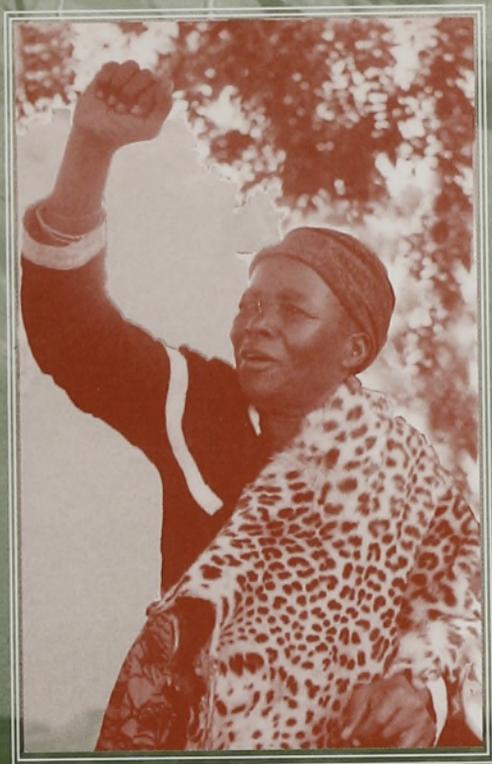


AFRICAN EARTHKEEPERS



Volume 1
Interfaith mission in earth-care

M L Daneel

**African Initiatives in
Christian Mission 2**



UNISA

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Vol 1

Interfaith mission in earth-care

M L Daneel

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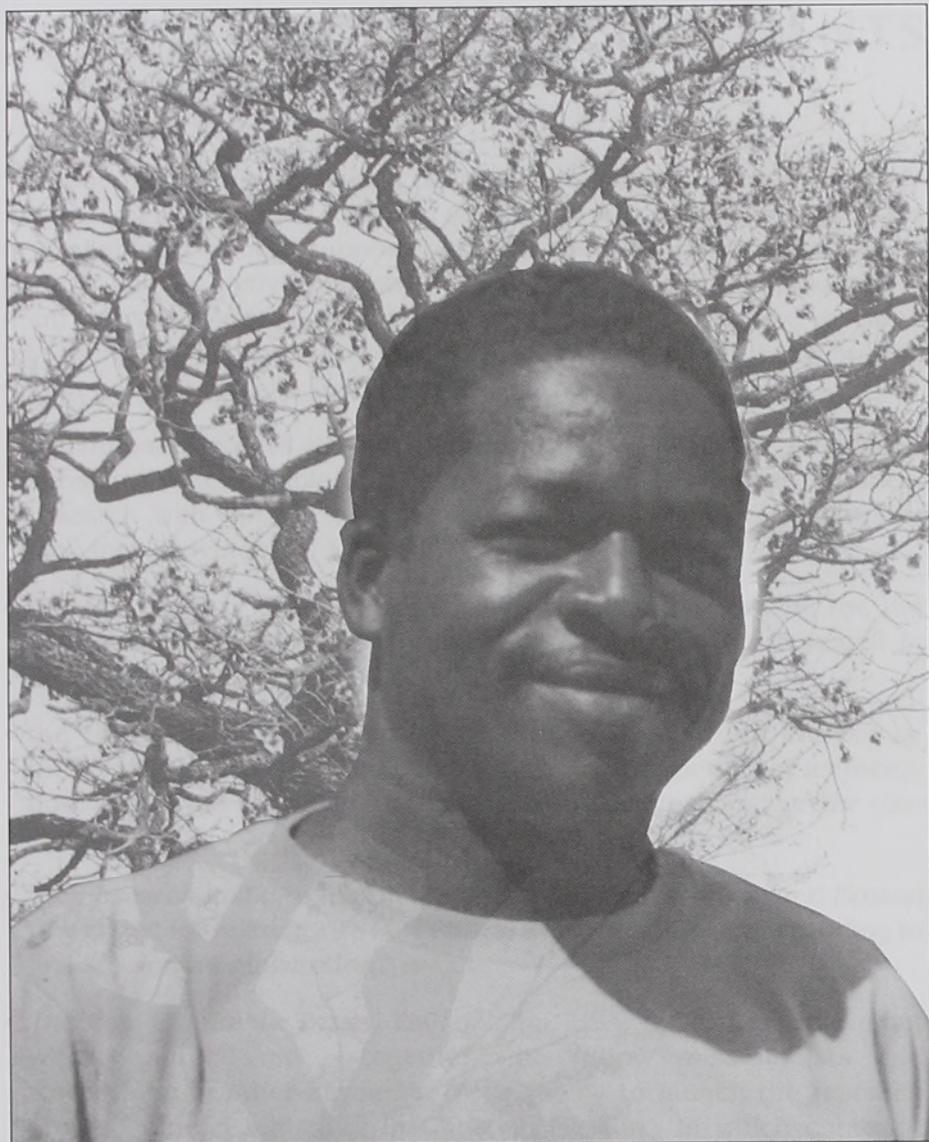
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iv In memory of Mabvamaropa Leonard Gono

A former member of the Zimbabwean government, Gono served as the first Vice President of Zimbabwe from 1980 to 1987. He was a prominent figure in the country's political and economic development during that period. He is remembered for his role in the country's economic growth and for his efforts to improve the lives of the people of Zimbabwe.

