & Henriot (1983), and developed by Cochrane et al 1990, and adapted by the missiology department of the University of South Africa. Karecki (1999:14) says that they have chosen to call it a cycle because it depicts an ongoing process. The cycle has four steps as shown in the diagram. The first step is identification. This first step has been defined by Luzbetak (in Karecki: 15) as "...being in communion and in communication with the local community." It is through this communion and communication that one is able to find out what people are feeling, what they are undergoing, and how they are responding (Mashoko 2002:2). The second step of the cycle is that of context analysis. At this stage the historical dimension of a society as well as its social, political and economic structures, and cultural make-up are examined (Karecki 1999:16). Karecki (:17) goes on to state that this analysis is aimed at discovering both the visible and the invisible factors shaping society as they manifest themselves in the local context.

The third step of the cycle is theological reflection. Karecki gives a very precise summary of this step when she asserts that



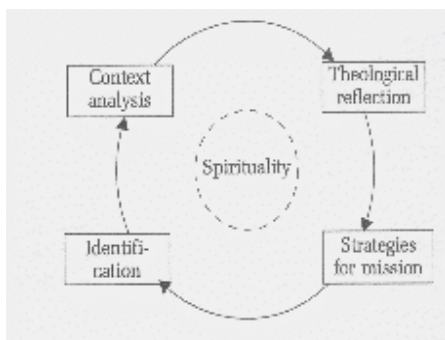
Theological reflection means that a local community reflects on the information that was gathered during context analysis in the light of the Bible and Christian tradition. It is meant to help local Christian communities to see their situation from a biblical perspective of their particular Christian heritage (: 18).

Mashoko (2002:2) gives a good understanding of theological reflection when he mentions that “...this reflection also questions how closely linked the theology is to the social situation.”

The final step in the cycle is the strategies for mission. According to Karecki (1999:20):

This step leads to a deeper quality of identification and action, which is based on the data collected through context analysis and biblical passages which are understood in the light of people’s particular Christian tradition.

Holland and Henriot (in Cochrane et al 1991:24) call this pastoral planning and praxis and say that at this step, the community decides on what they now discern to be God’s will for them, what it is they are called to be as the people of God, and what action this requires in the world.



**Figure 1: Cycle of Mission Praxis**

### **1.1 Mission and Contextualization**

Mission can be looked at as contextualization because in order for mission to make sense to any group of people it has to be carried out within the context of the people in symbols they will understand. Mission can be defined as “the entire task, for which the Church is

sent into the world” (Newbigin: 1989:121). Mission is also *Missio Dei*: God’s mission and an activity of God himself (Bosch 1991:389). Bosch (: 431) goes on to refer to *Missio Dei* as God’s liberating, correcting and restorative mission in a fallen, sinful and needy world. It is fitting to also look at the *Missio Dei* as God’s activity, which embraces both the church and the world (: 39). This entire task has to be contextualized. Mission can therefore be looked at as contextualization because in order for mission to make sense to any group of people it has to be carried out within the context of the people in symbols they will understand. In other words, whether it be teaching, preaching, evangelizing, helping or living the life, mission has to be undertaken in ways the local community will understand and appreciate.

Van der Meer (2001:16) states that when Christ came into the world he did not come into a vacuum but he became part of a particular cultural, religious, socio-economic and political context. He had a culture of heaven from where he had come from but he did not bring that with him to the Jewish culture into which he was born. He, by being born in a specific culture and incarnating into it, demonstrated that mission had to be contextualized. If the Son of God contextualized his life and mission, it shows that, “The church, God's missionary community, does not operate in a contextual vacuum” (: 16).

Secondly, mission can be looked at as contextualization because of attempts that have been made at contextualization in the past (Molyneux 1984:55; Hao 1990:33; Hesselgrave & Rommen 1985:24; Hiebert 1985:186; Zvanaka 1997:69). All attempts made at contextualization, as will be cited, have been attempts done in mission activity of one type or another. Whilst contextualization is a wide subject that can be applied to almost any discipline, it has featured very much in missiological circles since the term was coined in the early 1970s. Since the adaptation of the term, it has replaced earlier terms such as indigenization or adaptation; there has been no doubt about the need for it in mission (Pretorius et al 1987:111). In fact, it is widely agreed that mission without contextualization is inadequate.

According to Molyneux (1945:55), there has been some degree of contextualization of the Christian message that took place since the earliest times of missionary penetration into Africa. Hao (1990:33) gives more examples of attempts at contextualization in mission when he mentions that during the post-colonial period and

under the pressure of nationalism Asian Christians were urged to indigenize Christianity. While some earlier attempts made at contextualization may have been lacking in many ways, it goes to show that the two have been linked for a long time. Ritchie (1999:6), in my opinion, gives a good outline of the progression of attempts at and development of contextualization from as far back as the 1960s. He begins with what he terms “adaptation.” He uses the term to refer to the changes brought in the Roman Catholic Church by Vatican II (1963-65). In 1965 Pope Paul VI said to the Roman Catholic bishops in Uganda “You may and must have an African Christianity.” What this meant to me was that in the past it was essential to look at mission as contextualization even before it was given that name. Without contextualization there is no mission.

## **1.2 Developing a working Definition of Contextualization**

There can be as many definitions of contextualization as there are scholars of the subject. Bosch (1991:421) explains the term by saying that it is having the church “incarnated in the life of the recipients.” This simple definition touches all aspects of contextualization of the Epworth community. Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:1) define contextualization as presenting the supracultural message of the Gospel in culturally relevant terms. Luzbetak (1988:79) says that the goal of contextualization is to “integrate the Gospel message with the local culture in such a way that it is faithful to God’s revelation. He defines contextualization as:

“the process by which a local Christian community integrates the Gospel message with the real-life context, blending text and context into that single, God-intended reality called “Christian living” (:134).

Another definition of contextualization comes from Beyerhaus (in Pretorius et al 1987:112) who gives what contextualization is about when he says,

The communicator of the Gospel would proclaim it in such a way as to set the proclamation free from the traditional western form in which it seems repulsive to the hearers, and to present it, clothed afresh in Asian or African form, so as to appear intelligible and relevant to both Christian and non-Christian hearers.

Hesselgrave (1978:143) explains contextualization as:

the communication of the Christian message “in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teaching of Holy Scriptures” which is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts.

The last author whose definition I will include is Bevans (1992:21) who says that the term “contextualization” not only includes all that is implied in the older indigenisation or enculturation, but also seeks to include the realities of contemporary secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice.

Having looked at the various definitions of contextualization, I would like to define it as applying the Gospel in any context in a way that will make it possible for the respondents to understand it and apply it to their lives and circumstances. When intercultural Christian witnesses examine the church being incarnated in the lives of the recipients, they look at every aspect of church life. So, the working definition of contextualization for the Epworth community is therefore taken to mean that the church is doing the task for which God sent it in the Epworth community and as it does the task it makes sure that it is “incarnated in the life of the people” of Epworth (Newbigin 1989: 121; Bosch 1991:421).

Contextualization implies that there is a need to understand the cultural plurality of the community and present the Gospel in a way that can be understood according to the forms and symbols of this community. While one can explain the symbols used in the Bible from a Jewish culture, it would help to simplify matters if one used the symbols of the Shona, Ndebele or any other culture represented in Epworth. There will, obviously, be a need to look into the language of the recipients of the Gospel and to make sure that the Gospel is presented in a language the recipients can understand. For the church to be incarnated in the community, it will mean interacting with the community with a view to appreciating the importance of the cultural dynamics in the process of relating the biblical message to the life of the people (Bevans 1992:30, Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989: 211; Schreiter 1985:7).

This process is also necessary in the light of the realization that the Gospel message is a ‘prepared message for a prepared people’ (Richardson 1995:55). If God has already prepared his people for the message by placing within their culture symbols and forms to aid in understanding the Gospel, it means all that the missionary needs to do is to identify such elements of the culture that will make it easier for the communicator to be understood. Richardson (:55) asserts that God has already prepared all the people on

earth to hear the Gospel. He goes on to explain that the preparation has been done through general revelation and special revelation. He goes on to explain that,

The basic ideas a child gets from general revelation and continues to receive all the way through his education – even in graduate school - are foundational to that individual's hoped for later response to special revelation (:55)

The presentation of the Gospel becomes easier when it is presented in such situations where God has already prepared. When a missionary goes into this context or culture the main thing for him or her is to know the context or the culture.

Any definition given for contextualization today has to recognize the strides that have already been made towards finding a term that fits the time. This will have to take into consideration that contextualization has evolved to the present terminology. We need to realize that previously concepts such as “adaptation” were not going far enough (Ritchie 1999:7). His observation is that adaptation meant replacing a white pastor with a black one who did exactly the same thing in exactly the same ways as did the “Euroamerican” pastor. This, he says, helped very little, if at all. He goes on to point out that by 1974 there was an “incarnation” of Christianity with truly African roots. This phase marked the rejection of “adaptation”<sup>1</sup> and the adoption of the theology of incarnation in its place. According to (Ritchie 1999:8) this was progressive in that:

African theologians were now in search of a church with African leadership, with truly African mind and spirit, and where Africans could feel free to explore the meaning of a truly African Christianity, without restrictions imposed from outside mission agencies, without “Euroamerican” Christians constantly looking over their shoulders. They wanted the freedom to innovate in their attempts to Africanise Christianity in a manner analogous to the founders of the African independent church movements.

This background is a must in formulating a working definition of contextualization. Without it we might make the same mistakes others have made.

Since I am dealing mainly with an African context, and that the term contextualization was coined in the two-thirds world<sup>2</sup>, it would be beneficial for us to

---

<sup>1</sup>The attempt to make acceptance of the Gospel easier for non-Christians by adapting to local customs and/or withholding certain Christian customs which might be offensive.

<sup>2</sup>‘Two-thirds world’ is a common synonym among evangelicals for ‘Third World.’

look also at attempts at contextualization that have already been undertaken in this context.

A case of contextualization in an African context is seen in the work of John Gration. Gration (1984: 297) had taught in Zaire<sup>3</sup> from 1953 to 1964. During these eleven years he did not facilitate the process of contextualization as much as he could have. In his efforts he had to speak on many issues crucial to the people of DRC. The efforts led him to go back to the DRC context in 1981 to attempt to contextualize the Gospel. One of the issues he brought up to the Zairean church leaders was the need for him to address the relationship between the Gospel and the African culture. The church leaders seem to have been excited by this new approach and brought out some issues that are highlighted below. Molyneux (1984:280), who also wrote on the same experience, reports that upon being asked why such issues that touch on the relationship between the Gospel and African culture had not been discussed before he pointed out that it was because:

- 1 Missionaries did not encourage dialogue; they remained apart from African people, both in attitude and in location.
- 2 Missionaries were better educated and felt that the Africans were ignorant; thus, their own word was considered to be final and non-negotiable. As a result, the Africans expressed to the expatriate missionary not their real beliefs and feelings, but rather what they thought the expatriate missionary wanted to hear.
- 3 The missionary attitude was that Africa was “the dark Continent” and that everything African was 'diabolical'.

Proper contextualization cannot be done without the kind of openness witnessed in DRC. Since the process of contextualization witnessed in DRC followed a logical sequence, it would be helpful to look more closely at how they formulated a contextualization that was relevant to their situation. Gration (1984:301) points out that the process in Zaire began by having the leaders define simple terms such as “Gospel” and “culture”. After this they were ready for the third major topic which addressed the question, “Why was the Gospel 'good news' for the African people?” The response to the question ranged from deliverance from sin and judgment to deliverance from fear of evil spirits (: 301).

---

<sup>3</sup>Zaire is now called the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The next section was introduced through the question: “Where has the Gospel not touched or adequately transformed African culture?” From there they moved on to mentioning issues that had to be addressed. After about twenty-nine issues were listed the leaders were then asked to describe each issue and examine it in the light of what the Bible teaches. Any definition of contextualization that does not have such a thorough starting point will not be the best for the context. If the Epworth community will have a working definition and model of contextualization, the model used in Zaire will be a good starting point since it is concerned with where the people are and where they can possibly go from there.

It would be appropriate to look at the formulation of contextualization that took place in Zaire as a starting point. However, in the Zairean situation efforts made at contextualization did not touch on the social, political and economic issues of the context.

### **1.3 Efforts of contextualization among the African Independent Churches.**

Any effort to come up with a working definition of contextualization for the Epworth community will not be complete without addressing the efforts made by the African Independent Churches (AICs). According to Zvanaka (1997:69), one of the strengths of the AICs has been their attempt to contextualize the Gospel message. In this attempt they are said to have endeavoured to accommodate all the needs of the people, not only the material ones. In their attempts they also use familiar images in the people's culture to communicate the Gospel. A few examples are given of how the AIC in general and the Zion Apostolic Church (ZAC) in particular have made successful attempts at the contextualization of the Gospel by using people's cultures. One area where this has worked is in the structure of the church that follows the building of strong and permanent relationships based on kinship, even though this could lead to nepotism. Another aspect of culture that has been contextualized is the place of dreams and visions in calling to conversion and vocation. “In non-Christian tradition, dreams are regarded as notable channels of communication between the living and the dead (:70). Zvanaka goes on to say that in the ZAC dreams and visions are recognized phenomena in the divine-human encounter. Members of the church relate dreams and visions through which God called

them to become Christians, to get into certain ministry or to make certain decisions in life.

In the ZAC they also use storytelling as a tool for communicating essential scriptural messages. Zvanaka (: 71) argues that, “Our preaching is punctuated by stories.” With storytelling during the worship service comes the use of traditional musical instruments, such as drums, kudu horns, rattles etc. These would be the same instruments used during traditional services although the music played during worship services is distinctly different.

The ZAC has also utilized the need for healing in their proclamation of the Gospel. They believe that illnesses are caused by spirits of departed relatives who may have departed and have ‘unfinished business’ with the living relatives (:74) An example Zvanaka gives is one of a mother-in-law who dies before the son-in-law pays the motherhood bride-price cow. He says that her spirit can come back and cause barrenness in the family. However, Zvanaka’s observations have their limitations as seen in the following: firstly, that is the same way non-Christian mediums operate; and secondly, it portrays the view of the dead influencing the living. Having said this, it should be pointed out that the main idea here is that the Zion Apostolic Church has seen a need in the church to address illnesses associated with spirits, need for the casting out the spirits and the need for healing. If someone who is alleged to be demon-possessed or has an illness connected to demonic influence comes to the members of the church, they will cast out the demon and pray for the person’s healing.

While I do not agree with the idea of attributing sickness and demon possession to the spirits of the dead, I agree with the idea of prayer for healing as a way to address the spiritual and physical needs of the people. If these needs are not addressed what might happen is that the same Christians who come to church will go back to their old traditional ways of addressing these issues. The traditional ways include consulting traditional diviners and appeasing ancestor spirits. This is what Hiebert (1985:184) means when he says that the suppressing of old cultural ways without addressing them results in these practices merely going underground. On the same topic Capenhoudt (in Molyneux 1984:45) argues that, “Only that which is replaced can truly be abandoned.”

Another area in which the ZAC has made efforts at contextualization is the



consoling ceremonies after someone has died. They do well in addressing this issue because there is an apparent fear of the spirits of the dead among the African people in general and Shona people in particular. According to the Shona people, something has to be done after an adult <sup>4</sup> person dies to bring his or her spirit back to the home. If this is not done it is believed that his or her spirit will cause problems for the family. According to Zvanaka (1997:75) the ZAC has attempted to accommodate these needs by introducing a more Christian way of carrying out the same ceremony. The traditional ceremony has now been covered up with a Christian appearance to justify it. In English both ceremonies would be called consolation or memorial services, but in Shona the non-Christian ceremony is called *kugadzira* (to set things right by bringing the spirit of the deceased from the bush to the home) and the Christian version is called *nyaradzo* or *manyaradzo*<sup>5</sup> (consolation or comforting). The situation here reflects a lot on the quality of evangelism that has been done among the people. If evangelism would include thorough teaching on some of these issues then the problems would be solved.

Zvanaka (:75) concludes by saying that the process of contextualization is evident in the African Independent Churches (AICs) although it is riddled with some limitations.<sup>6</sup> For the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe, any attempt to formulate a working definition of contextualization that ignores the “controversial Jirri”<sup>7</sup> attempt would be incomplete. Jirri’s book, *How to Uproot Church Problems* (Jirri 1972) should be edited and republished. It could become a bestseller because of the subject matter it addresses. Since the book addresses the need to know the recipients, context and language of the people to whom we reach with the Gospel, it is a good starting point for the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe and for the Epworth church in particular. Jirri (1972:5) is of the opinion that sometimes missionaries see the need to re-adjust in order to cope with local situations in the “mission field,” but some prefer to “dance to the tune of the ‘mother church’” so that they avoid being at odds with it. Dealing with the issue raised here

---

<sup>4</sup>By adult here we mean anyone of marriageable age.

<sup>5</sup>This ceremony used to be conducted a year after the death of the person but has now been changed to a few weeks after the death so that it does not become similar to traditional ceremonies.

