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# DEATH AND AFTER-LIFE RITUALS IN THE EYES OF THE SHONA

Dialogue with Shona Customs in the Quest for Authentic Inculturation

Canisius Mwandayi



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## **Abbreviations**

A.D	Anno Domini
AIDS	Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
AMEC	American Methodist Episcopal Church
AMECEA	Association of Members of Episcopal Conference in East Africa
ANE	Ancient Near East
ATR	African Traditional Religion
BCE	Before the Common Era/ Before the Christian Era/ Before the Current Era
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CA	Catholic Association
CAA	Catholic African Association
c.A.D	about Anno Domini
CWN	Catholic World News
EL	Elohim
IMBISA	Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa
LMS	London Missionary Society
LXX	Septuagint
NADC	National Association of Diocesan Clergy
NT	New Testament
RCBC	Rhodesia Catholic Bishops Conference
RSV	Revised Standard Version (Bible)
SACBC	South Africa Catholic Bishops Conference
SJ	Society of Jesus (Jesuits)
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
WCC	World Council of Churches
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference
ZINATHA	Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association

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## **Summary in German/ Deutsche Zusammenfassung**

### **Rituale im Zusammenhang mit Tod und Jenseits aus der Sicht der Shona: Ein Dialog mit Shona-Traditionen im Streben nach authentischer Inkulturation.**

Die vorliegende Arbeit ist im Forschungsfeld der Theologie kultureller Begegnung angesiedelt. Sie beschäftigt sich insbesondere mit den Problemen, die durch das Verbot der traditionellen Shona-Zeremonie der „Heimholung des Geistes“ (*kurova guva*, auf Englisch *bringing home the spirit*) durch die frühen christlichen Missionare verursacht wurden. Während die Missionare wie selbstverständlich davon ausgegangen waren, dass das Verbot unter den Christen Fuß fassen würde, waren sie sich nicht darüber im Klaren, in welchem schwierigen Dilemma es die Gläubigen bringen würde. Schon seit dieser Zeit wie noch heute sind die Shona zwischen der Welt des christlichen Glaubens und ihrer Welt traditioneller afrikanischer Werte und Überzeugungen hin und her gerissen. Zwar sind auch andere Konfessionen in Zimbabwe keinesfalls frei von diesem Dilemma, doch konzentriert sich diese Arbeit vorrangig auf die katholische Kirche.

Im Geiste des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils (1962-65) und der Afrikanischen Synode (1994) versucht diese Arbeit, einen engen Dialog mit den Shona in Bezug auf ihre Begräbnissitten herzustellen, der darauf angelegt ist, die christliche Botschaft in ihre Kultur zu integrieren. Dies ist nicht das erste Mal, dass eine Diskussion dieser Art in den Vordergrund rückt; seit den späten 1950er und frühen 1960er Jahren waren wiederholt unzufriedene Stimmen zu hören hinsichtlich des Verbots des *kurova guva* und des Bedürfnisses, die traditionelle Zeremonie durch einen christlichen Ritus zu ersetzen. Dies resultierte in der Veröffentlichung *Shona ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* („Reinigung des Geistes“) durch die Katholische Bischofskonferenz von Zimbabwe im Jahr 1982. Trotz seiner amtlichen Verkündigung trifft dieses Dokument jedoch selbst bei Katholiken auf Widerspruch und Protest. Einige Laien und sogar kirchliche Würdenträger bestreiten die lehrmäßige Gangbarkeit dieses Textes. Infolgedessen ist die Katholische Kirche von Zimbabwe tief gespalten zwischen einer liberalen Gruppe, die die Authentizität afrikanischer Spiritualität vertritt, und einem konservativen Lager, das die theologische Relevanz afrikanischer Gebräuche bestreitet. Auf der wissenschaft-

lichen. Ebene ist der Themenbereich der Indigenisierung jedoch noch dürftig besetzt. Bislang sind erst wenige nennenswerte Werke erschienen, beispielsweise Paul Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Kurova Guva Ritual in Zimbabwe* (1994), John Elsener und Fritz Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit of the Dead: The History of a case of Inculturation in Zimbabwe* (2001) und Berry Muchemwa: *Death and Burial Among the Shona: The Christian celebration of death and burial in the context of inculturation in Shona culture* (2002). Die vorliegende Arbeit gewinnt ihre Bedeutung also nicht nur daher, dass sie einen wissenschaftlichen Beitrag zum dürftig erforschten Gebiet der Inkulturation liefert, sondern auch daher, dass sie zu einer Zeit erscheint, in der die katholische Kirche in Zimbabwe sich hinsichtlich des *kurova guva* in einer festgefahrenen Situation befindet.

Die Vorgehensweise der vorliegenden Arbeit orientiert sich an einer systematischen Reflexion afrikanischer Kulturwerte im Hinblick auf drei Prinzipien: die Heilige Schrift, die Heilige Tradition der Kirche und das Magisterium bzw. das kirchliche Lehramt. Sie geht dabei von der Annahme aus, dass es in den Bestattungsriten der Shona zahlreiche positive kulturelle Elemente gibt, die sich für die Vermittlung des Evangeliums als nützlich und vorteilhaft erweisen.

Zu Beginn werden in Kapitel 1 alle verwendeten Fachtermini definiert. Dabei wird versucht, die Bedeutung oder den Zusammenhang zu erläutern, in denen die Begriffe verstanden werden sollen. Die Schlüsselbegriffe, die hier eingeführt werden, sind: das Volk der Shona, Bestattungsriten, die traditionelle afrikanische Religion, Dialog und Inkulturation.

Kapitel 2 der Arbeit untersucht im Detail die Ereignisse und Ursachen, die zu der gegenwärtig festgefahrenen Situation geführt haben. Zunächst beschreibt es, wie die frühen Missionare, die nach Zimbabwe kamen, um bei den Shona zu arbeiten, eine religiöse Kultur vorfanden, die sich grundlegend von ihrer eigenen unterschied. Diese Andersartigkeit bestand nicht nur darin, dass die Religion nicht schriftlich niedergelegt war, sondern auch darin, dass ihre Anhänger ihre Ahnen zu verehren schienen, aber kaum eine Vorstellung von einem Höchsten Wesen hatten, und dass ihre religiösen Überzeugungen aus Aberglauben über Geister, Gespenster und Hexen zu bestehen schienen. Obwohl es einen Glauben an die Unsterblichkeit gab, erschien es, als sei nichts über das Jenseits bekannt. Die höchste Priesterin war meist eine Frau,

die vorgab, mit *Mhondoro*-Geistern (Löwengeistern) zu kommunizieren. Außerdem genoss ein Mediziner hohes Ansehen, der in der Meinung des Volkes höheres Wissen besaß, aber tatsächlich die Leichtgläubigkeit der Menschen ausnutzte, um sich selbst zu bereichern. Dies war das Bild der religiösen Kultur der Shona in den Augen der Kolonialisten und Missionare, das schließlich zu einem Verbot des *kurova guva* führte, mit der Begründung, dass es das erste der Zehn Gebote verletze.

Mit dem Aufkommen eines afrikanisch-christlichen Bewusstseins kam es jedoch zu einem Aufbegehren gegen das Verbot des *kurova guva* durch die *Catholic African Association (CAA)*, eine Laienorganisation. Dies führte zu einer langen und kontrovers geführten Debatte, die praktisch die ganze katholische Kirche in Zimbabwe in den Abgrund riss. Der Ruf nach einer Aufhebung des Verbots war so stark, dass die katholischen Führer in Zimbabwe schließlich gezwungen waren, in die Forderungen einzuwilligen. Ihrerseits regten diese eine tiefer gehende Untersuchung der Shona-Kultur an, die zum Ziel hatte, bessere Wege zur Integration des fraglichen Ritus aufzudecken. Das Ergebnis dieser Untersuchung war die Veröffentlichung des christianisierten Ritus, *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* (1982).

Während die Bischöfe glaubten, einen wichtigen Meilenstein in der Afrikanisierung der lokalen Kirche erreicht zu haben, fand der Ritus bedauerlicherweise keine Anerkennung in der Praxis. Seine schwache Akzeptanz trug dazu bei, eine weitere harte Debatte über das alte Thema des *kurova guva* anzufachen. Eine gewisse Gruppierung im afrikanischen Klerus brachte die Einschätzung der Missionare wieder auf, nach der das *kurova guva* das Erste Gebot missachte. Verschiedene Passagen der Heiligen Schrift wurden angeführt als Belege dafür, dass der Brauch des *kurova guva* vollkommen fehlgeleitet sei. Dies traf allerdings auf starken Widerspruch anderer Vertreter des Klerus und der Laien. Bis zur Zeit der Abfassung dieser Arbeit verläuft diese Diskussion noch ergebnislos.

In Kapitel 3 nimmt die Arbeit diese Debatte auf, indem sie zunächst untersucht, wie die Missionare die Heilige Schrift bei ihrer Begegnung mit nicht-christlichen Religionen benutzten. Die Arbeit stellt eine Verbindung her zwischen der Verwendung der Heiligen Schrift durch die Missionare und der Art ihrer Auslegung durch die bereits genannte Gruppierung im afrikanischen Klerus, die fortan in der Arbeit als die „Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa“-Schule charakterisiert wird. Bei beiden

wird ein Interesse an einer bestimmten Tendenz in der Botschaft der Heiligen Schrift festgestellt, nämlich der nachdrücklichen Verfechtung des Monotheismus. In ihren Augen bot es sich an, die christliche Kirche als das neue Volk Gottes (die Israeliten) und die nicht-christlichen religiösen Auffassungen als Götzenverehrung und verabscheuungswürdige Praktiken aufzufassen, die in diesen monotheistischen Texten angegriffen und verhöhnt werden.

Die Arbeit verfolgt die Denkweisen dieser Missionare weiter, um ein besseres und schärferes Bild von ihnen zu erhalten, und untersucht in der Folge den sozialen und historischen Kontext, in dem diese monotheistischen Texte entstanden. Dabei zeigt sich: Der Monotheismus ist „a kind of inner community discourse establishing a distance from outsiders; it uses the language of Yahweh’s exceptional divine status beyond and in all reality (,there are no other deities but the Lord’) to absolutize Yahweh’s claim on Israel and to express Israel’s ultimate fidelity to Yahweh.“<sup>1</sup> (Übers.: eine Art von innerem Diskurs einer Gemeinschaft, der eine Distanz zu Außenstehenden herstellt; er benutzt die Sprache von Jahwes außerordentlichem göttlichen Status jenseits und in aller Wirklichkeit (,es gibt keine anderen Götter neben dem Herrn’), um Jahwes Anspruch auf Israel zu verabsolutieren und Israels unbegrenzte Treue zu Jahwe auszudrücken.) Dieser Diskurs, so wird beobachtet, entwickelte sich vor allem während der Nach-Exil-Phase in Juda. Neben diesen monotheistischen Texten, die eine sich nach außen abgrenzende Ghetto-Mentalität unter den Juden verbreiteten, gab es jedoch auch Texte, die eine einschließende Perspektive einnahmen. Diese einschließenden Texte scheinen die Missionare und Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa-Schüler übergangen zu haben – ein erheblicher Fehler ihrerseits.

Im Weiteren konzentriert sich die Arbeit insbesondere auf diese Denkschule und liefert eine exegetische Analyse der meisten Texte, auf die sich die Schule stützt, wobei kaum Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen dem, was diese Texte ächten, und den Praktiken der Shona aufgedeckt werden. Trotz der nur schwer zu fassenden Bedeutung der in diesen Texten enthaltenen Verbote wird angemerkt, dass die traditionelle Religion der Shona nur einen Gott kennt, ganz im Gegensatz zu den po-

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<sup>1</sup> N.S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugarit Texts*. N.Y. 2001, p. 154.

lytheistischen Strukturen, die in diesen Texten behandelt werden. Am Ende des Kapitels wird die Hermeneutik der Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa-Schule in Frage gestellt, die Lukas 16, 19-31 heranzieht, um ihre Argumentation zu stützen, nach der Gott es keiner Seele erlaubt, auf die Erde zurückzukehren – eine Fragestellung, die in dem Text nicht keineswegs wird. Diese Herangehensweise deckt nicht nur die Schwäche der Hermeneutik dieser Schule auf, sondern sie widerspricht sogar der Lehre der Kirche über die Gemeinschaft der Heiligen.

In der Absicht, eine starke argumentative Unterstützung für den Wert der traditionellen Shona-Praktiken zu liefern, beginnt Kapitel 4 mit einer Untersuchung verschiedener Epochen der Kirchengeschichte im Hinblick auf ihr Heilsverständnis. Es wird festgestellt, dass die patristische Epoche durch zwei Typen von Aussagen charakterisiert war, die sich auf ein bekanntes Axiom bezogen: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. Ein Typus besteht in restriktiven Aussagen, die scheinbar alle, die nicht volle Mitglieder der Kirche waren, vom Heil ausschließen, während der andere Typus die Kirchenmitgliedschaft weniger einschränkend definiert. Beide Versionen scheinen die gesamte Kirchengeschichte hindurch bis zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil nebeneinander existiert zu haben, jedoch mit leichten Vorteilen auf Seiten der restriktiveren Auffassung. Das Zweite Vatikanum stellte diesen Irrweg richtig, indem es offiziell anerkannte, dass das Heil auch außerhalb der sichtbaren institutionellen Kirche möglich sei. Das Thema der ‚getrennten Brüder‘ wurde angegangen und es wurde zugebilligt, dass auch nicht-katholische Christen der Erlösung würdig seien, insofern als auch sie an Christus glauben und in ihnen vieles Gute zu finden sei. Entsprechendes galt für nicht-christliche Religionen: Es wurde anerkannt, dass auch sie von Gott eingesetzte, regelmäßige Wege für Gottes Heilswirken seien und dass die katholische Kirche diesen Lehren zu Handlungsweisen und Lebenseinstellungen respektvoll begegne. Das Zweite Vatikanum verlangte also eine Rückkehr zum Inkarnationsprinzip bei der Evangelisierung, die auch die frühe Kirche charakterisierte, da nun offiziell anerkannt war, dass nicht-christliche religiöse Formen, Strukturen und Erfahrungen durchdrungen seien von unzähligen Samen des Wortes. Die besondere Rolle der Kirche angesichts dieser Religionen wurde definiert als die eines Instrumentes der Mission der Inkarnation unter den Nationen. Als das ‚universelle Sakrament der Erlösung‘ und ein ‚Licht der Nationen‘ soll die Kirche ‚Licht‘, ‚Salz‘ und ‚Sauerteig‘ für die

Welt sein, indem sie der Welt vor Augen führt, dass Gott inmitten seines Volkes ist.

Die Konzilsväter ermutigten alle Kinder der Kirche, von Christus ein fruchtbares Zeugnis zu geben durch das Beispiel ihres Lebens und ihres Verhaltens gegenüber den Anhängern anderer Religionen und ehrfürchtig die Samen des Wortes zu erkennen und zu würdigen, die in diesen Religionen verborgen sind. Beiträge von Karl Rahner und Johannes Paul II. wurden als zusätzliche theologische Verankerung der Position des Zweiten Vatikanums gewertet.

In Anwendung der Empfehlungen des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils sucht Kapitel 5 der Arbeit die ‚Samen des Wortes‘ in den Bestattungsbräuchen der Shona aufzudecken. Über die Diskussion um das *kurova guva* hinausgehend untersucht es die Mehrzahl der Shona-Riten, die sich um den Tod drehen, in der Überzeugung, dass eine Beschränkung auf das *kurova guva* nur Stückwerk bliebe. Eine Analyse der traditionellen Praktiken der Shona zeigt, dass sie heilstiftende Elemente in großer Zahl enthalten. Diese Werte, beispielsweise der Respekt für das Leben, den Gemeinschaftssinn, die Achtung für den letzten Willen, das Eingeständnis der Unvollkommenheit jedes Menschen, die Verantwortung der Lebenden für den Weg des Verstorbenen, der Respekt für die Stätte der Toten, die Treue zu seinen Verpflichtungen und andere wurden anerkannt als die regulären gottgegebenen Mittel, die Gott selbst für die Erlösung des Volkes der Shona gestiftet hat.

Dies bedeutet mit anderen Worten, dass die Begräbnissitten der Shona nicht nur von Gott toleriert, sondern tatsächlich von ihm so vorgesehen wurden. Seit Anbeginn der Vorfahren der Shona ist Gottes Geist, der die gesamte Welt durchdringt, auch in ihrer Mitte tätig. So kann die Kirche von sehr Vielem profitieren, wie diese Arbeit aufzeigt, wenn sie die Praktiken der Shona ernst nimmt. Die Tatsache, dass die menschliche Natur und ihre Bestrebungen von der Sünde überschattet werden, wird angemerkt und somit auch eingeräumt, dass sich möglicherweise auch schlechte Elemente in den Praktiken der Shona finden könnten.

Um der traditionellen Ordnung der Shona gerecht zu werden, befasst sich die Arbeit in Kapitel 6 mit dem traditionellen Berufsstands des Heilers/der Heilerin, einer Figur, deren Rolle in den Begräbnisriten der Shona mit dem Aufkommen des christianisierten *Kuchenura Munhu*-Rituals zerschlagen wurde. Beim Nachzeichnen der Geschichte des

traditionellen Heilberufs fällt auf, dass traditionelle Heiler vor der Kolonialisierung eine privilegierte Position in der Shona-Gesellschaft inne hatten, die jedoch mit der Ankunft der Kolonialisten und Missionare stark geschwächt wurde. Traditionelle Heiler und ihre Anhänger wurden als Verehrer des Teufels gebrandmarkt, verdammt für die Hölle, es sei denn, sie konvertierten zum Christentum; schlimmer noch, es wurde ihnen nachgesagt, dass sie andere vom Glauben an Gott abbrächten und zur Anbetung der Ahnen verleiteten. Dieselbe Verdammung erstreckte sich auch auf ihre Medizin, die als wirkungslos betrachtet wurde, da sie nicht nach wissenschaftlichen Standards entwickelt wurde.

Trotz der Versuche, dem traditionellen Medizinmann seine Berufsausübung zu verbieten, suchten Einheimische weiterhin Rat und Hilfe bei der traditionellen Medizin, bis die traditionellen Heiler es schließlich schafften, sich zu verschiedenen Verbänden zusammenzuschließen und sich somit gegenseitig zu stärken. Nach Zimbabwes politischer Unabhängigkeit wurde die eher nationale Vereinigung ZI-NATHA gegründet. 1981 trat das Gesetz *The Traditional Medical Practitioners Act* in Kraft und verschaffte den traditionellen Heilberufen endlich die lang erstrebte offizielle Anerkennung. Traditionelle Heiler konnten ihr verlorenes Prestige somit zurückgewinnen.

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht ebenfalls die Art und Weise, wie man traditioneller Heiler werden kann. Besitzergreifung durch einen Geist, eine Ausbildung, Träume und Lehren durch *nzuzu*-Geister unter Wasser werden als die üblichen Wege angeführt, durch die man in den Stand der traditionellen Heiler aufgenommen wird. Des Weiteren wird der Verhaltenskodex von traditionellen Heilern betrachtet. Demnach wird die Glaubwürdigkeit des Kodex für sehr gut befunden, wohingegen es der Berufsstand des Heilers Unglück brächte, wenn der Ethikkodex (*muko*) nicht befolgt würde. Ein Abschnitt beschäftigt sich auch mit den sozialen Funktionen eines traditionellen Heilers. In diesem Zusammenhang wird festgestellt, dass der traditionelle Heiler an erster Stelle der Shona-Gesellschaft steht. So wird er/sie nicht nur als Arzt/Ärztin bei Krankheiten betrachtet, sondern seine/ihre Dienste beinhalten auch jene als Priester/in in religiösen Fragen, als Polizist/in bei der Aufklärung und Verhinderung von Verbrechen, als Anwalt/Anwältin in rechtlichen Anliegen, als Besitzer/in von Zaubermitteln für das Allgemeinwohl der Gesellschaft und andere Nebenfunktionen.

Am Ende des Kapitels wird der Vorschlag gemacht, dass sich Priester und traditionelle Heiler bei ihren Aufgaben gemeinschaftlich unterstützen. Es wurde angemerkt, dass beide ihre Arbeit hervorragend ausführen könnten, wenn sie einander sowohl im Bereich des Heilens und der Erlösung als auch bei der Betreuung von Sterbenden und Verstorbenen helfen würden. Die vorliegende Arbeit befürwortet einen solchen Schritt, wenn er auch neuartig und herausfordernd ist, da beide auf Gott als die letztgültige Quelle des Wohlergehens vertrauen.

Nachdem diese Arbeit sowohl die heilsbringenden Werte der traditionellen Shona-Begräbnisbräuche als auch die zentrale Rolle des traditionellen Heilers in den traditionellen Praktiken herausgestellt hat, wendet sie sich in Kapitel 7 schließlich den Möglichkeiten zu, wie das Prinzip der Inkarnation auf diese Begräbnisriten angewandt werden könnte. Drei Herangehensweisen werden vorgeschlagen, nämlich der integrierte Ansatz, der unabhängige Ansatz und der Substitutionsansatz, die letztlich alle das Ziel verfolgen, dass sich die Kirche unter den Shona und auch die Shona in der Kirche zu Hause fühlen kann bzw. können.

Beim integrierten Ansatz wurde das christianisierte *Kuchenura Munhu* herangezogen, aber sowohl dessen Unvollständigkeit als auch die Missachtung des traditionellen Heilers wurden als seine Hauptschwachpunkte angesehen, die die vorliegende Arbeit zu beseitigen versucht. Indem zwei Methoden angewendet werden, die in der Vergangenheit zu erfolgreichen Formen der Inkulturation in die Kirchengeschichte geführt haben, nämlich diejenige der dynamischen Äquivalenz und der kreativen Assimilation, wird festgestellt, dass Vieles von den Shona-Praktiken in die christliche Botschaft integriert werden kann. Wenn auch die Lehren der Kirche verschriftlicht wurden, wohingegen diejenigen der Shona mündlich und eher praktisch überliefert werden, wurde ein gemeinsamer Nenner zwischen den beiden ausgemacht, der ein Umsetzen der Kirchenlehren in die lebendige Sprache und die Praktiken der Shona möglich macht. Durch kreative Assimilation könnte eine Vielzahl von Symbolen bei den traditionellen Praktiken der Shona Raum für eine kontextuelle Theologie der Shona bieten.

Zum unabhängigen Ansatz wird dann angemerkt, dass die traditionellen Begräbnispraktiken der Shona eigentlich unabhängig von einem direkten christlichen Einfluss weitergeführt werden könnten, so dass eigenständige christliche Praktiken nur hinzugefügt würden, ent-

weder im Anschluss oder zuvor als Lückenfüller. Es wird argumentiert, dass es den Shona-Praktiken, da von Gott bestimmt als Mittel der Erlösung für die Shona, nur an Vollendung mangelt, da die menschliche Natur und ihre Bestrebungen von Sünde überschattet sind. Der sühnende Tod Christi wurde als beste Vollendung dieser traditionellen Praktiken gesehen. Wenn beide Seite an Seite bestehen können, so die Argumentation, bestärke dies individuelle Freiheit und verhindere einen Antagonismus, der manchmal zwischen Anhängern des Christentums und traditioneller Religionen besteht.

Zuletzt wurde der Substitutionsansatz behandelt, wobei ein Individuum mit den richtigen Motiven alles in die Hände Christi legt. Mit anderen Worten, es ersetzt alles Traditionelle durch das Christliche, allerdings nicht aus Geringschätzung gegenüber der traditionellen Religion, sondern um Christus in seinem Leben den Vorzug zu geben. Christus nimmt somit den Platz der verehrten Ahnen ein, die selbst gerne Christus den Vortritt gewähren würden, da sie alle rücksichtsvolle und kultivierte Menschen sind. Die Art und Weise, wie Priester und Nonnen betrauert und begraben wurden und ihr Andenken gewahrt wurde, ebenso wie die gegenwärtigen Praktiken des *Nyradzo* und des Enthüllens des Grabsteines werden als Wegweiser in diese Richtung betrachtet. Dabei wird jedoch auch die Problematik betont, dass es sich hierbei tendenziell um individuelle Präferenzen handelt, die oftmals zu Konflikten mit der Familie oder Gemeinschaftsinteressen führen. Eine weitere bedeutende Schwäche ist die Tatsache, dass so die eigene Kultur aufgegeben wird und durch eine fremde Kultur ersetzt wird.

Das Kapitel endet mit der Bemerkung, dass die Kirche nicht versuchen sollte, einen bestimmten Weg oder Ansatz vorzuschreiben, da jeder einzelne zulässig und gangbar erscheint. Kultureller Wandel und Glaube sollten das Beste für jede Familie bestimmen. Eher sollte die Kirche sich mehr für den Pluralismus in Dingen des Glaubens einsetzen, denn wir leben bereits in einer pluralistischen Gesellschaft.

Bei der Aufzeichnung des Afrikanisierungsprozesses der Kirche in Zimbabwe lässt sich feststellen, dass, obwohl im Bereich der Kirchenmusik, der Übersetzung der Bibel in einheimische Sprachen und der Feier der Messe in einheimischer Sprache Fortschritte gemacht wurden, noch immer eine Art Zögern vorherrscht, insbesondere in der Hierarchie, wenn es um weitere Innovationen geht. Wie wahr waren in der Tat die Worte von John Baur, der die Wurzeln dieses Zögerns in

einer Spirale des Misstrauens, die durch die Kirche geht, sieht. Er merkt an: „Rome mistrusts the African bishops, the bishops mistrust the priest, the priests mistrust the lay people, whenever a new initiative is started or a new idea proposed.“<sup>2</sup> (Übers.: Rom misstraut den afrikanischen Bischöfen, die Bischöfe misstrauen den Priestern, die Priester misstrauen den Laien, wann immer eine neue Initiative gestartet oder eine neue Idee vorgeschlagen wird.) Was kaum bedacht wird, ist, dass diese Innovationen tatsächlich darin resultieren könnten, dass sich die Kirche wohler unter den Einheimischen fühlt und die Einheimischen sich wohler in der Kirche fühlen. Denn viele fürchten die Veränderungen, die mit einer weit reichenden Welle der Inkulturation einhergingen; sie zögen es vor, den Status quo zu verteidigen, indem sie sich an das Vorbild der missionarischen Aktivität hielten. Mit anderen Worten, sie fühlten sich wohler, wenn westliche Erfahrungen des Christentums weiterhin übernommen würden.

Um dieses Zögern in der Hierarchie anzugehen, denke ich, dass es notwendig wäre, sich das Vorbild des verstorbenen Papstes Johannes Paul II vor Augen zu halten. Während seiner Pastoralreisen in Afrika fand er kraftvolle Gesten der Anerkennung und des Dialogs mit ATR. In einer seiner Reden, die in der Vatikanpublikation *L'Osservatore Romano* veröffentlicht wurde, sagte er: „The adherents of African Traditional Religion should [...] be treated with great respect and esteem and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided.“<sup>3</sup> (Übers.: Den Anhängern der afrikanischen traditionellen Religion sollte mit großem Respekt und großer Wertschätzung begegnet werden und jede Form von falscher oder respektloser Sprache sollte vermieden werden.) Er ließ seinen Worten Taten folgen, als er 1986 zusammen mit verschiedenen religiösen Führern auch Vertreter der ATR zu einem Tag des Gebets nach Assisi einlud. Diese drei waren: Togbui Assenou aus Togoville (Togo), Amegawi Ottoto Klouse aus Be-Lome (Togo) und Okomfo Kodwo Akom aus Cape Coast (Ghana). Sechs Jahre später lud er die Führer unterschiedlicher Religionen wieder zu einem Tag des Gebets für den Frieden in der Welt. Unter den Eingeladenen befand sich auch ein Voodoo-Priester aus der Republik Benin. Im Jahre 1993 be-

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<sup>2</sup> J. Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Nairobi: S. 517.

<sup>3</sup> Papst Johannes Paul II., in: 'L'Osservatore Romano' (11.05.1994) zitiert in C.D. Isizoh, *Dialogue with Followers of ATR: Progress and Challenges*, [www.africaworld.net7afrel/dialogue-with-atr.htm](http://www.africaworld.net7afrel/dialogue-with-atr.htm) (letzter Abruf 15.04.08).

suchte er selbst Benin während eines internationalen Vodun-Festivals und sprach zu Vodun-Anhängern. Sowohl das internationale Festival wie auch dessen Anerkennung durch Johannes Paul II verschaffte der Vodun-Religion eine beispiellose Sichtbarkeit.<sup>4</sup>

Zuletzt möchte ich darauf hinweisen, dass ich, obwohl die vorliegende Arbeit zugegeben ermaßen das Thema nicht erschöpfend behandeln kann, mich bemüht habe, angesehene Autoritäten der meisten Fachbereiche, die die Arbeit berührt, zu zitieren und heranzuziehen, um die speziellen Fragen dieser Arbeit zu untersuchen. Dort, wo die Arbeit den Beitrag von christlichen Historiographen verlangte, habe ich deren Aussagen zu Rate gezogen. Dort, wo die Arbeit nach einer biblischen Perspektive verlangte, habe ich Autoritäten auf diesem Gebiet hinzugezogen. Falls eine missiologische Fragestellung behandelt wurde, wurden Autoren dieser Fachrichtung besprochen. Falls es galt, phänomenologische Einblicke zu geben, habe ich phänomenologisch gearbeitet und falls theologische, anthropologische und liturgische Belange diskutiert wurden, wurden auch dazu Experten auf diesen Gebieten herangezogen. Obwohl ich auf all diese Teildisziplinen verweise, möchte ich keineswegs behaupten, alles ausgeschöpft zu haben. Diejenigen, die in diesen verschiedenen Fachrichtungen ausgewiesen sind, mögen noch immer Kritik üben oder Ideen weiterentwickeln, die ich nur flüchtig umrissen habe. Denn: „The whole of history“, schreibt G.R. Elton, „The whole of a person, or a problem – can never be got between the covers of one book [...]“. <sup>5</sup> (Übers.: Die gesamte Geschichte, die Gesamtheit einer Person oder eines Problems kann niemals zwischen den Deckeln eines Buches eingefangen werden).

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<sup>4</sup> Vgl. Isizoh, *Dialogue with Followers of*.

<sup>5</sup> G.R. Elton zitiert in Gundani, *Changing Patterns of Authority*, S. 1.

## Introduction

This research lies in the field of the Theology of Cultural Encounters. It grapples in particular with the problem that ensued after the Shona traditional ceremony of BRINGING HOME THE SPIRIT (*kurova guva*) was forbidden to the Christian converts by the early Missionaries. Whilst the Missionaries had simply assumed that the prohibition would take hold among the faithful, they did not realize into what difficult dilemma it was placing them. The Shona were thus torn apart between the world of Christian beliefs and their world of African traditional values and beliefs. Since those early days up to this present time, Shona Christians suffer from this 'split-personality syndrome'. More like their brothers and sisters in the whole African continent and even beyond, they suffer from:

[...] a double tendency that makes them live their Christian life in two parallel lines that hold them between their fidelity to Christ and their fear of *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits). This polarity becomes a confusing and disturbing factor in their Christian behavior. It creates a painful tension in their conscience. And this tension, so devastating to their Christian faith [...] must at all costs be resolved.<sup>1</sup>

Had proper steps been taken by the early Missionaries to inculturate the Gospel into Shona culture the Shona would possibly not have been suffering from this painful tension. Though other denominations in Zimbabwe cannot be said to be exempted from this 'split-personality syndrome' this thesis focuses mainly on the Catholic Church.

Following the spirit of Vatican Council II (1962-65) as well as that of the African Synod (1994), this research is an attempt to have an intimate dialogue with the Shona as regards their funeral customs with a view to inculturate the Christian message into them. The task at hand is surely not an easy one for whilst there seems to be a fairly wide consensus on the need for inculturation; most difficulties arise when it comes to the application of general principles of inculturation to particular areas. More often than not, there is disagreement, hesitancy, passive and active resistance to the ways and steps to reach the end in view.

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<sup>1</sup> E.J. Mavhudzi cited in J. Elsener and F. Kollbrunner, *Traditional and Christianized Rites of Accommodating the Spirit of the Dead: A History of a Case of Inculturation in Zimbabwe*, Harare: 2001, pp.45-46.

Yet another aspect we have to factor in also is what the South African Bishops Conference in its *Pastoral Statement on Inculturation* (1995) highlighted:

Another difficulty [...] we will encounter is the already existing deep wound caused when the local culture was neglected or even despised for many years. We have to work for the healing of such wounds. We begin our task of inculturation by asking pardon for having hurt others, by not respecting their culture in the Church for so many years.<sup>2</sup>

It is not the first time that a discussion of this nature has come to light, discontented voices since the late fifties and early sixties on the ban on *kurova guva* and the need to replace the traditional ceremony with a Christianised rite are a known fact. This resulted in the publication of the *Shona ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* (1982) by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. In spite of the publication, however, the document faces resistance and objections from the Catholics themselves. Some of the laity and even elements of the hierarchy itself are not convinced of the doctrinal viability of this document. In his address to more than 800 Catholic men gathered for the St Joseph's Guild National Congress at Regina Mundi in Gweru, the Right Reverend Alexio Churu Muchabaiwa took an opposing stance in his remark, "If there is anything that destroys Christianity it is *kurova guva*. It destroys Christianity fundamentally".<sup>3</sup> This highly contentious declaration stirred a two-hour long heated debate among the delegates for it was like a bombshell.

What happened at Regina Mundi was just a tip of an iceberg. For many years now, Catholics in Zimbabwe have passionately and emotively differed on this thorny issue and this has left the Church deeply divided with battle lines drawn between a liberal group cognisant of the authenticity of African spirituality and a conservative camp which does not believe in African practises as having any theological significance.

Since unity in diversity is what we clamour for in the Church as a whole, there is need to find ways in which people are able to tolerate and appreciate other peoples' ways of worship. A divided community spells disaster for its own self. In the case of the Church in Zimbabwe, a way

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<sup>2</sup> SACBC, Pastoral Statement on Inculturation, <http://emi.it/AfricanEnchiridion/ae/docs/annexes4.htm#1307> (accessed 07/10/09).

<sup>3</sup> A.C. Muchabaiwa cited in 'Cultural practice destroys Christianity: Bishop,' <http://www.herald.co.zw.php?id=31499&update=2004-05-03> (accessed 05/03/04).

forward would be to try and bring the two camps together through the incorporation of sound ideas from both sides. To achieve this end result, this research will progress along the lines of a systematic reflection of African cultural values in the light of three key principles or sources of authority in Catholicism, namely: Sacred Scriptures, the Church's Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium/Official Teaching Authority of the Church. A bit more detailed explanation of these principles comes in the later part of this introductory section of the thesis. The research is anchored on the assumption that there are many positive cultural elements in the funeral rites of the Shona which are useful and advantageous for bridging the gospel.

### ***Justification of Study***

As one can already see, the Church in Zimbabwe has since been gripped with a serious crisis. Though much has been done to try and avert this crisis, some of the researchers who have so far focused on the issue are at times found hammering on distorted facets of these rituals. More often than not one finds also cases whereby inappropriate research methods, data gathering techniques and interpretations have been used. It just has to be admitted that for any meaningful inculturation to result, research methods that are essential and applicable to these rituals should be in place. It is on this basis that I consider this research justified for it makes use of the phenomenological method as one of its key methods. In as far as this method seeks to respect the believer; I find the research tool so key in that it tallies so well with the Vatican II and African Synod spirit which advocates the respect for other peoples' cultures and beliefs.

The better Shona customs are understood by heralds of the gospel, the easier will be the presentation of the gospel message to these peoples. Through a proper study of Shona customs the underlying felt-needs of the Shona will be identified and in that way Christianity will be in a position to respond to those needs in a more effective way. By the end of the day the Church will become more and more at home among the Shona and they themselves become also more and more at home within the Church.

Further justifying the taking up of this research work are the experiences of the Shona themselves with their traditional culture. To begin with, it is a fact of reality that the fear of death and the dead makes the hearts of many Shona people to melt. Any failure to follow properly

the ancestral traditions is believed to bring about revenge upon the living. As a result of this fear of the dead coupled also by a reverential respect for them we find that many Christians live a 'frog type' of existence. When the water current in a river is strong a frog is known to jump out for safety and when the water becomes still it jumps back. In the same way, when everything is alright it is easy to find many Christians in Church almost everyday but when a moment of crisis comes they secretly rush back to their traditions for they feel they can get effective help and healing from such traditional practices. Some, however, do it openly for they believe that there is nothing in Shona burial customs that is irreconcilable with Christian faith and morality. Some even go to the extent of joining sects or the so-called 'Independent Churches' where they feel that some elements of their traditional culture are being more respected than in the mainline Churches.

Though some Christians affirm that Shona customs which are offensive to the Christian conscience are not to be forced upon staunch Christians, the traditional clan customs more often than not, take the precedence over the stated preferences of the individuals. In view of this whole scenario I consider this research justified in as far as it helps us think through the Shona traditional religious heritage or in other words, to understand the appeal of the traditional religion. An issue that surely needs to be fully addressed is why these Christians resort to traditional practices. Could this be merely a sinful relapse brought on by the Evil One or can we not learn some felt-needs which the Church has not yet met with its present approach to ministry and teaching? It is surely imperative to reflect more deeply on Shona traditional practices otherwise the work of evangelization remains at a standstill.

One thing for sure is that African Traditional Religion is still alive and dynamic. It is the religious and cultural context from which most Christians in Africa come and which many of them still live to a greater extent. Even in the academia, we find some of the intellectual elite declaring themselves to be adherents of African Traditional Religion. As part of the academic pursuit this research is justified for it tries to give value to that which is at the heart of African peoples

Today among the Shona, as in the rest of the tribes in Zimbabwe, there is a cry for genuine, authentic African Christianity, one that is truly rooted in the lives of the indigenous peoples. Carried by the spirit of nationalism, they are rejecting many of the customs and ways of the

Europeans and are now seeking to re-assert their own traditional ways, including their religion. This close association of the traditional religion with nationalism really poses a serious problem for the Christian church. A non-thinking negative attitude, as Richard J. Gehman would put it, is not the answer. A Christian surely need not reject all the pleas for 'authenticity', 'self-identity', 'African culture' and 'African personality'. A passive blind acceptance is equally not possible for a Christian. A passive attitude leading to compromise spells disaster for the Christian church.<sup>4</sup> In so far as this research seeks not to offer a blind eye to this problem at hand I consider it justified. Using the aforementioned key principles as the standard measure, where truth is to be found in the Shona traditional customs we must preserve but where error exists, we must expose.

No man or woman can in a brief lifetime grasp all that there is to know about various cultures. At best all that scholars have managed to do so far is to present different cultures from their various points of view. The same can be said of this thesis; it is a look at the encounter between the Judeo-Christian culture and Shona burial customs. I consider such an investigation justified in the sense that it seeks to contribute to the Theology of Cultural Encounters.

### ***Scope of the Study and link with previous works***

Quite a number of authors have, in passing or detail, looked at Shona traditional customs but so far very few works have been devoted to the study in particular of the relation between traditional Shona funerary rites and the Christian teachings. What follows below is a selective look at some of these works so as to bring to light the road that has been traveled so far in the debate on *kurova guva* and thereby map out areas of consideration for future works including the current study.

The study of African traditional religion in general started a long way back but such a study can be said to have been heavily coloured by the bias of European explorers, a bias which early missionaries could not be exempted of. The work by John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Nairobi (2001) is quite a key in this discussion for he tries to capture the sad historical consequence: "First the explorer, then the mis-

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. R.J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Nairobi: 1989, p. 22.

sionary, then the soldier”<sup>5</sup> In their reports and letters back home, these explorers would report that Africans were ‘savages’ to be civilized, ‘cursed sons of Ham’ to be saved and ‘big children’ to be educated. For them, as portrayed in their letters, there existed no African culture, only tribal customs, no religion, only foolish superstitions and devilish cults.

In regard to Zimbabwe, one of the key studies on the colonial mentality and bias of the missionaries is the impressive work by C.J.M. Zvobgo: *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe 1890-1939*, Gweru (1996). Herein Zvobgo looks at the missionary enterprise in both Matebeleland and Mashonaland during that aforesaid period. Among the issues he looks at was the establishment of Christian villages that were meant to shield converts from pagan influences. To bring out this idea well, he makes reference to Fr J. Loubiere who, living during those days, passed this remark:

The pagan atmosphere is so thoroughly corrupt. The Devil is so well at home in the native milieu, he has such a hold on the native mind that nothing short of heroism will enable the young convert to persevere if he is in daily contact with his pagan acquaintances. It is only by creating new surroundings for the converts, by introducing them into a healthy and Christian atmosphere that we hope to preserve them.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the formation of these Christian villages, Zvobgo notes that the general reaction of the natives to the missionaries was that of suspicion and dislike.

Tracing in detail how this hidden transcript of a dislike of the missionary’s ways was finally brought to the public forum is the informative article: *The Roman Catholic Church and the Kurova Guva Ritual in Zimbabwe* (1994) by Paul Gundani. Gundani begins by shedding some light on the Shona people’s beliefs surrounding death and after-life and the resistance of the early Shona converts to the ban of the traditional ceremony of *kurova guva* (re-instating of the deceased’s spirit). Such resistance often took subtle secretive forms. Many catechumens and full members, as observed by Gundani, promised not to perform the ritual but when death occurred in the family they would secretly perform the traditional ceremonies. Following the education of some of the natives and the developments that were happening in the Church the world

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<sup>5</sup> Baur, *2000 Years*, p.420.

<sup>6</sup> C.M. Zvobgo, *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe*, 1996, p. 127.

over, as a result especially of the reforms brought by Vatican II, the resistance shifted from subtle secretive forms to public debates led by a lay group which advocated the recognition of the traditional ceremony of *kurova guva* in the Church.

