

**The silent echoing voice:  
aspects of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism and the quest  
for power, healing and miracles**

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*Abstract*

Many Pentecostal or “born again” church services are characterised by the theology of “deliverance from powers of darkness” that ruin the life of a Christian. Located within the rubric of “powers of darkness” are African traditional religions and culture (ATRs). ATRs have been condemned by Pentecostals as demonic so a “born again” Christian needs a “total break from the past”, supposedly achieved through its denunciation. This article seeks to contest the notion of a “total break from the past” through a close study of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), founded by Ezekiel Guti, and United Families International (UFI) of Emmanuel Makandiwa. It argues that the traditional religion and culture inform Pentecostals and continue to be a source of reflection, meaning and purpose, manifesting in their theology and rituals in spite of the adversarial stance. This article discerns ATRs as the “voice” of African spiritualities that has been “silenced” by Pentecostals but that continues to whisper and guide their perception and quest for the power of healing and miracles. “Outsiders” have critiqued the Pentecostal quest for spiritual power that is embedded in Pentecostal “dominion theology”. “Dominion theology” denies poverty, sickness, failure and anything that is not positive in the believer’s life. In spite of the criticism, people continue to subscribe to Pentecostal denominations. At the same time it has been forcefully argued and demonstrated that Pentecostals preach “a crossless Christianity”. The article also argues that the emphasis on healing and searching for spiritual power at the expense of the cross is evidence that Pentecostalism does not offer anything completely new but that what it offers either resonates well with or is sourced from the historical religious and cultural background of believers. This may explain why people subscribe to Pentecostalism in ever-increasing numbers, and engage with traditional “religious functionaries” as well as with the cultural practices in various ways and forms that they vehemently denounce. Hence the resilience of ATRs, a significant “silent voice” that continues to echo the quest of spiritual power in the hearts and ears of Pentecostals as involuntarily they continue to be informed by the realities of their African traditional religious and cultural background. The adversarial attitude towards ATRs and at the same time the continued interaction with it is the premise for arguing that ATR is a “silent but echoing voice” among Pentecostals that has shown a high level of resilience against all odds.

**Introduction**

The focus is on the specific innovations emerging in the creative process of appropriation of the gospel and reconstruction of the social world. The key concern is the extent to which Pentecostals, with their central theme of personal and social rebirth, have invented new types of practice as well as symbolic opportunities for survival (Kalu 1998:3-4). The study of ATR has not seen any appreciable decline and the resilience of ATR has been documented by several scholars. However, as pointed out by Mosala (1983:24), it is therefore somewhat difficult to answer the question: What is the relationship of traditional beliefs to Christianity – because one must retort with the question that asks which Christianity and which African religion? This article aims to unpack the aspects of Shona culture that have resurfaced in Zimbabwean Pentecostals, with a special focus on ZAOGA and UFI. The study carefully selected UFI, one of the youngest Pentecostal churches, and the old established ZAOGA. The study contests the claim that traditional authority structures and religious beliefs have declined in the face of colonial domination and Westernisation. The study argues that some aspects of ATRs seem to have been in decline, yet have remained dynamic in these Pentecostal denominations. These features are expressed in various ways in these churches. ATR is a silent voice and, as such, it is not easy to notice its presence among Pentecostals. Yet ATR is also an echoing voice because Pentecostals have

re-fashioned and re-sacralised Shona traditional features in dynamic ways. These ways manifest the continued engagement with features of traditional Shona religion.

Time will not allow us to spell out most of the areas where Pentecostals have related with the traditional religion. Rather, this article pays particular attention to the Pentecostal quest for power for healing, miracles and their preoccupation with accumulation of wealth through faith. The study focuses on rituals that ZAOGA and UFI undertake, through an examination of the icons that they employ during their service. It is argued that Pentecostal movements are adversarial towards the use of traditional religious icons that are used for healing, protection and prosperity, but that ironically they have re-vitalised them. We therefore set out to investigate and establish the contradiction(s) that are manifest in ZAOGA and UFI. The engagement with traditional religious icons has taken different forms, leading to re-vitalisation, re-sacralisation and syncretism. According to Jules-Rosette (1997), re-vitalisation introduces new concepts to regenerate the old, seeking an explanation of the sacred in both new and old terms. Syncretism is the process by which former definitions of the sacred are combined with innovative patterns to produce a satisfying definition of the whole. And it is an expression of core values which is both in line with the past and adaptive to new institutions. The traditional religious icons are “silenced” (through verbal “denunciation” but as they continue to be practised, they “echo” their voices. Hence what, how and why ZAOGA and UFI draw from the Shona religious tradition is the thrust of this article in their quest for power, healing and miracles.