<sup>6</sup>The limitations include when the spirit of the deceased is accompanied to heaven during a *nyaradzo* or when the sacred healing cords tied to an individual to represent the presence of the Holy Spirit is taken as overshadowing the divine power of Christ for which it is only a symbol.

<sup>7</sup>Jirri has become a controversial figure in the church circles because of his attempt at contextualization in the early 1970s.

would be a good starting point for this church group. Incidentally, the author is a member of the same group; hence the efforts made in Epworth community have come from this brave attempt at contextualization.

It would be essential for anyone in Zimbabwe to reflect on related work other church groups have already done in Zimbabwe. For the Church of Christ there is need to be familiar with what the Anglican, the Roman Catholic, the Pentecostal and the Charismatic churches have done in the area of contextualization. This knowledge will help them to improve in areas they need to improve as they see what works and what does not work in this context.

Any formulation of a definition of contextualization should take into consideration the various models authors have formulated to help them do contextual theology. In his book *Models of Contextual Theology* Stephen Bevans gives (1992:27) a summary of five of the models. The book gives various approaches to contextual theology. It works with the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model and the transcendental model. Bevans describes each model and then goes on to outline its presuppositions, critique and examples. He summarizes the models by saying,

The most conservative of the five models, the translation model, while certainly taking account of culture and cultural change, puts much more emphasis on fidelity to what it considers the essential content of scripture and tradition. The anthropological model will emphasize cultural identity and its relevance for theology more than scripture or tradition. The practitioners of praxis model will zero in on the importance or need of social change in his or her articulation of faith, while the one who prefers the synthetic model will attempt the extremely difficult task of keeping each of the four elements in perfect balance. Finally the view of the transcendental model focuses not on a content to be articulated but on the subject who is articulating (:27).

In this section, I have looked at a working definition of contextualization that can be done in Epworth. We have said that the church is doing the task for which God sent it in the Epworth community and as it does the task it makes sure that it is “incarnated in the life of the people of Epworth” (Newbigin 1989:121, Bosch 1991:421). I have demonstrated that a number of factors come into play in this process. These include the church incarnating into the community and using forms and symbols of the local people. In the Epworth community it would help to consider the work that has already been done from

all angles without prejudice. Such a contextualization will have to address the whole person.

### **1.3.1 Independent Churches, Contextualization and Syncretism**

By syncretistic I am referring to the definition given by Kraft (1999:390) where he says that syncretism is the mixing of Christian assumption with those worldview assumptions that are incompatible with Christianity so that the result is non-biblical Christianity. I realize that almost all types of religious practices have incorporated elements of other cultures and secular society, but what I am addressing here is slightly different. In the attempts made by independent churches in Zimbabwe, they have gone as far as mixing Christianity with practices from the African traditional religion. They have practiced ancestor worship<sup>8</sup> and have condoned going to diviners for help with spiritual problems. Schreiter (1985:144) calls this the second type of syncretism where Christianity is blended with non-Christian elements e.g. African Independent Churches. In this case Christianity loses its basic structure and identity.

### **1.4 Motivation for this Study**

I have been educated in Church of Christ educational institutions from primary education to a Bachelor degree. I have gone to school both locally and in the United States of America. I used to accept without question the theological teachings and methods of the expatriate missionaries, but lately I have started asking questions which Hiebert (1985:184) anticipates a young church asking. “Does the church not have the right to read and interpret the Scriptures for themselves?” “Is reading scriptures and interpreting them equally important or is one more important than the other?” “How does the Gospel speak to my culture?” and “How does Christianity answer the basic questions being asked by the people?” Because of my educational background I learned, like many Zimbabweans, to appreciate Western culture, dress, language, music and symbols more than those from my own culture. This was not communicated directly from formal

---

<sup>8</sup> In 1.10 the use of this term is explained.

teaching, but from the natural process of acculturation. As an individual member of the Church of Christ I feel there is more that needs to be done to make the Gospel relevant to African cultures as the church builds on what its predecessors have started.

The church's background has contributed to the way the church is structured and the way people understand Christianity and the word of God. American and New Zealand expatriate missionaries founded this church in 1898 (King 1959:59). They and all the other expatriate missionaries who came after them have done a good job of evangelizing, preaching, teaching and healing through modern medicine. Over the years they have also been instrumental in building mission stations, which normally include schools, clinics and hospitals. The mission methods they used worked very well for their time but one feels that it is time to implement methods that take the African context seriously. Saayman (1991:31) refers to missionary methods that introduced a form of Christianity heavily loaded with Western cultural forms and thought patterns with little respect for the cultural values of the recipients. This is very true of the Church of Christ situation. While there is some respect for the cultural values of the recipients, it is very limited. This is in the same line with what Crafford (1993:165) says when he states, "...even an evangelical theologian like Kato emphasized the importance of contextualization in liturgy, dress, language, music, symbols, et cetera."

Since the Church of Christ has this background, the way it has operationalised mission in general has been from an almost completely Western perspective. The church has not addressed issues that have to do with demon possession, ancestor worship, healing and African culture in general. It is unfortunate that, in a lot of ways, the Gospel has not been made relevant to the context of the people of Zimbabwe. This will be illustrated in more detail in the fourth chapter.

The way the church has approached mission has convinced me that the communication of the Gospel needs to be contextualized. Unfortunately attempts that have been made to contextualize could be looked at as being syncretistic<sup>9</sup> in some ways. The fear that presentation of the Gospel will be syncretistic should not deter the church from making attempts to contextualize the Gospel. Schreiter (in Van der Meer 2001:17) suggests that in order to avoid the dangers of syncretism, one should not allow the

---

<sup>9</sup> See definition in the terminology section.

context to be the point of orientation as opposed to the text. In the light of this very brief historical background of contextualization in the Church of Christ, this study will explore practical ways of contextualizing the Gospel in an African Evangelical context. The ways of contextualizing the Gospel will be put to use by members of the church in preaching the Gospel in our country and anywhere else it can be preached. While I write from an Evangelical perspective, what I have written can be useful to anyone who wants to be more effective in intercultural communication.

### **1.5 Relevance of this Study**

Contextualization in Evangelical missiology is not yet viewed with as much importance as it should be. This, of course, is with the exception of theologians such as Charles Kraft (1999), Paul Hiebert (1985,1999), David Hesselgrave (1978, 1999) and Daniel Shaw (1988), among others, who have authored helpful works on the subject. However, most expatriate missionaries, ministers and church members in Epworth have probably never heard of contextualization.

This study is relevant to the church both in the Epworth community and in the country as a whole for two main reasons. Firstly, I do not know of any similar study that has been done in the light of the Church of Christ. I am told that one fellow minister made an attempt in the early 70s to do such a study, but his work was not very well received in the Churches of Christ because of his approach to the subject and because of timing. The early 1970s were, for most members of the church, too early a time to present the sensitive issues he brought up on the topic of contextualization. Secondly, I believe that this study will be a starting point in challenging the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches in Zimbabwe to consider as an imperative the contextualization of the presentation of the Gospel interculturally. This will not only help the local church but will also benefit the church universal to present the Gospel more effectively as the local churches carry out Christian mission "...to the ends of the earth."

This study has already challenged me to start looking at ways of making the Gospel contextual. I believe that those who will read it will be challenged to contextualize their presentation of the Gospel to make it more relevant and effective.

This study should also be beneficial as a mission tool. The expatriate missionaries who taught me at the Bible college approached their teaching mainly from an American perspective. The Gospel was presented for the most part “dressed in Western clothing”. There is need for what Hao (1990:34) refers to as “unwrapping the Western theological package.” I believe this study will make Christian witnesses more effective by contextualizing the Gospel whether they do so in Zimbabwe or whether they go from Zimbabwe to minister to other cultures.

The study will also help in the theological training of the church. In the Bible college where I lecture, most of the textbooks are from United States of America and the approach is basically American. While I was doing research for this study I could not find any resources in the college library that were written on the church in Zimbabwe or mission in Zimbabwe. I was able to find no more than five works on mission in Africa. One of the few works is *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Response* by Frans J. Verstraelen (1998). Since 1972 when Zimbabwe Christian College was established, there was no full-time African lecturer until 1991. Even then there was only one until 1995 when another African staff member was hired. In 1997 the number increased to four and at present there is only one expatriate missionary and six African lecturers at the school. The college is now indigenised as far as lecturers are concerned, but there is need to continue to work on ways of making the curriculum and presentation of lectures contextual since just hiring African lecturers is not enough to be considered contextualization.

The findings from this dissertation should make a difference in the congregation that meets on the college premises. It is my hope that this study will bring about a breakthrough in the way we do mission, whether it be at the National Annual Conference, annual seminar, evangelistic crusades and efforts, workshops, counselling sessions and any other missionary activity.

### **1.6 Limitations of this Study**

This study is limited to an African perspective and in particular to the need for contextualization in intercultural communication of the Gospel in the Epworth

community. This narrows the topic very much to one community out of many communities in the country. It also focuses mainly in the Church of Christ without in-depth consideration of what is happening in other denominations. Since it would be too wide a study if other denominations were included in detail, I have chosen to focus on the need and ways of contextualizing in Church of Christ to which I belong. However, references will be made to other denominations and details given on the one group will help to form a picture that clearly shows the need for contextualization interculturally. From the lessons I shall also have drawn lessons for a larger community.

This dissertation deals with selected aspects of the subject of contextualization based on what I perceive to be the needs of this particular context. Whilst there are many perspectives from which contextualization has been looked at, this study does not take all of them into consideration because of time constraints and the nature of the study (dissertation of limited scope).

### **1.7 Method of this Study**

I have done a literature study. I am now going to use what I have learned to evaluate the evangelism that was done in the past so that I can apply what I learned and propose that whatever method is used it must be contextual and intercultural.

### **1.8 Literature Review**

This section of the dissertation serves to identify other scholars of the same subject of contextualization. It will also bring out the research problem more clearly than any other part of the dissertation. Since scholars approach the subject from various angles, it will help bring out the various perspectives on the subject. It will also show the various research findings already available. The review will, among other things, identify some of the limitations in previous formulations of the question of contextualization.

The review of literature used for writing this dissertation would have failed to achieve its goal if it had not clearly brought out the research problem. It will show why the proposed research strategy was adopted. Since it will bring out the various perspectives on the subject at hand, it will show the various supporting research findings already in

literature. The review, will among other things, identify some of the limitations in previous formulations of the problem of contextualization.

The research problem at hand is that *there is need for contextualization in intercultural communication of the Gospel*. The given topic can be discussed according to the major concepts within it. These are as follows: 1. contextualization, 2. intercultural communication and 3. the Gospel. There is the concept of culture that is not directly stated but will be dealt with under the concept of intercultural communication. A combination of articles has been used in the dissertation since there is no author who has written comprehensively on the specific topic at hand. These articles form the basis of the literature review. We will review authors according to the concepts they have dealt with on the subject. The author will first define the concept of contextualization before we move on to the other concepts that are listed above. We will also need to look at intercultural communication and then at the Gospel. Lastly these three major concepts that make up the research topic will be drawn together.

The reason this research problem has been identified is the apparent need that has been observed both in past and in present mission work. Since the Gospel has been and continues to be presented intercultural, it has to be contextualized if it is to make sense to the recipients.

The main focus of the discussion is the cycle of mission praxis, hence the order in which the articles have been used.

Whilst no author has comprehensively written on contextualization, many authors have dealt with the various aspects of the subject. I have drawn from a good number of them as will be evidenced by references I make to different ones. The wider concept of contextualization emerges as the key in this paper since it is the underlying theme. A clear understanding of this concept had to be arrived at before connecting it to the subject of this dissertation. Ritchie (1999:8) traces the origin of contextualization to as far back as the 1960s while it was still known as adaptation. Bosch (1991:421-422) regards contextualization as having been “given birth” in 1972 by Shoki Coe and Aharan Sapsezian, directors of the Theological Education Fund which was a World Council of Churches (WCC) agency. Despite the two authors' seeming differences in approach, they



seem to agree on at least the one point that contextualization developed from the earlier concept of adaptation (Ritchie 1999:8; Bosch 1991:420-421).

A review of the literature used for the dissertation indicates that there are a number of models of contextual theology. Bosch (1991:421) talks about the indigenization model and the social economic model. He expands on this idea by bringing out the aspect of interpretation of a text as not only a literary exercise but also a social, economic and political exercise thus bringing the entire context into play when one interprets a biblical text. With this he also goes on to say that one needs an experimental theology in which an ongoing dialogue is taking place between text and context (Bosch 1991:427). This idea creates a close relationship between text and context.

Whilst Schreiter (1985:6-16) talks about the translation models, the adaptation models and the contextual models, he seems to agree with Bosch with the need to adopt a model that is sensitive to the culture of the recipients. Bevans (1992:27-28) does not give one model but gives a detailed description of each of the five main models of contextual theology. He calls the five models by names different from those Schreiter uses. These are the transcendental model, anthropological model, praxis model, synthetic model as well as the translation model. I have included brief definitions or characteristics of each of the models. In the transcendental model, “the starting point is transcendental, concerned with one’s own religious experience and one’s own experience of oneself” (Bevans 1992:99). The same author (:48) also regards the anthropological model as one that focuses on the validity of the human as the place of divine revelation and as a source for theology that is equal to scripture and tradition. About the same model he (:63) says that it “focuses on the cultural identity of Christians and their unique way of articulating faith.” The praxis model focuses the identity of Christians within a culture as that culture is understood in terms of social change (:63). The synthetic model, according to Bevans (1992:84), tries to balance the insights from the other three models. It tried hard to keep the integrity of the traditional message and at the same time to take culture and social change seriously. The translation model focuses on Christian identity within a particular culture and on the continuity of a cultural subject within the older and wider traditions). Schreiter (1985:6) asserts that in this model he sees the task of local theology as one that calls for the freeing of the Christian message from its previous cultural accretions and the

translating of it into a new situation. Schreiter's writings on the models have drawn a close link with Bevans' writing. They are both of the opinion that the translation model is the most commonly used model for local theology (Bevans 1992:30; Schreiter 1985:8). Whilst they generally differ in the language they use in describing the models, it is amazing how they both use the kernel and husk theory to describe the translation model denoting some measure of consensus on the issues.

Nicholls (1987:101) also holds the same idea of contextualization as Schreiter and Bevans as is seen in his definition of contextualization: “a dynamic process of the Church's reflection on the interaction of the Text as Word and the context as a specific human situation...” Jirri (1972:16) also looks at text and context in contextualization when he asserts that, “...a wise church leader will need to secure a good knowledge of the customs and ways of the life of the people among whom he labours.” He also adds that a good knowledge of the local language would help remove the tension and even suspicion. (: 22)

Karecki (1993:153) in her article on “Inculturation: An imperative for mission” also emphasizes the need for the Christian witness to incarnate the Gospel into local culture. De Ward (1990:33) examines the link between contextualization and culture and states that, “...a contextualized theology asks the question, “How do we interpret what was given in a culture 2000 years ago to different cultures today?” Schreiter (1985:1) argues that the theologies being passed on to churches outside the North Atlantic area are not meeting the specific needs of the newer churches and that theologies are needed which make sense “...of the Christian message in local circumstances”. In this statement he agrees with all the other authors on the relationship that should exist between text and context (culture). Hiebert (1985) talks about critical contextualization. In this book he addresses the pertinent issue of critical contextualization i.e. how to deal with one's culture after becoming a Christian and how the expatriate missionary should respond to the traditional beliefs and practices. After examining a number of ways of looking at culture, he advocates a critical contextualization where the old beliefs and customs are examined before they are either rejected or accepted. They are first studied with regard to the meanings and places they hold within their cultural setting and then evaluated in the light of biblical norms (1985:186).

Most of the authors cited in this dissertation approach the subject of contextualization from the point of view of the relevance of the Gospel to the culture in which it is presented. Hesselgrave & Rommen (1989:x) regard the Gospel as being relevant to all ages, cultures, and peoples; but they stress that its communication must be contextualized in order for it to be experienced as the living message of God. They present the original discussion on contextualization as inclusive of the issue of the distance between the ancient text and the modern context. (: 30). They indicate that there is no commonly accepted definition of contextualization among Evangelicals, but they emphasize that it is imperative that the Evangelicals understand both the meaning and the methods that are stated or implied in the various definitions. They bring out a very strong point when they maintain, “If theology is to be relevant within a given culture it must be contextualized” (: 54). Luzbetak (1988:79) agrees with them and adds that the goal of contextualization is to “...integrate the Gospel message within the local culture in such a way that it is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teaching of the Holy Scriptures” and is “meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts.” He goes on to say that text and context must be blended into that one, God-intended reality called “Christian living” (: 70).

Charles Kraft’s view is that a contextualized church responds to the Gospel in terms of its own culture and creates the same impact on its society as the first century Christians did on their environment. There may be some argument on this point, but it conveys the general thrust of what contextualization is all about. Kraft (in Price 1997:7) says that

different worldviews are a stubborn fact of life. And if one wants to communicate divine truth, he had better be willing to reconceptualize that truth according to the worldview and thought-forms of his audience, just as God himself did in his revelations to the writers of the Bible.