Equally informative on the push by the natives for the recognition of the *kurova guva* ceremony is a work by John Elsener and Fritz Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit of the Dead: The History of a case of Inculturation in Zimbabwe* (2001). This work adds not so much new information to the one already captured by Gundani except help clarify some of the areas touched in passing in Gundani's article. The same applies to Gundani's own second work around the same subject of the indigenization of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe: *Changing Patterns of Authority and Leadership: Developments in the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe after Vatican II (1965-1985)*, (2001). What is worth appreciating with these works is that they lay the historical foundation of the effort by the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe at indigenization in matters especially related to death.

Proposing a way forward in the face of a stalemate in the *kurova guva* debate as reflected in the afore-mentioned works is a work by Berry Muchemwa: *Death and Burial Among the Shona: The Christian celebration of death and burial in the context of inculturation in Shona culture* (2002). Muchemwa begins by looking at the liturgies of Christian death and burial from the Early Church up to the reforms brought by Vatican II and goes on to suggest a way in which the Roman Rite can be adapted to the fundamental areas of Shona traditional rites of burial. As Muchemwa himself acknowledges, this work is far from being comprehensive. The work, for example, leaves untouched the issue of the traditional healer whose role has often been the borne of contention in the debate on *kurova guva*. In so far as his work also proposes only one approach, namely: that of integration, it means that those opposed to it will remain a stumbling block to such a move. Other methods such as substitution and independent/compartamentalised approaches need to be considered as well in this modern and pluralistic world. It is in this direction that my current investigation is progressing.

A recent doctoral thesis by Antony Igbokwe Amadi: *Inculturating the Eucharist in the Catholic Diocese of Mutare, Zimbabwe*, South Africa (2008) while it is also an attempt to indigenise the Church in Zimbabwe bears less significance to the current study due to its primary focus on

the Eucharist. The same remark goes also to an earlier attempt at inculturation by Frederick E. Chiromba: *The Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist in the Shona cultural situation*, Roma (1988). Generally, the method of inculturation advocated in these works is that of creative assimilation. Amadi, for example, argues for the incorporation of local staple food and drink as some of the possible elements of inculturating the Eucharist. For him,

[...] when the Catholics of Mutare diocese start celebrating Mass with the local staple food and drink, visitors outside the Shona culture will respect their culture and join them to partake of that bread that comes from their own local staple food.<sup>7</sup>

Equally playing a less role to the current investigation is a publication by Zvarevashe, Ignatius M: *Authentic inculturation and Reconciliation: A Catholic Perspective*, Lusaka (2005) in which he tries to explore ways of indigenising the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance among the Shona and Ndebele peoples. What all this help show is that scholarship at the inculturation of Shona traditional customs, especially the funeral rites, is still in its infancy. This current work therefore is important not only in that it adds scholarly literature to the thirsty area of inculturation but also in that it comes at a right time when the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe is faced with a stalemate on the *kurova guva* issue. Adding impetus to the current investigation is an insightful work by Clement Chinkambako Abenguni Majawa, *Integrated Approach to African Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Nairobi (2005). Among the other things Majawa looks at are the salvific values of African traditional religion in general. He also strongly contends that humanity cannot do without inculturation. It is a reality as old as humanity thus even local churches cannot run away from it. For him, failure to come to terms with it, or any naive opposition to its study and implementation, or not wanting to accommodate adequately the reality and process of inculturation is tantamount to ecclesiastical suicide.

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<sup>7</sup> .I. Amadi, *Inculturating the Eucharist in the Catholic Diocese of Mutare, Zimbabwe*, University of South Africa,  
<http://uir.unisa.ac.za/dspace/bitstream/10500/2365/1/hesis.pdf>, p.262.

## **Structure and Methodology**

Since the basic aim of this research is to inculturate the Christian message into Shona funerary traditions, a systematic reflection of Shona cultural values in the light of Sacred Scriptures, Sacred Tradition and Magisterium becomes the umbrella research framework through which various methods shall be employed. I consider this a justified move in the sense that the Bible, in the first place, remains the first and powerful source and principle of any inculturation. Its profound influence on people over the past two millennia cannot in any way be underestimated and it is still no less important today for it is a witness of God's word in human language. It is actually the prime source of every Christian teaching and belief, and takes precedence over everything else. As in the history of Israel, the Word of God in the Church plays such an important role that it conditions the very existence of the Church as God's people. The Church can hardly propagate itself if it is not founded and built on the Word of God. The words of Robert Sarah, Archbishop of Conakry, Guinea, capture well the importance of the Biblical text in this whole discussion when he says, "The Word of God is the centre of everything. It impregnates and gives life to the faith of God's people. It inspires, directs and guides the existence and history of humanity."<sup>8</sup> In approaching the Scriptures, however, Catholic teaching warns against a fundamentalistic interpretation which would like to look at the Bible as a direct revelation of timeless truths. Catholic exegesis, as illustrated by the Pontifical Biblical Commission:

[...] recognizes that one of the aspects of biblical texts is that they are the work of human authors, who employed both their own capacities for expression and the means which their age and social context put at their disposal. Consequently Catholic exegesis freely makes use of the scientific methods and approaches which allow a better grasp of the meaning of texts in their linguistic, literary, sociocultural, religious and historical contexts, while explaining them as well through studying their sources and attending to the personality of each author.<sup>9</sup>

Coming to Sacred Tradition, we find that the Church has a very long

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<sup>8</sup> R. Sarah, *African Bible*, Nairobi: 2000, p. ii.

<sup>9</sup> 'The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church' Presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Pope John Paul II on April 23, 1993, [http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC\\_Interp3.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp3.htm).

tradition stretching from the time of Christ right up to the present day. By Sacred Tradition is meant the life of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with the leadership of the Magisterium in the history of salvation.<sup>10</sup> Appeal to Tradition is justified in the sense that it helps to protect the Unicity, Sanctity, Catholicity and Apostolicity of the Church. Every endeavour thus in inculturation should be faithful to this Tradition. Respect, however, for tradition involves a critique and discernment because not everything in the tradition is of the same value. Fidelity and infidelity undeniably have been seen to characterise the Church since its humble beginnings, one generation or one section of the Church could be or have been more faithful to Christ and the gospel than others.

The third point of reference is the Magisterium. Magisterium can be defined as the official teaching authority in the Church on issues of faith and morals. Encompassed here are also the conclusions of the Church Councils and Synods. Since the thesis is aiming at a fruitful inculturation process of the local Church in Zimbabwe, reference to the central doctrine of the Church is justified for it helps to maintain the authentic relationship between the local and universal Church.

This methodological reflection of Shona cultural values shall be done following four speculative levels which merge with the structure of the work:

**1<sup>st</sup> Level-** This involves the identification of the pastoral, theological or doctrinal problem in the local Church. At this level I shall examine more thoroughly the aforementioned problem, its origins, the two faces of the debate leading to the 1982 publication of the *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu*, and the aftermath of this publication ushering in the current dissensions over the matter. To register success in this endeavour, a Third-World perspective of Christian history shall be employed. While the old guard of Christian history tended to focus more on the achievements of the evangeliser, a Third-World perspective shifts the focus to the evangelised.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Level-** At this level, the path that this reflection takes is that of exegeting Scriptural texts used in the dismissal of non-Christian religions and in particular, the Shona funerary customs. Among the tools

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. C.C.A. Majawa, *Integrated Approach to African Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Nairobi: 2005, p. 110.

used in the exegetical enterprise, social-scientific criticism stands out as the best tool for this task at hand.

J.H. Elliot defines social-scientific criticism of the Bible as:

[...] that phase of the exegetical task which analyses the social and cultural dimensions of the text and of its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models and research of the social sciences.<sup>11</sup>

It studies, in other words, the text as both a reflection of and a response to the social and cultural settings in which the text was produced. Basically its aim is to determine the meaning explicit and implicit in the text, meanings made possible and shaped by the social and cultural systems inhabited by both authors and intended audiences. The matrix of social and cultural forces surrounding a story, are quite essential for a fuller grasp of the story's meaning. Concerning the validity of religious doctrine, for example, the existence of God, the death and resurrection of Christ or the action of the Holy Spirit, this method does not dismiss them as irrelevant but rather asks under which conditions such beliefs are plausible and persuasive, which persons and groups hold which beliefs and what were the social consequences of such beliefs.<sup>12</sup> Thus this method is surely an asset in critiquing the biblical message itself.

Social-scientific criticism, it is to be admitted, has its own limitations. The first limiting factor has to do with the amount and fragmentary nature of the material available for analysis. Biblical texts presume far more than they explicitly state concerning the social world in which they were produced. Though scholars have made a vast reservoir of evidence concerning the social world of the Bible available, their findings, to a greater extent, remain hypothetical in nature.

The second limiting factor is the dread of the Procrustean bed, which is, forcing material to fit the theory. Almost all exegetes and historians are potentially vulnerable to this charge of forcing material into 'cookie-cutter moulds'.<sup>13</sup> More often than not, the end result is that the bed of a precious theory counts more than the variant shapes and sizes of the material to be interpreted. As can be easily noted, specific theories determine scholarly notions on how ancient society was organised and

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<sup>11</sup> J.H. Elliot, *What is Social-Scientific Criticism*, Augsburg Fortress, 1993, p.7.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Elliot, *Social-Scientific*, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Elliot, *Social-Scientific*, p. 94.

functioned, what values and norms governed social conduct, how ancients perceived the world and their place in it and how they sought to make sense of their everyday experience.

At this level also is the examination into the teaching of the Church in regard to her understanding of salvation. The missiological approach stands out as the effective tool to carry out this exercise since the Church's understanding of salvation is related to her mission in the world.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Level-** What is at this level is the systematic exposition of the salvific values in Shona funeral rites as well as an examination into the profession of traditional healers.

Before any exposition is made there is need to understand first the Shona world-view in matters relating to death and after-life. To bring onboard this world-view, the phenomenological method becomes an inevitable tool. The same method will be useful when examining the profession of traditional healers. Phenomenology is actually a philosophical movement attributed to the German philosopher Edmund Husserl [1859-1938]. He defines phenomenology as a descriptive theory of knowledge, which begins from within the person, the subject, and seeks to move outside the person into an objective description of the world. In this process nothing should be assumed but rather everything should be questioned.<sup>14</sup> Its purpose is to describe the phenomena and to attain an understanding of that which is manifested. To arrive at the perception of the thing's essence, the observer must suspend all his previous judgements about the world, including his own feelings, ideas and presuppositions. He must, according to Husserl, perform what he calls 'epoché' meaning 'to stop' or 'to hold back' every previously held belief and assumption and allow pure phenomena to speak for themselves.<sup>15</sup>

The use of this method, however, does not imply that it is without limitations. Two fundamental limitations can be noted within this method. Firstly, it has to be noted that there are no 'pure' descriptions of the phenomena separable from the subjective observer.<sup>16</sup> The subject

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. E. Husserl cited in J.L. Cox, *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, Harare: 1992, p.18.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Husserl in Cox, *Expressing*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cox, *Expressing*, p. 22.

does not merely receive and note the various phenomena striking his or her bracketed consciousness without being actively involved in the process. Epoche, in other words, does not remove the observer from the act of observing. Secondly, there is no final or universal statement of the essence of the meaning of the world possible. The essence of the phenomena simply provides a means for understanding how the observer interacts with the data of experience and is not an end in itself; it is in other words, inexhaustible.

**4<sup>th</sup> Level-** This constitutes the climax of the whole discussion for it is geared towards the application of the inculturation principle to the Shona funerary customs. Through such a functional approach I believe the doctrinal controversy which has rocked the local Church in Zimbabwe will pave way for unity and a better way of living the Christian faith on the Zimbabwean soil.

When it comes to the methods of data collection, while there is much reliance on written literature, personal experience also counts a lot in some sections of the thesis. Having been brought up within a Shona family and environment and later, as an adult, worked within the same society, I have come to personally experience much of the Shona culture. The information gathered via the aforesaid means was augmented also through the interviews I conducted during my field research in Zimbabwe.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

It appears it is an inescapable reality that any research work is faced with limitations of one kind or another. Being finite beings we can only produce limited contributions to any subject.

One limiting factor is that the writer's experience and research has been confined largely to Zimbabwe in general and to the Shona speaking peoples in particular. Problems resulting from an encounter between Judeo-Christian faith and Shona traditional customs are not restricted to the Shona only, rather are common to almost all the tribes in Zimbabwe but for obvious reasons, for example, the diversity in cultural practises and the writer being himself Shona also, I have restricted myself to the Shona group where I have a better experience.

Though it may appear an admirable advantage in restricting my research to the Shona speaking peoples, one has to face the fact that there are different groupings among the Shona speaking people them-

selves. We have, for example, the Zezuru, Manyika, Karanga, Korekore, Ndau, Hwesa and the Bocha people, whose customs differ in one way or the other from each other. Even among these groupings details of the rites may vary even for different clans within a given locality. One therefore has to battle with the human tendency that yearns to generalise, seeing the relationship of the particular to the universal. There is a temptation to minimize the great differences between one ethnic group and another, or in other words, gloss over marked differences and paint something that is far more homogeneous than is actually true.

Not equally to be forgotten is the complexity in data collection. Among the Shona there is a lot of hide and seek, no one wants to let the cat out of the bag when it comes to essential matters of their traditional customs. To magnify it, there are no written rubrics of these rituals. Most of the ritual etiquettes are oral and only to be found in the adherent's memory.

Over and above all, the crippling aspect to the task at hand, just as highlighted already, lies in the complexity of achieving an end result satisfactory to all. While indeed the ultimate aim might be clear to all, the diversity of opinion since the start of this whole debate demonstrates that expertise in various academic fields is called for. How true indeed it is when E. Ikenga-Metuh, a Nigerian theologian says:

Inculturation does not come easy. Any authentic inculturation effort must be preceded by in-depth research by a team of experts in various fields ranging from Biblicists, theologians, liturgists, anthropologists, specialists in African traditional Religion, Church historians etc which many African dioceses or even Episcopal Conferences can ill afford. However, a firm commitment to inculturation towards the realization of African Christianity is enough to make a modest beginning. Then should follow intense study, research, experimentation of theories and praxis in inculturation [...] The research efforts should be accompanied at every stage by intense enlightenment programmes to educate the people on the meaning and importance of inculturation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ikenga-Metuh cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 53.

# Chapter One

## Definitions and some background information

*“The problem of the last century would have been the problem of the colour line. The greatest battle of the new century and indeed of the entire new millennium, is the battle for the African mind”*

- W.E.B. Du Bois

### ***Introduction***

I begin my thesis by setting boundaries to all the technical terms I will employ as well as those terms which may appear common but whose meanings are ambiguous. In cases where there is ambiguity, through setting boundaries I seek to clarify the sense or the context in which I intend that term to be understood. Clarity in the use of terms, I believe, is the keystone in all communication efforts. The key terms to be unpacked at this initial stage of my work are: Shona people; Funeral rituals; African Traditional Religion; Dialogue and Inculturation.

### ***Shona people***

The question of who the Shona are plunges us into the ‘dark’ history of these peoples. I call it ‘dark’ because Western historiography wanted us to believe that the Shona had no history. Writing on Southern African history as propaganda, Martin Hall rightly avers that Southern Africa is a region of extremes and contradictions. Its history is no exception: the way South African and Zimbabwean history has been taught during the colonial period and even today remains a source of controversy.<sup>1</sup>

It would be almost impossible to talk of the history of the Shona without tracking back to the magnificent civilisation on the Great Plateau south of the Zambezi River. This Plateau is the scene of much of the Shona people’s history over the last thousand years. Tonnes of historic evidence at Great Zimbabwe suggest that the ancestors of the modern day Shona are the ones who built this site and hundreds of other stone walled sites in Zimbabwe. It is, however, this history which the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Hall, ‘History as Propaganda in South Africa, Zimbabwe’, in *Lost Cities of the South*. [www.pbs.org/wonders/Episodes/Ep6/6\\_wonder3.htm](http://www.pbs.org/wonders/Episodes/Ep6/6_wonder3.htm). (accessed 18/04/08).

colonial regime, bent on subjugating Africans, tried by all means to obliterate.

Reaching the site of Great Zimbabwe on the eve of colonisation, European explorers were stunned by the immense ruins. It was almost impossible for them to believe how the black African ancestors of the people they were about to colonize and exploit could have had such skill and knowledge to build such an out of this world beauty. It had now been 200 or so years since the site had been abandoned. The first investigator to arrive at the site was Karl Mauch, a German explorer, in 1871. On seeing the ruins, Mauch made a quick conclusion that Great Zimbabwe, whether or not it was Ophir, was most certainly not the handiwork of Africans.

I do not think that I am far wrong, so he wrote, if I suppose that the ruin on the hill is a copy of Solomon's Temple or Mount Moriah and the building in the plain a copy of the palace where the Queen of Sheba lived during her visit to Solomon [...] a civilised nation (implying white) must once have lived there.<sup>2</sup>

A look at the style of the stonework revealed that it was too sophisticated and the culture too advanced. It looked to Mauch to have been the result of Phoenician or Israelite settlers. A sample of the wood he took from the lintel happened to bolster his rapid assessment for it smelled like his pencil. Both appeared to come from cedar and since cedar wood is found in Lebanon, Mauch saw it thus worthy to conclude that Great Zimbabwe was the home of the Queen of Sheba.<sup>3</sup> Deeply imbued with racist attitudes as can easily be seen, Mauch could not credit black Africans with the intellectual ability to construct such an amazing site. Such a vision was limited and securely bound by Arab centeredness and Eurocentricism which mistakenly thinks that Arabs and Europeans are responsible for almost all human achievement and that, conversely, other peoples have achieved little or nothing. This speaks volumes on the intellectual and ideological basis of Arab and

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<sup>2</sup> Manu Ampim, *Great Zimbabwe: A History Almost Forgotten*, [www.manuampim.com/Zimbabwe.html](http://www.manuampim.com/Zimbabwe.html) (accessed 23/04/08).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Hall, *The Antiquity of Man: Great Zimbabwe and the Lost City*, [www.antiquityofman.com/GreatZimbabwe\\_LostCity.htm](http://www.antiquityofman.com/GreatZimbabwe_LostCity.htm) (accessed 23/04/08).

European enslavement and colonization of Africans, some of the biggest crimes in human history.

In the eyes of Henry Ridder Haggard, whose best-selling novel *King Solomon's Mines* fired European imagination with African themes on the eve of the imperialist expansion, Mauch had found in the far interior a ruined city he believed to be Ophir of the Bible.<sup>4</sup> To Mauch, Great Zimbabwe symbolised both the ancient mysteries and the exciting potential of the 'dark' continent. On learning this, the salivating land-grabbers ensured that they would reach this interior and benefit themselves with its promise of gold, diamonds and other valuables.

Several other visitors followed in the footsteps of Mauch and among them was W.G. Neal of the Ancient Ruins Company which had been created in 1895 by the British colonial regime. With the approval of Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902), founder of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and whose aim was to distort the origins of Zimbabwe, W. Neal pillaged Great Zimbabwe and other Iron Age Sites looting away the gold and other precious materials, throwing away what appeared to be of no use to him like pottery shards, pots and clay figures.<sup>5</sup>

What, however, may be termed the first official archaeological dig at the site was done by a British, James Theodore Bent in 1891. Being financed also by Cecil Rhodes, Bent threw away clay and metal artifacts including Persian and Arab trade beads as insignificant. Bent's conclusions were no different from those of his predecessors since Rhodes and most European settlers maintained that native Africans could never have constructed Great Zimbabwe. In his book, *Ruined Cities of Mashonaland* (1892), Bent concluded that the items found within Great Zimbabwe complex proved that the civilisation was not built by local Africans.<sup>6</sup> If J.T Bent was an officially well-trained archaeologist then one might say that he was a victim of circumstances because his conclusion seems not to go hand-in-hand with his profession. The colonial mentality that prevailed at the time that the African continent had no

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. The Historical Context, Conditions and Chain of Events, [www.cbc.ca/newsinreview/sep2000/zimbabwe/historical2.htm](http://www.cbc.ca/newsinreview/sep2000/zimbabwe/historical2.htm) (accessed 18/04/08).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. W. Ndoro, *Great Zimbabwe*, [www.mc.maricopa.edu/anthr/Zimbabwe.pdf](http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/anthr/Zimbabwe.pdf) (accessed 20/04/08), p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ndoro, *Great Zimbabwe*, p. 98.

history, no sophistication, its people and tribes unchanging, unable to develop and culturally barren could have prevailed on him also.

A few other Europeans who appeared to hold a different view from the colonial one were accused of being unpatriotic or worse, in secret conspiracy with black terrorists intent on overthrowing a well-ordered colonial society and so were either imprisoned or deported. One particular dissent voice was that of David Randall-McIver, an Egyptologist. In 1905 Randall-McIver managed to uncover artifacts which were very similar to the ones which were being used by the Karanga people living in the vicinity. The continuity of these artifacts suggested to him that the site had been built by people whose culture was similar. Apart from scoring a great milestone with his conclusion as regards the continuity of the artifacts, Randall-McIver managed also to demonstrate that the Arab and Persian beads were not older than the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> Century and thus could not be dated back to the Biblical times and King Solomon. Yet another argument he advanced was that the stonework was not at all Arabic for it was curved and not arranged in geometric or symmetrical patterns.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent research and digs on the site by J.F. Shofield in 1926 and Getrude Caton-Thompson in 1929 confirmed David Randall-McIver's conclusions.<sup>8</sup>

Despite, however, the mounting detailed evidence and archaeological testimony which was offered by this second group of archaeologists, most European settlers in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) adamantly held on to their old view. To ensure that the findings of this second school of archaeologists received no public recognition, the Rhodesian Front began to censor all books and any information on Great Zimbabwe from 1965 till independence in 1980.<sup>9</sup> It was openly an apartheid kind of system aimed at preventing Africans from gaining power. Kiami Nehusi was thus right to say,

[...] the fundamental form of enslavement of Africans by Arabs and Europeans during the MAAFA:<sup>10</sup> the holocaust of Africans, has not been physical enslavement, but mental enslavement.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ndoro, *Great Zimbabwe*, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ndoro, *Great Zimbabwe*, p. 99.  
Ndoro, *Great Zimbabwe*, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> The term 'Maafa' is derived from a Kiswahili word meaning disaster, terrible occurrence or great tragedy. The term is known also as African holocaust and today has col-

As has been noted earlier on, those archaeologists who tried to be vocal on the native construction of Great Zimbabwe were faced either with imprisonment or deportation. Among the deported victims was Peter S. Garlake, a noted archaeologist. Natives also who tried to perpetuate the same view were kicked out of their jobs and locals were not allowed to use the site for any traditional ceremony.<sup>12</sup>

Prior, however, to the arrival of European explorers, missionaries and settlers the Great Plateau had since witnessed the influx of many tribal groups. Following the Bantu migrations from the original Bantu homeland north of the Great Basin of the Congo River and its tributaries, the Bantu ancestors of the Shona were the first occupants of the Great Zimbabwe site. Ezekia Matshobana informs us that between 500 and 1000A.D, the Gokomere, a Bantu group, enslaved and absorbed San groups who were in the area and as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, some foundations and stonework could be visible at Great Zimbabwe and the settlement generally regarded as the burgeoning Shona society.<sup>13</sup>

Adding more light on this burgeoning Shona society, David N. Beach informs us that the Great Zimbabwe state arose out of the Gumanye culture, the second of the two Shona cultures to have settled on the Southern half of the Great Plateau. South-west of the Plateau was the Leopard's Kopje culture after about 940A.D. In the central Plateau was the Harare culture which flourished from about 1150-80A.D around the Hunyani and Umfuli Valleys. Further to the North and North-west was the Musengezi culture which dates from 1210A.D. These cultures on the Plateau, as Beach further explains, were closely associated with the Eiland and Touppe cultures located beyond the Limpopo and towards the Kalahari. As a result of their close relatedness seen in their pottery styles and being so distinct from their contemporaries, these six cultures can be grouped together into a unit named 'Kutama' from the Shona word

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lectively been used to refer to the 500 years of the suffering of African peoples through slavery, imperialism, colonialism, oppression, invasions and exploitation. The legacy of such enslavement still manifests itself in the socio-economic status of Africans

<sup>11</sup> K. Nehusi, *Mental Enslavement*, p.2.

[www.africaholocaust.net/html\\_ah/mentalslavery.html](http://www.africaholocaust.net/html_ah/mentalslavery.html) (accessed 30/04/08).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ndoro, *Great Zimbabwe*, p.99.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ezekia Matshobana, *Zimbabwe History*,

<http://www.bulawayo1872.com/history/shona.htm> (accessed 15/02/08).

for 'migrate'.<sup>14</sup> Linking also all the cultures together was the fact that they were Bantu in origin. As with the Gumanye culture, Beach informs us that its villages were found across the Southern part of the Plateau from the middle of Mtilikwe River to the Lundi River. It is one of the dynasties of these Gumanye people which is believed to have managed to build up enough power to dominate trade between the South-western goldfields of the Leopard's Kopje people and the coast and this led to the foundation of the Great Zimbabwe state.<sup>15</sup>

These Bantu ancestors of the Shona who occupied Great Zimbabwe were all embodied under the umbrella name 'Hungwe'.<sup>16</sup> Between 1000 and 1050A.D, the Mbire, from across the Zambezi River, took over land from the Hungwe and this invasion marked the beginning of Mbire dynasty which is commonly known as Mutapa Empire. This great empire also known as Monomotapa Empire covered most parts of today's Zimbabwe and incorporated northern parts of South Africa and considerable stretches of Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania. It was ruled by powerful Kings whose wealth was based on huge herds of cattle and whose trade relations extended from neighbouring kingdoms all the way to Arabia and distant Asia.<sup>17</sup> Great Zimbabwe, however, served as the headquarters of the Monomotapa Empire and its hilltop acropolis came to serve not only as a fortress but a shrine for the worship of Mwari, the pre-eminent Shona deity.

Kingdoms rise and fall, so does the history of humanity testify. The Monomotapa Empire was no exception. By around 1500A.D the authority of this powerful empire began to wane. Concrete reasons for this decline cannot be established with accuracy but historians generally believe that the mere presence of so many peoples at Great Zimbabwe could have seriously affected the ability of this site to supply crops, firewood, game and all other necessities of life. Power struggles also among the Mbire could have resulted in the fall of the empire and the founding of the Rozvi Empire in the South-west.

Under the Rozvi Empire, peace and prosperity reigned over the centres of Dhlo-Dhlo, Khami and Great Zimbabwe itself during the two

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. D.N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe 900-1850*, Gweru, 1980, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe*, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Matshobana, *Zimbabwe History*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. The Historical Context, Conditions and Chain of events.

centuries which followed. The Rozvi Empire, however, failed to have complete control over those areas which had formerly been under the Monomotapa Empire. Following the political turmoil in the Transvaal and Natal which had been ignited by the ruthless rule of Shaka, the Rozvi Empire was brought to an end by the Matebeles under Mzilikazi in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>18</sup> The fall of the Rozvi Empire exacerbated the migrations which had long started during even the period of the Mutapa Empire itself. The Rozvi emigrated westwards abandoning their centre and grass began to grow over the ancient walls of Great Zimbabwe.

As the Shona dynasties scattered over a large area and in contrasting environments; they had a language and so many other cultural traits in common. Though, however, they appeared to have many cultural traits in common, these Shona dynasties were not conscious of a cultural identity. Autonomous as they had become, they also conceived nothing of a political identity save only local chieftaincy group. David N. Beach says that even in the times past, when powerful states had emerged, these states had never pulled all their subjects together into self-conscious identities nor had they manipulated concepts of group identity in a manner which left a lasting ethnic legacy.<sup>19</sup>

What the foregoing observation brings to light is that the numerous groups of the Shona were not and had never been clustered together in self-conscious ethnicities such as are implied today by the terms 'Manyika'; 'Karanga'; 'Zezuru'; 'Korekore' and 'Ndau'. Though these ethnic terms were sure in existence prior to the colonial era, each had arisen in a different way and with different connotations. With the coming of the colonial administration, however, bent on the system of divide and rule, tribalism was incited and the tribal differences magnified through the distortion of these ethnic terms.

A closer analysis shows that the terms 'Karanga/Kalanga and Manyika' had a long recorded history while 'Korekore and Zezuru' had a topographical connotation. 'Ndau' on the other hand appears to have had been a slang term invented by the raiding enemy of these Ndau people.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Matshobana, *Zimbabwe History*.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. D.N. Beach cited in T. Ranger, 'Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe' in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, <http://content.cdlib.org/xtf/view?docId, p.121>, (accessed 10/03/08).

## Karanga

The term 'Karanga' as noted by Terence Ranger suffered a shift both of location and meaning. With the moving inland of the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century this historic term was used to refer to the ruling lineages of the Northern and Eastern Shona speakers whom they encountered. When the British came, this term was, however, shifted to refer to the first Shona speakers they had encountered in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Those they encountered in the South-west of the Plateau they named 'Kalanga' while those they met in the Southern Plateau were named 'Karanga'.<sup>20</sup> In the past, however, when the Great Zimbabwe was still flourishing the term 'Karanga' was almost synonymous with Monomotapa.

Today the term 'Karanga' refers not only to ethnic identity but also to the dialect spoken by part of the Shona people. According to Tabona Shoko, the Karanga comprise approximately 30 percent of the total Shona population in the present-day Zimbabwe, occupying an area between Gweru in the North-west, Bikita in the North-east, Chiredzi in the South-east and West Nicholson in the South-west. Shoko goes further to say that contemporary chiefdoms in this vast area of the Karanga are mainly a result of migrations and political alignments in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.<sup>21</sup>

While distinctive features of Karanga culture are remarkably visible, one can note also a similarity of some features to those of the Korekore, Manyika, Zezuru or even the Ndau, for example, in their burial customs. The fruit of early missionary work among the Karanga has been visible especially in the educational system, hence, a number of the Karanga have been quite prominent in elite circles of the Zimbabwean society. As for the Kalanga people, they have somewhat remained cut off from the rest of the Shona peoples. Exacerbating their being cut off was the settlement of the Ndebele people between them and the rest of the Shona peoples. The Kalanga have thus come to develop a distinct language and culture from the rest of the Shona-speaking peoples hence they will not be covered in this thesis.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. T. Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe*, Hampshire: 2007, p.xi.

## Manyika

As indicated already, the term 'Manyika' also had a long recorded history. Back in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century the Portuguese reported the existence of a chiefly territory called Manyika. They thus called the large region around the Manyika Chieftaincy, Manicaland.<sup>22</sup> When the British came in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, they also picked up this historic term and applied it to almost all the inhabitants of that area. Most people, however, living in this region never thought of themselves as related in any way to the Manyika Chieftaincy.

Prior to the existence of this extended Manyika identity, the concept 'Manyika' can be said to have been used in three different ways. H. H. K. Bhila tells us that the original historical meaning of Manyika is the people of Chief or King Mutasa. This territory lies North and North-west of the modern day Mutare city. The Western side bordering Chief Mutasa's kingdom was his long time enemy and competitor for land, cattle, women and slaves: Makoni, who headed the Maungwe kingdom. As a result of the wars between these rivals the boundaries of the two kingdoms often shifted, thus the best definition of traditional Manyika, according to Bhila, was political rather than geographical. Manyika in this case, encompassed all those who at any one time acknowledged the authority of Mutasa and nobody else.<sup>23</sup>

Moving to the second sense in which the term 'Manyika' was used, the Portuguese in the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century developed and propagated this concept for themselves. A claim was made by them that the then reigning Mutasa Chief had made a voluntary submission to them in 1876.<sup>24</sup> They thus utilised this as a basis to expand the area of Manyika

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 122.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. H.H.K. Bhila cited in Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 123.

<sup>24</sup> Soon after their arrival on the East African Coast, the Portuguese had heard tales of a very powerful Mutapa ruler who reigned from the Kalahari Desert in the west to the Indian Ocean in the east. Though these tales could not exactly tally with what they found on ground, it remained true that Mutapa was an influential figure such that both Muslim and Portuguese traders, missionaries and administrators continued to have dealings with him. More significant to the Portuguese was the Barwe state whose rulers held the dynastic title Makombe. The Barwe actually occupied the country through which passed the main trade routes from the port to the Sena in the interior making it thus difficult for the Portuguese not to have dealings with the Makombe. After a brief missionary activity in this Makombe area, a new Makombe ruler is said to have asked for 'baptismal water', obtained from the Por-

on their maps. At the end of it, they had an enormous territory under their influence. As evidenced from the writings of Bhila,

On a Portuguese map of 1887 [...] its boundaries extended along the Zambezi from Shupanga to near Tete, then South-west along the Mazoe and South by the Sabi river valley to its junction with the Odzi River, then along the Musapa and Buzi Rivers to the mouth of the Pungwe. This enormous size of Manyika was evidently fixed by political and commercial considerations. The Mazoe river valley was included because of rumours of abundant alluvial gold. The kingdom of Manyika over which the Manyika rulers [...] exercised authority [...] was a much smaller area.<sup>25</sup>

The Maungwe kingdom which had been once outside the Manyika territory came to be encompassed also on this Portuguese map. This was, however, a merely notional and paper definition for the Makoni chiefs continued to exercise their autonomous sovereignty. To avoid clashes, as noted by T. Ranger, the Portuguese made treaties with these Makoni chiefs.<sup>26</sup>

The coming of the British, as has been earlier noted, ushered another sense of Manyikahood. The BSAC in its effort to gain control of the Pungwe River route, the main water way to and from Beira, imposed a treaty on Mutasa on 14 September 1890.<sup>27</sup> As is evidently clear, this move was a counter measure to the Portuguese claims and the condition of the treaty was that no one could possess land in Manyika without the consent of the BSAC. With the signing of this treaty, the BSAC created

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tuguese at Sena, to be used for the accession rituals. Such a gesture was interpreted by the Portuguese as a sign of his subjection to them. The reality, however, is that there was nothing even like a religious submission to them on the part of the Makombes, this 'baptismal water' referred to here was in fact drunk by the new ruler after it had been medicated by a senior spirit medium. The Makombes simply sought to ally themselves with the Portuguese against powerful neighbouring chiefs. The readiness of the Makombes to attack Portuguese outposts and block trade routes each time when there was conflict between the two camps, shows that the Makombes retained their autonomy. When the Portuguese in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century tried to exercise their supposed authority over the Makombes, the latter showed their resentment of this interference by coming out in full force against the Portuguese in two wars, finally suffering defeat only in 1917. See M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples*, Harare, (1998).

<sup>25</sup> Bhila cited in Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 124.

its own 'Greater Manyika', the Western boundaries lying deep inside Portuguese territory. Areas like Maungwe and Mazoe were, however, left out of this new draft of the BSAC.

Having ensured that the Company's frontiers had been fixed, the BSAC went on to break the Old Manyika kingdom between two administrative districts of Umtali and Inyanga. The colonial administration took upon itself the task of developing a minimalist definition of Manyikahood. Only Mutasa's people and only those in his territory were defined as Manyika. Language also became a special characterisation of these people for the Manyika have a dialect different from other Mashonas. The Umtali Native Commissioner Hulley in pursuit of the same minimalist understanding of Manyikahood argued that the three Chiefs in the district, Mutasa, Marange and Zimunya were of quite distinct origins even though there was a popular tendency to refer to his district as Manicaland.<sup>28</sup>

In the case of the Maungwe, the Native Department was concerned to emphasize the distinction between people of that region and the Manyika ones. One thing quite certain was that tribally, linguistically and culturally the people of Maungwe could not in any way be seen as one with the Manyika of Mutasa. It was only much later in the 1930s that a diffused sense of Manyikahood was reached and the Maungwe too have generally come to accept being labelled as members of the wide Manyika identity. Some, however, still vehemently deny any links with this Manyika identity.

In my research, however, when I make reference to the Manyika it would be the old sense of Manyikahood I would employ, namely: Mutasa's people. Mainly on the basis of dialect and some other cultural traits, I argue that the Manyika of Mutasa are still up to this day quite distinct from other tribes which are found in Manicaland.

## **Korekore**

The term 'Korekore' is attested to have had a topographical connection. According to M. Bourdillon, following developments at Great Zimbabwe in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> Century, large migrations of the Shona peoples moved to

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 124.

the Northern edge of the Plateau and spread East and West to cover what is now Korekore country.<sup>29</sup> Though the term 'Korekore' was officially applied to these people at a much later date, it had generally been used as referring to the people of the North and North-west of the Plateau.

In this present day a few other chiefdoms have come to settle among the Korekore. Living North-east of the Korekore are the Tavara, the autochthonous people who lived in the Zambezi Valley before the Korekore moved down from the Plateau. Prior to the movement of the Korekore from the Plateau, the Tavara saw themselves under the influence of these Shona people hence they fled East and South away from these new invaders. Today the division between the Korekore and the Tavara correspond roughly with the boundary between Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Though a bigger number could have moved into Mozambique, some elements of the Tavara people can, however, still be noted on the Zimbabwean side. Such a boundary is similar to what we find when we look at their cultures, the Tavara have a distinctive kinship system which gives less emphasis to the male line than do other Shona systems.<sup>30</sup> When the Korekore are compared with the Zezuru, little can be said of a cultural difference between them.

## **Zezuru**

More like the term 'Korekore', the term 'Zezuru' also did not originally correspond to any clearly defined 20<sup>th</sup> Century tribal reality but simply had a topographical connection. While the Korekore were generally referred to as the people of the North and North-west, people around the head of the Mazoe Valley were referred to as 'Zezuru'. Thus put side by side, the terms could simply be conceived as the equivalent of 'Northern' and 'Highlander' rather than ethnic or tribal categorizations. According to D. N. Beach, the term 'Zezuru' meant people who live in a high area, but the area in which it was used was only high in relation to the Mazoe and other valleys. He further contends that it is difficult to be certain which groups originally used the term because it was later used by linguists to denote a complete dialect cluster which has since led to

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. M. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples*, Gweru: 1998, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 18.

many peoples calling themselves ‘Zezuru’ who would not have done so a century ago.<sup>31</sup>

For the Zezuru to be found where they are today, it was a result of the numerous movements of groups of people who were breaking off from larger chiefdoms and coming to settle in this central Shona country. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as M. Bourdillon observes, much of the central Plateau was becoming settled and most of the modern chiefdoms had been established. As regards the political structure of these people, they comprised a hotchpotch of chiefly dynasties with a variety of histories but united by geographical propinquity and a common culture.<sup>32</sup>

Up till this day, the Zezuru peoples are made up of independent chiefdoms. Apart from being united by geographical propinquity and culture, they have a language in common and some of the greater religious cults which spread their influence beyond tribal boundaries. Having the capital city of Zimbabwe: Harare, in their midst, much of their material lifestyle has been made to look a bit more advanced when compared to other peoples in the remoter parts of the country.

## Ndau

When it comes to the term ‘Ndau’, there is no clear cut information as regards its origin. David Beach on one hand would like us to understand that it was a derogatory nickname given to the peoples of the Eastern frontier by the raiding Gaza Nguni of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth MacGonagle argues almost along the same line with Beach when she says that Ndau became a nickname used by others in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to describe the people who said *Ndau-we Ndau-we* as their customary greeting when they entered a homestead.<sup>34</sup> *Ndau-we* literally meant ‘we salute you!’ and such a greeting served as a sign of humbleness and respect.

On the other hand, however, we find that the term ‘Ndau’ can even be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The earliest reference to this term is apparently from a Portuguese document that mentions ‘Mujao’

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Beach, *Shona and Zimbabwe*, p. 280.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Beach cited in Ranger, *Missionaries*, p. 122.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. E. MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity in Zimbabwe and Mozambique*, New York: 2007, p.16.

traders who crossed the Save River in 1739 to trade gold for cloth at Inhambane to the South. Such a reference to 'Mujao' is said to be said to be similar to the Inhambane version of Nda. <sup>35</sup> Other references suggesting an earlier existence of the term can be found in the writings of both the Portuguese and the British. More like the other ethnic terms we have been looking at, it can also be argued that whatever the time the term originated, Nda was not widely used to designate a specific group of the Shona people until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

When the Portuguese arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, they found that the dominant aristocracy in the Shona region of the Northern Zimbabwe Plateau was the Mutapa state. The influence of the Mutapa rulers covered also much of the Eastern region and further into Mozambique which was inhabited by the Nda people. Hence, many of the states in the Nda region such as Teve, Danda and Sanga relied on the Mutapa state for symbolic legitimacy and they all claimed along with Manica that the sons of the Mutapa ruler founded these States. <sup>36</sup> When the Mutapa state began to fade away, States in the greater Nda region began to craft their own political identities which lasted into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Though such distinct identities had emerged, a wider cultural identity based on a shared history and the Shona language permeated much of the Eastern region.

Just as they had done with the other Shona tribal groups, the colonial administration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century revitalised the Nda political identities as ethnic markers in their quest to classify and sort out the tribes of the South-east Africa. Though today some speakers of Nda would identify themselves as both Shona and Nda, their ancestors would not have considered themselves as either Shona or Nda before the 19<sup>th</sup> century but rather as Danda, Sanga or Teve.

Today among the Nda of Zimbabwe, being Shona is replaced for the most part by a sense of being Nda and even many of the Mozambicans who live in the wider Nda region do not see themselves as being Shona even though linguists designate Nda as a dialect of Shona language. Culturally, it is easy to note that several long-standing, inter-dependent social structures and cultural practices have bound together Nda communities over successive generations and across a vast region.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, p. 7.

Though such structures and practises are not unique to the Ndaou, certain myths and rituals have helped shape their identity.

## The contemporary Shona people

Looked at as a whole, one can say that though the Shona were once a fragmented horde of tribes with very tenuous bonds of unity between them, such bonds are now much stronger due to inter-marriages, industrialisation, politics and the Christian religion. While Ezekia Matshobana contends that the Shona consisted and still consists to this day of two distinct families – the original Bantu occupants of the country and the conquerors – each which has split up into a multiplicity of tribes,<sup>37</sup> it can easily be argued that such a distinction is now blurred. People are beginning to understand that the idea of a Global Village<sup>38</sup> starts at home. The use of the term ‘Shona’, however, to encompass the various identities of the people living in Zimbabwe, parts of Mozambique, stretching to the Zambezi River in the North and the Indian Ocean in the East is problematic. It is neither an apt ethnic or tribal label but has generally

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Matshobana, *Zimbabwe History*.

