

"PROMISE OF POWER" – AN ANALYSIS OF BIBLE LIFE

MINISTRIES IN BOTSWANA

by

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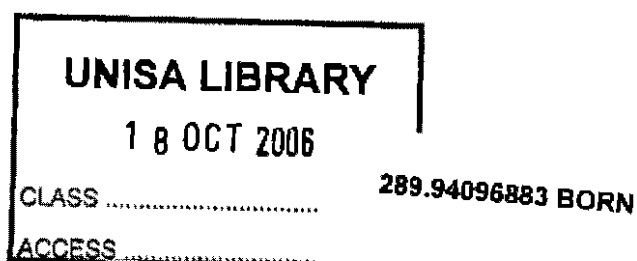
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SUMMARY

In a manner similar to other countries on the African continent, Botswana has witnessed the explosive growth of new Pentecostal churches. These churches are most often distinguished by their recent origins, focus on the prosperity gospel and spiritual deliverance ministries. In this study, one specific church, Bible Life Ministries, in the capital city of Gaborone, was researched in an effort to understand its great appeal. I have proposed that their rapid growth is a result of their “promise of power” – spiritual power that provides individuals with temporal results such as health, wealth and control over one’s environment. Faced with the rapid changes brought about by external forces such as urbanization and globalization, these churches are deliberately seeking to bridge western and Setswana culture in an effort to contextualize the gospel for contemporary Botswana. Of major missiological concern is whether or not the gospel message has been distorted in this process.



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Key terms:

Pentecostalism in Africa; Prosperity Gospel; Faith Movement; Contextualization; Holy Spirit; Tongues; Spiritual warfare; Deliverance; Spiritual power; Botswana culture; Church growth; Witchcraft; Charismatic leadership; Bible Life Ministries

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Chapter 1

A WAVE BREAKS OVER THE DESERT

“Pentecostalism is undoubtedly the salient sector of African Christianity today” (Gifford 1998:33).

1. INTRODUCTION

Considering that the Kalahari Desert provides the most dominant geographic feature of Botswana, and that more than 1000 kilometers separate the country from the nearest ocean, it may appear somewhat surprising to use the image of a “wave” to describe the impact of new Pentecostal churches in this setting.¹ Nevertheless it is an apt one as it captures well both the internal power of the movement as well as its drive to keep moving forward. With a strong emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit and a youthful appeal to advance into the possibilities of the future, the new Pentecostal movement is radically changing the religious landscape of Botswana.²

As Paul Gifford's quote above suggests, the growing influence of new Pentecostal churches is not an isolated phenomenon. Gifford (1998:31) uses the “wave” metaphor to describe the impact of Pentecostalism all across Africa. In many African cities, new Pentecostal churches are filling up with thousands of worshippers each Sunday while the Pentecostal evangelist Reinhard Bonnke preaches to crowds numbered in hundreds of thousands wherever he travels on the continent (Gifford

¹ I am using the term “new Pentecostal churches” to refer to the numerous church bodies that have sprung up in Botswana from approximately 1985 to the present. These churches are relatively young; therefore, I have chosen to call them “new.” At the same time, they continue to hold to most classic Pentecostal doctrines, therefore the term Pentecostal. For a fuller discussion, see below (1.2).

² Botswana is the name of the country. Batswana is the plural form for the people, whereas Motswana refers to a single citizen of Botswana. The national language is Setswana, and the official language is English.

1992:157-161). But the Pentecostal “wave” has reached far beyond Africa. Recent commentators on the movement speak of the “globalization of Pentecostalism” (Dempster et al. 1999), or its “transnational” character (Corten & Marshall-Frantini 2001). Even a cursory look at the worldwide growth of Pentecostalism reveals some amazing numbers. In Barrett and Johnson’s (2002:23) most recent statistical analysis of the growth of Christianity, they claim that there are now nearly 550 million followers of Pentecostalism worldwide. That the movement only began in 1906,³ and that it only had just over 70 million followers in 1970, clearly demonstrates its incredible growth.

As suggested at the outset, Botswana is no exception to the worldwide growth of Pentecostalism although in contrast to some other areas of Africa it was not until the late 1980’s that the wave began to break over Botswana. The Botswana Handbook of Churches, published in 1994, lists only two churches in the entire country that can be classified as new Pentecostal (Amanze 1994).⁴ However, recent research in the capital city of Gaborone and the immediately surrounding villages of Tlokweng and Mogoditshane has revealed more than 40 of these congregations, with new churches springing up continually (see Appendix 1).

Having personally witnessed this phenomenal growth during my ten years of service here in Botswana, it has seemed critical to attempt to understand its underlying dynamics. Sent to Botswana in 1992 under the auspices of the Africa Inter Mennonite Mission, my wife and I have been primarily engaged in the areas of biblical and theological education, leadership development and HIV/AIDS ministries

³ On the historical roots of Pentecostalism, see Cox 1995:45-79, or Hollenweger (1999:33-44) for a briefer description.

⁴ These were Bible Life Fellowship Church (now Bible Life Ministries) established in 1987 and Living Waters Christian Fellowship established in 1985.

among Spiritual Churches (often referred to as African Initiated Churches). In numerous settings we have noted the growing influence of new Pentecostal beliefs and practices in Spiritual Churches, and we have also heard the laments of pastors whose younger members seem to be migrating to these new church bodies. In an effort to obtain a better grasp on the movement, I targeted my research on the largest single congregation in the country, Bible Life Ministries in Gaborone. Chapters 3 and 4 will deal specifically with the “promise of power” offered by that particular congregation. However before turning attention to Bible Life Ministries, various other issues need to be dealt with. In the rest of this chapter I will state the thesis to be argued, outline the missiological issues raised by the thesis, describe the research methodology employed, provide a review of pertinent literature as well as sketch out the chapters which will follow.

1.2 NOMENCLATURE

It is of course necessary to define clearly the identity of new Pentecostal churches in relation to other church bodies in Africa. Various names have been used to describe this movement: Pentecostal, charismatic, “born agains”, neo-pentecostal, or even “gospel of prosperity churches”. Although “Pentecostal” is the preferred description of many, some take issue with its use as an all-encompassing description of the movement. Oskarsson (1999:405-418) has argued that the emphasis these new churches place on the prosperity gospel⁵ and deliverance ministries distinguishes them from the historic or “classic” Pentecostal churches

⁵ The prosperity gospel is also referred to as the “Faith movement.” This movement began in America and is characterized by a radical emphasis on a positive confession of faith in order to receive all the blessings of Christ. Gifford (1998:39) describes it well: “According to the Faith Gospel, God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty.” For a full and rather critical discussion of the Faith movement, see Horn (1989) and Gifford (1993:146-189).

which focussed on spiritual rebirth, healing, baptism of the Holy Spirit, tongues (*glossalalia*) and the second coming of Christ.

In the last decade South African scholar Allan Anderson has sought to introduce a new typology of Pentecostal churches. Anderson (1992:2-12) originally proposed that three groups of churches be brought together under the heading "African Pentecostal": Pentecostal mission churches (historic Pentecostal churches), independent African Pentecostal churches (those of much more recent origin) and finally the largest group, Indigenous Pentecostal-type churches (classic African Initiated Churches [AICs] or Spiritual churches).⁶ Anderson has been rightly criticized for his overly simplistic attempt to unify these highly divergent groups under the Pentecostal umbrella (Kalu 2000:125). Recently (2001:109-110) he responded to this criticism and slightly, but significantly, modified his typology. He now argues that "Spiritual/Prophet-Healing" churches and "Newer Pentecostal/Charismatic" churches should be more carefully distinguished from one another but still brought under the heading "African Initiated Churches". Except for dropping the designation "charismatic"⁷, I have chosen to follow Anderson's use of the term "new Pentecostal" as most of these bodies uphold the historic doctrines of Pentecostalism and refer to themselves as Pentecostal. Nevertheless they can be distinguished from the "older"

⁶ The acronym AIC originally stood for African Independent Churches, but has also been used to stand for African Indigenous Churches, African Instituted Churches and now often stands for African Initiated Churches. "Spirit-type" churches is the appellation Inus Daneel applied to the "Zionist" or "Apostolic" type churches found throughout southern Africa (see Anderson 2001:108-110). These churches emphasize the work of the Spirit in their congregations through dreams, visions, trance and healing. Outsiders can most easily identify them by distinctive church uniforms. In Botswana, both groups, Zionist and Apostolic, are referred to as *dikereke tsa semoya*, Spiritual churches. Having worked together with these churches for ten years, that is how I know them, and it is how I will refer to them in this dissertation.

⁷ Few churches here in Botswana choose to identify themselves as charismatic. The term "charismatic" has usually been applied to those Christians within Protestant or Roman Catholic circles who have received the "baptism of the Spirit" and the accompanying gift of speaking in tongues as understood by Pentecostals (Ojo 1996:92).

bodies on account of their later origins, their African “roots” (i.e., founded by Africans) and their distinctive emphasis on deliverance ministries and prosperity teaching. For this reason I have adopted the term “new Pentecostal churches.”⁸

1.3 THESIS: PROMISE OF POWER

“Anointing, fall on me, Anointing, fall on me,
Let the power of the Holy Ghost fall on me,
Anointing, fall on me.”⁹

“Tell your neighbor: ‘There is unlimited power and it is available!’”¹⁰

The core question that this dissertation seeks to explore can be stated as follows: What constitutes the essential appeal of new Pentecostal churches in Botswana? I will argue that the “promise of power” proclaimed in the chorus and the exhortation above does much to provide an answer to that question. The promised power of the Holy Spirit enables the anointed “born again” members of these churches to experience both spiritual and temporal victory. Confident that the Spirit empowers and protects them, they boldly progress into the new opportunities presented by urbanization, higher education and globalization.

To understand the appeal of the new Pentecostal promise of power it is important to examine carefully the context in which these churches have sprung up. In doing so, one must take pains to understand traditional Setswana cosmology, the impact of western colonialism as well as the extremely rapid pace of social change that has taken place since Independence from Britain in 1966 (the focus of chapter

⁸ Interestingly, Batswana refer to these churches in a number of ways: *dikereke tsa pholoso*, churches of salvation/deliverance; *dikereke tsa makwerekwere*, churches of the African foreigners (a very pejorative term used to denigrate the African expatriate leadership of these churches); and finally, *dikereke tsa sekgoa*, English churches (because English is commonly spoken in these churches).

⁹ Familiar chorus sung in Bible Life Ministries. AM Worship Service (27 January 2002).

¹⁰ Dr. Enock Sitima, Bible Life Ministries. PM Worship Service (21 April 2002).

2). At home in the thought-forms of Setswana culture the new Pentecostals have the ability, with their emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit, to deal with many of the serious everyday concerns that arise from within the culture including witchcraft, curses and evil spirits. Furthermore the power of the Spirit holds out more than just a way of dealing with “cultural” or “spiritual” problems. New Pentecostal churches also situate their followers within the modern and emerging post-modern world. By borrowing from a theology with western links, many of the new Pentecostal leaders encourage their followers to look both outward and forward into the “modern world.” The “promise of power” provides an opportunity to step into a new future full of possibility and prosperity (the content of chapters 3 and 4).

Finally I will argue that the growth of the new Pentecostal churches must be viewed in a holistic manner – being “filled with the Spirit” is a profoundly spiritual, emotional, physical as well as communal experience. Furthermore the radical spiritual reorientation demanded by the “new birth” experience has serious repercussions with regard to self-identity, family relationships and one’s understanding of both Setswana and western culture. The “promise of power” is no less than an invitation to view the world in a whole new way.

1.4 MISSIOLOGICAL ISSUES

Missiology as a discipline is fundamentally concerned with the communication of the gospel and the advancement of God’s kingdom on earth. I identify closely with Orlando Costas’ definition of missiology (in Escobar 2001:54):

Missiology has to do with the witnessing engagement of Christians in the concrete situations of life. It is a critical reflection that takes place in their praxis of mission. It is an analytical interpretation, evaluation, and projection of the meaning, effectiveness, obstacles, and possibilities of the communication of the Gospel to the world.

When engaging in the missiological task, the emphasis is placed on both context (“the concrete situations of life”) and text (“the communication of the gospel”). In addition it is important to note the missional imperative to advance God's reign on earth. In the past Christians have often identified the kingdom or reign of God with the church but a new appreciation for the mission of God, *missio Dei*, has led to an awareness that it is the triune God who drives mission, not the church. Using Luke 4:18-21 as a paradigm, Saayman (1991:6) has identified three key dimensions in the *missio Dei*: “an evangelizing dimension; a healing dimension; and a dimension of striving for social, political and economic justice”. Furthermore in this paradigm the church takes on a new role as participant in God's mission or as God's instrument of salvation, liberation and unification of all humanity; in short, a sign of God's action in establishing His reign on earth (Bosch 1991:373-74). I will return to this theme in the final chapter in an effort to consider the degree to which new Pentecostal churches fulfill this role.

Returning to the missiological concern for the interplay of text and context it seems that for all who are concerned with questions surrounding the contextualization¹¹ of the gospel message, the phenomenal growth of new Pentecostal churches poses a serious challenge. How does one explain the tremendous appeal of these churches, especially to the younger generation? Why, after having had the Bible in the vernacular for over 100 years, do most followers of the new churches prefer to use English versions and worship in English? Closely related, one has to ask what to make of the almost wholesale rejection, even

¹¹ Bevans (1992:1) has defined contextual theology “as a way of doing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change in that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation.” It is an effort that takes seriously both human culture and socio-historical realities.

demonization, of certain aspects of Setswana culture including veneration of ancestors and traditional medicine? Is this new Pentecostal movement largely an American import, or are they actually contextualizing the gospel in a uniquely African way? Can one really claim that this movement is "of the soil of Africa, which is like that on which Jesus walked" (Kalu 2000:140)?

Questions of contextualization raise the issue of worldview and culture change. Earlier generations of western missionaries also challenged various aspects of Setswana culture (Dube 1999:38-42), and so with their talk of spiritual power, Satan, evil spirits and demonization of the ancestors, are the new Pentecostals in any way venturing onto new ground? Their call to be "born again" and "make a clean break with the past" signals a step into a new reality – are they re-shaping the meaning of conversion and salvation in the Botswana context? And if the "promise of power" is so important, why do Batswana feel the need for power?

One last angle that needs to be considered in this discussion is that of economics. Some have argued that the particular emphasis on wealth and health – the temporal benefits of salvation – is driving the spread of these churches (Gifford 1990:382-383). According to this view Africans have lost hope in traditional political structures and are grasping for another source of power, even if it proves to be illusionary. They argue that due to the influence of American Pentecostal evangelists the gospel of prosperity and its doctrine of "seed faith"¹² has taken root and is now warping the essential nature of African Christianity. But is this an accurate assessment, a gross caricature or does the truth lie somewhere between these extremes? My intention in the following chapters is to explore these questions

¹² Based on a variety of biblical verses such as Luke 6:38; Mark 4:24 and Malachi 3:10, proponents of the "seed faith" doctrine argue that if you give generously, you can expect to receive even more. "God wants you to receive a harvest from the financial seeds you plant" (Copeland 1986:5).

and demonstrate how the new Pentecostal promise of power has shown itself to be in tune with the reality of present day Botswana. The methodology employed to reach that conclusion is described below.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Approach

1.5.1.1 Eclectic Method

When investigating a phenomenon, Bate (1998:160) has argued that one needs to consider at least three perspectives: (1) the local community perception, (2) the perception of others involved in the phenomenon, (3) and the perception of others who have studied the phenomenon carefully. Gifford employed a similar method when he studied new Pentecostals in Liberia (1993:4-5). He attended mid-week and Sunday services as well as crusades, listened to Christian radio programmes and read any Christian literature he could find. In addition he interviewed as many Liberians who were close to the movement as possible. To gain a more academic perspective he did considerable research outside Liberia. My approach is similar to his except that I have made some additional efforts to gain a clear perception of those within the community (see below).

1.5.1.2 Participant Observer

In an attempt to get a closer perspective of new Pentecostal churches, I spent the first five months of 2002 immersing myself as much as possible in these churches. This meant participating in numerous church services, crusades and prayer meetings. I sang, prayed and danced together with my brothers and sisters in many churches but especially focussed my attentions on the congregation of Bible Life Ministries. While attending these services I paid special attention to the songs

and spontaneous testimonies in an effort to better grasp the essentially oral and narrative character of this experiential faith.¹³ I have used some of the favorite songs of the new Pentecostals as illustrations of the way they create a “promise of power”.

As a participant observer, issues of race, culture and religious background must be faced. I am a white male Mennonite Canadian who has lived in Botswana for barely ten years. All of those descriptions could be seen as detrimental in an effort to understand this phenomenon. On the other hand I also bring certain strengths to this task. Having worked with Spiritual churches during our years in Botswana, my understanding of both Setswana language and culture is reasonably sound. Second, even though I come from a fairly conservative, non-Pentecostal background,¹⁴ I have long had interest and involvement in the charismatic movement. Finally, during our years in Botswana I have developed relationships with many people within new Pentecostal churches as well as with those closely associated with the movement. Although these factors do not eliminate my white North American background, I believe they do at least mitigate them somewhat.

In the process of my research I have realized that although I may attempt to gain a look inside (‘emic’), I will always remain somewhat of an outsider (‘etic’). However, like Cox (1995:181), I would argue that this stance – “being a ‘sympathetic outsider’ and a ‘critical participant’” - may actually shed some valuable light on the movement. It has been my experience that in the midst of carefully listening to a prayer or recording a song, I have often found my own spirit stirred – perhaps this too is a way of understanding these churches better.

¹³ Piet Naudé (1995) studied the narrative dimension of a spiritual experience by analyzing the hymns of a small Zionist congregation. In a limited way I have tried to follow his example.

¹⁴ I was raised, baptized and ordained in the Mennonite Brethren Church of Canada, an Anabaptist Evangelical denomination formed in Russia in 1861 but with roots back to the Radical Reformation.

1.5.1.3 Structured Interviews and Questionnaires

In an attempt to gain the perspective of those inside these churches, I prepared a Structured Interview (Appendix 2) and Questionnaire (Appendix 3). The Structured Interview was intended for the leadership of Bible Life Ministries for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the history and growth patterns of Bible Life Ministries as well as to explore some specific aspects of the church's theology which might suggest reasons for the church's growth. Fifteen pastors and church leaders were interviewed in this manner. The Questionnaire was prepared for the general membership of Bible Life Ministries. It followed the same general pattern as the Structured Interview but was in a much simpler format making it easier to fill out. The goal of the Questionnaire was to hear why "ordinary members" joined their church as well as to gain an impression of their theology. The questionnaires were distributed in a number of home care groups and some 45 people completed it, representing approximately 2.5% of the adults in the church.

1.5.2 Assumptions

There are three key assumptions underlying the methodology of this dissertation. The first assumption is that the historical context from which new Pentecostal churches have arisen provides important information concerning the growth of this movement. On account of this assumption I spend considerable time in chapter 2 describing the Botswana context. Furthermore, when dealing with contextual issues, both the internal distinctives of the new Pentecostals and the external cultural and socio-historical factors in Botswana need to be explored simultaneously in order to determine how they impinge upon one another (Droogens 2001:41).

Secondly, I also believe that to appreciate the full-orbed nature of Pentecostal growth one needs to look beyond written statements. New Pentecostals have an oral or narrative theology that is built upon an immediate personal experience of God's power by the Spirit. As Hollenweger (1986:10) has so emphatically put it:

But one thing is sure: for them the medium of communication is, just as in biblical times, not the definition but the description, not the statement but the story, not the doctrine but the testimony, not the book but the parable, not a systematic theology but a song, not the treatise but the television programme, not the articulation of concepts but the celebration of banquets.¹⁵

Experience and doctrine are not mutually exclusive but they are understood and expressed in different ways.

Finally I have assumed that the people I interviewed and those who filled out the questionnaires at Bible Life Ministries answered honestly. The danger exists that some may have answered questions in a manner that they thought would please the church leadership or myself. To try and eliminate this problem, church members who filled out the questionnaire were not asked to provide their names.

1.5.3 Challenges

Under participant observation (1.5.1.2), I have already listed some of the limitations my cultural and theological baggage may pose. At this point I also need to deal with the issue of objectivity. Maluleke (1996b:41) has rightly observed that

¹⁵ Walter Hollenweger's pioneering work has focussed on the experiential nature of Pentecostal faith. One of his primary contributions has been to establish firmly the African-American origins of Pentecostalism. In fact, he argues that it is Pentecostalism's "black oral roots" which provide the reason for its remarkable growth. He delineates these as follows: oral liturgy, narrative theology and witness, maximum community participation, inclusion of dreams and visions and the understanding of the relationship of body and mind revealed in healing by prayer and liturgical dance (1999:36-39). By involving the whole person spiritually, emotionally and physically in community worship, Pentecostals tap into a deep human need. Harvey Cox (1995:81) argues along much the same lines when he suggests that Pentecostals have connected "into the core of human religiousness, into what might be called 'primal spirituality'".

often “researchers try hard to persuade us that they are letting the sources speak for themselves, when their own voices are actually drowning the sources”. To a certain extent I am sure that this, too, has taken place in this study. I designed the questionnaire, quoted from the interviews what I believed was most pertinent and I was the one determining what was most significant in the numerous services I attended. How to overcome this danger is a serious issue.

Graham Philpott (1993:20-28) in his study of a South African grassroots community attempted what he called “participatory research”. He sought to involve the community as much as possible in the research project in order to overcome various problems related to participation, knowledge and power. For a variety of reasons my research project does not lend itself to a complete adoption of Philpott’s method.¹⁶ Nevertheless I have adopted some aspects of his work. From the outset I have sought to involve the researched in the control of the research process. I wrote letters to leaders of some new Pentecostal churches asking permission to conduct research in their churches. Secondly, to involve them in the research I have asked for and received their help in creating the questions in the interview and general questionnaire. Finally, I assured them that copies of my research results will be made available to them before they are published so that they can comment on, clarify or correct any perceived misconceptions.

Does this remove the problem of subjectivity or “the problem of bias” identified by Sundkler in his study of Spiritual churches (in Maluleke 1996b:32)? Unfortunately it does not. The best I can do is to declare my intentions. I have chosen to study new Pentecostal churches in Botswana because in my work with Spiritual churches I

¹⁶ Philpott (:22) argues that the problem should arise from within the community and that research should focus on oppressed groups. The problem in this case has been identified from the outside (I want to know why these churches are growing), and the groups studied are not identified by most as oppressed (in fact, some would argue that they are the privileged).

have witnessed numerous church members, especially young people, leaving their “churches of birth” for the new Pentecostal churches. I want to understand this phenomenon so that I might help Spiritual church leadership minister to their youth more effectively. Obviously I have chosen Botswana as a research site, and more particularly Gaborone, because it is where I live and minister. And finally, I have chosen Bible Life Ministries as one particular example of the new Pentecostal churches because it was one of the first of its kind in Botswana and because it has grown quickly.

1.6. LITERATURE REVIEW

I have already made reference to some of the scholars who have researched the emergence of new Pentecostal churches in Africa. However at this point, it may prove useful to look more closely at their arguments, especially as they relate to what will follow. Three of the key topics dealt with in this dissertation are as follows: power and how it is experienced; non-African, especially American, influences on the movement; and the issue of worldview or cultural transformation. The discussion that follows deals with each of these topics and explores what some of the most knowledgeable and experienced scholars of this movement have written.