He calls this “dynamic-equivalence” theologizing.

Gratian (in Molyneux 1984:282) says that the contextualization of the Gospel will not just be an adaptation of an existing theology to a particular culture. It will have to be the result of a new, open-ended study of Scripture with a hermeneutic in which Gospel and culture become mutually engaged in a dialogue where the purpose is to place the church

under the lordship of Jesus Christ in its historical situation. The Bible will not mean much to recipients if it does not engage in a dialogue with the particular culture in which it is presented.

It is hoped that contextualization will help give meaning to the Word as intended by God. De Ward (1990:34) points out that the Bible has a wide variety of words and phrases to describe what God has done in the lives of people but they are meaningless to the secular person today. Even though in biblical times they were used in everyday conversation they do not tell the whole story today because the meanings of words and phrases change with time. These would be words such as adoption, reconciliation, justice, sanctification, salvation, regeneration. So we need to contextualize the message. We need "... modern translations that will convey the message with fresh accuracy and power." On the same point De Ward (1990:34) says that a contextualized theology asks the question, "How do we interpret what was given to a culture 2000 years ago in different cultures today?" In answering the question we engage in a process of contextualization.

In my understanding this is what John Parratt (1987:142) means when he asserts that most African theologians agree that in order to contextualize theology on the African continent new methods of approach are needed. Western theology, they argue, is inadequate for this task, for it deals with quite different issues to those which are important in Africa as they arise from a quite different context. In fact, it is interesting that theologizing by African theologians has retained a uniqueness of 'Africanness' in spite of the environment in which they theologized. Even those who theologized from Europe or the Americas have remained uniquely African. G.H. Muzorewa is an example of this. Although he wrote his book *An African theology of Mission* in the United States, it exhibits a uniquely African way of theologizing. While there are weaknesses in their theology, there are weaknesses in any other theology.

As I examined the various types and models of contextualization, I noticed that Bosch (1991:421-422) has identified two major types of contextualization: firstly, the indigenization model, also called the translation or inculturation model; secondly, the socio-economic model, also called a political or development model. The word "contextualization" captured more than the older notion of indigenization, in the sense

that theology should take into account certain aspects of the culture which had been hitherto neglected, such as the social and economic dimensions (Engel 1983:87). Van der Meer (2001:16) points out that the indigenization model, which has been especially popular in evangelical missiological circles, is more focussed on communicating the eternal aspect of salvation and the need for individual repentance as well as establishing indigenous churches. He (:17) goes on to observe that the weaknesses of this model are not only that with its strong emphasis on inculturation it neglects other contextual dynamics such as the socio-political climate and prevailing economic conditions. Bowers (in Van der Meer 2001:17) points out that the weakness in this model are not only reflected in the writings of missiologists, such as Charles Kraft, but are also evidenced in the writings of John Mbiti and Kwami Bediako. He goes on to conclude that

The latter are so focussed on traditional Africa and its cultural heritage that they fail to be relevant to modern Africa that is trying to keep its balance between both traditional and western ideologies while faced with complicated socio-political and economic issues (:17).

A more holistic approach to contextualization will avoid any one extreme but will involve a combination of models. Just as in the beginning, the Christian witness' message of the Christian church today needs to be incarnated in the life world of its recipients (Bosch 1991:421).

In the observations given above, we have examined the concept of contextualization and culture and have seen how the authors have generally agreed on the interrelationship that should exist between culture and the Word if contextualization is to be realized. This section has addressed these two concepts i.e. culture and contextualization. By virtue of the connectedness of the concepts, this section has implicitly covered the concept of intercultural communication. It will not help much here to review the authors' way of looking at intercultural communication since it is implied in there.

### **1.9 Overview of the dissertation**

Having introduced the dissertation in this first chapter, I will go on in the next chapter to show the need for identification in contextualization of the Gospel. A brief summary of Christian Mission in Zimbabwe, as was done by the church, will also be outlined so that

one can see where the church has lacked in the process of identification. This presentation will give a brief outline of the history of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe. It will also give a historical background of mission and mission methods as they pertain to the Church of Christ. Finally, I will show the need for identification in mission in the Epworth community. Chapter 3 will deal with the second stage of the cycle of mission praxis, namely context analysis in Epworth. It will show the importance of this stage in the cycle of mission praxis and then how it relates with contextualization. This chapter will also include historical background of Epworth, its present situation (culturally, socially and economically) and contextualization in the Epworth community. The dynamics of the Epworth community - cultural plurality of Epworth, denominational plurality, the spiritual needs of Epworth and the socio-economic situation in Epworth - will also be looked into as a way of analyzing the context of the Epworth community. Chapter 4 will focus on contextualization and theological reflection. This section will give the definition of theological reflection and show its value in the cycle which is the tool we are using in putting together this dissertation. This section on theological reflection will also include Old Testament evidence of contextualization as well as the examples of contextualization we see in Jesus' ministry. I will also show how integrated theological reflection works now. The final section in this chapter will show how the early church participated in contextualization as well as how the apostle Paul demonstrated contextualization as well. Chapter 5 goes on to give some strategies for effective mission work in Epworth. The strategies include identification of what the church can do to address the socio-economic situation, the spiritual needs and the psychological needs of the Epworth community. The last chapter is an evaluation that includes challenges of a contextual approach to mission for the particular church in Zimbabwe. This mainly focuses on applying the lessons I have learnt from this study to a larger community.

It is hoped that the study will influence positive implications for missiology in general but more importantly for missiology in an African context. In describing missiology, Ikenga-Metuh (1989:7) says that it is the study of methods, strategies and experiences of expatriate missionaries in different historical and cultural situations in order to learn from their successes and failures. Indeed this study will be one of those

studies. This study will show methods, strategies and experiences of expatriate missionaries in different parts of Zimbabwe; in various historical and cultural situations; and how one can learn from their successes and failures. This dissertation will be a response to expatriate missionary efforts in the Epworth community. It will also show other responses to expatriate missionary efforts over the years.

In this chapter I have stated the aim of the study and have described mission as contextualization. I have included a working definition of contextualization as well as the motivation for this study. In the next chapter I give a brief summary of Christian mission in Zimbabwe in general. I also narrow it down to the history, methods of mission, evaluation of ways of doing mission and the need for contextualization in mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe.

### **1.10 Terminology**

This section defines some terms used in this dissertation. This is so that they can be understood in the context they are used. By **syncretism** I am referring to the definition given by Kraft (1999:408) where he says that syncretism is the mixing of Christian assumptions with those worldview assumptions that are incompatible with Christianity so that the result is non-biblical Christianity. I realize that almost all types of religious practices have incorporated elements of other cultures and secular society, but what I am addressing here is slightly different. In the attempts made by independent churches in Zimbabwe, they have gone as far as mixing Christianity with practices from the African traditional religion. They have practiced ancestor worship and have condoned going to diviners for help with spiritual problems.

This is similar to the one specific definition that Schreier (1985:144) gives of syncretism when he describes it as the mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses its basic structure and identity. Schreier (:144) pointed out that in Christian literature syncretism usually has this negative connotation, but he prefers a more neutral, descriptive use of the term, with the negative interpretation being only one of three basic meanings of the term.

**Ancestor worship** in this study refers to ritual acts of devotion directed to departed relatives. While others prefer to call this ‘ancestor veneration,’ which gives it a

lighter and more acceptable appearance, in this dissertation it is pictured as an act that amounts to idolatry. I am aware that there are various opinions on the subject. For example, Cardinal Yu Ping (in Van Rheenen 1991:262), speaking from an Asian context, states that ancestor worship was “not idolatry but in accordance with God’s will, the fifth commandment.” On the basis of my evangelical theological convictions, I am of the opinion that the fifth commandment does not apply to deceased parents or grandparents, and that all contact with the departed is unacceptable in a Christian life. On the basis of the first commandment, it is my conviction that ritual acts in which departed relatives are approached for protection or as mediators to convey requests to God amount to idolatry.

By **mission** I am using the definition of mission as given by Carter (1963:30) that is, “The redemptive activity of God in the world through the church.” Willem Saayman (1991:6) expands this same idea when he says that there is no inherent priority among the different dimensions of mission, evangelistic, social, political and economical the “one is as important as the other.” In different words, Newbigin (1989:121) indicates more or less the same thing when he defines mission as, “the entire task for which the Church is sent into the world.” Therefore the mission method we are looking at is the sum of the redemptive activities of God through the Churches of Christ as well as its ministry in the various areas including its evangelistic, social, political as well as economic involvement in the country. In other words, this is a holistic approach to mission.

**Expatriate missionary/missionaries** are used in this dissertation to mean an individual or individuals who go to other countries to preach the Gospel. On the other hand Christian witness is used in the dissertation to mean any Christian spreading the Gospel.



## CHAPTER 2

### NEED FOR IDENTIFICATION

#### 2.0 Introduction

This second chapter of the dissertation gives a brief history of Christian mission in Zimbabwe with the goal of pointing out the need for identification in what has already been done and in future mission work in the country. We will also look at areas where identification was applied and where it could have been applied but most importantly where it needs to be applied in order to be more relevant and effective in mission efforts. The chapter also evaluates ways of doing mission in these churches and shows the need for contextualization and identification in mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe

#### 2.1 Definition of Identification

This chapter has been entitled “Need for Identification” because identification is a much-needed part of contextualization. Since the cycle of mission praxis has been used as a tool for this study, it is imperative to define the first part of the cycle and then show how it fits in my presentation of the question at hand. In this chapter I will define identification from a missiological point of view. Identification has been defined by Luzbetak (in Karecki 2000:15) “as being in communion and communication with the local community.” Gourdet (1999:1) defines it as:

a complex and rewarding experience that increases our capacity for growth and our ability to effectively communicate the gospel interculturally which can be accomplished only when we become one in communion and community with the people with whom we live.

This gives us a clear picture of the relationship between identifying with the people we minister to and its contribution towards effective communication of the Gospel. Closely related to these definitions in the one by Nida (in Gourdet (1999:2): “...Identification is a very complex concept involving the totality of inter-human relationships.” A totality of

inter-human relationships implies dealing with the whole person in the whole context. This can result in total effectiveness in communication of the Gospel. Lingenfelter (in Hill 1993:1) concludes that:

We must love the people to whom we minister so much that we are willing to enter their culture as children, to learn how to speak as they speak, play as they play, eat as they eat, sleep where they sleep, study what they study and thus earn their respect and admiration.

This gives us a good summary of what should happen in identification since it touches on all aspects of the recipient culture. If one is able to do this then he/she will be effective in reaching out to any people group with the Gospel. This would indeed be what the apostle says in 1 Cor. 9:22-23, “becoming all things to all people” so that by all possible means he might save some.

Identification is essential in intercultural communication of the Gospel because it takes cognizance of every aspect of a community. Kraft (in Gourdet 1999:2) gives a definition of identification that is more closely linked with intercultural communication when he describes what he calls the “identificational approach” to communication. In his approach, “Communicator 'a' identifies with receptor 'b' by entering into the latter's frame-of-reference. Effective communication is possible because 'a' constructs the message in terms of the frame-of-reference of 'b'”. This shows that identification is needed because without it effective communication is not possible. When he talks about communicating in terms of “frame-of-reference” Kraft implies a wide range of knowledge of the recipient’s culture. Gourdet (1999:2) goes on to explain that identification

involves entering and participating in a community from that community's frame-of-reference or context with real empathy so as to establish a two-way relationship that brings about mutual intercultural understanding and communication. It is, as Luzbetak has said, casting one's lot with that community with all the implications that brings with it.

Identification means that the Christian witness enters into the life of a community as a learner. S/he tries to identify with the recipient culture and the knowledge s/he can gain from the citizens of the country. This approach at least has the possibility of more effective communication because the Christian witness shows openness to the indigenous

knowledge of the people. This can only happen if the Christian witness comes with an attitude of respect and love for the people among whom s/he is ministering.

Gourdet (1999:6) asserts that participating in the lives of people as co-labourers is an effective way to break down barriers. She declares, "...as co-labourers, we are able to share our joys and failures. We learn from each other and about each other." This also means a willingness to learn to accept subordinate roles. This can be difficult but it is needed if communication of the Gospel is going to be effective. When one goes in as a participant and a co-labourer this helps to remove some of the barriers such as 'stuffiness' and 'cultural snobbery'. Gourdet (1999:3) says, "identification requires confronting two barriers: personal stuffiness (being overly formal and proper) and cultural snobbery (thinking you are better than the local people)." It becomes difficult for one to maintain the same attitude of stuffiness and snobbery if one goes into a community as a participant and co-labourer. This is because a participant and a co-labourer is on equal footing with the community. If one goes as better than the local people it will be difficult to get rid of the negative attitude.

## **2.2 Need for Identification in Christian Mission in Zimbabwe.**

In this section we will look at the need for identification in the Epworth community in particular, but we will also show the need in the wider context of Christian mission in Zimbabwe. The wider context is helpful in that it is the foundation from which the mission work in Epworth began. Whilst it does not help to dwell on the negatives and failures of the past, it will help to highlight areas where there can be improvement. This section is designed to show the need for identification in what has already been done with the hope that it is not too late to implement identification where we see it lacking in mission today. I know that there are Christian witnesses who are looking critically at the expatriate missionary work over the years and who would like to change things where they can. This dissertation seeks to contribute to such efforts to help with such changes and also to influence the direction for any similar future work.

By 1897 the London Missionary Society had established 23 schools and several mission stations in Zimbabwe (King 1959:16). The normal trend at that time was that

they would establish a mission station and then a school. Muzorewa (1991:xx) describes a mission station as "...a pocket of western civilization in the heart of Africa." That phrase on its own indicates Muzorewa's negative attitude towards the set up. He (: xx) goes on to say that the mission station was characterized by the following:

- a a church building
- b classroom building
- c a clinic or hospital (and sometimes, an orphanage)
- d western styled residential buildings
- e. a small multiracial community with a minority who controlled everything and everybody on campus
- f. a fence surrounding the mission station
- g. a cemetery designated "for Christians only."
- h. a telephone, and
- i. one or more vehicles

If we refer to the definition of identification adopted at the beginning of section two, we notice that this approach to mission does not include much identification. The approach did not encourage the principles we have noted above as being part of the process of identification. Since this is still the trend in most of the work being carried out in Zimbabwe, the need for identification becomes very apparent even in a wider area of the work in the country. The history of the church in Zimbabwe shows that this method of mission was similar countrywide. One of the main tools the expatriate missionaries used to start missionary work in the country was medical work. In his book *Godly Medicine*, Michael Gelfand (1988:13) shows how some of the denominations used modern medicine to reach out to citizens. He points out:

The medical missionary had entered Southern Africa as early as 1841 with David Livingstone and since then there were a number of others who had come to Malawi (British) Central Africa (Zambia and South Africa) but it was really after the occupation of Mashonaland in 1800 that they began to increase steadily in what was to become Zimbabwe.

Gelfand (: 16) shows that the Dutch Reformed Church, American Board (now the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe), Lutheran Swedish Mission, Brethren in Christ, Free

Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Anglican Church, Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church all started medical expatriate missionary work in the country. There was no such medical service in the country prior to this time (: 23). The fact that so many church groups saw the need to provide medical services shows that they viewed it as a real need to be met and an appropriate entry point for their other expatriate missionary activities. From this information one notes that the work of the church at this early stage basically followed the same pattern of various denominations and it cuts across the Churches of Christ as a whole. While needs were met through this service, the need for identification still remained.

### **2.3 A Brief History of Mission in the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches<sup>10</sup> in Zimbabwe.**

The work of the Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand was begun in what was Southern Rhodesia in 1898 (King 1959:59): “A man by the name of John Sheriff arrived in Bulawayo and established a church on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Main Street, supporting himself by his labours as a stonemason.” King (:59) narrates an incident that marked the beginning of the work of the Churches of Christ through the efforts of Mr Sheriff. This happened when Mr Sheriff was taking a stroll through the Bulawayo location and came upon a group of Africans who were trying to read from an English book. This challenged him to start education and church work amongst the great African population of Southern Rhodesia. Here one notes that Mr Sheriff was identifying with the people of Bulawayo by realising their need and responding to the need.

The mission of this church in the country was initiated by the action of Mr. and Mrs. Sheriff who took to the ministry of education and preaching. The ministry of education was necessitated by an apparent need he saw in Bulawayo. While this was a good ministry in that it ministered to needs that were there, it would have been good if he had involved local leaders from the beginning. Other expatriate missionaries later arrived in what was then Southern Rhodesia to help Mr and Mrs Sheriff. Mr. and Mrs F. L.

---

<sup>10</sup>. These will be referred to as Churches of Christ

Hadfield<sup>11</sup> arrived in 1906 to help the Sheriffs. According to King (1959:59) they worked amongst Europeans, Coloureds and Africans in and around Bulawayo. In 1912 accompanied by Mr. W.W. Mansill, recently arrived recruits from New Zealand, Mr. Sheriff travelled to the Lundi Reserve to set about establishing a mission station. Mr. Mansill was from the same sending church in New Zealand as the first expatriate missionaries and had come to join them in the work. He travelled with the others to Lundi Reserve to set about establishing work there. This was a very important development since it signalled the beginning of work in the rural areas.