<sup>38</sup> Global Village is a term which was first coined by Wyndham Lewis in his book: *America and Cosmic Man* (1948). The same term was employed by Herbert Marshall McLuhan in his book: *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) to describe how electronic mass media collapse space and time barriers in human communication, thus enabling people to interact and live on a global scale. In this sense, the globe has been turned into a village by electronic mass media. This new reality has implications for forming new sociological structures within the context of culture. Thus, today, the term Global Village is used as a metaphor for cultural mixing. In this Present Age, the idea of a Global Village plays a crucial role. This idea recognises that as responsible inhabitants or citizens of this village, we all need to collectively dedicate the same energy, enthusiasm and attention to the affairs of the village. The reality is that whatever happens in the village, regardless of its geographical location, touches the lives of us all in some ways. What is needed, in other words, is the support of everyone in promoting this village, contributions dealing with global problems and commitment in making our village a relatively harmonious and peaceful place in which we all can enjoy a decent standard of living, respect for human rights and freedom of expression. It should be a village in which most, if not all, of its inhabitants can have access to healthcare, education, food, clean water and information and a village that our children would be proud to inherit from us. Cf. *Marshall McLuhan Foresees The Global Village*, [http://www.livinginternet.com/i/ii\\_mcluhan.htm](http://www.livinginternet.com/i/ii_mcluhan.htm) (accessed 20/05/08).

been used as a blanket term which implies that being Shona is tantamount to speaking the same language, having similar cultural traditions and experiencing a shared history. The derivation of the term itself is quite uncertain also. Some try to argue that it was first used by the Ndebele as a derogatory name for the people they had defeated and particularly the Rozvi. From the analysis of Tabona Shoko, it derives from the designation *svina* which means 'dirty' introduced by the Ndebele to scold Shona captives. He further notes that the Shona were also derogatorily called 'Holis' which means 'captives', 'bush draggers', and 'Shabi', 'peddlars'.<sup>39</sup> Some, however, argue that the term 'Shona' originates from the Ndebele word *abets'hona* meaning 'those from over there'. Among the Northern and Eastern Shona the only name which appeared common to them was 'Karanga'.

Whatever the origins of term 'Shona' were, what seems clear is that the Shona at first disliked it. Generally, the Shona tended to classify themselves by their chiefdoms and apparently only began to use the term 'Shona' for themselves sometime after 1890. Terence Ranger captures well the sense of identity among the Shona speakers at that time when he argues,

There certainly existed a very wide zone of common culture, which scholars have come to call 'Shona', but in the 19th Century the people who shared that common culture did not feel themselves to be part of a single 'Shona' identity. People defined themselves politically- as subjects of a particular Chief- rather than linguistically, culturally or ethically.<sup>40</sup>

The extension of the term 'Shona' to encompass all the tribes native to Zimbabwe was more of a British innovation than a historical set-up. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the British colonial administration commissioned a linguistic study on the possibility of developing a unified language from various dialects. The outcome of such a study was that the dialects spoken by the Zezuru in the central Shona country, the Korekore in the North, Karanga and Kalanga in the South and Manyika and Ndau in the East could actually be classified under a single linguistic unit.<sup>41</sup> It was upon such a basis that the linguist Clement Doke recommended the term 'Shona' as the official name of the language. It was not without

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Shoko, *Karanga Indigenous*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Ranger cited in MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona People*, p. 17.

problems that such a term was finally arrived at. As acknowledged in the report of Doke himself published in 1931, he says,

It has been widely felt that the name 'Shona' is inaccurate and unworthy, that it is not the true name of any of the peoples whom we propose to group under the term 'Shona-speaking people' and further that it lies under a strong suspicion of being a name given in contempt by the enemies of the tribes. It is pretty certainly a foreign name and as such is very likely to be uncomplimentary.<sup>42</sup>

One thing to be taken note of, however, is that it was not only the colonial administration which played a part in the creation of the present-day regional ethnicities. Missionaries too and their converts as well as African labour migrants played a role in the creation of these dialect identities.<sup>43 44</sup> Though such classifications were mostly linguistic and the boundaries not so precise, they nevertheless do reflect the cultural patterns of the Shona peoples and also to some extent, their various ethnic histories.

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<sup>42</sup> C. Doke cited in MacGonagle, *Crafting Identity*, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> In Manyikaland, for example, three mission churches: the Anglicans, the Trappist/Mariannahill Catholic fathers and the American Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) played a key role in specifying the Shona dialect identities. The Anglicans developed their main intellectual and educational centre at St Augustine's Penhalonga near Umtali and they had by far their greatest early evangelical success in Umtali and Makoni districts. The AMEC on the other hand, radiated from their main station at Old Umtali and they too scored considerable evangelical success in Umtali and Makoni districts. The Mariannahill fathers operated out of their main base at Triashill and from there they spread into Inyanga, Makoni and Umtali districts. What is key to note is that all these three churches came to develop a strong doctrine regarding alleged special qualities of the people of these eastern districts. This doctrine was founded intellectually on the language work of these churches. Oral communication and rhetorical skills generated amongst many Africans a great linguistic enthusiasm as well as fascination with linguistic variations and techniques. What the missionaries did was simply to give the people what they were interested in and curious about for they possessed those linguistic skills and tools. From the spoken vernacular of these people, they developed a written form of the language. See T.Ranger, *Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika: The Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe* (1989).

## ***Funeral rituals***

### **Ritual**

Before embarking on an explanation of the funeral rituals of the Shona it would be worthy to begin by looking at the term 'ritual' itself. Going back to its origins, we find that it is derived from the Latin word *ritualis* which is generally translated as 'rite.' A ritual may thus simply be defined as an action usually prescribed by a religion, by the traditions of a community or by political laws because of the perceived efficacy of those actions. More technically, rituals can be defined as, "highly symbolic acts that confer transcendental significance and meaning on certain life events or experiences."<sup>45</sup> Such a technical definition sets a border line thus distinguishing ritual from mere habits or what are often called ritualised behaviours like smoking a cigar after every meal or giving a kiss to one's kids before they go to bed. Unlike a mere habit, a ritual is an act of transcendental significance.

Rituals are powerful vehicles of meaning on life's events and they offer the opportunity to contain and express emotion. Such a transcendental significance of rituals is usually shared within a group, thus a community is allowed to come together, witness and interpret an event for its own survival. A ritual enforces a particular collective identity. It is no mistake then to say that one of the recognitions shared by humans the world-over and over time is the importance of ritual. Ample anthropological evidence, as noted by K.J. Doka, testifies to the fact that even prior to history's written record; rituals formed the core of preliterate societies. In every culture, as he further notes, significant transitions of one's life such as birth, marriage and death are punctuated by rituals.<sup>46</sup>

The timing of rituals is determined by particular societies or individuals. Rituals may thus be performed at regular intervals or on specific occasions depending on the discretion of the individuals or communities. There are also no restrictions as regards places where they are performed, it may be in arbitrary places or in places especially reserved for these rituals, either in public, in private or before a specific group of

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<sup>45</sup> K. J. Doka, *The Role of Rituals*, [www.leukemia-lymphoma.org/all\\_page\\_dp?item\\_id=280111](http://www.leukemia-lymphoma.org/all_page_dp?item_id=280111) (accessed 15/04/08).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Doka, *Role of Rituals*.

people. Due to their symbolic nature, there are also hardly any limits to the kind of actions which may be incorporated in a ritual. As attested in the *Wikipedia*,

The rites of past and present societies have typically involved special gestures and words, recitation of fixed texts, performance of specific music, songs or dances, processions, manipulation of certain objects, use of special dresses, consumption of special food, drink or drugs and much more.<sup>47</sup>

Key, however, to any ritual is the fact that the actions and their symbolism are not arbitrarily picked up by the performers nor dictated by logic or necessity rather they are either prescribed and imposed upon the performers by some external source or are inherited unconsciously from past social traditions.

Since preliterate times, human societies have come up with various kinds of rituals. These range from various worship rites and sacraments of organised religious cults to rites of passage of certain societies, oaths of allegiance, coronations and presidential inaugurations. Just as there are various types of rituals so also the purposes of these rituals vary. The purpose of rituals vary from compliance with religious obligations or ideals to satisfaction of spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners, strengthening of social bonds, demonstration of respect or submission, stating one's affiliation, obtaining social acceptance or approval for some event.<sup>48</sup>

Limiting down to rites of passage namely: birth; initiation; graduation; marriage; death; seasonal changes and seasonal processions we find that through these rites, people make a statement about who they are, what they believe and what they think about the world. Initiation, for example, allows a boy or girl affirm his/her new status as an adult. The ritual which one undergoes implies a change in status and a change in the social role of the participant. Van Gennep was thus right when he described rituals as liminal, that is, rituals allow one to cross a threshold from one identity or status to another.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ritual*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/Ritual> (accessed 25/04/08).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Ritual*, Wikipedia (accessed 25/04/08).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. V. Gennep cited by Doka, *Role of Rituals*.

## Death rituals among the Shona

Death, as commonly perceived among the Shona, is the separation of the body and soul in which the material body takes a new state of decomposition while the soul due to its immortality continues to survive as a spiritual entity. In looking at death with an African eye, one can hardly object except agree with Berry Muchemwa when he says,

Death is the most common reality; the most profound being of all beings. It is an ineluctable contradiction which confronts every person, group and nation; that most incommensurable and incomprehensible reality of all realities. In putting an end to human life, death leaves its impression on human personality. Before this inevitable necessity, one cannot help but feel that life, so ardently desired, is but a fragile and fugitive good. In Africa, there is no rite or event that demands so much ceremony, numinosity and dread as does death. The obsequies are celebrated with utmost grandeur and solemnity.<sup>50</sup>

When it comes to the Shona, one finds that it is not a single rite but rather several of them which they perform in respect of their dead and for their own well-being. In total, they can actually come up to seven. They are as follows: *kupeta* (folding) ritual; burial ritual; ritual of purification; ritual of bringing back the spirit; ritual of inheritance; ritual of honour and rituals of appeasement. A detailed account and the procedural steps taken in these rituals and their implications are dedicated to a later part of the thesis.

As regards the study of these Shona funerary rituals, it can be observed that past research work has tended to focus so much on the ritual of bringing back the spirit at the expense of those other quite important enumerated rituals as well. What is new with this research is that it will try as much as possible to give enough coverage to all the cited rituals. I strongly believe that any attempts at inculturation in this area should be integral, nothing which is of concern to the Shona is to be taken for granted.

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<sup>50</sup> B. Muchemwa, *Death and Burial Among the Shona*, Harare, 2002, p.11.

## **Therapeutic role of Shona funeral rituals**

While a look at Shona funerary rituals tends in some way to bring to light a rather negative element in Shona culture, namely: the fear of the dead, the therapeutic nature of these rituals cannot in any way be overlooked. T. A. Rando's assessment of what funeral rituals can offer mourners is equally applicable to the Shona too. Among other benefits, he notes that funeral rituals:

- . Confirm the reality of death.
- . Assist in the expression of grief while simultaneously offering a structure that contains grief.
- . Stimulate recollections of the deceased, both individually and collectively.
- . Allow griever to 'do something', offering structured activities at an otherwise disorganised time.
- . Provide social support to the bereaved, reaffirming their new identity and incorporating them into the larger community.
- . Offer possible meaning for the loss, allowing mourners to understand the death within the context of their beliefs.
- . Reaffirm social order, reminding people of both the reality of death and the continuance of the community.
- . Serve as rite of passage providing for the final disposition of the remains.<sup>51</sup>

## ***African Traditional Religion***

Results from the scholarly study of African religion tend to prove that African Traditional Religion is a very difficult concept to define. There is no single, simple and precise definition to describe it. The study itself has passed through several phases, each epoch involving different purposes and points of view. The difficulty in defining ATR partly seems to

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. T. A. Rando cited in Doka, *Role of Rituals*.

come from the fact that its propagation is carried out by living it other than by preaching it. As Richard Nnyombi observes,

Its followers are more preoccupied with its practise than with its theory. In ATR, dogmas and doctrines have a very little role to play in the life of its followers [...]. Its influence covers all aspects of life, from before the birth of a person to long after s/he has died. It is a way of life and life is at its centre. It is concerned with life and how to protect it and augment it. Hence the remark such as: For the African, religion is literally life and life is religion.<sup>52</sup>

### **‘African’**

The problem in defining ATR is compounded also by what scholars, in recent years, have come to recognise as key ways in which the terms ‘African’ and ‘Religion’ appear to be Western constructs involving both misconceptions and changing perceptions. Since the time of Pliny the elder, who is reputed to have first used the term ‘Africa’, this term has been a bone of contention. It means different things to different people. As Abraham Akrong contends,

For some people, Africa is essentially a racial group; for some, Africa is a geo-political entity carved up in the last century at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85; for others, Africa is a linguistic cultural entity that describes the life of the African peoples that belong to these communities: the Niger-Congo, the Nilo-Sahara, the Afro-Asiatic and the Khoisan linguistic groups.<sup>53</sup>

In the Western scholarly study of African religion, the adjective ‘African’ as attested by Kofi Johnson, “has generally been used in a racially oriented way to refer to the darker skinned, black peoples who live South of the Sahara and have been assumed to possess the same culture.”<sup>54</sup> Such a

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<sup>52</sup> R. Nnyombi, *African Traditional Religion (ATR)*, <http://afgen.com/atr.html>. (accessed 15/04/08).

<sup>53</sup> A. Akrong, *An Introduction to African Traditional Religions*, [http://www.africanwithin.com/religion/intr\\_to\\_atr.htm](http://www.africanwithin.com/religion/intr_to_atr.htm) (accessed 21/04/08).

<sup>54</sup> K. Johnson, *Understanding African Traditional Religion*, [http://organisations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/vo4\\_johnson](http://organisations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/vo4_johnson). (accessed 21/05/08).

perception of 'cultural uniformity' did actually originate with the slave trading colonial powers who believed that the vast area of the sub-Saharan Africa was a single country occupied by one people. This assumption, as Kofi Johnson further notes, was developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and significantly ignored the separate linguistic, cultural and ethnic identities that African societies had developed for over a thousand years and that continue to define cultural life today.<sup>55</sup>

Today, it is worth to note that we are generally conditioned to view Africa as a conglomeration of different ethnic groups bound together by the colonial divisions of Africa which persist up to this day in independent Africa. In this present study, when I speak of Africa in the context of ATR, I would be referring to the region in sub-Saharan Africa and in particular, to Zimbabwe.

### **'Religion'**

When it comes to the term 'religion' one finds that it has only been in the late colonial period of the 1950s that scholars began to use religion to characterise African religion in a positive way. Prior to this period, certain terms with clear negative and degrading connotations were employed by writers to refer to African religious elements. E.B. Tylor, for example, coined the term 'animism' in reference to African religions. In Tylor's eyes African religions were the same in appearance and primitive in nature for they consider every object as having its own soul, thus giving rise to belief in countless spirits in the universe.<sup>56</sup> Other terms employed were: savage, fetishism, paganism, heathenism and others. The use of such terms by Western anthropologists and evolutionists formed part of the background of serious racial prejudice and discrimination against Africans. African theologians in the likes of J.S. Mbiti and E.B. Idowu have in their works tried to examine the etymological implications of most of these terms and they castigated their use in the study of ATR. A follow up of this discussion in its entirety lies beyond my immediate purposes.

It is good to note, however, that these African theologians have managed to bring African religion to its height. To be commendable also

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Johnson, *Understanding ATR.*

<sup>56</sup> Cf. E.B. Taylor cited in Johnson, *Understanding ATR.*

are some anthropologists such as Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, Marcel Griaule and Victor Turner plus also the theologian Placide Temples. Going back to J.S. Mbiti and E. Bolaji Idowu, as Christians, they have set out to refute missionary claims about the inferiority of African religion and actually maintain that the traditional religions are the foundation upon which Christianity gained roots on the African soil. In the eyes of these theologians, Africans had known God well before the missionaries came. Refusing to swallow the arrogance of the West, J. S. Mbiti says clearly,

the missionaries who introduced the Gospel to Africa in the past 200 years did not bring God to our continent. Instead, God brought them. They proclaimed the name of Jesus Christ. But they used the names of the God who was and is already known by African peoples- such as Mungu, Mulungu, Katonda, Ngai, Olodumare, Asis, Ruwa, Ruhanga, Jok, Modimo, Unkulunkulu and a thousand more. These were names of one and the same God, the creator of the world, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>57</sup>

Though these scholars have managed to give life and integrity to African religion it remains true that the term 'religion' itself as said before, is believed by scholars to be a Western concept and actually a late comer to the scholarly discourse on Africa. Assenting to this reality B.C. Ray says, "It is true that religion is neither an African word nor an indigenous concept."<sup>58</sup> Most African languages show that the term itself is absent. What it stands for, however, can easily be observed in the lives of Africans if we are to go by the general understanding that religion is a complex of ideas and practises that give ultimate meaning to human existence and enhances the quality of life. As further shown by B.C. Ray,

In Africa, such ideas and practises are found not only in the worship of gods but also in a wide range of cultural creation, such as stories of origin, healing rituals, funeral rites, divination séances, public festivals and sacred sculptures, as well as witchcraft and sorcery practices.<sup>59</sup>

This simply echoes Richard Nnyombi's observation that traditional African religion cannot be separated from daily life. It cuts across the economic, politics, arts and social lives of people.

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<sup>57</sup> J.S. Mbiti cited in Johnson, *Understanding ATR*.

<sup>58</sup> B.C. Ray cited in Johnson, *Understanding ATR*.

<sup>59</sup> Ray cited in Johnson, *Understanding ATR*.

## ‘Traditional’

Moving to the term ‘traditional’, it is pertinent to note that J. Mbiti has taken a step ahead in wanting Christianity and Islam to be regarded as indigenous and traditional religions of Africa because of their deep historical roots in the Continent.<sup>60</sup> Powerful though the argument might look, it is worthy to note that his point of view has not won acceptance among many scholars. Some scholars, for example, E. Bolaji Idowu, Christopher I. Ejizu, Kofi Asare Opuku and others want to retain and use the word ‘traditional’ for the original experience of the sacred cultivated by the African man and the concrete expression of that experience within the different ecological and socio-historical backgrounds.

What needs to be emphasized, however, is that the term ‘traditional’ does not connote that African religion is static or unchanging from age to age. In keeping with its original Latin sense, *tradere*, the term implies that the living experience and expression are handed-on from one successive generation to another. As affirmed by Kofi Asare Opoku,

To call the religion ‘traditional’ is not to refer to it as something of the past; it is only to indicate that it is undergirded by a fundamentally indigenous value system and that has its own pattern, with its own historical inheritance and tradition from the past.<sup>61</sup>

While the scholarly debate on African Traditional Religion has underscored significant results, one sticky issue, however, involves the precise name of the subject. There is no scholarly consensus as regards its name. On one hand we have E. B. Idowu and some other like-minded scholars who argue that it is legitimate to speak of African Traditional Religion in the singular.<sup>62</sup> For J.S. Mbiti, however, and some like-minded thinkers such as B. Ray and E. Ikenga-Metuh, there is no basis for such a position. Mbiti maintains that the title of the subject should be in the plural, that is to mean African Traditional Religions, many not one.

Standing by a position that there are a remarkable number of features and a basic world-view which fundamentally is everywhere the same in Sub-Saharan Africa, E. B. Idowu argues,

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. J. S. Mbiti, *African Philosophy and Religions*, London: 1990, p. 223.

<sup>61</sup> K.A. Opoku cited by Johnson, *Understanding ATR*.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. E.B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, London: 1973, p. 103.

[...] a careful look through actual observation and comparative discussions with Africans from various parts of the continent will show, first and foremost, that there is a common factor which the coined word *negritude* will express aptly. There is a common Africanness about the total culture and religious beliefs and practises of Africa. This common factor may be due either to the fact of diffusions or to the fact that most Africans share common origins with regard to race and customs and religious practices.<sup>63</sup>

The debate raged on for a considerable period of time with J.Mbiti still showing his disapproval of Idowu's ideas. While he admitted to the existence of a single, basic religious philosophy for Africa, he still pressed his argument that there are as many religions in the Sub-Saharan Africa as there are distinct ethno-language groups. For him, African traditional religions are not universal but tribal, each being bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. He further noted that one traditional religion cannot be propagated in another group and there is no way conversion from one traditional religion to another can take place.<sup>64</sup>

Be that as it may, more and more recent scholarship appears to favour Idowu's position. Most scholars are beginning to see that there is more weight in the argument that the existence of a common world-view as well as the similarities in belief systems, ritual forms, values and institutions across the various regions of the continent, provide a sufficient base for keeping the singular form of the name. As Christopher I. Ejizu points out also, there is no valid reason to single out African traditional religion, while accepting as normal a multiplicity of denominations, even rival sects in other religions of humankind, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.<sup>65</sup> In as much as many scholars have come to adopt Idowu's persuasive position so will I, wherever the nomenclature ATR will appear in this thesis, it will be in the singular.

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<sup>63</sup> Idowu cited in C. I. Ejizu, *Emergent Key Issues in the Study of African Traditional religion*, [www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/ejizu.htm](http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/ejizu.htm) (accessed 29/10/07).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Mbiti cited in Ejizu, *Emergent Key Issues*.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Ejizu, *Emergent Key Issues*.

## Shona Traditional Religion

Falling within the nomenclature ATR, Shona traditional religion shows that it is nothing but a religion of a particular group among the African peoples, namely: the Shona. The indigenous religion of the Shona consists basically of a tripartite view of the cosmology. As noted by T. Shoko, there is in the first place, a belief in a 'world above' which is the abode of the Supreme Being known by different names, *Mwari* (God), *Musiki* (Creator), *Nyadenga* (Owner of the Heavens), *Dzivaguru* (Great Pool) and quite a number of other names. Secondly, there is the 'human world' which is the physical location here on earth. Constituting this world are humans themselves, animals, rocks, rivers, forests and so many other natural features. Thirdly, one finds belief in the 'underworld' also. Such an underworld is normally associated with the dead as well as with evil powers. Though these worlds may be conceived as tripartite, they are not separate entities as such, but are linked through ritual and conciliation. Spirits of different kinds, especially that of ancestors; pervade the worlds 'above', 'below' and 'underground'.<sup>66</sup> Human beings hold a central position in this Shona worldview.

## Dialogue

Etymologically, the term 'dialogue' is a derivation from related Ancient Greek terms *dialogos* 'conversation, discourse', *-dia* meaning 'through, inter' plus *logos* 'speech, oration, discourse', and *dialegomai* 'to converse', plus *legein* 'to speak'.<sup>67</sup> Simply put then, dialogue can be taken as a conversation on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views. The primary purpose of such a dialogue would be for each participant to learn from the other so as to grow and change.

In this thesis, the subject matter is a specific kind of dialogue, an inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue surely sounds a novel phenomenon of the modern world. We could not conceive of it, let alone do it in the past if one brings into memory the historic crusades of the Medieval period. Dialogue thus understood in the religious sphere

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. T. Shoko, "My Bones Shall Rise Again": *War Veterans, Spirits and Land Reform in Zimbabwe*, [http://www.asc/eiden.nl/\\_Ascwebsite](http://www.asc/eiden.nl/_Ascwebsite) (accessed 30/06/09).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. English Dictionary-With Multi-Lingual Search, [www.allwords.com/word-dialogue.html](http://www.allwords.com/word-dialogue.html) (accessed 02/05/08).

means a formal process in which authoritative members of at least two religious communities come together for an extended and serious discussion of the beliefs and practices that separate the communities. It is, in other words, witnessing to one's deepest convictions and listening to those of one's neighbours. A more formal definition of inter-religious dialogue was given by John Taylor, a former missionary and Anglican bishop of Winchester. Taylor defined it as "[...] a sustained conversation between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognise and respect contradictions and mutual exclusions between their various ways of thinking."<sup>68</sup>

Inter-religious dialogue as is evidently clear does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest but is rather an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is, as John Paul II put it in his Encyclical Letter: *Redemptor Hominis*, demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought in human beings by the spirit who blows where he wills.<sup>69</sup> For it to be more effective, guiding principles and requirements, as I have said, need to be followed. I will draw most of these basic ground rules from Leonard Swindler's publication: *The Dialogue Decalogue*, a foundational document in inter-religious dialogue. In summary, the commandments he proposes are as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: The primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: Inter-religious dialogue must be a two-sided project within each religious community and between religious communities.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment: Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.
- 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners.

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<sup>68</sup> J. Taylor cited by J. Barker, *Christians and Inter-religious Dialogue*, [www.watchman.org/re/top/christiandialogue.htm](http://www.watchman.org/re/top/christiandialogue.htm) (accessed 06/05/08).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. J. Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 12: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis\\_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_ge.html).

- 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Each participant must define himself. Conversely the one interpreted must be able to recognise her/himself in the interpretation.
- 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where points of disagreement are.
- 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Dialogue can take place only between equals or *par cum pari* as Vatican II put it.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Dialogue can take place only  
on the basis of mutual trust.
- 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Persons entering dialogue  
must be at least minimally self-critical of both  
themselves and their own religious traditions.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Each participant eventually  
must attempt to experience the partner's religion  
'from within'.<sup>70</sup>

A closer look at Swindler's Decalogue shows that it can be subdivided into at least three general categories. In the first category we have those who should participate; in the second: what participants should expect from the dialogue and the third category is how the dialogue should be conducted. Following is a further clarification of Swindler's understanding on each of these general categories as well as the input from various other angles which help augment Swindler's ideas.

## Who Should Participate?

In the eyes of Swidler, there is particularly no dialogue between a skilled scholar and an ordinary kind of person in the pew and also no such thing as a one-way dialogue. If authentic dialogue is to take place both parties should be willing to learn, only then will it be a *par cum pari*. The

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. L. Swindler, *The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Inter-religious Dialogue*, [www.masscouncilofchurches.org/docs/Dialogue%20decalogue.htm](http://www.masscouncilofchurches.org/docs/Dialogue%20decalogue.htm). (accessed 10/04/08).

participants should be equal in authority and when possible, equal in education. Cementing Swidler's views, Paul Griffiths says that the participants should be, "the representative intellectuals of a religious community who typically engage, among other things, in the formulation and defence of sentences expressing doctrines of the community."<sup>71</sup>

In a similar vein Vatican II says that these intellectuals should have "Equality in sacred and secular learning and equality in the level of responsibilities held."<sup>72</sup> Apart from the need for the participants to be solid scholars and religious leaders, they should be open to self-criticism of both themselves and their religious traditions. It is only by honestly considering the criticism levied against one's own religious tradition that one can effectively respond to the criticism. The necessity of trust among the participants comes to the fore because for one to accept criticism more constructively, a fair play ground that all motives for the dialogue are honest and sincere should have been established.

### **What should Participants expect from the Dialogue?**

As seen in Swidler's first commandment, the participants should expect to change and grow in perception and understanding of reality and correspondingly one would expect their actions to reflect that also. As one learns about the other's position precisely, that proportionally changes one's attitude towards the other. Since dialogue is a two-way kind of communication, the other partner will also change. Sincere understanding of the other's religious tradition can lessen the risk of sectarian strife as well as increase the efficacy of evangelism. Since it is more of a give and take exercise, in understanding each other's beliefs and practices, evangelists can more effectively identify ways in which the gospel can be presented. Christian apologetics can also benefit a lot from this since Christians become more clearly aware of the objections that other religions raise against Christianity.

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<sup>71</sup> P. Griffiths cited in J. Barker, *Christians and Inter-religious Dialogue*.

<sup>72</sup> Secretariat for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians, *Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue*, p. 543 cited in J. Barker, *The Key to Effective Religious Dialogue*,  
<http://www.watchman.org/rektop/guidelinesdialogue.htm> (accessed 04/05/08).

## How Inter-religious Dialogue should be conducted

The first thing which Swindler makes clear is that dialogue is not a debate. It is not trying to learn about an opponent so as to deal more effectively with him or her. Neither is it a confrontation nor polemics done on the pretext that one alone holds the absolute truth. Though open disagreements may occur during a dialogue, formal debate should occur outside of the dialogue since the purpose of dialogue is to increase understanding. Authentic dialogue knows not of a winner or loser at the end of it.

To facilitate sincere dialogue it is mandatory that each dialogue partner define what it means to be an authentic member of his/her own tradition. Only a Muslim, for example, can define from the inside what it means to be a Muslim, outsiders can only describe what it looks like from the outside. Calvin Shenk clarifies more this point raised by Swindler when he says,

It is important to understand the difference between the meaning we project onto religions and what other religions understand as their own meaning. Even if we know well the religious system, we must listen to the person's perspectives of faith and truth and be open to the faith as the faithful hold it. It is misleading to interpret what others are saying in terms of our concepts and worldview.<sup>73</sup>

Allowing a person to define himself/herself does not, however, mean that all self-definitions must be naively accepted. If a participant's beliefs show serious discrepancies with the historic faith of the religion in question such a participant must surely be questioned in regard to the orthodoxy of his/her statements. Conversely, the one being interpreted must be comfortable with the way he/she would have been understood, if not, one may always raise an objection so as to be better understood.

To be remembered also whenever participants engage in a dialogue is the need to 'pass over' into another's religious or ideological experience. There is need, in other words, of a willingness to walk in the shoes of others. Taking such a step is not just a matter of 'blind following' but is being sensitive to the experiences of others, even if those experiences may tend to conflict with what one holds to be the truth. At the end the day one realises that it was not just an experience in vain for

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<sup>73</sup> C.E. Shenk, *Who Do You Say That I Am?* Scotdale: 1997, p. 215.

one comes back enlightened, broadened and deepened. In being flexible and open to the truth every prejudice, intolerance and unnecessary misunderstandings are all removed. Thus dialogue leaves one with the capacity to collaborate with those who have a different point of view or faith from one's own for the good of religion and society.

## **Dialogue with African Traditional religion**

The African Synodal spirit within which this thesis is framed notes the necessity of dialogue with ATR adherents basing it on various solid grounds. In the first place, the Synod observes that as with all men and women of good will, irrespective of the religious faith to which they belong, the Church must dialogue with adherents of ATR since,

the Living God, Creator of heaven and earth and Lord of all history is the Father of the one great human family to which we all belong. As such, he wants us to bear witness to him through our respect for the values and religious traditions of each person, work together with them for human progress and development at all levels. Far from wishing to be the one in whose name a person would kill other people, he requires believers to join together in the service of life in justice and peace.<sup>74</sup>

Secondly, in view of the foregoing remark, the Synod was quick to note that it was now high time to give attention to ATR. It regretted that ATR had not been given the recognition it deserves as a valid partner in dialogue nor the attention it should receive on a pastoral level. On a sad note, however, it has been seen as a deposit for prospective converts. Echoing almost the same sentiments with the African Synod, Ezra Chitando notes that the preoccupation with the 'sacred text' has tended to push religions that do not privilege the written word to the periphery and he singles out ATR in particular, arguing that it does not feature prominently in inter-religious dialogue as propounded by eminent theologians. The end result of this, as he notes, "has been to write off ATRs

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<sup>74</sup> J. Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation **Ecclesia in Africa** of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission towards the year 2000, [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa_en.html). no. 66.

from the process of conversation and to relegate the religion of millions to mere footnotes.”<sup>75</sup>

The third reason why the Synod advocated a serious dialogue with ATR adherents is because ATR is still very strong and widely practised in many places. In its January 1998 report, the Association of Members of Episcopal Conference in East Africa (AMECEA) noted, for example, that over 23 million people are still adherents of ATR in its area. In the Republic of Benin about 64% of the population were still adherents of ATR while about 12.6 million in Nigeria and about 29.1% of Ghanaians were still followers of ATR.<sup>76</sup>

The picture reflected in the above numbers and percentages simply shows that in the majority of African countries ATR is still the all pervasive determinant of the life and culture of these peoples. It is actually part and parcel of the cultural heritage and it determines the spontaneous and subconscious reactions of these people and their interpretation of reality. The Synod was able to note also that some African intellectuals are actually returning to this religion and are reorganising according to modern principles. These bare facts made the Synod to conclude that the Church cannot afford to marginalise these followers hence making dialogue with ATR an urgent necessity.

Another push to dialogue with ATR is the understanding that such an exercise can reveal many of the values which are common to both Christianity and ATR which can serve as a *preparatio Evangelica* or as stepping stones for introducing African adherents of ATR into full acceptance of the Christian faith. These values will in the long run prove a great asset when it comes to inculturation.

### **Obstacles to dialogue with ATR**

Probably the greatest hindrance to dialogue with ATR is the since erected wall of prejudice that exists between Christian adherents and those of ATR. With the coming of Christianity we find that Missionary

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<sup>75</sup> E. Chitando, Dialogue Between Christianity and African Traditional Religions: Challenges and Possibilities, *Chiedza: Religion and Identities, Journal of Arrupe*, Vol.7, Batinge P.K (ed.et al) 2004, p.3.

<sup>76</sup> Cf.E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Dialogue with African Traditional Religion (ATR)*, <http://afgen.com/atr2.html>. (accessed 05/05/08).

Catechesis has for the most part taught African converts to hold ATR in disdain and its adherents in great contempt. Early journals on Africans and their religion, as we saw, were fraught with derogatory terms such as Paganism, Animism, Heathenism, Idolatry, Polytheism and others. Missionary Catechesis did nothing better except rub more salt to these derogatory terms in a much more practical way. This is evidenced by the way ATR devotees were chucked out from Christian villages. Such a disdain of ATR should hardly be conceived as a thing of the past only for it exists even to this day. As noted by the African Synod,

Christian Catechesis in Africa still sustains its polemics that it is stupid to be an adherent of ATR, which it sees as the citadel of Satan, and its ministers disdainfully called Juju priests, fetish priests, witchdoctors, as agents of the devil.<sup>77</sup>

Due to the close association between Christianity and European culture, Christianity in Africa has also assumed a superiority complex resulting in the labelling of ATR as primitive and unprogressive. There is thus need to treat adherents of ATR with respect and esteem if significant progress in dialogue is to be achieved.

Yet another obstacle that lies in the path of dialogue is the argument that dialoguing with ATR which the Church has since vehemently condemned would look like now endorsing it. In addition to that, it is often argued that it is not easy to listen to others with respect, charity and patience without running the risk of watering down one's faith.<sup>78</sup> While indeed one has to admit that it is a risky business in engaging a dialogue, it is such an important step without which the Church cannot accomplish her mission. The Church has a mandate to proclaim Christ to all creation (Mk 16:16). Recalling Swindler's ground rules for dialogue which he admits to be a fruit born of hard experience, we find that the risk of watering down one's faith in a dialogue would be a less likely thing. If dialogue is to be among equals and each being capable of defining himself/herself why would one fear such a risk? The risk is rather pronounced if one of the partners in dialogue is less informed of his/her faith position. When engaging a dialogue with an ATR adherent, a Christian must always be true to the name, bearing the obligation to witness to Christ.

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<sup>77</sup> E. Ikenga- Metuh, *Dialogue with ATR*.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. E. Ikenga- Metuh, *Dialogue with ATR*.

Equally propping up as an obstacle to dialogue with ATR is the mistaken notion that ATR is almost dying out hence no reason to dialogue. Due to modernity youngsters are seen as abandoning ATR in huge numbers, hence its demise is seen as a matter of time. Though such an observation may appear true, it is altogether not true that ATR is fast dying out. As argued already, ATR is still very strong and widely practised in many places on the African continent. It is equally not a far fetched possibility that even in the Diaspora where some Africans are scattered, ATR is still being practised even though they are in the heartland of the so-called civilisation.

A rather denigrating obstacle to dialogue with ATR is the mentality in some that it is not easy to find competent people to dialogue with since most leaders of ATR are illiterate. While this may sound true if one maintains a minimalist understanding of what dialogue is all about, the reality, however, is that dialogue cannot be limited to an abstract theological exercise requiring literacy and systematic reasoning. Dialogue encompasses also spiritual sharing, active collaboration in life situations and more especially, the sharing of life's experiences by simple ordinary adherents of ATR and Christians. The African Synod made equally a good observation when it noted that,

Christian missionaries and local pastors have been dialoguing with leaders of ATR communities, chiefs, priests, clan heads, prophets and diviners over matters which touch on traditional religious beliefs like converting former shrine sites into Christian mission sites, on aspects of traditional festivals, initiation rites and different types of taboos with varying degrees of success. Through dialogue, they have in some places prayed and taken joint action to broker peace, organise the education and medical services for the community.<sup>79</sup>

The reality thus, is such that the same community with which one discusses other matters would also be partners in dialogue over traditional beliefs. One needs to bear in mind also that so many things in Africa have since changed, including the ratio of literacy also. Many adherents of ATR are now educated men and women who, if engaged in dialogue, can actually speak on behalf of their genuine ATR community of believers.

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<sup>79</sup> E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Dialogue with ATR*.

## Types of dialogue in view of ATR

Looking more closely at the recommendations of the African Synod one notes that as a special activity, dialogue can actually be expressed in two main ways: dialogue of life and deeds and the dialogue of specialists.

### (i) Dialogue of Life and Deeds

As noted above, dialogue is not limited to abstract theological discussions and debates of experts. Ordinary adherents of different religions can actually engage in very useful sharing of experiences and collaborations in life. The Synod suggests that in view of the situation in which the Church finds herself in Africa, this type of dialogue is particularly important and necessary because the Church in Africa is only 13% of the total population and members of the Church are literally surrounded by others among whom they must live, witness to and work for the kingdom of God.<sup>80</sup>

In most African States, it is an undeniable fact that religious pluralism cuts across national, tribal and at times even family ties. Be it in rural areas or in the same block of flats in town, people of different faiths live together and they actually meet at family meetings, funerals, weddings and some even work together in the same offices, factories and so on. In situations such as these, the necessity of dialogue sort of imposes itself on the people. Such a kind of dialogue is sometimes characterised by some scholars as dialogue *ad extra* meaning 'ordinary inter-religious relations'. Paul F. Knitter, for example, defines dialogue *ad extra* as "the interaction of mutual presence [...] speaking and listening [...] witnessing the commitments, the values, and the rituals of others."<sup>81</sup> In this kind of dialogue believers live out what their religions would have taught them about good neighbourliness, about honesty, dedication to duty, service to neighbour, duties in the family, community development and so on.

One big danger, however, is that such a dialogue may result in conflict and discord if it is not carried out in a genuine spirit of dialogue by all concerned parties. Equally posing as a danger to such a dialogue

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Dialogue with ATR*.

<sup>81</sup> P.F. Knitter cited in C.D. Isizoh, *Dialogue with Followers of ATR: Progress and Challenges*, [www.africaworld.net7afrel/dialogue-with-atr.htm](http://www.africaworld.net7afrel/dialogue-with-atr.htm). (accessed 15/04/08).

by convenience is the possibility of people reaching compromises that go against their faith though at times without intending to do so. More often than not, one finds members who are not well instructed or committed to their faiths and these become so vulnerable. While their immediate aim of coming up with workable compromises for coexistence and cooperation would be positive, some often end up losing their faith.

One can also talk of dialogue *ad intra* or in other words, a dialogue of worldviews. Such a form of dialogue usually takes place within an individual who, although has inherited much from ATR, now belongs to another religion and wants to integrate the values from the two religions. To illustrate a bit on this kind of dialogue, it is often the case that when a Christian believer runs into trouble he/she first consults his/her priest or pastor. When the pastor, however, proves to be of no help either because he is too intellectualistic or simply because he has no time to listen to pagan stories, the next step that person takes, because he/she has no choice, is to succour help from ATR. When everything is well again he/she returns to Church. Such a shuttle between Christianity and ATR as observed by Chidi Denis Isizoh, is a form of internal dialogue which is going on in some converts to Christianity. It is basically non-verbal and its primary goal is to integrate the two worldviews so as to give the African Christian an integrated religious personality.<sup>82</sup> As one can see, it sometimes takes the form of inculturation of some religious values.

## **(ii) Dialogue of Specialists**

On the second level of dialogue we have that of specialists and experts. The African Synod made it a point that dialogue with ATR should not be left to chance or mere interest, rather adequate and effective structures and programmes should be designed to promote it in a systematic way. The African Synod further recommended that such projects of dialogue should involve research and publication by experts assigned to the task and that Higher Catholic Theological Institutes like Universities and Seminaries should actually continue to do research in dialogue with ATR and inculturation and make proposals to the bishops. It does not

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. C.D. Isizoh, *Dialogue with Followers of ATR*.

take effort to note that it is on this second level of dialogue that this thesis is to be situated. The opinion, however, of the ordinary adherents of ATR would be taken into consideration also since wisdom is not the preserve of the educated only.

Looking back, however, into the history of the Church in Africa, one can be able to notice that this second level of dialogue has actually been a black spot on the page of this history. Quite a number of individuals who, in the past, have organised or shared religious experiences with adherents of ATR were labelled backsliders or syncretists hence ended up being summoned to Rome for inquisition and at times being excommunicated. While such has been the case, accredited Church authorities have up to now not worked out how Christians could take part in some rites which may involve Christians and ATR adherents. Quite a number of thorny issues remain unaddressed or have been given a veeener kind of touch. We have such issues like: How could a Christian who becomes the chief or head of the family perform traditional cultural duties attached to his office? How could a Christian be conferred with a well merited traditional title? Or as the case with this thesis: How can the Shona Christians honour their dead and remain feeling at home both in their traditional practises and in the Church?

Dialogue at this level, as recommended also by the African Synod, involves entering into dialogue with the ATR community at the highest levels to work out a formula of rites that would respect the religious beliefs of both parties. Millions of African Christians today want their hierarchy which are now almost completely African, to have that pastoral zeal so that they can give them that much required leadership.