1.6.1 Experiencing Power

Ruth Marshall-Fratani's (1991, 1992, 1995) first studies on new Pentecostalism in Nigeria dealt with the emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit, or “power in the name of Jesus”. She argued that for Pentecostals the acquisition of this power is “probably the single most important consequence of conversion” (1992:22). Similar to Allan Anderson (1990:68-69), Marshall-Fratani emphasizes that Pentecostals understand this power as primarily spiritual; it is the power to

overcome all other spiritual forces such as evil spirits, witchcraft and wrathful ancestors. But she also argues that this power must be understood in a holistic manner (1991:32):

The 'power in the name of Jesus', the spiritual power called upon by born-again in their prayers, the authority behind the exorcism of evil spirits, and the protection each born-again has against misfortune, is also temporal power, the power to impose categories of perception onto the world of real things, to realize the symbolic realm of the spiritual by transforming the world of practice.

What she argues, in effect, is that the spiritual power wielded by new Pentecostals is real and effective – it can change things in the here and now. The way it does so is by offering born-again believers “an alternate vision in its reconceptualisation of a morally chaotic world” (1995:246).

According to Marshall-Fratani (1995:246-248) the need for an alternative vision has arisen on account of the dismal failure of African nation-states to deliver democracy and development (i.e., to empower their people). A second reason is the inability of both mission and Spiritual churches “to construct a redemptive and empowering theology” (:246). Ogbu Kalu (1998:4), a Nigerian himself, has strongly endorsed this line of thinking:

The mainline churches, products of the evangelical revival and missionary enterprise, failed at that meeting point of liturgy and proclamation to provide people with new materials or old materials freshly voiced, that would fund, feed, nurture, nourish, legitimate and authorise a counter-imagination of the world. 'Ethiopianism' did not do so either.

The new Pentecostals have stepped into the gap created by the failure of both nation-states and older churches, and provided an alternate source of power.

Although this power is most definitely viewed in spiritual terms, it cannot be divorced

from temporal concerns precisely because of its claim to change social and economic realities – it transforms everyday life.¹⁷

The significance of this argument for my purposes is two-fold. First, Marshall-Fratani's recognition of the close relationship between spiritual and temporal power corresponds with what I believe is the new Pentecostal understanding of their experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. This will be demonstrated in chapter three in the discussion of the manner in which various symbols and technologies create an image and expectation of power at Bible Life Ministries. The second aspect of Marshall-Fratani's argument that is significant for this study concerns the assumption that the failure of African states has played a significant role in the rise of new Pentecostal churches. This is a very attractive thesis that seems to make sense in many African contexts. But what if an African government has been democratic, reasonably transparent, and quite effective at raising the living standards of many of its citizens? How then does one explain the growth of new Pentecostalism in that setting? That is the challenge when considering Botswana.

1.6.2 Foreign Influences

Of primary concern when discussing the rapid growth of new Pentecostalism has been the issue of foreign influence. Paul Gifford was one of the first scholars to seriously analyze the emergence of new Pentecostal churches in Africa. Beginning with his study in southern Africa (1988), and consistently into the present (2001:62-65), he has argued that the new Pentecostals in Africa have basically appropriated the theology of the Faith Movement from the West (especially America) with little or no modification. His evaluation of this development is rather obvious: "This Gospel

¹⁷ I am in close agreement with Anderson on this point: "In the holistic African worldview we may not adopt a Western dualistic idea that the power of the Spirit only has to do with some sort of mystical, inner power and nothing with our concrete physical, social, political and economic needs" (1990:68).

of Prosperity does not belong in Africa's revival. It did not originate in Africa. It originated with the media evangelists of the US" (1990:382). Crucial for Gifford is the economic collapse that many African nations have suffered in past decades. He argues that pastors have found the prosperity gospel useful for their own economic benefit (1998:335), while dire economic realities have also encouraged churches to look overseas for help (1990:383).

That new Pentecostalism in Africa has foreign origins can hardly be disputed. The worldwide spread of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements from the West generated a movement that only gained momentum once it reached Africa (Ojo 1988:175-176). Therefore the central issue is not its foreign genesis but whether or not it has adapted itself to the African continent. Contrary to Gifford, some scholars (Kalu 1998:7-8; Maxwell 1995:335) now argue that although many African leaders and churches may retain an American façade they are actually rapidly indigenising the message they are receiving. External elements are retained as "symbols of the prosperity, international standing and embellishments that dazzle and arouse local interest" (Kalu 1998:8). Just because something looks or sounds American does not necessarily mean that it has not been contextualized.

To his credit, Gifford has begun to allow for some African creativity in their borrowing from the West. In fact, he has even gone so far as to suggest that the new Pentecostals' twin emphases of prosperity and deliverance from evil spirits "might be viewed more as a local conceptualization expressed in a standardised foreign form" (2001:77). In an earlier work (1998:325-334) he suggested that new Pentecostals address the religious needs that arise from the traditional African worldview. They do this not by holding onto traditional culture, but by repudiating it and attempting instead to link to the wider world.

Although overstated in my opinion, Gifford's comments on worldview transformation are highly suggestive. Andrew Walls (1996:5-14) has followed a similar line of thought in his attempt to explain the severe antagonism between Spiritual churches and the new Pentecostals. Referring to worldview as a map of the universe, Walls argues that Christianity has no choice but to be placed upon the existing African map. "Christianity has thus necessarily inherited all the old goals of religion; in particular, the association with protection and with power is undiminished" (:5). Spiritual churches and new Pentecostals use the same maps or worldview; it is just that "they color them differently" (:9). But is it really that simple?

One of the first commentators on the new Pentecostals, Matthews Ojo, (1988:189) has long argued that new Pentecostal churches have combined traditional beliefs and an "appropriated foreign spirituality" in an attempt "to create a new cosmology". Ojo's suggestion that new Pentecostals are blending elements of both western and African origin to create something new appears to be on target. Africans have long been engaged in this kind of process as will become evident in the discussion of the Botswana context found in chapter 2. Using the terminology of Jean and John Comaroff (1991:171) I would argue that the new Pentecostal movement is another chapter in the long conversation between the west and Africa, a conversation that has effected both parties in the process.

1.6.3 A New *Imaginaire*¹⁸ of Power

The previous discussions of the experience of power and foreign influences have suggested that new Pentecostals are attempting something new with regard to

¹⁸ Corten and Marshall-Fratani (2001:1) use the term to speak of how Pentecostalism offers "a new vision of the world". "Pentecostalism constitutes not only a discourse within modernity, but also a discourse *about* modernity, insofar as it elaborates a series of reflections on the present, adopting and adapting modernity's techniques, discourses, and practices into a new *imaginaire*" (:4). Or as Marshall-Fratani (1998:291) puts it in another article: "What is new about Pentecostalism is... the way in which the individual is incited to re-imagine his (sic) life".

how they envision the world. Rijk van Dijk (2001:216-219), another scholar with wide experience of new Pentecostalism within Africa (Malawi and Ghana), argues that Pentecostalism creates the possibility for a reorientation in terms of time, place and self-identity. Along with Birgit Meyer (1998), he notes the fundamental importance of the complete rupture with an “inferior” past, and an embrace of a “superior” future (:216,218). For new Pentecostals, the past has power and is dangerous; “the past’ in their view, haunts people and stands in their way of making progress” (Meyer 1998:328). They argue that in order to move forward into a modern future, one must break free from the constraints of African culture and tradition.¹⁹

Making a break with the past represents the spiritual rebirth experience but the reception of the Spirit represents another step in the process. Marshall-Fratani (1995:289-291) argues that the primary effect of receiving the power of the Spirit is that it empowers one to change identity, to choose a new story or narrative. “Thus while pentecostalism is resolutely ‘modern’ and ‘transcultural’ it does not find its success through wholesale *rejection* of the past, but through an engagement with it; refashioning history and domesticating it at the same time” (1998:291). Marshall-Fratani’s qualification that new Pentecostals do not completely reject the past is significant. Although certain aspects of African culture are rejected, it is more accurate to speak of a reshaping or redefining process. In this process a new vision of reality, an *imaginaire* of power, is created, one in which each believer is endowed with supernatural power, dignity and the ability to craft a future filled with hope instead of despair (Kalu 1998:5; D. Petersen 1998:25). By incorporating aspects of the past into a new framework, new Pentecostal churches encourage their followers

¹⁹ This new orientation towards the future is powerful. “In the secularized world the mystery of the future predominates, and those come-of-age in the modern world have at their disposal unparalleled creative and transforming power” (Oosthuizen 1988:9).



to feel at home while also exploring the new possibilities offered by urbanization, higher education, globalization and modernization.

1.7 SUMMARY AND OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

Similar to many parts of Africa and the rest of the world, new Pentecostal churches have quickly become a major presence on the ecclesiastical landscape of Botswana. Although closely linked theologically with historic or classic Pentecostal churches, they are distinct on account of their recent origins, their emphasis on the “prosperity gospel” and deliverance ministries as well as their African “roots” (i.e., founded by Africans). The purpose of this study is to examine the appeal of these churches by carefully considering the Botswana social context and then focusing on one particular church in Gaborone, Bible Life Ministries, the largest congregation in the country. The thesis argued is that the major appeal of Bible Life Ministries is a promise of power, power that is spiritual in nature but that has concrete temporal effects in contemporary Botswana life. By taking hold of this power, Botswana are offered a way of approaching the world that promises them prosperity and greater control over their lives.

The missiological issues that emerge from this study deal primarily with concerns of contextualization, the nature of the gospel message and the relationship between Christianity and African culture. Commentators on the growth of new Pentecostal churches have noted the emphasis placed on experiencing spiritual power – power over demons and witchcraft. But spiritual power in this context should not be misunderstood as “other-worldly” as it promises temporal benefits such as healing, employment and an improved family life. The concern for financial prosperity, which has clearly been linked to American evangelists, has become a

defining mark of these churches. In effect what these churches offer is a new way of envisioning the world and one's place within that world. In place of failure, sickness and poverty, they offer a vision of success, health and prosperity.

As noted above (1.6.1), some argue that the need for a "new imagination" or vision of the world has arisen from the desolation and despair that failed African political and ecclesiastical structures have produced. However I do not believe that explanation adequately explains the success of new Pentecostals in Botswana. Instead I will argue that the need for a new 'imaginaire', a "promise of power", has emerged because of the radical changes that have taken place within Botswana society in the past century, especially post-Independence, as well as to cope with the spiritual challenges which arise from traditional Setswana beliefs.

The following chapters will progress in a manner that demonstrates the relationship between the new Pentecostal promise of power and the Botswana context. Chapter 2 demonstrates how Botswana culture and society has been profoundly impacted through its contact with western culture and Christianity in the past century. The results of this contact have created a need in many for a greater sense of self-worth, better social interactions and power over unseen spiritual forces. Chapter 3 turns its attention to Bible Life Ministries and its promise of power. A variety of issues are explored including the creation of an image of power, the nature of the promised power, its source and ways of accessing this power. In Chapter 4, I deal with the findings of chapters 2 and 3 simultaneously in an effort to understand how the Bible Life Ministries' promise of power seeks to meet the felt needs of contemporary Botswana. The final chapter will sum up the arguments presented throughout as well as suggest some missiological and theological challenges raised by this movement, both to churches outside of its orbit as well as to those within it.

Chapter 2

THE BOTSWANA CONTEXT – CHALLENGE, CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

“Botswana finds itself in a period of history when social attitudes and values around the world are changing at an unprecedented rate. Within the country itself, this has been accelerated by the pace of urbanization, and increasing contact with diverse foreign cultures. In the future, the people of Botswana will need to adapt to the challenges of global society while not sacrificing the positive aspects of their cultural values that distinguish them from other nations” (Republic of Botswana 1996:7).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As the quote above suggests, Botswana finds itself in the middle of a rapidly changing world. Changes inside and outside the country have created a situation of both opportunity and concern. It is precisely within this context that the new Pentecostal churches have arisen and grown. To understand some of the factors behind this growth, I believe it is necessary to consider both the past and the present situation in Botswana. In the first section of this chapter I will provide a brief discussion of how the Batswana interacted with the considerable forces of change introduced by western missionaries, the British colonial government and worldwide economic realities prior to national Independence. One of the consequences of this clash of cultures for the Batswana was a growing self-awareness of their beliefs and customs, leading to the identification of their traditions as Setswana culture as opposed to western culture. The second section of this chapter will briefly explore the ways different church traditions have handled the interplay of Setswana and western culture. In the final section, I will consider some of the momentous post-Independence developments that have created a climate of unprecedented change and a desire for continued progress on the part of many Batswana.

2.2 THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN CULTURES

2.2.1 Framework for the Dialogue

“To tell the truth, *Moruti, ngwan’ke* (Minister, my child), the missionaries have not taught us anything new about God and his workings with man and the world” (Setiloane 1978:402).

For Gabriel Setiloane, the answer given above by an old Motswana woman to his question, “What do you see as unique in what the missionaries have brought to us?”, was an apt illustration of the way in which the Setswana worldview has stubbornly persisted in spite of more than 100 years of mission presence and European influence. At the same time the Batswana have clearly been profoundly impacted by their contact with Christianity and western culture. The challenge is to describe the complexities of this encounter in a way which does not simply pit the powerful “giant” of western culture over against the weak “midget” of Setswana culture (Maluleke 1996a:20-21). Helpful in this regard is the work of Jean and John Comaroff (1991:171) who have traced the intricacies in the relationship between missionaries and Batswana and described it as a “long conversation”. Moreover they argue that this was a true dialogue between cultures, each with their own notions of power and each impacting the other in the encounter. Nevertheless the Comaroff’s (1991:4) are well aware that embedded within this meeting of two cultures, or worlds, was a serious imbalance of power.

This culture - the culture of European capitalism, of western modernity – had, and continues to have, enormous historical force – a force at once ideological and economic, semantic and social. In the face of it, some black Africans have succumbed, some have resisted, some have tried to recast its intrusive forms in their own image. Most have done all these things, at one time or another time, in the effort to formulate an awareness of, and to gain a measure of mastery over, their changing world.

The purpose of the discussion which follows is to describe the ways in which Batswana dealt with the intrusion of western culture in an attempt to regain control of

their world. As suggested above, different tactics were adopted at different times, some of which were subtly disguised. Much more could be said about the Comaroff's work however it is not my purpose here to repeat their arguments so much as use their findings to demonstrate how some aspects of Setswana culture were changed, retained and transformed during the long conversation with western culture.

2.2.2 The Background - Setswana Hierarchy of Order

At the outset it must be made clear that one cannot speak of a traditional Setswana worldview in isolation from its relationship with western culture. According to Jean Comaroff (1985:125), prior to contact with Europeans the Batswana worldview was "almost entirely implicit in Tswana thought and action". There was no formal systematic belief system or tradition. What has come to be called Setswana (not just the language but also the culture) arose later in the encounter with Europeans as Batswana attempted to assert their own identity in opposition to western culture (see 2.3).

At the same time one can identify some fundamental principles of Setswana life. There is agreement that Setswana society was based on a hierarchical order (Schapera 1955:30-32; J. & J. Comaroff 1991:129). Mogapi (1991:136) has diagrammed this hierarchy as follows (see figure 1):

Modimo (God)
Badimo ba morafe (Tribal ancestors)
Dikgosi tse di tlhokafetseng (Chiefs who have died)
Kgosi ya motlha oo (Present Chief)
Borremogolo ba ba tlhokafetseng (Male family elders who have died)
Borremogolo ba ba tshelang (Male family elders)
Batsadi ba me (My parents)²⁰

Figure 1: Hierarchical Order

²⁰ Translations are my own.

A person's position in society was largely based on three factors: sex, age and lineage. Men were believed to be superior to women, older members of the same sex were one's superiors while younger members were subordinates and patrilineal descent (agnation) ordered rank within the tribal hierarchy (Schapera 1955:28-32; Alverson 1978:12).

Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, God, *Modimo*, was primarily conceived of as the high God and creator of all, who was largely removed from human affairs and relations (J. & J. Comaroff 1991:155). At the same time *Modimo* was also intensely present within creation: "[B]eyond, yet all-pervading the whole cosmos – is MODIMO, the great IT, the source of 'bomodimo' (the numinous), Protector and Sustainer of all" (Setiloane 1976:21). Within creation, *Modimo* established a certain moral order that if adhered to would ensure social harmony and positive benefits for all. If the moral order was transgressed people could expect to experience *bolwetse*, dis-ease, which included all manner of physical, social, or economic difficulties (Setiloane 1976:44).

Batswana understood that *Modimo* could not be approached directly but rather through the *badimo*, the deceased as well as aged members of the tribe who had attained to a special position in relation to God. The *badimo* watched over the living, and blessed good behaviour as well as punished transgressions of tribal custom (*mekgwa*). According to Schapera (1955:41), they "were held to be the guardians of the social order, the custodians of tradition; to inaugurate new ways was believed to be a sure method of estranging and alienating them, and so bringing

down misfortune on the tribe". In this regard the *kgosi*, chief of the tribe, played a key role as he was the living connection between the *badimo* and his people.²¹

Below the chief were the male heads of the family clans (*borremogolo*). They held a special position in relation to the *kgosi* and the rest of the clan. Linked to the authority of the *badimo*, the father of each household, *ramotse*, was to provide for, protect and represent his family in public. Women, young men and children all recognized their place in this hierarchy and depended upon their male elders to represent them well (Lethare 2001:475). This then provides the backdrop for the conversation that was to take place between the Europeans and the Batswana.

2.2.3 Conversation Concerning Chieftaincy (*Bogosi*)

The relationship between the Batswana chiefs and Europeans was of course extremely complex and full of ambiguities but there are a few key aspects that need to be drawn out. First, as noted above the chief stood at the center of tribal life and his power depended upon his relationship to the *badimo*. When the missionaries arrived, they came with a dualistic notion of spiritual and temporal power, and tried to suggest that they only wanted to claim the spiritual power of the chiefs. They thought that by displacing the *badimo* (in fact, by demonizing them)²² they were only dealing with "spiritual" issues while the chiefs recognized that they were actually undermining their authority (J. & J. Comaroff 1991:255-257) as well as striking at the heart of Setswana culture (Dube 1999:41-42).

Nevertheless the chiefs felt compelled to keep the missionaries in close proximity because of their perceived power. Early on they realized the missionaries'

²¹ Although it loses some emphasis in translation, Mogapi's (1991:136) description is extremely apt: "The chief is the 'nurturer of the people' (*mmabatho*), furthermore he is the way between the tribe and the ancestors" (my translation).

²² The effort to demonize the *badimo* at its most blatant was effected by translating the New Testament references to demons and evil spirits as *badimo*. See Dube 1999:39-42.

value as bearers of new technologies (e.g., ploughs, guns, literacy), mediators with colonial authorities and as a shield against more militant whites. It appears that the chiefs were trying to seize the powers of the missionaries while also retaining their own culturally defined authority (J. & J. Comaroff 1991:246; Schapera 1960:496). While this effort was understandable it was also doomed to failure. Eventually many of the chiefs were drawn into the church and began to enact wide-ranging reforms that had serious ramifications on Setswana life.

Primary among these reforms was the abandonment of rain-making practices, the end of initiation rites and the abolition of polygamy. The chiefs often joined forces with the missionaries in their evangelistic zeal to defeat Satan and wipe out the so-called "network of false African religious values, traditions and practices" (Amanze 1998:52-53). As will be seen below this attempt to eradicate Setswana culture affected family life deeply, forced many Setswana beliefs and practices underground and led to the widening perception of a gulf between Setswana and western culture.

Finally, in the political realm, contact with Europeans also had far-ranging effects. Following the establishment of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885, the chiefs increasingly saw themselves stripped of their autonomy by colonial officials. However they also gained greater power and control over their people on account of the increased judicial powers and right of taxation given to them by officials eager to maintain tribal order (Samatar 1999:46-47; Picard 1987:13). Even though the chiefs were virtually replaced as "tribal priests" by the missionaries (Schapera 1960:493), they were loathe to relinquish control easily in the spiritual realm and so they

effectively established “state churches” in order to retain authority as well as limit tribal divisions.²³

2.2.4 Conversation Concerning the Word (*Lefoko*)

Clearly one of the major innovations introduced by the missionaries was the Bible, the Word of God. The missionaries believed the Bible to be objective truth, and that its truth had the power to transform a person’s life. The Batswana, too, believed that a word, *lefoko*, had power to impact life, but simply by its very utterance. A common proverb says, “A word once uttered can never turn back, only the pointed finger can” (Dibeela 2001:391). Spoken words are bound to have effect, but under the missionaries *lefoko* came to be associated with literacy and the written word. As certain Batswana, often those within the chiefly circle, began to associate the power of the Europeans with their reading ability, they too desired to master this skill. Eventually many of these elite joined the church and became the cult or people of the Word. “The cult and the Word defining it were also tied to the presumed power of the missionaries (in their identity as whites and an odd sort of *dingaka* [traditional doctor]) through shared signification in manners, expression, and clothing” (Landau 1995:19). Over time this European way of life became identified as *sekgoa*, while leading to the reifying of local customs (*mekgwa*) as *setswana* (see 2.3). Again it is important to note that often those who most closely identified with *sekgoa* and the missionaries were among the elite members of the tribe. But what effect was the “long conversation” having upon the common people?

²³ Khama III of the Bamangwato was the most forceful proponent of this strategy. His efforts to control the London Missionary Society church in his territory led to numerous conflicts with the missionaries, with the chief emerging victorious on most occasions. See Landau (1995:30-52).

2.2.5 Conversation Concerning the Family (*Lo/wapa*)

For Batswana, life found its order and meaning in the family, starting with the immediate household but extending outward to encompass all of one's relations both living and dead.²⁴ Life was both experienced and defined in community. As the famous proverb says, 'a person is a person through people' (*motho ke motho ka batho*). It was understood that words and actions impacted not only the individual but had consequences for the community. Therefore a respected Motswana, one full of 'humanity', *botho*, could be characterized as "one who follows the accepted pattern of social living, who shows equanimity and maturity" (Setiloane 1976:40).

When the chiefs, under the influence of missionaries, began to abolish traditional rites it is unlikely that they had any idea how far-reaching the consequences would be. Schapera (1940:313-314) argued that nothing impacted the Batswana family more than Christianity.

The Mission introduced a new form of religion, whose acceptance meant the abandonment of the domestic cult of ancestor-worship; it also brought new forms of wedding and death ritual, baptism and confirmation ceremonies, schools and the ideals of sexual morality, which either supplemented or modified traditional aspects of family life; and it forbade polygamy, several of the customs practised to ensure the birth of an heir, and various kindred usages directly connected to marriage.

Furthermore, for Batswana women accustomed to male control, the egalitarian rhetoric of the gospel and education for girls held a great attraction and led to changes in gender relations. The combined effect of these changes was to challenge seriously the former coherence of Batswana homes.

But there was perhaps another factor that influenced Batswana families at least as much as missionary teaching - labour migration. Even before the formation

²⁴ The traditional Batswana family structure is a huge topic. For a full discussion, see Schapera 1953:39-46 and J. & J. Comaroff 1991:132-140.

of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885, adult Batswana men were leaving their homes to work in South Africa. But this trend only increased under colonial rule (Schapera 1947:43). The colonial policy of deliberate under-development (especially of the agriculture sector) along with taxation made it mandatory for most Batswana men to travel to South African mines and farms in order to obtain cash to pay their taxes as well as supply their families with necessities (Picard 1987:97-118). The effects in many cases were dire. Agriculture was impacted as the work was often left to women and children. Family life was severely disrupted as marriages were delayed, children born out of wedlock, infidelity increased, child discipline suffered and women began to set up their own households (Schapera 1947:165-193).

Among the serious affects of labour migration was that it served to emphasize individualism while also destroying a man's sense of worth. The commodization of their time and labour taught men new work patterns and created autonomy from tribal structures. When they returned home their concept of work and person had been changed, and often not for the better. Although perhaps overstated, the following words of Bessie Head (1977:92) hold much truth:

The colonial era and the period of migratory mining labour to South Africa was a further affliction visited on this man. It broke the hold of the ancestors. It broke the old, traditional form of family life and for long periods a man was separated from his wife and children while he worked for a pittance in another land in order to raise the money to pay his British colonial poll-tax. He then became 'the boy' of the white man and a machine-tool of the South African mines.