### **Methodology**

The material used in this article has been collected through field studies, participant observation and anonymous interviews. We employ the Interpretive Phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is primarily concerned about analysing the experiences that people have in life. IPA helps us to dissect the inconsistencies that Pentecostals display in their faith and establish the reasons why they continue to engage with the Shona traditional religion that they denounce. Utilising a systematic model, we compare Pentecostalism and ATR with a focus on healing and protective icons used by traditional religious practitioners and Pentecostal leaders. We argue that the element of popular religiosity in African Pentecostalism offers a new possibility for historical reconstruction of re-appropriating the religio-cultural features beyond what early Western missionaries did (Kalu 1998:7). We therefore need to consider the backgrounds of the two Pentecostal movements.

### **History of ZAOGA and UFI**

The history of ZAOGA and UFI is not meant to be exhaustive but is selective, for the purposes of this article. Also, the history of ZAOGA is documented by Maxwell (1995:13, 2006).

The founder of ZAOGA is Ezekiel Guti, according to *ZAOGA Sacred History*, although Maxwell rightly and correctly includes other prominent co-founders, some still members of the church, others either deceased or excommunicated from the church that are part of the founding team. Maxwell (2002:265) mentions several co-founders who are undermined and silenced in the church’s canonical history. ZAOGA was founded as a breakaway movement from the Apostolic Faith Mission in 1963 by a group of “young Zealots who formed a prayer band” in which Guti later stood out as the sole leading figure. Ezekiel Guti and his wife Eunor have systematically purged the movement’s co-founders and replaced them with successful businessmen, family members and those of the Ndau ethnic sect. To date, ZAOGA has become a trans-national movement, Guti and his wife being the nodal power points of the ministries that the church runs.

UFI was founded by Emmanuel Makandiwa (commonly known as “Prophet” in Zimbabwe) and his wife Ruth in May 2010, after breaking away from the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in April 2010 in Harare. An AFM pastor said that Makandiwa met with other AFM leaders and then broke away (interview 8-9/6/2011). Reasons for the breakaway are complex, with some claiming that he was raised by God to revive the dormant oldest Pentecostal movement in the country (interviews 10/06/201). UFI has become one of the Pentecostal churches that attract large numbers of people to their services. There have been claims of healings and miracles and these have continued to heighten public curiosity and attract the attention of the media. The claimed healings and miracles in UFI are significant to this article as we need an in-depth critique of the methods employed.

Makandiwa grew up in Muzarabani, one of the remote rural areas in Zimbabwe. Guti also grew up as a herd boy in the Mutemangaone rural area of Chipinge district. The rural backgrounds of both Guti and Makandiwa are important in a number of ways. Rural areas are the haven of Shona traditional religion and culture. Many people flock to rural areas during holidays and moments of crisis in their lives in order to carry out traditional rituals. The places that Guti and Makandiwa come from are

popularly claimed (as a general view/perception/belief among the Shona) to be areas where witchcraft is widespread in Zimbabwe. This is important because we need to establish whether or not these backgrounds and popular belief in witchcraft have informed the “deliverance” activities in these two Pentecostal churches. The craving for power for healing and miracles appears to be influenced by the strong belief in witchcraft. We will therefore briefly explore the belief in witches and witchcraft among the Shona people.

### **Witchcraft and witchcraft activities**

The belief in witchcraft activities is widespread among the Shona people (the dominant ethnic group) in Zimbabwe. Although the belief is widespread, it has a focus in certain areas and these include Chipinge (where Guti comes from), and Zaka and Muzarabani (where Makandiwa grew up) among others. People visit traditional healers (*n'anga*), for protective charms from evil forces and for healing. Some of these charms or icons can be tied to the body or kept in designated areas in the home. We argue that the central place that is given to healing and deliverance is largely necessitated by belief in witchcraft activities from the Shona worldview. People can slowly change their values but they cannot readily overthrow the cognitive framework within which they understand the world they live in (Sundkler 1961:55). In an African worldview, the religious is inextricably intertwined with political, economic, ecological and other social forces. A people's worldview constitutes the lens with which they interpret the world around them and the African worldview is religious at its core (Gundani 2004:87). Although Pentecostals emphasise “a complete break from the past” (which is however controversial), we need to start our analysis from the pre-conversion era of these Pentecostals. It matters where an analysis starts or is located because many studies on African Pentecostalism that are placed in the contemporary period and in the context of modernity and urban culture miss how the movement fits into the indigenous worldview as well as the Pentecostal practices in the rural context (Kalu 2008:169). Guti and Makandiwa's rural backgrounds are significant in as far as the traditional belief in witchcraft and protection from evil powers seems to have influenced the emphasis on deliverance. The use of religious icons seems to be borrowed from the familiar traditional practices in both Pentecostal movements. In an interview with a ZAOGA pastor, she said:

I was called around 2 am. A mother-in-law is sending *tokoloshis* (a malevolent mythical man-like animal of short stature) to her daughter-in-law. She comes to sleep in the one-roomed house. That is not according to our custom. The lady is failing to conceive because of that. The lady was delivered around 9 am this morning (interview: 26/5/2011).

The pastor brings two things to light. The belief in witchcraft activities with the use of concoction and also antisocial behaviour (mother-in-law sleeping in her daughter-in-law's bedroom is taboo among the Shona) is equated with witchcraft. Among the Shona people, witchcraft involves not only the use of concoctions. There are times when people point to antisocial acts as *kuroya* (bewitching) (Chavunduka 1994.) For example, a mother-in-law cannot enter a daughter-in-law's bedroom, let alone sleep on the floor. That is tantamount to witchcraft. The Shona believe in the use of bad medicine that can be used to ensure that there is no conception. Among the Shona, children are very important for a variety of reasons and failure to conceive means one cannot extend the lineage. Sometimes it can lead to divorce or the husband marrying another woman.

Guti taught that he did not want to hear people accusing one another of witchcraft. Instead one has to pray and deliver the witch. He does not deny that witches are there. There are also several rumours in the church (ZAOGA) in which members accuse one another of witchcraft. Hence Guti diplomatically commands believers not to accuse one another but to “deliver” the witch from the evil powers. We locate this within the framework of arguments and strife that have characterised Shona extended families or neighbours who often accuse one another of witchcraft. In spite of the claims of being “born again” and undergoing several deliverance sessions, many members still point to witchcraft activities, haunted by evil spirits even within the church. In one incident, a pastor scolded a teenage girl: “You like your demon of witchcraft, why is it refusing to go? You are failing to maintain your deliverance. I am leaving you like that.”

However, tradition among the Shona has it that *uroyi hwedzinza hauperi* (witchcraft activities inherited within the lineage are difficult to exorcise). Even when one converts, one might continue with witchcraft activities. This brings to light that although Pentecostals claim to offer solutions to all problems in life there are some limitations, which might explain why members continue to attend deliverance sessions for deliverance and protection from evil powers and for healing. In cases where

physical healing “fails”, it also explains why people revert to traditional healers whom they believe can cure and offer protection. Sometimes members seek the help of both traditional and Pentecostal religious functionaries. We therefore need to examine ZAOGA and UFI forms of healing.

#### **The quest for healing and power**

Health is one of the primary concerns of the Shona people (Shoko 2010:87) and it is where Zimbabwean Pentecostalism has shown a great deal of innovation by re-sacralising, re-interpreting and re-defining traditional symbols such as artefacts. Life is so precious and of such cardinal value in African societies that it has become the starting point of some theologies (Stinton 2004:120). This is why in ZAOGA and UFI, the theology of deliverance dominates their services. This means the African concept of life is fundamental to the ways in which Christians interpret and appropriate the gospel. This is perhaps where African Pentecostalism differs from North American Pentecostalism. Among the Shona traditional healers would give protective charms, amulets and *madumwa* (talismans). We therefore need to establish how ZAOGA and UFI administer healing to its adherents in order to assess how and in what ways they have drawn from the traditional religion.

*Methods of healing among Pentecostals*

Nkomazana and Tabalaka (2009:141-146) explain the methods that Pentecostals use in healing in Botswana. These methods equally apply to Pentecostals all over the world. They include laying on of hands, anointing with oil, worship, healing at a distance, healing by faith in the word and also through faith in the name of Jesus. The aspect of primal spirituality has a dogmatic formulation in classical Pentecostalism (Ukpong 2008), and Cox (1995:110) argues that healing is central among Pentecostals. Healing is an essential element of the primary piety, the archaic spirituality, that Pentecostal worship brings to the surface. Ayegboyin (2004:79) also argues that healing is central among Pentecostals. He points out that Pentecostals believe that one who is called to begin a ministry will also be equipped to perform signs and wonders, foremost of which is to heal the sick and deliver the oppressed. The themes on healing, deliverance and protection (maintaining deliverance) are stressed at conferences, seminars and conventions.