Gono was a member of the Council for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, for a

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The material for this book was collected during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when I managed to spend several months each year in the field in Zimbabwe. Financial support from various institutions enabled me to launch, and be actively involved in, the African Earthkeeping movement described in this publication, and to conduct extensive research into the religio-ecological motivation and endeavour that it triggered in Shona peasant society. In this regard I wish to thank:

- the *Human Sciences Research Council* in South Africa for substantial subsidies which enabled me, over many years, to conduct empirical research with the aid of a regular team of Shona fieldworkers in Masvingo Province
- the *University of South Africa* (Unisa), Pretoria, for granting me the paid leave required for environmental involvement and research in Zimbabwe
- the ecological institute *Faith and Earthkeeping* at Unisa (funded by the mining house Gold Fields) which, during the period of its inception, supported me as co-founder, senior researcher and senior consultant
- the *Research Institute for Theology and Religion* at Unisa, and Boston University, for hosting The Pew Research Programme and attending to finance and administration
- *The Pew Charitable Trusts*, Philadelphia, USA, for a three-year grant which enabled me – together with fellow missiologists and researchers in other academic disciplines – to launch the research project 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission', in which context I could proceed with the preparations for this publication
- the *African Studies Center and School of Theology* of Boston University, Massachusetts, for providing me with office and library facilities during periodic spells of academic work in the United States
- the *Center for the Study of World Religions*, Harvard University, for a

fellowship (1995–1996) which enabled me to relate to scholars of religion from countries all over the world

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Over the years representatives of all these institutions have given me loyal support. I am especially indebted to Asa Maree, senior representative of the Human Sciences Research Council, for her efficient handling of funding issues and research reports. The late Prof David Bosch, former head of our Department of Missiology at Unisa, generously enabled me to proceed with project work among the Shona in Zimbabwe despite pressing academic duties in our department. I salute the memory of one of South Africa's great missiologists. The brunt of my frequent absences from Unisa, however, was borne by my colleagues, Professors Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger. Without their friendship, consistent back-up and altruistic consideration of my work in Zimbabwe I would not have been able to meet the demands of a near nomadic existence of endless 'commuting' between the academic world in Pretoria and a religio-environmental ministry in Masvingo.

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innovation in African grassroots society have inspired and encouraged us in project implementation.

In Boston and Cambridge, USA, I could count on Prof Dana Lee Robert of the Boston University School of Theology, my wife and companion, to help me settle into a new mould of academic endeavour and to plan meaningful interaction between Boston University and Unisa in the implementation of the Pew research project 'African Initiatives ...' which incorporates this publication. Dr James McCann, director of the Boston University African Studies Center and Dr Larry Sullivan, director of the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard, helped to publicise my religio-environmental work by way of seminars. To all these friends and colleagues, my sincere thanks.

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As the AAEC currently counts some 150 AIC member churches, I can mention and thank only a few core leaders on behalf of the entire association: Bishops Rabson Machokoto (first president of the AAEC), Eriah Hore, Reuben Marinda, Kindiam Wapendama, Farao Murambiwa, Chimhangwa, Makuku, Marima, Dube, Job Kamudzi, Zacheo Chamutsa, Saul Kuudzerema, J Chabanga, Gondo Chivire, Ruben Mutendi, Ndamba, David Masuka and Mrs Maria Forridge, representing the late Bishop Matthew Forridge. With most of these bishops and their wives I

have had close bonds of friendship for more than thirty years. We have shared dreams of a better future, the hardships of implementing joint projects in rural society, and the celebration of accomplishments in the ecumenical fellowship of Independent Churches. My deepest gratitude for an adventure shared and for lasting relationships of mutual trust.

The dedication and accountability of the senior staff of ZIRRCON (Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation), who guided our earthkeeping movement through previously uncharted territory and the ups and downs of unpredictable funding and human conflicts, have contributed to a profound sense of meaning and accomplishment in my life. The competent, excellent leadership of Revd Solomon Zvanaka, my successor as director of ZIRRCON, has enabled me to withdraw from the Institute's day-to-day administration, with a sense of relief and confidence in its future. Revd Zvanaka is ably assisted by Bishop Reuben Marinda, senior officer of the training department, Raviro Mutonga, coordinator of the Women's Desk, Edwin Machokoto, coordinator of the ecological department, Abraham Mupuwi, senior bookkeeper and secretary, and a host of liaison officers, research workers and salaried nursery keepers. ZIRRCON, together with its sister organisations AZTREC and the AAEC, has provided me with a place of belonging, a family in Zimbabwe. This has enriched my life and allowed me the privilege of participating at the very heart of African society. It is with humility and pride that I thank my African family.

Throughout the research period I could rely on ZIRRCON's team of loyal and competent field assistants. Operating from our base in Masvingo town, they diligently and faithfully probed areas in which information was required. I thank Tarisai Zvokuomba and Andison Chagweda for loyal and reliable service at all times; Farai Mafanyana and Taverengwa Chiwara for diligent and inventive teamwork, which will also benefit the ongoing Pew Research Programme 'African Initiatives ...'; and Claver Gwizhu, my mentor on domestic and related affairs and trusted guardian of our Masvingo research base.