Following the example of Pope John Paul II, African Church leaders should gather courage to dialogue with leaders of ATR, not only to promote social and cultural values but also to share common religious experiences like prayer. How revolutionary yet remarkably sound are the words of Emeffie Ikenga-Metuh when he says,

Church leaders should work out modalities that would permit Catholics to participate in some traditional cultural activities which may have religious overtones like title-taking, the cultural roles of the chief and family heads, initiation rites, some traditional marriage rites, oath and covenant making and some traditional festivals. Failure to participate in these tra-

ditional activities that cut across the religious affiliation of Africans leave the Christians marginalised in their various communities.<sup>83</sup>

## ***Inculturation***

The issue of the relation between the Christian message and particular cultures can surely be said to be as old as the Church herself. The first century, which saw the birth of the Church, witnessed a cultural shift that had to occur when the Christian communities developed outside the Jewish world and this was not without its problems. Over a lengthy period of time, two parallel Churches co-existed on fragile compromises over the practise of Jewish laws by Gentile Christians, thanks in disguise to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD which saw the virtual extinction of a uniquely Jewish Christianity otherwise schism would have rocked the infant Church.

Following the Constantinian era, Christian thinking interacted with different philosophies and cultic systems. A synthesis, as Majawa observes, was achieved in the Middle Ages between the Christian faith and the Platonic or Aristotelian philosophies. As a result then, the classical culture of Greece and Rome provided for many centuries provided a cultural base for Western Christianity.<sup>84</sup> As Christianity further expanded into the non-European world contact with the different cultures of these places was inevitable. The encounter, however, was not always peaceful, Christian historiography testifies to the serious tensions that often ensued, for example, the wars with the Arab peoples or the suppression of native cultures in America.

According to Majawa, it was probably contact with the Far East and through such enlightened missionaries as Ricci and De Nobili that the thinking of the Church started to 'change'. As far back as 1659, in a letter to missionaries going to China and Indonesia, the Propaganda Fide spoke of the need for respect for other cultures,

Put no obstacles in their way, and for no reason whatever should you persuade these peoples to change their rites, customs and ways of life, unless these are obviously opposed to religion and good morals. For what is more absurd than to bring France or Spain or Italy or any other part of

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<sup>83</sup> E. Ikenga-Metuh, *Dialogue with ATR*.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. C.C.A. Majawa, *Integrated Approach to African Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Nairobi: 2005, p.7.

Europe into China? [...] Admire and praise what deserves to be respected.<sup>85</sup>

From then on, the talk of ‘adaptation’ or ‘accommodation’ became a dominant theme in theology as well as in Pius XII’s Encyclicals and Allocutions. In his radio message to India in 1952, Pius XII said that whatever is good and human, and in agreement with the nature of man as created by God “the Church accepts, further develops, elevates and sanctifies.”<sup>86</sup>

Since Vatican II (1962-65), however, the term ‘adaptation’ has been replaced by that of ‘inculturation’ not only in theological circles but also in Official Church declarations. Ascertaining the origin of the term ‘inculturation’ is nevertheless not easy. Some think it was a derivation of ‘acculturation’, a term used in anthropology to designate the process by which one social group acquires the customs and habits of another. Some, however, see the use of the prefix ‘in’ as adding a theological insight and thus suggesting that a seed is sown, takes root and flourishes in a new soil.

In trying to trace the origin of the term ‘inculturation’, Majawa makes reference to Yves Congar who argues that it was first used in Japan. Majawa notes, however, that Congar does not provide us with the precise date or context. Majawa went on to cite A.A. Roest Crolius who traces it to a publication of J. Masson in 1962. A more insightful suggestion, concludes Majawa, seems to come from Bruno Chenu who says that the term was already widely used in the late 1950s within Missiological circles to replace words of family resemblance such as ‘adaptation’, ‘accommodation’, and ‘indigestion’ and so on.<sup>87</sup> Chris Nwaka Egbulem concurs with Bruno Chenu when he says that our earliest known use of the term ‘inculturation’ occurred during the debates on “mission and non-Christian culture” at the 29<sup>th</sup> Missiology Week at Louvain in 1959.<sup>88</sup>

Though the term ‘inculturation’ turns out to be a neologism, the reality that it represents has been present throughout Church history as

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<sup>85</sup> Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> Pius XII cited in Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. C.N. Egbulem, *An African Interpretation of Liturgical Inculturation: The Rite Zairos*, <http://www2.bc.edu/~morrib/Egbulem.pdf>, p. 231. (accessed 03/05/08).

discussed briefly earlier on. Developments in the expansion of Christianity, as shown, were fuelled by the spirit of inculturation. As said also, the last decades have seen the term 'inculturation' being widely used not only in areas of theology and missiology but it has been applied also in a special way to liturgy.

In their final statement, the Federation of Asian Bishops' meeting in Taipei (1974) called for, "a Church indigenous and inculturated" and in that same year the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar declared that the theology of adaptation was completely outdated.<sup>89</sup> The reason why adaptation came to be viewed as an outdated terminology is that it suggests a ready-made Christianity which does not change anything of substance and does not suggest an equal relationship of reciprocity in its contact with other cultural traditions. Inculturation, however, as seen by these pastors of the Church, takes a further step from adaptation. It, in other words, goes beyond cosmetic changes. This is what Paul VI emphasized in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* when he spoke of the evangelisation of cultures, "not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots."<sup>90</sup>

In a similar vein, participants of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod in Rome stated:

Since the Church is a communion which enjoys diversity and unity, being present throughout the world, it takes up whatever it finds positive in all cultures. Inculturation, however, is different from mere external adaptation, as it signifies an interior transformation of authentic cultural values through integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures.<sup>91</sup>

From a liturgical perspective, integration hereby means that the culture will influence the way prayer formularies are composed and proclaimed, ritual actions are performed and message proclaimed in art forms. Integration entails also that the local symbols, rites and festivals, after due critique and Christian reinterpretation, will become part of the liturgical worship of the Church.

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 20.

<sup>91</sup> Egbulem, *An African Interpretation*, p. 232.

Earlier on in 1978, during the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the Society of Jesus, Pedro Arrupe had defined inculturation as,

[...] the incarnation of the Christian message in a concrete cultural situation in such a way that not only is this experience expressed with elements typical of the culture in question (otherwise it would only be superficial adaptation), but also that this same experience transforms itself into a principle of inspiration, being both a norm and a unifying force, transforming and recreating this culture, thus being at the origin of a new creation.<sup>92</sup>

Inculturation, seen thus in this way, signifies the insertion of the Christian message analogous to Christ's incarnation in human history. It acknowledges the responsibility of the local Churches to shape the future of the Church in their own part of the world and the enrichment the Universal Church as a whole gains as a result of this experience. What is implied here, in other words, is that just as the Universal Church has given a lot to the local churches so also the local churches should share their values and riches with the Universal Church for integral development. In this whole process neither the Gospel nor the culture is independent of the other. Both interact at the deep level of mutual give and take, making thus a new creation.

As a sign of his pastoral concern, the late Holy Father John Paul II created the Pontifical Council for culture in 1982 and in his encyclical: *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) repeated calls for incarnating the gospel in native cultures. He made it clear also that the Church, “[...] transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that actually exist in them and renewing them from within.”<sup>93</sup>

Since inculturation expresses one of the elements of the great mystery of incarnation, it follows that liturgical inculturation pertains to the incarnation of the Christian liturgical experience in a local worshipping community. As further clarified by the great liturgist Anscar J. Chupungco, liturgical inculturation is,

[...] the process whereby the texts and rituals used in worship by the local church are so inserted in the framework of culture, that they absorb its thought, language and ritual patterns. Liturgical inculturation operates according to the dynamics of insertion in a given culture and interior as-

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<sup>92</sup> P. Arrupe cited in Egbulem, *An African Interpretation*, p. 232.

<sup>93</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 52.

similation of cultural elements. From a purely anthropological point of view, inculturation means that the people are made to experience in liturgical celebration a 'cultural event' whose language and ritual they are able to identify as elements of their culture.<sup>94</sup>

Analysing Chupungco's definition, it is easy to note that in praxis, liturgical inculturation opens up to a whole new area of not only making already established liturgical rites meaningful in a given local situation but also of developing new dimensions in the Church's worship patterns, thus bringing some new but yet authentic experiences of worship into the Church. The great challenge of liturgical inculturation, when looked at closely, lies not in explaining away the Roman rite but rather in celebrating the Christian mystery in question in such a way as to exhibit both the true sense of the mystery and the authentic cultic sense of a given people.

### **Challenges of liturgical inculturation**

Focusing on Africa, one realises that at least two blocks lie in the way of trying to inculturate its liturgy. In the first place, one has to reckon with the dynamic nature of African culture. It is a fact that, just like any other culture, African culture is not static but rather participates in the process of evolution. What it means then is that the search for a genuine or original African culture runs the risk of invading the Church of today with aspects of African life of the past which may today impede progress or which have by their nature become redundant. What it calls for then is a serious discernment or in other words, the cultural elements and values to be incarnated into the liturgy must undergo critical evaluation. Aware of this danger, the Vatican II Document: *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* spells out clearly that nothing should be admitted which is indissolubly bound up with superstition and error. Instead, they should be in harmony with the true and authentic spirit of liturgy.<sup>95</sup> Talk about African heritage in inculturation debates as is evidently clear, needs to bring into focus the evolutionary aspect or the total growth experienced in its cultural evolution.

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<sup>94</sup> A. J. Chupungco cited in Egbulem, *An African Interpretation*, p. 233.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Vatican II Documents: *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy*, No. 37.

Equally an acute challenge as observed by Chris Egbulem, is the fact that Official Church documents tend to give so much prominence to the primacy of the Gospel in such a way that the carrier of that Gospel, the Church, is presented as having been fully made already. Such a scenario gives the impression that everything seen in the Church's way of life is part of the authentic mystery of Christ. It further gives room for the Church to claim being the sole judge of culture, the measure being itself, ignoring as it were its own cultural accretions through history. The end result of such an unfortunate claim to authority is that certain traits of a given culture become condemned because they do not immediately fit in the vision of the Church as perceived by the evangeliser.<sup>96</sup>

For authentic inculturation to take place, no part should claim authority over the other. There should rather be a mutual dialogue and sharing between the Church and culture, promoting thus an experience of bonding ushering in a 'new creation'. The Church's message will have to be 'converted' into a mode assimilable to the culture and expressible in the language patterns of the given culture.

Since we do not possess a pure Christian Gospel devoid of cultural traits, inculturation should allow the Gospel as transmitted to be challenged and transformed with the view of liberating it from cultural accretions of other peoples. Liturgical inculturation is thus not based on what the Gospel does with culture but rather is based on what the Gospel and culture do with each other in the continuous process of encounter and mutual embrace. Hammering on this point Anscar Chupungco says,

There must be reciprocity and mutual respect between liturgy and culture. Culture has also its categories, dynamics and intrinsic laws. Liturgy must not impose on culture a meaning or bearing that is intrinsically alien to its nature. Authentic inculturation respects the process of transculturation whereby both liturgy and culture are able to evolve through mutual insertion and absorption without damage to the identity of each.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Egbulem, *An African Interpretation*, p. 234.

<sup>97</sup> Chupungco cited in Egbulem, *An African Interpretation*, p. 236.

## Methods of inculturation

Christian historiography, as pointed out earlier on, bears testimony to the fact that Christian worship, whose origin dates back to the time of Jesus and the apostles, has in the course of centuries integrated the culture of Greeks, Romans, Franco-Germanics and nations of the late Middle Ages in Europe. Now faced with the need for authentic Christian worship in Africa also, the question that confronts us today is: How can we revive this spirit of inculturation which inspired progress in Europe during those centuries? There is actually need to think of a methodology, a methodology that remains faithful to the spirit that fuelled past successful forms of inculturation. A correct method, in other words, is the key to authentic inculturation. Without the correct method it would be very difficult to shape the future of inculturation. Though there are several methods one could possibly use, for example, prescriptive/magisterial inculturation, organic progression, the synthetic method and others, in this thesis I will use only two which I am borrowing from Anscar J. Chupungco and these are: creative assimilation and dynamic equivalence.

## Creative Assimilation

Chipungco notes that during the age of Patristic creativity, especially during the time of writers like Tertulian, Hippolytus and Ambrose, inculturation was often done through integration of pertinent rites, symbols and linguistic expressions, religious or otherwise, into the liturgy.<sup>98</sup> Among those things integrated was the anointing at baptism, the giving of the cup of milk and honey, the foot washing of neophytes as well as the type of ritual language. What remains evidently clear is that the Greeks and the Romans commonly practised these rites centuries before the advent of Christianity either as household rites or as religious acts of mystery religions. Through creative assimilation these rites became part of Christian worship, shaping thus the Church's liturgy in a profound way. The way these rites shaped the liturgy in a profound way is more evident when one looks, for example, at the rite of baptism. From the simple apostolic rite of 'washing in water with the word' (Eph

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. A.J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation: The Future that Awaits Us*, [www.valpo.edu/ils/assets/pdfs/chupungco2.pdf](http://www.valpo.edu/ils/assets/pdfs/chupungco2.pdf). (accessed 18/05/08).

5:26), baptism developed to a full-blown liturgical celebration that included a pre-baptismal anointing, act of renunciation toward the West and the concomitant profession of faith toward the East, blessing of baptismal water and post-baptismal rites like foot washing, anointing with chrism, clothing in white robes and the giving of a lighted candle.

In applying the method of creative assimilation, Patristic writers often made recourse also to Biblical typology. The author of the Apostolic Tradition, for example, reinterpreted the ancient Roman practise of feeding the newly born with milk and honey to ward off evil spirits or as a symbol of the child's acceptance into the family, in light of God's promise that He would lead His Chosen people into a land flowing with milk and honey. After being creatively integrated into the rite of communion, the cup of milk and honey assured the Church's newborn sons and daughters that by passing through the waters of baptism they had crossed over to the new land of promise.<sup>99</sup>

Looking at Shona culture, one realises that this method actually offers a wide range of possibilities. It is not so difficult to note a wide range of similarities between liturgical rites and those of Shona culture, between liturgical symbolism and the local Shona system of symbols, between liturgical language and the ritual language of the Shona peoples.

Creative assimilation may also include the contextualisation<sup>100</sup> of certain Biblical texts so that they reflect the contemporary experiences of the local congregation. It is important, however, to always bear in mind that similarity is not always the gauge of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. In our efforts to engage the process of contextualisation we also need to avoid doing violence to the Biblical text in order to accommodate

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, p.3.

<sup>100</sup> Contextualization as some would rightly comment, is 'a slippery term with diverse connotations and meanings depending very much on who is using it' Be that as it may, one can hardly dispute the notion that contextualization involves certain transformations of a text from one context to another in a way that enables its meaning to be understood. It is, in other words, a method of communication in which the text from one context, say for example, that of the bible, language, history or culture is being made comprehensible in another. In the above reference, the first context is assumed to be the original one of the 'biblical text'. The second is the context to which the text is to be apprehended which is the 'mind of the interpreter' 'the reader' or the 'listeners' and in the above case, the Shona peoples. See C.C.A.Majawa, *Integrated Approach to African Christian Theology of Inculturation* (2005).

culture. Culture, it should be always remembered, is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be 'healed, ennobled and perfected'.<sup>101</sup> What again this calls for is the need for serious discernment or critical evaluation.

### **Dynamic Equivalence**

While the starting point of creative assimilation is what culture can offer which then has to be added to Christian liturgy, dynamic equivalence starts with what exists in Christian liturgy and how culture can further develop its ordo, which are the composites of the rite.<sup>102</sup> Dynamic equivalence translates or re-expresses the liturgical ordo in the living language, rites and symbols of a local community. It seeks, in other words, to replace elements of the liturgical ordo with something that has an equal meaning or value in the culture of the people so that the message intended by the ordo is transmitted suitably. Facilitating this transmission is the reality that there are certain aspects of culture that by their very own nature witness to the highest realities of the Gospel. Chipungco refers to this concurrence of meaning between cultural values and gospel values as 'connaturalness'. This helps us see how Christian liturgy adopted and maintains the uses of bread and wine, incense, laying of hands, anointing and so on. In all these, the cultural elements retain their traditional expression and vitality.

Focusing on Shona culture, one finds that among the examples of values which have a bearing on liturgical ordo are hospitality, family ties, communal spirit, leadership and others. Certain cultural characteristics might surely need to be purged of certain meanings before they can truly bear an evangelical character. Inspired by the Gospel, experts in inculturation should liberate such values from images contrary to the truth. As said before, what is evidently and wholly contrary to the Gospel must not be admitted into liturgy.

It should be noted, however, that dynamic equivalence is not the same as formal correspondence which is no more than a literal, word for word or phrase-by-phrase translation. Formal correspondence remains

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 54.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Chipungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*, p.4.

on the level of form or shape or external appearance and does not take into consideration the cultural patterns, the history and life experience of the local community. While the temptation to settle easily for formal correspondence is so high in the Church, most of whose liturgical formularies are translations from Latin, it is a pity that though appearing 'faithful' to the original, formal correspondence fails to communicate the message effectively. Though most people are familiar with common words such as 'Amen', 'Alleluia' and so on, such a familiarity does not necessarily mean that these words have become embedded in their cultural consciousness. One last remark on the use of the said methods in this thesis is that they tend to overlap in many ways. As we progress in the use of these methods also, it is important to keep in mind the basic guidelines which govern inculturation and these are: "compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the Universal Church."<sup>103</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While it has not been easy to come up with precise and consensually accepted definitions to the terms that were under discussion, what this Chapter has done was to clarify and set parameters on the future usage of these terms in the thesis. In so doing, cases which may involve ambiguity of meanings have been guarded against. The thesis, in the next Chapter, proceeds to look at the problem which has been the centre of debate in the local Church in Zimbabwe, namely: *kurova guva*. Such a problem will not be examined in isolation but will be looked at against the whole background of the planting of the Word on the Zimbabwean soil and the subsequent efforts at the Africanisation of the Catholic Church.

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<sup>103</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 54.

## Chapter Two

# Initial attempts at inculturation of Shona traditional customs: Successes and failures

*“Until Lions write their own history, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter”.*

-African Proverb

### ***Introduction***

Put no obstacles in their way and for no reason whatever should you persuade these people to change their rites, customs and ways of life, unless these are obviously opposed to religion and good morals. For what is more absurd than to bring France or Spain or Italy or any other part of Europe into China? [...]Admire and practise whatever deserves to be respected.<sup>1</sup>

This, as we saw, was the directive given by Propaganda Fide, a Catholic Commission in the Vatican responsible for the Propagation of Faith as far back as 1695. Looking closely at this directive one would surely admire the clarity of its message as well as the motherly love of the Church in trying to embrace and bring home her sons and daughters scattered all over the world. While often it was not easy to translate into action the above generous adaptation principle, the heroism of missionaries shown in them leaving the comfort zones of their mother countries to plant Christianity on African soil and even die for these peoples surely needs to be emulated. Some really became apostles of perfect adaptation as had been directed by Propaganda Fide. This Chapter seeks to examine the efforts which have been made to Africanise the Church in Zimbabwe. To come up with a clear picture of how such an ‘adaptation’ was tried on the Zimbabwean soil it would be proper to begin with a brief look at the early missionary enterprise on this part of the African continent.

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<sup>1</sup> Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 7.

## ***Overview of the missionary enterprise among the Shona***

When one begins to think of the missionary enterprise on the Zimbabwean soil, cognisance of a two-pronged missionary attempt should be made. Since, however, a somehow thorough coverage of these missionary activities has already been made in past works by A.J. Dachs and W.F. Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*; C.J.M. Zvobgo, *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe* and J. Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, I see no point in going through the same matter all over except just to highlight important dates and major activities that accompanied them.

The first man to think of bringing Christianity into the interior region of the Monomotapa Empire was Gonsalo da Silveira (1521-1561). Dreaming of this mission, Fr Gonsalo saw it as a blessing to the Portuguese crown since the Christianised king would mean a king dependent on the king of Portugal. Basing also on the experience he had had with African slaves back in his home country, he thought tribes in the interior would be eager to embrace Christianity. Though he indeed managed to reach the famous Emperor of Gold, Negomo Mupunzagutu in 1560 and have him baptised under a new name Sebastiao, his missionary zeal was nipped in its bud when he was strangled to death in his bed in 1561.<sup>2</sup> Though other Jesuits and Dominican priests tried to revive what had been initiated by Fr Gonsalo, a fatal blow had already been experienced. By 1750 both the Dominicans and the Jesuits had ceased baptising African adults arguing that they did not live according to the Christian doctrine, hence Christianity would bring them condemnation rather than salvation. Slowly the Churches began to decay or were burned down by the ravaging tribes and most of the faithful returned fully to their traditional religion. Calls for more missionaries to the Zambezi were suppressed by Portugal and everything practically came to a halt with the death of the last Dominican priest in 1837.<sup>3</sup>

Acting as a pre-cursor to the second leg of the missionary activity in Zimbabwe was David Livingstone (1813-1873), a member of the London Missionary Society (LMS). In terms of path-finding and inspiration Livingstone is generally credited by most Church historians as having had no peer. He directly initiated the evangelisation of Zambia,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 85.

Zimbabwe and Malawi and it should be admitted that Catholic White Fathers and the Jesuits indirectly owe to him almost as much as the Protestant and Anglican missionaries do. As a result of his attitude towards Africans, David Livingstone became the icon of the ideal missionary to most of his Englishmen. As noted by J. Baur, he indeed had set a model of Afro-European relationship by conceiving himself as a 'servant to Africa' and respecting the African as a brother 'capable of holding an honourable rank in the family of man'.<sup>4</sup> Propelled by this perception, he treated African medicine-men as colleagues and accepted the valuable knowledge of herbalists. While at times he would suggest to practitioners a better method, he did not hesitate to entrust himself to them when stricken by fever.

Following the path into the interior which had been opened by David Livingstone, a caravan of twelve Jesuits started out from Grahams-town, South Africa in 1879 to evangelize the Ndebele peoples in Bulawayo.<sup>5</sup> While the 'Matebele mission' later proved out to be a dismal failure due to none among the Ndebeles who was coming for baptism, shortage of manpower on the part of missionaries as some were dying of malaria as well as their loss of credibility among the people which forced them to withdraw temporarily, that however, did not mark the end of it. With every hope of success, missionaries returned with Rhode's Pioneer Column in 1890, a move which inaugurated another chapter in Zimbabwe's encounter with the gospel.<sup>6</sup> At the back of the minds of these missionaries was the conviction that only the overthrow of the Ndebele kingdom would pave way for the country's evangelisation. Writing after the 1893 war in which the Ndebele had been forced to surrender, paving thus the chance for Rhode's British South Africa Company to extend its rule over the whole Matebele area, Fr Prestage summed up the missionary mentality when he said,

If ever there was a just war, the Matebele war is just. I am delighted that such a tyrannical and hateful rule has been smashed

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. N. Bhebhe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe 1859-1923*, London: 1979, pp. 81-6.

up. The Chartered Company's force deserves sound praise. They have done their work well.<sup>7</sup>

The 1896 Chimurenga revolt of both the Ndebele and Shona against British rule drastically impeded and in many cases destroyed the missionary efforts of the Christian Churches in colonial Rhodesia. Soon after the Ndebele had negotiated a peace settlement with the BSAC, the company in turn forcibly subdued the Shona, whereupon a new era of evangelisation dawned in its fullness, seeing European and American missionaries beginning aggressive evangelization campaigns. Judging from the results of this renewed missionary activity, one can just but designate it as a fruitful campaign. As seen in the figures collated by Nicholas M. Creary, the Jesuit mission at Chishawasha which had recorded only 40 baptisms from its founding in 1892 to 1898, increased its converts to 300 in 1899, 1 000 in 1905, 1 600 in 1910 and 3 600 in 1920. Similarly, the Jesuit mission at Empandeni registered 500 baptisms between 1894 and 1904 but increased to 1 000 by 1908 and 1 400 by 1910. By the 1970s Rhodesia could boast of approximately 1.4 million Christians when figures of all the denominations are put together, that is, the Catholics, Protestants and adherents of African Independent Churches.<sup>8</sup>

### **Colonial influence on missionaries**

As reflected in the overview, those Jesuit and Dominican missionaries who accompanied the Pioneer Column of the British South Africa Company in its occupation of both Matebeleland and Mashonaland were faced with a dual mission: to serve the white settlers and to establish the Catholic Church among African peoples north of the Limpopo. They certainly derived strength and support from the BSAC's occupation and its reduction of Ndebele power. Faced with the changing circumstances and what they perceived as needs of the Zimbabwean society, the missionaries and secular authority embarked on the remodelling of society

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<sup>7</sup> Fr Prestage cited in J. McLaughlin, *On the Frontline: Catholic Missions in Zimbabwe's Liberation War*, Harare, 1996, p.10.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. N.M. Creary, *African Inculturation of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, 1858-1977*, [www.encyclopedia.com/doc/IGI-56909069.html](http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/IGI-56909069.html). (accessed 16/04/08).

to Western needs and standards. Convinced by their own 19<sup>th</sup> Century formation which assured them that the Western European civilisation was superior to any other, missionaries thought that the only salvation from eternal damnation was for Africans to enthusiastically embrace the Gospel of Christ. No thought was ever made to enquire what the African considered was best for him. Though the Black man never had asked for this 'civilisation,' he was expected to receive it with open hands. Missionaries and their secular brothers and sisters expected the Black man to be grateful for all this and were actually impatient with the aloofness of Africans and were indeed also frustrated at the opposition of African society and polity to Christianity. In their eyes, there was totally nothing to be admired in the lives of Africans whom they believed dwelt in a state of barbarism. Instead of them admiring and praising African customs and ways of life, they rather saw Africans as 'savages' to be civilised, 'cursed sons of Ham' to be saved, 'big children' to be educated for in their eyes, there existed no African culture, only tribal customs, no religion, save foolish superstitions and devilish cults. New comers to the Mission field south of the Zambezi were informed, "here we do not shake hands with Africans."<sup>9</sup> The description of the Shona in the BSAC report for the years 1889-1892 sums well the attitude of the missionaries as well. Part of this report on the 'Religion of the Mashonas' reads:

1. Amongst the Mashonas there are only very faint traces of a religion, i.e. of what may be called the remnants of an original revelation, and they have degenerated in this respect in a comparatively short time. They have hardly an idea of a supreme being, and although they have a word signifying 'God' it is not certain at all, if it has not been brought to them by hunters and traders previous to the coming of the Chartered Company's troops. In any case, whatever this Supreme Being may be in their eyes they do not trouble themselves about it.
2. Their religious belief is made up of superstitions about spirits and ghosts. In various districts there is a principal spirit which is called the 'Lion-God'. Only those who have married and had children belong to the spirits of the ancestors; whilst children and unmarried people, or married people who died without issue have no special rank. Their abode is the veldt, or the place where they have been interred.
3. They believe also in the immortality of the soul, but know nothing about their future state.

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<sup>9</sup> Baur, *2000 Years*, p.422.

4. Their religious practices consist mainly in bringing sacrifices to their ancestral spirits, and of cattle and the produce of their gardens. In former times when they had more cattle, oxen were slaughtered and sacrificed; the place for sacrificing is a short distance from the village and is a tree fenced in.

5. The principal priest is most frequently a woman, who is expected to keep single; and who pretends to have communications with the 'Mhondoro' or 'Lion-God' who informs her of the approach of any enemy or any calamity, on which she warns the villagers, and takes flight herself. The 'Mondoro' is also invoked when rain is wanted.

6. Another person of importance is the witch doctor, who in the popular opinion is possessed of some higher science, but who in fact abuses the credulity of the people to enrich himself, and instances are not wanting when a man had brought everything he had to the doctor, in order to find out who was the cause of the illness of his wife. The dice of the witch doctor are believed to forecast and know everything.

7. Their belief in spirits, ghosts and witchcraft influences to a great extent their whole life and tends to their unhappiness, as they are regarded as irresistible forces.<sup>10</sup>

Though the report helps us gain some insights into the lives of the Shona at that time, it simply displays that it was the fruit of a half-baked exercise. No serious effort, it appears, had been made to understand the life of the Black man; his life was simply brushed aside as backward and full of superstition. Leading other like-minded Arabs and Europeans in producing a 'scholarship' purporting to show that Africans were under-achievers or no achievers in history was the Dutchman William Bosman. Shedding more light about him K. Nehusi says, "Bosman was an early European enslaver of Africans and not co-incidentally, the first Dutchman to begin misrepresenting Africans as less than Europeans and less than human."<sup>11</sup> In coming up with such 'scholarship' Bosman had a hidden agenda. All he sought was to protect his economic interests. Such a scholarship was thus a way of trying to 'justify' his crimes.

Though many other European scholars were not as directly and clearly involved in the large-scale terrorism and mass murder as Bosman, they also sought to 'justify' and so protect the national projects of

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<sup>10</sup> BSAC report cited in M.Gelfand, *Ukama: Reflections on Shona and Western Cultures in Zimbabwe*, Gwelo: 1981, pp. 63-4.

<sup>11</sup> K. Nehusi, *Mental Enslavement in African Holocaust*, [www.africanholocaust.net/html\\_ah/mentalslavery.html](http://www.africanholocaust.net/html_ah/mentalslavery.html) (accessed 06/05/08).

their countries, which was the enslavement and exploitation of Africans and the denial of these crimes. This then marked the beginning of the European tradition of falsification and misrepresentation from which many Africans still suffer. Rating the Africans in the first place as underachievers in history was seen as justification for the White man to mould Africans into a civilised race through the humane or paternalistic interests of the West.

Carried away by an undeclared solidarity, especially where settlers were of the missionary's own nationality, a number of missionaries were thus no less racist than their kith and kin, which saw them failing to live up to the Propaganda Fide directive. Having the same mentality of his European compatriots Fr Hartmann, for example, after failing to see the fruit of his labour despite spending much of his time working among the Mashonas came to conclude, "So deplorably sunk are they in bestial immorality, witchcraft and superstition."<sup>12</sup> What Fr Hartmann and others like him failed to understand was that the work of conversion should not be measured against human effort but is actually the work of the spirit who blows wherever he wills (John 3:8). What missionaries failed also to understand was that the Shona felt that there was actually nothing wrong with their own culture hence the resistance they made to Western influence.

The bias of Fr Hartmann and others against African customs and beliefs was simply that nothing good could come from Africa. They found it even hard to adopt the local usage of the name '*Mwari*' in reference to God. Writing from Chishawasha in 1892 Fr Hartmann says,

We started to admit Natives on our ground and we started at once to teach them after we had acquired some knowledge of the language. Of course we tried to find out all about their heathen ideas of God, etc [...]. They tried to keep many things secret from us [...] we got more and more doubtful. We found it dangerous to adopt for our Christian instruction the name *Mwari* used by our Heathens and introduced the old Hebrew name *Yave* which is certainly unmistakable and known in the whole Christian world.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gelfand, *Ukama*, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Fr Hartmann cited in A.J. Dachs and W.F. Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe 1879-1979*, Gweru: 1979, p. 9.

Enveloped in the same thick cloud of bias, these missionaries could not withstand the Shona ceremonial practice of *kurova guva* (reinstating of the deceased's spirit). To them, participating in this ritual was a clear manifestation of ancestral worship contrary to the first commandment in the Decalogue hence; the practice was to be stopped with immediate effect.

Early missionaries of almost all the various denominations were, as a matter of fact, opponents to ancestor veneration. To curb this ancestor veneration and the related belief in the powers of the *n'anga* (diviner), Catholic missionaries had brought in the idea of Christian villages. Missionaries and Christians from Empandeni mission, for example, made sorties on neighbouring villages. When it became known that ceremonies of the ancestor veneration were still taking place, participants were pursued with dogs and the spirit mediums beaten with sticks. On one occasion, the village of a *n'anga* was destroyed and he was threatened with hanging.<sup>14</sup>

Believing that there was nothing wrong with their African custom of ancestor veneration, the practice continued to be carried out secretly. Though the ban on *kurova guva* was already in force, there were somehow some rare relaxations to the rigid principle. At Chishawasha mission farm relatives of the person who had died were allowed to have a ceremonial beer party, thought to be a replacement of the earlier 'superstitious rites' of *kurova guva*.<sup>15</sup>

One cannot help except wonder at this lack of appreciation of African culture on the part of these missionaries even in very clear cases like the use of the term 'Mwari' in reference to God. Still recalling to mind the 1659 directive of Propaganda Fide, one would wonder why those missionaries would not give it a try to dialogue with the Shona so as to understand them in a much better way before coming up with stern measures as in the *kurova guva* case. Had they really forgotten that the Church is what it is today as a result of adopting many things from the Greco-Roman culture?

Fritz Kollbrunner thinks, however, that the naiveté of the missionaries towards the culture of the Shona should not be understood in

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. W.R. Peanden, *Missionary Attitudes to Shona Culture 1890-1923. Central Africa Historical Association Local Series*, No.27, Salisbury: 1970, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Peanden, *Missionary Attitudes to Shona Culture*, p. 20.

the sense that they did not have exact knowledge of the local customs. He is of the belief that the Jesuits were as well informed as was possible though without ethnological competence. He points out that a number of articles dealing expressly with Shona customs can actually be found in the missionary magazine, the '*Zambezi Mission Record*'. He notes, for example, that in 1907 Fr E. Biehler SJ published an article on Shona customs in which he gave a few brief remarks on *kurova guva*. Yet another article he notes was one which came up in 1917 on 'Some Tribal Customs of the Manyika' including also a short description of a burial written by an anonymous Brother<sup>16</sup> of the Religious Missionaries of Marianhill. In 1920 featured another article signed by ES which was on 'Some Religious Customs of the Makaranga.'<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the articles, F. Kollbrunner goes on to mention that the first Conference of Catholic Missionaries took place from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1920 at St George's College in Bulawayo wherein various topics were looked at. Among the topics were the validity of pagan marriages, Christian villages, beer drinking, catechumenate, marital status of teachers, language and its various dialects in Mashonaland. A second Conference kicked off from 22 June to 1 July 1972 and among the various issues discussed was the giving of names and their meaning which is connected with ancestors. The giving of the name of an ancestor to a child was condemned as superstitious since it implied that the ancestor was re-incarnated in the child.<sup>18</sup>

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16 The anonymous Brother referred to here is most

likely Br Aegidius Pfister who lived for many years at Triashill Mission. He had thoroughly mastered ChiManyika that he could not only speak it fluently but understood the formation of the language so well that he wrote books on it. He, however, thought that since he was a Brother, he should not get publicity by putting his name to his books so he would often write under the name of Fr F. Mayr with whom he collaborated. At one point he contributed to Material Relating to the Nyika (maNyika) People in Mashonaland under his own name but the work was, however, edited by W. Wanger and published at Marianhill in 1913. His contribution centred on the description of various African customs, the description being in ChiManyika with an English translation. (Cf. A.J. Dachs and W.F. Rea, *The Catholic Church and Zimbabwe 1879-1979*, 1979).

17 Cf. J. Elsener and F. Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit of the Dead: The History of a case of Inculturation in Zimbabwe*, No.6, Harare: 2001, p. 5.

18 Cf. Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 6.

If we are to assume as F. Kollbrunner that the missionaries definitely knew something about Shona culture, the question still remains, why did they not translate their knowledge into something positive in their perception of African customs? John Baur was thus probably right when he argued that the root cause of missionaries' lack of adaptation to African culture should not be sought in colonial occupation but rather in the spiritual captivity of these Western missionaries within their own culture. For him, it was not the colonial administrators but their own narrow concept of orthodoxy – canon law for Catholics and conformity with their home Churches for the Protestants which prohibited them from a true inculturation of Christianity. He further argues that it was European paternalism based chiefly on the same fear of deviating from the true faith that hesitated them to entrust Africans with tasks of responsibility. Colonialism, for him, simply hardened those shortcomings and tended to perpetuate them.<sup>19</sup>

The negative outlook of the White man on the Black man's culture pervaded the whole colonial era and even beyond. General Smuts, in his Rhodes Memorial Lecture at Oxford in 1929 which was on the Black man, had this to say:

[...]No other race is so easily satisfied, so care-free. If this had not been the case, it could scarcely have survived the intolerable evils which have weighed on it like a nightmare throughout the ages. [...] The African simply forgets past troubles and does not anticipate future troubles. This happy-go-lucky disposition is a great asset, but it has also its drawbacks. There is no inward incentive to improvement, there is no persistent effort in construction and there is complete absorption in the present, its joys and sorrows. Wine, women and song in their African forms remain the great consolation of life. No indigenous religion has been evolved, no literature, no art since the magnificent promise of the cave-men and the South African petroglyphist, no architecture since Zimbabwe (if that is African) [...].<sup>20</sup>

While General Smuts' presentation would have received great applause from the White audience, the Black man would have listened to this with utter disgust. This was again a product of newspaper research lacking an in-depth analysis. It is unfortunate that one can still up to this day trace a

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 424.

<sup>20</sup> Genarel Smuts cited in Gelfand, *Ukama*, pp. 64-5.

disdain of African culture in some missionaries working among the Shona. It is actually a scandal to find some priests who have worked for more than 20 years or so in Zimbabwe delivering an English sermon before a Black congregation with a translator nearby. The very fact of them taking no interest in the local language of these people simply displays that they would like to remain aloof in case they are contaminated by the local culture.

### **Missionaries as conscientious objectors**

Generally, the thinking pattern in Europe towards African culture in the 1890s began to shift and surely was no longer the same in the 1970s. Some missionaries among the Shona became more and more aware also that they had not moved into a religious vacuum and that they had come to complete the religious beliefs and practices of the African peoples rather than to replace them. They too came to recognise the need for adjustment of Christian practice in African social life. Most began to question also how far the Church was ministering to African political needs and aspirations. In the area of teaching, they realised that this apostolate was too heavily doing the work of the Rhodesian government.

Though undoubtedly the Catholic Church had enjoyed a special relationship with the White Rhodesian public and government, it had its own particular difficulties. The Church could not countenance the unjust discrimination by the state hence she stood on the side of the helpless, the sad, the oppressed and those deprived. As reflected in the pastoral instruction of the newly consecrated Bishop Chichester to the Catholics of Rhodesia, the upholding of exclusiveness and privilege of the few was by no means to be condoned. In clear and distinct terms, he openly declared in August 1931:

The Catholic Bishop owes himself to all; nor does Catholic justice or charity differentiate in the smallest degree between rich or poor, prominent or obscure, compatriot or immigrant, European or Native. In the presence of God every living human soul is equal [...]. One Justice and One Love embrace us all, and if in any way differentiation could be made, it would be in favour of the more helpless, the more sick, the more

sad, according to the model set by Christ, who defined Himself as having come amongst us to 'seek and save that which was lost.'<sup>21</sup>

In those early days the relationship between the Church and State could be characterised as cordial, which to some extent inhibited public criticism or confrontation. If criticism had to be made, it was done in a diplomatic way, best at a colonial club or over a glass of beer or coffee. It is no surprise then that when the Bishops later began to voice openly against some government policies, they suffered estrangement from many of their White Catholics with accusations that the Church leaders had come to espouse exclusive African nationalism and even communism. Such accusations would surely stick when one brings into focus the move, for example, by the later Bishop Aloysius Haene. He had first come to Rhodesia in 1940 as a Swiss missionary but not after long had he managed to establish close contacts with African nationalists. Later when he had become bishop of Gwelo Diocese, he assisted quite a number of the African nationalists to go abroad for higher studies and even gave financial assistance to the families of imprisoned nationalist leaders.<sup>22</sup>

Key to the new turn against colonial structures was the formation of the Rhodesian Episcopal Conference in 1955. Through her combined leadership, the Catholic Church began to be more and more critical of the policies and methods of the Rhodesian government and any practice of racial discrimination. In the eyes of the Bishops any discrimination against men and women or harassment of them because of their race, colour or religion was purely foreign to the mind of Christ.<sup>23</sup> Apart from vehement opposition to injustice and oppression, the Church leadership sought to remedy the wrongs which had already been done through the promotion of African responsibility and influence. To the Bishops, the African call for more and higher educational facilities, greater responsibility and less discrimination seemed more urgent and more valid.

The most outspoken leaders in the Bishops' Conference were Bishop Aloysius Haene of Gwelo and Bishop Donal Lamont of Umtali.

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<sup>21</sup> Pastoral, of Right Rev. Bishop Chichester cited in Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. McLaughlin, *On the Frontline*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p.213.

In 1959 Bishop Haene called for a conference to discuss the 'deteriorating race relation'. He had been worried by the repressive laws when the United Federal Party of Sir Edgar Whitehead met the powerful expression of Black Nationalism and its growing recourse to violence by the assumption of emergency powers and putting into law the immensely restrictive *Law and Order (Maintenance) Act*.<sup>24</sup> Though the Bishops could not come up with a joint Statement at this meeting, they saw it as their responsibility to teach and lead in matters relating to the relative roles of Church and State and in national issues of land, legislation, segregation and education. Most of the conclusions they arrived at in this meeting were to form the basis of the numerous individual and joint pastoral letters during the twenty or so years which were to follow.

Bishop Lamont who had openly confessed what he had seen as the need to formally denounce racial discrimination since the time he was made a Bishop in 1957, published on his own a Statement under the title: *Purchased People (1959)*. Archbishop Markall, however, still respecting the cordial relationship between the Church and State, had tried to block it. In it, Bishop Lamont vehemently attacked the *Native Education Bill* which barred any person or organisation from opening schools for Africans without the express permission of the Director of Native Education.<sup>25</sup> In legislating such a Bill, the government was trying to curtail those it viewed as subversive organisations from disseminating their propaganda under the guise of 'education'. In Lamont's eyes, however, such a statute was an implicit denial of the Church's right to teach. To him also, such an education birth-control exercise by the State was the root cause of much of the dissatisfaction which was among Africans at that time. As he later expressed it also in his letter to the *Tablet*, he argued,

However much people may dislike hearing it, as far as education is concerned in Southern Rhodesia, there is one law for the White child and another for the non-White. Education is compulsory and costs the European little in school fees if he attends a Government school. Education is not compulsory, it is relatively expensive and the facilities are totally inadequate for the African majority.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 206.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> Bishop Lamont cited in Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 208.