Ayegboyin (2004:79) underscores the same point by adding the following:

The enthusiasm and the willingness of New Pentecostal Churches to address people's problems like sickness, poverty, attacks from evil spirits, barrenness, loneliness and all kinds of unproductiveness and misfortunes demonstrate the centrality of healing and wholeness to the African.

However, in this study we acknowledge this enthusiasm but go beyond to examine the use of religious healing and protective icons by ZAOGA and UFI that resonates well with or is influenced by the traditional paradigm. We need to explore the deliverance explosions in ZAOGA because they are one of the major platforms for claimed healings and miracles.

- ZAOGA's deliverance explosions

We note in the deliverance sessions, services and crusades a strong undercurrent of the belief in witches and witchcraft activities. You hear of Satanism in ZAOGA. But what are they referring to? "By Satanism we mean *varoyi neuroyi hwavo*" (witches and witchcraft [sermon: 5/7/2011]) in which ZAOGA gives primacy to deliverance. It is argued and taught that when one is born again, one has to make a complete break from the past (2 Cor 2:17). A complete break is achieved by denouncing the past verbally (Rom 10) and attending deliverance sessions because the evil spirits that dominate families will continue to haunt the believer and prevent him or her from prospering in life. Deliverance is, therefore, undertaken by ZAOGA to prevent/remedy the negative ills that bedevil believers.

- The use of symbolic icons in healing and deliverance

In ZAOGA, Guti's portrait is found in every church, in the manner that president Mugabe's portrait is found in both private homes and government institutions. This is meant to acknowledge the authority of the leadership. In ZAOGA, Guti alone is recognised as the founder and president of the movement and the presence of his portrait in every ZAOGA church reinforces this claim. The use of this portrait has a strong autocratic and authoritarian undercurrent. However, there is a belief and several claims that the portrait has healing powers. Several people claim to have used the portrait to cast away demons and to heal the sick. Below is the testimony of a ZAOGA elder:

We toiled all the night but the young girl that we were praying for did not get deliverance. One of the leaders then told us that he had witnessed a group using Guti's portrait to expel demons. We then took the portrait and before we even started praying the girl shrieked and the demon went away. Until now the girl is free (interview 2/7/2010).

It was also reported during Sunday service in Chitungwiza (Seke 1 assembly) that a crusade team from Zimbabwe went to Mozambique and had difficulties expelling demons. Some of these evil spirits and diseases remain a threat to the believers; therefore, without the pastor around, they have to ensure that the believer continues to be protected. The team used Guti's portrait for healing and the people were delivered. We note the myth of sacralising Guti's photo, both in the church and in believers' homes (many ZAOGA members have Guti's portrait in their homes). Thus the portrait has gained the significance of a protective charm. This has resulted in Guti being elevated to a living saint. Guti (2008) claims:

... how many of you dreamt me when they had challenges? It is not me but God [who] sends angels to you, that personify themselves as me. But they will be angels to deliver you. Then your problems will be gone!

A ZAOGA pastor and evangelist claimed that he was raising money in order to visit TB Joshua in Nigeria. He wanted healing powers and he admitted that he was challenged by Makandiwa, the 34-year-old founder of the UFI movement. He inquired about the water that TB Joshua gives to his patients and wanted to know what was in the water. The quest to use objects is informed by the Bible but the desire to get impartation from TB Joshua is more or less *kuromba* in Shona. *Kuromba* is a word that denotes the act of visiting a traditional healer in order to get medicine (*muti*), to be feared, to be wealthy or in any way noteworthy in society. Besides the idea of getting impartation, a ZAOGA pastor in Chitungwiza was caught at a traditional healer after several visits, in the trap set by a member of his congregation (*Herald* 3/7/2011). In his defence, the pastor claimed to have been forced by his relatives to visit the traditional healer (interview 6/7/2011). The pastor is one of the veteran leaders close to Guti. His closeness to Guti is of significance as it portrays the contradiction of the message that leaders preach while on the other hand they often visit traditional healers.

UFI also run these deliverance services and we need to examine them in order to establish the quest for power for healing and miracles.