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It is with deep gratitude that I mention the warm and unswerving support of my family. My late parents and sister, Nyasa, have left a rich legacy of missionary service in Malawi and Zimbabwe. Even though my ministry among the AICs has led me along a less conventional route in mission, our Protestant roots have remained essentially the same. My sons and daughters – Alec, Lidia, Talita and Inus – have always filled my life with laughter and joy, despite my nomadic pursuits. Dana Lee, gracious companion, and my two stepsons, Samuel and John, are gifts from God. As fellow editor of the series 'African Initiatives ...' Dana Lee has been an invaluable support to me and the entire team of contributors. Her understanding of my African roots has given me wholeness of purpose and being.

Finally, I raise a hand in honour and admiration of the memory of my African son and friend, the late Leonard Gono. Leonard led a life of many full seasons. He was an outstanding research worker, meticulous boat-builder, and dedicated environmentalist. As ZIRRCO's field operations manager, he breathed the true spirit of the earthkeeper. We shared a love for the earth and the Zambezi wilderness.

Muchakata Daneel
Shiri Chena
Masvingo, 1997

SERIES PREFACE

Literature on Christian mission in Africa has been biased toward the activity of Western-oriented mission. White missionaries, Western mission policies and the relationship of mission to European imperialism have dominated the discussion of African missions. Little or no attention has been paid by scholars to African initiatives in Christian mission, nor have missiological studies been made from the perspective of the so-called 'recipients'. Yet the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa has occurred in the twentieth century, much of it after the independence of the continent from outside control. The series 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission' represents an attempt to address the reality that the spread of Christianity in Africa, its shape and character, has been the product of African Christians, both in the 'Mission Churches' and the 'African Initiated/Independent Churches (AICs).¹

Mission churches and AICs are the two primary ecclesial contexts in which African initiative has occurred. Mission churches are those that have evolved directly from the outreach of Western denominations, and still represent the collegial traditions concerned. African Initiated Churches are churches begun by Africans in Africa primarily for Africans. AICs have consistently asserted their own leadership autonomy and religio-cultural contextuality free from the immediate control of influence of Western-oriented church leaders. These classificatory terms are somewhat misleading in that AICs are missionary churches par excellence, and the Mission Churches, by virtue of the missionary contributions of their members from the beginnings of their history, could be characterised as African Initiated Churches. Nevertheless the distinction between the two families of churches remains important for historical and sociological reasons.

1 Nomenclature varies on the two groups of African churches. 'Mission Churches' have also been called 'Historical or Established Churches'. The acronym 'AICs' originally stood for 'African Independent Churches', a term which is still preferred by many scholars. In recent years, the World Council of Churches has tended to use the term 'African Initiated Churches'. In this series, different authors are free to use any of the three they choose. But in the introduction to the series the editors generally refer to 'African Initiated Churches' because the term resonates with the title 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission'.

This series seeks to overcome some of the limitations in previous studies of missions in Africa. Mission churches have been analysed primarily as denominational institutions, with a focus on educational work, or else as participants in political processes such as nation building. Less attention has been paid to Mission Churches as social movements, as products of indigenous culture and leadership, or as creators of African theologies. In short, the indigenous mission dimension has been weak in many of these studies. Works on Mission Churches today tend to be generalised rather than based on reliable, representative information gleaned from empirical enquiries. Thus the uniqueness and witness of these churches remains obscure. A predominantly male image of church history, moreover, has resulted in a paucity of literature on the contribution of women to church life and church expansion. The roles of black women pioneers in African churches are of particular interest to the editors of the series.

As regards the African Initiated Churches, the tendency in most of the earlier studies has been to assess AICs in terms of reaction to Western missions, separatism or protest against oppressive colonialism. As a result the missionary genius, missionary methods and missiological significance of AICs have not been studied in depth. However, the contribution of the AICs to the growth and religion-cultural footedness of Christianity in Africa is of vital importance for the development of a relevant mission theology in Africa. It is increasingly evident that in terms of growth rates, indigenised evangelisation, missionary campaigns, and ecclesiastic contextualisation, the AICs are not peripheral but belong to the mainstream of African Christianity. Their contribution therefore should be evaluated as such, alongside that of the Mission Churches. Critical, yet open and fair-minded field studies should overcome the bias that has frequently distorted AIC studies in the past.

The ideas behind African Initiatives in Christian Mission originated in an interdisciplinary research project conceived by Professor in Marthinus L Daneel. With thirty years of empirical research on AICs in Zimbabwe, Daneel gathered a team of researchers from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Malawi and received a grant in 1994 from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Assisted by field workers, researchers set out to gather data on different facets of African initiative within various churches in southern Africa. Meeting periodically at the Department of Missiology at the University of South Africa, the researchers reported on the work in progress and received feedback from other team members. The cooperative nature of the project was essential to its success, for the original

team included members of Mission Churches and AICS, academics and practitioners, blacks and whites. The Research Institute for Theology and Religion at Unisa provided administrative support; and Professor Dana Robert participated as the representative of Boston University, the official host institution for the project.