Migration to the mines often led to the dehumanization of those who went and alienation from those left behind, while doing little to alleviate the growing poverty of many Batswana. What emerged from the combination of changes introduced by missionaries, colonial authorities and labour migration was serious disruption in the social sphere and an upheaval of the harmony so important in Batswana thinking.

2.2.6 Conversation Concerning Dis-ease (*Bolwetse*)

As a person in community it was firmly believed that others, especially those within close proximity, could either positively or negatively effect the state of one's being (J. Comaroff 1985:128). At birth all persons had been granted a spirit of life or power for life (*moya*). The general health, wealth and wellbeing of an individual (and his/her family) were prime indicators of a strong or weak *moya*. When a person's *moya* was out of balance or adversely affected by some other force, he or she was in danger of experiencing *bolwetse*, dis-ease, the disruption of the moral order.

As mentioned, missionary teaching, colonial authority and labour migration had the effect of disrupting existing patterns of relationships resulting in confusion and uncertainty for many. In an effort to deal with this situation, Batswana relied upon their understanding of the created order and their traditional healers. Dis-ease, *bolwetse*, was believed to have had three primary causes: witchcraft or sorcery (*boloi*), ancestral disapproval (*dikgaba*) and acts of God (*ditiro tsa Modimo*) (Ntloedibe 2001:500). *Boloi* was intimately concerned with social relationships and the attempt to overpower another either actively by introducing poisons (*ditlhare*)²⁵ into an intended victim's food, or passively by means of malevolent feelings of jealousy or anger (Setiloane 1976:49-50). To discover the cause of *bolwetse*, help restore health and harmony as well as to provide guidance in uncertain times was the task of the traditional doctor, *ngaka*.

The traditional doctors claimed a calling from *Modimo* and relied upon empowerment by the *badimo* to perform their tasks. In addition to restoring those afflicted with *bolwetse*, they were also believed to be able to protect and fortify one

²⁵ From the earlier discussion of God, *Modimo*, it should be remembered that all matter in creation was infused with power. Such inherent power could be used either positively to help and heal (see the discussion of the traditional doctor, *ngaka*) or negatively to injure or overpower another, *boloi* (see Schapera 1953:63-65).

against *bolo* by means of their rites and medicines (Schapera 1953:63-65). In the face of fierce opposition from both missionaries (who believed they were agents of Satan) and colonial officials (who held their beliefs to be useless superstition), the traditional doctors, and the concomitant belief in witchcraft, not only persisted but grew in popularity. This is not surprising considering the social upheaval taking place among the Batswana at that time. Commenting on the situation just after Independence, Alec Campbell (1968:9) wrote: "A very large proportion of the population employ the services of a diviner at all moments of crisis or decision, particularly to seek the cause of inexplicable occurrences, or sickness, or to determine the right steps to be taken to bring a doubtful issue to a successful conclusion". Here again one sees the persistence of Setswana belief in the face of strong western opposition.

2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SETSWANA AND WESTERN WORLDS

The impact of European contact with Batswana was bound to challenge traditional norms and practices. But as I noted earlier one of the unintended results of the encounter was a reification of Setswana culture as a system of belief or worldview. European culture, technologies and missionary doctrine became identified with *sekgoa* while traditional custom and beliefs were objectified as *setswana* (J. Comaroff 1985:192). The growing awareness among Batswana of the contrast between *sekgoa* and *setswana* is highly important. The Comaroff's (1991:247) have argued convincingly that these two terms came to express two extremes on a continuum with most Batswana "between the blanket refusal of those who championed *setswana* and the positive identification with *sekgoa* of those who became 'believers'". This cultural dichotomy has persisted to the present and I will

argue that new Pentecostal churches represent an attempt to bridge the gap but it should be noted that they are not the first to deal with this issue.

Over time the mission churches, which were closely aligned to and at times under the control of the chiefs and their influential advisors, became closely identified with *sekgoa*. In these churches were found the powerful elite, those who had access to tribal authority, education, cattle wealth and colonial power. Many were led into mission churches in order to remain connected to these powerful individuals (Schapera 1960:501; J. Comaroff 1985:193).²⁶ But it was not always that simple. As Setiloane (1976:225) argues, a parallel system of life developed for many Batswana. “Without thought to their relationship, ‘mekgwa’ [Setswana custom] and the official ways of the church exist side by side, as two sets of clothes to be worn on different occasions and sometimes even together at the same time”. Two parallel tracks were running side by side, with only the occasional overlap. In the long conversation, Setswana custom had not been eclipsed; it had merely hidden in the shadows and been practiced away from prying eyes.²⁷

But there was a second way of dealing with the *setswana/sekgoa* dichotomy. Jean Comaroff (1985:212-219) argues that the Spiritual churches were an attempt to mediate between the two extremes. It was in these churches that the poor and powerless sought a way forward. With their emphasis on the Spirit of God (*Moya*), an appropriation of various symbols of western Christianity and a willingness to access ancestral power when necessary, the Spiritual churches were able to

²⁶ Mission churches in Botswana have been termed *dikereke tsa molao*, churches of the law/order, in opposition to the Spiritual churches. The reasons behind this designation are numerous but chief among them must be the connection to literacy, the Bible as the book of the law, and chiefly authority.

²⁷ It is almost surprising how someone as astute as Schapera (1960:494) could claim that ancestor veneration had virtually disappeared among the Batswana. It demonstrates how well the conversation regarding *badimo* had become a “hidden transcript” (see Scott 1990).

confront many of the issues left untouched by the cerebral doctrine of the missionaries. While the mission churches tried to keep Setswana custom out of the church (and thus forced it underground), the Spiritual churches tried to integrate *setswana* and *sekgoa* in their ritual and belief. Their strength lay in their capacity to incorporate Setswana beliefs; however over time, they lost much of their ability to absorb and reinterpret western innovations. Nevertheless, what is important to recognize in both of these approaches, mission church and Spiritual church, was that while Setswana culture had been challenged and at times changed in the encounter with Europeans, it continued to survive albeit in altered forms and often hidden from view. Setswana culture was still a force for any church to reckon with.

2.4 POST INDEPENDENCE – CHANGE, GROWTH AND CONCERN

In this section I want to outline briefly how post-Independence Botswana has both changed and remained the same creating a situation highly conducive to the message of the new Pentecostals.

2.4.1 Situation at Independence

When Botswana achieved Independence from Britain on 30 September 1966, few held much hope for the rapid development of the country. It was considered one of the poorest countries in the world, dependent upon foreign aid while surrounded by racist white regimes. With over ninety percent of all Batswana reliant on agriculture, a devastating drought had forced nearly one fifth of the population of 540,000 to depend upon international famine relief (Republic of Botswana 1966:5,15). On account of colonial policies which led Botswana to serve as a cheap labour reserve for South Africa, the country was highly dependent upon the cash remittances of record numbers of men working in South African mines (over 32,000

in 1966). Educational facilities were in their infancy with few schools and a dearth of trained teachers. Seventy five per cent of the population was considered illiterate and only 40 Batswana held university degrees (Republic of Botswana 1966:3,8,41).

Botswana at Independence was a country lacking two major ingredients necessary for economic growth: exploitable natural resources and a skilled workforce. Danevad (1993:8) sums up the situation:

[T]he British rulers had made nearly no efforts to industrialise, modernise agriculture, or develop infrastructure. The Batswana majority based their livelihood on subsistence agriculture, hunting and gathering, small-scale cattle rearing, and temporary migration to South African mines. There was also a small economic elite of Batswana and European settlers, prospering on arable farming and large herds of cattle.

This small group of wealthy elite, closely connected to traditional sources of chiefly power, formed the Botswana Democratic Party and eventually led Botswana into the future. Given legitimacy by the first president, Seretse Khama, a wealthy, well-educated, hereditary chief of one of the largest tribes in the Republic, Botswana quickly achieved political stability (Samatar 1999:71). But few could have foreseen the remarkably quick turnaround in the country's fortunes.

2.4.2 An African Success

Most definitely the key to Botswana's rapid economic rise was the discovery of diamonds. Botswana's first diamond mine came on line in 1971 and two more began production by 1981. Soon diamond mining was generating over half of the country's gross domestic product and close to seventy five percent of its exports earnings (Grandberg & Parkinson 1988:19). Since 1971 the country has experienced phenomenal rates of economic growth averaging 13% between 1970 and 1990 and 7% between 1990 and 1998. With per capita gross domestic product earnings at USD \$3,200, Botswana is now classified as a middle-income country

(Kwelagobe in Snoeks 2000:137). But diamonds alone could not produce a stable state. Credit must also be given to the strong political and economic leadership shown by the government throughout this period.

What effect has this economic miracle had on the lives of Batswana? In terms of education, primary school enrollment in 1997 had increased to almost 100% from 42% in 1971, junior secondary enrollment had jumped to over 45% from just 7.3% (United Nations Development Programme²⁸ 2000:70-71). The University of Botswana (non-existent at Independence) increased its number of students from 520 in 1977 to over 5000 by 1994 (Kwape 1996:221). Rapid development of infrastructure, including the provision of primary health care facilities, clean water supplies, roads and housing, has led to "improving social and health indicators that are vastly superior to most Sub-Saharan African countries" (Mugabe 1997:179). But beyond improving the quality of education and health, one also needs to look at other social indicators.

One of the major changes that Botswana has faced is rapid urbanization, faster than any other African nation (Republic of Botswana 1999:35). Only 4% of Batswana lived in towns in 1966, whereas rural and urban populations had almost equalized by 1999 (UNDP 2000:72-73). This growth has been most pronounced in Gaborone which has grown from an estimated 12,000 at Independence (Republic of Botswana 1966:) to over 175,000 today (UNDP 2000:82). There are multiple reasons for this phenomenon but one key factor has been a shift in labour migration patterns. The number of men finding work in South African mines climbed to a high of around 50,000 in the mid-1970s and then steadily declined (to around 17,500 by 1990). At the same time formal sector employment in Botswana has rapidly

²⁸ Hereafter referred to as UNDP.

increased from 25,000 in 1965 to 312,000 in 1993 (Mugabe 1997:178). Fewer men chose to leave the country and went instead to the populated areas of Botswana to find employment.

Related to the growth in urbanization has been the steady growth of an urban middle class. As formal sector employment opportunities grew, many young government workers and professionals moved to Gaborone to establish their homes. Government employees at all levels received substantial salary increases (30%) in the early 1980's along with various other incentives which have allowed them to enjoy a much higher standard of living (Picard 1987:220-221). Due to the underdevelopment of education in Botswana prior to Independence, the government was forced to hire large numbers of expatriates for many skilled positions (Picard 1987:203-206). Together these two groups have slowly become an influential force within the country.

One other factor in the rapid rate of urbanization has been Botswana's quickly expanding population. Although the population is still extremely small (1.6 million) in comparison to its landmass, it is significant that from Independence to 1991 the population was growing at close to 4% a year, one of the fastest rates in the world. By 1991 nearly half the population was under 15 years of age (Granberg & Parkinson 1988:49). This rapid growth has posed challenges to government resources as well as to the ability of families to provide adequate care for children.

At this point we would do well to note that Botswana's economic development has not helped all members of society equally. There is abundant evidence that the cattle-owning elite of the colonial era, and their descendents, have used their political power for their own economic benefit (Picard 1987:252-264; Samatar 1999:67-75). Since 1975 the numbers of those living below the officially defined poverty line have

remained fairly constant at close to 50 % (Republic of Botswana 1998:3), while a minority have grown increasingly richer. Poverty levels in the rural areas are higher than those of the urban centres but large pockets of impoverished people live in Gaborone and other towns as well. While numerous studies have been conducted outlining the extent of the problem, little seems to be changing (see Nteta et al. 1997).

Some of the negative effects of rapid urbanization and a widening gap between the rich and poor, urban and rural as well as the young and old, have become increasingly obvious. Traditional patterns of family support began to show signs of breaking down while family structures have changed considerably as well. By 1991 almost half (47%) of all households were headed by women, where the levels of poverty were also highest (Mugabe 1997:180). Young people felt less constrained by parental control as attested to by the increase in the percentage of pregnant teenage girls aged 15-19 (from 15.4% in 1971 to 24% by 1988) (Mazonde 1997:67-68). The loss of male authority and responsibility noted earlier seems to have increased as many men began to skip simply from one relationship to another (see Gulbrandsen 1994:256-267). All of these factors have led to the extremely alarming HIV/AIDS crisis that Botswana faces today.²⁹

It is not surprising then, in this context of changing societal patterns and norms, that the belief in witchcraft also increased. Often in contexts of widening disparities between rich and poor, urban and rural, witchcraft becomes more common and widespread (J. & J. Comaroff 1993:xxiv-xxvi). Bessie Head (1977:47) describes the situation as follows:

²⁹ In the year 2000, it was estimated that 17% of the total population was infected with HIV, while 36% of the sexually active population was infected with HIV. By 2010 it is estimated that close to 20% of all children will have lost their mothers to AIDS (UNDP 2000:58-59).

Political independence seemed to have aggravated the disease more than anything because people now said: 'Our old people used to say that you can't kill someone who is not your relative. You know what you are going to take from your relative. But these days they are killing everyone from jealousy'.

The power of witchcraft, of jealousy, explains many things in a context of social change and upheaval. Traditional doctors and Spiritual church prophets have continued to flourish even as people's levels of westernized education have risen. The need for an explanation in times of change, and protection from evil powers has become acute for many. It was in this context that the new Pentecostal movement began in Botswana.

2.5 CONCLUSION – CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

My purpose in this chapter has been to trace some of the contours of the encounter between the Batswana and various foreign peoples and forces in order to provide the context for the emergence of new Pentecostal churches in Gaborone. What has become evident is that the Batswana have seen their world challenged, and been forced to change, but have also reacted in creative ways in order to retain what they perceived as essential from their cultural tradition.

From the discussion of pre-Independence Botswana it was noted that the interaction of cultures had major consequences. Traditional structures of authority eroded in influence as the missionaries claimed the spiritual power of the chiefs while the colonial authorities threatened their temporal power. Over time there arose an educated (by the missionaries) elite, most often closely related to the chiefs, who became wealthy and highly influential. At the same time, colonial policies led to a situation where large numbers of men were compelled to serve long periods of time working in South Africa in order to provide for the material needs of their families.

Family dynamics were also seriously impacted by the abolition of initiation rites and polygamy, education for girls, and the introduction of modern technologies.

In what the missionaries referred to as the spiritual realm, serious efforts were made to root out or demonize the ancestors, *badimo*, but they continued to live on, although in a more hidden role. Much the same could be said of the beliefs surrounding *bohwetse*, the underlying concept of dis-ease, and *boloj*, witchcraft. Although the role of traditional doctors was diminished substantially, they still served an important purpose for those seeking a way to understand the world around them. Over time, these beliefs and others became objectified as *setswana*, an identifiable system and ideology, as opposed to that of western culture, *sekgoa*.

Within Christian circles, the tension between western and Setswana culture was most often dealt with in one of two ways. In the mission churches adherents accepted western theology (*sekgoa*) in public while continuing to practice Setswana customs (*mekgwa ya Setswana*) in private. In the Spiritual churches an attempt was made to connect the two by appropriating many of the symbols of Christianity and then infusing them with new meaning and power – power from both the Spirit of God and the ancestors. Both of these ways of dealing with the *setswana/sekgoa* dichotomy have enjoyed considerable success but the new situation created by even more rapid change has provided an opportunity for new Pentecostal churches to suggest another way of dealing with the interplay of cultures.

At Independence the new Republic of Botswana was truly in a dire situation. While a small group of wealthy educated elite (often closely connected to the traditional chiefs) had emerged to lead the country politically, economically the country faced grim prospects. But the fortuitous discovery of diamonds led to a future radically different from what had been predicted. Rapid development of

infrastructure and various health and educational services led to a better quality of life for many. Yet serious concerns have been raised regarding the widening gap between rich and poor. Labour migration from the rural areas has largely shifted from South Africa to the urban areas of Botswana, especially the capital city of Gaborone. Rapid population growth, especially from 1970-1990, has led to increasing numbers of young people in the cities seeking both educational and employment opportunities. The rise of female-headed households and unwed mothers, which began during the pre-Independence period has accelerated, and women in general have sought greater rights and freedoms.

Expatriate professionals have also flocked to the country, and especially Gaborone, as the rapid expansion of the economy created a need for expertise not yet acquired by most Batswana. Simultaneously, there has been an emerging middle class of professionals, government employees and business people who are eager to continue their upward climb towards financial success and greater social power. These people are keen to experience more of the world and the perceived benefits of globalization. It also appears that they long for stable families, power to overcome the spiritual world they inherited from their ancestors and a relationship with God which encompasses all areas of life.

The description above provides an outline of the Botswana context and some of the forces that have created this situation. What has emerged is a picture of a society in flux. Various beliefs and customs from the past have persisted into the present and still influence the lives of many Batswana. At the same time numerous outside influences have created a situation radically different from the life most Batswana experienced only thirty years ago. Describing how new Pentecostals have managed to situate themselves into this context is the task of the next two chapters.

In chapter 3, I will describe the promise of power of one new Pentecostal church, Bible Life Ministries. The manner in which they create an image of power and then seek to provide ways of accessing that power is the primary focus. Then in chapter 4 I will explore how this church attempts to meet the needs and aspirations of contemporary Batswana in light of the context described in this chapter.

Chapter 3

POWER – THE BIBLE LIFE PROMISE

“A god is not merely an authority upon whom we depend, but a force upon which our strength relies. The man who has obeyed his god and who for this reason believes the god is with him, approaches the world with confidence and with the feeling of increased energy (Emile Durkheim in Pickering 1975:229).³⁰

3.1 INTRODUCTION

When arriving at Bible Life Ministries the first time, many things stand out but the most important of these is the people. It is difficult not to be impressed by the crowds of well-dressed young people who exude both confidence and joy with their warm smiles, handshakes and hugs. From where does their confidence arise? Many of them boldly claim that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has changed their lives and given them power to experience success and prosperity. They have been promised power and in faith they are living according to that promise.

One of the subjects discussed in the first chapter is the attempt by new Pentecostals to create an *imaginaire* of power, a new way of looking at the world. In this chapter I want to consider one specific example of a new Pentecostal church, Bible Life Ministries (hereafter BLM), and its promise of power. I will argue that BLM employs various means to create an image of power, building hope and expectation in those who attend. The explicit content of the promise of power is summarized in their Believers Class Lessons booklet ([S.a.]:32) as follows: “Omnipotent power, the power of the Holy Spirit, is available to you, to enable you to live a holy and fruitful

³⁰ From his book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

life for Jesus Christ". This power from the Holy Spirit is meant to transform lives and lead to prosperity, health and success.

The first section of the chapter provides a brief history of the founder and an overview of the growth of BLM. In the following sections three issues will be addressed. The first of these deals with the nature and content of the BLM promise of power. I will illustrate the manner in which BLM uses various technologies and symbols to create an image of power that is modern, prosperous, global and holistic. The explicit message of power promulgated at BLM promises to help believers find purpose for their lives, make progress in their lives, experience prosperity in all areas of life and emerge victorious over all forms of opposition. The second issue to be explored is the source of promised power. Here the focus is on the triune God. Each member of the Trinity is understood to be both omnipotent as well as immediately accessible. The third and final section investigates the various ways in which BLM members access the promised power. A number of subjects will be considered including the new birth experience, baptism, praise and worship, prayer, fasting, faith and the role of church leadership. By focussing on the nature, source and means of accessing the promised power, I intend to provide a better understanding of the appeal of BLM.

3.2 HISTORY AND GROWTH OF BIBLE LIFE MINISTRIES (BLM)

Bible Life Ministries was introduced to Botswana in August of 1987 by Dr. Enock Sitima³¹ (born 1958), a Malawian national, and his Motswana wife, Tshegofatso. Sunday morning worship services began on 10 January 1988 with just

³¹ Although Dr. Sitima does not have an earned doctorate, he uses the appellation to signify his position and authority in the church. For further discussion of this point, see 3.6.4 and 4.2.1.

10 people attending the original meeting. By 1991 the congregation had grown to 500 with a membership of approximately 300. At present the congregation in Gaborone numbers over 3000 with approximately 1500 members comprised of people from over 30 different nationalities. The ministry has expanded and now has 12 additional branches,³² 16 paid staff as well as a fully functional Bible school (Bannerman 2000:2).³³

Dr. Sitima was originally invited to come to Botswana in 1984 to address a group of students at the University of Botswana as well as other groups including the Scripture Union. Although raised in a climate of poverty in Blantyre, he was by that time employed as an assistant manager of the Bata Shoe Company in Malawi, while also engaging in ministry on a voluntary basis. Originally from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, he had experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and begun to speak in tongues in 1980 when he joined the Assemblies of God. Tshogofatso Sitima, his future wife, was at that time actively involved in the Scripture Union and a member of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. During his visit, they met and were then married in 1985. Shortly thereafter Mrs. Sitima went to the United States to study at Cornell University. Dr. Sitima followed and helped establish a Pentecostal church in Ithaca, New York. During their years in the United States (1985-1987), Dr. Sitima developed a close relationship with Doyle "Buddy" Harrison of Faith Christian Fellowship International, a close associate of the well-known prosperity preacher, Kenneth Haggin, Sr. In a personal interview, Rev. T. Sitima (Dr. Sitima's wife and now an ordained pastor at BLM) shared that it was while in the United States that

³² In addition to the original church in Gaborone, branches are located in Mochudi, Mahalapye, Palapye, Selebi Phikwe, Francistown, Maun, Kasane, Gantsi, Jwaneng, Molepolole, Lobatse and Kanye. Total attendance in these branches is approximately 1400 (Tshiping 2002).

³³ Additional information was supplied in personal interviews with E. Sitima (23 April and 17 May 2002), T. Tshiping (8 May 2002) and E. Bannerman (17 May, 2002).

they felt God's call to establish a vibrant, success orientated church in Botswana, one that would meet the needs of young people and reach out to professionals.³⁴

Dr. M. Phuthego, one of the founding members of BLM, states that it is the vision of the full and abundant life, as Jesus promised his disciples in John 10:10, that has guided this ministry from its inception.³⁵ That vision has been articulated as follows: "Bible Life Ministries Mission is to bring God's life to people in a manner that is practical and relevant to the society and its needs; the mandate is being fulfilled in everything that the ministry sets forth to do" (Bannerman 2000:98). Much of the rest of this chapter is concerned with understanding how BLM understands "God's life" as well as with how "God's life" is brought to the people.

3.3 THE PROMISE OF POWER

It is clear that BLM members do not hesitate to use the language of power as the discussion below will demonstrate (especially 3.3.3). But the production and use of power is not always immediately recognized or understood, even by those who wield that power. Before considering the BLM promise of power in detail, it is necessary to discuss briefly a framework for understanding the dynamics of power.

3.3.1 The Dynamics of Power

In chapter 1, Ruth Marshall-Fratini's observation concerning the importance of power for new Pentecostal churches was highlighted (1.6.1). In one of her earliest articles (1991:36) she provides a lengthy quote from a work by Achille Mbembe:

The logic of Christianity is an imperial logic in the sense that it ties together in the same network the construction of organising concepts of the world here below and on high with an 'imaginaire' of power, of authority, of society, of time, of justice and of dreams; in short, of history and its ultimate truth.

³⁴ Personal Interview, 14 May, 2002.

³⁵ Personal Interview, 11 May, 2002.