Bishop Lamont's *Purchased People* gave also a detailed account of the evils of discrimination and segregation and the denial of individual rights, advocating a new attitude on the part of Rhodesia's White citizens and their government. It was actually two years after its publication that other Bishops saw the need to incorporate most of his ideas in a new Pastoral Statement entitled: *Peace Through Justice*, when they realised the lack of cooperation by the government in implementing the much sought for change. The situation at that time inevitably vomited a gentleman's approach but simply demanded to call a spade a spade. *Peace Through Justice* exposed and unequivocally condemned the imbalance between the Black community and the White electorate and taxpayers. Part of the Statement read:

Wages are inadequate, housing conditions in many instances are unworthy of human beings, terms of employment are such that husbands are separated from their wives and families [...]. Such a state of affairs cries to heaven for vengeance and even in the natural order can only breed crime and chaos [...]. There must be made available to the majority, at the earliest possible opportunity, much greater facilities for land and home ownership. There can be no stability in society while the few possess much, and the majority have little or nothing.<sup>27</sup>

The Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in November 1965 by the Rhodesian government from the British Crown caused further anxiety to the Bishops. As way to curb any resistance to its unilateral action, the government had once again assumed emergency powers which further exacerbated the already volatile situation. In response, the Bishops issued another Pastoral Statement: *A Plea for Peace (1965)* wherein they deplored the divisions that had been produced by the declaration of independence and advocated the pursuit of unity.<sup>28</sup> The legislations that followed UDI: the *Republic Constitution of 1969* and the *Land Tenure Act* of the same year were more discriminatory, more unjust and more provocative to Christian principles. Citing the unfairness of the *Land Tenure Act*, Janice McLaughlin says:

The Act divided the country unequally on racial lines, giving 45 million acres of the best land to less than a quarter million whites, while five and

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<sup>27</sup> Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter , *Peace Through Justice* cited in Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 209.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 210.

a half million blacks were given an equal area of land in the least fertile regions with the lowest rainfall. It also restricted movement into areas reserved for one race by members of another race except by special permit.<sup>29</sup>

The Bishops were once again seen on the defense of human rights, condemning the principles of the Constitution as completely contrary to Christian teaching. Instead of falling by the new legislation, the Bishops rather took a lead in declaring the path to the Christian formation of a harmonious, multiracial society by introducing non-Whites into their hitherto exclusively White schools, hospitals and even the social Catholic Club in Salisbury despite rigorous opposition from some White members of the Church. Together with the heads of their Catholic schools and Institutions, they resolved to close all their schools and institutions once the government interfered with their right to deal with people of all races as members of one human family.<sup>30</sup> The government sensing the volatile situation never pressed beyond threat and intimidation.

Apart from condemning the *1969 Constitution* and the *Land Tenure Act*, the Bishops pounced heavily also on the amended *African Affairs Act of 1972* which was also a step towards greater discrimination and more inhibited movement between the different areas which had been set apart for racial occupation. In their address to the Catholic congregation the Bishops enumerated the inhibitions of the new legislation:

From now on, your priest and other pastoral workers if they are not of your racial group will have to obtain special permission / permit from the Government to give you their service and live among you. In other words, the law as it now stands presupposes that White pastors should live and work among Whites, and Black pastors among Blacks. Those who want to cross the barrier have to obtain a special permit from the public authorities.<sup>31</sup>

Just as they had ignored the *1969 Constitution* so too the Bishops ignored the amended *African Affairs Act*. They sternly refused to apply for any such permits and refused also to restrict or impede the freedom of the Church in the carrying out of its essential mission by the absence of any such permits. Realising that their legislation was being ignored the

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<sup>29</sup> McLaughlin, *On the Frontline*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 213.

<sup>31</sup> Catholic Bishops cited in Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 214.

government informed the Bishops that a 'blanket permit' had been granted to all Catholic missionary personnel to operate in the African areas of Rhodesia. Far from it impressing the Bishops to be quiet, they pressed positively still for an integrated harmonious Christian society. To remedy most of the areas they felt a dark cloud still hang over, they established the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in March 1972.<sup>32</sup> Of much concern to the Bishops in establishing this Commission was the need for the local Church to actively give witness to the concern for justice and peace, for the laity to see that the Church was working for justice and peace, to educate both the laity and the clergy on the responsibility of acting as Christians in a multi-racial society and to make positive suggestions for the enactment of just civil laws and their impartial administration.

The immoral and discriminatory legislation of the country they were working in was actually a continuous thorn in the flesh to the Bishops. In January 1974 they again sent out a message calling for reconciliation in the country:

We express our grave concern at the present unhappy state of the country [...]. In our opinion much of the blame rests with the present Rhodesian Administration and with those who support its racist policies [...]. If there is to be any hope of permanent peace, those policies must be radically changed [...] discrimination based on race must be eliminated; equality of opportunity must be guaranteed; there must be proper parliamentary representation; job reservation must go; land reform must be seriously tackled [...]. These are the demands of simple justice.<sup>33</sup>

Instead of the message from the Bishops being appreciated as a call to change of heart and of policy, it was rather viewed as a threat of yet more politics being preached from the pulpit by some conservative White Catholics. Not only did the message sound to them as politically naïve but was also perceived as socially dangerous. It was in such a scenario that some began to call for the Church leaders and ministers to concentrate exclusively on their religious responsibilities and leave political matters to the elected government. To such people again, the Bishops were not only dangerous but foreign to the interest of Rhodesia. It is thus easier to understand why the committee of the Chichester Club, a

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> Catholic Bishops cited in Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 215.

group of Catholic business and professional men in Salisbury, appealed in June 1974 to His Holiness Pope Paul VI to forthwith remove Bishop Lamont from Rhodesia and from Africa as a whole.<sup>34</sup> It had indeed become clear to almost everyone that any document bearing the signatures of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, especially if it included that of the Bishop of Umtali, was almost completely counter-productive as far as the majority of the Europeans were concerned.

Bishop Lamont had in the previous year 1973 succeeded Bishop Haene as the Chairperson of the Justice and Peace Commission. This was actually the time of the escalation of the guerrilla war along the borders of Rhodesia. In October 1976 Bishop Lamont was arrested and pleaded guilty of failing to report the presence of guerrillas around mission stations in his Diocese and having encouraged others to do the same. Slammed in the first place with a ten year sentence with hard labour, he was deported in March 1977.<sup>35</sup>

With the war now on its full scale, the remaining Bishops continued to condemn violence now on both sides of the warring parties. They persistently appealed for an end to the cause of the conflict through the realization of peace through justice. In 1975 the Justice and peace Commission had published a pamphlet: *The Man in the Middle*, a title suggesting the plight of the rural African family from both the guerrilla and the White militia. Key in this document was the statement that:

The Commission cannot remain silent about these injustices which not only expose the true extent of the hardship and suffering endured by these innocent and defenceless people, but also indicate the real nature of the armed struggle taking place [...]. The only workable remedy in human terms is reconciliation and dialogue between people who are free in mind and body and who acknowledge and guard those same freedoms for each other.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from informing the public on the immorality of racial discrimination and hostility through the Justice and Peace Commission, the Bishops made use of the press. While they would always find space in the national newspapers, they had their own publications: *The Shield* which

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 216.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 218.

<sup>36</sup> Justice and Peace Statement cited in Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 219.

circulated mainly among the White as well as the *Moto* which circulated predominantly among African readership. Once again some 'pious' White Catholics in Salisbury and having close ties with the government petitioned the Bishops to eliminate the 'political' and 'seditious' comments in *Moto Magazine* which they viewed as a great disservice to Catholicism. Bouncing back possibly as a great scandal to these 'pious' White Catholics was the Bishops Conference's refusal to conform to their wishes. It was not long, however, before the *Moto* was declared a prohibited publication by the Rhodesian government in 1974. A similar ban was extended to the *Mambo Magazine* and all the other publications which tried to cover political news.

Be that as it may, around 1979 one could notice some change in opinion among elements of the White community. What emerged was almost a 'change of heart' in their acceptance of African advancement and political rights. The Catholic Bishops surely deserve some credit for all this. While indeed some other Churches, for example, the Anglican, United Methodist and the Lutheran had each played a part in the struggle, Janice McLaughlin argues that none had spoken out so publicly nor so frequently as the Catholic Church. None also had suffered as many war casualties both at the hands of government security forces and guerrillas as the Catholic Church. Still on the sad note, she goes on to note that 18 Catholic missionaries and one bishop had been deported, 23 expatriate missionaries, a bishop and one local priest had been killed by the end of January 1979.<sup>37</sup> The killings did not necessarily mean that these victims were politically active; quite a number of the missionaries had chosen to remain politically neutral so as to serve all in need. Along dusty roads some missionaries braved the hazards of landmines to administer sacraments and sometimes some would be caught in the cross-fire as they did so. Thanks to the birth of independence on 18 April 1980, the missionaries were at least able to smile that their being the conscience of their various local congregations had at least borne some fruits.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. McLaughlin, *On the Frontline*, p. 4.

## ***The emergence of African Christian consciousness***

While in the foregoing discussion it may appear as if the Bishops were the only players in the mission field, the presence and role of the African laity should not in any way be underestimated. As the Bishops were more like cadres in the war-front, their African flocks were being soaked in a re-awakening kind of spirit which was sweeping across Africa. It was more of a fight for self identity and recognition as African Christians. Such a change within the African flock is what I characterise here as the emerging African Christian Consciousness. In discussing about African Christian Consciousness, there is perhaps need to view this phenomenon within the context of the whole movement of African self-assertion.

The movement of African self-assertion had its very origin in the disappointment of the African elite who had adopted the White man's God and his ways of living but were baffled by the rejection in the society of this White man. With the hope of being accommodated by the society of Paris, the Francophones<sup>38</sup> had gone to France only to find doors being slammed right before their faces. The same was true with the Anglophones; some had sought admission in British clubs such as the Chichester Club only to find sentries, who often were fellow Black Africans, turning them away following the orders of the White Chef. Quite disappointing also was that even with equal educational qualifications, the treatment was never to be the same; the Black man would always be taken as second class. Interpreting the events of his time, it was easy for the Black man to conclude that there was no future at all in trying to be 'a Black European'. As a result, to assert their own dignity

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<sup>38</sup> The adjective 'francophone' means French-speaking, typically as primary language whether referring to individuals, groups or places. More often the term is used as a noun to describe a natively French-speaking person. In a narrower sense, the term refers to people whose cultural background is primarily associated with the French language regardless of ethnic and geographical differences. The Francophone culture beyond Europe is the legacy of the French colonial empire and that of Belgium. A related term 'Anglophone' on the other hand, refers to belonging to an English-speaking population in a country where two or more languages are spoken. In its narrower sense, the term refers to people whose cultural background is primarily associated with English language regardless of the ethnic and geographical differences. The Anglophone culture is largely the legacy of British colonial empire. See *Francophone and Anglophone* in <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed 21/07/08).

the French-speaking intelligentsia discovered “la negritude” and the English-speaking came up with “African personality.”<sup>39</sup>

Generally, the whole movement of African self-assertion can be looked at under three facets: cultural, religious and political. In view of the Zimbabwean context, the political aspect has in a way been covered already in the previous discussion on missionaries as conscientious objectors. As alluded in the discussion, colonial administrators in Rhodesia had tried to suppress political parties but in the 1950s the movement of African nationalism was just impossible to resist. Repeated calls by the Catholic Bishops for the government to grant African aspirations for independence were falling on deaf ears of the State. When Ian Smith had assumed power as Prime Minister, he had declared, “Independence yes, but not in this century, surely not in my life-time”.<sup>40</sup> Since something already has been said on this political aspect there shall be no reason to cover the whole of it once again. Finer details of this war in Rhodesia can be obtained in publications such as: *On the Frontline: Catholic Missions in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War* (1996) by Janice McLaughlin; *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (1985) by Terrence Ranger; *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (1985) by David Lan and many others.

When it comes to the religious-ecclesial aspect, one finds that the movement of self-assertion chiefly fought with the lack of trust evident in the slow pace of promotion of the African clergy and the preferential treatment of White Church members. Abhorrent also to the movement was the wholesale rejection of African customs and any kind of missionary paternalism. A more pronounced form of this protest was the open secession of some Church members, leading thus to the formation of the earliest Independent Churches. The impact of this religious-ecclesial aspect of self-assertion was not so well pronounced in the Catholic Church. As early as the 1930s African candidates for the priesthood and sisterhood were sought and their training inaugurated. One can recall also that by at least 1973 Patrick Chakaipa had been consecrated as Auxiliary Bishop and installed as Archbishop in 1976 in succession to Archbishop Francis Markall. Fewer members also were lost to Independent Churches in comparison with other denominations. Shed-

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 425.

<sup>40</sup> Ian Smith cited in Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 427.

ding more light on this is a comparison which was made by M.L. Daneel (1971) between the attitudes and policies of the Roman Catholic Missions and the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in an effort to explain why the former lost fewer members to the Independents than the latter. Daneel came to conclude that the willingness of the Catholics to Christianise elements of Shona rituals and to be flexible on such matters as polygamy, bride wealth and veneration of ancestors was the most important reason for this discrepancy.<sup>41</sup>

Moving to the cultural aspect of African self-assertion, it has been highlighted already that Western missionaries presented the Christian message under the garb of Western culture thereby requiring African Christians to adhere to Western cultural norms. The prevailing conviction was that African culture had to be replaced by a European Christian civilisation. The call to go back to the Gospel as a meeting place with African culture had since been pronounced in the early 1870s but it had failed to draw the attention of this second wave of missionary activity. Making an analysis of the Catholic missionary approach at that time, John Baur says that Catholic dogmatism had a close set of truths in which the Bible served only as a book of reference and no room was left for an African cultural approach.<sup>42</sup> Nothing went beyond the use of African proverbs by the missionary to bring home a moral lesson.

It was, however, only a matter of time and opportunity to have the African's deepest longings realized. Since their reception of Christianity, Africans had always sought to live their faith within the context of their own cultures, condemnation of what they held as treasure to themselves was the only thing hampering them. By the 1950s this self-assertion was becoming too powerful to resist. Nicholas M. Creary captures well what was going on within the African camp in Zimbabwe by analogously relating it to James C. Scott's idea of a 'hidden transcript'. Creary notes that the expression of African Christian Consciousness in Zimbabwe from the late 1950s and through the anti-colonial war of liberation (1966-1979) involved making public what political scientist James C. Scott calls a "hidden transcript", a discourse that occurs "beyond di-

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. M.L. Daneel cited in R. Strayer, *Mission History in Africa: New Perspectives on an Encounter*, <http://www.jstor.org>. (accessed 07/05/08).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Baur, 2000 Years, p. 426.

rect observation by powerholders".<sup>43</sup> The late 1950s saw African Catholics in Zimbabwe beginning for the first time to express their views and aspirations to each other and to Whites in the public forum.

Looking back a bit into the period prior to the 1950s, one would realise that while the need to express their views and aspirations was indeed always felt by many among the African Catholics, it was often overshadowed by fear emanating from the subjugation following the suppression of the First Chimurenga Uprising (1896) as well as by a hidden desire to exploit what they had come to conceive as the benefits of encountering the White man. Generally, it can be noted that the presence of the White missionary at this period was considered as unwelcome. This is well reflected in the words of the editor to the *Zambezi Mission Record* (1910),

When he first settles among these natives, the missionary is regarded with suspicion and dislike. He has come-so they think-to rob them of their deeply-cherished customs; to upset their social economy; to turn the hearts of the children against their fathers, and of fathers against their children; and worst of all, to fetter them with the creed of the hated Whites.<sup>44</sup>

In a similar vein, Lawrence Vambe in his publication: *An Ill-Fated People* recalls a family crisis from his childhood in the 1920s. His aunt Josephine Mandinema had fallen pregnant prior to being married in Church. Being staunch Christians, Josephine's father and sisters had condemned her irresponsible disregard for the rules of Christian conduct which was also now putting the interest of the whole family at stake. The only person in the family who had stood by her was her mother called Mandizha. Instead of having been offended by what Josephine had done she had actually been delighted. Privately, Mandizha had made her view of the matter known to the family:

This matter was African [...] and strictly domestic [...]. (The couple) had done no wrong whatever (because) among our people the birth of a child was the only binding factor in a marriage, almost the only reason for getting married at all [...]. More than that, Mandizha regarded (the preg-

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Editor of the *Zambezi Mission Record* cited in C.J.M Zvobgo, *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe 1890-1939*, Gweru: 1996, p. 91.

nancy) as an act of defiance against the alien religious system that she detested and felt it her duty to denounce day by day.<sup>45</sup>

Though the family ultimately managed to keep the pregnancy secret and arrange a Church wedding at their earliest convenience, what it helps us show is that given a chance, some would have publicly challenged the White missionary's teachings. Mandizha's voice was not a lone voice but was actually one among many. It is unfortunate that the opposing voice of the Africans in many matters was often kept from the missionary. Cases of 'good boy' especially if one was working within the mission farm, are hard not to conceive of, such people would at times act as some form of insulin blocking the venom of fellow Africans from reaching the missionary. The quest for total conversion in some, however, made them regard any opposition to what the missionary would have said a taboo. In Josephine's case, her husband agreed to marry in Church out of his respect for his father-in-law's faith and out of love for Josephine but not necessarily out of concern for the Church's teaching.

Applying Scott's idea of the 'hidden transcript' one would find that while the public transcript reveals Josephine's husband asking the priest to announce the marriage banns and there afterwards he and Josephine having a 'White wedding', the hidden transcript shows that not only were these VaShona aware of Church marriage regulations and the penalties for violating them but were actually aware of the specific points of contention between their African and European understandings of marriage. The 'hidden transcript' in this case also brings to light the vigorous debate and considerable opposition to Church teachings which was going on but could not be publicly expressed at the mission.

Moving to the 1950s, a different scenario with regard to the ability of Africans to express themselves, as already been pointed out, had emerged. Those who had been fortunate enough to pass through the mission schools had managed to come together in 1934 and form an organisation which later came to be known as the Catholic African Association (CAA)<sup>46</sup> under the leadership of Ambrose Majongwe. The objec-

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<sup>45</sup> L. Vambe cited in Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> The initial idea of forming an association for the laity had actually been started by Fr Bernard Huss of Marianhill in Natal (1934). Later after its formation CAA was later changed to Catholic Association (CA) to express its non-racial character. In 1971 it was registered as a welfare organisation under the Welfare Organisation Act (1966). Despite its new non-racial face, a few of the Whites who had been registered with it soon

tive of this Black lay organisation was to mobilise African adults in self-help and self-improvement schemes that would produce 'better homes, better hearts and better harvests. Under the guidance of the then Fr Markall, later to be Archbishop, the Association had grown to be nationwide in 1955 and by 1961 it could boast of 5 000 paid-up members, a large membership than any African national organisation of the time.<sup>47</sup> It was actually in the annual general meetings of this organisation that different questions were raised and discussed at length. Thus indeed for the first time Black Catholics had found an opportunity to express their views and aspirations to each other and to the White hierarchy in the public forum.

Quite a number of reasons can be enumerated which acted as catalysts in the incorporation of the hidden transcript of African values and symbols. Inspiring CA in the first place was the greater cultural freedom that the Church allowed on the eve of Vatican II and the period after this Council. In 1958 Pope John XXIII had made an announcement on the need for reform in the Church. He also had gone on to announce the convening of the Second Vatican Council and called the Church in the whole world to prepare for it. When the Council finally took place from 1962-65, various resolutions were passed resulting in a new image of the Church. Among the laborious fruits of this Council was the *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* which addressed the relationship between the Gospel and local cultures, pleading for a multi-cultural and plural Church. Vatican II revived the 1659 Propaganda Fide directive, calling for the adaptation of the liturgy in missionary lands. Much of the work was left in the hands of the local Episcopal Conferences to carefully and prudently consider which elements from the traditions and cultures of individual peoples could appropriately be admitted into divine worship.<sup>48</sup>

What the CA did was simply to take advantage of the new winds of change which were blowing from Rome and they sought to find a

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left leaving it predominantly a Black association. The formation, however, of the Roman Catholic Council for the Laity in 1968 and the Diocesan Councils for the Laity in the early 70s saw CA being eventually superseded at national, diocesan and parish levels. Cf. P. Gundani, *Changing Patterns of Authority and Leadership: Developments in the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe after Vatican II (1965-1985)*, (2001).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 194.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Vatican II, 'Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, article 40', in W. Abbot (ed), *The Documents of Vatican II*, New Jersey: 1966, pp. 151-2.

spiritual home within the Church by incorporating their values and symbols to make it their own. Moreover, Pope Paul VI in a post-conciliar document: *Ecclesia Sanctae*, produced a year after Vatican II, had requested the Episcopal Conferences to set up study groups whose tasks were to examine the thought of the people on the universe, on man and his attitude to God and undertake theological reflection on what was good and true in their culture.<sup>49</sup> The CA saw their meetings as the appropriate forum to fulfil Pope Paul VI's recommendations.

Playing a pivotal role also was the growing African nationalist movement that culminated in Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. After the failure of the 1961 constitutional arrangements, some mission schools and Churches had been attacked and burnt in civil disorders. The blame for this civic disorder was laid on Archbishop Francis Markall who had called on Catholics to vote in the 1961 elections.<sup>50</sup> It was unfortunate that only a few people voted making thus no impact. Seeing no progress the people had turned against the Archbishop, interpreting his call to vote as a perpetuation of their past experience with the Church as being one with the colonial state and colonial structures. Disappointed, a few leaders of the Catholic Association, Ambrose Majongwe being among them, resigned and joined politics full-time.<sup>51</sup> The Catholic Association was not slow to take advantage of this political situation to drive home the need for reform in the Church.

Not least among the catalysing forces was the ordination of indigenous priests. By the late fifties and early sixties a few Black priests had been ordained and these were invited by the CA to say mass and give talks at the congresses and annual general meetings. Invited in particular were Frs. Joseph Kumbirai and Raymond Kapito. Unlike the missionary priests, the CA found the indigenous priests as more approachable and conversant with some of the cultural matters they were debating. Since some of these local priests were found indeed to have a keen interest in the culture of the Shona, the CA took advantage of that by approaching them as potential mediators with the Bishops. Though unfortunately many of the indigenous priests could not explain Shona

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Ecclesia Sanctae*, 6 Aug. 1966 cited in A. Flannery (ed), *Vatican II, 'The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New York: 1987, p. 857.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. P. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church and The Kurova Guva Ritual in Zimbabwe*, <http://archive.lib.msu.edu>, p.130 (accessed 07/04/08).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 130.

customs more intelligibly to the hierarchy, an opportunity for research had availed itself so as to advise the hierarchy on the aspects of the culture the Church could adopt.<sup>52</sup>

Enhancing also the CA to bring the hidden transcript into the public forum was the *Moto Magazine* which had been launched by Bishop Haene of Gweru in conjunction with members of this lay organisation in 1958.<sup>53</sup> Prior to its launch, it had always been a felt need among the CA members for a magazine or paper that would provide Catholics with a reliable source of information and, as noted by P. Gundani, such a need had arisen against the background of misinformation which was emanating from the government media.<sup>54</sup> While the monthly *Moto Magazine* had initially been dedicated to the coverage of CA congresses and the annual get-togethers, no later had it become one of the most outspoken voices of lay African perspective in Rhodesia, often providing also scathing criticism of the settler government and support for African nationalist parties. Apart from advocating African political rights, *Moto* covered also local Church-related events, keeping a close watch on the formation of African clergy and religious, paying particular attention to the elevation of Africans to the hierarchy and ranks of the Canonized. It also touched upon many facets of the inculturation of the Church in an African context, including liturgy and the promotion of African literature. Broadly viewed, one can say that *Moto* provides the window through which one can view the maturation of a distinctly Africanized Catholic Church in Zimbabwe.

Having attended school in the established mission schools many of the African Catholics were aware of the European cultural components of the Christian message hence they were very vocal in their desire to integrate their own religious symbols and practises into Christian liturgy. One contributor, for example, to the *Moto Magazine* argued that Christianity was not:

as real as African religion [...] (because it) still appears like an imported product. It has not paid enough attention to the African way of doing things- ways of asking for favours, of honouring or praising a hero, of behaving at a religious ceremony. For example, in the Latin rite of Catho-

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 131.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Gundani, *Changing Patterns of Authority*, p. 22.

lic Mass, the congregation stands during the Prayer of the Faithful, but VaShona custom is to sit when asking a favour.<sup>55</sup>

In a similar vein Adam Mkosana, contributing to the December issue of 1970 pointed out that if Christianity is not integrated to the culture of the people, people are bound to lead two lives: that demanded by the Church and that by reason of their belief and ideas developed and fostered through culture for centuries.<sup>56</sup>

### **Chitenderano chitsva (New Testament)**

An important step in the Africanization of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe was the publication of the New Testament in ChiShona in 1966. Compared with other denominations, one would realise that the Catholic Church took this step at a very much late time. Protestant Christians had since begun translating the Bible into ChiShona and SiNdebele as early as 1897.<sup>57</sup> What early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic missionaries had managed to do was the translation of Catechisms, Prayer books and Hymnals into African languages. Somehow a laxity to translate the Scriptures into Shona existed in the Church at the time emanating from the fear that the laity would misinterpret the Bible if the Scriptures were put at their disposal. As earlier cited from John Baur, Catholic dogmatism had a close set of truths in which the Bible served only as a book of reference.

Later when the tide began to change, Catholic-Shona speakers began to rely on the International Protestant Shona Bible. They would have loved to modify the language of this Protestant Shona Bible to suit Catholic expression had it not been that they were denied permission by the publishers of the Protestant Shona Bible. Seeing that the door had been slammed in their face, the Catholic Bishops appointed a five-member Committee in 1962 to undertake a translation that would be readily intelligible in any Shona dialect.<sup>58</sup> Contributions were sought from all Catholics across Shonaland and the project spanned something

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<sup>55</sup> O. Makoni, 'Is Christianity Still a Foreign Import', in *Moto*, August, 1966 cited in Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. A. Mkosana, 'Church must adapt good Customs', in *Moto*, Dec. 1970 cited in Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 8.

like four years to see its completion. With the publication of *Chitenderano Chitsva (NT)* the long wish of the Shona Catholics to have their own translation had been fulfilled. Writing to *Moto*, to express his joy at having a new Shona Bible, B.J. Moyo said that it is, “a great blessing for the majority of Christians who do not know enough English”.<sup>59</sup> Others described it as a clear and animated text, one that should have great influence.

## Music

Following the liberalisation of Vatican II as regards the use of vernacular in liturgy as a whole and in music in particular, the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe took no time to have the mass and other liturgies translated into ChiShona and SiNdebele. Music in particular, which forms an integral part of the liturgy, was made open to local variations. Prior to this development, the hymnody of the Roman Catholic Church was marked by different nationalities involved in the mission work using their German, English and French hymnals as source books. Most of these hymns were translated into Shona. The first Shona hymnal in the Zezuru dialect, as J. Lenherr points out, appeared in 1905 and it had been edited by Fr E. Biehler. Another hymnal *Munda we mweya* (field of the spirit) in the Manyika dialect was compiled by Fr F. Mayr and published in 1911. This was the only Catholic Shona hymn book to use sol-fa notation<sup>60</sup> The following second year, 1913, saw another publication by Fr Yaeckel and in 1918 yet another collection was edited by missionaries at

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<sup>59</sup> B.J. Moyo, ‘We are Proud to have a new Shona Bible’, in *Moto*, July, 1966 cited in Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Tonic sol-fa is a system of musical notation invented by John Curwen (1816-1880) on a basis of the principles of solmization (from names of the syllables sol and mi) and solfege (sol-fa) and once used by choral singers, for it simplifies the sight-reading of music. Tonic sol-fa is based on the old syllabic system of Do, Re, Mi and so on and takes the following form: d, r, m, f, s, l, t, the names of the notes being Doh, Ray, Me, Fa, Soh, Lah, Te. In English-speaking countries these seven syllables are normally pronounced: do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti. Traditionally, solfege is taught in a series of exercises of gradually increasing difficulty. Cf. *Tonic sol-fa in The Free Dictionary*, <http://encyclo-pedia.farlex.com> (accessed 21/07/08).

Triashill Station. Finally, the various hymnals were gradually worked into one called *Dzimbo Sande* (Holy Songs) during the 1930s.<sup>61</sup>

A certain discontent, however, with the *Dzimbo Sande* hymnody began to arise from around 1935. A proposal was made that “the hymns be revised with the assistance and guidance of Africans to suit the natural desires of the Bishops’ African flock”.<sup>62</sup> Around the 1940s Swiss missionaries gave a new impulse to this need and this saw some hymns being translated and some new ones being composed using a solo-chorus pattern which was derived from African musical form. The period up to the 1950s saw the growth of Shona hymnody in a number of different dialects, so was also the growth in the desire to find a style that was more natural to African congregations.

In the month of December 1964, two Shona-speaking Africans joined 26 delegates from ten other African nations to attend a training course for African Church music composers in Kitwe, Zambia.<sup>63</sup> During this composers’ training course, the participants were made to study music theory and history, methods of composition, music criticism, choral conducting and practical singing. As part of their initiative, the participants strongly recommended the use of drums in the liturgy and suggested that composers should work in rural areas so as to maintain a closer contact with the traditional African heritage unlike in the Western musically populated towns.

Following the success of the training course in Zambia, Abraham Maraire released a record of nine hymns in February 1965 which were in traditional African style wherein he fitted Christian texts to traditional Shona songs. In July of the same year, R.H. Paradza writing to *Moto*, noted that many teachers and catechists were now producing their own tunes to the Psalms in the Shona prayer book ‘*Mupiro Wedu*’.<sup>64</sup> What this simply indicates is that Africans were quite zealous in incorporating indigenous music into the liturgy. Many had come to realise that it is through music that they could participate more lively in the liturgy of the Church as laity and have an opportunity to exert some

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. J. Lenherr, ‘The Hymnody of the Mission Churches among the Shona and Ndebele’ in *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, edited by M.F.C. Bourdillon, Gweru: 1977, p.109.

<sup>62</sup> Lenherr, *The Hymnody of the Mission Churches*, p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. R.H. Paradza cited in Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 8.

influence over the shape of their lives in the Church. Following in the footsteps of Maraire was Stephen Ponde who composed 19 new hymns and were recorded in the January of 1966. Jeminos Masvingise, through *Moto*, took no time to praise Ponde's compositions and noted:

Ten of the nineteen hymns are accompanied by drums and *hosho* (rattle). All of those who want to introduce these instruments into their singing [...] would do well to listen carefully to the record to find out how the drumming should be done [...] Missa Shona 1 (collection title) can serve as evidence of the deep roots which Christian faith has taken in our people. It is at the same time a proof that Christianity is as African as it is European, or rather that it is 'all things to all men.'<sup>65</sup>

Since the door to new compositions had been made open, more and more people zealously undertook the new challenge and it was not long before Mambo records produced another landmark in Shona Church music with the release of five records by four different composers. Most of these hymns were composed from the new and official Shona translations of the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Creed*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* or simply the traditional elements of Catholic Mass. The main purpose behind the Mambo records having these compositions recorded was not just to have them stored on discs but rather that they could be more accessible to all, thus enlivening the liturgy of the congregations throughout the country. To ensure that the African liturgical music was well received and sung properly, various workshops were conducted between 1964 and 1970.<sup>66</sup> In such workshops people received training on how to introduce African music and instruments into Catholic liturgy. This development in music was surely a landmark in the Africanisation of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe.

## **Kurova guva**

The success in music was followed by the adoption of a Christianised rite of the Shona custom of *kurova guva* though after a long contentious debate. This debate stretching as far back as the 1950s had actually been ignited by the CA. In its congresses and annual general meetings a

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<sup>65</sup> J. Masvingise, 'Landmark in Church Music', in *Moto*, January, 1966 cited in Creary, *African Inculturation*, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Creary, *African Inculturation*, p.9.

dominant theme that had always featured from time to time was the issue of *kurova guva*. Now having found the opportunity to bring the 'hidden transcript' to the public forum, members of the CA had persistently expressed their discontent at the Church's stance against the African ways of honouring their deceased parents and relatives. What they wanted was the Church to lift the ban on *kurova guva* and that they be provided the guidance on how to practice the ritual in a Christian way. The concerns of CA in these early days were also shared by some White missionaries who felt also that there was need to recognise some values of the Black man's religion. Writing back as early as 1954 R. Federer, a Bethlehem missionary as well as a gifted philosopher and linguist said,

It would be an ill people that did not remember its dead. And it would be foolish of us if, because the Chikaranga custom of *kugadzira* involves some elements contrary to the faith as for instance, ancestor worship, we should try to eliminate it root and all. It is very doubtful whether we would succeed, and if we did we might have done more harm than good.<sup>67</sup>

During the recess of the Second Vatican Council in 1963, the Rhodesian Catholic Bishops agreed to delegate the Inter-diocesan Liturgical Commission to investigate the degree to which African customs which had a religious nature could possibly be incorporated in Catholic worship. In no time, some local priests from Salisbury and Gwelo dioceses were seen embarking on field research and discussions on the *kurova guva* practice. From their research findings most began to advocate that the practise be Christianised. Courageous advocates of adaptation of the traditional rite at this time were Fr C. Dober and Rev Joseph Kumbirai who advised the Bishops that the whole liturgy needed a total overhaul so that African worshippers could feel at home with the manner in which it was celebrated.<sup>68</sup>

The years between 1965-1968 were full of 'uncontrollable experimentation' in regard to Shona customs led by African priests and some of the laity. The Chilimanzi Deanery in the diocese of Gwelo actually came up with its own form of a Christianised *kurova guva* which they called *Musande* (saint). In order to shroud the whole ceremony, they would talk of *Kuita Musande* (to include someone in the communion of

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<sup>67</sup> R. Federer cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 132.

saints).<sup>69</sup> Though the ceremony looked quite a step ahead since it had adapted most of the elements from the traditional *kurova guva* ritual, a number of priests felt that it did not express enough some fundamental Christian truths, for example, the redemption through Christ, the cleansing and atonement of purgatory and the function of Holy Mass. In the Archdiocese of Salisbury, Fr Mavhudzi drew up also an alternative rite of *kurova guva*. The rite of Fr Mavhudzi was focused more on substituting rather than adapting the traditional rite. In a paper which Fr Mavhudzi presented at a meeting of African priests on 16 April 1968, he argued that what was offered at the *kurova guva* ceremony were sacrifices to the spirits and were therefore against the first commandment. This claim led him to conclude that *kurova guva* could therefore not be adapted by the Church hence a substitute would be the only way forward.<sup>70</sup>

In as much as other dioceses were engaged in the debate, Umtali diocese was no exception. Bishop Lamont set up a commission to investigate whether or not *kurova guva* was to be Christianised. The general conclusion was that great caution had to be made in adapting *kurova guva* and that certain elements were totally unacceptable in Christian faith. The commission was quick to point out the consultation of a *n'anga* (traditional healer), the motive of fear which inspired the rite, belief in the *vadzimu* (ancestors) to wreak vengeance, the libation of beer on the grave, the mixing of blood and the *nhaka* (inheritance) ceremony as those elements which were completely unacceptable. What the commission, however, could not condone was the Church's explicit condemnation of *kurova guva*. It instead recommended that: 1) the whole tradition of Shona culture needs to be studied and consultation with the *vakuru* (elders) and with other Churches should be undertaken; 2) *kurova guva* is only one aspect of a much larger problem which faces our people; 3) the desire to Christianise *kurova guva* appears to come from the Bishops and priests; 4) this interest in traditional beliefs has been awakened by the politicians for their own purposes.<sup>71</sup>

Meeting on 9 July 1968, the Bishops' Conference found the recommendations made by the Umtali Diocesan Commission worth adopt-

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 16.

ing.<sup>72</sup> As a result, the Bishops decided to set up an Inter-Diocesan Commission to investigate the matter in all its aspects. To ensure a fruitful investigation, the Commission was to enlist the help of professional anthropologists, other Churches and priests engaged in pastoral work. Among the crucial issues that were to be tackled by the Commission were:

[...] whether the honour paid to the *midzimu* (i.e. ancestors) and the manner of expressing it by offering *rapoko* (millet) was a sacrifice in the strict sense, and whether the power attributed to the *midzimu* derogates the power of the Almighty.<sup>73</sup>

Through the course of 1969 the Inter-Diocesan Commission was engaged in consultation and it was not after long that a minority report was presented to the Bishops' Conference by Fr Mavhudzi perpetuating his earlier view that the offerings made at *kurova guva* were of a sacrificial nature, thus an offence against the first commandment of worship of God alone. The report called upon Church members and their relatives to engage in a simple ceremony of *Nyaradzo* (comforting the bereaved). The report of the majority which was submitted a bit later, however, argued that *kurova guva* and similar ancestral rites were to be understood in the context of the fourth commandment: 'Honour thy father and mother' rather than in the context of first commandment. Finding nothing idolatrous or against faith with the ceremony, this majority report recommended that:

[...] the ban on *kurova guva* should be lifted at once. The people are everywhere continuing to participate in the ceremony and are in bad faith because the Church has forbidden it as gravely sinful. Their bad faith must be removed since there is no adequate theological reason for proscribing the ceremony. We suggest that the people be told that [...] we can permit it with a clear conscience [...]. The Church has never forbidden acts of supplication made by individuals to departed Christians.<sup>74</sup>

The stance of the majority report was also built upon pastoral developments which had occurred within the Universal Church at that time. Contributors to the majority report had noted that cremation, a practice

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 134.

<sup>73</sup> RCBC Minutes, 2BB (1968) cited in Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 134.

<sup>74</sup> Dachs and Rea, *Catholic Church and Zimbabwe*, p. 226.

formerly condemned by the Church for doctrinal reasons, had now been allowed. They had also taken into consideration the acceptance by Rome of the second mortuary ceremony of 'washing the grave' in Chinese rites<sup>75</sup> as a classic case of inculturation worth emulating. Of worth to note also in the majority report was the argument it presented that it was "an accepted missiological principle that Christianity must become a leaven in society and be present in all the important events and happenings in the way of life of the people".<sup>76</sup> Basing on this principle the report noted that it was imperative to produce an adult Catechism that would form the basis of an inculturated liturgy on *kurova guva*. It also stressed the principle that Christianity should preserve what was good and purge erroneous elements of the traditional culture. Note was taken also that the veneration of Saints in Europe had evolved in such a similar way hence the same was to be expected in the case of *kurova guva*.

Faced with the conflicting claims and recommendations from the two reports which had been presented, the Bishops' Conference decided that there was need for more intimate knowledge of local attitudes and practices of the ceremony before any move could be taken. The Conference noted also that ethnic differences among the Shona was something which could not just be swept under carpet. As a way forward, the Bishops placed the matter into the hands of Black indigenous clergy who first had to be organised into a national association in pursuit of the Vatican II spirit of trying to foster unity of mind and action among the clergy themselves and their hierarchy.

The National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC) was founded in January 1973 and at their meeting in December of the same year, the indigenous diocesan clergy supported the recommendations of

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<sup>75</sup> Around the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century there developed a sharp argument among Roman Catholic missionaries working in China as to whether the ceremonies honouring Confucius and family ancestors were so tainted with superstition as to be incompatible with Christian belief. The Jesuits believed that they probably were not and so argued that they could be tolerated within certain limits. The Dominicans and Franciscans, however, took the opposite view and carried the issue to Rome. In 1645 the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith acting on the basis of the argument presented by the Dominicans, condemned the rites. After, however, considering the arguments of the Jesuits, the same congregation lifted the ban in 1656. See *Chinese Rites Controversy: Roman Catholicism*, [www.Britannica.com](http://www.Britannica.com) (accessed on 17/07/08).

<sup>76</sup> RCBC, Minutes of the Pastoral Committee 18 July 1973 cited in Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 135.

the majority report to have the ban lifted on *kurova guva*.<sup>77</sup> Subsequently the Bishops during their meeting in June 1974 accepted the recommendations by both the Inter-Diocesan Commission and the NADC to have the ban on *kurova guva* lifted. The Bishops went on to task the Pastoral Centre to work in collaboration with African priests in the production of a pastoral guide that would preserve and stress all cultural values that were clearly not against faith in order that they too could be accepted in the Church. The Inter-Diocesan Commission was dissolved paving way for the creation of a Theological Commission whose mandate was to make a theological argument and not to examine evidence nor to pass judgement on the work produced by the former commission. It was tasked also to look into the minority report of Fr Mavhudzi.<sup>78</sup>

The Theological Commission's progress was for a while halted by Fr Bernard Ndhlovu who was arguing that the time was not yet ripe for a final decision. Thinking along the same line with Fr Mavhudzi, Fr Bernard had come to conclude that the whole ceremony was in violation of the first commandment for the sacrifice in *kurova guva* was directed to the spirit of the deceased and not to God. For him also, reinstating the spirit of the deceased into the family was against the Church's teaching regarding the disembodied spirit after death.<sup>79</sup> The majority in the Commission, however, dismissed Fr Ndhlovu's understanding of sacrifice, arguing that the beast (*n'ombe yenhevedzo*) and the goat (*mbudzi yeshungu*) offered during the ceremony should not be viewed as sacrifice in the theological sense but as food for the invited guests and all participants and that they symbolized the honour and respect paid to the deceased. The Commission went on to endorse also the defunct Inter-Diocesan Commission's position that *kurova guva* and the overall Shona belief in communing with and depending on ancestors provided fertile soil for the Church's teaching and belief in the Communion of Saints. As regards Fr Ndhlovu's reservations on the fate of the dead, the Commission adopted a position based on the Catholic doctrine of purgatory,<sup>80</sup> arguing that purification (*kuchenura*) was necessary because death

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 136.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 137.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 137.