Out of the project meeting emerged a decision to hold an international conference in 1997 on 'African Initiatives in Christian Mission in Southern Africa'. As well as the conference, the group decided to launch a publication series that would make the results of the project available to scholars and church people in Africa. Given the lack of research and its limitations as outlined above, the project participants decided to broaden the focus of the series beyond southern Africa and, by implication, beyond the core group of scholars. The widest possible definition of 'mission' underlies the series. The participant scholars agreed to deal essentially with Christian mission: the outreach of Christian faith and life in the extension of Christ's good news beyond the boundaries of ignorance, cultures, poverty, suffering or whatever obstacles obscure a clear Christian witness in the world. Nevertheless, not all contributors are missiologists and their research methodologies include phenomenological, sociol-anthropological, historical and distinctly non-theological approaches, or a combination of these. Yet the team feels that even if the joint venture, against the background of diverse disciplines, against the background of diverse disciplines, runs the risk of controversy and overdiversity within the series, the overall outcome will be both challenging and enriching. The qualification 'African initiative', too, is not subject to narrow definition. Black and white African theologians, for instance, are contributors in this series. And despite the predominant concern with black African initiatives, a number of studies on white missionary endeavour will be included, particularly the attempts of black African scholars to interpret the legacy of white-controlled missions, their impact on African society and the attitudes and response of African communities to such endeavour. In many respects white and black participation in mission in Africa are two sides of the same coin, the implication being that study of one enhances understanding of the other.

On behalf of all participants in this joint research and publishing venture, we express our appreciation to our sponsors, the staff of Unisa's Research Institute for Theology and Religion, and Unisa Press; their support remains crucial in the realisation of the envisaged goals.

About this publication

African Earthkeepers, volume 1, recounts an extraordinary story of African initiative in mission – that of Shona Traditionalists in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, who fight ‘the war of the trees’ against ecological degradation. Working in ecumenical partnership with indigenous Christians (the subject of the forthcoming *African Earthkeepers*, volume 2) the Traditionalist tree planters, led by chiefs and spirit mediums, have revitalised ancestral rites to protect the natural world.

This fascinating volume fits into our series on ‘African Initiatives in Christian Mission’ for several reasons. As partners of a parallel movement among African Tradition Religions (ATRs), the Traditionalist African earthkeepers demonstrate inter-religious dialogue and ecumenical cooperation at the grassroots – interaction so unique its story simply must be told.

The environmental movement among Shona Traditionalists shows a missionary dynamism and potential for development within African Tradition Religion that will astonish observers who have predicted its demise. Readers of this volume will wish to reflect on the missiological significance of Christian influence on the revitalisation of Shona Traditional Religion.

The author, Inus Daneel, founder of both the Traditional and Christian wings of the tree-planting movement, exemplifies the missionary tension between firm Christian commitment and cooperation with non-Christians for the sake of God’s Kingdom. His decision to engage in a common mission with Traditionalists acknowledges the seriousness of today’s environmental crisis and the need for all people of good will to join in protecting God’s sacred creation. Supporters of Christian mission will be challenged by the ramifications of *African Earthkeepers* for mission in peasant societies, and intrigued by the way in which African traditions have been reformulated to meet the needs of the present. Honest, thought-provoking and inspiring, this book raises vital issues for Christian mission in southern Africa.

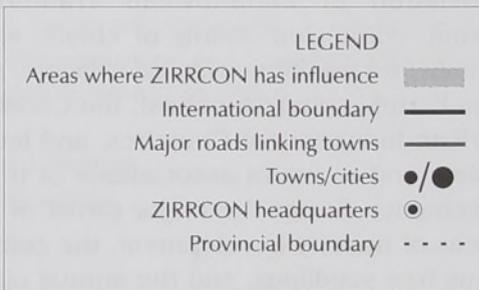
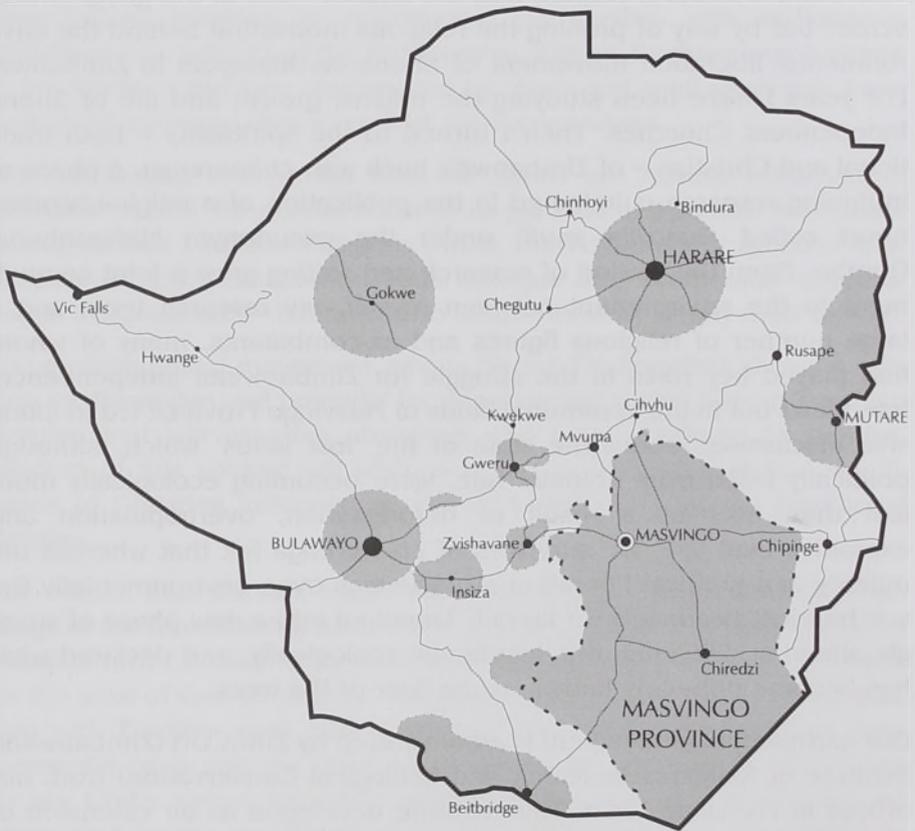
Dana L Robert
Series editor