- Deliverance sessions in UFI

Members of UFI have sacralised the life of Makandiwa from childhood. They claim that Makandiwa had divine visitations from childhood. Some of the stories claim that when he was staying with his grandmother at his rural home in Muzarabani, they went out into the field and while Makandiwa was sleeping in the shade people saw this shady area burning. They saw Makandiwa was fast asleep but was not hurt (interviews 25-5, 8-9/6/2011). He is pictured as the biblical Moses in the incident of the burning bush. The stories are significant as they help to bolster the claim of divine calling by these pastors and cultivate uncompromising allegiance to the founders. Makandiwa holds his services at the National Sports Centre and has healing sessions three days a week. Makandiwa employs several methods of healing but this study examines the use of icons. Informants who are former members of Makandiwa's AFM assembly claim that before Makandiwa broke away from AFM, he used to say: "*Muchandiona kana ndave kubva kuGhana*" (You will see when I return from Ghana, the powers that I will have) (interview). Ghana is where his mentor/spiritual father known as Boateng is. It is speculated that Makandiwa went to get powers from Ghana to perform miracles. West Africa is pictured in West African/Nigerian movies as a place where there is widespread occultism.

Also critics of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe have argued that the "miracles" in West Africa have been a result of the acquisition and use of traditional medicines. Makandiwa authorises his believers to go to the Nigerian Pentecostal healer and miracle worker TB Joshua (interview 9/9/2011). Most interviewees confirmed that healings take place in Makandiwa's sessions and services but that some people would relapse into their former state afterwards (interviews 25/5/2011). Below are testimonies surrounding the mystery healing power of Makandiwa's cream jacket:

#### Testimony 1

A ZAOGA pastor claimed that a sister of a member of his crusade team became mentally ill. The family members took her to Makandiwa's service. Makandiwa did not pray for the sick but simply told them to touch his jacket. The mentally ill lady became sane after touching Makandiwa's jacket.

#### Testimony 2

After church service, Makandiwa's wife Ruth was holding the jacket in the passage at their home. Their two maids met Ruth in the corridor and they both fell down and started speaking in tongues (interview 7/9/2011). It is the same jacket that was sent to Mutare (city in the Eastern part of Zimbabwe). People were seen praying touching the jacket for anointing (interview 7/9/2011).

In the light of the above testimonies, Makandiwa's jacket becomes a deified religious icon and many members of his church have defended the use of the jacket. The question that we might ask is how different is it from the icons that the *n'anga* use when employing healing?

Testimony 3

A lady with a bulging stomach regularly went to the hospital for treatment. She claimed that the Prophet (Makandiwa) had prophesied that she would undergo the problem that she was experiencing. This prophecy gave her hope “outside hope”. However, she had to go to Nigeria to TB Joshua, with the approval of Makandiwa. Although she still has her bulging stomach she claims that her health is being restored.

In the light of the above testimonies, Maxwell’s (2005) observation is valid: he writes that Zimbabwean Pentecostalism (ZAOGA) continues to give people hope in the face of social and economic challenges. People invest their faith in these “men of God” to the extent that some claim that they have used towels or healing cloths that were prayed for by these leaders.

**The use of towels**

In the Bible, Acts 19:12 talks of handkerchiefs or aprons from the bodies of apostles that had healing powers so that those who were sick were healed. In like manner, Pentecostals like Benny Hinn have been praying for cloths for healing, but for specific sicknesses. ZAOGA and UFI have employed the same means of healing through the use of cloths. Most UFI members have bought the cloths for \$3 (US). They claim that the cloths have healing powers and are protective. Apart from healing and protecting, one can wipe a car for example and in future, through faith, one can acquire a similar car. Below are testimonies of miracles that UFI members claimed as a result of using the towels:

Testimony I

A lady claimed that her cooking stove stopped functioning and she could not cook. She then phoned an electrician but then she remembered the towel. She wiped the stove with the towel and it worked. She then cancelled the appointment with the electrician (interview 3/7/2011).

Testimony 2

Towels have been used to wipe cars that believers intend to buy.

However these stories become questionable because it is not logical to claim that simply wiping a stove and a car of your dream will enable you make the stove work and to drive the car.

Testimony 3

A lady claimed that the towel was burnt and that afterwards it was found on the bed of the sick person the following morning (interview 2/7/2011).

So there are also negative stories about the use of such icons.

In yet another case it was claimed that UFI reflects occultism and that what is done by Makandiwa is no different from the work of magicians or *n’anga* in ATR. While Acts talks of shadows and handkerchiefs that the apostles used, they were not used for everyone or at all times. Because every member of the church can buy the towels for healing and protection, and as a means to getting wealth, the icons become more or less objects that are venerated by UFI members but are equivalent to a charm or amulet, as a means of protection or fetish. Supernatural or magical powers are attributed to such objects. Traditional icons seem to have been re-defined by the genius of Guti and Makandiwa. People are attracted because they are familiar with the symbolism of the icons and seem to understand and interpret them from their traditional Shona perspective. Yet Pentecostals are opposed to traditional medicine and the icons used by traditional healers because it is tantamount to worshipping the ancestors instead of God (Chavunduka 1994:5). The founders act as specialists and are also expected to deal with a wide range of social problems. Maxwell (1995:366) points out that in ZAOGA, they look to the movement, in particular to Guti, for protection from *ngozi* (avenging spirit), *chikwambo* (witchcraft) and for fertility, healing, success in public examinations, jobs and “repaired” marriages (as various forms of life challenges).