The year 1919 marked a great achievement in the history of the Churches of Christ in the country. This is when Dadaya mission was established (:59). The Lundi area in Zvishavane where the station was established proved to be very prosperous. This then became the centre from which Church of Christ expatriate missionaries conducted all evangelistic work. King (:59) goes on to say that the station was the centre from which outstations were opened, evangelists trained and the medical work was developed.

While this was a great achievement, it set a pattern that continued in the country. Again from the definition of identification, the approach did not demonstrate genuine identification on the part of the expatriate missionaries who chose to lead separate and different lives from those of the people to whom they were preaching. The expatriate missionaries would rather have had the local believers identify with them. There was no effort made to learn the language but instead they created little models of their homelands on foreign soil. It has been shown that to make a genuine effort to learn the language of the recipient is one of the most effective tools in identification (Gourdet 1999:4).

In 1934 Mr. and Mrs. Garfield Todd<sup>12</sup> came from New Zealand to work as expatriate missionaries at Dadaya mission station. In 1947 the secondary school was established at Dadaya, one of the first four African Secondary Schools in the country (1959:60). In 1951 a higher teacher training school<sup>13</sup> was also established for the training of teachers who had passed through a secondary school course of study.

---

<sup>11</sup>These two are also very important in the history of the work of the church in the country because they were among the first people who came to do missionary work in the country.

<sup>12</sup>Mr and Mrs.Todd helped in the establishment of the secondary school and they are also popular for designing the teaching schemes which became a national teaching tool.

<sup>13</sup> This was a primary school teacher training course done after form two and was for non-standard teachers who could not qualify to teach outside the country.

In 1952 the Church of Christ was directly involved in politics when Mr. Todd became the prime minister of Southern Rhodesia. King (1959:60) points out that it was with very deep regret that the Church of Christ had to accept Mr. Todd's resignation as a missionary in 1952 after 19 years of service. Not many denominations have had such a unique privilege as the church had through the ministry of Mr. Todd in the government of Southern Rhodesia. While this had its disadvantages, it also had its blessings, especially to have their own leaders elevated to such a high position. Two disadvantages that come to mind are the risk of being misunderstood in the political realm ( as siding with white minority rule) and being in the spotlight for all to see and scrutinize. One obvious advantage was being able to identify with the people of Rhodesia and to influence the politics of the country from the highest position possible in the land.

The main strategy of the church was similar throughout the country and with many denominations. It followed a pattern of the establishment of mission stations that included schools, hospitals, and clinics. On a few stations there were either teacher training colleges or ministry training colleges. Two such places for the Churches of Christ had teacher training: Mashoko Mission and Dadaya Mission. The Bible college was established at Mashoko and was then moved to Masvingo and finally to Harare where it is to this day.

One of the major developments in the history of the mission of the Churches of Christ was the establishment of Mashoko Mission. According to Gelfand (1988:288), the work of the Churches of Christ began at Mashoko when some people in the Matsai Reserve, 150 miles away from Dadaya, expressed a desire to have the Churches of Christ establish a church and start medical work in the area. At the time, since the New Zealand churches did not have the financial resources to do this, they asked the American Christian Churches to provide a church and a hospital for the Matsai area. This led to an appeal sent to the United States of America to the friends in the Central Christian Church in Ironton, Ohio. This congregation accepted the mission in 1953 and Mr. John Pemberton and Dr. Dennis Pruett offered their services. The two men were at the Bible college at the time in Grayson, Kentucky, and they decided to come out and establish mission work. Mr. J. Pemberton arrived in 1956 and Dr. Pruett two years later.

When Dr. Pruett arrived at Mashoko he started his first medical work under a

huge fir tree where he pitched a little tent. According to Gelfand (1988:288), “...from the tent they graduated to the clinic, a series of white-washed mud huts with thatched roofs where the medical services were conducted for the next two years.” Later on they added a small surgical theater and an electric power plant that enabled them to perform major surgical procedures. The hospital was then named Southern Rhodesia Christian Hospital and was officially opened by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Todd, on 27 August 1961.

It is encouraging to notice that some form of identification took place when the expatriate missionaries at Mashoko Mission constructed thatched huts to match the community they were living in. However there was need still to get closer to the people and to live with them. The work of the Churches of Christ was extended to the Hurungwe area when an expatriate missionary, Sister Madonna Burget, started a clinic in 1967 (1988:183). Sister Burget had come to Mashoko from the United States of America to serve as a nurse. A hospital was later built at Chidamoyo as well as a primary and a secondary school. It became the third mission station after Dadaya and Mashoko. All the mission stations had the same pattern hence had the same need for identification.

Many other medical expatriate missionaries came to Zimbabwe to work with the Churches of Christ at the established mission stations. They were mainly from sister churches in the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that the work of the Churches of Christ at the mission stations included medical work, education and ministry through congregations. At each of the mission stations there would be a congregation meeting either in a church building, hospital chapel, under a tree in a classroom or in a proper church building. This has continued and the work has greatly expanded. There is a total number of fifteen primary and secondary schools, and five clinics and hospitals.

---

<sup>14</sup> Some of these would include Gladys Jongling who came in 1961, Mary Bliffen, Dr. Richard Lee who came in 1962, Dr. Jon Durr, Dr. Gloria Cobb who arrived in 1967, Dr. James Frasure who came in 1968, Dr. David Grubbs, and Dr. Dwain Illman whose years of arrival are not supplied (Gelfand 1988:183).



## **2.4 Need for Identification in the Methods of Mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe**

In the history of mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe we have looked at the mission activities undertaken by the Church over the years. The activities reveal the main mission methods the church has employed. Within the activities we also observed that there was, and still is, need to apply identification. It is important that we look at the need in retrospect to draw lessons so that we will not make the same mistakes as our predecessors. We will now pinpoint some of those methods as they are seen from the activities undertaken.

We notice the church has focussed mainly on one dimension of mission i.e. the social dimension through education and medical work to address the needs of the people. As educational work and medical work are going on, the church uses these tools to preach the Gospel. This can only be done when the church realizes that mission has to do with meeting people's needs both physically and spiritually. Since people have both physical and spiritual needs they need to be ministered to in the two areas. I believe this is what Kritzinger (in Saayman1991: 7) means by saying,

Mission is the attempt to embody God's liberating presence in every human situation. It never takes place in a vacuum, but is always concerned with specific people in specific situations, and searches to discover the meaning of the Good News in each context.

This happened very clearly when the church responded to the need for education and medical services and provided the services. Whilst the missions carried out by the church addressed clear needs of the local community, more could have been done to identify with them. Even as the expatriate missionaries participated in the life of the people to a certain extent, much more could have been done to identify with the recipients of the Gospel message.

## **2.5 Evaluating Ways of Doing Mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe**

The church in Zimbabwe was influenced by the situations as the expatriate missionaries observed them. Here the church used "the methods that measured up to the needs of the

contemporary situation” (Carter 1963:30). Where the people of Zimbabwe needed physical liberation from disease, medical work was introduced to the situation. To meet the need for mental liberation formal education was introduced. It is worth noting, as Carter (1963:15) observes, that the aim of the expatriate missionaries was to see the Gospel that they preached take on flesh, “for they knew that a love that cares will never treat a man (sic) as though he were just a soul with ears.” He goes on (1963:15-16) to point out that

The pattern of mission stations shows how the ministry of incarnation and identification worked out in practice. Churches, schools, and hospitals stand grouped together; for spirit, mind and body are all involved as Christian workers seek to meet the need of the whole man (sic) in the whole situation.

Here Carter shows us the church ministering to every aspect of the life of people and not just the spiritual aspect. The methods used also apply specifically to the needs at hand. While the church did very well in addressing some real needs, it seems there were other critical areas in which they could have done better.

Firstly, the expatriate missionaries relied upon the local believers to interpret for them as they preached and taught in their own language. This was justified for the first six to twelve months they were in Zimbabwe, but there was need to learn the language so that they could be more effective in their communication. In most cases not much was done to learn the local languages. This omission proved to be very costly as the expatriate missionaries failed to understand the culture of the people since the culture of any group can best be learned from the language. Karecki (1993:155) put it well when she said that language is central to understanding a culture. The aspect of identification as “to learn how to speak as they speak,” (Gourdet 1999:5) was lacking in this attempt at contextualization.

Inability to speak the language of the people resulted in expatriate missionaries not knowing how effective or ineffective their ministry was, since they were detached from the people. An example of this is the fact that the citizens continued with dual allegiance to God and to the worship of ancestral spirits, unknown to the expatriate missionary. The elderly people, when confronted about their worship of ancestors, defend themselves by arguing that the expatriate missionaries did not condemn the practice. What this means for mission is that those who observe from the outside will not see the

need to be part of Christianity and those who become Christians will not see the need to change their old traditional ways, but will model their lives after those of the old members. This also means that the church will not be as effective in the society as it could be if Christians did not live a dualistic lifestyle.

This leads to the second observation, that the idea of mission stations separated the expatriate missionaries from the people and made it difficult for them to get to know the people well. This approach, according to Gourdet (1999:5), lacked identification in that it did not include: “learning to play as they play, eat as they eat, sleep where they sleep, study what they study.” While expatriate missionaries earned respect and admiration, the admiration would have been greater if they had made an effort to identify with the community. Since identification was lacking, a gulf developed between the citizens and the expatriate missionaries. The gulf developed because of lack of conviction about equality in the body of Christ, and hence the expatriate missionaries did good work but did not build up a sense of solidarity based on their unity in Christ.

To make matters worse, expatriate missionaries were classified together with the other whites who were colonizers and oppressors (the election of Garfield Todd as prime minister within the Rhodesian political system dominated by the small white minority was a clear expression of this). In some areas the lives of the expatriate missionaries were no different from those of the colonizers. Carter (1963:340) gives an analysis of their attitude when he says, “When we went to the house to see him (the expatriate missionary) he would not ask us in.” This also happened to me when I went to see an expatriate missionary at his house and he told me never to come there again because this was not his office but his home. If ever I wanted to see him I would have to go to his office and not to his house. This action was culturally improper because in the Shona culture visitors are always welcome no matter where the host is or what s/he is doing. This stance, taken by this expatriate missionary (which was a common stance among many expatriate missionaries), contributed to the ineffectiveness of the evangelistic work and it widened the gap between some expatriate missionaries and the people. Unfortunately, it also took away the respect I had had for him. I believe many other citizens felt the same way as I felt. By so doing the expatriate missionaries were not able to be “in communion and in communication with the local community” and the expatriate

missionary failed to identify with the local community in that he was not able to adopt and make the community's customs and values his own. Carter (1963:340) quotes Christ's words when he said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27) and goes on to comment that, "the church is to express in its corporate life the nature and the true quality of God's redeeming work." This life is, in fact, itself a method of mission, and a very important one.

Finally, there is need for the proclamation of the word in words, symbols and cultural forms understandable to a particular culture if expatriate missionaries are to achieve identification with the people. This is what Hiebert (1985:153) points out when he says that the lack of creative attempts to give expression to the Christian message in words and symbols understandable to particular cultures dooms Christianity to being perceived as foreign. It lacks in the aspect of "speaking as they speak." It has been difficult for the people of Zimbabwe, who have never seen snow, to understand the idea of "white as snow". In this case it will help to bring in such examples like "cotton" or "milk" or anything else the people would be familiar with. The Gospel has to be contextualized if it is going to make any sense to the receptor culture. This observation leads to an even greater challenge for the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe in that while a lot has been done by expatriate missionaries, both local and foreign, a lot more needs to be done in the presentation of the message. Luzbetak (1988:83) makes a very good connection between contextualization and communication:

Contextualization, although always based on Scripture, nonetheless utilizes as much as possible local symbols, genres, and media, especially such that have the greatest impact in the given society. Local genres, and symbols refer to such conveyors of ideas as parables, folklore, proverbs, songs, poetry, mythology, rituals, art, dances, drama, historical events and figures.

He rightly points out that communication ought to be in the media of the local people for it to be contextual. When communication involves the symbols, genres and media of the local people, it will achieve its purpose in that the locals do not have to deal with too many new things. Identification in the way of communication helps to make even new information easier to grasp. Unfortunately, often times the Gospel has been made foreign when it has been presented in the foreign symbols, genres and media. For some reason even local Zimbabwean believers sometimes prefer to communicate the Gospel in

English, since it is perceived as more ‘civilized’ and ‘educated.’

## **2.6 The Need for Identification in Mission in the Epworth Community**

From the preceding discussion on the mission methods used by the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe, one can see that there is a need for identification in the presentation of the Gospel. Genuine contextualization cannot be undertaken without identification, hence the need for identification in mission in the Epworth community. Going back to what Newbigin and Bosch have given as definitions for contextualization as the church doing the task for which God sent it into a given community. As it does the work it is making sure in the process that it is “incarnated in the life of the people of that community” (Newbigin 1989: 121; Bosch 1991:421).

There are two basic areas in the process of contextualization. These are: 1) the church doing the work for which God sent it into the community (Newbigin 1989:121) and 2) meeting the needs of the people in the community, whether it be physical, spiritual, and emotional or whatever need (Shaw 1988:188; Chester 1993:38,127). This should be done in a way that is relevant to the particular culture. In other words, it cannot be properly done without taking identification into consideration.

This means that instead of being detached from the people the witnessing community (local and foreign) should go and live among the people. This will help them to identify more with the people of that community. Living among them should lead to developing a deeper understanding of the local people’s language, norms, ceremonies, feasts and taboos. This removes barriers and builds a sense of solidarity with the local community. The receptors of the Gospel will most likely readily listen to the Gospel coming from people who have identified with them than those who are detached from them. This is what Dao (in Karecki 1993:153) points out when he asserts that Jesus was born in a specific culture; hence “the Gospel needs to be born in specific cultures.” This, according to Dao, “will only happen if the church allows itself to enter deeply into every culture.” Hiebert (1985:82) echoed the same idea when he stressed the importance of learning a new culture as the means of carrying out mission. He maintains that forming

relationships is one of the best ways of moving out of the so-called tourist phase of life into a new culture. In coming to know persons and their life situations the Christian witness is better equipped to act as a catalyst in the inculturation process. Whether the Christian witness goes to a community or not, the community will be involved in a process of inculturation. This inculturation can be good or bad depending on the process that is chosen. The Christian witness creates a situation where the culture to be developed through this otherwise natural process becomes one that is influenced by the Word of God. What contextualization in mission in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe means is that the Gospel ceases to be foreign and becomes local. For the Gospel to be local and relevant, it should be presented in ways that will make people accept it as their own.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This second chapter of the dissertation gave a brief history of Christian mission in Zimbabwe with the goal of pointing out the need for identification in what has already been done and in future mission work. This included a brief history of Christian mission in the Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe and also methods of mission in these churches. We have also looked at areas where identification was applied, where it could have been applied, but most importantly where it needs to be applied in order to be more relevant and effective in mission efforts. The chapter also evaluated ways of doing mission in the Church of Christ and showed the need for contextualization and identification in mission in the church in Zimbabwe. The next chapter is a context analysis of the Epworth community. I will, in the chapter, do a context analysis by giving a brief history of Epworth and Christian mission in the Epworth community. I will also trace the dynamics of the Epworth context as well as the cultural and denominational plurality. I will also show the spiritual needs and the socio-economic situation as part of the context analysis.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CONTEXT ANALYSIS IN EPWORTH**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

Chapter three gives a context analysis of the Epworth community. It does this by showing the relationship between contextualization and the history of the Epworth community. In this chapter we also look at the origin of the community as well as Christian mission in the community. The analysis will also be covered by showing the cultural as well as the denominational plurality of Epworth. The process would not be complete if we did not show the spiritual needs as well as the socio-economic situation of the community.

#### **3.1 Contextualization and Context Analysis.**

Any work that is done in the area of contextualization needs to be done in a particular context. A process of analysing the context will better enhance understanding of a context. This process has been called context analysis. This is the second stage in the cycle of mission praxis. I am using it here since I have chosen the cycle as a tool to make my case for an intercultural presentation of the Gospel among the people of the Epworth community. In this chapter I present an analysis of the Epworth community to bring out the dynamics that are at work in this community. Karecki (2000:16) gives the aim of this process as, “discovering both the visible and invisible factors shaping society as they manifest themselves in the local context.” This discovery will make the proclamation of the Gospel relevant and effective.