INTRODUCTION

This book is about a venture into the interior – not in the geographical sense, but by way of probing the religious motivation behind the environmental liberation movement of Shona earthkeepers in Zimbabwe. For years I have been studying the origins, growth and life of Shona Independent Churches. Then I turned to the spirituality – both traditional and Christian – of Zimbabwe's bush war, *chimurenga*. A phase of intriguing research culminated in the publication of a religio-historical novel called *Guerrilla snuff*, under the pseudonym Mafurahunzi Gumbo. From this period of research and writing grew a joint commitment to the environment between myself, my research team and a large number of religious figures and ex-combatants, many of whom had played key roles in the struggle for Zimbabwean independence. Interviews out in the communal lands of Masvingo Province led to intensive discussions about the state of the 'lost lands' which, although politically freed from colonial rule, were becoming ecologically more lost than ever as a result of deforestation, overpopulation and exploitive land use. We survivors of *chimurenga* felt that whereas the military and political liberation struggle was over, environmentally the war had just begun. So we literally launched into a new phase of struggle aimed at delivering the 'lost lands' ecologically, and declared what has become popularly known as the 'war of the trees'.

Our earthkeeping movement is administered by ZIRRCO (Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation) from our offices in Masvingo town. This institute developed as an extension of my original research unit. ZIRRCO's 'green army' consists of two sister organisations: AZTREC (Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists), the traditionalist wing, composed mainly of chiefs, spirit mediums, headmen, excombatants and tradition-oriented villagers; and the AAEC (Association of African Earthkeeping Churches), the Christian wing, comprising some 150 African Independent Churches, and led in the field by the bishops, prophets and women's associations of these geographically widespread movements. So far the major thrust of the war of trees has been in the areas of nursery development, the cultivation of predominantly indigenous tree seedlings, and the annual plant-

ZIRRCON's main spheres of influence in Zimbabwe



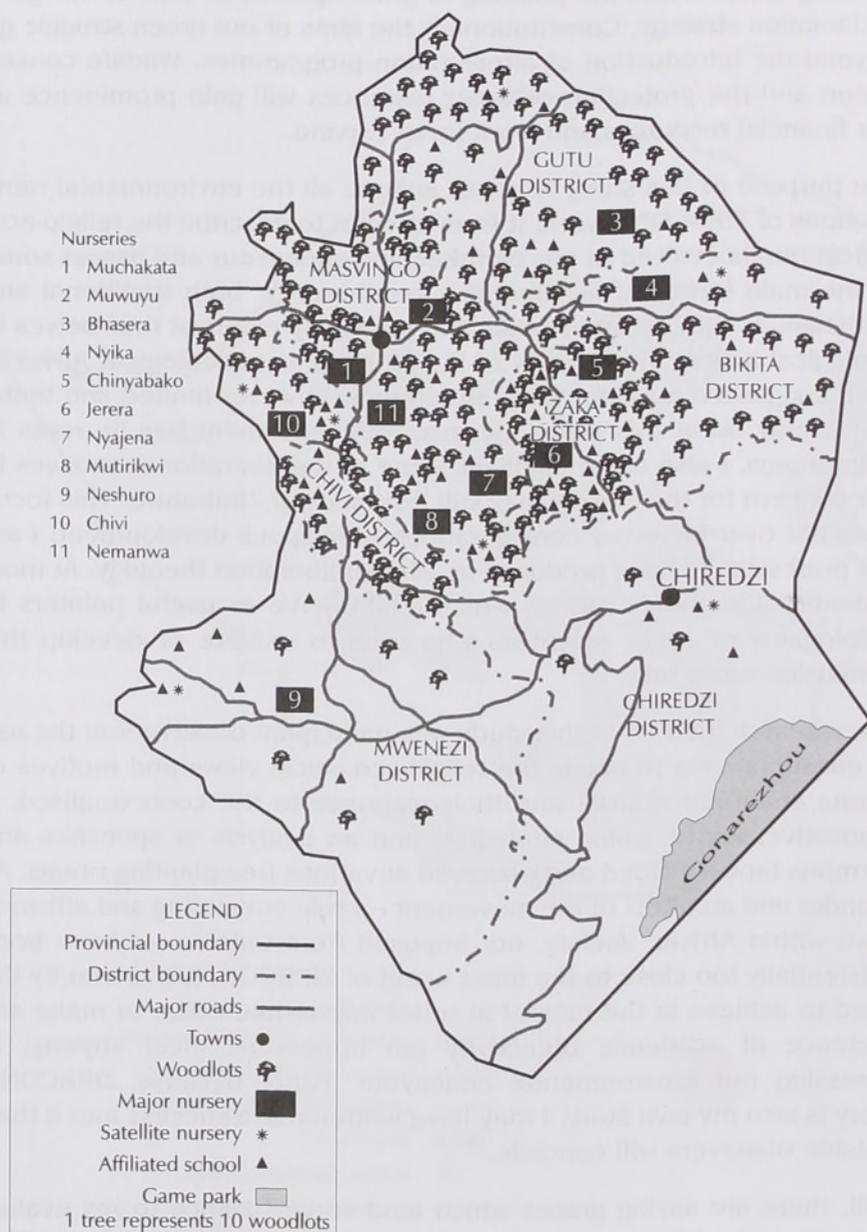
ing of up to half a million trees in woodlots and orchards throughout Masvingo Province and adjacent regions. Field training includes conscientising lectures and the planting of grass species as part of our gully reclamation strategy. Constitutionally the aims of our green struggle go beyond the introduction of afforestation programmes. Wildlife conservation and the protection of water resources will gain prominence as our financial resources and work force expand.