This is not to claim that all Pentecostals display the same mentality. Within the church, resentment is expressed obliquely. In spite of a general belief in healing, a ZAOGA elder claimed that the prophecies and miracles of TB Joshua were too exact and that she did not like them. She said Ezekiel Guti performed miracles but that those of Joshua were too frightening (interview 6/7/2011). However, the use of and quest for healing icons betrays ZAOGA and UFI in their “affiliation” and allegiance to the traditional conception and methods of healing. They appear to have been sourced from

the traditional religion but the methods have been re-defined and re-sacralised in new forms. We proceed to examine the deployment of icons for healing.

### **Healing and use of icons in ZAOGA and UFI**

Many people from ZAOGA and UFI have claimed to have been cured of all manner of diseases, including HIV/AIDS, through prayer. Togarasei (2009:37) observes correctly when he points out that the Bible stories inform healing in Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. While the Bible informs healing among these Pentecostals, they appear to have made innovative adaptations from their local experiences. Among the Shona, each household or person needs protective charms or icons. Makandiwa prays for the healing cloths/towels and every member of the church has access to them. Yet in the Bible, the apostles prayed for the healing cloths for those who were sick. This article argues that the difference lies in the local interpretation of protection, deliverance and healing from evil forces rather than interpretation of the Bible in their use of protective icons (cloths/towels and portrait). Protective icons resonate well with the traditional beliefs. Therefore, ZAOGA and UFI seem to draw from the traditional religion that continues to inform their perception and conception of healing and protection. The religious ideas are expressed through protective charms and emblems. ZAOGA and UFI have found ways of accommodating old values in their deliverance services, sessions and crusades. This leads us to the quest for material wealth. There is also an economic undercurrent as evidenced by Makandiwa's claim that "the more you bring to God the swifter the healing".

We should point out that among the Shona, health (healing) and wellbeing (material wealth) are related. One notes that in these Pentecostal churches, physical healing is related to prosperity, and prosperity enables the believer to give to God and live in abundance (Gifford 2009:145-146). The quest for miracles has given birth to the claims of miraculous prosperity.

### **The quest for miracles of material wealth**

Related to healing (as part of wellbeing) is the quest for material wealth by ZAOGA and UFI. The love of material wealth espoused in the message of prosperity betrays the Pentecostal interpretation of the Bible. Spiritual matters are ignored and material wealth is overemphasised. Some ZAOGA pastors have left the church after being deployed in the rural areas where people claim that one cannot prosper materially as one can in the city. It is within this area that we find ZAOGA does not balance the gospel in terms of the spiritual and the material. They show more inclination towards the traditional perception of affirming earthly life than towards the Biblical emphasis on the need to prepare for spiritual life.

The theology of prosperity does not leave room for the teachings of Jesus at the cost of discipleship (Mark). This reflects an inclination towards understanding prosperity from a traditional perspective that is holistic and denies negative ills as a result of evil spirits. Yet the Bible talks of sacrificing and becoming poor for the sake of the gospel. Pentecostalism has been portrayed as a crossless Christianity which is inadequate and adulterated, but in fact is not Christianity at all (Akinwale 2004:121-122). UFI members fall into three groups, based on their contributions to the church: the gold class, composed of those who pay \$1 000 (US) per month, the silver class, who pay \$500 (US) a month, and the bronze class who pay \$100 (US) and more. This means that those who do not contribute are not recognised. Anyone wishing to participate in Makandiwa's deliverance session pays \$1 (US). The ZAOGA has different ministries that are funded by members of the church. The quest for healing and miracles has had a significant bearing on the Pentecostal belief and practice of giving, commonly known as "seeding"/ "sowing". The ZAOGA and UFI claim that sometimes a sick person needs to "sow" in order to be healed, especially to the "man of God" (a gospel that appears to function as financing the ever-expanding movements and the lavish lifestyles of their founders).

### **Seeding/Sowing**

Both the ZAOGA and UFI believe in giving. Recently the terms "seeding" or "sowing" have become popular. Seeding takes various forms, funding church activities and giving to the "man of God", who is usually the founder of the church, although these churches have been sensitive to the needy. In ZAOGA and UFI people seek to accumulate wealth. Sermons are marked by statements like "To be poor is a sin before God" or "Why are you poor? Check your life/relationship with God!"