The distinction between 'temporal power' and 'spiritual power' is therefore in a sense, artificial (Marshall-Fratini's translation).

Marshall-Fratini argues that this general description of Christianity largely explains the specific vision of new Pentecostal churches. Their goal is to provide a new way of organizing the world, a holistic vision that binds together temporal and spiritual realities. But more than just offer a vision; they also promise the power to transform an individual's spiritual, social and economic world.

Marshall-Fratini's discussion of power is helpful but in some ways does not go far enough, for it does not explain the inner dynamics of power. More helpful in this regard is the work of Jean and John Comaroff. In their book, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, they include an important explanation of the relations between culture, ideology, hegemony, power and consciousness (1991:19-31). Their primary concern is the manner in which dominated cultures both succumb to and resist dominating cultures. Their discussion is especially pertinent to this study in that they have outlined the way in which power is experienced within culture in terms of a series of continua. Robin Petersen (1996:220) has diagrammed these continua as follows (see figure 2):

Power:	Non-agentive	< ----- >	Agentive
Consciousness:	Unconscious	< ----- >	Conscious
Power & Culture:	Hegemony	< ----- >	Ideology

Figure 2: Continua of Power

The poles of the continua should not be understood as diametrical opposites, for social life or culture is in constant flux, subject to change and constantly moving back and forth. With regard to power, the central concern of this study, the Comaroff's argue that there are two primary ways that it is experienced: the agentive and the nonagentive modes. They define the agentive mode as "the (relative) capacity of human beings to shape the actions and perceptions of others by

exercising control over the production, circulation, and consumption of signs and objects, over the making of both subjectivities and realities” (1991:22). This is the active, and most often visible, ability to influence others directly. In the nonagentive mode, power is often hidden, or at least difficult to see. Here power can be ascribed to transcendental or supernatural forces such as gods or ancestors as well as to nature or physics. Although these forms of power are beyond human control they are often internalized at a subliminal level in everyday activities, values and habits.

When considering the promised power of BLM it is useful to note that the focus is primarily on agentive power, the conscious use of power to influence one’s circumstances or other people. BLM members claim that they have access to spiritual power that enables them to manage or perhaps overcome other forces with which they come into contact. It is also important to note that agentive power comes in various forms – as signs, symbols, ideas and representations. The production and control of these forms is foundational to maintaining power.

Before concluding this discussion one further point needs to be made regarding the relation between power and ideology. As the continua suggest, the conscious employment of power is closely related to the promotion of an ideology. The Comaroff’s were concerned to demonstrate how dominated groups use their ideologies (counter-worldviews, counter-symbolic and ideational structures and visions) to resist the mastery of those more powerful (see R. Petersen 1996:222). They define ideology as “an articulated system of meanings, values and beliefs of a kind that can be abstracted as the ‘worldview’ of any social grouping. [It is] borne in explicit manifestos and everyday practices, self-conscious texts and spontaneous images, popular styles and political platforms” (1991:24). Ideologies are most often formulated in relation to hegemonies or other ideologies. In chapter 2 I sought to

demonstrate how both western and Setswana cultures have become the major ideologies in Botswana. In chapter 4 I will seek to demonstrate how BLM relates to these two cultures, or ideologies, in their attempt to help their followers gain control over their lives. However before doing so I want to spend the rest of this chapter describing the BLM ideology, their “promise of power.”

3.3.2 A Powerful Image

As mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter, the first issue to be addressed is the ability of BLM to create an image of power. As suggested above, power as experienced within new Pentecostal churches must be understood in a holistic manner including both spiritual and temporal realities. Furthermore in the attempt to understand the BLM promise of power one must consider signs and symbols of power, not just the words spoken. The image of power projected by BLM is one that is modern, prosperous, global and holistic.

3.3.2.1 Modern

Upon arrival at BLM one is immediately struck by the youthfulness of the congregation. Although exact figures were impossible to obtain, it is estimated that 85% of the congregation is under 35 years of age. This is no accident as BLM cultivates an image of youth, modernity and relevance to today's world. In fact the logo on the church sign reads, “The church for today's world”. But beyond the explicit claim to being modern, signs and symbols of modernity abound. The worship centre, a large rectangular structure does not look like a traditional church building but more like a warehouse.³⁶ Inside one does not find church pews but

³⁶ BLM is in the process of erecting a large church structure that will include a worship auditorium seating 3800 people, a smaller chapel for weddings and funerals, Christian education classrooms and office space. The estimated cost is Pula 7.5 million (Rand 12 million). To this point, over Pula 1 million has been raised and the church foundation laid. A model of the new church structure, referred to as the Lord's City Complex, is prominently displayed at the front of the present church.

1600 individual chairs. Modern western instruments such as keyboard, electric guitars, trumpet, saxophone and a drum set are employed for praise and worship along with bongos and tambourine. A prominent feature is the use of modern sound equipment including cordless and tie-clip microphones as well as video technology. By magnifying the voice of the worship leaders and preachers, a larger than life image is created – an image of power and importance.

Other symbols of modernity are also obvious including the use of an electronic signboard at the front of the church in order to provide words for the songs as well as to make announcements (one of the most frequent of which is for people to switch off their cell phones during services). During one of the Easter services, a number of young adults performed a drama set in a workplace – all of them walked in, sat at desks and opened their laptop computers.³⁷ By means both subtle and blatant the message is communicated that this church is in tune with the power of modernity and technology.

3.3.2.2 Prosperous

Closely related to the previous point, it would be difficult not to gain the impression that BLM cultivates an image of prosperity and professionalism. The message of prosperity is communicated even in the church parking lot, full with 300 or more vehicles (many of them high priced models). People at BLM dress well, especially those who serve in highly visible ministries such as the worship team and pastors. Within the worship centre itself prosperity and power are proclaimed in the stage décor. The wall behind the stage and the stage itself are covered in a red, gold and purple material suggesting royalty. The same is true of the chairs on the stage. The royal message is reinforced by a large banner hanging near the front of

³⁷ PM Worship Service (30 March 2002).

the church that reads “Jesus – Kings of Kings” and includes the image of a crown. The décor, combined with the various modern technologies present, create the image that the stage is a place of both regal power and modern prosperity.

More will be mentioned later concerning the message of prosperity at BLM (see 3.3.3.3) but the significance of money – hard currency and cheques – must be noted at this point. While suggestions of prosperity abound cash is the preeminent symbol of financial prosperity and power. During regular offerings, referred to as “worshipping God with our substance”, large plastic bowls are passed around to collect the congregation’s tithes and offerings enabling all to see how much has been given. In addition, during sermons it is common for people go forward and lay large denomination Pula³⁸ notes on the stage. Most public of all are the impromptu offerings that are occasionally taken when people are asked to publicly pledge large amounts of money.³⁹ Money signifies power and by frequently displaying symbols of wealth BLM conveys the message that power is found within the church.

3.3.2.3 Global

One of the fascinating features of BLM is their ability to attract both Batswana and expatriates. Although the congregation is predominantly Batswana (approximately 75%), a great deal of effort is expended into making it appeal to

³⁸ The Botswana currency is known as Pula, which is also the Setswana word for “rain”, the primary symbol of prosperity in this dry country.

³⁹ On successive Sundays in May 2002, two remarkable offerings were taken. On the first (12 May) Dr. Sitima expressed great dissatisfaction with the sound system in the church and urged the congregation to contribute towards a new system. He estimated it would cost P25,000. He immediately pledged P1000 and asked others to join with him. In less than three minutes the total amount was pledged by those matching Dr. Sitima's amount. But far more phenomenal was the offering the following Sunday (19 May) when the visiting pastor, Felix Omobude from Nigeria, encouraged the congregation to give towards the completion of the church's building program. He promised to give P20,000 towards the project and then asked for people to come forward who would pledge to give P20,000 within three months (14 responded), then P10,000 (15 responded), then P5000 (close to 45 responded), then P2500 (approximately 50 responded) and finally P1000 (perhaps as many as 150 people came forward). In one service approximately P950,000 was pledged towards the building project.

people of all nationalities (but most especially African). Both the pastoral team and the elders committee are comprised of equal numbers of Batswana and expatriates. Perhaps the nature of the Sitima's marriage (one Motswana and one Malawian) mirrors in some ways the nature of BLM. But the global/local relationship finds expression in other important ways as well such the use of English in all services,⁴⁰ the prominent display of 20 different flags hanging from the rafters of the worship centre and the frequent visits of internationally known ministers and evangelists.⁴¹ By emphasizing the global, BLM promises new ideas and the ability to access power not yet experienced.

At the same time BLM seems to recognize that for members to benefit from the global experience many still need an anchor to the local context. To provide that anchor, translation into Setswana is provided in many of the services. Another more subtle way of blending the global and local often takes place during the praise and worship session of a service. Contemporary worship songs from North America, African Pentecostal choruses and Setswana hymns are combined to create an enriching blend of Setswana, African and global worship.⁴² While affirming the local context, mixing songs in this manner also communicates an important message. The congregation is encouraged to see themselves as part of something bigger, as

⁴⁰ On Sunday morning, BLM has an 8:00 am worship service in which English is the only spoken language. At 11:00 am and at all other services, they employ Setswana speaking translators.

⁴¹ In the first five months of 2002, three international speakers spoke at BLM: Mensa Otabil of Nigeria in February, Ronald Bruce of the U.S.A. during the Easter conference and another Nigerian, Felix Omobude, in May. Dr. Sitima (24 March 2002) declared that BLM is a "governing territorial church – a gate for the entrance for the power of God" because these foreign speakers bring special teaching and spiritual power that would not come to Botswana if it were not for BLM.

⁴² A good example of this blending took place during the 24 March 2002 service. First a western chorus, "Holy, Holy, Holy," was sung. It was immediately followed by a traditional hymn, "*Ke tla opa ka diatla*" (I will clap my hands) from the Sesotho hymnal, *Lifela tsa Sione* (Hymns of Zion). The final two songs were an African Pentecostal chorus, "Worthy, worthy is the Lamb," and a Setswana chorus, "*Tsoitlhe di etswa ke wena*" (All things come from you).

part of a powerful worldwide movement, even as they stand and worship on Botswana soil.

3.3.3.4 Participatory

To attend a service at BLM and not participate in some manner is an almost impossible task. During the praise and worship the congregation is encouraged to stand, clap or raise their hands, dance and shout while singing. Extended periods of time (up to 15 minutes) are taken in each service for the entire congregation to pray individually. During this prayer time, some kneel, some stand, others raise their hands, all while prayers are offered in various languages and many pray in tongues. Often one hears cries, shouts of joy or laughter. People are encouraged to give vent to their emotions and worship in whatever manner they feel led. Tears are shed, some fall down under the power of the Spirit while others sit quietly seeking to hear from God.

According to Rev. T. Sitima, the pastor in charge of worship, BLM desires to involve everyone in all aspects of their being in the act of worship – worship is not a place for spectators but for active participants.⁴³ Full participation is even emphasized during the actual preaching sessions as the pastors often exhort those gathered to repeat to the one sitting next to them short phrases of encouragement. “Tell your neighbor that it’s good to be in the house of the Lord!” is a common refrain. Dr. Sitima encourages people to respond with “Amen!” when they agree with him and often asks the congregation, “Are we together?” Other times the entire congregation repeats key concepts after the pastor in a type of responsive dialogue. Finally, almost every service includes a call to come forward for salvation, healing or some other blessing.

⁴³ Personal Interview (14 May 2002).

For anyone unaccustomed to this type of worship, and especially the phenomenon of speaking in tongues, it may be uncomfortable but it also communicates that one is in the presence of something unusual, perhaps something supernatural, and certainly something powerful. The confluence of the various elements listed above both generates power as well as creates a tremendous expectation of power in an individual. One is both drawn in by the crowd and symbols as well as encouraged to desire the power that seems so evident all around. For people arriving at BLM in need of help, all signs suggest that they have arrived at the right place.

3.3.3 Promised Power

The previous section explored the ways in which an image of power is created through various elements and symbols at BLM. In this section the more explicit content of the promise of power is delineated.

3.3.3.1 Power and Purpose for Life

Every Sunday the electronic signboard at the front of the church proclaims the BLM mission statement: “transforming life into God’s kind of life and success”. Referring to passages such as Jeremiah 29:11 and Ephesians 2:10, Dr. Sitima often reminds the congregation that God has a purpose for each person’s life – a plan for a good life, a life without failure or struggle.⁴⁴ In the BLM Believers Class Lessons ([S.a.]: 32), purpose and power are intimately linked:

The Christian life is a great adventure. It is a life of purpose and power. Christ has given us the almost unbelievable promise, *“He who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do ...”* (John 14:12,13) (italics in original).

⁴⁴ AM Worship Service (27 January 2002).

During one of his sermons, Dr. Sitima exhorted each member of the congregation to turn to their neighbor and tell them, "There is unlimited power and it is available".⁴⁵

This is power for all and it is intended to touch all areas of life. God's purpose for life is accomplished by his power in those believers who choose to take hold of it. But what does this power to experience "God's kind of life" look like?

3.3.3.2 Power for Progress

At BLM power is often pictured in terms of the ability to move forward. Dr. Sitima is referred to as a "mover", a person with vision,⁴⁶ and he himself claims that "I'm taking you somewhere".⁴⁷ This emphasis on progress taps into a deep need as BLM itself acknowledges. One of their hand-outs states: "In life there are very few people if none [sic] who do not desire to make progress. Spiritually people desire to see progress in their lives, in their souls, in their minds, in their bodies, in their finances and in their relationships".⁴⁸ The "born again" believer, having surrendered their life to Jesus as Lord and Savior, breaks free from the past and moves forward in confidence. They believe that they can experience a better life, a life of victory over sin, struggle and over Satan and his evil forces.

The promise of a better life is well illustrated by Dr. Sitima's 'guarantee' to new believers at the end of a service that their lives would be more successful within one year or they should feel free to leave the church.⁴⁹ If they stayed for three years without change, then he would close the church! While he was obviously engaging

⁴⁵ PM Worship Service (21 April 2002).

⁴⁶ S. Sibanda, Personal Interview (14 May 2002).

⁴⁷ AM Worship Service (17 March 2002).

⁴⁸ Taken from a hand-out given to people attending Home Care Groups (23 April 2002).

⁴⁹ AM Worship Service (27 January 2002).

in homiletic rhetoric, it is clear that a better life is expected, and expected immediately. The closing words of one of Dr. Sitima's prayers attests to their belief in the immediacy of this power for progress: "I bless you with the miracle of the suddenly, I bless you with the miracle with immediate results, I bless you with the miracle of power of the same hour right now!"⁵⁰

3.3.3.3 Power for Prosperity

Dr. Sitima unabashedly refers to himself as a "prosperity preacher". At BLM prosperity however should not be defined in the narrow sense of financial wealth. Prosperity refers to the full experience of the abundant life including building a positive self-image, enjoying an enriching marriage and healthy family life, experiencing good health as well as finding satisfaction and financial success in one's business or career. The power for this kind of life is there if one makes the choice. This is perhaps one of the most important teachings at BLM – each individual is important and they have the power to choose. As one visiting speaker, Ronald Bruce, put it: "the amount of power we experience is not up to God but up to us – we can be full of power if we want to be".⁵¹ Church members are often reminded that they do not have to be victims for they are God's children, created in His image, indwelt by the living Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit and people worthy to be loved. As one song puts it: "You are awesome *in my life*, Mighty God". The emphasis is on the individual and their ability to access the power of God.

Healing as part of the message of prosperity at BLM is also readily apparent. Based on Isaiah 53:5, the church teaches that Christ's redemptive work provides the grounds for the healing of every believer. Sickness is linked not only to the Fall but

⁵⁰ AM Worship Service (21 April 2002).

⁵¹ PM Worship Service (29 March 2002).

to Satanic and demonic forces. Diseases are often referred to as spirits (of cancer or AIDS, for example) which need to be cast out. God is our healer (Exodus 15:26), and it is His intention that all experience a long life (Exodus 23:25-26).⁵²

Testimonies of healing abounded in both formal and informal interviews with BLM members attesting to the significance of this aspect of the church's ministry.

Finally, when considering the power of prosperity, the importance of financial success in the BLM message cannot be ignored.⁵³ Deuteronomy 8:18 is one of the favorite texts used in this regard: "Remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Bible, KJV). Wealth is not something to be despised but rather to be welcomed. God never intended for Christians to be poor but rather to enjoy God's gifts as well as use their money to spread the gospel message all around the globe. More will be said below concerning how this wealth is accessed but it should be mentioned that BLM strongly promotes financial success by means of training people in business management and career planning. The Champion's Club, a men's group, helps men to build business contacts and learn from those who have been successful. BLM publishes its own Business Directory to encourage church members to frequent each other's businesses.

3.3.3.4 Power for Spiritual Victory

As has already been suggested, a key component of the promised power is that born again believers are able to overcome Satan and his demonic forces. This includes the ability to cast out evil spirits (deliverance), repel curses and experience victory over witchcraft. As one of their popular choruses affirms:

⁵² PM Worship Service (29 January 2002).

⁵³ The strong connection between divine healing and financial prosperity was underscored in an evening worship service (21 April 2002) during which Dr. Sitima asserted that God had told him that he was sending two angels to BLM that evening: the angels of prosperity and of healing. These angels were there to bless all those present.

Victory is mine, Victory is mine!
 Victory today is mine!
 God told Satan, get thee behind me!
 Victory today is mine!

It is important in this regard to note the close connection between spiritual and temporal reality for people at BLM. The spiritual battle raging in the heavenlies between God and Satan directly impacts one's life on earth. The devil and his forces have actual power that can harm and harass human beings but the good news is that God has given believers power to experience victory and the abundant, prosperous life right now. One does not have to live in fear because the believer has already "overcome the wicked one" (I John 2:13-14; KJV) and "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4; KJV).⁵⁴ Power is present within the born again believer; all they need to do is believe that God is willing to help them.

3.4 THE SOURCE OF PROMISED POWER

The previous section (3.3) explored the nature of the promised power – how it is represented and what it promises to do in the life of the believer. At this point I will consider the source of the promised power. That God is the ultimate source of power is beyond dispute at BLM. What is interesting to note however is how each person of the Trinity is viewed as all-powerful and also immediately accessible. It is important to note this Trinitarian emphasis as it is sometimes assumed that new Pentecostals focus almost entirely on the power of the Spirit. Although the power of the Spirit is heavily emphasized, God the Father and Jesus the Son are not ignored.

The importance BLM places on the power of God the Father is well represented by one of the songs referred to earlier.

⁵⁴ PM Worship Service (12 May 2002).

You are awesome in my life, *Mighty God*,
 You are awesome in my life, *Abba Father*.
 You are worthy of our praise,
 to you our lives we raise,
 You are awesome in my life, *Mighty God* (italics mine).

God is a mighty God, able to conquer every foe but God is also a Father, who loves his children and seeks to bless, not curse them. Edmund Bannerman said it simply: “When I was born again, God became real. The God of the Bible, the Father of Jesus Christ was not just the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he is my God. I can talk to him myself – he loves me and cares for me.”⁵⁵ For BLM members, God the Father is powerful, and he wants to empower his children.

When considering Jesus, the music at BLM again illustrates the close connection between Jesus’ power and his immediacy to the believer. Songs such as “Jesus is mine, everywhere I go” and the familiar hymn “What a friend we have in Jesus” stress that Jesus is ever present. At the same time numerous choruses such as “Jesus, your name is power”, “Jesus you are the King of Kings” and “Jesus is the answer” all emphasize the power of Christ. The blood of Jesus, his death, has power because through it believers have forgiveness of sins, healing and even financial prosperity.⁵⁶

As the faithful Son of God, Jesus is the connection, the link, the only one able to provide access to the Father (John 14:6). Moreover his indwelling (Galatians 2:20) or abiding presence (John 15:1-7) within the born again believer provides the key to accessing spiritual power. The Believers Class Lessons ([S.a.]:29) drive home the point:

In order to experience God’s power in your life, you must come to the understanding that you can live in conscious dependence upon Christ,

⁵⁵ Personal Interview (17 May 2002). Also T. Tshiping, Personal Interview (8 May 2002).

⁵⁶ AM Worship Service (31 March 2002).

recognizing that it is His power, His wisdom, His resources, His strength and His ability – His very life – *operating through you*, which will enable you to live an abundant, victorious life (*italics in original*).

But even as Jesus was dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit during his earthly life, BLM also teaches that Jesus gives believers the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's purposes in their lives.

As expected the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in the BLM promise of power for without the Spirit, the believer can do nothing. As with the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit too is pictured as both full of power and intimately related to the believer. A chorus like "Anointing, fall on me, let the power of the Holy Ghost fall on me" emphasizes power while "Holy Spirit move me now, make my life whole again" expresses a longing for the Spirit to touch all aspects of a person's being. The Holy Spirit is a friend who leads the believer to a better future:

(1) Blessed Holy Spirit,
You are the joy of my soul.
*As you lead the way,
My life keeps getting better.*

(2) My friend, Holy Spirit,
You are the joy of my soul.
*As you lead the way,
My life keeps getting better (italics mine).*

The Holy Spirit as breath, breathes into the believer, as oil anoints the believer and as water cleanses and purifies the believer. As one interviewee put it, "life without the Holy Spirit is like an engine without petrol".⁵⁷

At BLM, God the Father is clearly all-powerful and Jesus indwells the born again believer but the role of the Holy Spirit is emphasized most strongly. One cannot feel the indwelling presence of Christ, but when the Spirit overwhelms a person and they fall down, begin to laugh uncontrollably or most often speak in unknown tongues there is no doubt that something powerful has happened. An experience of the Spirit is one that impacts the mind, body and emotions – it is a

⁵⁷ M. Ofithile, Personal Interview (10 May 2002).

holistic experience. As will emerge below power for BLM members is preeminently available to those who have been baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit but it is not the only way to access power.

3.5 ACCESSING THE PROMISED POWER

For the promise of power to have any effect on the world in which BLM believers inhabit, there must be ways of accessing that power. As will be demonstrated some of these are non-repeatable experiences while others are encouraged on an on-going basis.

3.5.1 Spiritual Rebirth and Water Baptism

The importance of being “born again”, to experience a spiritual rebirth, is driven home at BLM by the calls given at the end of nearly every service to come to the front of the church and surrender one’s life to Jesus as Saviour and Lord. No one can experience any aspect of the abundant life until they take this important first step into the kingdom of God. The significance of this act is underscored by an excerpt from a call issued by Dr. Sitima on Easter Sunday:

The Bible says the wages of sin is death, so you are either of God or you are of Satan, you are either of the light or you are of darkness. You are either of the love of God, or the hate of God. I want to give you an opportunity this morning before we close today.... I want you to come out of the hands of Satan and darkness.... Do you want to come alive in God, do you want the Lord to raise you from a dead spirit to a spirit that is alive toward God? To do that is simple, just by the accepting the prayer of salvation.⁵⁸

To be born again is an act of changing allegiance, from serving Satan to serving God. One experiences a spiritual rebirth (John 3:3) involving a person’s will,

⁵⁸ AM Worship Service (31 Mach 2002).

emotions and intellect – the old sin nature has been crucified and the Spirit of Jesus now lives within.

One of the benefits of the new birth experience is the forgiveness of sin. Just as importantly, BLM also teaches that when one receives the Lord Jesus the actual sin nature is put to death (Romans 6:6). This frees the new believer to experience victory over sin and enables a gradual transformation into the image of Christ. As one person put it, “Jesus is the one controlling my life so I don’t struggle with some sins like I used to”.⁵⁹ To confirm this experience, born again believers are encouraged to undergo water baptism by immersion. Baptism is not only viewed as a symbolic participation in Christ’s death and resurrection but also the spiritual burial of the old sinful nature. “Baptism therefore allows for the spiritual burial of the body of sin which is now dead and a resurrection into new life (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12)” (Believers Class Lessons n.d.:11). Water baptism has power for the believer because by burying the old sin nature, Satan no longer has access to the believer as he once did.