The purpose of this study is not to analyse all the environmental ramifications of ZIRRCON's work. It is an attempt to describe the religio-ecological rituals evolved in our earthkeeping endeavour and assess some of the main trends of an emerging eco-theology, both traditional and Christian, as they spontaneously and intuitively manifest themselves in ecological action. The paucity of literature on eco-theology in Africa in itself suggests a need for such an attempt, however limited and tentative it may be at this stage. Because our movement has its roots in *chimurenga*, I also try to highlight some of the liberationist motives in our concern for the ecologically still lost lands of Zimbabwe. This focus does not override other considerations in religious development: I am not professing to have produced an African liberation theology. At most I identify liberationist trends which could serve as useful pointers to theologians or social scientists who wish to explore or develop this dimension more fully.

The research method in this study was participant observation; the use of questionnaires to gauge the religio-ecological views and motives of Shona environmentalists and their response to the contextualised, if innovative, earthkeeping strategies; and an analysis of speeches and sermons tape-recorded and observed at various tree-planting rituals. As founder and architect of the movement – a role emanating and affirmed from within African society, not imposed from outside – I have been existentially too close to the inner world of ZIRRCON, too driven by the need to achieve in the face of at times impossible odds, to make any pretence of academic objectivity (an impossible ideal anyway) in assessing our environmental endeavour. Partly because ZIRRCON's story is also my own story, I may have written more success into it than outside observers will concede.

Still, there are saving graces which lend some balance to my evaluation. First, my fellow earthkeepers' remarkable ability to contextualise

ZIRRCON's woodlots, major & satellite nurseries and affiliated schools in Masvingo Province