<sup>80</sup> Though now a debatable doctrine, it has been a long teaching of the Church that those in a state of grace, but still retaining after-effects of repented sins as well as those retaining unrepented venial sins, need to undergo purification before they can receive

was believed among the Shona to inflict a 'black spell' on the spirit of the deceased. The likelihood of both the Christianised and traditional rites existing side by side for quite some time was quite apparent in the eyes of the Commission members but they envisaged that the erroneous elements would eventually fade out while the Christian rite would prevail.

Having completed its work, the Commission reported its findings to the Bishops' Conference which in turn handed over the responsibility of consulting Black clergy to Bishop Chakaipa who also in turn requested the National Association of Diocesan Clergy to present their recommendations.<sup>81</sup> It was not until 1977 that NADC set up diocese-based commissions whose task was to make an assessment of each of the stages of *kurova guva* rite and work out a tentative rite of *kurova guva* that reflected the Christian spirit. During a workshop which was held at Driefontein Mission from 14-16 December 1977 representatives from Salisbury, Gwelo and Umtali adopted a well researched and comprehensive guideline from Gwelo diocese with few amendments.<sup>82</sup> While much disagreement surfaced during the workshop as to whether the diviner had to be totally excluded or not, the final resolve among the members was that the diviner's role was unacceptable at any stage of the *kurova guva* ritual.

After the NADC executive meeting held on 6 March 1978 in Gwelo, the finalised text of the rite was presented to the Bishops' Conference with a request for its approval *ad experimentum* for three years.<sup>83</sup> After a careful examination by the two African Bishops, Chiginya and Chakaipa, it was recommended that the Commission for Christian Formation and Workshop redraft the proposed rite for liturgical purposes and a memorandum was sent to the NADC that there be a Catechism on the new rite of *kurova guva*. The Bishops proposed also that this new rite

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beatific vision. To speed up the state of purification they need the prayers and especially the Masses of the faithful living members. The Church formulated this doctrine of faith on purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence (AD 1431-1445) and Trent (AD 1545-1563).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. NADC/B15, Letter to Fr Makusha, Chairman of NADC, from RCBC Secretary, August, 1974 cited in Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 139.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. NADC, Dec, 1977 cited in Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 139.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 140.

be termed *Kuchenura Munhu* (cleansing of a person), a term which corresponds with the purification which purgatory is believed to effect.

After the initial failure by Fr R.J. Kapito and others to work out the desired Catechesis due to lack of time, Fr R. Zinkann with a group of deacons and catechists produced such a Catechesis in Shona.<sup>84</sup> The Catechesis presented *kuchenura munhu* as the pivot of ancestor veneration in Shona life and it concentrated on the lasting values which should be retained in a changing society. After criticism and revision by the Commission for Christian Formation and Workshop, the draft was finally sent to the Bishops' Conference for adoption. The Bishops' Conference in turn sent it to Rome for approval. Having received Rome's approval, the Christianised *Kuchenura Munhu Rite* was finally published in October 1982 for use by all members of the Church as official liturgy.

### ***The Christianised Kuchenura Munhu rite***

The published Christianised text '*Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* (1982) consists of three main sections: 1. A Catechesis; 2. A Description of the Rites; 3. The Ritual with the Prayers. Following are a few excerpts of the original Shona version which was translated literally by Karl Hermann.<sup>85</sup>

#### **Catechesis**

Before we begin with the purpose (of this book) we want to explain first a bit about the subject of the midzimu. The elders say, "There is a great mudzimu who is called God (Mwari), or the owner of the heavens (Nyadenga), or Creator of peoples (Musikavanhu)." This mudzimu, God, they say, was not like a human being; he has no race (tribe, clan); he has no father, he has no mother. To say how he has come about, no one knows. He is Mutangakugara (The first to be around), Muwanikwa (Original inhabitant), Chidzivachepo (Original Pool).

But when we usually say midzimu, it means those people who have died, who once lived on this earth, who used to walk on earth as we are doing

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. J. Elsener and F. Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 33.

<sup>85</sup> K. Hermann, 'Appendix' in *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu. An Encounter between Shona religion and Christian Faith*, Mbare: 1997. (Some adjustments to this Appendix are mine to make it at least reader friendly).

too, eating, being happy, procreating children, just as we do nowadays. Therefore, when a human being dies, his body is buried, but there remains something which is not buried, that is what we call mudzimu, some people call it spirit. The mudzimu cannot be seen with the eyes, but it is there, as is God too, whom we cannot see with the eyes.

**To offer to the vadzimu: What do the Shona mean when they say 'offer'?**

1. The word 'to offer' is used in different situations, e.g. if a message from a district is given to the chief, the sabhuku (village-head) says, "Sir, I have come to inform you that in our district you have been attacked, people have killed each other a lot." This is to offer a message to the chief.

2. To offer beer to an elder who has arrived at a village, the father or grandfather. When the grandfather is being given the pot of beer, he who gives this beer tells the young one near him to say, "This beer we gave to grandfather, that he finishes his thirst. Tell your elder brother, he then tells his elder brother, his elder brother then brings to the grandfather to say what has been said, "We said, this beer, to sprinkle the throat with (because) you are thirsty, you came out of the sun". Now all the people clap hands, if women are present they ululate. He who was given says, "I thank you, receive (my) words, carry on like that". We say this beer has been given (offered) to the living grandfather.

3. To offer (sacrifice) to the vadzimu, we mean the same said in (2), only that this person is no longer alive. Therefore concerning the grandfather whom we spoke of in (2), this is the very great difference that this one is alive, the other is dead. It is offered like this: See! You (1<sup>st</sup> name), our younger father. Tell also (2<sup>nd</sup> name), your elder, he too (2<sup>nd</sup> name) then tells to grandfather (3<sup>rd</sup> name) that this has been said by your grandchildren, "There was a long time before we gave you a little pot for sprinkling the throat. Therefore, we have said, see for yourself this little pot'.

People now clap hands, the women ululate. Now they themselves drink this beer in place of the deceased. Some pour a small amount of beer on the earth with a ladle not as a real offering (not as a real thing) but just an imitation which means, "This beer has been given to a human being who is in the grave (literal: earth)". This is purely symbolic gesture without sacrificial connotations in the theological sense.

You have seen that the offering which was done in (2) is the same as that done in (3), there is no difference. In (2) there is no worship of the grandfather, he has not been made God or equal to him. The grandfather is only honoured and respected by his grandchildren who have given him a pot of beer. In (3) it is the same. (We are happy and grateful for all who

buried the deceased). In Shona custom, to sacrifice to the vadzimu is to serve them, in the same way as we serve the living on this earth.

### **The thinking of Christians concerning the dead**

St Paul says, “But we would not have you ignorant brethren concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1Thes.4:13). All Christians believe that the soul of a human being can never perish (Chishawasha Katekismo Q.5). We Christians believe again that if a human being dies his soul can go to heaven, to purgatory or to hell. The human being is judged by God at his death therefore it is God who judges him, so that he goes to heaven or goes to purgatory and then to heaven or he is lost in hell. A human being who died, if he was united with God, is also united with Christ together with all the saints who are in heaven. He who goes to purgatory is the believer, who dies still having sins, therefore his soul fails to arrive at God. While it is waiting, it is cleansed in purgatory; it needs help so that it arrives in the courtyard of the saints. The souls who are in purgatory want the help of our prayers, the living so that God forgives them and that they hurry to enter in the courtyard of heaven. It is a holy thought of love to pray for the dead (2Macc 12:44f).

All who died, that is to say, all vadzimu who used to live in accordance with the laws of God or with the laws of past times are with God (Nyadenga) where they are happy together with all Christians who have been keeping the laws of God. Therefore we say all our ancestors and all others who have been keeping a way of life not opposed to what is wanted by God (Nyadenga), are in his courtyard, where we hope we will arrive too, if we do too what agrees with what is wanted by the Creator.

### **Inheritance**

As Christians, the distribution of the property of the dead should be done in love and understanding. In every family, husband and wife help each other in making a livelihood together and in gathering their wealth. Therefore whenever one of them dies this consideration should be understood first by those who distribute the things of the dead. Let us say, maybe it is the man who has died, the property should be distributed. They begin by observing the distribution of the property that was left and arranged by the dead if they see that it exists and that the wife has her right in this wealth too. It is the same if it was the wife who died, her relatives together with the relatives of the husband should see that the wealth is not just put on one side. This means that whenever one dis-

tributes the things of a dead person, the whole family on the side of the husband together with that on the side of the wife should see that all things are done in love without leaving the husband or wife frustrated with two sufferings, which are, to be bereaved by one's next of kin and have one's wealth taken away.

### **Goat of anger and provision**

In some districts, some kill the goat of anger only but somewhere else they kill a second one- the one of provision. The goat of anger is killed to reconcile the living and the dead. The Shona, doing this, want that if there was something which caused division between the living and the dead person it be ended, that they forgive each other. The goat of anger belongs to everyone of the lineage of the dead person, but it is not sacred, it has been eaten by strangers. In other districts again, the goat of provision is given to the strangers and it is said like this, 'It should not at all eaten by anyone of the tribe of the dead person or anyone who is a relative of the dead person. This goat should not be killed near the village therefore those who are given it (strangers) go with it far away from the village, on arriving there they kill it and they eat it without salt. What is left should be burned in fire there, its bones, hide and everything.

In other districts again, the custom of the Shona, who are in districts in which both goats are killed, the goat of anger and of provision, compels us to compare it with what Israel did on great days, e.g. at the day of reconciliation (Day of Atonement), there they killed four animals: two goats, a ram and a bull (Lev.16:5-11, 21, 26-28). The first goat was the one of reconciliation of the people (offering of expiation), the second was called Azezeri, it was taken and dedicated and all the sins of the people were put on its head. This goat was given to a man who went with it in the veldt far away, where no people are living and he drove it there (the release of the scapegoat). This is repeated again where the Black people do it if they drive out (cast out) ngozi when they take a goat or chicken which is released.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Appendix A.

## ***Reception of the rite and subsequent discussions leading to a stalemate***

While the Bishops thought that they had reached a great milestone in the Africanization of the local Church in Zimbabwe with the publication of the rite, it is unfortunate that the rite did not receive much publicity among the faithful. Its publicity tended to depend more on the role of the parish priest and informed Catechists and this of course varied also from diocese to diocese. One of the reasons for its lack of publicity among the faithful, as P. Gundani sees it, lies in the fact that it was not included in the hymn book *Munamato* which, since 1967, has become the handbook on faith for the ordinary Catholic.<sup>87</sup> While also the discussion had initially been ignited by a lay organisation, as the debate had rolled on it had sort of been hijacked and it remained largely confined to the clergy. As a result, most of the laity had been left in the dark as regards the development of the debate. Just as with other reforms, in liturgy especially, which were being introduced into the local Church without adequate consultation having been made with the faithful, the laity felt that they had been sidelined in the *kurova guva* discussions. Highlighting the push factor for the strong dissatisfaction on the part of the laity, Gundani avers,

The change which the Second Vatican Council, and subsequently the Rhodesian hierarchy wanted to see, however positive it may have been, was not readily embraced by its would-be beneficiaries because it came from the top. It was not based on thorough education and consultation of the laity. Without this it was inevitable that such change would be met with resistance. Clearly, the Roman Catholic Church in Rhodesia of the sixties and seventies was still far from being people-based and participatory in approach.<sup>88</sup>

Giving weight to the observation by Gundani is the concrete reality that after the publication of the Christianized *Kuchenura Munhu* rite, no special programmes were put in place to train Catechists and community leaders in the use of it. As regards its lack of popularity among the clergy, Fr F Chiromba mentions that the Christianised rite demands too

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 144.

<sup>88</sup> Gundani, *Changing Patterns of Authority and Leadership*, p. 25.

much time from the priest hence most priests were content with just the celebration of the Mass. He actually criticises the way the rite tries to make the priest present from the beginning right to the end. He questions why the Church would want to be involved in all the traditional aspects which is not demanded of other rituals?<sup>89</sup>

Given this poor reception, surely it was not after long that those voices of rejection began to murmur more loudly. Leading the rumblings of discontent was once again the same minority group which had once expressed theological and pastoral reservations in the 70s. Some of the key arguments offered by this minority group in their critique to the rite as well as their rejection of the traditional practice are reflected in the following selected quotations:

. It can be shown that the so-called *vadzimu* venerated by our people in their customs of *kurova guva* and *kuchenura*, in *mabira* and *madiro*, are not really dead people, but are in fact 'evil spirits' who hide behind the identity and names and characteristics of their dead kin. Thus people are deceived and are made to deal with evil spirits (1 Cor 10:14-22).<sup>90</sup>

. Here is confirmed the superstition of the Shona people, that the dead person's spirit hovers over the grave and wonders about in desolate places, awaiting ritual cleansing, induction into the spirit world and reinstating into the home. All these beliefs are superstitious [...] There is absolutely no possibility for the spirit to hover over the grave or wander about in desolate places or to return to earth as *ngozi* (avenging spirit) to molest people or to demand beer or meat or clothes.<sup>91</sup>

. The custom of *kurova guva*, being a parody of Christ by Satan, cannot be adapted to Christian use.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Fr F. Chiomba, 'The Why and How of Kurova Guva' for WCC *Eighth Assembly Padare*, 3-14 Dec, Harare, 1998, pp. 3-4.

<sup>90</sup> E. Mavhudzi, 'The Sacred Meal of the Proto-Ancestor Christ' in *Crossroads*, No.162, Aug, 1998 cited in J. Elsner, *Kuchenura Munhu: The Continuing Discussion around an Example of Inculturation*, 1999, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Mavhudzi, 'Shona Ritual of Kuchenura Munhu needs to be looked at again' in *Crossroads*, No. 146, Apr/May 1995 cited in Elsner and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 44.

<sup>92</sup> Mavhudzi, 'Kurova Guva, Kugadzira, Kuchenura Munhu: A Second Look at the Rites' in *Crossroads*, No. 164, Christmas, 1998 cited in Elsner, *Kuchenura Munhu*, p. 5.

. It (*Magadziro*) is only a waste of time because it contains no salvation at all. It only serves to cryptically hamper spiritual progress of those not conversant with the studies of comparative religion.<sup>93</sup>

. Shona religion aims at saving the soul of the person especially at *Magadziro* ceremony but this now is fulfilled by Christ' Holy Sacrifice, the Mass.<sup>94</sup>

. If there is anything which destroys Christianity it is *kurova guva*. It destroys Christianity fundamentally.<sup>95</sup>

To support its arguments this minority group often makes recourse to the Scriptures. To bolster his view that no soul either good or bad is ever permitted by God to return to earth to speak to the living and less still, to roam about here on earth, hovering over grave yards or in the forests as is believed by most people, Fr Mavhudzi cites the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). Among the Old Testament passages favoured by this group we find:

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|---------------|--|
| 1. Ex 20: 1-2 | “I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no gods except me.”  |
| 2. Dt 18: 10  | “There must never be anyone among you who practices divination, who is a soothsayer, augur or sorcerer, who uses charms, consults ghosts or spirits or calls up the dead. For the man who does these things is detestable to Yahweh your God.” |
| 3. Lev 19: 31 | “Do not have recourse to the spirits of the dead or to magicians; they will defy you. I am Yahweh your God.”   |
| 4. Lev 20: 6  | “If a man has recourse to the spirits of the dead or to magicians, to prostitute himself by following them, I shall set my face against that man and outlaw him from his people.”  |

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<sup>93</sup> C. Matibini, 'An Issue for us! Response II' in *Pakati Pedu*, Vol.29, No.4, July/Aug 1997 cited in Elsner, *Kuchenura Munhu*, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Matibini, An Issue for us, cited in Elsner, *Kuchenura Munhu*, p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Bishop A.C. Muchabaiwa cited in 'Cultural practice destroys Christianity: Bishop' in *The Herald Online* [www.herald.co.zw/index.php?id=31499&update=2004-05-03](http://www.herald.co.zw/index.php?id=31499&update=2004-05-03) (accessed 27/08/07).

5. Is 8: 19-21                    “Should men say to you, ‘Consult ghosts and wizards that whisper and mutter’ –by all means a people must consult its gods and on behalf of the living, consult the dead to obtain a revelation and testimony, without doubt this is how they will talk, since there is no dawn for them.”
6. 1Chron 10: 13                “Saul died because he had shown himself unfaithful to Yahweh; he had not kept the word of Yahweh; he had even questioned and consulted a necromancer. He had not consulted Yahweh” (1Sam. 28: 7-20).
7. Heb 10: 4                      “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

On the other hand, the voice of the majority opinion which had once prevailed continued to be heard also. That voice, personified in people like Fr T.C. Mashonganyika and others continued to defend the Christianised rite as well as the whole of African Traditional Religion. Just to have a look also at a few selected quotations which bring to light the trend of opinion within this second group:

. The problem of having to accommodate a cult of the dead in the Christian faith is by no means a new one. The Church Fathers (Ambrose, Augustine) tell us about Christians celebrating banquets with and for the dead on the graves. Eventually an elaborate system of commemorating the dead through funeral and anniversary masses developed [...]. Jesuit missionaries in China in the 17th and 18th Century had to deal with ancestor cults.<sup>96</sup>

. Traditional religion is not a creation of the Devil but it was a means through which the Shona people could relate to God before the coming of Christ [...]. Traditional religion was God’s design for the salvation of the Shona people before the new dispensation. It is the duty of the Church to lead people into this new dispensation by showing the differences between the old and the new.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> T.C. Mashonganyika, ‘An Issue for us. Response to July/August Issue 1997’ in *Pakati Pedu*, Vol.29, No.5 Sep/Oct. 1997 cited in Elsner, *Kuchenura Munhu*, p. 5.

<sup>97</sup> Mashonganyika, Response, cited in Elsner, *Kuchenura Munhu*, p. 5.

To authenticate their argument some would quote the words of the late Pope John Paul II which he said in his homily at the opening Liturgy of the African Synod in 1994,

. The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love of life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the communion of Saints?<sup>98</sup>

To boost their defence also of the Christianised rite, some saw wisdom in the proposition made by the Bishops at the end of the African Synod,

. In many African communities, the ancestors occupy a place of honour. They are part of the community together with the living. In many cultures, there are clear ideas of who merits to be called an ancestor. Were many of these not seeking God with a sincere heart? The ancestors are venerated, a practice which in no way implies worshipping them. We therefore recommend that ancestor veneration, taking due precaution not to diminish true worship of God or play down the role of the saints should be permitted with ceremonies devised, authorised and proposed by competent authority in the Church.<sup>99</sup>

The pressure which resulted from this criss-cross of divergent opinions among the contributors to *Crossroads* and *Catholic Church News* -two publications of the Bishops' Conference, other diocesan publications as well as questions which were being constantly raised at diocesan congresses, deanery meetings and meetings of the diocesan clergy, forced the Bishops to lift the lid to what they once had considered a closed issue. At its meeting on 2-3 December 1997 the Bishops' Conference was forced to admit that 'much confusion existed among clergy and faithful' about the rites drawn by the Conference in respect of the dead.<sup>100</sup> The source of the confusion was attributed to the role of the *n'anga* (diviner).

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<sup>98</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, No. 43 cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 47.

<sup>99</sup> Africa Synod Bishops cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 47.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. ZCBC *Administrative Meeting*, 2/3 Dec 1997, No.126/97 cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 49.

The published rite had been silent on the issue yet many felt that it was a role central to the whole issue. The majority of laity as well as some Shona priests were arguing that consulting a diviner was quite key in order for him/her to shed light on the deceased's desires as well as clarifying some areas of concern or ambiguity about what to do hence there was no need to ban it.<sup>101</sup> The Bishops thus saw it proper for each diocese to arrange discussions of this issue once again and invite lay people to have an active role in the discussions. They also instructed the reorganised Theological Commission to revisit the *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* and identify areas that needed clarification.

On the forefront in trying to carry out the resolution by the Bishops to engage the faithful in the discussions was the diocese of Mutare. Consultations with the laity in almost all the missions in this diocese were done but how neutral those discussions were is something that is open to questioning given the fact that they were co-ordinated by Fr Mavhudzi and Bishop A.C. Muchabaiwa both of whom had already some misgivings towards traditional religion. Recalling myself attending some of these discussions, I feel that they were conducted in such a way that the co-ordinators would want almost everyone to go by their preconceived idea that Shona traditional customs were just but the work of the devil.

During the course of 1999-2000, the Theological Commission did a limited inquiry on the current practice of *Kuchenura Munhu*, concentrating its research on a few central aspects such as the sacrificial character of *Kuchenura Munhu* and the role of the *n'anga* (diviner). In a report given by Bishop Robert Ndhlovu in August 2000, it was made clear that members of the Commission were strongly entrenched in opposing views, making it thus impossible to give a unanimous or majority agreement.<sup>102</sup> What this stalemate simply reflected, in other words, was that the whole debate had returned to where it had stagnated some years back.

In its report dated 14 March 2007 to *The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, the Commission admitted its slow progress since no information on the matter was coming from the dioceses.

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. P.Gundani, *The Roman Catholic Church*, p. 145.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. ZCBC *Administrative Meeting*, 1/2 August 2000, Minutes, No. 74/2000 cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 50.

In this report the Commission says that at the last meeting of its sub-committee held on 26 June 2003 and constituted of two elderly priests: Fr Mavhudzi and Fr Chiromba (Secretary) and four other junior priests: Fr Mkandla, Fr Chaputsira, Fr Mukosera and Fr Mushawasha, it was noted that a substantial number of Catholics were moving towards the emerging rituals of Tombstone Unveiling and *Nyaradzo* (Memorial Service) as substitute to the practice of *kurova guva*. In the light of this new development, the sub-committee thus came up with these recommendations:

1. That the practice of *kurova guva* be allowed to die a natural but gently speeded death.
2. That in the process of laying it to rest we exercise charity and use language that encourages and builds up and not appear condemnatory to avoid polarisation.
3. That the present *Kuchenura Munhu Rite* be ignored and left to die together with the practice of *kurova guva*.
4. And most importantly that we, as Church leaders, recognise and be sensitive to the people's situation in which they find themselves needing to pray for the expiation of the souls of their dead relatives in purgatory. This is something they need today. This expiatory ritual covers three stages: a) the Funeral Rite, b) the Memorial Rite or *Nyaradzo*, c) the Tombstone Unveiling Rite.<sup>103</sup>

When one takes a closer look at this report, the temptation to question its capacity as a representative of the majority opinion becomes too hard to resist. The report reflects more the prevailing opinion of Fr Mavhudzi who was not only a long time contributor to this debate but also the most senior within a group of young priests not yet well seasoned in the debate. Had all the members of the Commission been in attendance maybe it could have been a different report all together. Moreover, it looks an overestimation to think that since a substantial number of Catholics is abandoning the traditional practice of *kurova guva* therefore it will die a natural but speeded death. While indeed some have moved away from the practice or behave as if *kurova guva* is still banned, some

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. ZCBC Secretariat, Brief Summary of the Activities of the ZCBC Theology and Canon Law Commission since 2000, 14 March 2007.

try to follow the letter and spirit of the *Shona ritual: Kuchenura Munhu*. To be found also among the laity are some who still stick to the *Kuita Musande ritual*. Quite a number also still continue to consult diviners.

## **Conclusion**

Faced with the above scenario, an inevitable question that comes to mind is *Quo Vadis* the local Church in Zimbabwe? Following the observation of the African Synod also, it is actually a dream indeed to think that African Traditional Religion is a dying phenomenon. There is every amount of evidence that the traditional African world-views still hold sway and this applies also so well to the traditional practice of *kurova guva* among the Shona. While there is need to commend the work and zeal which has been done and shown in coming up with a Christianised rite of *Kuchenura Munhu*, there are some issues that need to be looked at more deeply once again if we are to register a breakthrough to this stalemate and some new ones to be addressed also. To be reviewed, for example, is the role of the *n'anga*, an issue which had sort of been shoved aside in the debate leading to the 1982 publication of the *Kuchenura Munhu rite*.

Some bit novel matters to be brought to the discussing table are a probe into the providential values in the funeral rites of the Shona and how other funerary rites of the Shona have a play in trying to come up with authentic inculturation of Shona funerary customs. It is my conviction that addressing *kurova guva* only and neglecting other rites relating to death among the Shona would be quite a serious blunder that would still leave Christians living in two parallel lines that hold them divided between their loyalty to Christ and their ancestral customs yet we expect them to reach a point whereby they are satisfied that their own world and philosophy essentially participate in the Sacramentality of the Church and the Church also 'feeling at home' among the Shona. Of much concern also to this thesis is how the Biblical texts have often been quoted and interpreted to dismiss Shona practices. It is somehow questionable whether the oft cited passages of Scripture are actually applicable to Shona practices.

As a way forward, I shall begin by a review of the missionary approach to the Scriptures in their encounter with non-Christian religions and see if there is any relation between that approach and the cur-

rent approach of those who continue to dismiss Shona traditional customs. I will then move into an exegetical analysis of some of those texts which are regarded as explicit testimonies of Yahweh's abhorrence with traditional practices.

## Chapter Three

# A Critical analysis of the Scriptural texts used in the dismissal of non-Christian religions

### *Introduction*

The encounter of the Christian faith with cultures in the non-European world, as hinted in chapter one, has not always been an easy and peaceful one. The great challenge, as was envisaged and which attracted dedicated personalities ready for action and suffering even to the point of death, was to bring the 'true' faith to the 'pagans' so as to 'save souls' that were understood to be living in total darkness.<sup>1</sup> Assessing the zeal and determination with which the missionary enterprise was carried out, it is possible to liken it to a military expedition. Like any military expedition whose enemy is known and must be destroyed at all costs, Satan was the target of this great missionary enterprise. The guiding presumption was that Satan was disguised and active through his network of 'false religions' and so, "He and his associates had to be encountered, unmasked in their perfidy and then engaged in mortal battle."<sup>2</sup> Compromise at this period was a word never to be found in the missionary's vocabulary.

To validate and seek guidance in their actions, missionaries turned to the Scriptures and naturally passages that struck them most were those which had overtones of opposition against gentiles as enemies of God's Chosen People, as practitioners of idolatry and various other prohibited abominations. Having fished out such passages it was easy for the missionaries to conclude that the Christian Church as the New People of God had the right to stamp out anything which was against Yahweh and his plan of salvation and that openly meant the non-Christian religious systems. In view of such a conclusion and course of action taken by the missionaries, the interest of this chapter lies therefore in assessing whether all relevant elements of evidence available in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> P. Kalilombe, 'The Salvific Value of African Religions' in T. Okure (ed.) *32 Articles Evaluating Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, Eldoret: 1990, p. 133.

the Scriptures were carefully taken into account. Assessment would also be made on whether there was no tendency of just highlighting only certain trends of thought appearing in the Scriptures and then shoving into the background other important trends which might have modified the nature of the investigation. How the missionary approach impacted on the 'Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought'<sup>3</sup> shall also be discussed followed by a closer analysis of some of the arguments raised by this school.

### ***Savoury Texts to Missionaries***

Passages selling as hot cakes for the missionaries as reflected above in the introduction were those which have expressions of hostility towards the gentiles. Texts in ridicule-style, as noted by P. Kalilombe, in which Deutero-Isaiah excels, for example, Is. 44:9-20; 46:1-7 and those parts of the Old Testament which are tributary to this literary form, for example, Psalm 115; Baruch 6; and Daniel 4, were among those highly appealing to the missionaries.<sup>4</sup> In Isaiah 44: 9-20, the ridicule of other gods in favour of Yahweh comes out quite clearly,

All who make idols are nothing [...]. The ironsmith fashions it and works it over the coals; he shapes it with hammers and forges it with his strong arm [...]. The carpenter stretches a line, he marks it out with a pencil [...]. Half of it he burns in the fire; over the half he eats flesh [...]. And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol; and falls down to it and worships it [...] No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire, I also baked bread on its coals [...] shall I fall down before a block of wood [...].

A look at Isaiah 46: 1-7 further furnishes one with the unrelenting tone of ridicule,

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<sup>3</sup> The Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought is a term I am coining in this thesis to refer to that trend of thought in the *kurova guva* debate which tries to argue on the basis of Scripture especially that the Shona custom of *kurova guva* is a parody of Christ by Satan. Fr Emmanuel Mavhudzi and Bishop Alexio Churu Muchabaiwa are the 'gurus' of this school for they are on the forefront in initiating and defending this line of thinking. Other members belonging to the same school are: Fr C. Matibini, Fr I. Chidavaenzi, Br Mandaza, Fr Bernard Ndhlovu and others.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 133.

[...] To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike? Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith and he makes into a god; then they fall down and worship! [...] it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.

As with the Zimbabwean leg of the missionary enterprise, Deuteronomy 5: 6-7, "I am the Lord your God, [...]. You shall have no other gods before me," was used to effect a ban on *kurova guva*.

A closer look at this missionary approach to the Scriptures allows one to draw some parallels with the manner in which the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought approaches the Scriptures also. As we saw in the previous Chapter, the school cites such passages like, Ex. 20:1-2; Dt. 18:10f; Lev. 19:31; 1 Sam. 28:7-20 and others as providing a strong basis that Yahweh is the only one to be worshipped and that He detests any foreign practices that may threaten the honour due to Him. Both sides, as can be seen, tend to give preference to those texts which have overtones of opposition against 'pagan' practices while extolling Yahwistic monolatry in absolute terms. The rhetorical style manifest in these texts was a way of trying to reinforce strict monotheism so characteristic of exilic and post-exilic Judaism.

Being almost the first products of a missionary catechesis which taught African converts to hold ATR in disdain and its adherents in great contempt, one may appreciate why the school might as well have adopted the missionary approach to the Scriptures. Both Fr E. Mavhudzi and Bishop A. Muchabaiwa also underwent Seminary training at Chishawasha, Harare, when the teaching panel of that institution at that time was still the prerogative of missionaries. Since its inception around the 1930s to early 70s Jesuit missionaries were largely the sole administrators and lecturers to the aspiring young men that were enrolled at this institution. One could not therefore dream of disciplines such as ATR being taught at the institution at that time. If any references to it were made, they likely carried negative overtones given the spirit of the time.

Questions which remain, however, are whether both the missionaries and the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school ever took into consideration all the relevant elements of evidence available in the Scriptures themselves to sustain their arguments? Are the foreign practices prohibited under the banner of monotheism of the exact nature with what is

found in non-Christian religious systems and in particular, in Shona traditional religion? Is the worship of other deities implied in the monotheistic passages found also in the Shona religious system? To address some of these concerns, a revisit to the social and historical context within which monotheistic rhetoric emerged would be necessary for it would help throw more light on the matter under discussion.

### ***The Social and Historical Context of Monotheism***

Etymologically the term ‘monotheism’ is a derivation from two Greek terms *MONOS* (single) and *ΘΕΟΣ* (God) hence, its literal meaning is the belief/doctrine in the existence of one God. More technically, monotheism is the exclusion of other gods or a denial of their existence. As a doctrine, it thus differs from those views which accept a plurality of divine beings like henotheism and monolatry.<sup>5</sup> A descriptive definition of monotheism employed in this thesis is that of Mark S. Smith who defined monotheism as,

[...] a kind of inner community discourse establishing a distance from outsiders; it uses the language of Yahweh’s exceptional divine status beyond and in all reality (“there are no other deities but the Lord”) to absolutize Yahweh’s claim on Israel and to express Israel’s ultimate fidelity to Yahweh.<sup>6</sup>

Tracing, however, the causes for such a discourse, proves a surmountable task given the dauntingly scanty evidence of both ancient and post-exilic history of Israelite religion. While the books of Ezra-Nehemiah should have been the best sources for a post-exilic history, scholars approach these texts with caution because there are no authentic references attested in these texts. There seems in these texts to be less interest in the chronology of events but rather the narration of specific times. No details also are given about the author and the date of writing. Some actually would like to argue that it was a single author who chose to deal with Ezra first because he felt that Ezra, a scribe and priest, should take

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<sup>5</sup> Henotheism is the belief in many gods alongside the belief in one god who presides over those gods whilst monolatry is the insistence on the worship of one supreme god among other gods.

<sup>6</sup> M. S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, New York: 2001, p. 154.

precedence over Nehemiah, a simple lay man.<sup>7</sup> What Ezra and Nehemiah portray is just a tip of an iceberg as regards the distinction between the canonical collection of Scripture and what actually happened in ancient Israelite history and life. Due to the propagandist nature of much of the Old Testament, many ancient Israelite beliefs and customs were obscured.

Dating references to monotheism seems also a difficult task but on the whole, the period spanning the late monarchy, exile and post-exilic appears to represent the general framework when much of the monotheistic rhetoric emerged. Historical developments surrounding this period as well as some aspects of Judah's social structure have often provided scholars with avenues to intelligibly craft working hypotheses to account for the emergence of the discourse.

One hypothesis proposed by M.S. Smith involves an aspect of changing social dynamics in the late monarchic to exilic period. The idea of a single deity, so he suggests, correlates well with the perspective of Judean social structure at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and afterwards. Contrasting the post-exilic set up with the Ugarit and early Israelite polytheism whose conceptual religious unity was expressed in terms of a divine council or a single family of deities connected by familial relations, Smith notes that the root metaphor of the divine family had been eclipsed in biblical texts after the exile. This eclipse of the divine family metaphor resulted also in the erosion of the lineage system of the family.<sup>8</sup> For him the erosion of the lineage system or the traditional family structure was manifest in texts dating roughly the same period like Ezekiel 14:12-23 which proclaims that the righteousness of parents cannot save their children. Other texts carrying a similar tone but with a different emphasis are: Jer.31:29-30; Ez.18, 33:12-20; and Dt.24:16, these texts bring out the idea that children would no longer be punished for the sins of their fathers. Such evidence led Smith to conclude,

A culture with diminished lineage system, one less embedded in traditional family patrimonies due to societal changes in the eighth through the sixth centuries, might be more predisposed both to hold

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. N. Weanzana, 'Ezra-Nehemiah' in *Africa Bible Commentary*, T. Adeyemo (ed.et al), Nairobi: 2006, pp. 531, 543.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, p. 164.

individual human accountability for behaviour and to see an individual deity accountable for the cosmos.<sup>9</sup>

Another working hypothesis commanding respect involves Judah's situation which it had come to face for the first time during the period under discussion. Standing behind this corollary J.H. Tigay says,

The need to emphasize the monotheistic idea in this period was probably due to the increased exposure of Israel to the triumphant Assyrian and Babylonian empires, which attributed their victories, including victories over Israel, to their gods.<sup>10</sup>

The rise of these great empires in the eighth and seventh centuries, resulting in the defeat and eventual taking away of Israel into captivity, in other words, had altered both Israel's political status and social structure in such a serious manner which impacted on its traditional theology. It made Israel exalt its deity inversely as a ruler of the whole universe, eclipsing thus the older deities known from the pre-exilic period. M.S. Smith nicely wraps up this development when he says, "As Judah's situation on the mundane level deteriorated in history, the cosmic status of its deity soared in its literature."<sup>11</sup>

Be that as it may, some scholars in the likes of T.L. Thompson, P.R. Davies, G. Ahn and others propose the Persian period as the time-frame within which this shift to monotheism was made. Such a time-frame appears more plausible when one brings into focus the book of Deutero-Isaiah where an unnamed author speaking in the prophet's voice around the end of the Judean exile in Babylon ridicules other gods as 'nothings' or 'dead' and extols Yahweh as the only God. It is not only Deutero-Isaiah but most of the other biblical texts with a monotheistic flavour have also been dated to this Persian period by the holders of this theory. To have a better grasp of this theory I shall dwell more on Philip R. Davies' views.

P. Davies begins by drawing our attention to the contested claim of the name 'Israel'. Different groups, so it appears, continued to use the name Israel after the exile. Firstly, there were the literal remnant of historical Israel, that is, those who had remained in Samaria and its sur-

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<sup>9</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, p. 164.

<sup>10</sup> J.H. Tigay cited in Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, p. 165.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, p. 165.

rounding territories since the deportation had not affected everyone. Secondly, there were those who had been forcibly immigrated into the territory of erstwhile Israel and possibly could indeed have adopted the name Israel. These immigrants as normally expected would have brought their own religions with them and in the manner of ANE people, would possibly have added the local deity with his consort to their pantheon or simply have regarded him as the supreme local deity or the 'god of Israel'. Thirdly, there was a population which had remained in Judah too after the deportation. Fourthly, there were those who could have been imported into Judah by either the Assyrians or the Babylonians. Then lastly, there were the Israelite and Judean deportees and refugees in Assyria, Syria, Babylonia, and Egypt who also could have had an interest in the name Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Focusing on the immigrants in Judah, given its centrality in Biblical literature, Davies, while acknowledging the Persian imperial policy of repatriation of previously deported groups declared in the 'Cyrus Cylinder'<sup>13</sup>, was quick to point out that Judeans are not on the list of those mentioned in this inscription. To account therefore for the origins of the immigrants, Davies suggests that they were subjects of transportation within the empire and not necessarily Judean exiles coming home. The system of transporting populations to under-developed or sensitive regions within the Empire for economic and political purposes had actually started with the Babylonians and the Persians simply adopted it.<sup>14</sup> The possibility of the ancestors of some of these immigrants coming from Judea while not to be ruled out completely, remains

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. P.R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*, Sheffield: 1998, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> Cyrus Cylinder, discovered in 1879, is among the most famous Cuneiform texts. Much interest in this text stemmed from the now refuted position that it confirmed what the Bible says (Is.44:23-45; Ezra 1:1-6, 6:1-5; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23) that in 539 BC, the Persian Conqueror Cyrus the Great had allowed the Jews to return from their Babylonian Exile. Even though there is no allusion to this information in this text save that of countries east of the Tigris, the Cyrus Cylinder remains an interesting document in that it shows that the common elements of Babylonian royal propaganda were also used by the Persian conqueror, for example, the restoration of temples, foundation of new settlements, establishment of law codes, a lengthy titulary good care for the gods and others. The document is interesting also because it confirms that after the capture of Babylon, it was peaceful. Cf., Cyrus Cylinder, [http://www.livius.org/ct-cz/cyrus\\_cylinder.html](http://www.livius.org/ct-cz/cyrus_cylinder.html) (accessed 08/07/09).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Davies, *In Search of*, p. 80.

only a probability to be accepted with some caution given the already reflected unresolved issues with the literary history of Ezra-Nehemiah.

On their part, as Davies goes on to intelligibly theorise, these immigrants whether they were originally from Judah or not, were likely to have claimed that they were indigenous. The Persians too, in order to facilitate compliance with the process, may have told these transportees that they were descended from Judean deportees and now being resettled in their own 'homeland'.<sup>15</sup> According to the hypothesis, the combined effect of the initiatives chartered by the Persian policy like, for example, the establishment of law codes, restoration of temples, foundation of new resettlements and others as reflected in the Cyrus Cylinder, could have helped create in Judah a society, the core of whose had been brought into the land from outside, which organized itself on what it saw as a traditional cult around a temple and which constituted itself as a new ethnic entity. While the Biblical account differs from the non-biblical data in its insistence that the reconstruction of Judah was a Judean initiative, there seems, however, to be a general agreement on the creation of a Biblical 'Israel'. Shedding more light on this, Davies says,

The circumstances which both the non-biblical evidence and the biblical account of Nehemiah and Ezra confirms, provide the earliest plausible context for the creation of the biblical 'Israel': 'ethnic collectives, the exclusive 'exile'-society, and the provision of a central sanctuary and a law.'<sup>16</sup>

Though a more detailed study of this new 'Israelite' society formed in Judah which was carried out by J. Weinberg, Morton Smith, J. Blenkinsopp and others using the evidence from other contemporary societies resulted in various models being put forward, it reflects a more unanimous confirmation that the immigrants formed a temple and Jerusalem centered exclusive cultic society. This cultic society was bent not only on the practice of a high god cult but also on the control of the economic and political life of the province in the name of its law since the temple was capable of functioning also as a political and economic tool.<sup>17</sup> As a

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Davies, *In Search of*, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Davies, *In Search of*, p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Davies, *In Search of*, pp. 116-117.

further pointer to what may be the true origins of monotheism, this study by Weinberg and others brings to light that,

The deity worshipped by this society is in character a High God, though he is given the name and some of the titles and peripheral characteristics of a traditional local deity, Yahweh, still widely worshipped in Palestine (and also Transjordan and Syria). But the cult of this god is not the Yahweh cult of Iron Age Palestine: this deity is a single male god, creator of all the earth and all nations, one who would be recognized elsewhere in the satrapy of Beyond the River as Marduk or Sin. The Persian monarchs would certainly have no difficulty in recognizing this deity as their Lord Ahura Mazda.<sup>18</sup>

Sharing the same view that there was a formation of an exclusive cultic society around Jerusalem and whose deity was a single male god, is Othmar Keel who writes:

A religious community that separates itself vigorously from “foreign” religions and cultic practices now rallies around the newly reconstructed temple that had been built using resources of the diaspora community. [...] the foreign cult is personified by a woman and is dispatched to Babylon, the motherland of idol worship (Zech.5:5-11). From now on, there would be no room in Judah for a goddess alongside Yahweh.<sup>19</sup>

An interesting question that arises at this point is, why was the Israelite political-religious leadership so keen about establishing clear lines of demarcation with ‘foreign’ religions and especially the practice of a centralized high god cult given that it was practically identical to the traditional local deity, Yahweh, who was still widely worshipped in Palestine? Dharendra Nath Shastri sees the cause of all this as emanating from the Levite conspiracy. Basing on Numbers 18: 21-26 which brings to light that the Levite priests had no share of the land but rather had to live off the religious tax (“tithes”) payable to them by the Jewish people in return for their religious services, Shastri suggests that Levite ringleaders who acted as priests in the new Israelite cult were concerned more about their material welfare. Had the Jewish people embraced the religion of Canaan what it would have meant was the loss of livelihood to the Le-

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<sup>18</sup> Davies, *In Search of*, p. 116.