“Context analysis explores the historical dimension of society as well as its social, political and economic structures, and cultural make-up” (Karecki 2000:16). Such an exploration of a society should be as comprehensive as possible so that all possible areas of that context become familiar to the one theologizing in the community. Since contextualization deals with “the reflection on the interaction of the Text as the Word of

God and the context as specific human situation in obedience to Christ and His mission in the world” (Nicholls 1987:101), an exploration of any given context will facilitate reflection on the interaction of the text and the context. Such an approach to the communication of the Gospel in the Epworth community will yield desirable results. The exploration of the Epworth community will begin with the historical dimension of Epworth and will then go on to other dimensions. Once this is done, even when we do a theological reflection it will be undertaken based on a thorough knowledge of our context, so as to achieve effective contextualization. As I move on to some dimensions of the community it will be imperative to address questions raised by Holland and Henriot (in Karecki 2000:17) when analyzing data in social analysis. These include the following:

- 1 What do you notice about the situation today? What are people experiencing?
- 2 What influence does money have in this situation? Why?
- 3 Who makes the most important decisions in this situation?
- 4 What do people want most in life? Why?

These questions, as well as others, should penetrate into the core of the society to where one gets to know the people very well. Intercultural communication of the Gospel will become more effective in such an environment.

### **3.2 History of Epworth**

According to Ranger and Weller (1975:136) before the European occupation in 1890 the area had been in the Seke territory where the Harare people lived. A few miles to the north was the Chinamora territory of the Shawasha, the boundary being the Makabusi River. When Epworth was surveyed, the area to the immediate south of the mission had already been made into European farms. On the other hand, for some miles to the north were a number of African villages of varying sizes. Three of these were of great importance for the future of development of the mission. The largest of the three villages had a headman named Chiremba, who belonged to one of the chiefly houses. The other



two were in Seke country. One of them, called Besa, was about a mile northwest of Epworth, and the third, with the name Chiremba, rather similar to the largest village, was on the border of the mission itself. Numerically Chiremba contained only about a dozen household heads, but it became the most important village in the early years of the mission because it was then the only community to accept Wesleyan mission wholeheartedly.

As the story unfolds from Ranger and Weller (1975:140), Chiremba village consisted mainly of the three extended families belonging to the chiefly families of Mashonganyika, Chihota, and Rusike. They included individuals who may have had expectations of attaining the chieftainships of their respective tribal territory. About the time the mission was established the family that should have had headmanship was the Mashonganyika family since they had been the original head. This background, I believe, will be relevant as we continue to look at the background of the whole area and also as we connect it with the coming of the Europeans together with the establishment of the mission station. When the Europeans came, Mashonganyika, who should have been headman, refused to meet them. Chiremba, the younger brother to chief Chihota, met them and he came to be regarded as the headman.

It should be noted that Christianity had an influence on culture from the very beginning in that Chiremba was a n'anga (diviner) by profession. He became a Christian when he heard the Gospel (Banana 1991:84). He should have been the heir to the Chihota chieftaincy, but he forfeited it when he chose to inherit his late young brother's widow contrary to the wishes of the chief and tribal custom. Isaac Shimmin was instrumental in getting the farm from Rhodes that became the mission station (in Zvobgo 1991: 27). This was the somewhat unstable background of the village, which accepted the Wesleyan mission.

### **3.3 History of Christian Mission in Epworth**

At the very beginning of colonialism in Zimbabwe, in 1890 to be precise, Cecil John Rhodes donated 3000 acres of Chiremba's land to the Methodist Church. This is the same Chiremba who was a diviner (Banana 1991:84). Later in 1892, a school was opened

under the Sotho evangelist Josiah Ramusha. About 1895 the whole village moved and was rebuilt in the mission area.

The school attracted children by day and adult workers by night, and led to some settling on the mission station. The night school laid the educational foundation of some of the first teachers and evangelists to be trained by the Wesleyan church in the then Rhodesia.

The church established a mission station, which they called Epworth. This was in honour of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church who lived in a village in the United Kingdom, which was called Epworth (Patsanza 1988:20). The tenants on this church land, with the help of a missionary called Mr. White, bought an extra 3000 acres (*Sunday Mail* April 8, 2001).

According to Banana (1991:77), many people were attracted to the mission land because of developments that included advanced agricultural practices, health care and education. According to the interview I had with the secretary of the Epworth Local Board (May 11, 2001) many people flocked to the church land and the church made the “mistake” of charging them rent. This gave the people some right to the land they occupied. Around 1978 to 1980 there was an influx of people into this area most of them were seeking refuge from the liberation war that broke out in the country from the late 1960s to 1980. A good number of people came from the Mutoko area in the northeastern part of Zimbabwe to settle in Epworth. Since there were so many people coming in, the church could not cope with the numbers and in 1983 they decided to donate the land to the state. When the government accepted, it was accepting the people on the land as well. Since the church had been levying these people, the government accepted them as legal settlers. However the church remained with part of the land on which they had built a primary school, a secondary school, a clinic, an orphanage and a theological college. The college became a training school for five other denominations<sup>14</sup>.

According to the 1992<sup>15</sup> census records, Epworth had 120,000 people on this 3737,72 hectare piece of land (1992 census file). There is not much as far as the infrastructure. At the official growth rate of 2.6% per annum today there could be up to

---

<sup>14</sup>The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church, The Anglican Church and the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

<sup>15</sup>The 1992 census records were the only ones that were made available to me

150,000 people on this land. It is possible that there are many more than this because of illegal settlers.

### **3.4. The Dynamics of the Epworth Context**

#### **3.4.1 Cultural Plurality in Epworth**

In 1992 there were already 12 people from Botswana in Epworth, along with 144 Malawians, 636 Mozambicans, 48 Zambians, 3 South Africans and one American. The rest were Zimbabweans.

With so many nationalities in the Epworth community, it means there are many cultures and languages represented there. Among the local people in this community there will be represented various local language groups. Some of the languages spoken are: Shona, Ndebele, Shangani, Ndau,<sup>16</sup> Toko, and Zezuru. What this means is that there are as many cultures as the local language groups. This shows the cultural plurality of the Epworth Community.

Since this community is so diverse, it will definitely require inter-cultural communication with each cultural group when one preaches the Gospel message. To communicate the Gospel message effectively here, one also needs to seriously consider contextualization.

#### **3.4.2 Denominational Plurality in Epworth**

The name Epworth originated from the Methodist background of the community, so the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe is credited for starting mission work in the area in 1890 (Banana 1991:84). Many other denominations would later move into the area but the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe had pioneered the mission work. As I write there are now a number of mainline churches, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, African Independent churches and one Muslim congregation. These include the following: the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Christ, the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church, Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), Glad Tidings, Abundant Life

---

<sup>16</sup> The Ndau and the Zezuru groups, while they have distinct cultures, are Shona dialects.

Ministries, Apostolic Faith, Vapostori (the Apostles),<sup>17</sup> Zionist Church, Jack Mission and Jehovah's Witness (Zvapupu ZvaJehovha). One can safely say that most of the church groups in the country are represented in the Epworth community. We also have African Traditionalists, under African Traditional Religion, represented there.

### **3.4.3 Spiritual Needs of Epworth Community**

This section addresses three main spiritual needs of the Epworth community. Firstly there is the need that I am going to address as the need to make the Gospel message applicable to the recipient culture. While African Independent churches have their own problems and needs, they have made great strides in their attempt to make the church in Epworth an African church for Africans. Sanon (in Karecki 2000:153) points out that if there is no attempt made to give expression to the Christian message in words and symbols understandable to particular cultures, "then the church will always remain a foreigner."

The way forward is what Niles (in Hao 1990:33) referred to as the process where the potted plant from a Western country becomes rooted in the cultural soil of the East. According to him the pot vessel has to be broken and the plant allowed to grow in the new Asian soil. The same can be stated for Christianity in Africa in general and in Epworth in particular. Any given culture, including the cultures represented in Epworth, is made up of folkways, mores, language, human productions and social structures. In order for the Gospel to make sense it has to be reappropriated to a point where it makes sense culturally. Newbigin (1989:141) echoes the same idea when he says that if the Gospel is to "make sense" it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be "clothed" in symbols which are meaningful to them

Molyneux (1984:40) put it very well when he said that they have attempted to make Christianity in Africa African by attempts at indigenising it and ridding it of its 'foreignness' and to render it truly at home in Africa. He points out that the common feature of these churches is their concern for the health and welfare of their church

---

<sup>17</sup> There are several of these Vapostori (Apostles) Churches. They seem to be more of a sect and split very frequently.

members. “The combination of economic and religious activities expresses the holistic conception of life that is characteristic of African thinking” (: 48). He goes on to say:

I want to think like an African, worship like an African, sing like an African, live like an African. The Gospel must be presented to the African in a way he can understand and interpret in his own thought-forms and worship (55).

Kitamori (in Hao 1990:34) echoes the same idea when he says that Western forms should not bind Christianity. Since it has been bound in Western forms in a number of denominations, Christianity has been superficial and irrelevant in a lot of ways. This is the same idea Mbiti (in Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989:99) expresses when he says:

Missionaries have been unable to contextualize the gospel with an understanding of and appreciation for African thought and religion. As a result the Gospel has not yet been made relevant to Africans, conversions have not been real, and African Christianity is superficial.

Since the Gospel has not been contextualized, it has not touched every aspect of African people. People will come to church and still continue with their old traditional ways that, in some cases, will be contrary to the teaching of the Bible. Hiebert (1985:184) refers to this as “denial of the old”. In this we reject most of the old customs as “pagan.” These “would include drums, songs, dramas, dances, certain types of dress and food, marriage customs, and funeral rites because of their relationship with traditional religions.” This, according to Hiebert, creates some problems. The cultural vacuum it creates will be filled by imported customs. The second problem is that “the old cultural ways just go underground. The old cultural ways are practiced in secret” (: 184).

Zvobgo (1991:154) expresses the need for contextualization very well when he cites the reason for the difficulty the expatriate missionaries had in converting the Ndebele and the Shonas to Christianity as failure by the expatriate missionaries to appreciate the importance of traditional religion among the Shona and Ndebele. There is no way one will be able to preach the Gospel to a group of people and be effective without understanding and appreciating where the people are and preaching in a way which makes the Gospel applicable to the situation. This is more or less the idea Kraft (in Kilpatrick 1999: 68) brings out when he asserts that:

Everything we do and think, plus everything done and thought by those to whom we go, plus everything recorded in the Scriptures, is totally affected by culture; we can at least contend that no one should attempt to work cross-culturally for Christ without a pretty solid understanding of culture.

One other main area of spiritual need for the people of Epworth is the area of understanding and relating to spirits. This includes spirits of the dead and other spirits, either evil or “good.” The focus here is on demons and demon possession with reference to other spiritual needs. The church has not adequately addressed this area and as a result Christians have been syncretistic<sup>18</sup>. When it comes to spirits of the dead and ancestor worship, there are two main schools of thought among theologians. One school looks at it as worship of ancestors and another looks at it as ancestor veneration.<sup>19</sup> In a bid to address the problem of demon possession some people have consulted spirit mediums, and that has led to ancestor worship.

Demon possession and casting out of demons has been a prohibited area of discussion for most mainline churches. The Church of Christ is not left out of this attitude. Of all the mainline churches I know which are in the Epworth area, the Church of Christ probably takes the most conservative stance. This, of course, goes back to our background that has been influenced by the expatriate missionary worldview. Our people continue to ask the question Hiebert (1999:416) asks, “What about spirit possession or curses or witchcraft or black magic? What is the Christian answer to these?” Oduyoye (in Crafford 1993:169) says that the daily problems of witchcraft, sorcery and ancestor worship were in most cases ignored by expatriate missionaries. On the same point Hiebert (1999:416) also makes a correct assessment which directly applies to our situation in Epworth when he says that often times the expatriate missionary evangelist or doctor has no answer. To them and their understanding these do not really exist. However, “to the people for whom these are very real experiences in their lives, there

---

<sup>18</sup> Here I am referring to the idea of mixing two religious practices. The two referred to here are Christianity and African Traditional Religion. See terminology section in chapter one.

<sup>19</sup> According to Schoonhoven (in Verstraelen 1998:84-85) “The essence of ancestor worship is the belief that the deep communion that exists between the members of a family is not severed by death; it is not an ‘adoration of the ancestors’. In confessing the ‘communion’ in Christ cross the boundary of death, the church should encourage African Christians to remain in contact with their beloved ones who are passed away- especially in the context of the Eucharist. Hung (in VanRheenen 1991:262) says, “Thus on New Year’s Day, 1971, Catholic Cardinal Yu Ping of Taiwan declared that ancestor worship was “not idolatry but in accordance with God’s will,” the fifth commandment”

must be another answer.” Hiebert goes on to assert that when people do not find an answer to their needs and questions, many of them return to the magician for cures. This is what has been happening to Christians in the Epworth community. They go to n’angas (diviners), spirit mediums and also to African Independent Church prophets contrary to the wish of their leaders.<sup>20</sup>

While it is unfortunate that the Christians in Africa have received the Western worldview on the supernatural, it is not too difficult to help them to understand the concept because of the African supernaturalistic worldview of the spirit world. While the Western worldview is mainly naturalistic (Kraft 1989:27), I would say the African worldview is supernaturalistic. The only difficulty would be to differentiate between demons and ‘ancestor’ spirits. Being Evangelicals has not helped the situation much. It is possible to remain a non-Pentecostal non-Charismatic Evangelical who still addresses the issue of demon possession, although this may be difficult because of the heritage from the Western Evangelical worldview. It is likely to be made worse by the influence of the Enlightenment thinking which asks questions about “belief in anything that could not be rationally understood” (Kraft 1989:25).

Related to demon possession is the issue of healing. There are people who have gone either to the hospital or to a private doctor with illnesses, but they were told that there was nothing wrong with them. Some doctors or medical workers have told patients to try “chivanhu” (traditional means). By this they mean for people to go to n’angas who will tell them what to do. The n’anga may instruct the patient to brew beer or offer a sacrifice. This obviously means that people develop dual allegiance: “a loyalty to Christianity to handle certain needs paralleled by a continued loyalty to traditional religious practitioners to handle their power needs” (Kraft 1989:4). Kraft adds that while expatriate missionaries bemoaned the situation, they did not have an effective antidote. Today the church, especially Evangelicals, bemoans the situation but does not have a solution to it. Some African church leaders are strongly opposed to prayer for healing and, if anything, they discourage it. In this case, prayers for healing are conducted

---

<sup>20</sup> Since African Independent Churches (most of them) seem to have “syncretistic” tendencies, some mainline church groups have not wanted to associate with them or to have their church members associate with them. In fact, both groups are ‘syncretistic’ (in their own way) having committed themselves to a particular culture each.

mainly for those in African Independent Churches, or in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.<sup>21</sup> In a good number of mainline Evangelical churches prayer for healing is scarcely talked about. As Kraft (1989:4) says, “Our missionaries brought us an essentially powerless message to a very power-conscious people.” This sounds very critical but it seems true. After my three years of Bible college training, I still could not help people who came to me as a minister of the Gospel to find solutions to their problems with illnesses that could not be explained medically. Crafford (1993:169) accurately states that the daily problems of witchcraft, sorcery and ancestor worship were in most cases ignored by expatriate missionaries although some of these practices are not unknown in their culture.

One other need I notice in the Epworth community, again related to the need for physical and spiritual healing, is the need for spiritual power. This power frees one from fear of n’angas, fear of personal curses and generational curses, fear of being bewitched, fear of ancestors, fear of demons. The power enables one to break free from all these fears. The primary reason for the amazing growth rate of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches was quite simply their ability to address people’s need for spiritual power (Kraft 1989:6). This fear of n’angas, fear of personal curses and generational curses, fear of being bewitched, fear of ancestors, fear of demons and need for power is so real that people have done strange things to gain that power. Some men have raped their babies; others have paid large amounts of money or livestock; and yet some have offered their daughters as living sacrifices to the spirits<sup>22</sup>. It is important for the recipients to not only experience truth encounter but also to experience power encounter as we Evangelicals have always emphasised. This is very closely related to miracles healing and casting out demons but in this section, it is being viewed from the basic position where people “see a demonstration that the power of God is greater than that of the local pagan deities.” (Kraft 1999:408). The issue of power encounter fits the African context very well because they are acquainted with power from the time they begin to

---

<sup>21</sup> There may be some churches I am not aware of that conduct healing sessions.

<sup>22</sup> In some cases, especially in the case of a “chikwambo”(spirit that helps acquire wealth and prestige), men have often offered their live daughters to be the spirit’s wives. The spirit will not allow them either to be married or to be educated. They can be prostitutes but not married women. The spirit is also given other members of the family to kill at will in order to drink blood. They say a “chikwambo” requires a human sacrifice each year. This can be from the man’s family or from his extended family.



understand life. It is important that in the presentation of the Gospel they see the power of Christ being demonstrated as being greater than any power they are used to. Truth encounter will also show the power of Christ to be superior to any power since the Word clearly shows that the power of Christ is greater than any power that exists (Colossians 1:15-17).

#### **3.4.4 The Socio-economic Situation in Epworth**

The whole nation of Zimbabwe is currently going through one of the worst droughts ever experienced in the nation. According to the SABC News on 4 June (in ZWNEWS 2002):

It is estimated that about 7,8 million Zimbabweans face starvation. A recent assessment by international food agencies has stated that drought and the Zimbabwean faltering land resettlement programme are two of the factors which have contributed to the current food crisis. More and more people within the region face massive food shortages.