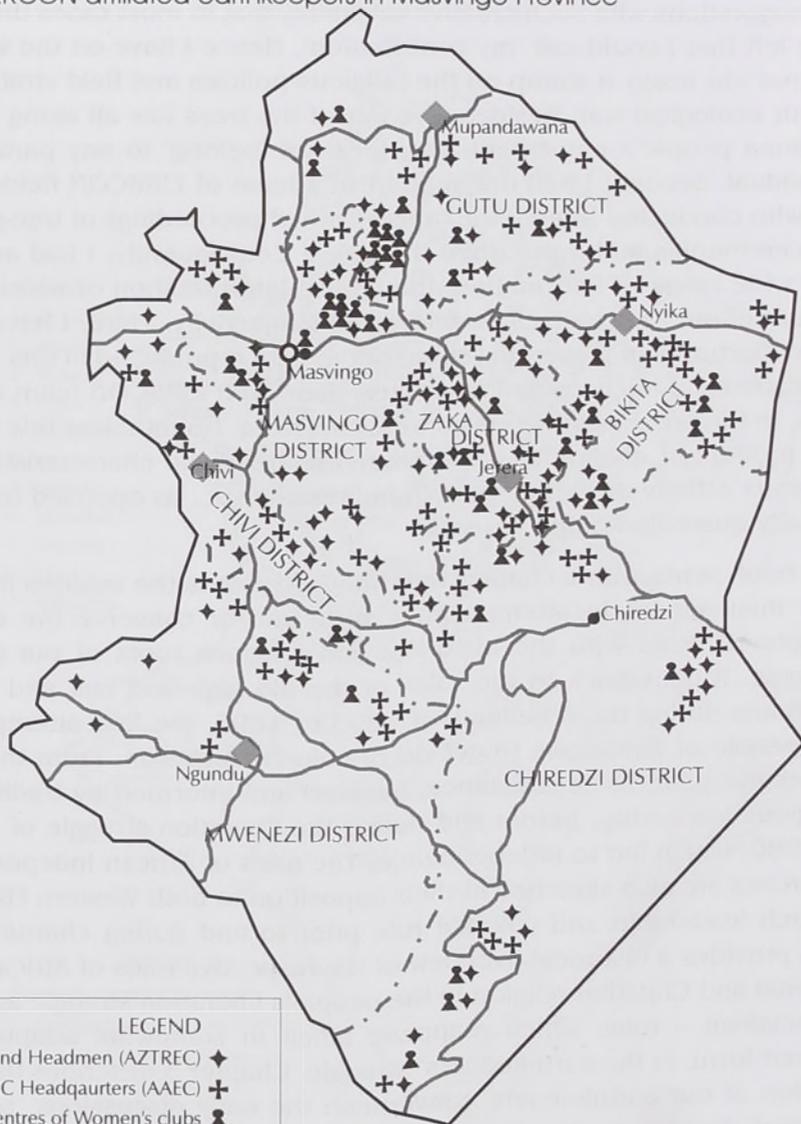


and improvise in ritual and belief has caused them to integrate some of my suggestions with such creative originality that in most cases there is little left that I could call 'my contribution'. Hence I have on the whole not put too heavy a stamp on the religious policies and field strategies of our ecological war. Besides, the war of the trees has all along been a Shona people's movement and does not 'belong' to any particular individual. Second, I had the support of a team of ZIRRCON fieldworkers who conducted interviews, tape-recorded proceedings at tree-planting ceremonies and transcribed the tapes. Consequently, I had access to a wide range of information, the critical interpretation of which was a team effort. This in itself counteracted subjectivity. Third, I have had the opportunity of presenting some of the data reproduced in this study to academic audiences and to discuss them with ZIRRCON team members. In the process some errors were corrected. Nonetheless this study is a product of qualitative research and some of the characteristics of religious activity described remain impressionistic, as opposed to statistically quantified data.

The book starts with a chapter that briefly sketches the reasons for my own involvement in attempts to restore and/or conserve the earth. Chapter 2 deals with the historical and religious roots of our green struggle. It goes back to the roles of the old high-God cult and spirit mediums during the rebellions of 1893 to 1896, the first attempts of the people of Zimbabwe to get rid of colonial intrusion. From there it traces the patterns of resistance, inspired and informed by traditional religious leadership, before and during the liberation struggle of 1965 to 1980, which led to Independence. The roles of African Independent Churches are also sketched in their opposition to both Western Mission Church leadership and colonial rule prior to and during *chimurenga*. This provides a historical overview of the respective roles of African traditional and Christian religion in the people's liberation struggle against colonialism – roles which reappear, albeit in somewhat adapted or altered form, in the earthkeepers' struggle. Chapter 3 describes the formation of our earthkeepers' movement: the early discussions, constitutional development and initial ecological thrust in the war of the trees.

Together these first three chapters form a background to the entire study, which consists of two volumes. The rest of this first volume deals mainly with the traditional religious contribution to the struggle; the

ZIRRCON affiliated earthkeepers in Masvingo Province



LEGEND

- Chiefs and Headmen (AZTREC) ◆
- AIC Headquarters (AAEC) +
- Centres of Women's clubs ▲
- ZIRRCON Headquarters ○
- Main roads ———
- Provincial boundary ———
- District boundary - - -
- Towns ●
- Growth points ◆

second volume describes the Christian counterpart. It means that those interested in the eco-theological input of both religions, or only in that of the AICs, will have to consult both volumes. After all, we are dealing with one struggle and one mission, despite the distinct contributions of two religious systems.

Chapter 4 deals with the harnessing of traditional belief systems in ecology. Addresses in honour of the guardian ancestors of the land during tree-planting ceremonies illustrate that holistic healing of all the earth requires ritual affirmation of the mystical union between creator and creation, living and living dead human beings, and all animate and inanimate creatures. The newly introduced *mafukidzanyika* (clothing the land) ritual ceremonies are compared with their traditional *mukwere-re* (rain ritual) counterparts to indicate innovation and adaptation or transformation in the Shona environmentalists' ritualisation of their earthkeeping activities. The analysis of oracular pronouncements to ZIRRCO delegates made by the Shona high-God, Mwari, at the cult caves of Matonjeni in the Matopo hills is unique, not so much because of the content of these pronouncements, but mainly because the secretive nature of the cult makes direct reporting well-nigh impossible. Oracular support for ZIRRCO's earthkeeping drive at the grassroots highlights the extension of a liberationist tradition which characterises the Mwari cult and its far-reaching influence in Shona peasant society. I also indicate how aspects of *chimurenga* history are being mythologised in our war of the trees to legitimise the environmental liberation struggle and give it clout.

Chapter 5 discusses the revival and reinterpretation of traditional African ecology in the fields of afforestation, wildlife and water resources. Shona environmentalists' use of tree names as nicknames for themselves in the war of trees reflects their recognition of the close bond between members of the earth community: humans and trees are brothers and sisters. The feasibility of restoring holy groves (*marambatemwa*; literally 'refusal to have the trees felled') and developing them in modern society as tree and game sanctuaries is considered. This entails proposals for the promotion of wilderness areas in the overpopulated communal lands; the inclusion of youth in the development and use of game sanctuaries, in-field lessons in bushcraft, tree identification and the religio-cultural roots of ecology; and reintroduction of traditional hunting laws in modified form under the tutelage of tradi-

tional elders entrusted with the guardianship of sanctuaries. Thus, in contrast to previous chapters, chapter 5 includes a discussion of future environmental prospects.