3.5.2 Covenants and Spiritual Deliverance

BLM teaches that when a person is born again they make a new covenant with God through Christ Jesus. This covenant supercedes all other covenants and makes one a child of God (John 1:12), and therefore an heir to all the other covenant promises of God found in the Bible, in particular those made to Abraham (see Galatians 3:13-14,29). In this respect Dr. Sitima can confidently claim that “nothing can stop the person with a covenant with God. When I hear of covenant, I know I am a winner”.⁶⁰ That is the positive aspect of covenant teaching in BLM.

⁵⁹ A. Chalwe, Personal Interview (11 May 2002).

⁶⁰ PM Worship Service (29 March 2002). Also AM Worship Service (28 April 2002).

But covenants can also have negative and harmful effects. As was evident from the excerpt from Dr. Sitima's altar call (see 3.5.1), one either has made a covenant with God or with Satan – "everything is covenant based".⁶¹ Previous covenants, whether entered into personally or by one's parents, can allow or actively encourage malignant spirits to enter or harass a person. No distinction is made between demonic spirits and ancestral spirits (*badimo*) as ancestral spirits are believed to be "familiar" spirits, demons disguised as one's deceased relatives.⁶² When a person is born again they must break all previous spiritual covenants, and traditional doctors (*dingaka*) must be avoided at all costs for they employ demonic or ancestral power. Also noteworthy in this regard is the antipathy shown towards Spiritual Churches as they are believed to use various rituals and elements (e.g., uniforms, cords, water) to bind their adherents in spiritual covenants.

This is where deliverance ministry comes into play. The elders at BLM lead Freedom Classes for all new believers. Although not only intended to help those harassed by evil spirits this is a major emphasis in these counseling sessions. New believers are encouraged to break free from the past by renouncing all previously known spiritual covenants. The name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit are invoked in prayer to drive out any unclean spirits. According to those interviewed, demonic manifestations are not uncommon especially among those with a background in Spiritual Churches or those from the homes of traditional doctors.⁶³

⁶¹ M. Mokgwathise, Personal Interview (8 May 2002).

⁶² B. Keleneilwe, Personal Interview (30 April 2002), and G. Kganchaba, Personal Interview (8 August 2002).

⁶³ S. Sibanda, Personal Interview (14 May 2002), and M. Mokgwathise, Personal Interview (8 May 2002).

3.5.3 Baptism of the Spirit and Tongues

The power of Spirit-filled believers was mentioned above in connection with deliverance ministry. Nothing is more important for a Christian than experiencing the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit except for being born again. Among those interviewed there was general agreement that all born again believers have received a measure of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:9), but one must be baptized in the Spirit in order to experience the full presence and power of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is as simple as surrendering completely to God in faith and asking him to fill you with the Spirit, often accompanied by the laying on of hands by a Spirit anointed leader. Luke 11:13 (NIV) is a favorite text in this regard: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Having asked for the Spirit, one needs only to believe in order to receive the power of the Spirit.

Historic or classical Pentecostalism has always taught that the initial evidence of the baptism of the Spirit is speaking in tongues (Hollenweger 1972:342-344). BLM also strongly emphasizes speaking in tongues but some of the church leaders⁶⁴ suggested that not all those baptized in the Spirit necessarily speak in tongues immediately. Some of the other chief evidences of having been baptized in the Spirit were boldness in sharing Christ with non-believers, displaying the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), victory over sinful habits and the practice of other spiritual gifts as recorded in I Corinthians 12-14.

Nevertheless speaking in tongues still figures prominently in any discussion of Spirit baptism at BLM. The biblical examples found in the book of Acts (2:4; 10:46;

⁶⁴ For example, B. Keloneilwe and M. Phuthogo.

19:6) are used as evidence that those filled with the Spirit will speak in unknown languages. Tongues edify (or empower) the believer, and provide an important link to spiritual power as they are believed to act as the doorway by which other spiritual gifts are accessed – “the other gifts flow from this gift”.⁶⁵ Tongues help in prayer as believers can communicate with God even when unable to express themselves in their natural language. Furthermore, tongues offer special benefits during spiritual warfare and intercession as the devil is believed to be unable to understand when the believer speaks in tongues (Believers Class Lessons [S.a.]:39). As is often said, the born again, Spirit filled, tongues speaking child of God is a powerful individual!

3.5.4 Power in Community

BLM teaches that the church, the gathered body of believers, is where one can best access spiritual power. Three of the most obvious ways to do so are through charismatic leadership, Spirit-led praise and home care groups. The first, charismatic leadership, was cited by those interviewed as one of the prime reasons for the growth of BLM. Dr. Sitima is regarded as a spiritually gifted leader who provides both vision and inspiring messages that are applicable to daily life. Not only does he communicate extremely well orally but he also has an incredible stage presence. When he begins to dance, sing and even jump during worship, the congregation follows his lead almost as if he were a rock star! The image of the charismatic leader is further cultivated through his titles: Apostle and Man of God.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ E. Bannerman, Personal Interview (17 May 2002).

⁶⁶ Apostle and Man of God appear to be titles gaining currency among new Pentecostals. D.D. Monnakgosi of Good News Ministries in Gaborone, another rapidly growing church in Botswana, also uses these titles. “Man of God” most likely is drawn from the Old Testament, while “Apostle” is the New Testament designation with both having connotations to individuals with unique spiritual empowerment (see 2 Kings 1-2 and I Corinthians 12).

The congregation is repeatedly warned not to “disconnect with their Man of God”.⁶⁷ He is viewed as one important conduit of spiritual power into their lives.

However he is not the only human link to power. The entire leadership of the church is believed to offer spiritual power and protection. Near the end of most services people are encouraged to come forward for prayer during which Dr. Sitima and other leaders lay hands on those who have responded. In this manner spiritual power is mediated to individuals and it is common to see people fall down, cry out or in some other manner demonstrate the reception of this power. Church leadership is also believed to offer spiritual protection. During a ceremony receiving new members, the church leadership covenanted with them “to release [the] spiritual covering of this local church upon you and your life”.⁶⁸ Leaders at BLM are perceived to be people of power who are able to transmit that power to others.⁶⁹

As a gathered community, a second way in which BLM members are encouraged to access power for life is through praise and worship. Most services include at least 45 minutes of singing interspersed with periods of congregational prayer. As mentioned earlier worship is a highly charged event involving the whole person. Worship songs are repeated ten and even more times, while the words are often personalized and individualized. For example, “What a mighty God we serve” is modified to “I serve a mighty God”. The BLM welcome pamphlet asserts that “as you enter into praise and worship with us, you will be lifted, encouraged and healed.

⁶⁷ AM Worship Service (17 March 2002).

⁶⁸ AM Worship Service (19 May 2002). During the same service Dr. Sitima also claimed at one point that “no demon in hell can bother you now because you have the covering of the church”.

⁶⁹ The connection of spiritual and temporal power is especially evident in the makeup of the church leadership. Professionalism and the promise of power are closely related as all the leaders I met at BLM came from the professional class. They included accountants, doctors, consultants and business people.

You will experience praise in music in the way God intended it to be joyful, exuberant, worshipful and reverent". All those participating can experience God in whatever way best meets their needs, for the Spirit moves in different people in different ways – what really matters is the spiritual experience.

One final way of accessing power in the community setting is through home care groups. BLM strongly encourages all of its members to join these groups in order that they grow in their faith. At present there are 68 groups with approximately 400 people attending. There are additional groups for teenagers, young adults and men's and women's groups that together may include another 500 people. The word 'care' in home care groups is an acronym standing for 'contact, assistance, relationship, encouragement'. The emphasis is on meeting one another's spiritual, emotional and perhaps physical needs in the small group setting.⁷⁰ The promise of power is less explicit in this context but no less important for here, as is the case in the large congregation, the focus is on hearing, believing, confessing and obeying the Word.

3.5.5 Triad of Power – Word, Faith, Prayer

The front of the BLM weekly programme of events boldly proclaims that BLM is "preaching the power of God's Word". The Bible, the Word of God, is believed to possess incredible power to change life. It is the "blueprint for life", the "strainer" used to evaluate culture and the "seed" that when planted in the heart can create growth and life.⁷¹ However to understand the Word correctly one must have the Spirit of God as natural intelligence may actually obscure the message instead of

⁷⁰ S. Sibanda, Personal Interview (14 May 2002).

⁷¹ These descriptions are from T. Mokaila, Personal Interview (20 May 2002), M. Mokgwathise, Personal Interview (8 May 2002), and E. Bannerman, Personal Interview (17 May 2002).

illuminate it. To really benefit from what the Bible teaches one has to accept the Word by faith.

According to one of the church elders, Edmund Bannerman, the Word of God creates an image of what is possible in a person's heart – it builds hope. For example, if someone is ill they need to “get the Word for healing and sow it into their heart, speak it out of their mouth and renew their mind with it”.⁷² The same is true concerning finances or family problems. To access God's power is as simple as finding specific texts that speak to one's particular problem and then focusing on those texts. The way to build faith is to confess the Word, speak it out and give thanks for what God has already done. To express doubt is a sure way of destroying the seed of the Word that has been planted.⁷³ As one of the favorite BLM choruses puts it: “God will do what he said he will do, so don't be surprised when it happens”.

Confessing the Word is understood as an expression of faith. Faith and obedience, or applying the Word, are seen as a single act. Cognitive or intellectual belief is frowned upon for the key is to act upon the Word that has been sown in one's heart. In fact a person cannot expect to reap God's blessings unless they have been obedient. The “seed faith” principle is especially evident in the BLM teaching regarding giving. As mentioned above BLM unashamedly teaches a gospel of financial prosperity. While the church empowers its members through seminars on sound financial management and positive work habits, it also strongly encourages people to believe that if they give faithfully and generously they should expect to

⁷² E. Bannerman, Personal Interview (17 May 2002).

⁷³ The primary Scripture text used to support this doctrine is Mark 11:22-24: “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen; it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Bible, NIV).

receive as much and more back from God. If a believer wants to increase their quality of life and financial holdings, they need to scatter their "seed money" in faith so that they can obtain a bountiful financial harvest.⁷⁴

Since prayer has already been alluded to in this discussion only a few additional points are necessary. The way to the Father is through prayer in Jesus' name. For this reason "few experiences can equal prayer in empowering Christians and lifting them above their problems", according to the Believers Class Lessons ([S.a.]:17). At BLM great emphasis is put on both personal and corporate prayer. Daily prayer meetings are held at the church from 5:00-6:00 am, and prayer is an integral part of every church service. Along with prayer, fasting is strongly encouraged.⁷⁵ During January and June of each year the congregation is enjoined to fast and seek the Lord's blessing. It is believed that by following Jesus' example (Matthew 4:1-2), believers are drawn closer to God for as they "humble the body, the spirit is lifted".⁷⁶ At BLM faith in the promises of Scripture, prayer and fasting are considered sure ways of accessing the power of God in one's life.

3.6 CONCLUSION – LIFE-CHANGING POWER

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss the nature of the power promised by BLM, the source of that power as well as to illustrate the ways in which

⁷⁴ AM Worship Service (17 March 2002). Some of the most frequently cited texts in support of this doctrine during my fieldwork were the following: Proverbs 3:9-10; 11:24-26; Deuteronomy 28:1; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38 and Ephesians 6:8. The common expression is "you reap what you sow" (see Galatians 6:7).

⁷⁵ PM Worship Service (29 January 2002). Fasting at BLM does not follow a strict procedure. During a fast those who need to eat for medical reasons are encouraged to do so. Fasts can last any period of time and a person can fast one meal a day or abstain from food completely. If possible, members are encouraged to abstain from sex but wives should not refuse their husbands if it will cause discord. The key is to fast and pray about one specific request or concern – it is considered a form of intense prayer.

⁷⁶ S. Mushi, Personal Interview (9 May 2002).

this promised power can be accessed. The first section of the chapter (3.2) outlined the rapid growth of BLM from its humble beginnings in 1987 to the point where it is now recognized as the largest single congregation in Gaborone. From the outset, their guiding vision has been to bring "God's life" to the people of Botswana in a way that is relevant to this specific context. Based on the research conducted, I have defined "God's life" as a promise of power – the ability to shape and control one's world in order to experience success, prosperity and health.

The second major section (3.3) of this chapter dealt with the nature of the promised power. Following Jean and John Comaroff I have suggested that power can be experienced in both agentive and non-agentive modes. The power promised by BLM is by nature agentive. It is power consciously exercised by means of signs, symbols and ideas in an effort to mold, control and at times overcome the context in which a community (and individuals within that community) find themselves. In the process of articulating and exercising that power, BLM in effect promulgates a certain ideology. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter this ideology, which I have called a promise of power, must interact with other ideologies present in the Botswana context, namely both western and Setswana cultures.

In addition I have argued that the nature of the power promised is not only spiritual but also temporal. Thus in the discussion of the way BLM creates an image of power, I emphasized the role of various symbols and western technologies to create an image that is modern, prosperous, global and holistic. It should be noted that while each of these elements links closely with western culture, various aspects of Setswana culture are also retained. This was especially evident in the way African music and dance as well as physical expressions of worship are all

encouraged at BLM. Although it often appears that western culture dominates, an undercurrent of Setswana culture still remains.

The explicit promise of power promulgated at BLM emphasizes that each believer can experience success in life. The promised power enables the believer to find purpose for life, make progress in life, experience prosperity in all areas of life and to experience victory over all opposition (especially spiritual or satanic power). This message is intended to encourage BLM members to become active agents, seeking all that God has intended for them. The goal is to inspire hope and confidence that their future can improve.

In the third section (3.4) of the chapter the source of the promised power was discussed. The key findings under this heading were that the promised power originates in the triune God, and furthermore that each member of the Trinity is both omnipotent as well as immediately accessible. At BLM the promised power originates outside the individual but the triune God has made this power accessible through faith in Jesus and the reception of the Holy Spirit. By means of the Spirit, the power now resides within the believer. This foundational belief is central for BLM members, for it allows them to control their world not just at church but wherever they find themselves.

The final section (3.5) discussed the many and various means of accessing the promised power. Some of these experiences, such as spiritual rebirth and water baptism are non-repeatable, while others, such as praise and worship, prayer and fasting are encouraged on an on-going basis. The importance of charismatic leadership and the faith community was also recognized with regard to experiencing power in one's life. A key finding here was the recognition that while the promised power is always present in the person of the Holy Spirit, there are also various rituals

and practices that are necessary in order to fully experience God's power. Each believer needs to stay in contact with the faith community in order to discover all that has been promised.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the BLM promise of power is represented, articulated and accessed in a variety of ways. The church calls on its followers to become conscious agents in the pursuit and practice of power. As was evident in the discussion of the image of power, it is clear that various cultural factors are at work – mostly western but also Setswana. In the following chapter I will show how BLM is attempting to provide a contextualized gospel message to urban Batswana. The insights gained in chapter 2 concerning the Botswana context will be considered in conjunction with the promise of power as described above.

Chapter 4

POWER FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

"All I want is to emphasize that in modern times of religious pluralism, the winning characteristic of a religion is the goods it delivers – the quality of life it enables its followers to lead – rather than the doctrines it proclaims" (Kavunkal 1994:87-88).

4.1 INTRODUCTION

From its beginning Bible Life Ministries has sought to attract new members by promoting a high "quality of life" for their followers. Their mission statement, "transforming life into God's kind of life and success", forms the foundation on which everything else is built. But in order to engage in this "life-transforming" ministry it is necessary to understand the felt needs of contemporary Botswana, and then seek to meet those needs in an effective manner.⁷⁷ In this chapter I will demonstrate how BLM has contextualized their message and ministry to fulfill that goal.

The key task of this chapter is to explore how BLM employs its promise of power (as outlined in chapter 3) to help its members gain control over the rapidly changing social conditions present in Botswana (the subject of chapter 2), and thus create the conditions conducive for church growth. In this discussion I will pay close attention to some of the principal findings of the Questionnaire (Appendix 3), especially the reasons given for why people attend BLM.⁷⁸ The research results suggest five key elements in the BLM appeal: a charismatic leader, an alternative

⁷⁷ Although speaking in the context of Christian conversion, I believe the following words from Charles Kraft (1991:344) are applicable in the present discussion as well: "Openness to Christian conversion on the part of receptors is usually conditioned by the receptor's ability to relate the Gospel message to their felt needs. A perceptive advocate will be able to discover these felt needs and to present the Gospel in relation to them".

⁷⁸ A brief summary of the Questionnaire results is provided immediately following this Introduction (see 4.2).

source of power, a relevant message, an experiential theology and a new vision of the world. Confident that the power of the Spirit they have received will enable them to meet any challenge – spiritual or temporal – they are boldly looking forward to a brighter future.

As mentioned in the previous chapter (3.3.1), the BLM promise of power is in effect the proclamation of an alternative ideology. Nevertheless it has much in common with both western and Setswana ideologies. This should not surprise us for the Comaroff's (1991:22) have argued that all ideology cannot be reduced to pure creativity but always includes elements of mimesis or reproduction. This chapter will seek to demonstrate the ways in which BLM has incorporated elements of both western and Setswana cultures, along with biblical images and ideas, in an attempt to create a new ideology, a promise of power.

In addition to the concerns above I will also pay attention to the debate concerning the validity of the new Pentecostal message for Africans. In his original investigations of new Pentecostalism, Paul Gifford argued that these churches were not in fact offering a contextualized gospel but a foreign message that is distorting African Christianity. According to Gifford (1990:382-83; 1993:294-95), this "American gospel" is a cynical attempt by western Faith Gospel evangelists to gain control over African Christians. It has little of positive value in the African context, and is only being used by numerous church leaders as a way to enrich themselves at the expense of their followers. On the other hand, Nigerian scholars, Matthews Ojo (1988:189-190; 1996:106) and Ogbu Kalu (1998:7-8), argue that even though much of the message was imported, it has been made to fit the African context and provides the power Africans need today. Although I cannot provide a definitive

solution to this debate, a closer look at what BLM members have said about their church may provide some clues.

4.2 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In constructing the Questionnaire I had three primary objectives: to hear why average BLM members attend their church, to discover how these members experience “spiritual power” in their lives and to see how they understand the relationship between BLM teachings and Setswana culture. Much of the rest of this chapter will deal with those concerns. At this point I will briefly highlight some of the key findings of the General Questionnaire.

First, it is clear that one of the primary reasons BLM has grown so large so quickly is that church members seem unabashed in their enthusiasm to share their faith with others. Every single respondent to the Questionnaire agreed that it is important to evangelize others, even those who were not ‘born again’ (#10).⁷⁹ But not only do they believe it is important, they are acting on that conviction. Over 80% had shared their faith in the past six months (#12), and nearly 90% had brought new people to BLM at some time (#14). BLM is growing because the people who attend believe that what they are receiving and experiencing is good news.

A second key finding is that a large percentage of the respondents (89%) felt that attending BLM has changed their life in some way (#4). The following question, “If so, what has been the difference?” (#5), generated a wide variety of responses with most seeming to prefer “spiritual” answers such as “spiritual growth” or a “better understanding of the Word”. However later on in the Questionnaire, it also became clear that healing, protection from witchcraft and financial prosperity are also

⁷⁹ Individual questions from the Questionnaire and the responses are indicated in brackets (#_).

important elements in the lives of BLM members. I will discuss this further in section 4.3.3.1.

The questions dealing with spiritual power quite naturally demonstrated the importance of the Holy Spirit. Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues were closely linked although some who claimed to have been baptized in the Spirit did not admit to speaking in tongues (#15-18). How to obtain or receive spiritual power produced a number of different answers with most clustering around the need for Spirit baptism, reading and believing the Word of God and prayer (#21). Prayer also emerged as the primary way to experience protection from witches or evil spirits (#24). Finally the importance of fasting in order to experience spiritual power was strongly confirmed by the responses (#28-29).

The questions dealing with Setswana culture were very specific and only considered a few aspects pertaining to what are most often viewed as "spiritual" concerns. Interestingly the question, "Does Setswana culture ever conflict with your church's teaching?" (#31) produced an almost equal amount of both positive (55%) and negative (45%) responses among those who answered. Other questions that dealt with Setswana beliefs focussed on witchcraft (#22), the role of ancestors (#33 and 34) and traditional doctors (#35 and 36). Although most of the answers tended to emphasize the spiritual power of God over against traditional forms of power, often identifying them as Satanic or demonic, the important element in almost all responses was the recognition that witchcraft, ancestors and traditional doctors all have power. There was almost no evidence of the common western mindset that views these beliefs as mere superstition. For BLM members the interpretation of these powers varies from the traditional understanding but their reality is a given. It seems that one cannot argue that BLM has simply Christianized a western

worldview. The importance of both western and Setswana cultures in the promulgation of the BLM promise of power becomes even clearer in the following consideration of the appeal of Bible Life Ministries.

4.3 THE APPEAL OF BIBLE LIFE MINISTRIES

4.3.1 A Charismatic Leader

During the course of the personal interviews with church leaders I was struck by the universal claim that one of the primary reasons for the growth of BLM was the charismatic preaching and leadership of Dr. Sitima. The General Questionnaire results confirmed this finding with nearly 50% of those responding claiming that they were attracted to BLM by the "charismatic, inspired, prophetic teachings" (#2). Fully 80% of all respondents indicated that they "always enjoyed" the preaching at BLM (#6.b). Dr. Sitima, as founder of the church along with his wife, has clearly been a pivotal figure in the growth of the church. Before looking specifically at how the BLM promise of power attracts people, I want to consider briefly what Dr. Sitima actually represents.

In chapter 2 (see 2.2.3) it was noted that the traditional leadership figure in Botswana was the chief (*kgosi*). Through contact with western influences, the power of the chief was severely eroded and other figures stepped in to fill the vacuum; first colonial officials and missionaries, and upon gaining Independence, various political authorities. Dr. Sitima represents a different kind of leader – a leader not chosen by genealogy nor by the popular will of the masses but one chosen by God, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. "Spiritual power, unlike political power, is situated not in institutions themselves, nor in the will of the people, but in the world of the invisible" (Ellis & ter Haar 1998:195). In this sense he is more like the traditional

doctor, *ngaka*, except that the people of BLM almost unanimously agree that the spiritual power of BLM is both greater and of a completely different sort than that of the *ngaka* (see #35 and #36). Here again one can see a reinterpretation of an element in Setswana culture. Although BLM members would argue that the source of power is completely different, Dr. Sitima does represent a figure that is familiar to them from their tradition.

Looking more closely at Dr. Sitima's role in the church, one finds that within his person and experience he combines a number of characteristics which make him uniquely attractive as a leader to contemporary Batswana. The first of these characteristics is the fact that he is young. Only 29 years old when he started the church, he is still an energetic figure able to relate well to young people. As mentioned in chapter 2, a large percentage of Batswana fall into the younger age categories and this is especially the case in urban settings. With the rapid changes introduced by westernization and urbanization, many younger people are looking for someone who understands their way of life, someone they can relate to instead of the elderly traditional leaders. Dr. Sitima presents himself as a modern leader, willing to embrace new technologies and strategies in order to more efficiently run the church.⁸⁰ Instead of the old, familiar message he presents the gospel in a way that is fresh and new – in a way “that is not boring”.⁸¹

A second important characteristic of Dr. Sitima is the simple fact that he has been successful. For many, Dr. Sitima's dramatic testimony of how God lifted him up from an impoverished childhood, making him first a successful businessman and

⁸⁰ In an interview with E.O. Bannerman (2000:94-97) regarding church management at BLM, Dr. Sitima repeatedly emphasizes the importance of change and adaptability: “Change is needed. The plan is to assess the current situation, re-cast the vision and put structures and systems in place to implement the vision” (97).