<sup>19</sup> O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, Minneapolis: 1998, pp. 404-405.

vites unless they themselves were prepared to become Canaanite priests.<sup>20</sup>

Their interests, as Shastri further suggests, extended even far beyond earning a living as they aimed also at a political take-over of the whole of Canaan. Thus for him, Monotheism was not the only defining feature of Levitic Judaism, the political take-over of the whole land of Canaan was equally its essential ingredient. In practice then, what Monotheism meant was:

[...] instead of many Gods, worshipped by many groups of believers, in many temples controlled by so many spiritual authorities, there was to be one God, worshipped by the entire population in one Temple only, controlled exclusively by one spiritual authority (the Levites).<sup>21</sup>

While that was just a spiritual veneer, Monotheism in reality meant more income and power for the Levites who controlled the one and only Temple and the enormous revenue it generated. In the same way, the envisioned political take-over meant additional territory and a larger population paying more taxes to the Levites. Had Monotheism been imposed for purely religious reasons, the worship of Yahweh would have been allowed in a multitude of local temples since it would not have mattered much really where Jews worshipped their God so long as they all worshipped the same one God. What can be concluded from this, as pointed out by Shastri, is that the exclusive centralisation of worship at the Jerusalem Temple was motivated not by religious, but by political and economic reasons.<sup>22</sup> Aware that neither the Canaanites nor some of their fellow Jews were prepared to embrace the new development of the centralization of worship, “the Levites and their militia resorted to imposing their replacement cult by means of an aggressive campaign of propaganda, intimidation, coercion and elimination.”<sup>23</sup> Such an observation made by Shastri as regards the religious and political maneuver taken by the religious leadership in Judah, finds echo in the words of Othmar Keel who says:

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<sup>20</sup> D.N. Shastri, *Monotheism and Western Pathology: Causes, Development and Impact of the Western Drive for World Domination from the 1<sup>st</sup> BCE Millennium to the Present*, <http://www.hindurevolution.org/01/monotheismju07.htm> (accessed 10/06/10).

<sup>21</sup> Shastri, *Monotheism and Western Pathology*.

<sup>22</sup> Shastri, *Monotheism and Western Pathology*.

<sup>23</sup> Shastri, *Monotheism and Western Pathology*.

They [the religious establishment] made Israel inwardly independent from all despots, but at the same time attributed to the God of Israel the characteristics of a despot of the worst kind.<sup>24</sup>

Added to the massive measures of self-definition by this new society was the creation of Biblical literature. Its literate class, so suggests Davies, created an idealized identity and heritage for itself in Palestine, an identity which was continuous with the kingdoms that had previously been the occupants of that area, of whom some concrete memory as well as some archival material still lingered in that area.<sup>25</sup> Thus, through the aspect of continuity, the scribes were able to bind the Biblical history together. The picture they managed to create, according to the theory, is that this 'true Israel' has been in Canaan for quite a long period of time, with the Temple in its old place for centuries and that the kings of Judah were actually the predecessors of the then current high priests. The ideological triumph of the Biblical literature that they produced, so argues Davies, was "to convince that what is new is actually old".<sup>26</sup> Historically speaking, however, the society which this literature describes is in no sense an Israel but rather a territory by the name Yehud/Judah in the Persian Province.

Touching on the main ingredients which go to constitute this 'true Israel', namely: exile, relationship between Samaria and Judah and the Covenant, Davies advances a suggestion that the 'exile' is "if not a myth in the sense of an event that did not occur, then at least an interpretation of a transportation out of and later a transportation into Judah, which turned historical discontinuity into continuity".<sup>27</sup> Linked with the past, Davies finds the exile story written in such a way that the minority experience of the immigrants, more like that of their pilgrim fathers, determines the majority whose real history was quite different. To maintain a link with the past also, the true Israel is identified as having been brought into the 'promised land' from outside and so has to distinguish itself radically and polemically from the indigenous population. Ezra and Nehemiah generally refer to this indigenous population as 'people of the land' whose identity is viewed as of alien stock and impure, people with

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<sup>24</sup> Keel cited in Shastri, *Monotheism and Western Pathology*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Davies, *In Search of*, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> Davies, *In Search of*, p. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, *In Search of*, p. 87.

whom the true 'Israel' is not to mingle its 'holy seed' (Cf. Neh.13:23-27). Though this population has a *prima facie* right to the land, it is denied that right unless the people conform to the cultic and ethnic definition of the new society.

On the issue of relationships between Samaria and Judah, Davies suggests that the awareness that the inhabitants of Samaria also worshipped Yahweh should have forced the scribes to explain this fact and act upon it. While the Samaritans are incorporated into this history, they also had to be ejected from it because, being part of the Northern kingdom; they seceded from Judah and abandoned the worship of Yahweh at his sanctuary in Jerusalem. As with the Transjordanian territories and Edom where a number of Yahweh worshippers seem to have been found also, they are depicted as rejected family members until the Hasmonians reverse the policy by making them Judeans.<sup>28</sup>

Addressing the issue of the covenant which lies at the heart of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative, Davies points that such a religious ritual may actually have had its origin at this time in a community constitution linking a society, God and a sanctuary. Bolstering his view is the observation he makes that,

[...] the social situation which Deuteronomy envisages is more consistent with the post-monarchic situation, with justice administered *de jure* and not *de facto* by elders, a virtually absent monarch and a society governed by a lawcode.<sup>29</sup>

Added to these conditions which make a post-exilic dating for Deuteronomy more plausible is the paraenetic character of Deuteronomy which has its reflection in Nehemiah 8:7-8, of the law being read and described by the Levites. Further giving credence to such a possibility is the Deuteronomic ideology which exhibits Canaanites and their practices as impure and of an alien stock.

Davies concludes his theory by underscoring the fact that this process of constructing a history of the new 'Israelite' society through literature did not occur suddenly nor was it ever entirely coherently accomplished. While the scribes could have produced this literature out of self interest or sheer creative enjoyment, it cannot be ruled out also that the ruling elite could have authorized or commissioned scribes serving

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Davies, *In Search of*, p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> Davies, *In Search of*, p. 89.

them to produce what forms the major part of what we know today as Biblical literature.<sup>30</sup>

Recalling what Davies said on the composition of the new Israelite identity that what had remained in Palestine in the form of concrete memory as well as some archival material were harnessed, it is thus interesting to see such information tallying in a way with what is generally observed by textual critics that the books of Genesis to Kings appear to be products of a good deal of re-writing, amending and patching together. While the theory by P.R. Davies and others seems to account better for the emergence of most of the monotheistic rhetoric, I think it should not be taken in isolation from the other cited theories whose observations are equally valid. It sounds more plausible, in other words, to see them as complimenting each other in filling the historical gap left void by the Biblical accounts.

### ***Critique on the Missionary Approach***

Now with plausible social and historical data surrounding the emergence of the rhetoric under discussion at hand, it sounds ripe to revisit the missionary approach to biblical texts. In selecting only those passages which have an affirmation of strict monotheism, which is also what the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought are doing; missionaries missed it out because they, in the first place, failed to read behind those texts and see that they are a rhetoric generated by a certain group of people trying to situate themselves and having an enthusiasm for a high god cult in a single sanctuary and a corresponding rejection of other cults. Monotheism, as we saw, is basically a kind of inner community discourse establishing distance from those who are considered outsiders using the language of Yahweh's exceptional divine status. Putting words into the mouth of Yahweh is a common ploy employed by many Biblical authors just as some people try to do it even to this day. Such a method is often exploited by the elite to silence people from questioning since Yahweh is posited as the source of that authoritative word. More concretely, such a ploy was exposed by O. Keel, who, tracing the developments in Israel towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE, attests:

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Davies, *In Search of*, p. 87.

At the end of the 7th century BCE the Assyrian Empire [which controlled Canaan or Ancient Israel] collapsed. A power vacuum emerged. Judaic theologians had the original idea, of filling out the vacuum, by making the demands of the Assyrian great king to come from Yahweh, the God of Israel.<sup>31</sup>

While there is need to admit surely that reading the Bible is never a totally neutral exercise in that the reader who takes it up comes with all sorts of conditionings<sup>32</sup> and limitations, certain approaches, however, appear totally out of the way and so cannot remain unchallenged especially if their effects are detrimental for the cause of the common good. Such is the case with the missionaries' approach and that of their counterparts in the above mentioned school. Their heavy-handed parochial approach eluded them from seeing the all-embracing nature of the Scriptures. While the monotheistic rhetoric they opted for had in fact helped develop the theme of the Holy People of God separated from all that was considered as impure and profane, they failed to see that such an apologetic style had a dark side to it. Making reference to this blind spot, P. Kalilombe says,

From the notion of Holy People, and the preoccupation to express this holiness and protect it, a tendency developed towards an exclusivist ghetto-mentality. The Law ran the danger of legalism and intransigence, as is witnessed by Ezra's fierce treatment of "mixed marriages" (Ezra 9-10).<sup>33</sup>

Later developments within the history of Israel, for example, the persecutions under the Seleucids and the Romans,<sup>34</sup> further worsened the exclusivist ghetto-mentality hardening thus Jewish attitude towards the Gentiles. Little or no sympathy at all was shown towards anything which lay outside the framework of God's Chosen People. The Apocalyptic literature arising around this time of persecutions, for example, the book of Revelations, demonstrates the antagonism between the Jews and Gentiles with the latter being worse hated. Though one may sympathize with the need to defend themselves in that hostile environment, such a defense at times was left to blow out of proportion.

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<sup>31</sup> Keel cited in Shastri, *Monotheism and the Western Pathology*.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 131.

<sup>33</sup> Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 134.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 134.

Be that as it may, a certain current opposed to this exclusivist Jewish mentality and its negative attitude towards Gentiles developed alongside the more intransigent one.<sup>35</sup> The book of Ruth, for example, generally believed to be a post-exilic composition, in presenting God as blessing a foreign woman and enabling her to conceive a child who became the grandfather of David, the king of Israel, implicitly criticizes the then current purist ideas reflected in Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 13:23-27 where God is presented as opposed to Hebrew men marrying foreign women. The same was with the book of Jonah, it castigates Jewish exclusive claim to God's favour (Jonah 3:1-3).

When we move to the New Testament times we find the voice against this parochial mentality of the Jews becoming even louder. In Matthew 3:7-10, for example, we find John the Baptist shaking the Jews from their false comfort zones, warning them of impending disaster unless they repented. Though indeed they were children of Abraham, so John tells them, they were not supposed to take this for granted, hiding under the spiritual covering that membership of the elect nation was assumed to provide. Jesus too on more than one occasion, went out of his way to stigmatize the misplaced confidence in mere belonging to an ethnic group and its rules (Cf. Jn.8:37-41; Mt.23:1f; Mk.7:6-13). He attacked the official Judaism of his day because it had literally turned out to be more than a legalistic system that, in spite of its rigour, could not lead anyone to a saving relationship with God. It had become, in other words, spiritually devoid of any credibility.

With the Early Christian Community, one finds that while it was conscious of its commission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus up to the ends of the earth (Mt.28:19-20) and convinced that only through faith in Jesus could the world be saved (Acts 4:12), the Jewish section in that community still had difficulties in ridding itself of the ghetto-mentality. The question which appears to have bothered them most was where the Jewish Chosen People now stood before their God in the new set up whereby God's election was now determined through faith in Christ? Were the Jews at any real advantage over non-Jews? Their interpretation of it was that they were, as this is reflected in the controversy about requirements for the conversion of non-Jews (Acts 15). There was an erroneous confusion of Christianity with their own ethnic conven-

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 134.

tions and cultural practices which they adamantly wanted to see being imposed upon all non-Jewish converts to Christianity. Earlier in the book of Acts, we find that even for Peter, at first it was hard for him to widen his vision on this conversion of the non-Jewish (Acts 10).

Working on the assumption that something like a Council of Jerusalem<sup>36</sup> took place, it is evident to note that a great step was taken within the Early Church. Though the guidelines that the Council sent to Gentile believers listed what was more Jewish cultural prohibitions namely: to abstain from food polluted by idols; abstain from sexual immorality: abstain from the meat of strangled animals and abstain from blood (Acts 15:20), they did not require the Gentiles to adhere to those specific aspects of Jewish law like circumcision, the Sabbath observance and the dietary laws as was demanded by the pro-legalistic Jewish believ-

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<sup>36</sup> Whilst Luke's account is straightforward, difficulties arise, however, when an attempt is made to relate it to Paul's account in Galatians 2:1-10. While the general tendency among many is to regard Luke and Paul as reporting on the same occasion, there are sound reasons to question the supposed identical nature of these Conferences. Paul's account in Galatians is in the first place seen to centre around the demarcation of the spheres of missionary activity. The agreement reached was that Paul and Barnabas should continue their work of Gentile evangelization while the Jerusalem leaders should concentrate on the witness among the Jews. Circumcision appears to receive only a marginal mention in this meeting. As with table fellowship between Gentile and Jewish Christians, nothing at all is mentioned about it. Secondly, the Conference in Gal.2 is expressly said to have been a private one (v.2) whilst the meeting in Acts 15 was held publicly. While it could be argued that a private interview mentioned in Gal.2 could have been held aside the main public meeting, it would still be difficult, however, to understand why Paul told the Galatian Christians nothing of the decisions reached by the public meeting since they were relevant also to the Galatian controversy. A suggestion therefore is made that Luke in Acts 15 combines into one narrative two originally separate meetings, one of which is recorded also in Gal.2:1-10 at which Paul and Barnabas were present and the other which produced the decisions in Acts 15 but at which Paul and Barnabas were not present. That there were possibly two separate meetings resulting thus in Paul having his own line of thinking less influenced by the decisions in Acts 15 may help explain why Paul, in matters where true religion and basic Christian ethics were concerned, would not hesitate to legislate against idolatry and fornication but refused to lay down a rule in matters like food which were religiously and ethically neutral (1 Cor.6:12-20). When asked to make a ruling on eating the flesh of animals which had been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor.8:1-11) the last thing, so it appears, to occur to him was to quote the decisions which had been arrived at in Acts 15 as binding on all Gentile Christians. He rather solves the problem by arguing from the order of creation and the ethical implications of a law-free gospel. Cf. Fraderick Fyvie Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (1988).

ers. The battle for the inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian community had actually been won. In reality, it had now become accepted that, “[...] in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love” (Gal.5:6). In another manifest protest against a hard-line attitude towards the Gentiles Paul had this to say, “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality” (Rom.2:9-11).

Paul’s faith and conviction of humanity’s basic equality before God can be gleaned also in Romans 3:28:30 “[...] is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also since God is one [...]” Similar sentiments are expressed in 1Timothy 2:3-6, “This is good [...] in the sight of God our Saviour who desires all men (and women) to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth [...]” For Paul, God has ever been present though in different ways in the lives of the whole of humankind. Among the Jews he was present through the agency of the Law and among the rest of humanity through the working of their conscience. In his letter to the Romans, he captures so well this idea when he says,

When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my Gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Romans 2:14-16).

The foregoing analysis shows that the missionaries and their counterparts in the named school did not carefully take into consideration all the relevant elements of evidence available in the Scriptures. This resulted in them failing to give a consideration to the counter current evident in these Scriptures during their assessment of the place of non-Christian religions in divine providence. The bias against non-Christian religious systems, as we saw, coupled also with sheer ignorance resulted in them producing such a half-baked and misleading interpretation of Scriptures to warrant an imposition of Christianity and all the First World adage it had come to accrue over the years. Instead of giving primacy to the wholeness of the Word, missionary work was often reduced

to the establishment of spiritual colonies in the Third World. Karl Rahner captures well the spirit of the time when he says,

[...] the actual concrete activity of the Church in its relation to the world outside of Europe, in fact (if you would pardon the expression) was [like] the activity of an export firm, which exported a European religion, as a commodity it did not really want to change, but send throughout the world, together with the rest of the culture and civilization it considered superior.<sup>37</sup>

If one were to bring into consideration the fact that the Christian Church is institutionally outreaching, sent to go out to the whole world, the only thing one would end up doing is to stare in wonder at the confusion or contradiction which missionaries and the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school involved themselves in when they did not give attention to the more embracing current. As rightly noted by P. Kalilombe, “It would seem strange, in fact, that missionaries would give relatively more importance to the contrary current, for they were searching the Scriptures in view of a commitment quite contrary to that of a ghetto community.”<sup>38</sup> It sounds absurd sure when one thinks that the primary normative texts that the Church should bank on in her missionary enterprise should be those that suggest an easy and blanket dismissal of other religions. It sounds also too simplistic to think that God loves Christians only and has no time for all others, the rest of humanity.

### ***Special Focus on the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school***

To give a bit more attention now to some of the particular propositions from the above named school: the first thing that possibly needs to dawn in the minds of those behind the school is that Shona traditional religion was not and is not polytheistic. In the veneration of their ancestors, the Shona have not tried to substitute the place of God in their cosmology with something else. To them, *Mwari* (God) is the ultimate cause of all things and enjoys a status immeasurably higher than any other being hence, worthy of the highest honour also (worship). While in their day to day life they appear occupied with the veneration of their ancestors,

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<sup>37</sup> K. Rahner cited in E. Hillman, ‘Missionary Approach to African Cultures’ in T. Okure (ed) *32 Articles Evaluating Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, Eldoret: 1990, p. 150.

<sup>38</sup> Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 135.

*Mwari* to them is not someone who is so distant as evidenced in them calling upon his name especially in tragic scenarios. What all this means then is that the use of such texts as Exodus 20:1-2/ Deuteronomy 5:6-7 which forbid the worship of other gods outside Yahweh as a basis for dismissing Shona practices in regard to their dead does not hold water. Such texts, as we saw in the social and historical background of monotheism, arose and were used against the background of other deities worshipped by the 'people of the land'. Apart from the deities of the 'people of the land' ancient Israel itself was polytheistic. As attested in M.S. Smith, "El was the head of an early Israelite pantheon, with Yahweh as its warrior god."<sup>39</sup> Biblically, one may need to visit Genesis 49; Numbers 23-24 and Psalm 82 to get a confirmation of this. With time, however, Yahweh appears to have incorporated El's characteristics resulting thus in Yahweh as the eventual historical 'winner'. A detailed discussion as to how El and Yahweh coalesced I feel lies beyond the borders of this thesis so I leave it at that.

Moving on to the prohibitions and negative statements we find in Deuteronomy 18:10f; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Isaiah 8:19-21 to see if the practices were really evil in themselves, the presence also of neutral or positive references to a wide range of magical and divinatory practices in the Old Testament itself such as dreams, decisions by the sacred lot of Urim and Thummin (1 Sam.14:41; Dt.38:8), genius and inspiration (Ex.28:3, 31:3; Num.27:18), blessings and curses (2 Kings 2:23-24), clairvoyance, belomancy (Ezekiel 21:21), hydromancy (Gen. 44:5, 15) and other similar practices, raises the question of the relationship between these positive and negative evaluations. The presence of both understandings, in other words, has left scholars stroking their heads on two interrelated questions: whether to view the prohibitions as the fundamental position of the Old Testament or as simply reflecting the views of particular times? Whether magic represent perverted or foreign influences on 'true' Yahwism or does it represent an indigenous variant of Yahwism itself?

Those scholars who take the prohibitive and negative evaluations of magic as the primary response of the biblical text to magic in ancient Israel usually tend to emphasize magic as foreign or perverted Yahwism. In such cases, as noted by Joane K. Kuemmerlin-McLean,

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, p. 143.

references to magic are taken as evidence of pre-Yahwistic practices, foreign impositions or rather as 'survival' of earlier practices into later times.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, those scholars who restrict the interest in prohibiting magic to particular times or particular authors, a position which I take also in this thesis, are more open to argue for magic as an indigenous and integral part of Israelite religion.<sup>41</sup> When broadly defined as a form of communication with the supernatural world in which effort is made to influence present or future events by means of ritual actions one is able to see that magic was not evil but indeed an acceptable practice in ancient Israel for there appears to be a streak of magic in the activities of most religious functionaries. It was only with the coming of the religious enthusiasts (Deuteronomistic and Priestly redactors) that such things began to be condemned.

A revisit also to the social and historical background to monotheism helps shed more light on this issue. Transported into the lands of Israel and Judah following the Persian policy of reorganization, were peoples of various cultures and religions. There is no way one can run away from the inevitable possibility of seeing these immigrants bringing along their own religious and cultural practices which they at times blended with that of the locals. The locals too, that is, 'people of the land' naturally should have something also which they copied from these incomers in their midst.

Now when the new society of 'Israel' came to generate its own identity via literature, cultic purity was taken as the undergirding component which defined the nation and Jerusalem, distinguishing itself thus from other nations. What would be interesting to note is that since that list of practices mentioned in the cited passages were considered of foreign origin, there was no way they were going to be tolerated under this system of cultic purity which was fighting anything which was considered foreign and as usual, Yahweh is brought in as the one who sanctions such rules. The question whether there was anything positive or negative in the practices themselves appears to have had been a secondary matter, if at all it mattered. A closer look at some of these so-called

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Joane K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, 'Magic (OT)' in D.N. Freedman (ed et al), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol.4, Sydney: 1992, p. 470.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Joane K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, 'Magic (OT)', p. 470.

'foreign practices' puts us in a better position to answer whether or not they fall in the same category with Shona practices.

## Divination and Sorcery in Israel

In Deuteronomy 18:10-11 it stands stated,

There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or wizard or a necromancer.

While child offerings appear to have been associated with the cult of Molech<sup>42</sup> which was widespread throughout Canaan, no one knows precisely what these professions and practices listed as prohibitions here in Deuteronomy and other similar legal texts really referred to since the biblical texts themselves do not elaborate on them. Geoffrey W. Bromiley captures so well the reason behind this when he says, "[...] the censorship exercised by various authors and redactors has not permitted a more intimate acquaintance with the exact forms and settings of such

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<sup>42</sup> The Hebrew word מֹלֵךְ 'Molech' does not represent the original pronunciation of the name, any more than the Greek vocalization *Moloch* found in the LXX and in the Acts (6:43). The original title of this god was probably *Melech*, "king". As the title probably meant king, it is difficult to determine whether it should be considered as the proper name of the deity or as a simple appellative in most of those places where it is mentioned in the Old Testament. The chief feature of Molech's worship among the Israelites seems to have been the sacrifice of children, and the usual expression for describing that sacrifice was "to pass through the fire", a rite carried out after the victims had been put to death. The special centre of such atrocities was just outside of Jerusalem, at a place called Tophet (probably "place of abomination"), in the valley of Geennom. According to 1 Kings 11:7, Solomon erected a high place for Moloch "on the mountain east Jerusalem", and on this account he is at times considered as the monarch who introduced the cult into Israel. After the secession of the Northerners traces of Molech worship appear in both Judah and Israel, and the prophets expressly treat the cult of Molech as foreign and as an apostasy from the worship of the true God (Jer.7:31; 19:5; Ez.20:25-31). The offerings by fire, the probable identity of Molech with Baal, and the fact that in Assyria and Babylonia Malik, and at Palmyra, Malach-bel, were sun-gods, have suggested to many that Molech was a fire- or sun-god. Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, *Moloch*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10443b.htm> (accessed 09/09/09).

magical activities.”<sup>43</sup> It is not surprising therefore to see scholars divided in regard to magical practices in Israel and one root cause of this diversity of opinion has to do with the lack of consensus on etymologies to certain magic terminology.<sup>44</sup>

From the scanty information that can be gleaned from the biblical texts, there appeared to have been two basic types of magical art, namely: divination and sorcery. Divination in the context of these texts, as noted by G.W. Bromiley, appeared to have been the attempt to understand and interpret coded messages from the gods while sorcery appeared more a system of influencing people and events in nature for personal gain or reasons.<sup>45</sup> That divination in ancient Israel involved the interpretation of coded messages from the gods can hardly be denied for it finds support from archaeology which has come to unravel that it was a common practice of the ancient world. Letters from the great Babylonian city of Mari as well as clay tablets of Babylonian priests have gone a long way in shedding light on this practise and they testify that divination was a highly technical job. As noted by L. Boadt:

Since it was difficult to know what the gods wanted human leaders to do, experts would interpret extraordinary ‘divine’ signs such as the movement of the stars, or deformities in the livers of sheep, or the flight of a flock of birds, or the meaning of dreams. It was through these unusual signals, all free from human tampering or “fixing” that the gods could indicate what decisions should be taken.<sup>46</sup>

Bromiley argues, however, that divination and sorcery were not so neatly distinguished. Using the symbolic or magical actions of the Israelite prophet Zedekiah ben Chenaanah (1 Kings 22:11) as an example, he argues for the similarity between sorcery and divination not only on the basis that sorcery is often concerned with revelation but that Canaanite and Israelite prophets also often attempted to influence the outcome of

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<sup>43</sup> G.W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1988, p. 216.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed analysis on the different etymologies to magic terminology in the OT see Joane K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, ‘Magic (OT)’ in D.N. Freedman (ed et al), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol.4, Sydney: Doubleday, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 215

<sup>46</sup> L. Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, New York: 1984, p.304.

the events they predicted by 'creating' the fulfillment of their prophecies.<sup>47</sup>

While little is known about the specific details which characterized magical art in ancient Israel, the manner in which the prohibitions of various magical practices are reiterated in various Old Testament texts suggest that they should have constituted a serious problem or threat. Apart from the other added forms of magical specializations such as snake charming (Jer.8:17; Eccl. 10:11) found in Israel, magical art appears to have been associated also with other forms of social deviance such as prostitution (Lev.19:26-29; 2 Kings 9:22; Is.57:3).

The chanting of ritual incantations appears to have been one of the methods used by magical practitioners. The adjuration by God's name for magical ends appears to have been one of the ways such incantations were made. In the Book of Kings, for example, we find Elisha cursing in the name of the Lord some boys who were jeering at him with the result that two she-bears appear on the scene and attack the boys (2 Kings 2:23-24). The use of God's name in magical adjurations may explain the existence of the third commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Dt.5:11; Ex.20:7). G.W. Bromiley comes up with a suggestion that, "It was perhaps due to the magical use of the divine name that the Tetragrammaton (now commonly vocalized "Yahweh") was so rarely pronounced that its original pronunciation was forgotten."<sup>48</sup>

A bit more enlightened picture on the various forms of magical practice in Israel seems to be painted in post-biblical Jewish sources. The *Sepher ha-Razim*, 'Book of Mysteries', for example, compiled around the 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> century AD by an educated Jew but reflecting material almost contemporaneous with the earlier Talmudic period (3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) deals with three kinds of magic: magical healing, magical revelation and magical procedures for gaining power over enemies. Acting as agents for the magician are angelic beings whose proper names must be called out or written down before being dispatched on various missions.<sup>49</sup> Another influential source of knowledge are the Aramaic Incantation Bowls made

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 215.

<sup>48</sup> Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 216.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 217.

by the Jews in Babylonia during the Sassanian period (AD 226-636). Made of clay, these bowls, as described by G. Bromiley, contain magical texts in spirals starting from the centre of the bowl. While acknowledging the lack of consensus on the exact use of these bowls, he believes that they had an apotropaic function in that they were used to ward off the evil effects of various witchcraft familiars and influences.<sup>50</sup> Among the malevolent supernatural beings was Lilith which appears to feature only once in the Old Testament text (Is.34:14) under the name 'night hag' (RSV). Lilith was conceived by the rabbis as a demonic creature of the night which, as a female succubus, was thought capable of taking on the likeness of a man's wife thus luring him into sexual relations. As a male incubus, Lilith was believed also to impersonate a husband so as to have sexual relations with his wife.<sup>51</sup>

The picture which is reflected in the foregoing rabbinic literature shows that despite the acquaintance with the prohibitions against various forms of divination and sorcery in the Torah, rabbinic sages were also well acquainted with magical practices. Not only were they acquainted with the practices, some of them even practiced them. A given case is that of a famous rabbi and magician Joshua ben Perahiah whose name is said to occur several times on the incantation bowls.<sup>52</sup> While post-biblical Jewish sources may be seen to add a bit of more light on magical practices in Israel, the extent, however, to which they illuminate on the earlier periods in Israel's religious history is questionable. What still remains questionable also up to this point is whether these various forms of magical art practiced in Israel, though in bits and pieces of information, fall in the same category with what we find being practiced among the Shona and meriting thus the same prohibition.

### **Divination in Shona religion**

While divination in Israel appears to have involved gods from whom coded messages were received, divination in Shona practices has nothing to do with the gods since, as argued already, the religion is not polytheistic. One finds also nothing like the adjuration by God's name for

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 217.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 217.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 217.

magical ends, the use of angelic beings, snake charming or even the use of incantation bowls in the practices of the Shona. Though a more detailed analysis of the diviner shall come later in chapter six, it would be good to note here that the practices are indeed different in that a diviner in Shona religion is an expert at carrying out a diagnosis mainly through spirit possession or other traditional methods such as the throwing of *hakata* (divining dice).

As for spirit possession, the diviner usually falls into a trance thereby allowing the healing spirit in him/her to carry out the diagnosis. He or she may remain in that state of possession for quite a number of hours during which the healing spirit speaks through him at convenient intervals. When it comes to the use of the *hakata*, the form of the dice tends to differ from healer to healer. They can be carved from wood, from bones, ivory or it could simply be half shells of certain fruit seed that are ritually prepared. The diviner, as observed by M. Bourdillon, normally gives the dice to the client for him/her to make the first throw or simply make contact with the dice. When that is done, the diviner takes over in throwing the dice himself and interprets the meaning that is reflected by the way the dice falls.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from them being different practices altogether, the prohibition of divination among other practices was not a divine sanction as such but just a human initiative of a people trying to distance themselves from what they perceived as foreign practices and in the process try to bring in a prophet as a substitute of the 'heathen' diviner. One therefore should not try and universalize what a particular people saw as a fitting measure to make their religion look 'pure'. Divination in the context of the Shona appears to be *Mwari's* design for the well-being of his people as evidenced also in the genuine Shona diviners beseeching the help of their *Musiki* (Creator) to make their diagnosis correct and their treatment bring about a cure. In no way has divination stood in the way of the Shona in the worship of their *Musiki*, as it later was perceived to do in the context of Israelite religion.

Attempts at dismissing Shona traditional healers on the grounds that magic is prohibited in the Biblical texts can hardly be sustained also. While sure one may find some similarity in that in both Israelite and Shona societies magic is understood as an art of obtaining

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 153.

mysterious results by certain tricks that one can employ, Shona traditional healers cannot be described as magicians. Though some traditional healers, as noted by Gordon Chavhunduka, may use some aspects of magic in the treatment of certain illnesses, they also use other methods of healing besides magic.<sup>54</sup> With sorcery, though the finer details of the practice may tend to differ, there seems, however, to be a common perception between Israelite and Shona practices that sorcery is a technique which is employed by someone in order to cause illness or other misfortune. Sorcery, however, seems not to have been a major cause of concern to the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school since they know already that the traditional Shona system does not condone such a practice.

### Necromancy

An issue that the above mentioned school tries to argue vehemently against is necromancy. Apart from using Deuteronomy 18:10-11 where it is listed among the prohibited practices, they also make reference to 1 Samuel 28:7-20. To further strengthen their argument, they cross over to the New Testament where they pick out Luke 16:19-31 as providing a strong Scriptural basis that no soul either good or bad is ever permitted by God to return to the earth to speak with the living and less still, to roam about here on earth or hovering over graveyards.

Taking the classic text, 1 Samuel 28:7-20, the centre basis of their argument, the first thing one has to bear in mind is that like other listed prohibitions, no one is really able to tell precisely how necromancy was done in ancient Israel. To have a more enlightened insight of the issues raised in this classic text requires one to revisit the social background where it is emerging and this of course involves knowing first how the Hebrew term **יִצְבֵּן** ('**ôb** -RSV 'medium') was understood. Though open to contestation, H.A. Hoffner argues that **יִצְבֵּן** is a 'non-Semitic migratory word' that appears in Sumerian (**ab**), Hurro-Hittite (**a-a-bi**), Akkadian (**aptu**, Neo-Assyr. **apu**), and Ugaritic (**ob<** **ayb**), carrying the same meaning of 'sacrificial pit'. Such sacrificial pits were dug in the ground for the sole purpose of making ritual sacrifices to chthonic dei-

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. G. Chavhunduka, *The Professionalisation of Traditional Medicine in Zimbabwe*, Harare: 1998, p. 12.

ties and the calling up of the spirits of the deceased. To Hoffner, אֵוִב shifted from its original meaning 'pit' to 'spirit(s) of the pit' then to 'necromancer' that is, one who calls forth the spirits of the dead through the use of a ritual pit.<sup>55</sup>

A look at the Old Testament shows that there was a familiarity with such ritual pits. In Isaiah, for example, we find the prophet mocking the use of such pits, "Then deep from the earth you shall speak, from low in the dust your words shall come; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and your speech shall whisper out of the dust" (Is.29:4). Such Biblical evidence, coupled also with the meaning of אֵוִב itself suggested by Hoffner, leaves open the possibility that when Saul visited the medium of Endor, he could have consulted her at her ritual pit and possibly some kind of ritual sacrifices, though not stated in the text, could have been made before the 'bringing up' of Samuel's ghost.

From encyclopedic information one learns that rituals of necromancy in Babylon, Rome, Greece and Egypt of antiquity involved the use of magic circles, wands, talismans, bells, incantations and took place in graveyards or at certain sites that suited specific guidelines of the necromancer. Another interesting insight from such information is that necromancers are said to have preferred summoning the recently departed citing that their revelations were spoken more clearly. The preferred timeframe was twelve months following death of the body and once this period lapsed, necromancers would summon the deceased's ghostly spirit to appear instead.<sup>56</sup> If this information is anything to go by, coupled also by the fact that ancient Israelite culture shared in that of the ANE, what it may help show is that it was almost over a year then since the death of Samuel that Saul visited this medium of Endor since she is said to have seen the ghostly spirit of Samuel (v.13).

The light from the foregoing analysis shows that the practice of consulting the dead must have existed in a legitimate way in the Ancient Near East as well as in ancient Israel. Marked graves alluded in Genesis 35:20 may have served as places for cultic activities as well as for practicing necromancy. In Genesis 28:15-18 and 35:13-14 we find Jacob pour-

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. H.A. Hoffner cited in Bromiley, *Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 307.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Necromancy: Facts, Discussion Forum, and Encyclopedia Article, <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Necromancy#encyclopedia> (accessed 15/07/09).

ing oil on spots where his ancestors' deity appeared. David also is presented in 1 Samuel 20:6 as acknowledging ancestor sacrifice. Being polytheistic, each family or clan in ancient Israel appears to have had regular recourse to local deities as well as seek help from the dead kin. In conjuring up the dead, it was believed that they had more power and knowledge than the living so one could manipulate this power for one's benefit. Such is what Saul is presented as doing after he had exhausted all other legitimate means of seeking advice: dreams, Urim and prophets but with no answer from the Lord (1 Sam.28:6).

Though necromancy may have been accepted as a legitimate practice in Israel, the coming, however, of the Deuteronomistic and Priestly redactors on the scene begins to witness the fight to bring such a practice to an end. From a Deuteronomistic perspective, so notes Maggie Cole, "it is possible to understand that as the worship of Yahweh evolved, necromancy may have been eventually rejected because it interfered with people's effort to seek Yahweh's will."<sup>57</sup> Since the cult of the dead had also in the former days been so much associated with family or clan worship, the new dispensation that Israelite history was now entering during this period of the Deuteronomistic and Priestly redactors demanded that the cult of the dead be brought to an end since it was viewed as no longer valid to serve the interests of the wider social group. Nationalising the Yahweh cult to the exclusion of other cults, in other words, was seen as the best option to hold the new society together. In this new set up, the prophet was made to take the place of the 'heathen' soothsayer. Remarking on the noticeable position assigned to the prophet in the new Israelite society S.R. Driver says,

He appears in it as the representative in Israel of the heathen diviner; he is presented as the appointed agent for satisfying, in as far they are legitimate, those cravings of humanity to unlock the secrets of the future, or to discover in some critical situation- as, for instance, that of Saul [...] – the purpose of Heaven, which gave birth in other nations to the arts of the diviner and kindred superstitions.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> M. Cole, '1 Samuel 28: The Medium of Endor- Part 1' in Dr. Claude Mariottini, <http://www.claudemariottini.com/blog/2007/08/1-Samuel-28-medium-of-endor-part-1.html> (accessed 16/07/09).

<sup>58</sup> S.R. Driver (ed), *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, Clark: 1973, p.221.

As noted earlier, the very fact also that necromancy was listed among practices which were considered as of foreign origin shows by itself that there was no way it was going to be tolerated by the Deuteronomistic and Priestly redactors. To them, the practice of consulting the dead was synonymous with magical practices of the ‘people of the land’ and other outsiders. Since in their ‘foreign policy’, if I may use that term, redactors emphasized conformity of the outsider to Israelite religion, those “whose magical practices deviated from the normally accepted Israelite practices”, writes M. Cole, “were thought of as powered by something other than Yahweh, a practice which undermined the religious foundations of Israelite religion.”<sup>59</sup>

Now moving back to the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought, what is interesting to note in the first place is that the school appears to be picking and trying to perpetuate an idea which emerged with Medieval Christian thinkers and writers who, on the basis of their belief that resurrection was impossible without the assistance of the Christian God, rejected the idea that humans could bring back the spirits of the dead. As a result, they interpreted the shades consulted in necromancy as disguised demons, thus conflating necromancy with black magic and demon-summoning.<sup>60</sup> Since the practice had explicitly now come to be known as demonic magic, it was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church. What, however, comes out clearly is that with Medieval writers, necromancy lost its earlier, more specialized meaning.

It is interesting to note also that the very classic text itself which the school counts on, that is, 1 Samuel 28:7-20, self-defeats the premise upon which the school tries to build its argument. While the school tries to argue that communication with the dead is evil or demonic because no soul good or bad is ever permitted by God to return to earth and speak with the living, we find in this text the dead Samuel speaking with Saul (vv.15-19). What we find here speaking with Saul is not a demon but the ghost figure of the real Samuel. Asked whom she sees, the woman replies that she sees Samuel’s ghost as an אֱלֹהִים (’*ĕlōhīm* - supernatural being -RSV ‘god’) and when she goes further to describe him Saul knows that it is Samuel (vv.13-14). Not only does this text further demonstrate that necromancy’s earlier meaning was lost with the

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<sup>59</sup> M. Cole, *Medium of Endor*.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Necromancy: Facts.

Renaissance but helps show also that it is possible to communicate with the dead.

Though necromancy in its earlier and not later corrupted sense has some kind of links with what Shona possessed spirit mediums do when they enter the spirit world to get messages from ancestors, necromancy as practiced in ancient Israel cannot be said to be the same as the practice of these Shona mediums. The use of 'sacrificial pits', for example, is unheard of among the Shona. The same would be said of the ritual sacrifices to chthonic or underworld deities which also characterized necromancy in those ancient biblical times. Shona religion, as has been repeatedly remarked, is not polytheistic. In entering the spirit world also, most Shona mediums do not target a particular spirit as such, a technique used in ancient Israel, rather the matter of concern which they bring before *varikumhepo* (the ancestors) is first addressed to them in their communal aspect. If there is a particular spirit calling for attention they may only come to discover of it upon entry into the spirit world of these ancestors and then try to address those concerns, but again this is not done in isolation of the other ancestral spirits, these too are informed. Exceptional cases, however, do exist of another type of mediums called *svikiro* (tribal spirit medium); such a medium tends to target only the spirit of the hosted spirit medium.

The incident at Endor not only negates but exposes also the serious flaws of the school's hermeneutics which is also evident when they go on and cite the story of the Dives and Lazarus (Lk.16:19-31) as another proof text that no soul is ever permitted by God to return to earth. In applying its *intentio lectoris* (reader's intention) the school seems to have neglected completely the *intentio auctoris* (author's intention) and as a result, it turns the passage into a mechanism of satisfying its felt need of castigating the traditional Shona belief in the spirit's return.

In inserting this pericope into his Gospel, Luke does not in any way intend to allude to the impossibility of the soul's return. The plea of the slow-witted rich man and the response of father Abraham should not be literally interpreted as a pointer to the impossibility of the soul's return. In fact, the punch-line verse 31, simply teaches that wondrous events such as resurrection from the dead do not automatically save or convince anyone, proof of which is found in Jesus' own resurrection.

What makes even the allusion to the impossibility of the soul's return almost unthinkable is the fact that the manner in which Dives

and Lazarus are presented in this passage as being in separate places, that of punishment and that of reward, alludes to a later development of the concept 'Sheol'. In early Israelite thinking, Sheol was conceived as the destiny of all humans. The Psalmist, for example, echoes this when he points to life's brevity, "What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?" (Ps.89:48). In Ecclesiastes, the writer also shares a similar view, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going" (Eccl.9:10).

Apart from being conceived as the destiny of all, Sheol at that time was popularly believed to be a place of no return, dark, gloomy place, and a place where the bad and the good led a vague, unsatisfying and inevitable existence (Cf. 2 Sam.12:23; Job 14:12). As attested in Lawrence Boadt also,

[...] it appears to be a place of stillness, darkness and total helplessness where the spirit of a person lies after the grave has taken the body. Both Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 32 give elaborate descriptions of Sheol as a place where bodies lie row on row, with no power and no hope.<sup>61</sup>

Although popular belief subscribed to no return from the underworld, a certain kind of belief in the continued presence and influence of the departed upon the living appears to have existed also. That the dead could cause harm and that their higher knowledge could be exploited was conceivable. References such as Deuteronomy 18:10-11 and 1 Samuel 28:1f which have been the subject matter of the past analysis show how Israel stood close to these ideas. From the available evidence one can note that the concepts of resurrection and retribution after death had not yet evolved at this time.

Watson E. Mills and Roger Aubrey Bullard suggest late apocalypticism as the period when the belief in resurrection emerged. Making reference to Daniel 12:1-3, they argue, "God's justice demanded that the faithful martyrs who had fallen in the struggle be rewarded and that the apostate Jews who had collaborated with the Seleucids be punished."<sup>62</sup> It is possibly also in the context of apocalypticism that one has to under-

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<sup>61</sup> Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, pp. 250-251.