Perhaps it would help if we gave a brief background of this Epworth community.

Epworth is very underdeveloped as an area. There is no electricity and running water in most areas. The situation is more like what Ritchie (1999:1) described as the situation for many people in Africa in the 80's. He said that the majority of Africans lived with a daily reality of grinding poverty in which clean water, food and the basic necessities of life are increasingly difficult to obtain. No better description could be given for this community. According to the Local Board Secretary, (May 2, 2001) the Board does not have a policy on housing, but they encourage the residents to improve buildings. To do so, they have to use approved plans to construct approved buildings. The people of this community are so poor that they are not able to put up an approved structure. If you see any substantial house in Epworth, you can be assured that it belongs to someone who wants to rent it out to get money. The usual places people use as houses leave a lot to be desired. Some of them are shacks. It is not unusual to find five people in a room that should accommodate one person. Those people who cannot afford the expensive accommodation of Harare will just move to Epworth where the rents are very affordable.

When life gets economically unbearable in Harare the place of refuge is Epworth. Talking about this Patsanza (1988:20) says, "The situation at Epworth Mission, located a

few kilometres from Harare's city centre, is a microcosm of the land struggle and search for economic and spiritual security that prevails in Zimbabwe today." Indeed Epworth has become a place of refuge for many. Recently a member of a certain congregation in Harare lost his money and accommodation and had to move to Epworth. Fortunately he and his family are back in Harare but many never get the chance to come back.

If one is retrenched from his/her job, the first place to run to is Epworth. In Epworth some people survive by selling whatever they can find. If you went to Epworth you would see a lot of informal traders selling fruits, vegetables, clothes, tools, meat, cornmeal and many other wares.

The Epworth economy has been described by Banana (1991:73) as an urban monetary economy compared to the agrarian economy that it used to be. It seems as if a lot of people want to make money quickly but they do not realize the limitedness of their source.

Paraffin is the main source of energy for most people living in the Epworth community, but it is not readily available. When it becomes available it is more expensive than petrol. Diesel fuel is often used as a substitute, but it presents well-known health hazards. Community workers and religious leaders might do well to organise the people in Epworth so that they become empowered to put pressure on the government and petrol station owners to change this unjust situation through conscientization. This would be in line with what Holland and Henriot (1983:94) conclude about social analysis when they assert, "To be effective, it should engage whole communities - people working together - rather than isolated individuals."

The problem with paraffin, petrol, sugar, cooking oil and other commodities is sometimes because of the profiteering mentality in people. The government seems not to be doing much to get rid of the ongoing profiteering and often times there is corruption involving these basic commodities. In the case of Zimbabwe, as Holland and Henriot (1983:69) say, the state intervenes very little in the economy and assumes almost no responsibility for the general social welfare. People are concerned about themselves and they take advantage of lack of restriction on profit. The people are not organizing and questioning why the government is not doing anything because there is not much political freedom in the country.

As I write, there are people in Epworth, many of them, who go for a day or two without food because they cannot afford the basic meal of “sadza” (thick cornmeal porridge) and vegetables. In 2003, cornmeal costs \$125 per kg, but now it costs almost double. It shows that the economy is not stable and the poor are always the victims.

Epworth, like any other part of Zimbabwe, does not have gender equality. Women are still looked down upon and have to suffer in raising the family. While I was at a police post one woman and her two children came to seek refuge from a husband and father who had been beating them. They are the ones who fetch water from a well and have to gather firewood from the nearby forests. If they are caught while fetching firewood they will be arrested because it is illegal to do so. A number of women have been raped while fetching firewood from the forests near Epworth. Recently two women were raped in the vicinity of Epworth. One of these women was about seven months pregnant. When this happens it is very difficult for the woman to report it to the police and when she does, not much can be done to bring the perpetrators to book.

While I was in Epworth last year I helped one vendor (informal trader) to have his wife set up a place of her own so that they could both sell items as a way to better their situation. When I went back a few months later I was told that she had been stopped from trading because the husband was afraid that she would go out with other men if she went out to order fruit. While it is not good for women to go out with other men, it is normal and acceptable for married men to go out with other women.

A lot of women who contract HIV/AIDS get it from their husbands who contract it from adulterous affairs. If a woman were to complain about her husband’s behaviour she would be beaten up. This worsens the situation of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. Women and girls are affected more by virtue of their vulnerability. The situation is very bad particularly for women and girls. According to the United Nations Secretary General’s Task Force on Women (2004:1), Girls and young women make up nearly 80% of young people between the ages 15-24 living with HIV/AIDS. The same report (:1) shows how bad the situation is when it points out that 1.8 million adults and children in Zimbabwe are living with HIV/AIDS. Evans Davis (2005:3) also addresses the same subject of HIV/AIDS and says, “Zimbabwe now has the dubious honour (sic) of being the world’s most infected country – about a quarter of the adult population is HIV

positive.” He (:3) goes on to say that in many urban areas infection runs to 40% and 80% in the army. He (:2) paints a dark picture when he says, “across the country an HIV death occurs every few minutes.” Whilst the situation described above is for the country in general, the Epworth community is equally affected if not worse than most areas of the country.

Nelson (1987:417) describes a situation very similar to that of Epworth area when he says, "Since the coming of Christianity, women's situations have changed drastically from what they used to be. Of course you will find some men still holding to the old traditional ways that regard women as a lower class who should be treated as such. In this situation “women were considered to be the property of men, not equals” (:417). The women of Epworth are considered to be the property of men. They have no choice in what should or should not happen in the home; their feelings are not considered in what the husband does. The churches are not saying much since there are men in the church who need to be educated on how to treat their wives. They are taking what the society considers the norm. The church should be addressing the matter from a biblical point of view where, according to the Bible, the man should love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. The other implications in society of the way women have been treated is that the women do not perform to their potential, hence depriving the society of what it should get from the contribution of women.

Obviously this oppression and suppression of women by men is a hindrance to intercultural communication of the Gospel. Gudykunst (in Karecki 2000:65) mentions sexism as one of the barriers to intercultural communication. He says that sexism occurs in a situation where we assign characteristics to a person based on their sex. Gudykunst (: 65) goes on to elaborate on his point by saying, “One shows sexism by regarding women as genetically inferior, supporting discrimination against women, engaging in hostility toward women who do not fulfil traditional sex roles, using derogatory names for women and treating them as sex objects.” This issue will definitely have to be addressed in the Epworth community. This happens many times in the Epworth community and whoever takes the Gospel there will have to be aware of and address this ongoing attitude.

Presently (2004) there are massive food shortages in the whole country. There is

a shortage of basic commodities: cornmeal (the staple food for the majority of Zimbabweans), sugar, salt, cooking oil and bread. When they are available they are found on the ‘black market’ where they are being sold at exorbitant prices. I have noticed as I have frequented Epworth that there is also a thriving ‘black market.’ They sell mainly cornmeal, sugar and cooking oil.

Having done a social analysis of the Epworth community in the seven specific areas, it will help to go on to the next step. The next step would be to make sure that this analysis is not knowledge just for its own sake but that it will “lead to meaningful action that will help facilitate the coming of the reign of God in its fullness” (Karecki 2000:18). Karecki (:54) also describes context analysis as,

an essential element of contextual theology and mission praxis because through it we come to a realistic appraisal of the situation in which we are theologizing. For mission praxis it is a necessary step in discerning the best way the local community can manifest the reign of God in the world. It is also a fundamental element in demonstrating the relationship that exists between theology and life.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

We did a context analysis of the Epworth community in this chapter. We saw that the historical background of the Epworth community explains why the people are in the situation they are in now and why they have the spiritual and socio-economic needs they have. By outlining the historical background of this community and the historical background of Christian mission in the community, we saw why there is a cultural as well as a denominational plurality in the community.

Chapter Four will move on to the definition of theological reflection and then move on to Old and New Testament evidence of contextualization. In the chapter we will also look at the early church and contextualization. We also will show how scriptural texts could lend inspiration and direction to efforts at contextualization in Epworth. The chapter will conclude with the Pauline view on contextualization.

## **CHAPTER 4**

## CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

### 4.0 The Definition of Theological Reflection

In this chapter we look at the definition of theological reflection and then move on to Old and New Testament evidence of contextualization. We will also look at the early church and contextualization and then conclude with the Pauline view on contextualization.

Reflection can be defined as an act of thinking deeply about something or someone. Karecki (2000:64) states that the aim of reflection is to:

empower people to function as interdependent and responsible members of society who are prepared to take risks for the good of their communities. It enables them to ask the “why questions” that are necessary in order to arrive at the deeper meanings.

If reflection in general is what Karecki says above, then theological reflection limits the scope to matters of faith. Karecki (2000: 64) goes on to state, “It is a way of critically assessing one's context in the light of faith.” According to Holland and Henriot (1983:9),

theological reflection is an effort to understand more broadly and deeply the analysed experience in the light of the living faith, scripture, church social teachings and the resources of tradition. The Word of God brought to bear upon the situation raises new questions, suggests new insights, and opens new responses.

This chapter has shown that contextualization is part of Christian mission and that there is a lot of evidence of it in both the Old and the New Testament. From the definition of theological reflection one notes that there is need to ask how closely linked theology is to the social situation.

They go on to ask the question, “how closely linked is the theology to the social situation?” This is a relevant question to be asked because theology should be used to touch the social life of a people and change it. Whatever people are experiencing ought to be examined in the light of living faith, scripture, church social teachings and the resources of tradition. If this is not done, the situation remains outside the realm of theological reflection. Any study that does not include this will be nothing but secular

Anthropology or Sociology. There is need to take people's experiences further than the social. Karecki (2000:18) also says that theological reflection means that a local community reflects on the data collected during the process of context analysis in the light of the Bible and Christian tradition.

Theological reflection plays a very important role in the cycle. If we did not have theological reflection then the process would remain a secular analysis of the society. Adding a theological reflection to a secular analysis is also meant to help the community see the Bible and their tradition in a new way by reinterpreting them in the light of the questions raised in context analysis (Karecki 2000:18). She goes on to say,

This step in the cycle of mission praxis gives depth to the entire process. In this very explicit way, biblical faith is brought to bear on all the concrete realities of life.

In this chapter we are looking at the Epworth context in the light of what the Bible teaches as well as Christian tradition. This exercise should help to explain the need for the community to understand their situation from a biblical perspective, and this is the basis of an essential part of the process of mission praxis. I will also include general contextualization as seen in the Scriptures: in the Old Testament, the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles. Once we see contextualization in this wider perspective we will be able to apply it to the Epworth community.

#### **4.1 Old and New Testament Evidence**

Contextualization in the spreading of God's Word has been the strategy used in both the Old and the New Testament. Engel (1983:82) argues that contextualization was introduced (in the Old Testament) at the moment Adam first experienced personhood. He states that when God who is infinite created Adam who was finite, He contextualized his message as an infinite God to communicate in "finite" ways. The God of all wisdom communicated in ways which the limited Adam could understand. God dealt with Abraham according to his cultural context (:92). Whatever missionary work will be done in the Epworth context should take into consideration the culture of Epworth.

Lind (1982:141) states that his encounter with the Old Testament in the past twenty-five years has convinced him that it speaks of the universal mission of the God of Israel “not merely in a few texts here and there, but throughout its total message from Genesis to Malachi.” He goes on to say that “the entire Old Testament is profitable for the church to understand its place in Yahweh’s mission and its task of contextualization” (:159).

Engel (1983:93) shows Christ (in the New Testament) as the classic example of contextualization of God’s message without compromise. He states that by means of the incarnation God perfectly contextualized his communication. Through the incarnation, He met his target culture where it was, and as it was, in the man Christ Jesus, his sinless Son. Nicholls (1987:101) says basically the same when he asserts that, “the incarnation is the ultimate paradigm of the translation of the Text into context.” Here we see that even before he spoke he had already become a perfect example of contextualization by being born in the form of a human being. He went on to further exemplify the process through his preaching and teaching. When Christ communicated the Gospel to the Samaritan woman and to Nicodemus he used an approach that made the Gospel meaningful to both of them (Engel 1983:96). Commenting on both incidents, Studebaker (2002:6) points out that Christ took a contextual approach to ministry. He shows that in John 3, Christ confronts Nicodemus, a teacher of the law, with some deep theological insights suitable for his status as a Pharisee. However, in John 4, as Jesus casually converses with the woman at the well about her immoral past, He uses the well as a simple illustration of the "living water" He could provide. As seen in the two approaches, in each case, Jesus showed genuine respect for that person's background and mindset by tailoring the Gospel appropriately.

Bruce Nicholls (1987:101) points out the same example of Christ when he asserts that “Jesus Christ the Word incarnate as a Jew identified with a particular culture at a limited moment in history though transcending it.” He goes on to affirm that Christ was a supreme model of contextualization. Likewise, an ambassador for Christ must show utmost respect to the people he is trying to reach, and for their mind-set. By demonstrating a deep understanding of their culture, we gain credibility with our audience. Above all, we become more effective as communicators of the Gospel.



The Gospel writers also show amazing examples of contextualization. Hesselgrave & Rommen (1989:8) show this when they assert that:

Each of the four Gospels, for example, reflects the cultural orientation of its Author and is clearly addressed to a particular audience. Matthew's Jewish orientation is reflected in his emphasis on messianic prophecy, kingship, the divine titles of Jesus, and the Aramaisms that characterize his Jewish-Greek language. Luke, on the other hand, reflects a distinctly Hellenistic mindset. This can be seen in his use of what has been described as good Koine Greek with rich and varied vocabulary enhanced by numerous Semitisms.

Matthew, being a Jew, emphasized the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and puts a lot of emphasis on divine titles of Jesus since he was addressing a Jewish readership that would appreciate the contextualization. Since Luke was Greek and was writing to Greeks, he contextualizes by reflecting a Hellenistic mindset expressed in Koine Greek.

#### **4.2 The Early Church and Contextualization**

The implication and examples of the process of contextualization are seen in the life of the New Testament Church (Nicholls 1987:101) in the book of Acts. The Acts of the Apostles is the historical background for the first proclamation of the Gospel by the baptized believers. Engel (1983:94) gives the incident of the Day of Pentecost and the miraculous gift of tongues as a good example of contextualization. The incident illustrates the principle that people need to hear the Gospel in their own language; God contextualized the Gospel by allowing those who spoke in tongues to "communicate the Gospel in as many as fifteen different languages."

Paul and Barnabas had a chance to put into practice their cross-cultural communication skills when they took the Gospel message to Antioch of Pisidia where they preached to a mixed audience of Israelites and Gentile proselytes. In their preaching they talked about Israelite history leading to the advent, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. The message was presented this way because of the assumption that the audience had some knowledge of the Old Testament (: 95).

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas contextualized the Gospel with considerable effectiveness. Engel (: 95-96) says:

At Lystra the team encountered a large number who worshipped the Greek Pantheon and thought Paul and Barnabas were gods incarnate. Paul and Barnabas sought to contextualize the Gospel (Acts 14:15), so instead of appealing to Israel's history, they appealed to cosmology, world history, and common grace in the Bible. They were sensitive to the aspect of the biblical message most suitable for leading up to the Gospel.

Erickson (in Engel 1983:96) points out that the early Jerusalem church was comprised of the Jewish Christians who continued to follow the customs of Moses and that the second context was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. He goes on to say, "This is a model for crossing cultural barriers so that the message can be contextualized." The decision the church made at the Jerusalem council was one that demonstrated the church's effort at contextualization. The decision was applicable to both Jewish and Gentile members of the church.

#### **4.3 The Pauline View**

Within Corinth there was a man guilty of incest - something even pagans forbade. Engel (1983:93) observed that in that instance Christians and pagans were of one mind about incest. Such an agreement made that ethical teaching more acceptable.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul shows that he had contextualized the Gospel when he preached to them. Paul contextualized the Gospel when he circumcised Timothy on the second missionary trip. This, according to Studebaker (2002), was because they were going to come into contact with Jews who saw circumcision as very important. Nicholls (1987:101) refers to two different approaches in preaching the Gospel: Paul's address to the pagan intellectuals or Athens was different from the one he gave in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia:

The difference in theological emphasis and preaching methodology of Paul between his address to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41) and his address to the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31) is but one notable example of the sociological and theological inevitability of contextualization.

This chapter has shown that contextualization was part of Christian mission and that there was a lot of evidence of it in both the Old and the New Testament. That shows how theology was influenced by the social situation. The Epworth community was in need of the Gospel being communicated as contextualized Word for them. The next chapter will deal with strategies for mission in Epworth and with practical ways of addressing the needs already highlighted above. These will include: addressing the socio-economic situation in Epworth, addressing the spiritual needs of the Epworth community and addressing the psychological and emotional needs of the Epworth community.