Informants who attend services at the Apostolic Faith Mission in the Hebron assembly, where Makandiwa was pastor before he broke away to form the UFI, claim that he always preached about giving and prosperity (interview 25/5/2011). Pentecostals seed in order to get powers for either prosperity or healing. The desire to get powers brings to mind *kuromba*, the act of getting powers from



a traditional practitioner in order to acquire wealth, mostly at the expense of others. Pentecostals seek to get powers to prosper (see Maxwell on penny capitalism), although the purpose differs. Some need power for miracles and some for healing. Other pastors are simply obsessed with getting fame by just demonstrating their power when people for example touch an object like a handbag belonging to the pastor and the preacher. Makandiwa's preaching portrays the need for and love of money. The message that "Jesus is coming soon" is ignored. Guti says: "Let us not claim heaven every day [because] what matters is what you do here on earth before you go to heaven." There is a strong desire to participate in worldly affairs that shows a strong alignment with the traditional thinking/ perception that is not preoccupied with life after death but with the "here and now".

Akinwale (2004:114) argues that Pentecostalism is disconnected from the apostolic origins through "elastic reading" (misreading) of the gospel (with reference to the Eucharist and Episcopate) and that their teachings are not consistent with the authentic apostolic witness today in Nigeria. This applies to ZAOGA and UFI and we argue that in the same manner the discontinuity and inconsistency are because Pentecostals continue to listen more to the silent voice that we discern as traditional Shona religion than to the authentic biblical teachings and practices. The voice of the ATR remains authoritative among Pentecostals as they continue to create avenues that accommodate their traditional Shona way of life. In addition to that, in ZAOGA objects such as Eunor Guti's peanut butter and key holders are also icons for prosperity. It is claimed by believers that when they started using Eunor's key holders and peanut butter, sales of their goods increased. The underlying thrust is to get wealth by several methods. These become equivalent to the traditional use of charms for prosperity. Although Zimbabwean Pentecostalism has a redemptive and empowering theology one notes that old ideas survive in new forms (Shorter 1997:547); although they have been suppressed they persist.

The lavish lifestyles of leaders show that the love of the gospel is far outweighed by the love of accumulating material wealth. Makandiwa's one-year-old ministry sees him in possession of a latest Mercedes Benz and a house in Borrowdale, a leafy suburb of Harare. Recently, amid controversy and speculation, he left the country to holiday with his family in three overseas countries, including the United Kingdom and United States of America, leaving the "Catch the Fire" conference at which he was one of the main speakers. Most ZAOGA properties use Guti's name: for example the Ezekiel Guti Training Center, Ezekiel Guti Evangelistic Association, Ezekiel Guti Farm and Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University.

### **ZAOGA's "talents"**

Maxwell points out that "talents" were started by Priscilla Ngoma, although uncritical believers claim that they were initiated by Guti, contradicting Eunor who acknowledged the initiative of Ngoma. "Talents" refers to the money that one gets from buying and re-selling different goods or products such as vegetables. Guti always encourages his church members to be self-reliant so that if they lose their jobs, they will not be paupers. So it is money that one gets apart from the monthly/weekly salary. Talents are meant to empower the individual believer financially. Maxwell (1995) notes that ZAOGA encourages penny capitalism, with encouragement to prosper through hard work and seeding to the "man of God" (Guti). Seeding to the life of the "man of God" includes the "Birthday Gift".

### **ZAOGA's "Birthday Gift"**

The Birthday Gift is money that is contributed at the end of each year in order to "thank God and Guti". It is claimed that Guti uses the money from the birthday gift to donate to the needy churches. It is in the spirit of the birthday gift that we note how Pentecostals continue to pay allegiance to the echoing voice of traditional Shona religion. It is more or less the Shona practice known as *Zunde ramambo*. *Zunde ramambo* refers to the contributions that are made to the king by the subjects. The contributions were mainly in the form of grain or herds of cattle. The king would distribute these to the needy families, especially in times of crisis such as drought. In ZAOGA, the power to distribute the contributions to the needy ZAOGA or Forward in Faith (ZAOGA outside Zimbabwe) churches rests with Guti. Makandiwa has also donated cars, houses and groceries to members of the church and the needy from the contributions made by believers. This is the social aspect of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism that has an affinity with the traditional structure. Traditional symbols are reinvented in the process of appropriation of the gospel and the social world is reconstructed at individual and collective levels (Kalu 1998:4). Thus the old Shona concept of methods of healing appears to have been revived.