⁸¹ T. Thakadu, Personal Interview (17 May 2002).

then an internationally respected church leader, clearly marks him out as an example worthy to be emulated. He is not afraid to tell the BLM faithful, "Look at me!"⁸² Often using personal examples, he speaks of how God has blessed his family, finances and health. One of the proofs of his success is his overseas experience, living and travelling in America, Europe and Asia. Through his experiences, he offers Batswana a window to the outside world.

Dr. Sitima himself argues that the key to success is to envision it – you have to be a person of vision and believe God will bring it to pass. He and his leadership team all stress the importance of the church's vision – "bringing God's life to the people".⁸³ As mentioned in chapter 3 (3.3.3.1 and 3.3.3.2), one of the primary elements of the "promised power" is that it provides purpose and progress in life. Many Batswana as well as African expatriates have come to Gaborone to get ahead, to experience a better life. They hope for a brighter, more successful future. It is not difficult to understand why many young people, uprooted from their traditions and yearning for a better future, would want to follow a successful person with a vision for the future and a plan for how to get there.

One final important characteristic of Dr. Sitima is his ability to present himself as one who both encourages secular education and who receives extra revelation from God. He has done this by first adopting the title, Dr., and also by surrounding himself with a number of successful people, most of whom have received university degrees. Furthermore he is not afraid to challenge BLM members to use their intelligence – he wants to "raise a generation of thinkers" who are willing to learn

⁸² AM Worship Service (17 March 2002).

⁸³ M. Mokgwathise, Personal Interview (8 May 2002).

from the world around them.⁸⁴ At the same time, he speaks of having "an anointing that surpasses what a degree from the University of Botswana can give us". Christians need to rely on faith and tell themselves, "Mind, get out of my way. School, get out of my way!"⁸⁵ This somewhat paradoxical attitude toward education has the effect of casting Dr. Sitima as a person who is able to relate to modern realities as well as one who has supra-natural insight on account of his relation to the Holy Spirit. Furthermore it suggests that he is a leader who is able to straddle the divide between western and Setswana worlds.

At this point I return to my earlier comments on the charismatic nature of Dr. Sitima's leadership. A charismatic leader is one who has been "endowed with spiritual power" (Asamoah-Gyadu 1998:23) and "appears to his followers as a man powerful in word and deed, stronger than witchdoctors, those strong men of the traditional African religions whom the foreign missionaries never managed to vanquish" (de Haes 1992:84). Considering the rapid social upheaval that has taken place in Botswana, it is understandable that many people in Gaborone are looking for someone who can give them answers, make sense of their lives, and help them move forward to a better future. Youthful, modern, successful, internationally connected, full of vision and knowledge, and most importantly, empowered by the Holy Spirit, Dr. Sitima has turned BLM into a magnet for drawing the people of Gaborone.

4.3.2 An Alternative Source of Power

As mentioned above the key component to the appeal of Dr. Sitima is his endowment with spiritual power. As the Apostle and Man of God at BLM, he

⁸⁴ AM Worship Service (24 March 2002).

⁸⁵ AM Worship Service (21 April 2002).

occupies a special place in relation to the congregation – he is the “connection between you and your power”.⁸⁶ But as was discussed in chapter 3 (see 3.5), there are numerous other ways to access the promised power such as Spirit baptism, prayer, fasting and simple faith in the Word of God. BLM followers are promised a new kind of power, a power that is accessible to all members. That the membership was seeking to access this new spiritual power was evident from the Questionnaire. Over 90% of the respondents were born again (#8), while 78% claimed to have been filled with the Spirit (#15). Of those filled with the Spirit, 89% stated that they speak in tongues (#17).

When asked how “one obtains or receives spiritual power?” (#21), the most popular response was “being baptized/filled with the Spirit (20% of respondents), closely followed by reading and believing the Bible (18%), obedience/faith (16%) and prayer (16%). Prayer and fasting are seen as ways of drawing close to God and accessing the power necessary to experience the abundant life (#25 and #29). Some of the interviewees suggested that the primary reason for the growth and success of BLM was the prayer emphasis.⁸⁷ Prayer must be “in the name of Jesus” according to every respondent but one (#26). This is because he is the one who provides access to God the Father (cited by 36% of respondents), by his name we are saved (22%) and through Jesus we have been reconciled to God (20%) (#27). Still the question remains as to why this new power should be important to contemporary Batswana?

Chapter 2 included a brief discussion of both traditional concepts of witchcraft (2.2.6) as well as a description of how it persists today (2.4.2). First, it should be

⁸⁶ AM Worship Service (5 May 2002).

⁸⁷ D.K. Muchina, Personal Interview (7 May 2002), and B. Keloneitwe, Personal Interview (30 April 2002).

noted that traditionally, one of the most common ways to obtain power or to enrich oneself was by means of bewitching another and the concomitant ability to protect oneself by means of traditional medicine (J. & J. Comaroff 1991:139-40, 143, 156-158). The belief in witchcraft and therefore the need to protect oneself from it and other malevolent forces still remains strong in Botswana.⁸⁸ While most westerners have tended to dismiss witchcraft as foolish superstition, the new Pentecostals have attacked it head on. The extent of the problem is evident from the questionnaire responses - 31% claimed to have been troubled by witches or evil spirits (#22). Some interviewees shared personal testimonies of having undergone physical and mental illness as well as distressing dreams on account of demonic activity in their lives and then being freed miraculously (delivered) by the prayers of Spirit-filled believers. Having once been set free, they now claimed to no longer suffer from those difficulties - God's power is greater than Satan's power.⁸⁹

Regarding protection from spiritual attack, 87% responded that God protects Christians from witchcraft and evil spirits (#23). The key to spiritual protection (see #24) is prayer and the "blood of Jesus" (defined by one respondent as "acknowledging God's covering upon his/her life all the time – everything was finished at the cross"). Believers do not have to live in fear but instead view life in a confident manner, expecting that God will provide the necessary power and protection. A number of Questionnaire respondents cited victory over fear and the ability to live a positive life no matter what the circumstances as the primary differences in their lives since they began attending BLM (see #5).

⁸⁸ As it does in many other African countries. See van Dijk 1992b:167-169 for a discussion of witchcraft in contemporary Malawi, and Marshall 1998:304 for the situation in Nigeria.

⁸⁹ S. Mushi, Personal Interview (9 May 2002), and T. Tshiping, Personal Interview (8 May 2002).

The alternative nature of the power offered at BLM is further demonstrated when comparing it to that of the traditional doctors. On account of the belief in witchcraft, traditional doctors still enjoy considerable popularity in the country. But when asked, all those who responded agreed that the power of the traditional doctor was not the same as that of their church (#35).⁹⁰ The difference for many (33% of respondents) was that the power of the church comes from God/Holy Spirit, whereas the traditional doctor serves the devil or demons (29%) (#36). While traditional doctors are believed by many Batswana to derive their power from their deceased ancestors (*badimo*), many BLM members (but not all) refuse to accept that the ancestors can even communicate with the living.⁹¹ When one speaks of the *badimo*, most BLM members think in terms of demonic spirits, and therefore refuse to have anything to do with them (#34). Instead of following the traditional route to power, BLM offers an alternative, albeit one that takes traditional forms of power seriously.

The need for an alternative source of power is acute. According to many of the interviewees, spiritual covenants made in the past, whether related to Setswana traditional rites or Spiritual Church practices, can create serious difficulties such as physical or mental sickness, financial struggles or tormented dreams. This belief has reached the lay level as 87% of those who answered the question agreed that it is "important to break covenants made before a person is 'born again'" (#40). According to BLM members the power of the Holy Spirit is more than adequate to meet the spiritual forces with which they must do battle. It is power that is freely

⁹⁰ It should be noted that 11% of the respondents did not answer this question, suggesting that a degree of doubt may exist in some BLM members' minds.

⁹¹ It is important to note that a significant minority (22%) of respondents believe that "one's deceased relatives can communicate with the living" (#33). Another 22% of the respondents did not answer this question, suggesting that a significant amount of disagreement exists on this aspect of BLM teaching.

accessible to all, young and old, as long as one is willing to place their faith in the powerful name of Christ.

4.3.3 A Relevant Message

4.3.3.1 A Holistic Message

In section 4.2.1, the manner in which Dr. Sitima embodies the powerful image that BLM seeks to convey to urban Batswana was illustrated. But there is more to BLM than image. Those interviewed as well as the questionnaire respondents focussed on the message that is taught, and especially its practical, relevant nature. According to church leaders,⁹² the preaching at BLM addresses the everyday concerns of Gaborone residents including their families, finances, health and social life. As Pastor T. Sitima argues, Christianity must be “more than just how we get to heaven – it must talk about the here and now”.⁹³

However when reviewing the responses of the Questionnaire, one could gain the impression that temporal concerns such as finances and family relations have not played a significant role in drawing people to BLM. Respondents seem to prefer “spiritual” answers. When asked, “In what ways has the church helped you?” (#3), over 40% said they had been helped to grow spiritually, while another 25% spoke of a better understanding of the Word of God. To the question, “What has been the difference” in your life since you began attending BLM? (#5), most respondents spoke of applying and understanding the Word of God better, growth in their prayer life and a better relationship with God. Although some of the answers revealed a concern for financial development and better relationships with family and friends, these were a small minority.

⁹² E. Bannerman, Personal Interview (17 May 2002), and T. Thakadu (8 May 2002).

⁹³ Personal Interview (14 May 2002).

The questionnaire responses might suggest that the relevant, practical message, cited by BLM leaders as one key factor in the rapid growth of the church, is not as important as they think. In this regard it is important to remember the earlier discussions concerning the western dichotomy between spiritual and temporal power (2.2.3 and 3.3.1). While the missionaries brought a theology that tried to differentiate the earthly from the spiritual, the Batswana believe that the two are intimately connected. Therefore those responses that focussed on "spiritual growth" should not be narrowly defined but rather interpreted in light of some of the other questions. For example, nearly 60% of the respondents claimed to have experienced healing at BLM (#19). From the discussion above it is also clear that victory over witchcraft has numerous temporal benefits. With regard to finances, 75% believe that God promises to help Christians prosper financially (#37) and over 80% believe that the more you give, the more you will receive (#39). The picture that emerges from the interviews and the questionnaires is that BLM members believe that the message concerning "spiritual" power they hear each week is not "other-worldly" but that it will impact their everyday lives and meet their "felt needs."

4.3.3.2 A Message for the Individual

One of the issues that emerged clearly from the discussion of the Botswana context in chapter 2 was the way in which western contact with Batswana had the effect of breaking down many societal structures. Crushed under outside authorities many Batswana men have struggled to regain their self-respect. Even with the greater economic benefits delivered by diamond profits, large numbers of Batswana still live impoverished lives. Although women have gained greater rights and freedoms, they are still looking for a better future. Young people, most of whom are

far better educated than their parents, are also eager to hear a message that provides them with confidence and hope.

At BLM, the importance of the individual is strongly emphasized. First and foremost, BLM believes that each person is important to God. That message is repeatedly emphasized in sermons, songs and prayers. A good example is from Pastor Felix Omobude, visiting from Nigeria.⁹⁴ He began his sermon by asking the congregation to repeat after him: "I am a child of God. Hell has lost its power. I confess with my mouth that I am a winner – I am not a loser. I am a victor, not a victim. Jesus Christ in me makes me a winner". Dr. Sitima is not afraid to encourage his listeners to "embrace self-love, self-esteem and self-belief". But the reason for self-confidence is because "you have God with you, you are a child of God because you've been born again".⁹⁵

The importance of being "born again" was underscored in the Questionnaire. Over 90% of the respondents indicated that they had undergone a "born again" experience (#8). Nearly all of those emphasized the importance of personal faith in this act – the key is to "accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of my life" (#9). Being "born again" is a profoundly personal decision, for it entails "making a clean break with the past".⁹⁶ Once previously made spiritual covenants are renounced, an individual can experience a new, changed life, empowered to live as God has instructed in His Word.

What is perhaps most revolutionary about the new birth experience is that it establishes the believer in an intimate relationship with God. Whereas God

⁹⁴ AM Worship Service (19 May 2002).

⁹⁵ AM Worship Service (12 May 2002).

⁹⁶ M. Mokgwathise, Personal Interview (8 May 2002). For a much fuller discussion of what "breaking with the past" entails in the Ghanaian context, see Meyer 1998:317-318, 328-329.

(*Modimo*) was viewed as somewhat removed from human affairs in traditional thought (see 2.2.2), BLM teaches that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all immediately accessible to the born again believer (see 3.4). Each Christian has Jesus living within them. The key is to pray in the name of Jesus for he is the way to the Father (see #26 and #27). BLM respondents again agreed unanimously that if an individual has faith in the promises of God's Word, and boldly confesses those truths, they can be assured of success in their lives (see #41). At BLM people are told that they do not have to remain sick, poor, single, childless, bound by the Devil, terrified of being bewitched or held captive to sin. In the words of Dr. Sitima, "if you have faith and obey, you will never fail".⁹⁷ It is no wonder that almost all questionnaire respondents expressed their belief that their life would improve in the future (#42).

4.3.3.3 A Message for the Community

While emphasizing personal empowerment, the Holy Spirit is not just for the individual. Great emphasis is placed on building strong families. In this regard it is important to note that although BLM stresses the role of the nuclear family (and thus could be accused of following western culture), they do not denigrate the extended family (so important in the Setswana tradition). Church members are encouraged to fulfill their familial responsibilities as much as possible. When a conflict with church teaching arises, they should decline to participate in a most respectful manner. The goal is to win family members into the church – believers are "Christ's ambassadors".⁹⁸ There is a strong belief that society is best impacted for Christ

⁹⁷ AM Worship Service (27 January 2002).

⁹⁸ M. Phuthogo, Personal Interview (11 May 2002). This attitude seems to contrast with that of new Pentecostal churches in Ghana (Meyer 1998:336-339) and Nigeria (Marshall 1998:285-287) where new believers are encouraged to break away completely from non-Christian family members.

when people see successful, healthy families. Here again one can see the dichotomy between western and Setswana cultures, with BLM adopting aspects of both, and in the process attempting to chart an alternative path.

At BLM there are special programs and seminars for all members of the family: children, youth, singles, single parents, husbands and wives. Taking into consideration the serious breakdown in family life as evidenced by the rise in unwed mothers and the spread of HIV/AIDS, the BLM focus on "promoting family strength" (printed on the church letterhead) is readily understandable. Dr. Sitima often refers to the importance of strong marriages and enjoys giving examples of his own attempts to strengthen his marriage. In addition the church offers pre-marriage counseling for those contemplating marriage and marriage counseling for those facing struggles at home. Marriage and the family are highly esteemed at BLM and it was suggested to me that many of the young people present in the church were there to look for a good marriage partner.⁹⁹

Within this framework, men are targeted specifically for husbands are considered the head of the home. Men should be respected but BLM members are quick to point out that strong husbands are not dictators but men "who seek to attain to the likeness of Christ in all of their relationships".¹⁰⁰ The Champion's Club (note the emphasis on victory), a meeting for all men single or married, provides a forum for men to discuss how they can become good husbands and fathers, helping their wives reach their full potential. It also provides opportunities to build business contacts and learn from those who have been successful. Thus a good husband is

⁹⁹ S. Mushi, Personal Interview (9 May 2002).

¹⁰⁰ M. Phuthego, Personal Interview (11 May 2002).

encouraged and empowered to provide for his family financially as well as meet their spiritual and emotional needs.

Women, too, are encouraged to fulfill their God-given potential within the family and the community. Although men still tend by and large to dominate leadership positions in the home and church, women are encouraged to use their spiritual gifts to the greatest extent possible.¹⁰¹ Women serve in various roles in the church including ushering, praying for the sick, leading home care groups, leading worship and on occasion, preaching. In many ways it appears that BLM has recognized and encouraged the opportunities that Botswana women have begun to experience in the past century, and especially since Independence. With rising levels of education and employment among women, the message they receive at BLM challenges them to believe that they can succeed at whatever they do. Furthermore Dr. Sitima pointedly calls on men to fulfill their financial obligations to their children born outside of wedlock. Special seminars are held for single mothers to help them understand their legal rights, develop job skills and enable them to parent their children well.¹⁰²

Youth also have a high profile at BLM. As mentioned earlier there are various programs geared specifically for them. But perhaps most important is that young people are encouraged to experience the power of God for themselves. Young people are encouraged to speak in tongues, pray for the sick, share their faith with

¹⁰¹ V. Phuthego, Personal Interview (17 May 2002). Women are encouraged to meet regularly to receive power from the Word and prayer. This group is known as the "Esther generation" – note the reference to royalty, power and prosperity.

¹⁰² Ruth Marshall (1991:29-32) has highlighted numerous benefits that women gain from membership in a new Pentecostal type church in Nigeria (much of what she writes is also applicable to Botswana). She summarizes as follows: "They find in these communities an opportunity to construct a space in which they can move with relative freedom and dignity, to gain a measure of control over their sexual and family lives, and from there use their positions to gain more influence in the sphere of labour outside the home" (32). Also, see Kalu (1998:14).

friends, preach and receive visions from God.¹⁰³ Living in a social context far different than that of their elders, young people are looking for a new way to approach the challenges and opportunities they face. BLM teaches that the power of the Spirit is not just for an older generation, it is for whoever wants that power! As mentioned earlier (see 4.3.2), this alternative source of power stands in stark contrast to those forms of power most often wielded by the elderly or those with special knowledge.¹⁰⁴ When all have access to the Spirit's power, the result is a church community that is arguably more egalitarian than society at large.¹⁰⁵ Instead of being sidelined by traditional power structures, youth at BLM play a major role.

One can recognize the influence of young people at BLM in the emphasis on global connections. In chapter 3 (see 3.3.2.3) the manner in which BLM cultivates a global image was briefly explored. The large number of expatriates present in Gaborone, along with the growing desire of younger Batswana to experience more of the outside world, makes the BLM strategy of cultivating a global image a wise choice for attracting people to the church. The use of English, an international language, provides a means of communication that transcends borders and allows for the transmission of new ideas and possibilities. Similarly, the use of foreign evangelists is a way of importing new "teachings" and spiritual "giftings" into the church.¹⁰⁶ Finally the use of worship songs from around the world helps the whole

¹⁰³ AM Worship Service (29 March 2002).

¹⁰⁴ van Dijk (1992a:70-71; 1998:168), in the urban Malawian context, detects a sense in which new Pentecostals are strongly opposed to the elderly. The youth have a new source of power, one stronger than established forms of power (witchcraft, traditional medicine and politics), and one more adaptable to a rapidly changing social situation.

¹⁰⁵ See Maxwell (1995:319-320) for a similar assessment from Zimbabwe.

¹⁰⁶ M. Ofithile, Personal Interview (10 May 2002).

congregation feel as though they are part of a much larger community, one that spans the globe.¹⁰⁷

4.3.4 An Experiential Theology

4.3.4.1 The Bible Speaks to the Present

In chapter 2 (see 2.2.4) it was noted that early converts to Christianity in Botswana were referred to as “people of the Word”. They had a special power because they could read the book the missionaries had brought and understand the doctrines taught. At BLM the Bible is no less important but the emphasis is much more on experiencing what the Bible describes than reciting doctrinal statements. Douglas Petersen’s (1998:23) observation for Pentecostals in general also holds true for BLM: “Pentecostals contend that the biblical text cannot be fully understood apart from personally experiencing the events that the Bible describes”. The Bible provides the images and stories that inspire and inform the lives of BLM members. The Bible impacts the lives of believers and “provides the materials out of which an alternatively construed world can be properly imagined” (Kalu 1998:4).¹⁰⁸ As one Questionnaire respondent put it, the Bible “reveals God’s plan, will and purpose for my life” (#30). If one has faith, the promises of God’s Word can radically alter the present and future – it speaks to the issues of each individual.

At BLM the promises of God found in Scripture are not just for the believers of long ago, they are applicable to contemporary situations. A quick perusal of the

¹⁰⁷ Cédric Mayrargue (2001:291), from Benin, expresses this concept well: “The faithful feel they belong to something that is both vast (the ‘real’ Christian people) and distinct from others. They are not alone, they are carried by a movement, a wave that reaches virtually every country in the world and which creates a religious space without limits”.

¹⁰⁸ Gina Buijs (1995:93), in a discussion regarding the role of a charismatic leader, makes an important point concerning the use of familiar traditions and symbols such as the Bible: “Yet a charismatic leader should also appeal to tradition, for only by doing so can he establish communication with his followers. Traditional concepts, symbols and images, even if reinterpreted, are used to facilitate the acceptance of the radically new”.

answers given to questions 42 and 43 of the Questionnaire reveals that BLM followers believe their lives are going to improve because of God's promises. Many of the answers are direct quotations from Scripture, such as "he will never leave me or forsake me" (Hebrews 13:5) and "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). But it is more than just the promises of Scripture that are important; believers can also enter into biblical narratives. One is no longer just an observer of events that happened in the distant past but an active participant in the biblical story. For example, the account of Peter's remarkable deliverance from prison by means of the angel of the Lord (Acts 12:6-11) was retold in a way that BLM members recast themselves as Peter and the prison as financial or physical difficulties. But the angel of the Lord who delivered Peter is the same angel who is going to empower the believer today.¹⁰⁹ In this manner the Bible is brought to life for a new time and a new generation.

4.3.4.2 Life-Encompassing Worship

Bringing the Bible to life is not the only way in which BLM encourages the believer to experience, or live out, their faith. Attending a worship service at BLM is an invitation to use one's body and emotions in the quest to encounter God. The dynamic of a large crowd of energetic, young people dancing, jumping, clapping, singing, praying, crying, speaking in tongues and eagerly following the words and actions of those leading the service makes it difficult to remain aloof. Clearly the worship experience at BLM contributes to the church's appeal. Over 80% of the Questionnaire respondents (#6.a.) indicated that they enjoyed worship/praise at BLM all or most of the time. As discussed earlier (3.3.3.4) the presence and power of God is made tangible, especially when people collapse ("slain in the Spirit") or speak

¹⁰⁹ PM Worship Service (21 April 2002).

in unknown tongues. I listened to numerous testimonies of people who had been physically or emotionally healed. People at BLM are experiencing or feeling something that cannot simply be explained away. In the words of Harvey Cox (1995:71): “the experience is so total it shatters the cognitive packaging”.¹¹⁰

4.3.5 A New Way of Looking at the World

At the outset of this chapter I noted the disagreement that exists between scholars concerning the degree to which new Pentecostals are offering a contextualized gospel to African peoples. From the research, it appears that BLM has tailored their message to suit the context of present day Gaborone. What emerged from the discussion of the Botswana context in chapter 2 is that the world inhabited by young residents of Gaborone is very different from the world of their parents or grandparents. Western values and ideas have drastically changed their lives, and they are longing to hear a gospel that makes sense of their experience. The new Pentecostals are offering to do that for them.

Using the Bible as their guide and source of inspiration, BLM leadership is both reinterpreting the way Botswana once understood reality as well as offering their own understanding of the modern world. In so doing they are offering an alternative vision or ideology, a promise of power. They attempt to deal with both the “spiritual” concerns arising from Setswana culture (i.e., witchcraft, ancestors and traditional medicine) while also providing a way through the maze created by westernization, modernization and urbanization. The key to this effort is their firm belief that the Spirit of God enables them to perceive the true nature of traditional and modern life. For example, ancestral spirits are not deceased relatives but rather

¹¹⁰ People want to experience power, not just hear about it. A favorite text at BLM is I Corinthians 4:20: “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (KJV).

demons, and traditional doctors use the power of the devil, not God. They can make these radical claims because they are confident that they can overcome any spiritual force by the power of the Spirit.