#### **4.4 Scripture and Vision for the Epworth community**

In the light of the Scriptures already given, it is important at this stage to be able to answer the question “How does the church in Epworth understand God’s mandate for mission in the light of what is happening in the community?” Answering this question also helps us to see how Scriptural texts could lend inspiration and direction to efforts at contextualization in the community. The church needs to work on its missionary dimension within the walls of the local congregation by being open to outsiders, welcoming to visitors, caring for the needy and equipping the saints for service (Ephesians 4:12) in the church and in the community (Bosch 1991:373). Equipping the saints for works of service includes doing everything in the church’s capability to accomplish the task. It is clear that the Bible calls for the church to serve in a community it is situated (Newbigin 1989:85), where “we are elected to service.”

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **STRATEGIES FOR MISSION IN EPWORTH**

#### **5. Definition for Strategies**

By strategies for mission one is exploring practical ways from the Section on the pastoral

cycle that deals with action that needs to be taken in the light of the knowledge one now has of Epworth and what God's word teaches. This process becomes what we understand to be God's will for this community. It would not be complete to find out through context analysis what the community is going through and then just leave them to grapple with their problems. This would not complete the process. It would even be more tragic if one, through theological reflection, found out what God's will was for them and did nothing about it. At this stage one needs to discern what it is they are called to be as the people of God, and what action this requires in the world. One practical strategy for mission in the Epworth community would be to look at the needs we have identified and then find possible ways of meeting those needs.

### **5.1 How the Church Can Address the Socio-economic Situation in Epworth**

There are already two church groups that are doing something about the socio-economic needs of the Epworth community although when one looks at the depth of the problem it would look like nothing is being done to help the situation. Chester (1993:127) cautions against conducting development in a purely secular way and advocates for a holistic mission which takes care of physical as well as spiritual needs. If one is to carry out a holistic mission in Epworth, one needs to take care of both the spiritual and the physical needs of the community.

There is overwhelming evidence that the Epworth community needs help urgently. There is need in a number of areas including infrastructure, health care, education and finance. If infrastructure were to be improved it would make it easier for law agents to maintain law and order. On the need for improved infrastructure, it is the role of the government to provide that to its rate-paying citizens of this community. The area urgently needs running water and electricity. Running water would help reduce disease and electricity would help reduce suffering and crime. As it is, Epworth is a “dark city” and it has become a hideout for thieves from all over Harare.

There are three major players in the Epworth community, namely: the community, the church and the government. The community is suffering. The church could help more than they have done and the government could also do much better than

it has been doing. While the community needs someone to take the initiative, this should not make them backbenchers. As a church, God wants it to serve the Epworth community in various ways as He leads it.

The need in the Epworth community affects both the church and the world. While first priority should be given to the church, the non-Christians also need help. At the moment people desperately need food and it would not help the Christians much to go to church to feed the spirit while the body can hardly get to church. The church can also teach the community about income-generating activities so that they do not have to perpetually depend on handouts. If the church can do something to supply food they should do so. There are some desperate people who are non-Christians, and the church should also reach out to those as Christ did with the hungry. This is because, as George Ladd (in Chester 1993:38) says, “The kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God over all of life and that it is present as well as future.” “All of life” includes the physical as well as the spiritual side of life and also includes all people. There is need to meet both the physical and the spiritual needs.

## **5.2 How Can the Spiritual Needs of the Epworth Community Be Met?**

In chapter four we looked at what have been perceived to be the spiritual problems and needs in the Epworth community that have to be addressed. These have to be taken seriously if the church is going to communicate the Gospel more effectively. Hesselgrave (1978:134-135) stresses the point when he says that in contextualization one should take note of the respondent’s situation and spiritual need if we are to communicate effectively. He says that in the Bible each case and need was particularized. Shaw (1988:188) seems to share the same view when he says “in order to respond to the Gospel message people must perceive it as an answer to their needs.”

One of the problems I have identified is the need to make the Gospel message applicable and relevant to the recipient culture. One needs to focus on the Epworth community with its plurality of cultures and the need to have the Gospel contextualized there. Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989:1) say that contextualization means “to present the supracultural message of the Gospel in culturally relevant terms.” This means

avoiding both the enforcement of the expatriate missionary's own cultural heritage and the "syncretistic inclusion of the elements from the receptor culture which would alter or eliminate aspects of the message upon which the integrity of the Gospel depends". People of Epworth need to hear the Gospel message preached in Shona, Zezuru, Toko, Korekore, Ndebele and any other language or dialect used in the community. One sometimes witnesses a Shona preacher preaching the Gospel in English with someone interpreting to a Shona speaking community. The reasons for this may be complex but one of the reasons is that English has become a status symbol in urban churches.

If the Gospel message is going to make sense to the recipients, there is also need to translate the Bible text into forms that are understood by the community. This is what Kraft calls dynamic-equivalence. Luzbetak (1988:79) has this to say about a dynamic-equivalent church:

one that (1) conveys to its members truly Christian meanings, (2) functions within its society in such a way that in the name of Christ it plugs into the felt need of that society and produces within it an impact for Christ equivalent to that which first-century Church produced in its society, and (3) is couched in cultural forms that are as nearly indigenous as possible.

In discussing cultural forms and symbols, Hesselgrave (1999:393) says that the Christian message which comes from the "Bible Culture" comes to the "Missionary Culture" and then the expatriate missionary in turn goes to the biblical text and interprets it "in the light of the language and forms of the context it is presented." The church in the Epworth community needs this type of contextualization if the Gospel message is going to be relevant. This, as we will see, will apply to every aspect of life in the community. The next stage is for the expatriate missionary "to translate and communicate the biblical message into the language and forms that will make it understandable to the hearers and readers in recipient culture."

Robert Schreier (1985:7) expresses this same concept very simply by saying:

it is the method of Biblical translation, whereby biblical imagery is first translated into concepts, the equivalents of which are then sought in the local language. These concepts are then translated into imagery specific to the culture. For

Example, in cultures that do not know sheep or shepherds, an attempt is made to discern the theological concepts conveyed by the sheep imagery, in order to find out how the same concept might be conveyed in the new culture, albeit with different imagery.

This same concept has been called ‘redemptive analogy’ by Don Richardson (1995:99). The idea here is that God has already gone ahead and prepared every culture for the Gospel by placing an image in the culture that will help in presenting the Gospel. Richardson (1995:99) asserts that we should learn to discern the particular redemptive analogies of each culture. He points out the advantage of this method of communication:

When conversion is accompanied by concept fulfilment, the individual redeemed becomes aware of the spiritual meaning dormant within their own culture. Conversion does not deny their cultural background, leaving them disoriented (:99).

No message can be considered contextual while it is still in a foreign form (expatriate missionary form). If the Gospel message is to be understood in the Epworth community, there is need for every preacher of the Word to make deliberate effort to present it in language and forms that are meaningful to the people. This calls for the witnessing community to, as Hesselgrave (1999:394) says, “not only know the message for the world, but they also need to know the world in which the message must be communicated.” In a way this means that for the Gospel to make sense in a culture it has to be adapted to where it makes sense culturally. As the Gospel message is preached in Epworth, it should be adapted to the cultures represented in the community. On this, Newbigin (1989:141) says that if the Gospel is to be understood, it should be received as something which communicates truth about the real human situation. If it is to “make sense”, it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them. Unfortunately, some symbols that have been used in communicating the Gospel have been foreign and irrelevant in communicating the Gospel message. A young expatriate missionary using the electric chair as an illustration in rural Africa would not make much sense. In the same way “white as snow” will not make sense to a rural Zimbabwean. As a result they have actually hindered understanding of the message.

On this same issue Shaw (1988:188) says that the Christian expatriate missionary needs to explore relevant communication styles and communicate it in a way that makes it appropriate. He even goes on to focus on oral communication of the Gospel that involves numerous forms. These forms can range from poetry to song, dance, epic tale, proverbs, chants or animated discussion. In the Epworth community a good number of these forms would be very effective. The expatriate missionary would have to study the context to determine the appropriate form. At this stage it would be difficult to say which forms would be appropriate because of the cultural diversity of the community, but at the same time songs can appeal to all the groups represented since music plays a very important role in African life. Along these same lines, but addressing the language issue, Karecki (1993:155) says that some areas of church life which could more easily be inculturated are: language, postures, gestures, and the worship environment. I agree with her when she suggests, "If church services are not in the local languages, then this could be a good beginning because language is so central to understanding a culture."

Spiritual needs of the Epworth community have to be addressed by the Gospel if Christian witnesses are going to be effective in their ministry in this community. As I pointed out in Chapter Three, one of main area of spiritual need for the people of Epworth is the area of understanding and relating to spirits. The Gospel cannot be termed contextual if it does not fully address this area in Epworth. There is need to first of all acknowledge that it is a problem instead of pretending that it does not exist when people go to strange places at night to address the problem. This includes spirits of the dead and other spirits, either evil or "good." I believe that the greatest need of the Epworth community is to understand the area of spirits in general and demon possession in particular. A lot of fear and uncertainty in people emanate from ignorance. People need to know what these spirits are that torment them and then they also need to know that the power of God is greater than these other spirits. Kraft (1999:408) maintains that three encounters work together in evangelism, namely: truth encounter, power encounter and allegiance encounter. He says, "in truth encounter the truth of the Word of God counters ignorance of error and brings people to correct understanding about Jesus Christ." On the same subject Hiebert (1999:420) suggests that expatriate missionaries should develop holistic theologies that deal with all areas of life. He also includes the fact that such



theologies should avoid the Platonic dualism of the West, and take seriously both body and soul. The church in Epworth needs to seriously consider the fourth self<sup>23</sup> - self-theologizing. I bring this up because our understanding of the word of God has basically been from a Western perspective and this did not do much to address spiritual problems peculiar to Africa in general and the Epworth community in particular. In Epworth there is need for a demonstration of God's power as it counters demons that are tormenting people, but this power encounter has to go hand in hand with truth encounter. Situations where people were freed from demon possession just by receiving truth about the demons and the power of God have been witnessed. The author knows of a man in Epworth whose wife had a spirit of witchcraft. When the demon possessed her in the middle of the night, he would whip her to sanity. When the man asked a Christian man for help, the Christian bought a new Bible, taught him about demons from the Word of God and told him what God could do to deliver his wife. Through this approach the woman is now free from the evil spirit and from the brutal battering by the husband. This is only one case of the many possible cases in one community.

About three months ago the minister for the Harare Christian Church, who planted a congregation in Epworth, began a series of lessons on the subject of deliverance. This was an effort to give people thorough knowledge on the subject of spirits, how they possess or oppress people, and also how one can be delivered. The lessons have proved to be helpful and popular because before long many people who would not have otherwise come to church came in order to know more on the subject.

In his discussion on holistic theology, Hiebert (1999:420) includes key topics as provision and healing; a theology of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world; and also a theology of suffering, misfortune and death. Such a theology is so inclusive that no major issues in the subject of spirits and spiritual needs are left out. If the spiritual needs are approached in this way there will be a clear understanding of what spirits are and this understanding should lead to complete freedom in Christ.

---

<sup>23</sup> The three selves include self-propagating (able and eager to evangelize and plant more churches), self-governing (led by indigenous leaders, using local social structure and methods), self-supporting (dependent on avenues of internal support appropriate to their situation), and self-theologizing (able to express biblical truth in ways sensitive to their culture). In church autonomy each congregation is expected to propagate itself, govern itself, support itself financially and also come up with its understanding of the Word of God (self-theologizing).

While there has been scepticism in Evangelical circles on the subject of demons and demon possession, Kraft (1999:409) says that power demonstrations are as crucial to our ministries as they were in Jesus' day. This is because as Tippett (in Kraft 1999:409) observed, "Most of the world's peoples are power-oriented and respond to Christ most readily through power demonstrations." The people of Africa are among some of the most power-oriented people of the world. When people complain of problems caused by demon possession, the demons should be cast out in Jesus' name. Caution should be exercised that this does not become a preoccupation. A lot of Evangelicals fear that if a door is opened to this kind of practice the church becomes like many Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. I still believe that we can holistically address people's needs, including demon possession, and still remain non-Pentecostal, non-charismatic Evangelicals. A man in the Harare Christian Church, less than five kilometres from Epworth, stood in front of the whole congregation to express his fears after his family had gone through a number of misfortunes that could not be understood to be of natural causes. I will call him Mr. Chakandiwana to conceal his identity. His plea was for the church to help him. If the church does not do something about it, he is obviously going to look for help from diviners or some cults that claim to have solutions to spiritual problems. In cases like this, the church needs to do all that it can to address the need, such as undertaking fervent prayer and fasting in solidarity with the family or individual affected. The church needs to take authority over forces of evil and demonstrate that God's power is indeed greater than any other power, including the power of demons. There is need to help Mr. Chakandiwana to realize that the Kingdom of God touches his whole life. If this happens for him it will be a breakthrough for the congregation and a testimony for many that God can and will minister to the whole person: spirit soul and body.

Related to spirits and demon possession is the need for healing in the Epworth community. African-initiated churches have made great strides in this area. Some people will go to these churches just to have their need for healing met. In talking about them Crafford (1993:169) says that in their effort to indigenise Christianity, they have developed their own church structures, liturgical forms, healing methods and ways of pastoral care. Schreiter (1991:vii) says that

forms of religiosity run the range from continuing the European missionary patterns of half a century ago to the many thousands of so-called independent churches that reflect recurring pre-occupations with healing, the spirit world, and ecstatic prayer.

While a lot of caution should be exercised in taking from the Independent Churches, one should not be too quick to condemn everything about them. It should be appreciated that they have done something about contextualizing the Gospel in this regard. They, in their own way, make an attempt to meet people's needs for healing. In fact, the Christian witnesses going into the Epworth community need to develop biblical healing methods that will meet the need in the Epworth community. Where there is need for medicine, people will be given some; but where there is need for prayer or casting out of a demon, they do that as well.

One will find in the Epworth community people who believe that if ancestors are displeased they can cause illness. Since they believe this, they will seek to appease the ancestors in order to be healed. While we teach them, as Van Rheezen (1991:36) says, that they should not "call upon the dead on behalf of the living" (Isa. 8:19), we need to help them see that they can find true healing in God. A fellow Evangelical, Wagner (1999:537), on the subject of healing believes that we Evangelicals need a fresh look at supernatural power, a fresh awareness of worldview, and a fresh examination of the theology of the Kingdom. Kallas (in Boyd 1999:82) takes a bolder stand on the subject of healing and the Kingdom and asserts that "for Jesus, healing and exorcisms clearly did not merely symbolize the kingdom of God, they were the kingdom of God." I agree with Warner (1999:540) that

we can no longer afford to send Christian witnesses and national church leaders back to their fields or to send young people to the mission field for the first time without teaching them how to heal the sick and cast out demons.

Even those Christian witnesses going into the Epworth community have to be taught how to cast out demons and pray for the sick for healing. I also believe that expatriate missionaries will be more effective if they teach about the reality of spirit-caused sickness and the availability of the power of God to heal the sicknesses. There is a need for teaching all Christians to look at the whole subject from this perspective. Christian

witnesses have to do something about this need or they will have to put up with dual allegiance syncretism or outright worship of other spirits by African Christians. Shorter (in Ritchie1999) puts the point across well when he says:

Many missionaries have never accepted mashawe<sup>24</sup> as a disease worth healing, since they call it by their own name as a hysterical, and psychosomatic disease. They therefore consider anyone engaged in it as an imbecile who chases the wind. It is the problem of inculturation, much more [than] the refusal to plunge into it. It is universally observed that such sufferers inevitably seek help at the only places remaining which will offer it: at the abode of a local "native doctor" or ng'anga<sup>25</sup> (often referred to as a "witchdoctor") or perhaps that of a practitioner of one of the African Independent Churches, some of whose practices resemble those of the ng'anga.

The biblical text is not only “out there”, waiting to be interpreted; the text “becomes” as we engage with it. And yet, even this new hermeneutic approach is not going far enough. Interpreting a text is not only a literary exercise; it is also a social, economic, and political exercise. One therefore has to concede that all theology (or sociology), political theory, etc. is, by its very nature, contextual (Bosch 1991:423).

One other issue related to spiritual needs is that of intercultural communication of the Gospel in conversion. By conversion I mean change in a way that will make us more effective communicators of the Gospel. Karecki (2000:13) refers to conversion as returning to who we are in God, who we are at the deepest level of our being. It is a call to change so that we might be more authentic witnesses to the values of the Gospel. The kind of conversion we need in intercultural communication of the Gospel applies to everyone. The only difference is what needs to change in the individual (Karecki 2000:14). This, as Karecki says, is a process that goes on for the rest of one’s life, because as long we are in this body we will need to continue to change to be what God desires for us to become.

Some areas of church life which could more easily be inculturated are: language, postures and gestures, and the worship environment. If church services are not in the local languages then this could be a good beginning because language is so central to

---

<sup>24</sup> In my culture ‘mashave’ (mashavi) is not a disease but a spiritual condition caused by possession by evil spirits.

<sup>25</sup> In the Shona culture it is almost the same with the difference of a ‘g’. In Shona it is spelt as n’anga.

understanding a culture. Language helps one to understand the worldview of a particular people.