### **ZAOGA "round tables"**

ZAOGA women organise “round tables”. They divide themselves into groups and give one another a specific agreed sum of money in rotation. Each group has rules and a member who falters or breaks a rule pays a fine which goes to the person hosting the round table. “Round tables” first started and became popular among non-religious groups. ZAOGA has borrowed the concept, in the name of economically empowering women in the church. However pastors continue to rebuke and warn believers about involving themselves in traditional practices and rituals. The way of discouraging them is to denounce the ATR (in the manner that some Western missionaries denounced the ATRs). Chavunduka (1994:5) says the missionaries hated traditional healers because they thought that they acted as a hindrance to conversion. So they used the tactic of negative labelling in order to portray a negative picture, but they failed to destroy the traditional religions. So in the same manner Pentecostals demonise traditional practices, although they are often found engaging in these same practices. The fundamentalist and literalist approach to the Bible that Pentecostals adhere to and their allegiance to ATR, is our premise to argue that ATR continues to shape the ZAOGA and UFI worldview.

The irony is that ATR is “silenced” and seems not to find a place among the Pentecostals, yet “echoes” a voice that is listened to. Because of the existing affinity it is natural to make a case (Ayegboyin 2004:74) that they have borrowed from traditional Shona religion. While it may be difficult to identify all the apparent influences of ATR, evidently some overt and covert impacts are discernible in ZAOGA and UFI. These two Pentecostal churches re-enact biblical practices and ATR.

This gives weight to Thorpe’s (1991:118) observation:

Although ATR has often seemed to give way to either Christianity or Islam, on closer analysis, it remains discernible as a vital force among African peoples in much the same way that yeast, which cannot be seen, nevertheless permeates dough and changes its nature.

#### **Analysis of the quest for material wellbeing**

Shoko (2010:85) also argues that the saying that you can take an African out of the bush but that you can never take the bush out of an African is a condescending statement that is used to refer to Africans who have adopted a modern Western way of life but still hang onto their traditional beliefs. The schizophrenic attitude displayed by members of ZAOGA and UFI is because they are “standing between two cultures and are rarely well seated” (Shoko 2007). They are called by two voices: they need to pay allegiance to the Christian gospel but they cannot completely discard their traditional religious upbringing. This may be the reason why these Pentecostals either redefine the traditional practices and methods or in extreme cases participate in the traditional rituals under the guise of revelation from God. Those beliefs and rituals bring in the question of conversion. What do Pentecostals mean by “conversion” and being “born again”? To what extent do they live up to that claim? Against the backdrop of these questions, we argue that Pentecostals continue to engage the traditional belief systems and practices and that conversion does not entail “a complete break from the past”. The eschatological gospel is silent as the Pentecostals are more preoccupied with physical matters (healing and prosperity) than with the spiritual aspects of prosperity and healing. The use of icons is to enforce that worldview to ensure that all are healed, although Jesus did not physically heal all. There might be a thin margin, if any, within which Pentecostals are allowed to continue sourcing their ideologies of healing and wealth from traditional religion.

#### **Conclusion**

ZAOGA and UFI are radical and fundamentalist Pentecostal denominations in terms of their attitude towards traditional beliefs and practices. However, in their quest for healing, miracles and wealth accumulation they continue to engage with ATR at different varying and innovative levels. ZAOGA and UFI have a religious inclination that continues to tap into the reservoir of the traditional Shona religious culture in search of the meaning of life. Zimbabwean Pentecostalism has been a popular religion that is not alien to the masses (Jules-Rosette 1997:161) because it does not offer anything completely new. Kalu (1998:30) validly points out the following:

After a century of Christian experience in Africa, a process has begun leading, in the words of Sanneh, to a deeper engagement with issues of personal and social identity in scripture and with questions of individual transformation and cultural fulfilment. Much of that has taken place in the context of lively awareness of the African religious worldview.

ZAOGA and UFI have re-sacralised objects that resonate well with popular traditional religious and cultural understanding. This has made Pentecostalism viable to many Zimbabweans because ATR continues to be an “echoing” voice. As averred by Maxwell (2002:9), and applicable to the Pentecostals in question, African Christian leaders and practitioners borrowed from traditional culture and religion; but their appropriations were re-coded when located within a Christian system of ideas and thus took on a new form and significance which has great appeal. Hence there has been change and persistence because the answers to human suffering, fears, anxieties and other crises that the traditional religion has fashioned for many centuries are so deeply entrenched that they cannot easily be replaced, even by those of Christianity (Aguwa 1995).

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### Oral material

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