What BLM offers is a sense of control over a person's environment. A believer does not have to fear witchcraft because they have the spiritual protection of "the blood of Jesus". But it is not just a matter of dealing with concerns arising from a specifically Setswana context. They also address modern realities and interpret them in a manner that allows BLM adherents to utilize the perceived benefits of modern technologies in a manner consistent with their understanding of Scripture. They argue that media technology can and should be employed to advance the cause of Christ into new regions.¹¹¹ Instead of the *setswana/sekgoa* dichotomy that has arisen in mission churches or the attempt to synthesize traditional beliefs with Christian rituals found in some Spiritual Churches (see 2.3), new Pentecostals are offering a different vision, an alternative way of viewing the world.

Their vision is also based on a dichotomy, not between African and Western culture, but between the reign of God and the reign of Satan. Everything is interpreted in light of this spiritual battle that plays itself out here on earth. But the BLM member does not have to worry because they have the power of the Spirit, and direction from God's Word. The power they have experienced is primarily concerned with enabling an individual to enjoy life as God intended. Traditional culture (*setswana*) along with modern technologies (*sekgoa*) are free to be embraced so long as they further the reign of God as understood by BLM. If not, they must be either reinterpreted using biblical imagery and ideas or else rejected out of hand.

What emerges is a situation where BLM encourages their members to both

¹¹¹ On the use of media technology by new Pentecostals, see Hackett (1998:265-272).

accept and reject elements of both *setswana* and *sekgoa*.¹¹² There are definite similarities with the practice of the Spiritual Churches. However a brief look at the use and understanding of money illustrates the difference. It has been argued that Spiritual Churches make an attempt "to resituate the coin, symbol of domination and of power outside of their control, into a ritually controlled and communally orientated context" (R. Petersen 1996:230). Jean Comaroff (1985:236) has provided an extensive explanation of the rituals employed by Spiritual Churches in order to help church members regain "control over the self in the gift". In effect, one can argue that in the Spiritual Church context, money is a powerful foreign object that needs to be cleansed before it can be utilized.

At BLM, a rather different attitude is adopted. Money as a symbol of power is assumed (see 3.3.2). In fact, if one has been enabled to become wealthy it is often taken as a sign of God's blessing. But there is also a great deal of moral ambiguity surrounding money. This ambiguity was highlighted by Dr. Sitima in one of his sermons.¹¹³ He argued that one can treat money as "rule, mule, stool, tool or fuel". As a "rule", money can be wrongfully used as a standard to judge worth. In other words, believers may fall into the trap of judging people by their wealth (or lack thereof). Second, money as a "mule" becomes "the strength to impose one's will on others". Money is powerful and can be employed to enforce our will. Money as a "stool" represents a false sense of security if one trusts in money, instead of God. All three of these attitudes are sinful. But money can also be viewed positively. Money

¹¹² J. & J. Comaroff (1993:xxii-xxiii) describe how indigenous cultures often integrate certain symbols into their rituals in order to control them and access their power. In so doing these people are "seeking at once to contest and affirm aspects of the dominant order(s)" (xxiii). I would argue that this is the process at work in the new Pentecostal use of modern sound equipment and their understanding of money.

¹¹³ AM Worship Service (17 February 2002).

as a “tool” is used to further the kingdom of God, to show love to one’s family or to care for the needy. Finally, money as “fuel” represents the idea that money given to God (or the church) will return to the giver and be multiplied in the process. As Dr. Sitima put it: “If you want more fire, put wood on the fire”. Believers need to give generously in order to see good things happen in their lives.

The differences between the views of BLM and Spiritual churches when it comes to money are highly significant. For Spiritual churches money symbolizes “domination” and “power outside of their control” – it is something unclean. At BLM moral ambiguity surrounds money but the key idea is one of potential for it can serve positive or negative ends. Even so, it must be recognized that the primary emphasis is on the positive potential of money, and the corresponding “seed faith” doctrine. The key issue is what a believer does with their money – are they scattering the seed to advance God’s reign or are they becoming proud of their wealth? Members are encouraged to give a tenth of their income¹¹⁴ with the assurance that they will receive back as much or more. Money as a sign of God’s intention to promote life is to be enjoyed, not eyed suspiciously. At BLM, even money can be brought under the believer’s control if they have faith in the promises of God.¹¹⁵ The vision of the world offered to BLM members is one under God’s control and designed to enhance life, not diminish it in any way.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The BLM view of money demonstrates the manner in which they seek to help their members experience the abundant life – the church desires to enhance their

¹¹⁴ Apparently many of them do. Two thirds of the Questionnaire respondents claimed to give at least 10% of their income each month (#38).

¹¹⁵ AM Worship Service (24 March 2002).

adherents' "quality of life" by meeting felt needs. At the same time it also illustrates the manner in which BLM approaches some elements of western culture. Although their attitude is primarily one of welcome acceptance, a degree of critical reflection based on their understanding of the Bible, is also evident. They are addressing the issues that arise from both western and Setswana worlds without necessarily adopting either one uncritically. The promise of power is an ideology that posits a new way of looking at the world, based on the realities of both western and Setswana cultures.

In this chapter I have endeavored to demonstrate how BLM seeks to contextualize their promise of power in order to meet the felt needs of their adherents, with the corresponding result that the church has grown rapidly. Based on the findings of the Questionnaire, personal interviews and participatory observation, I concluded that BLM has grown rapidly on account of their charismatic leader, claim to have an alternative source of power, proclamation of a relevant message, experiential theology and promulgation of a new vision of the world. In the analysis of each of these subjects I noted the manner in which both western and Setswana cultures are addressed with the result that BLM propagates an ideology, a promise of power, that incorporates aspects of both cultures. The fundamental factor in this effort is the role of the Bible in providing images and ideas to evaluate each cultural element. In addition BLM assumes that the presence of the Spirit will guide them in this task.

When considering the role of Dr. Sitima, the charismatic leader, both similarities and differences were noted in relation to politicians, chiefs and traditional doctors. In his leadership role, it was suggested that he most closely resembles the traditional doctor except that he possesses a power of a completely different sort.

Familiar and yet different, he is able to encourage BLM members to think in new ways. Other key characteristics are his youth, economic and familial success and his image as one highly educated as well as supra-naturally endowed with special insight from God. In many ways he epitomizes the BLM promise of power in his person.

The second subject discussed, an alternative source of power, revealed the importance BLM members place on spiritual power to protect oneself from evil forces such as demons or witchcraft. They claim that their Holy Spirit power is both different and superior to the power of traditional doctors. Many church members believe that ancestral spirits are not actually their deceased relatives but rather demons in disguise. Here again it is important to note that although traditional understandings of Setswana beliefs have been seriously reinterpreted there is no sign that BLM members have dismissed evil spirits, witchcraft and ancestors as mere superstition. Instead they have incorporated them into their belief system albeit in a vastly different form.

The third subject dealt with under the appeal of BLM was their proclamation of a relevant message. The promise of power is envisioned as power that changes life in the present. It is power that affects the temporal as well as the spiritual life, power that initially addresses individuals with its call to be 'born again' but also power that must impact families and then spread throughout society. They embrace the western emphasis on the individual but also cling to the importance of the extended family found in Setswana culture. Furthermore their message targets all age groups because the promise of power is for everyone, not just a privileged few.

In the section dealing with their experiential theology, the crucial role played by the Bible in the BLM belief system was emphasized. The power of God promised

in the Bible must be experienced, not just understood. In fact a person cannot properly understand the Word of God unless one has put it into practice. The importance of experience was also underscored when considering the role of worship at BLM. Worship involves the entire person – mind, body, will and emotions. The holistic view of life found in Setswana thought is extremely evident in the BLM experience of worship.

In the final section of this chapter I recounted the way in which the BLM promise of power suggests a new view of the world in which believers can experience a sense of control. In recognition of the specific context, their view of the world draws heavily on elements of both western and Setswana cultures, while simultaneously reinterpreting them in view of the resources they find in the Word of God. The fundamental dichotomy is no longer between western and Setswana cultures but between the reign of God and the reign of Satan. Interpreted in this light they are seeking to straddle both cultural traditions, and in effect, producing a new ideology. BLM members are encouraged to become conscious agents in both experiencing and proclaiming this ideology, the promise of power.

In the concluding chapter, I will recap the findings of the first four chapters while highlighting the pivotal importance of the BLM promise of power in relation to the Botswana context, the growth of BLM and the development of a new synthesis of western and Setswana cultures. In addition some missiological issues raised by the new Pentecostal movement will be discussed as well as a few notes of caution sounded concerning the promise of power offered by BLM.

Chapter 5

THE CHALLENGE OF POWER

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7; KJV).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

At the outset of this study it was noted that the growth of new Pentecostal churches in Botswana is part of a much larger phenomenon that has swept like a wave over much of the world. My research has focussed on a very small corner of this much larger movement, and therefore could be regarded as somewhat peripheral. However I would argue that it is important inasmuch as it counters the prevailing argument that new Pentecostalism has arisen primarily because of the failure of African nation-states to deliver democracy and development (see Marshall 1995:246-248; Kalu 1998:4). Although poverty and under-development still plague Botswana today, one would be hard-pressed to argue that the Botswana government has failed to improve the lives of most Batswana. But, just as new Pentecostal churches have sprung up and grown in other African countries, so too have they proliferated within Botswana. The cause of this remarkable growth has been the major concern of this dissertation. In this concluding chapter I will summarize the findings of the previous chapters and reiterate my argument that the “promise of power”, that is, power from God that offers both spiritual and temporal benefits, provides one of the keys to understanding the popularity of this movement.

A second major concern of this chapter is to provide some missiological reflections with regard to new Pentecostal churches in general, and Bible Life Ministries in particular. As the Scripture passage above says, God has given both a

spirit of power and a sound mind – both need to be exercised. As mentioned in chapter 1 (1.4), missiology as a discipline is primarily concerned with the mission of God, and the communication of the gospel message – the Good News of Jesus Christ. Although the kingdom of God encompasses far more than the church alone, the church does participate in a unique way as a sign or instrument of the reign of God on earth. For this reason it is important to consider any church movement in light of its faithfulness to God's mission as revealed in the Bible, and especially as it relates to the ministry of Jesus.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The intent of this section is to provide a brief overview of the arguments presented throughout this study in a manner which contributes to a clearer understanding of the growth of new Pentecostal churches, and especially their "promise of power".

5.2.1 New Pentecostalism in Overview

The purpose of chapter 1 in the course of my argument was to provide an introduction to the new Pentecostal movement and to lay the foundation for the following chapters. It was noted that over the past thirty years a new kind of church has emerged on the African continent. Clearly a close link exists between these new churches and the historic Pentecostal churches and missions, as evidenced by the importance placed on "speaking in tongues" (*glossalalia*) and a strict holiness ethic. These new churches can, however, be distinguished by their relatively recent origins, proclamation of the "prosperity gospel", emphasis on deliverance ministries and the fact that most were started by Africans. For this reason the moniker, new Pentecostal churches, was adopted to describe these churches in this study.

As a rapidly growing movement, new Pentecostal churches should elicit serious missiological consideration. Their quick spread, the nature of the message they preach along with their attempts to contextualize the gospel all call for serious reflection and analysis. For this reason the principal objective of this study was to examine some of the fundamental reasons for the growth of these churches in Botswana. In order to gain a larger perspective on the movement, I examined a number of studies dealing with the phenomenon of new Pentecostal churches in Africa. In my review of these analyses, three issues were identified as of key importance: the experience of power, foreign influences and the creation of a new way of looking at the world, a new *imaginaire*.

Each of the issues listed above is crucial to my analysis of the "promise of power". First, I have argued that the new Pentecostal experience of power must be understood in a holistic sense, including both spiritual and temporal realities. New Pentecostals most definitely promise power from a spiritual source (the triune God), but it is power that impacts all areas of life. Second, the importance of foreign influences must be recognized. Few leaders of these churches would dispute that they have borrowed from the west. In fact, as my study of Bible Life Ministries demonstrates, they are doing so purposely. Having recognized the new cultural context created by the meeting of African and western cultures, they are attempting to straddle both cultures, using biblical images and resources to achieve this feat. And third, in the effort to bridge western and African culture, they have in effect created an alternative way to view the world, a new *imaginaire* of power. I have argued that they seek to provide a sense of control to individuals who are struggling to deal with "spiritual" concerns such as witchcraft as well as with the rapid changes brought about by technological change, urbanization and globalization.

In order to understand these dynamics in the Botswana setting, I endeavoured to examine both the local context from which these churches have arisen as well as one specific example of a new Pentecostal church, Bible Life Ministries. Established in 1987 and having a congregation of approximately 3000, it is both the largest of its kind in the capital city of Gaborone, as well as one of the oldest. I have suggested that Bible Life Ministries promises its followers life-changing power, power that allows them to experience spiritual and temporal benefits as well as the ability to exercise greater control over their lives in a rapidly changing world.

5.2.2 The Botswana Context

One of the assumptions of this study is that in order to understand the dynamics of growth of new Pentecostal churches one must carefully consider the local context. In chapter 2 I sought to provide an overview of how Setswana culture has both persisted and been modified in its dialogue with western culture. Particular attention was focussed on the way in which western agents of change, such as missionaries and colonial officials, challenged the traditional way of life for most Batswana. But even as their culture was greatly impacted and changed by foreign influences, another process was also at work which led to the objectification of various customs and practices as *setswana*, in contrast to western culture, *sekgoa*. In this manner Batswana both adapted to new innovations and resisted the domination of outside forces. Many fundamental beliefs and practices, such as those concerning ancestors, disease and witchcraft continued to flourish although often hidden from view.

Post-Independence Botswana has seen as much or perhaps even more change than that introduced during the colonial period. Contradicting the

expectations of almost all observers, instead of wallowing in poverty the country has seen its economy grow steadily over the past thirty-five years. The key of course was the discovery and exploitation of diamond wealth. The rapid changes introduced throughout this period have had both positive and negative consequences. Although the distribution of diamond wealth has been uneven most people in the country have seen their standard of living rise. At the same time, the rapid introduction of foreign customs, mores and goods has undermined traditional morality. Family breakdown, already a problem during the colonial era, has grown exponentially and led to the large increase of female-headed households. Many of these women, and their children, constitute the poor of Botswana today. All of this has of course contributed to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and the calamitous situation where Botswana now has the highest rate of HIV infection in the world.

Of great significance for my argument are the following observations from chapter 2. First, the changes introduced over the past century, and especially since Independence, have created a situation where churches must address both Setswana and western cultures if they are to appear relevant. Second, the new opportunities presented by economic growth, higher education, new technologies and globalization call for a message that speaks to the present and holds promise for the future. Third, the seriousness of family disruption (single-parent families) and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana calls for a response on the part of the church.

As discussed in chapter 2, mission churches have tended to respond to the dichotomy between Setswana and western culture by promoting western culture in public, while often allowing or encouraging Setswana practices to continue in private. Spiritual churches have often taken a different path. Many have sought to separate the Bible from western culture and use it in their attempt to retain aspects of

Setswana culture as over against western influence. In this manner they were able to synthesize Scripture and Setswana culture. The new Pentecostal churches, on the other hand, are using the opportunity of rapid cultural upheaval to suggest a different way of dealing with the cultural dichotomy. They are trying to bridge the two, or straddle the divide between Setswana and western culture, relying on biblical stories, images and themes to help them accomplish this feat. Evidence of this effort is provided in the case of Bible Life Ministries.

5.2.3 Articulating the Promise of Power

In chapters 3 and 4 one specific example of a new Pentecostal church, Bible Life Ministries (BLM), was studied in order to understand how it uses its “promise of power” to attract new members. Using the explanation of power dynamics developed by the Comaroff’s (1991), I argued that BLM promotes the conscious use of agentive power – that is, power which is meant to provide influence and control over a specific context. This “promise of power” can be identified as an ideology that interacts with other ideologies, specifically Setswana and western cultures in the Botswana setting.

When discussing the BLM promise of power, I suggested that they both project an image as well as expound a message. Dress, modern technologies, foreign speakers and money are all used to create an image that is at once modern, prosperous, global and holistic. Although it appears that western influences dominate in this process, I also noted the way in which Setswana and African features are retained, especially in the areas of music and dance. The significance of Setswana belief is also strongly underscored in the explicit promise of power. The ability to experience protection from and victory over witches, evil spirits and vengeful ancestors is a central component of the promise. In addition, believers

are assured that their life has meaning, and that God desires to see them succeed. BLM communicates that the power of the Spirit is power that enhances all areas of life – more wealth, full health, better relationships and a brighter future.

BLM members are encouraged to become conscious agents in the pursuit and practice of power but they also strongly believe that the power comes from God alone. Those who are faithful can be assured that the triune God is both all-powerful and intimately concerned for their well-being. In order to access the promised power one needs only to exercise faith in the infallible Word of God. The door to power is initially opened when one is born again, for then one receives the Spirit of Jesus. Having experienced spiritual rebirth, the road to power is through water and then spirit baptism. Speaking in tongues, prayer and fasting, praise and worship all enable the believer to receive more of God's power. It is no exaggeration to argue that the promise of power permeates almost all aspects of ministry at BLM.

5.2.4 A Promise Made to Fit the Context

Why is this promise of power so attractive to contemporary Batswana? The answer to that question is one of the major concerns of chapter 4. I have argued that the promise of power, as defined in chapter 3, addresses many of the "felt needs" identified in the discussion of the Botswana context found in chapter 2. Modern life in Gaborone is often a confusing mix of both old and new, local and foreign. Along with improvements in people's standards of living have come new challenges – changing morals, family breakdown, HIV/AIDS, gender and generational conflicts. Many people are looking for a way in which to gain control over their lives. They need an authority and a power that will enable them to both make sense of life and experience greater fulfillment.

The BLM promise of power meets these felt needs by supplying five key elements: a charismatic leader, an alternative source of power, a relevant message, an experiential theology and a new vision of the world. With each of these elements BLM addresses both western and Setswana cultures in their quest to provide an empowering gospel. In their effort to appear modern and relevant it is clear that BLM encourages the perception that it is in tune with western culture. At the same time, concerns arising from Setswana beliefs are also dealt with, although in a manner much different from traditional practices. BLM does not simply dismiss Setswana culture but rather reinterprets and incorporates it into their new way of looking at the world. Using the resources of the Bible, BLM seeks to enable believers to straddle both cultures and experience prosperity and victory while doing so.

As argued from the outset there are three closely inter-linked issues at work in new Pentecostal churches: the experience of power, foreign influences and the creation of new vision of the world, a new *imaginaire*. In this study I have sought to demonstrate how these three factors relate to the growth of new Pentecostal churches. Using the example of BLM I have argued that their message, the “promise of power”, fits the specific context of Botswana. They have adopted the power symbols of modernity – money, technology, language - and refashioned them for their own use as a way to proclaim Holy Spirit power. That same Holy Spirit power is also the key to dealing with concerns arising from the Setswana belief system such as witchcraft and ancestors. In so doing they promise to supply a means of control over a rapidly changing world. By accessing the power of the triune God, born again, Spirit-filled believers are enabled to overcome all Satanic forces arrayed against them, take hold of the opportunities for temporal success presented to them as well as navigate the difficult road of modern urban life.

5.3 MISSIOLOGICAL QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

“He [God] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (Apostle Paul, 2 Corinthians 12:9; NIV).

Before concluding this study it seems necessary to consider briefly the missiological implications of the findings presented above. If I am correct in suggesting that BLM’s growth is largely due to its promise of power, it seems imperative to probe the consequences of that conclusion for BLM and other new Pentecostal churches as well as the older mission and Spiritual churches. Three of the fundamental issues are articulated in the following questions. First, is the promise of power consistent with the gospel as preached and embodied by Jesus? The second question is closely related: does the promise of power emphasize a theology of glory at the expense of a theology of suffering? The third and final question deals once more with culture. In adapting their message to the current context in urban Botswana, are they in danger of substituting western culture for Setswana culture and creating people without a true African identity? It is impossible to answer each of these questions completely but I will attempt to delineate the missiological challenge represented in the promise of power for churches all across the spectrum.

5.3.1 Nature of the Gospel

BLM members are not shy about sharing the gospel as they understand it with outsiders. They have a message that is life-affirming and empowering, and they want others to experience all the benefits available to those who are “in Christ”. They cannot be accused of promoting a “pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die” theology that has little relevance for life in the here and now. The gospel must make a difference in people’s lives, enabling them to experience the promised “full and abundant life” of

John 10:10. Individual Christians should be confident people, assured that Christ, by the power of the Spirit, will give them victory in all areas of life.

This emphasis on the individual is both an important strength and a possible danger. Its strength lies in the new Pentecostal call for a clear commitment to Christ – people need to choose to follow Jesus (Asamoah-Gyadu 1998:25). The call is to break with the past and become a new person in Christ, renewed from the inside out. This experience can radically alter one's life and often produces people who are eager to share their faith (Wessels 1997:369). Every kind of church, new Pentecostal or not, needs to show evidence of this kind of passionate commitment to Christ. BLM and other new Pentecostal churches are growing rapidly because of the evangelistic zeal demonstrated by their followers.

However the danger exists that by focussing on the individual nature of one's faith the gospel message can be subverted. The warning expressed by Pentecostal scholar Douglas Petersen (1998:21) is worth heeding:

When pentecostals utilize their experience with the Spirit for only personal and individual edification, and neglect the community responsibilities that should accompany this phenomenon, they on the one hand, misuse the reason for receiving the gift of the Spirit, and on the other hand, forfeit the opportunity for effective evangelism and acts of compassion.

Placing excessive weight on the personal benefits of salvation such as wealth, health and other forms of success can lead to a situation where believers become self-absorbed and selfish. Instead of viewing salvation as a call to minister to others, it becomes an invitation to satisfy one's own desires. This is not God's intent. "It is not simply to *receive* life that people are called to become Christians, but rather to *give* life" (Bosch 1991:414).

An overly individualistic view of salvation conflicts with God's mission, *missio Dei*, in the world. Saayman (1991:5-6) rightly suggests that Jesus' declaration in

Luke 4:18-21 should serve as a model for the *missio Dei*. In it he finds “an evangelising dimension; a healing dimension; and a dimension of striving for social, political and economic justice” (6). If understood in a way that reaches beyond the individual and instead encompasses the broader community, the new Pentecostal promise of power has great potential to impact the world as God intends. The emphasis on reconciliation with God, healing in all of its forms and overcoming the forces of evil clearly resonates with the *missio Dei*. But if the promise of power degenerates into simple lust for personal influence, wealth and comfort, then clearly it can no longer be understood as the gospel of Christ. The challenge to all Christians is to take hold of the power of God, not simply to enhance our own lives, but to impact the world around us (see Bosch 1991:397). Considering the incredible amount of suffering created by the AIDS epidemic in Botswana (and the entire African continent), it is especially critical for churches to present a holistic gospel that offers both temporal and spiritual resources.

5.3.2 Power for Glory or Suffering

Closely related to the previous discussion is the question of whether or not the promise of power can accommodate a theology of suffering. As articulated above it is clear that the promise of power focuses on the glory of God and victory for the individual Christian. It can easily appear that there is no place for suffering in the life of a true believer. Those who do suffer can be accused of a lack of faith or disobedience but life is not that simple. Wrongly understood the promise of power can be reduced to a recipe for success where the cross of Christ becomes insignificant, or is too quickly and too simply transformed into a symbol of victory. The danger is that Christians can become proud, and forget that “God does not necessarily save us *from* suffering, but *in and through* it” (Bosch 1994:79). Suffering

is essential to the gospel message and Christ's followers dare not forget this truth. The church in mission is often a church that suffers on account of its faith.