The sixth and final chapter tries to evaluate the ecological influence and impact of the chiefs and spirit mediums as traditional custodians of the land. Do the empowerment and exposure afforded them by AZTREC promote a meaningful environmental contribution? I also pay attention to specific aspects of African traditional religion as inspirational and motivating forces in the current quest for environmental reform. In conclusion I take a brief look at the ecumenical dimension inevitably involved in a joint mission in earth-care by Africans, both traditionalist and Christian. Even though theological issues are only mentioned in passing, the implications for a *theologia religionum* are crucial.

Finally, I wish to raise a question which is bound to occur to some readers of this publication: Why include a study with such a pertinent focus on African traditional religion in a series entitled 'African initiatives in Christian mission'? Conservative and/or evangelical Christians may well find the very idea of sharing an environmental mission with non-Christians, or of empowering non-Christians to engage in such a mission in terms of their own religious convictions, contrary to their perceptions of biblically based Christian mission. I can fully understand this, having grown up at a Protestant Reformed mission station in Zimbabwe. However, the inclusion of this book in a series on Christian missions is based on the following considerations:

First, the entire ZIRRCON venture is essentially an outcome of Christian initiative. This is evident in chapter 3, despite the fact that the first step in our environmental mission was indeed the creation of an association for traditionalist spirit mediums. My motivation for this move derived both from the eagerness of traditionalist elders to extend *chimurenga* into the ecological field, and from my close identification with them over many years. These ties grew from my conviction that traditional cosmologies and belief systems must be studied in depth in the interest of a proper understanding and facilitation of an encounter between African religion and Christianity. Mutual respect and friendships between traditionalists and myself grew over many years, to the extent that partnership in joint development activities became possible –

hence the sharing of environmental mission between traditionalists and Christians, a process which is felt to be mutually enriching and to the benefit of God's creation. Joint action, it is believed by both wings of our 'green army', does not preclude religious differentiation and mutual recognition of diverse religious identities. Since Christian stewardship of creation is augmented, informed and encouraged by African religion, it seems appropriate to include the encounter between the two in this narrative of African endeavour.

Second, environmental devastation is assuming such drastic proportions that responsible, effective earthkeeping requires the mobilisation of *all people* of all nations, in all regions and on all continents, irrespective of religious affiliation. Just as the national crisis of *chimurenga* called for a united front across religious divisions, so does the environmental crisis in its national and global dimensions. Empowerment in such circumstances can indeed amount to traditionalist spirit mediums and Christian prophets collaborating in evolving offensive green strategies against a common enemy, just as they cooperated in some of *chimurenga's* political conscientisation and cleansing sessions (*pungwe*) in the war. Christian mission in such a situation could be interpreted from a position of religious inclusivism, rather than exclusivism.

Third, there are elements of truth and wisdom in all religions. In my view this is an outcome of God's presence and general revelation throughout the inhabited world. There also appears to be in all humanity an awareness – whether fleeting or pervasive – of human rebellion and flight from the divine. Consequently all religions, including Christianity, contain elements of truth and humanly introduced distortions of truth. Awareness of this built-in ambiguity of human existence calls for humility: people, regardless of religious persuasion, should recognise themselves as fellow creatures sharing a common destiny. They are addressed by their creator, God, and address each other as persons moulded by pluriform religious traditions and cultures. Given this condition of human religiosity, there is a sense in which God's mission (*missio dei* in Christian terms) to and in the world involves all humanity. As a result the active agent in Christian mission can only proclaim and teach the gospel in the realisation and acknowledgement that those to whom the message is brought have already been touched by the movement of God's Spirit. Part of the missionary experience, therefore, is listening to and being taught by the people considered to be the

recipients of the good news. This interaction is even more relevant when Christians invite non-Christians to participate in what they perceive to be God's mission to the whole earth. To be concrete, ZIRRCO's Christian environmentalists in Zimbabwe benefit tremendously from ongoing encounter and dialogue with their traditionalist counterparts. Not only do the traditionalist fellow fighters set an example in terms of wisdom accumulated through the ages, they also hold up an African cosmological mirror which enables the Christian earthkeepers to see and assess the contextualised nature of their mission more clearly.

Fourth, the emphasis on united action in ecological mission and on interreligious tolerance and dialogue does not imply religious relativism or syncretic compromise at the expense of Christian witness. Difficult as it may seem, it is possible to be open to other faiths and to interact in joint endeavour without betraying the uniqueness of Christ and the Christian message. The challenge of witnessing to Jesus Christ as saviour of all creation remains and takes on unexpected dimensions in the earthkeeping quest. At times I find myself balancing on a knife edge between two religious worlds, accommodating the old, drawn by the mystery of Africa's perception of our Creator, yet irrevocably bound by the salvific message of the Cross and resurrection. This, I am sure, is also the experience of my Zionist and other Christian colleagues in ZIRRCO as we encounter the living faith of our traditionalist earthkeeping counterparts in the war of the trees.

It is this realisation which has strengthened my resolve to present the entire ZIRRCO story in this series.