Just as Jesus was born into a specific culture, the gospel needs to be born in specific cultures. This will only happen if the church allows itself to enter deeply into every culture.

Hiebert (1985:82) stressed the importance of learning a new culture as means for carrying out mission. He maintains that forming relationships is one of the best ways of moving out of the so-called tourist phase of life in a new culture. In coming to know persons and their life situations, the expatriate missionary is better equipped to act as a catalyst in the inculturation process.

### **5.3 How the Church Can Meet Psychological and Emotional Needs of the Epworth Community.**

The psychological and emotional needs of the Epworth community stem from their environment. Since Epworth is a community of generally poor people, those who live there view themselves as poor and may remain so for life. The housing in Epworth is temporary and is in bad shape. One who lives in such accommodation will most likely have a low self-esteem. Since government has not been able to care much about the community, it is possible also that the residents will not look at themselves as worth much. Getting rid of the negative views of the 'self' is a major psychological need the church has to deal with. On poverty, Walker (in Ritchie 1999) says that:

Africans are poor because of their attitude towards wealth and its cause: they hold that when a white man envies the wealth of a rich neighbour, that envy serves as a stimulus to work hard and become wealthy also, to outdo the neighbour in wealth by gaining more of it than he or she has. They hold that when the African, on the other hand, envies the wealth of a rich neighbour, he or she seeks to destroy that wealth, primarily through witchcraft.

While this may have been the general attitude and may still be in some areas, one would not find much of this in the Epworth community. However, there are not many people in the community who would work together and encourage one another to excel and prosper. There is need to educate people in this community, basing the education on

biblical principles so that they appreciate the value of working together as a community. Walker (in Ritchie 1999) points out that the average economic level in society cannot rise very far because jealousies may prevent one from rising above the level of his or her neighbour. The way I see it the main reason for jealousy is lack. People lack the most basic things that are needed for life hence when one gets more or succeeds jealousy results. The church in this regard needs to help people to develop virtues that encourage oneness and working together. Emphasis on loving one another will also help people deal with jealousy.

This chapter has dealt with analyzing the Epworth community in which contextualization is supposed to take place. As we have already seen, the analysis has covered every aspect of life in this community. We now have an idea of what the community looks like and any effort to communicate the Gospel message has to take all the factors into consideration. Chapter Six will be an evaluation and conclusion of the paper that will include some recommendations for consideration in the light of the content of the dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **1 Evaluation and Conclusion**

This chapter sums up answers to the problems raised in the dissertation. The conclusions are drawn directly from the data reported in the preceding chapters. The study established that contextualization is critical if the Gospel is to be effectively communicated interculturally in the Epworth community. Whilst the main focus of the study was on

Epworth Community, the lessons learnt can also be used in a wider field especially in the Church of Christ wherever the church may be located.

From the observations and findings of the study, there are a number of challenges the church should address immediately. These include: 1. to present the Gospel in forms that will be understood by the recipients. This includes using the language of the recipients. Newbigin (in Goheen 2000) says, "The evangelist must use the language of the hearers". This is a must if there is to be progress in intercultural communication of the Gospel. Newbigin considers it as obligatory that they must use the language of the recipient. He also maintains that a language should use terms that reflect the worldview by which the hearers make sense of their world. If it helps to go to language school before one embarks on mission then let it be the case. Some might not want to go to language school but prefer to live with a family in the community they will be ministering to until they are able to communicate with the local people. This may even work better than a language school because it involves hands-on experience of the culture and cultural ways as well. One minister who was sent by the Churches of Christ/Christian Church to be an expatriate missionary to Tanzania found out that he was not allowed to do any missionary work in that country until he went to language school. It is recommended that the church in Zimbabwe adopts that policy as well.

2. To incarnate the Gospel in the life of the people of the community. The incarnation of the Gospel would make certain that the church identified with the community as Jesus did. Incarnation focuses more on "taking flesh." This is Pius XII's contention (in Luzbetak 1988:70):

The Church is placed in the center of the history of the whole human race...As Christ was in the midst of men, so too His Church, in which he continues to live, is placed in the midst of people. As Christ assumed a real human nature so too the Church takes to herself the fullness of all that is genuinely human wherever and however she finds it and transforms it into a source of supernatural energy.

John Stott (in Nakah 2003:8) challenges every theologian and Christian with the task of incarnating the Evangelical faith by contextualizing it. In the words of John Stott, the challenge is to be a 'contemporary Christian or theologian,' and this ensures that "the present is enriched to the fullest possible extent both by knowledge of the past and by our

expectation of the future.” This would obviously include addressing pressing needs of the people. In the Epworth community it would include such issues as HIV/AIDS and such related issues as child-headed households.

In conclusion, the process of contextualization cannot be ignored if the message of the Gospel is to be a part of the life of a people. However, as De Waard (1990) argues, the process has to be implemented with the following cautionary measures:

1. The message of the cross must not be compromised. This can be achieved by observing the common rules of hermeneutics. The message of God should be given the position it deserves in the whole process. It is the message of a transcendent God.
2. The proclamation of this message must be done in ways that will bring it close to the lives of people. It should not be so abstract that it fails to come "down to earth" where people can identify with it. It should be capable of being embraced and appreciated by those receiving it.

The proclamation of the gospel is chiefly verbal, but must be validated by the behaviour of the communicator. He must "model" the Gospel if it is to be effective. This is the same idea others would express as “incarnating the Gospel.”

- 1 The Gospel message must be a prophetic voice in any society. It must challenge the world-view, life-style, structures of power, political institutions etc.
- 2 Contextualization cannot happen unless there is dialogue. If one is to reflect theologically on one’s situation - religion, politics, education, justice - there must be dialogue both in analyzing situations and applying the message of Scripture.
- 3 Local expressions of theology must be related to and corrected by others from different parts of the world. This includes the past and theological work done in other parts of the world today. The church is subject to and guided by the Holy Spirit, but modesty requires that expatriate missionaries acknowledge their fallibility and seek correction and deeper insight through interaction with brothers and sisters worldwide.

This says a lot about what contextualization can be in any given situation. This, in a way, provides a summary of what I have been talking about on the subject of contextualization. Newbigin offers a path to the faithful: contextualization of the Gospel (or more accurately the faithful contextualizations of the Gospel) that includes three elements: faithfulness to the Scriptural story, a dialogue with the varied cultures of



humankind, and openness to the ecumenical fellowship of all Christians (Newbiggin 1978:10-22). I treat each of these in turn.

### **6.1 Recommendations**

In the light of the above conclusions, this study recommends that the church in the Epworth community conceptualises the Gospel without compromise. In conceptualising the church should be able to speak to the cultures of all the people represented. The Gospel should speak to the recipient culture and answer basic questions the people are asking. It will also help if the people in the recipient culture would read the Scripture with a hermeneutic in which Gospel and culture become mutually engaged in a dialogue whose purpose is to place the church under the lordship of Jesus Christ in its historical situation. This could mean receiving the Gospel in a way that is understood according to the words, cultural forms and symbols of this community. In order for the Gospel to make sense in culture, it has to be reinterpreted to a point where it makes sense culturally.

While the church has for a long time relied upon other people's commentary and interpretation on the Bible, it is recommended that the church rises up to a point of reading and interpreting the Scriptures for themselves. Meanwhile, while it has not been emphasized in the past, it should be emphasized that expatriate missionaries ought to learn the recipient culture. However, because the culture of any people is reflected in their language, the preachers of the Gospel ought to learn the language of the recipient culture. An expatriate missionary could go to language school before engaging in intercultural communication of the Gospel.

It is also recommended that the expatriate missionary ministers to both spirit and body and meets the needs of the people in the community whether the needs be physical, spiritual, and emotional. This should be done in a way that is relevant to the particular culture. Closely related to this is the fact that the church should be incarnated in the community and touch it as it were. Touching every aspect of the recipient's life has to include addressing the issues of demon possession, ancestor worship, and healing. It also means answering questions on sorcery, witchcraft, ancestor worship or black magic. What is the Christian answer to these? The power of God should be demonstrated as greater than that of demons, black magic, sorcery and witchcraft.

The Gospel should be born in any particular culture where it is being presented. To make this possible, it would help if the people of the recipient culture were to grapple with the old beliefs and customs and not have them rejected or accepted without examination. Then they should examine and evaluate them in the light of biblical norms. It would also mean giving an opportunity to the recipients of the Gospel to grapple with the religious, social, political and economic issues and dynamics of a society in a specific context and then make decisions or take action according to their understanding of God's word. By so doing they would be blending text and context into that one, God-intended reality called "Christian living."

It is also recommended that the church touch every aspect of African people. This would include drums, songs, dramas, dances, certain types of dress and food, marriage customs, and funeral rites because of their relationship with traditional religion. This cannot be effectively done without the knowledge of the customs and ways of life of the people among whom one labours. While the church has, in some ways, discouraged the African people from being African and has encouraged them to take on a Western lifestyle, they should be encouraged to hold on to the good in their culture and to do away with the bad.

This study recommends that further research be conducted on the subject of demon possession, witchcraft and ancestor worship and any correlation that may exist between them. This can be done with the view to depart from commonly accepted world traditions and beliefs on the subjects. This research should entail a thorough study of God's word as well as of traditional forms of worship.

In an African context like the Epworth community, any recommendation that does not address the issue of AIDS/HIV and other related issues is incomplete. This is mainly because this is one of the main issues that affect the whole country including the Epworth Community. It is recommended that the Christian witnesses who take the Gospel into this particular community address the issue of AIDS/HIV. This could include helping the affected and the infected as well as taking preventative measures. Among the affected are the children, some of whom are forced to 'head' households. Any teaching that addresses the issue of HIV/AIDS ought seriously to teach change of behaviour.

With all that has been presented in this paper, putting it into practice will go a long way in meeting the need to present the Gospel interculturally.

#### **LIST OF REFERENCES**

- Banana, C. 1991. *A Century of Methodism in Zimbabwe*. Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Beaver, R.P. 1987. The History of Mission Strategy, in *Perspectives on the world Christian Movement*, edited by R.D. Winter and S.C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library:241-252.
- Bevans, S.B. 1992. *Models of Contextual Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

- Bosch, D.J. 1991. *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in theology of Mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Boyd, G.A. 1999. God at War, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by R.D. Winter and S.C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library: 82-89.
- Carter, J. 1963. *Methods of Christian Mission in Southern Africa*. Essex: Talbot Press.
- Census File* for the Local Governing Board of Epworth, 1992.
- Chester, T. 1993. *Awakening to a World of Need*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Crafford, D. 1993. The Church in Africa and the struggle for an African Identity. *Skrif en kerk* 2:163-175.
- Cochrane, J.R, De Gruchy, J.W & Peterson, R. 1991. *In Word and Deed*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Depew, M. 1987. *Paul and the Contextualization of the Gospel*. [http://pages preferred.com/~mdepew/mis1.html](http://pages.preferred.com/~mdepew/mis1.html).
- Davis, E. 2005. BBC television's News night economics correspondent, in Zimbabwe, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/340000/video/\\_341469\\_davis\\_movie\\_vira](http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/340000/video/_341469_davis_movie_vira)
- De Waard, H. 1990. : Indonesia and the Kingdom of God. *Theological Forum* XVIII (3):1-8.
- Engel, R.W. 1983. Contextualization in Missions: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal. *Grace Theological Journal* 4(1):90-120.
- Gelfand, M. 1988. *Godly Medicine*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Goheen, M. 2000. *Gospel and Cultures: Newbiggin's Missionary Contribution*. <http://www.gospelcom.net/re/index.html>.
- Gourdet, S. 1999. *Identification* <http://geocities.com/missionalia/gourdet.html>. 1-6
- Gration, J. 1984. Willowbank to Zaire: the Doing of Theology. *Missiology: An International Review*, XII (3):297-309.
- Hao, K.P. 1990. Inter-contextualization: Releasing the "theological" frog from underneath the coconut shell. *Asia Journal of Theology* 4:36-44.
- Hesselgrave, D.J. 1978. *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally: an Introduction to*

*Missionary Communication*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Hesselgrave, D.J. 1999. The Role of Culture in Communication, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by R.D. Winter and S.C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library: 392-396.

Hesselgrave, D.J. & Rommen, E. 1989. *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods and Models*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Hiebert, P. 1985. *Cultural Anthropology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Hiebert, P. 1999. The Flaw of the Excluded Middle, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by R.D. Winter and S.C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library: 414-421.

Hill, H. 1993. Lifting the fog on incarnational ministry. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 29(3):1-3.

Holland, J. & Henriot, P. 1983. *Social Analysis. Linking Faith and Justice* (Revised and enlarged edition) Maryknoll: Orbis.

Ikenga-Metuh, E. 1989. Contextualization: A missiological imperative for the Church in Africa in the third millennium. *Mission Studies* 6(2):3-16.

Jirri, E. 1972. *How to Uproot Church Problems*. Salisbury: Sebri Printers.

Karecki, M. 1993. Inculturation. An imperative for Mission. *Missionalia* 21(2):152-158.

Karecki, M. 1999. *Patterns of Mission Praxis*. Study guide for CMM112-Q. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Karecki, M. 2000. *Intercultural Christian Communication*. Study guide for CGM310-T. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Kilpatrick, FA. 1999. Contextualising the Gospel in Africa. Youth Literature of the Baptist International Publications Services. MTh dissertation, University of South Africa.

King, P.S. 1959. *Mission in Southern Rhodesia*. Cape Town: Citadel Press.

Kraft, C.H. 1979. *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologising in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Maryknoll: Orbis.

Kraft, C.H. 1989. *Christianity With Power*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Vine Books

- Kraft, C.H. 1998. *I Give You Authority*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Kraft, C.H. 1999. Three Encounters in Christian Witness, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by R.D. Winter and S.C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library: 408-412.
- Lind, M.C. 1982. Refocusing Theological Education to Mission: The Old Testament And Contextualization. *Missiology: An International Review* X(2):141-160.
- Luzbetak, L. 1988. *The Church and Cultures*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Mashoko, F. 2002. The Land Issue in Zimbabwe: Missiological Implications for Marginalized and other Stakeholders. MTh dissertation of limited scope, University of South Africa.
- Muzorewa, G.H. 1991. *An African Theology of Mission*. Queenston, Ontario: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Molyneux, G.K. 1984. *African Christian Theology: The Quest for Selfhood*. Lewinston/Queenston/Lampeter: University Press.
- Nakah, V. 2003. Issues Facing the Church in Zimbabwe and how Theological Institutions can respond to them. Unpublished paper presented at the Africa Theological Fellowship Conference at Theological College of Zimbabwe.
- Nelson, T. 1987. *Strength for Your Journey. Daily Devotional Bible*. Lynchburg, VA: Thomas Nelson.
- Newbigin, L. 1978. Christ and Cultures, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 31:1-22.
- Newbigin, L. 1989. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Nicholls B.J. 1987. Doing Theology in Context. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 11 (2):101-106.
- Parratt, J. (ed.) 1987. *A Reader in African Christian Theology*. London.
- Patsanza, A.J. 1988. *Our Zimbabwe, an Element of Political Economy*. Harare: GMT House.
- Pretorius, H.L, Odendaal, A.A, Robinson, P.J & Van der Merwe, G. 1987. *Reflection on Mission in the African Context*. Bloemfontein.
- Price, M.R. 1997. *Beyond Born Again: Toward Evangelical Maturity*. <http://www.Infidels.Org/library/modern/theism/Christianity>.

- Ranger T.O. and Weller J. 1975 *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*. Bungay Suffolk: The Chancer Press.
- Richardson, I. 1995 *Vision for the nations (Leader's Guide)*. Pasadena: William Carey Library.
- Ritchie, I. 1999. *African Theology and Social Change: An Anthropological Approach*. <http://www3.simpatico.ca/ian.Ritchie/ATSC.Contents.htm>.
- Saayman, W.A. 1991. *Christian Mission in South Africa*. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Schreiter, R.J. 1985. *Constructing Local Theologies*. London: SCM.
- Schreiter, R.J. 1991. *Faces of Jesus in Africa*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Shaw, R.D. 1988. *Transculturation: The Cultural Factor in Translation and other Communication Tasks*. Pasadena: William Carey Library.
- Studebaker, R.J. 2002. *Building Bridges for the Gospel*, Probe Ministries <http://www.leaderu.com>.
- United Nations Secretary General's Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, 2004
- Van der Meer, E. 2001. *Spiritual Mapping*. MTh dissertation of limited scope, University of South Africa.
- Van Rheenen, G.V. 1991. *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Verstraelen, F.J. 1998. *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Responses*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Wagner, C.P. 1999. On the Cutting Edge of Mission Strategy, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne. Pasadena: William Carey Library: 531-540.
- Weller, J. 1975. *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa*. Bungay, Suffolk: The Chancer Press.
- Zvanaka, S. 1997. African Independent Churches in Context. *Missiology: An International Review* XXV(1):69-75.
- Zvobgo, C.J.M. 1991. *The Wesleyan Methodist Missions in Zimbabwe, 1891-1945*. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.

ZWNEWS, 4 June, 2002