There is a very real danger that Christians can be seduced into seeking the easy path instead of the way of Jesus. This is the critique offered by Paul Gifford (1998:337): "one only needs belief, or belief and giving money, or belief and the special gifts of the pastor and God will do everything". Spiritual power can be procured simply by reciting a formula – pray in "the name of Jesus" – or protection experienced through claiming "the blood of Jesus". But how much thought is put into understanding what these phrases mean? When focusing almost exclusively on power and victory, it is often easy to sidestep the hard questions of life. But as Allan Anderson (1990:73) has written, "our pneumatology must not only provide power when there is a lack of it, it must also be able to sustain us through life's tragedies and failures, and especially when there is no visible success". Again the AIDS crisis provides a poignant example – how does the promise of power relate to those who have not been physically healed?

Having recognized the danger of a theology overly concerned with victory and glory, it should be noted that the promise of power has an essential message. New Pentecostals have the potential to become powerful agents of change precisely because they believe that God can make a difference in them and the world around them. They no longer need to fear that their efforts will be subverted by witchcraft or other evil forces.¹¹⁶ They have hope for the present and the future because they are

¹¹⁶ Gifford (1998:336-338) suggests that the Faith Gospel of the new Pentecostals may lead to laziness and a lack of workplace initiative as believers embrace "the idea that faith will ensure that God intervenes to enrich the individual Christian" (:337). Obgu Kalu (2000b:127) disputes Gifford's claim and suggests instead that new Pentecostal churches create a new sense of hope in their followers that encourages them to believe that their efforts will pay dividends. This attitude can be summed in the words of a bumper sticker popular with new Pentecostals: "I will eat of the sweat of my brow". The sentiment expressed is that one's labours will be rewarded – external forces will not be able to steal or destroy what the believer has diligently worked for.

confident that God is with them, empowering them to persevere even in the face of opposition (D. Petersen 1998:24). They call on all churches to emulate the example of the early Christians who, by the power of the Spirit, boldly advanced the reign of God.¹¹⁷ A theology of power that takes seriously human frailty, Jesus' suffering and the power and presence of the Spirit is necessary for authentic mission in a needy world (Newbiggin 1989:119).

5.3.3 The Gospel and Cultures

The final issue raised in this study concerns the issue of contextualization versus syncretism. Syncretism has often been viewed as the corruption of a "pure gospel" by the culture into which it is introduced whereas contextualization is believed to be a faithful rendering of the true faith in a new setting. What has become clear over time is that no "pure gospel" can be extracted as though it were free from cultural constraints – the gospel always comes wrapped in a cultural form. As Juan Sepulveda points out, "we cannot grasp any meaning without the help of our precious cultural categories.... Some sort of syncretism *is* inevitable" (in Anderson 1999:228). Therefore the key issue is not syncretism versus contextualization *per se* but whether or not specific cultural forms become so dominant that they obscure the message. This is a particularly vexing question with regard to the new Pentecostals. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, there is a very real sense in which churches like Bible Life Ministries act as a bridge between cultures. That is a major part of their appeal. They deliberately address issues arising from the more traditional African context as well as the new realities introduced by urbanization, globalization and modernization.

¹¹⁷ Jesus' words in Matthew 11:12 (NIV) serve as a call to arms for many: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it".

However in their zeal to open up a new world to their followers it is hard not to question the way they seem to denigrate African or in this particular case, Setswana, culture. Andrew Walls (1996:5-6) argues that the new Pentecostals have simply taken the existing African map of the universe and reinterpreted it. The preoccupation with power and protection has continued undiminished in importance. Walls is most certainly correct to a point but it is important to note that new Pentecostals are not just concerned about the African map of the universe, they are also profoundly interested in the western map of the universe. They desire to provide a message that is relevant to their listeners, who are not the traditional African villagers of pre-Independence Botswana but rather the modern urbanites of Gaborone. But one feels compelled to ask if they are taking the same care to critique the western influences they are absorbing as they are in radically challenging the cultural traditions that were handed down to them? To his credit Dr. Sitima's message on how Christians should view money (see 4.3.5) demonstrated that BLM does not adopt western attitudes uncritically.

It was no accident that the question, "does Setswana culture ever conflict with your church's teaching?", displayed the greatest degree of disagreement on the entire Questionnaire. Fifty-five percent of the respondents agreed that it did, while forty-five percent answered in the negative.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately I did not ask the same question with regard to western culture. But in observing the church it appeared that certain aspects of Setswana culture have been cast off or demonized – even the language itself has been largely passed over in favour of a global language,

¹¹⁸ On this particular question there were a large number of people who did not answer (nearly 27%). Most of these were African expatriates who may have felt unable to answer the question because it dealt specifically with Setswana culture.

English.¹¹⁹ Admittedly cultural transition is inevitable and “even precious elements of each culture must face re-evaluation and be consciously accepted by each new generation” (Oduyoye 1995:215). Nevertheless serious thought must be devoted to how decisions are made to either accept or reject certain forms.

New Pentecostal churches stand at the forefront of religious innovation in Africa today. They challenge established mission churches and Spiritual churches alike to adapt to the changing realities of Africa. One cannot retreat into nostalgia for a so-called ideal African culture. It probably never existed and it certainly does not today. BLM and other new Pentecostal churches have recognized the new situation and are seeking to craft a message that appeals to many. The danger, I believe, is that in their desire to appear modern and innovative they may be too quick to both baptize western cultural forms and reject their own African roots. In the guise of modernization and globalization, it is often easy to fall into greed, materialism and a desire to dominate. Just as BLM claims to use Scripture as a “strainer” with regard to African culture, the same or even more diligence needs to be applied when dealing with western influences (Oduyoye 1995:186-187).

5.4 CONCLUSION

In what direction will this movement move in the future? That question remains to be answered but it is clear that new Pentecostals will continue to grow in numbers and influence. In the face of massive change and numerous social challenges, their gospel of empowerment taps into a deeply felt need. The “promise

¹¹⁹ Lamin Sanneh (1989:189) has suggested that “the pattern of the correlation between indigenous cultural revitalization and Christian renewal is a consistent one in Africa”. Whether or not his case will stand with regard to the new Pentecostals remains to be seen. There is an element within the movement calling for African Christians to take pride in their African identity, and to become a force for positive change on the continent.

of power" that they hold out to their followers is one that many desire. But power, even the power of God, holds both great potential and serious peril. The new Pentecostal message has helped many to experience freedom in Christ and victory over fear. Thousands of people have been empowered to discover more of what the abundant life in Christ really means. But if not rightly understood, the promise of power can also degenerate into cultural imperialism and even a rationalization for naked greed. My hope for my brothers and sisters at BLM and other new Pentecostal churches is that they will experience the power while avoiding the pitfalls.

APPENDIX 1: NEW PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN THE GABORONE AREA

Abba Father Ministries	Hope of Glory
Alliance Church	Jesus Christ Ministries
Back to God Assemblies	Lifeline Christian Centre
Bible Life Ministries	Lift Him Up Ministries
Calvary Ministries	Lighthouse Ministries
Christ Citadel International	Living Waters
Christian Centre	Miracle Faith Ministries
Church of Pentecost	New Covenant
City Bible Church	Oasis of Love
Deeper Life Ministries	Okeke Pentecostal Bible Ministries
Divine Touch	Outreach Ministries International
Eagle Ministries	Potters House
Echoes of Joy	Prevailing Ministries
End Time Ministries	River of Life
Family of God	Share the Fire Ministries
Forward in Faith	Universal Church of the Kingdom of God
Four Square	Victory Bible Church
Full Gospel Ministries	Voice of Power Ministries
Gaborone Christian Church	Word of Christ Ministries
Good News Ministries	Word of Life Outreach
Good Tidings Ministries	Zoe Ministries
Grace Christian Fellowship	
Harvest Ministries	
High Calling Ministries	

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHURCH LEADERS

I. Personal Information:

Name:

Age:

Employment:

II. Personal History with Church

1. How long have you attended this church?
2. What do you know about the history of this church? How did it start?
3. How would you describe your church – Pentecostal, evangelical, revivalist, charismatic or something else?
4. Describe the growth pattern of your church.
5. If your church is growing, what are the main reasons for this growth?
6. In what ways does your church help or empower its members?
7. Who attends this church – age, economic class, nationality, sex?
8. What is your ministry position in this church? For what length of time?
9. Have you ever attended Bible school or taken Bible correspondence courses? Where? With whom?
10. What books, tracts, cassettes or videos have you found to be most helpful in your Christian life and ministry?
11. Did you attend any other church previously?
12. What are the most important teachings of this church?
13. What do you think is the vision of this church, both for its members and for the wider community?

III. Church Teaching and Practice

A. Salvation

1. What does salvation mean to you?
2. How is one “born again”?

B. Evangelism

1. Is it important to evangelize others? Why?
2. Does your church promote evangelism?
3. If yes, what are some of the ways you do so?

C. Holy Spirit/Spiritual power

1. How do you know if you have been baptized in the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you speak in tongues?
3. What are the benefits of speaking in tongues?
4. How does the Holy Spirit help a Christian?
5. How can you tell the difference between someone with the Spirit and someone without the Spirit?
6. Does prophecy take place in your church?

7. In what ways is prophecy beneficial?
8. Have you ever been physically healed in this church? If so, what happened?
9. What or who causes sickness?
10. What is necessary in order to receive healing?
11. How does one receive spiritual power?
12. Are there material/physical objects that have spiritual power? What are they?

D. Use of English

1. What language is used most in your church?
2. Why is it important to use English?

E. Deliverance/Spiritual Warfare

1. What does your church teach regarding witchcraft and evil spirits?
2. Can evil spirits afflict Christians, or only non-Christians?
3. Is there a way that Christians can be protected from witches and demons?
Is so, what is it?

F. Spiritual Disciplines

1. Describe the importance of prayer in your church.
2. Is it important to pray in "the name of Jesus"? Why?
3. Is fasting important? Why?
4. In what ways is the Bible important in the life of your church members?

G. Setswana Beliefs

1. How does your church view Setswana culture?
2. Does Setswana culture ever conflict with the Bible? If yes, in what ways?
3. Can one's deceased relatives communicate with the living?
4. If you had a dream, and your grandfather appeared in it, instructing you to do something, what would you do?
5. Who or what are "*badimo*" (ancestors)?
6. Is there a difference between the spiritual power of your church and that of a *ngaka ya Setswana* (traditional doctor)? If yes, what is the difference?

H. Finances

1. What does your church teach concerning prosperity?
2. What are the principles concerning giving and receiving taught in the Bible?
3. Do you believe that the more you give, the more you will receive?

I. Church Leadership

1. What's the most important characteristic of a church leader?
2. Is age important when choosing a church leader? Why?
3. Can women be leaders in the church?
4. Do you believe women can teach the Bible to men?

J. Other Questions

1. What does your church teach about covenants?
2. Is it important to verbally confess the promises of God so that you may be blessed?
3. Is there a danger in verbally expressing doubt?
4. Should a Christian expect their life to improve as they faithfully follow God?
5. Why or why not?

APPENDIX 3 – QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESPONSES

I. Church Details:

Church name: Bible Life Ministries

Location: Broadhurst, Gaborone

II. Personal History with Church

1. How long have you attended this church? Answers in number of years.

1 – 8	4 – 9	7 -
2 - 10	5 – 6	8 – 2
3 - 7	6 – 2	9 – 1

2. What attracted you to visit this church the first time?

- the truth/Word of God that was being taught/preaching (22) – charismatic, inspired, prophetic teachings - their word of faith and success
- invited by a friend/family member (7)
- the way it holds services and relates to others (5)
- the way we worship (5)
- Bible School (2)
- the will of God that I could learn many things of God (2)
- dreamed of a Bible Life pastor
- I wanted to be filled with the Spirit
- salvation
- the love of the pastor
- no answer/don't know (2)

3. In what ways has this church helped you?

- spiritual development/growth (19)
- by teaching me and helping me understand the Word of God (12) – how to live
- helped me to be healed of a long-time sickness (4)
- financial development (3) – importance of finances
- knowing God better (3)
- changed my life completely (3)
- by providing salvation and blessings (2)
- helped me to leave sin (2)
- learn to work with people (2)
- deliverance
- made good friends
- accountability
- family management
- learned to handle children through children's church ministry
- have a positive outlook on life
- know who I am in God
- no answer/don't know (1)

4. Has there been a difference in your life since you began attending this church?

Yes - 40 or No - 3

No answer - 2

5. If so, what has been the difference?

- learned to apply the Word of God to my life (5)
- many changes in my lifestyle - I'm now self-controlled (5)
- spiritual growth/understanding of the Word of God (5)
- I pray more and have a personal relationship with God (4)
- used to be fearful but no longer (4)
- grown to love the presence of God - know God better (4)
- live a positive life no matter what the circumstances (3)
- growth in faith (3)
- I have been saved from bondage and am now free (2)
- growth in knowing how to relate to others/Christian family (2)
- my life is going well as I want it to (2)
- to conquer my enemy (Satan) by prayer
- I have Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour
- discover who I am and see myself the way God sees and created me to be
- more interaction with other nationalities
- God supplied material things
- my family life has changed
- more committed to children

6. What do you enjoy about your church? (Rate the following on a scale of 1 to 5 - circle your answer)

1 = you don't enjoy it at all

2 = most of time you don't enjoy it

3 = sometimes you enjoy it

4 = most of the time you enjoy it

5 = you always enjoy it

a. worship/praise	1	2 (1)	3 (6)	4 (6)	5 (31)
b. preaching	1	2 (1)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (36)
c. outreach events (e.g., crusades)	1	2 (1)	3 (6)	4 (10)	5 (25)
d. home groups	1 (1)	2	3 (3)	4 (13)	5 (27)
e. prayer meetings	1	2	3 (5)	4 (6)	5 (33)

7. Did you attend any other church previously?

Yes - 32 or No - 11

No answer - 2

III. Salvation

8. Are you "born again"?

Yes - 41 or No - 4

9. How is one "born again"?

- by receiving/believing in the Lord Jesus and following him always/as ruler of one's life (36) – "accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of my life"
- being born of the Spirit/ spiritual renewal (2)
- through prayer
- baptism
- through water and the spirit
- no answer/don't know (3)

IV. Evangelism

10. Is it important to evangelize others?

Yes - 45 or No - 0

11. Why or why not?

- duty of every born again Christian to lead others to the Lord (16) – great commission
- so we can win their souls to God (11) – save them from hell/from perishing
- so that they will be born again – must hear in order to receive Jesus (7)
- so they know God loves them (4)
- share positive experiences of Christianity (3)
- because Jesus died for everyone
- so light is given to those still oppressed
- in order to bring people to church
- no answer/don't know (1)

12. Have you shared your faith in the past six months?

Yes - 37 or No - 5

No answer - 3

13. What are some of the ways you have done so?

- talked about my faith with friends, workmates and parents; personal evangelism and sharing my testimony (27)
- preaching the Word of God to unbelievers (5)
- street witnessing (4)
- healing the sick in church/praying for the sick (3)
- handing out reading materials/tracts (3)
- sharing Scripture (2)
- encouraging others (2)
- no answer (3)

14. Have you ever brought new people to your church?

Yes - 40 or No - 3

No answer – 2

V. Holy Spirit/Spiritual power

15. Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit?

Yes - 35 or No – 9

No answer - 1

16. How do you know if you have?

- spoke in tongues (27)
- inner witness (5)
- manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit (5)
- when I was born again I was prayed over by a man of God with spiritual authority (2)
- have the power/Spirit of God upon me – God uses me (2)
- faith in Jesus
- I believe when I ask, God shall give me the Holy Spirit
- no answer/don't know (1)

17. Do you speak in tongues?

Yes - 31 or No – 13

No answer - 1

18. How does speaking in tongues help you?

- it edifies me (17) - builds me up spiritually ('recharges my spirit' and 'gets me going') - it empowers and strengthens me
- communicate with/prayer and be closer to God (12)
- helps me speak hidden truths, mysteries (7)
- no interference from the devil when I pray (2)

19. Have you ever been healed in this church?

Yes - 26 or No - 16

No answer – 3

20. If yes, from what problem were you healed?

- headache (6)
- spiritual sickness (4) spiritual healing/my broken heart has been fixed
- ulcers (3)
- back ache (2)
- tonsillitis, fatigue, stress, chest pain, head-wounds, boils, high blood pressure, bad dreams, tumour in the womb, poverty, emotional healing, low self-esteem, cancer, arm injury, pain in my hip, body pain, severe stomach ache

21. How does one obtain or receive spiritual power?

- being baptized/filled with the Spirit (9)

- by reading/believing the Bible (8) – simply believing the Word of God
- by believing and doing the work of the Lord/faith (7)
- by praying (7) – by asking God who gives freely
- being saved/born again (3)
- being obedient (3)
- by yielding to the Spirit (2)
- worship (2) – when people anointed of God sing
- by laying on of hands
- by praying and fasting
- being in covenant with God
- no answer/don't know (6)

VI. Witchcraft/Spiritual warfare

22. Have you ever been troubled by a witch, evil spirit or *tokoloshe*?

Yes - 14 or No – 27

No answer - 4

23. Can Christians be protected from witches/evil spirits?

Yes – 39 or No - 4

No answer – 2

24. If so, how?

- prayer (19) the name of the Lord
- through Jesus' blood (14) – the protection of God (by acknowledging God's covering upon his/her life all the time - everything was finished at the cross)
- believing God has power over everything (9) - faith
- depending upon what the Word says (4)
- living a holy life/obedience/righteousness (4)
- binding evil powers (3)
- through the Holy Spirit (2)
- total surrender to Christ (2)
- using spiritual weapons and putting on the whole armour of God

VII. Spiritual Disciplines

25. Describe the importance of prayer in your life.

- draws me closer to God (13) – refreshes my soul
- provides protection, healing, security, peace and joy (7)
- helps me grow strong in the Lord (6)
- it prospers me/builds the self (6) – key to progress (“it gets God running my errands”)
- opens doors in one's life (5) – moves the hand of God (“God's power on my life”)
- it is the master key – lifeline and mainstay of my life (2)
- destroys plans of the devil
- looses bondages

- builds my faith
- helps me in difficult situations
- helps me not to fall into sin
- prayer is the engine to drive the Word and ministry of God
- gives glory to God
- by praying the person is always at peace because there is someone whom he/she is free to speak to
- no answer/don't know (3)

26. Is it important to pray in "the name of Jesus"?

Yes – 44 or No - 0

No answer – 1

27. Why?

- to receive from God the Father, one must go through Jesus (16)
- it is the only name we are given to be saved (10)) – he is the way, truth and life
- through Jesus we were reconciled with God (9) – he died for us
- at the name of Jesus every situation bows (4)
- Christ has power over the enemy (3)
- He will help you in your problems (2)
- because all power and authority have been given in the name of Jesus (2)
- it's the way to make things happen – "whatever I ask from the Father through him I will get it" (2)

28. Is fasting important in your life?

Yes – 40 or No – 4

No answer - 1

29. Why?

- helps me concentrate on God/the Spirit instead of fleshly things (16) – subdues my body
- draws me closer to God and keeps me in the Spirit (9)
- helps me find solutions to problems (5) – moves mountains
- releases the power of God (5) – the H.S. works through fasting
- strengthens my prayer life (3)
- God breaks through and I experience victory (3)
- builds my faith (2)
- one gets the charge to renew his/her spirit life (2)
- gives time to really focus on talking to God
- reminds me of our covenant with God
- helps to reveal things that are hidden
- the more you hunger for food when fasting will be the more you hunger for God
- no answer/don't know (5)

30. In what ways does the Bible help you?

- to understand the will of God, "his promises and commands" (16) – "reveals God's plan, will and purpose for my life"
- to understand who Jesus/God really is (6)
- provides the truth I need for daily life (6)
- to understand my life (5) – who I am in Christ
- Bible is the carrier of my faith (5) – strengthens my faith
- helps in my spiritual life (5)
- helps in my social life (2)
- it gives me correction by rebuking, teaching and equipping me (2)
- practicing what it says and applying it's principles in my life
- no answer/don't know (4)

VIII. Setswana Culture

31. Does Setswana culture ever conflict with your church's teaching?

Yes – 18 or No – 15

No answer – 12

32. If yes, in what ways?

- traditional medicine (7) – we don't believe in it
- concerning badimo (ancestors) (5) – don't believe the dead speak to us
- taboos (3)
- concerning death
- deals with spirits – my church is led by the Holy Spirit
- concerning false gods

33. Can one's deceased relatives communicate with the living?

Yes – 8 or No - 29

No answer – 8

34. If you had a dream, and your deceased grandfather appeared in it, instructing you to do something, what would you do?

- pray and rebuke that spirit in the name of Jesus (16)
- I would pray (9)
- I wouldn't do it (9)
- I would do it because s/he would help me (3) – I'm his/her child
- consult my spiritual leaders (2)
- no answer/don't know (1)

35. Is there a difference between the spiritual power of your church and that of a traditional doctor (*ngaka ya Setswana*)?

Yes – 40 or No - 0

No answer - 5

36. If yes, what is the difference?

- spiritual power of the church comes from God/Holy Spirit who is holy (15)
- traditional doctors are serving/communicating with demons/devil (13)
- the church is more powerful (8)
- traditional doctor can heal whereas the church can't (3)
- church only uses prayer, not traditional medicine (2)
- can't trust a traditional doctor but you can trust my church (2)
- God conquers everything (2)
- with God, you don't pay; with a traditional doctor, you pay
- the church prays to God whereas the traditional doctor prays to the ancestors
- I don't believe in the power of the traditional doctor
- traditional doctor's power is manmade and always not true

IX. Finances

37. Does God promise to help Christians prosper financially?

Yes – 34 or No – 6

No answer - 5

38. What per cent of your income do you give to the church each month?

- 10 % (26), 12-20% (3), none (3), 50% (2), varies (1), 30 % (1)

No answer – 9

39. Do you believe that the more you give, the more you will receive?

Yes – 37 or No - 3

No answer – 5

X. Covenants

40. Is it important to break covenants made before a person was “born again”?

Yes – 34 or No – 5

No answer – 6

41. Is it important to verbally confess the promises of God so that you may be blessed or healed?

Yes – 40 or No – 0

No answer – 5

42. Do you think things will get better in your future?

Yes – 40 or No – 1

No answer – 4

43. Why or why not?

- because of God's promises/Word of God (10) – he will never leave me nor forsake me (I can do all things through him who strengthens me)
- because I have faith (6) - because whatever you want from God you have to believe and confess that it will come to pass
- because God has blessed me and will continue to bless me (5)
- because God has good plans for me, to give me a hope and a future (4)
- because God is faithful (2)
- because I've seen a change in my life (2)
- because God is merciful and hears me (2)
- because God is always on my side (2)
- because I have the God factor in me
- because God is moving in my life
- because I have great hope in God
- because God has spoken to me saying He will reward me
- because I am still discovering who I am from the Word of God
- because I'm walking in obedience to God
- because Jesus is my centre of everything

Personal Information:

Sex: Female (20), Male (15), No response (10)

Age: 18 (1)	20 (1)	21 (1)	22 (1)	23 (1)	24 (2)
26 (2)	27 (3)	28 (1)	29 (1)	30 (5)	31 (2)
32 (1)	33 (1)	34 (3)	35 (1)	36 (2)	38 (1)
39 (1)	40 (1)	45 (2)	48 (1)	58 (1)	

Nationality: Motswana (27), Zambian (5), Zimbabwean (4), Kenyan (3), Tanzanian (3), Malawian (2), Mozambican (1)

Are you married, single, widowed or divorced?: Single (18) Married (18) No response (9)

Do you have children?: Yes - 22 No – 13 No response (10)

Employment: Employed (23), Unemployed (14), No response (8)

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