<sup>62</sup> W.E. Mills and R.A. Bullard (eds), *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, Mercer University Press, 1990, p. 756.

stand references to resurrection in Isaiah 24-27 as well as in 1 Maccabees 12:43-45. Though one finds allusion also to the resurrection concept in Hosea 6:2 and Ezekiel 37, it is used in these passages as metaphor of national restoration and not resurrection of the body as such. Not much also in terms of influence on resurrection in Israel seems to have come from other religions in the ANE. As summed up by Mills and Bullard,

The Egyptians believed in life after death. Canaanite and Mesopotamian religions told of deities who travelled back and forth to the underworld. The Persians developed an advanced doctrine of resurrection and judgement [...]. Yet the content of the Old Testament resurrection faith remains distinctly Israelite.<sup>63</sup>

The foregoing analysis shows that the concept of Sheol was undergoing change such that a notable development could be seen during Jesus' time due to the belief in resurrection. Unlike in the earlier understanding where Sheol was conceived as the abode of all the dead and a place of no return, Sheol came to be understood now as having two compartments. In one compartment the just quietly awaited the resurrection while in the other, the wicked were already being punished.<sup>64</sup> In Luke's pericope on Dives and Lazarus, Jesus appears to have assumed this popular belief in places of reward and punishment. Though some scholars in the likes of G.T. Shedd would oppose such an idea that prior to Jesus death Sheol had two compartments, his contemporary Charles Hodge does not find the theory incompatible with Scripture. He argues,

Sheol is represented as the general receptacle or abode of departed spirits, who were there in a state of unconsciousness; some in a state of misery, others in a state of happiness. In all points the pagan idea of hades corresponds to the Scriptural idea of Sheol.<sup>65</sup>

For the immediate needs of this thesis, however, it sounds more intelligible if I put a lid to this debate on Sheol at this point. For a detailed discussion on Sheol one may need to refer to Robert Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life* (1960); Lloyd R. Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*

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<sup>63</sup> Mills and Bullard, *Mercer Dictionary*, p. 756.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. C. Hodge cited in J. Hayes (ed. et al), *Four Views on Hell*, Zondervan Publishing Company, 1997, p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> Hodge cited in Hayes, *Views on Hell*, p. 15.

(1979); Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (2002) and others. P. Johnston, for example, whose work shows to be an update of R. Martin-Achard and L. Bailey, notes that though the association of Sheol with the wicked may not be absolute, it foreshadows a later development –that of Sheol becoming hell.

Going back to the *intentio auctoris* of Luke, one finds that the central message which Luke would like to convey is that those who were well-off in his community were supposed to help the Lazaruses in their midst and thus be children of Abraham. Luke reinforces this central message by bringing Moses and the prophets on the scene, “[...] If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead” (v.31). In doing so, Luke lays bare before his readers the conviction he had that Moses and the prophets clearly command mercy and care for the poor, at the same time Luke warns of the consequences of failing to do so.

The school’s position contradicts even Catholic teaching on the living dead, their powers and their interaction with the living. In the Vatican II Document, *Lumen Gentium*, the Church teaches,

Until the Lord shall come in His majesty, and all angels with Him and death being destroyed, all things are subject to Him, some of His disciples are exiles on earth, some having died are purified, and others are in glory beholding “clearly God Himself triune and one, as He is” [...] all who are in Christ, having His Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in Him. Therefore the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least weakened or interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the perpetual faith of the Church, is strengthened by communication of spiritual goods [...].<sup>66</sup>

In talking of the union of wayfarers and the dead being reinforced by the exchange of spiritual goods, the Church recognizes, in as much as the Shona do, the influence of the dead on the living and the living on the dead. Such an interaction between the living and the dead goes beyond the limited geographical categories of ‘near’ and ‘far’; ‘here’ and ‘there’ because the dead in as much as they share in the presence of God who is

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<sup>66</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church **Lumen Gentium** solemnly promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, No.49, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/history\\_councils/ii\\_vatican/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/history_councils/ii_vatican/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

not confined to a certain point but whose nearness is experienced through faith, are present to their living family members.<sup>67</sup> This sharing of the dead in the presence of God who has no geographical boundaries makes another argument upheld by the school that *kurova guva* is tantamount to recalling a soul that would have been escorted to God fall like a deck of cards. It has to dawn in the minds of the protagonists of this school that the old conception of the abode of God as somewhere far away in heaven can hardly be sustained anymore. The world-view adhered to by this school, as well argued out by J. Elsner:

[...] separates too much heaven and earth, heaven (*kudenga*) and home (home), creator and creation, the physical and the metaphysical realities. It reveals a very limited theological view of heaven as places rather than as states or dimensions of existence in which the dead persons find themselves.<sup>68</sup>

A review of the whole manner in which the school approaches the prohibitions which were under discussion shows that its missing the forest for the trees began with a glossing over on the issue of translations. Care was not taken, so it appears, to see if a literal translation into Shona of such Biblical terms like divination necromancy and magician really refer to the same beliefs and practices as in Shona culture. The mere fact, in other words, that a certain word is used in the Shona translation of the Bible, for example, *kushopera* (divination) or *n'anga* (necromancer) does not, as was proved in the foregoing analysis, suffice for one to think that they mean one and the same thing with what we find being practiced by the Shona. The school's only mode of operation seems to have been a 'left to right' reading of the biblical texts and appear less aware that a 'right to left' reading is more informative especially when it comes to Old Testament texts. Understanding terms in the language in which the Old Testament was originally written (Hebrew) puts one at an advantage.

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<sup>67</sup> J. Elsner, *Catholic Beliefs and Our Relations to the Living Dead: A contribution to the Debate on the 'Kurova Guva' Rite*, Harare: Imbisa, p.4.

<sup>68</sup> Elsner, *Catholic Beliefs and Our Relations to the Living Dead*, p. 3.

## ***Conclusion***

While the missionary approach to the Scriptures had proved to be an effective tool at suppressing what were perceived as ‘pagan practices’ such a heavy-handed approach had a lot of flaws. It relied on just one trend in the Scriptures which tended to be exclusive and failed to do justice to the other trend which is inclusive in outlook. The Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school fell in the same trap which missionaries had fallen. What the school failed to see is that the heavy-handed rhetoric against foreign practices manifest in the Scriptures does not apply to Shona practices.

The heavy-handed approach which had characterized missionary activity proved difficult to sustain as more comprehensive knowledge of human history and geography became available. The unavoidable reality of life forced the Church into humble and official admission that salvation was possible even outside the visible institutional Christian Church and that non-Christian religious systems were the normal divinely-ordained channels of salvation to their adherents. Thus having learnt her mistakes in the missionary field, the Church during Vatican II, which should also be a reminder to the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought, corrected her perception of non-Christian religions. The resultant of Vatican II’s fruitful discussions was the recognition that the non-Christian religious forms, structures and experiences are impregnated with innumerable ‘seeds of the Word’. It is to this teaching on the ‘seeds of the Word’ that the following chapter is devoted.

## Chapter Four

### Church's teaching on Salvation

#### *Introduction*

Initially rocked by tensions, a phase which is reflected in the foregoing chapter three, the Early Church had finally through the efforts of Paul in particular, reached a certain point of maturity in its recognition of humanity's basic equality before God. Regardless of race, colour, sex and religion, the theology of Paul was that the Gospel should incarnate among peoples of all nations. Paul's interpretation of the incarnational principle was indeed a step in the right direction given the fact that though the mystery of incarnation had come to occur within the geographical and historical context of the Jewish people; it transcends cultural and geographical boundaries since Christ thereby became part of the whole of humanity. Through incarnation, Christ penetrates every time, place and people in order to transform them into sons and daughters of God (John.1:12).

Recalling the great commission to "go out and make disciples of all nations" (Mt.28:19-20), the Early Church realized that it also had to incarnate itself in the various cultures that constitute the whole of humanity. Much of this was achieved through the adoption of the positive cultural elements of those people among whom she was evangelizing. Apart from adopting what was purely Jewish; for example, Jewish forms of prayer, Jewish feasts and others, the Church adopted also other cultural forms and structures as she moved into the Hellenic, Roman and European world. This explains why, as writes E. Hillman,

[...] the code of Canon Law owes more to pre-Christian Roman law than to the Mosaic Law or the New Testament. This is also why so much of the Church's official teaching is unintelligible without reference to Greek philosophy; and why even Jesus in Galilee would hardly have understood the Christological definition of Chalcedon (AD 451).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 149.

As the Church, however, moved beyond the European borders, the incarnational principle was almost ignored and where it was remembered, it was simply given official lip-service as more attention, reflected in the previous Chapter also, was drawn to the establishment of spiritual colonies in the Third World. In the atmosphere of the Western conquest, observes P. Kalilombe,

[...] the meeting of Christianity with other religions was conceived of in the spirit typical of Christendom's crusading tradition. There is a streak of the crusader in Western Christianity. It tends to identify its own interest and vision with those supposed to be willed by God himself.<sup>2</sup>

Such a mistake is what Vatican II, among other things, sought to rectify in its call for a return to the missionary principle of incarnation. The aim of this Chapter is to examine the Church's understanding of salvation and her relation to non-Christian religions as enshrined in Vatican II documents and expounded also by some of her renowned theologians like Karl Rahner. To facilitate an easy explication of the Church's teaching on these matters, the Chapter will be divided into three main sections: (i) the Church's understanding of salvation prior to Vatican II; (ii) Vatican II's teaching on salvation and (iii) the visible Church's unique role in the face of other religions.

### ***The Church's understanding of salvation prior to Vatican II***

To the question as to whether there was any chance for one who was not a member of Christ's visible Church to find salvation, the answer given in the early period of the Church took the form of the famous expression: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation). Though the explicit wording of the formula itself is said to derive from Fulgentius Bishop of Ruspe (d.533),<sup>3</sup> the doctrine is traced back to the third century. Patristic scholars, so observes Michael J. Mazza, generally concur that there exist two classes of statements on this doctrine in the writings of the Patristics: first, restrictive statements which appear to exclude from salvation all those not fully members of the Church and

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<sup>2</sup> Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, London: 2000, p. 37.

secondly, more frequent testimonies that define Church membership in broader terms.<sup>4</sup>

Among the more restrictive statements falls that of St Cyprian of Carthage (200-258 A.D). In his letter '*On the Unity of the Catholic Church*' (251), written in direct response to the crisis which had arisen from the Decian persecution and the problem of the lapsed posed by the Donatists, Cyprian says,

Anyone who cuts themselves off from the Church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the Church, and anyone who leaves the Church of Christ behind cannot benefit from the rewards of Christ. Such people are strangers, outcasts, and enemies. You cannot have God as father unless you have the Church as mother. If any had been able to escape outside Noah's Ark, there might have been a way of escape for those who are outside the Church.<sup>5</sup>

In yet another statement of his on the baptism of heretics he says,

If the Baptism of public witness and of blood cannot profit a heretic unto salvation, because there is no salvation outside the Church, how much worthless is it for him, in secret places, in the caves of robbers, dipped in the contagion of adulterous water not merely not to have put off his former sins, but even to have added new and greater ones.<sup>6</sup>

Quite restrictive also was Origen's statement which he made in one of his *Homilies on Joshua* (c.A.D 249-251). Drawing the lesson of his sermon from the story of Rehab the harlot who hung a scarlet cord from her window (Josh.2:1-21), a sign which for Origen foreshadowed the salvation of Christ, he says,

If someone of that people wishes to be saved, let him come into this house, so that he may be able to obtain his salvation [...]. Let no one, then, be persuaded otherwise, nor let anyone deceive himself: outside

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. M.J. Mazza, *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus: Father Feeney Makes a Comeback*, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/answers/extrecl.htm> (accessed 23/07/09).

<sup>5</sup> St Cyprian cited by A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Oxford: 2001, p. 495.

<sup>6</sup> St Cyprian cited in Mazza, *Extra Ecclesiam*.

this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved. For if anyone go outside, he shall be guilty of his own death.<sup>7</sup>

Equally maintaining a hard stance on those who fell or found themselves outside the visible Church was the statement by St Fulgentius of Ruspe, who in his work, *'The Rule of Faith'* (c.A.D 523-526) says,

Hold most firmly and never doubt in the least that not only all pagans but also all Jews and all heretics and schismatics who end this present life outside the Catholic Church are about to go into the eternal fire that was prepared for the Devil and his angels.<sup>8</sup>

Though Amos Yong tries to argue that the emergence of the axiom: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* during the Patristic period should be understood more as a warning to schismatic or heretical Christians than to the unevangelised or adherents of other faiths,<sup>9</sup> the foregoing restrictive statements as well as of other writers falling in the same category, tend to betray Yong's defense. Fulgentius, in particular, leaves one with no doubt as to what he meant. For him, unless pagans and Jews were to convert, they stood no chance except facing the torments of hell fire. The same applies to Cyprian's allusion to the Ark, reading in-between the lines of this allusion which he makes shows that the unevangelised or adherents of other faiths appear to stand no chance of salvation at all. Though the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger tried to play down such implication from Cyprian's statement, the implication sticks. Made to comment on whether St Cyprian's statement that there is no salvation outside the Church was still true, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in January 1994 had cautioned on the need to understand such words in their proper historical context when he said,

We must remember that this expression was formulated by St Cyprian in the third century in a quite concrete situation. There were those who thought there were better Christians who were unhappy with the Church of bishops and separated themselves from her. In answer to that, Cyprian says: separation from the Church community

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<sup>7</sup> Origen cited in Mazza, *Extra Ecclesiam*.

<sup>8</sup> St Fulgentius of Ruspe cited in Mazza, *Extra Ecclesiam*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf., A. Yong, *Discerning Spirits*, p. 37.

is separating one from salvation. But he did not mean to lay down a theory on the eternal fate of all baptized and non-baptised persons.<sup>10</sup>

Running parallel to the restrictive attitude are those statements which speak of Church membership in broader terms. Writing around the year AD 150, the great Christian apologist Justin Martyr speaks of how one 'belongs' to the Church of Christ and specifically mentions the pagan philosophers: Socrates and Heraclitus when he says,

Christ is the logos of whom the whole race of men partake. Those who lived "with logos" are Christians, whether they were Greeks like Socrates and Heraclitus or barbarians like Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Mizael or Elijah [...].<sup>11</sup>

Known to have spoken also of Church membership in broader terms during the Patristic period is St Irenaeus. In his famous work *Against Heresies* written around the end of the second century he notes,

Christ came not only for those who believed from the time of Tiberius Caesar, nor did the Father provide only for those who are now, but for absolutely all men from the beginning, who according to their ability, feared and loved God and lived justly [...] and desired to see Christ and hear His voice.<sup>12</sup>

Yet another broad understanding of membership in the mysterious Body of Christ can be gleaned from the funeral oration of St Gregory of Nanzianzus which he delivered on the occasion of his father's death in 374 AD. Referring to him, Gregory said,

[...] Even before he was of our fold, he was ours. His character made him one of us. For, as many of our own are not with us, whose life alienates them from the common body, so, many of those without are on our side, whose character anticipates their faith, and need only the name of that which indeed they possess. My father was one of these, an alien shoot, but inclined by his life towards us. He was so

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<sup>10</sup> J. Ratzinger cited in Catholic World News (CWN) Feature Stories: The Future Pope Speaks, <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/features/index.afm?recnum=37855> (accessed 27/07/09).

<sup>11</sup> Justin Martyr cited in E.F. Osborn, *Justin Martyr*, Mohr Siebeck, 1973, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> St Irenaeus cited in Mazza, *Extra Ecclesiam*.

far advanced in self control, that he became at once most beloved and most modest, two qualities difficult to combine [...].<sup>13</sup>

Both the exclusivist and inclusivist attitudes appear to have existed side by side throughout the history of the Church running up to Vatican II (1963-65). Of worth to note on the restrictive side is the profession of faith by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), "There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one at all is saved."<sup>14</sup> Worth mentioning also is the Bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) by Pope Boniface VIII, part of which reads,

Urged by faith, we are obliged to believe and maintain that the Church is one, holy, Catholic and also apostolic. [...] outside of her there is neither salvation nor remission of sins, [...]. There had been at the time of the deluge only one ark of Noah, prefiguring one Church, which ark, having been finished to a single cubit had only one pilot and guide, i.e., Noah, and we read that outside of this ark, all that subsisted on the earth was destroyed [...]. Furthermore we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation that every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.<sup>15</sup>

Reflections on a broader understanding of the Church's membership appear to come later with Pope Pius IX (1846-1878). In his Allocution *Singulari Quadem* (Dec.9, 1854) he writes,

Not without sorrow we have learned that another error, no less destructive, has taken possession of some parts of the Catholic world, and has taken up its abode in the souls of many Catholics who think that one should have good hope of the eternal salvation of all those who have never lived in the Church of Christ. [...] it must be held by faith that outside the Apostolic Roman Church, no one can be saved [...]. But, just as the way of charity demands, let us pour forth continual prayers that all nations everywhere may be converted to Christ; and let us be devoted to the common salvation of men in

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<sup>13</sup> St Gregory of Nanzianus cited in Medieval Sourcebook: Gregory Nazianus: Oration 18: On the Death of His Father, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/gregnaz-fathr.html> (accessed 22/08/09).

<sup>14</sup> Fourth Lateran Council cited in *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extra\\_Ecclesiam\\_nulla\\_salus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extra_Ecclesiam_nulla_salus) (accessed 27/07/09).

<sup>15</sup> Pope Boniface VIII, **Unam Sanctam**, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Bon08/88unam.htm> (accessed 24/07/09).

proportion to our strength, 'for the hand of the Lord is not shortened' (Isa. 9.1) and the gifts of heavenly grace will not be wanting to those who sincerely wish and ask to be refreshed by this light.<sup>16</sup>

In another Encyclical of his *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore* (August 10, 1863), Pius IX expressed a similar sentiment when he wrote,

Here, too, our beloved sons and venerable brothers, it is again necessary to mention and censure a very grave error entrapping some Catholics who believe that it is possible to arrive at eternal salvation although living in error and alienated from the true faith and Catholic unity. Such belief is certainly opposed to Catholic teaching. There are, of course, those who are struggling with invincible ignorance about our most holy religion. Sincerely observing the natural law and its precepts inscribed by God on all hearts and ready to obey God, they live honest lives and are able to attain eternal life by the efficacious virtue of divine light and grace. Because God knows, searches and clearly understands the minds, hearts, thoughts, and nature of all, his supreme kindness and clemency do not permit anyone at all who is not guilty of deliberate sin to suffer eternal punishments.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Salvation from the perspective of Vatican II (1963-1965)***

While Vatican II adopted the same axiom: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* as reflected in the *Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium*, No.14, “[...] Hence they could not be saved who knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it,”<sup>18</sup> it was not without further qualification. The unevangelised yet seekers of God through the dictates of the conscience came to be acknowledged as meriting salvation also. *Lumen Gentium* spells out this well when it goes on to say,

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<sup>16</sup> Pope Pius IX, **Singulari Quadem**,  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extra\\_Ecclesiam\\_nulla\\_salus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extra_Ecclesiam_nulla_salus) (accessed 27/07/09).

<sup>17</sup> Pius IX, *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore*,  
<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9quanto.htm> (accessed 22/08/09).

<sup>18</sup> Dogmatic Constitution on the Church **Lumen Gentium** Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI (Nov.21, 1964),  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html). No. 14.

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience –those too may achieve eternal salvation.<sup>19</sup>

What this teaching from *Lumen Gentium* portrays is that inculpable ignorance by itself is not enough, it is not a means of salvation unless it is coupled by a search and readiness to obey God through a zealous keeping of the natural law and its precepts engraved in the hearts of all by God. If by no fault of the individual such invincible ignorance is not overcome, the spirit of *Lumen Gentium* is that it cannot prevent the saving grace that comes from Christ. Such a teaching is reiterated in another Vatican II document, *Ad Gentes*,

Although in ways known to himself, God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (Hebrews 11:6), the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelise all men (and women).<sup>20</sup>

## Church's relation to non-Catholic Christians

While holding firm to her teaching that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body, Vatican II recognizes the place of non-Catholic Christians or those who have come to be generally referred to as the 'separated brethren'. As reflected in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, *Unitatis Redintegration*, the Church teaches,

The children who are born into these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men (and women) who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized, are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect. The differences that exist in varying degrees between them and the Catholic

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<sup>19</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, No. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Decree **Ad Gentes** On the Mission Activity of the Church, No. 1, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_ad-gentes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html).

Church -whether in doctrine and sometimes in discipline, or concerning the structure of the Church -do indeed create many obstacles, sometimes serious ones, to full ecclesiastical communion. The ecumenical movement is striving to overcome these obstacles. But even in spite of them it remains true that all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ's body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.<sup>21</sup>

This was indeed a climb down from the spirit of defense and counter-attack which had been ignited most particularly by the Reformation (1516-1563)<sup>22</sup> and cemented by the Council of Trent (1545-1564). Trent, which was more of the Catholic response to Protestant Reformation, had gone through every single doctrine that the Protestants believed and declared that anybody who believed even in one of them was *anathema*. Having dealt a blow to Protestant theology, Trent had gone to define Catholic doctrines in much detail and declared that anybody who denied even one of the teachings was also *anathema*. Among the things which were declared unquestionable was the authority of the Pope, the practice of indulgencies, the veneration of Mary and the Saints as well as the use of Statues. Standing anathematized then by Trent were all non-Catholic Christians, both Protestants and Orthodox.<sup>23</sup> In opening, however, her windows to let fresh air blow in, the Church during Vatican II began to see and appreciate the value of these once anathematized Churches.

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<sup>21</sup> Decree on Ecumenism **Unitatis Redintegratio**,  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html).

<sup>22</sup> Reformation is the term for the religious movement which made its appearance in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, and which, while ostensibly aiming at an internal renewal of the Church, really led to a great revolt against it. It was ignited by Martin Luther's celebrated 95 theses in 1517. The first impulse to secession was a result of the promulgation by Leo X of an indulgence for contributions towards the building of the new St. Peter's at Rome. From Germany the movement spread to other European countries with other reformers following in the foot steps of Martin Luther or propounding their own new ideas and doctrines. Cf. T. McGonigle & J. Quigley, *A History of the Christian Tradition: From Reformation to the Present* (1996), M. Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, (1993), J. H. Merle D'Aubigne & H. White, *History of the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* (2007).

<sup>23</sup> Cf., M.A. Collins, *Ecumenism and the Council of Trent*,  
<http://www.behindthebadge.net/apologetics/discuss132.html> (accessed 28/07/09).

Expressing further her perception of these Churches, the Church in the *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes* says,

In addition, the Catholic Church gladly holds in high esteem the things which other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities have done or are doing cooperatively by way of achieving the same goal. At the same time, she is convinced that she can be abundantly and variously helped by the world in the matter of preparing the ground for the Gospel. This help she gains from the talents and industry of individuals and from human society as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Church's relation to non-Christian religions**

The encounter and awareness of the existence and dynamism of numerous civilizations, cultures and religious traditions which have since existed and developed outside the influence of Christianity posed a serious challenge that defied mere condemnation of them. Thus even before Vatican II, theologians in the likes of Danielou, Yves Congar and others had already begun debating on the essence of these non-Christian religions and to find out what providential role they have in God's plan of salvation of the people concerned. The ideas, however, became crystallized in the Vatican II documents *Nostra Aetate* as well as *Ad Gentes*.

In *Nostra Aetate*, the Church for the first time began to officially acknowledge the perception of a hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history among the non-Christian religions. The existence of this Supreme Being or Father was understood as permeating the adherents' lives in a profound religious way. Acknowledging the quest in these religions for answers to the unresolved riddles of human condition that often lead to God, the Council Fathers said,

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer [...] by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. [...] Again, Bud-

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<sup>24</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World **Gaudium et Spes** Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI (Dec.7, 1965), [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

dhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites.<sup>25</sup>

Moving on to define the Church's position in relation to these God-seeking non-Christian religions and setting the pace for the encounter with these religions the Council Fathers said,

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (and women).[...] The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.<sup>26</sup>

The urge by the Council Fathers for all Christians to recognize, preserve and promote the good things as well as the social-cultural values found in the non-Christian religions was reiterated in *Ad Gentes*. In it, the Council Fathers called upon all Christians to bear more fruitful witness to Christ by the example of their lives and by witness of the Word as they interact with the adherents of those other religions as well as to reverently uphold the *semina verbi* (seeds of the Word) present in these religions. As reflected in the section on *Christian Witness*, the Council Fathers in reference to all the children of the Church said,

In order that they may be able to bear more fruitful witness to Christ, let them be joined to those men by esteem and love; let them ac-

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<sup>25</sup> Decree on the Relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* Proclaimed by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI (Oct.28, 1965), No.2, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html).

<sup>26</sup> *Nostra Aetate*, No. 2.

knowledge themselves to be members of the group of men among whom they live; let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows.<sup>27</sup>

## Theological Input

The position of the Council Fathers towards non-Christian religions finds strong support among some of the Church's renowned theologians, for example, Karl Rahner, John Paul II and others. Karl Rahner (1904-1984) is famously known for coming up with a theology of the 'Anonymous Christian'. Cheryl Barber suggests that it is important to understand first the basis of Rahner's ideas if one is to understand how he arrives at the concept of 'anonymous Christian'. In line with this suggestion, Barber notes that Rahner owes much influence from Immanuel Kant, Heidegger and Joseph Marechal, hence, his ideas emanated from a vision of the world being a profound area of God's self-communication. This too was coupled by the Ignatian way of thinking since he was Jesuit.<sup>28</sup>

In defining what he meant by 'anonymous Christian', Rahner says,

We prefer the terminology according to which that a man is called an 'anonymous Christian' who on the one hand has de facto accepted of his freedom this gracious self-offering on God's part through faith, hope, and love, while on the other he is absolutely not yet a Christian at the social level (through baptism and membership of the Church) or in the sense of having consciously objectified his Christianity to himself in his own mind (by explicit Christian faith resulting from having hearkened to the explicit message). We might therefore, put it as follows: the 'anonymous Christian' in our sense of the term is the pagan after the beginning of the Christian mission, who lives in the state of Christ's grace through faith, hope, and love, yet who has no

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<sup>27</sup> *Ad Gentes*, No. 11.

<sup>28</sup> C. Barber, *The Anonymous Christian and what it means according to Karl Rahner*, <http://hubpages.com/hub/The-Anonymous-Christian> (accessed 28/07/09).

explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup>

While blanketing almost everyone under the banner of Christ's name, Rahner acknowledges that there is more than one way to reach God. For Rahner, in other words, it is not necessary to be declared Christian to work your way to God because it is not a prerequisite to receiving God's grace. Super-natural salvation is guaranteed to those who live in God's grace without the acknowledged title of Christian.<sup>30</sup> His anonymous Christian theology therefore is more inclusivist than exclusivist.

Giving some popularity to Rahner's claim that any person who acts according to natural law and is blessed by God's grace is an anonymous Christian even if he/she does not wish to admit it, was the gesture made by the late Pope John Paul II when he put flowers on the memorial place of Mahatma Gandhi at Rāj Ghāt, New Delhi and declared that followers of other religions can be 'saved by Christ' without being converted.<sup>31</sup> By the witness of his life, Gandhi indeed lived what one may call a true Christian life though he would never call himself a Christian. Asked by the missionary E. Stanley Jones on why he would not become a follower of Christ since he oft quoted the words of Christ, Gandhi is said to have replied, "Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ."<sup>32</sup> Such words found echo in his speech to Women Missionaries on 28 July 1925,

[...] although I am myself not a Christian, as an humble student of the Bible, who approaches it with faith and reverence, I wish respectfully to place before you the essence of the Sermon on the Mount [...] There are thousands of men and women today who, though they may not have heard about the Bible or Jesus have more faith and are more god fearing than Christians who know the Bible and who talk of its Ten Commandments.<sup>33</sup>

Coming to the missionary encounter with new lands, Karl Rahner says, "The Western World, during its wanderings into strange lands while

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<sup>29</sup> Karl Rahner cited in Barber, *Anonymous Christian*.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Barber, *Anonymous Christian*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Barber, *Anonymous Christian*.

<sup>32</sup> M. Gandhi cited in D. Samuel, *Mahatma Gandhi and Christianity*, <http://in.christiantoday.com/article/dir/print.htm?id=2837> (accessed 28/07/09).

<sup>33</sup> Gandhi cited in Samuel, *Mahatma Gandhi*.

carrying Christ's message, always encounters a world in which Christ's grace has long been at work even though not called by its own name."<sup>34</sup> What Rahner demonstrates here is that wherever one travels, one encounters anonymous Christians as there are always men and women enlightened by the light of God's grace which God denies no man or woman.

While Karl Rahner's anonymous Christian theology has some merits in that there are indeed many people who live a good life or who are Christ-like in their day to day life yet do not worship Jesus as Christians do and that to be near God does not necessarily require one to be declared Christian as a prerequisite, the theory, however, leaves some untied loose ends. In an interview with the Italian journalist Vittorio Messori, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger pointed to some of these loose ends when he said,

Your second question: Are not all people anonymous Christians? Frankly, I consider that a rather unfortunate turn of phrase. A Muslim could just as easily say we were all anonymous Muslims, and so on. It is true that Christianity spiritually touches all the other great religions, that the great religious currents, like the great cultural ones, somehow approach each other from within. But to say that because of that everyone is really already a Christian, whether he knows it or not, wants to be or not, seems to me fantastic. That is more what I would call a kind of spiritual imperialism.<sup>35</sup>

A score in favour of Karl Rahner can, however, still be made if a consideration is made that he was one of the most influential theologians during the Vatican II era. In coining the term, 'anonymous Christian', he probably intended to suggest that the Council Fathers and the generality of Christians should give the faithful adherents of non-Christians the same status in their reflections on the People of God as they give to their fellow Christians. This would indeed have been an advanced step in the right direction for it concurs also with Paul's theology of humanity's basic equality before God reflected in the previous Chapter.

Another theologian who gave impetus to the Church's renewed positive attitude towards non-Christian religions was John Paul II. Concurring with Vatican II, John Paul II notes that there are in all religions

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<sup>34</sup> Rahner cited in Barber, *Anonymous Christian*.

<sup>35</sup> Ratzinger cited in Catholic World News (CWN).

the seeds of the Word because of the Holy Spirit's presence in these religions. Identifying this Holy Spirit as the same Spirit who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, he says,

He (the Spirit) is therefore not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history the peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium* 16) and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

While Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium*, No. 62, affirmed that the unique mediation of Christ the Redeemer in salvation history does not exclude but rather gives rise to a 'manifold cooperation', especially that of Mary, which is but a sharing in this one source, John Paul II, as noted by Gerard Mannion, took a significant step beyond the Council. He extended this 'manifold cooperation' to non-Christian religions, recognizing thereby in them, "participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees" though "they acquire meaning and value only from Christ's own mediation [...]."<sup>37</sup> Taking also a step beyond Vatican II, John Paul II argued, "[...] the Holy Spirit works effectively even outside the visible structure of the Church, making use of these *semina verbi*, that constitute a kind of common soteriological root present in all religions."<sup>38</sup> While indeed Vatican II in *Ad Gentes*, No.11 recognizes the presence of *semina verbi* in non-Christian religions, it does not affirm that 'all religions' possess a 'common soteriological root' as John Paul II does. While the general perception is normally to see a common soteriological root between Christianity and Judaism with which Christianity is intrinsically connected, John Paul II went beyond this common perception.

From John Paul's teaching that the Holy Spirit is "at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning" and that "the Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individual but also society

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<sup>36</sup> John Paul II cited in G. Mannion, *The Vision of John Paul II*, Minnesota: 2008, p. 251.

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II cited in Mannion, *Vision of*, p. 251.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, New York: 1994, p.81.

and history, peoples, cultures and religions,”<sup>39</sup> one can see a reinforcement of Vatican II’s acknowledgement that non-Christian religions can function as ‘ways of salvation’ to their adherents (*Lumen Gentium*, No.16). Such a teaching, in other words, acknowledges that these non-Christians religions constitute the serious searchings of their adherents for the deity due to the Spirit who was actively present; hence, they are to be respected as the normal divinely-given means of salvation willed by God for the salvation of his people (*Nostra Aetate*, No.2). What this teaching shows is that the adherents of non-Christian religions are saved through their religious traditions and not in spite of them.

While the teaching of Vatican II and the positive contributions of John Paul II surely deserve every applause for the acknowledgement and defense they do to the existence of providential values in non-Christian religions, there lurks in these contributions, according to G. Mannion, the danger of subordinating the Spirit and his activity in history to Christ and his work.<sup>40</sup> While there is nothing like a separate and autonomous ‘economy’ of the Spirit which can be thought of apart from that of Christ, Mannion argues that the Spirit and his work must not be made to look dependent upon or subordinate to Christ and his work. Using the metaphor of St Irenaeus that the Son and the Spirit are the ‘two hands’ of God in the world, he argues,

While there is only one economy of salvation of God the Father, the two divine hands, i.e. the Son and the Spirit, who carry it out –in *perichoresis* (eternal circumincession) with each other and with the Father do not do so in the same place, at the same time, in the same manner, on the same persons.<sup>41</sup>

Arguing from the basis of this insubordinate nature of the Spirit gives one leverage to attribute to non-Christian religions a more positive and intrinsic value and refer to them as ‘ways of salvation’ since the Spirit was functioning salvifically in them. In no way would this contradict the uniqueness and universality of Christ or the role of the Church as universal sacrament of salvation.

While Karl Rahner, John Paul II and Vatican II generally, acknowledge that God can be encountered and his grace manifested in

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<sup>39</sup> John Paul II cited in Mannion, *Vision of*, p. 253.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Mannion, *Vision of*, p. 255.

<sup>41</sup> Mannion, *Vision of*, p. 255.

various ways through diverse religions, making it thus possible for non-Christian religions to function also as 'ways of salvation' to their adherents, it is worth to note that such an inclusivist theology that they advance differs from a similar yet different pluralistic theology advocated by John Hick.

Building his argument on the premise that the world religions constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to God or an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied visions of it, Hick arrived at a conclusion that no religious tradition holds the absolute truth about the Real. To reach such a conclusion he began by resolving a dilemma as to why religions appear diverse and contradictory yet they experience the same Reality. In the attempt to resolve it, he borrowed Immanuel Kant's idea on the distinction between 'an entity as it is in itself and as it appears in perception'. Applying then this distinction to religious phenomena, Hick proposed a distinction between the Real *an sich* (as it actually exists) and the Real as perceived and experienced by individuals in a particular tradition. From this he was then able to conclude that the reason individual religious traditions have conflicting conceptions of the Real is that none has direct access to it. For him, all perception of the Real is mediated through a unique religious tradition which acts as a "conceptual lens" of looking at that Reality.<sup>42</sup> For Hick, religious persons' characterization of the Real, in other words, depends upon the interpretive concepts they use and they can only be able to describe how the Real appears to them. To reinforce his argument that no religious tradition holds the absolute truth about the Real, Hick had to employ the famous story of the blind men and the elephant:

An elephant was brought to a group of blind men who had never encountered such an animal before. One felt a leg and reported that an elephant is a great living pillar. Another felt the trunk and reported that an elephant is a great snake. Another felt a tusk and reported that an elephant is like a plough-share. [...] Of course they were all true, but each re-

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<sup>42</sup> K.E. Johnson, John Hick's Pluralistic Hypothesis and the Problem of the Conflicting Truth-Claims, <http://www.leaderu.com/wri/articles/hick.html>. (accessed 23/05/10).

ferring only to one aspect of the total reality and all expressed in imperfect analogies.<sup>43</sup>

In Hick's eyes, each religious tradition is like one of these blind men who, suffering from a Kantian blindness, is unable to see the 'elephant' as it really is. While, however, he would not view religious phenomena such as Yahweh, the Christian Trinity, Shiva and others as mere hallucinations but rather as 'authentic manifestations' of the Real, he did not believe that these individual conceptions of the Real are 'objective existent personal individuals'.

Looking at John Hick's pluralistic position one can hardly run away from its attractiveness. On the surface of it, it tends to accord so well with Vatican II's attempt to be open and accepting of other persons without being too judgemental. Quite powerful also is the pluralistic view that not only can God be encountered through other world religions but that these religions can be 'ways of salvation' to their adherents, helping them thus to discover the true God and also lead holy and upright lives. In examining the theory deeper one realizes, however, that it is littered with loopholes. Among other things, Hick's contention that religious persons' truth-claims are subjective because they depend on the 'conceptual lens' each religious tradition uses and that they describe only how the Real appears and not the Real *an sich* leads inevitably not only to skepticism but also to atheism. As observed by Michael Peterson and others:

Unless we speak about the Ultimate, not only cannot we know anything about the real elephant (using Hick's analogy), we cannot even be sure that there is an elephant. [...] If we have no clear clear concept of God, if we are left with nothing to be said about God or the Ultimate as it is in itself, our religious belief more closely approximates unbelief and becomes relatively indistinguishable from atheism.<sup>44</sup>

Though Hick argues that we have to postulate the existence of the noumenal Reality, such a postulation appears baseless unless we can say something about that Reality itself. Using his analogy of the blind men and the elephant, for them to postulate that what they felt was really an elephant presupposes that they should have known what an elephant

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<sup>43</sup> J. Hick cited in M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach and D. Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: 1991, p. 224.

<sup>44</sup> M. Peterson et al, *Reason and Religious Belief*, pp. 226-227.

was. In the same way, we are not completely blind when it comes to knowledge about God and we can actually employ some consistent set of predicates to describe the properties that God has and these form the content about which we can make some truth-claims. The possession of these truth-claims empowers us to validly judge other claims we find inconsistent with what we know of God and what goes against the common good of humanity generally. Hick appears blinded to the fact that religion has often been the cause of so much bloodshed in the world as a result of those who hold that their religion allows them to kill infidels. Adopting Hick's pluralistic position would imply letting such people pursue laager mentality religious-politics and so do whatever they want with anyone who falls outside of their laager. We cannot just fold our hands and zip our mouths and let those who, for example, follow the spirit of jihad<sup>45</sup> in its corrupted sense of 'holy war' satisfy the savagery cravings of their hearts.

Last but not least, his use of the analogy of the blindmen and the elephant tends to undermine his own argument. The story is narrated from the viewpoint of a person who is not blind and can view the entire scene and in applying it to world religions, Hick can be compared to the storyteller in this parable. No wonder then that he has often been criticized for being guided by what has often been labelled as the myth of neutral observer.

## African Synod

What Vatican II said on the encounter with non-Christian religions that there should be dialogue and collaboration with members of these relig-

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<sup>45</sup> The term *jihad* has often been interpreted as "holy war". Muslim authors, however, tend to reject such an approach stressing the non-militant connotations of the word. The term actually stems from the Arabic root word J-H-D, which means "strive." In the Qur'an jihad is presented as a system of checks and balances: "And did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief; but Allah is full of Bounty to all the worlds" –Qur'an 2:251. According to Muslim authors, Jihad is essentially an effort to practice religion in the face of oppression and persecution. Such an effort may be in the form of fighting the evil in one's own heart, or in standing up to a dictator. Military effort is included as an option, but as a last resort and not "to spread Islam by the sword" as generally believed by many. Cf. *What is Jihad*, <http://islam.about.com/od/jihad/f/jihad.htm>. (accessed 26/05/10).

ions got an endorsement also from the African Synod (1984) as was reflected already in chapter one. Here possibly it should just be noted that the African Synod laments the slow-to-fall erected wall of prejudice that still exists between those who got carried away by missionary catechesis that they no longer see anything positive in what was their own and those who remained faithful to their religious systems. The polemics that it is stupid to be an adherent of African Traditional Religion still hangs on in much of the Christian catechesis in Africa today for ATR is continuously still being perceived as the citadel of Satan.

### ***The Church's unique role in the face of other religions***

Conceding that other religions are also divinely ordained 'ways of salvation' had far reaching implications that touched the core of the Church's self understanding, the meaning and goal of her missionary outreach.<sup>46</sup> The need arose to explain Christianity's uniqueness as God's final salvific self-revelation. Recalling also the great commission (Mt.28:19-20), the Church had to ask itself what it had to do in order not to forfeit the mission of its Redeemer given the social reality that numerous civilizations, cultures and religious traditions had developed outside the influence of Christianity yet at the same time appearing well in accord with God's salvation for their adherents.

To begin with the Church's missionary outreach; the primary concern of Vatican II, facing the Third World in a post-colonial era, was to show maximum respect for humanity's invincible cultural diversity hence, the emphasis on the return to the primordial and unique principle of incarnation.<sup>47</sup> Renewing herself therefore in the spirit of the Early Church which also, after the Master, had incarnated into the various cultures of the time, the Church during Vatican II saw the need to enter into communion with the different cultural and religious traditions which had developed outside the influence of Christianity so as to enrich both herself and the cultures too. The Church, according to the Council Fathers,

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<sup>46</sup> Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 130.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 148.

[...] in order to be able to offer all of them the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, must implant herself into these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to certain social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He dwelt.<sup>48</sup>

Just as Christ through the incarnation self-emptied himself, thereby disclaiming his divinity and humbling himself so that he might be one of us (Philippians 2:6-8), the Church in the spirit of Vatican II is called upon to,

[...] go out of herself, emptying herself of power, foreign riches and alien accretions; thus, opening herself to modes of existence that were not hers previously; and humbling herself: in order to assume, experience and express new life in the physical and cultural flesh of other people among whom she does not yet exist indigenously.<sup>49</sup>

In as much as Christ gave himself over and felt himself at home in a mode of existence that was not his previously in Nazareth, so too the Church, in other words, is called upon to make herself completely at home among various cultures. What gives the Church leverage to feel at home anywhere is that she is not indissolubly tied to any race, particular way of life –ancient or modern, or to any political, economic or social system.<sup>50</sup>

The incarnational principle was quite crucial also to the Council Fathers when it came to defining the Church's unique role in the face of these other religions. Just as Christ the Sacrament of God self-donated himself for the love of the world so also the Church which is the Sacrament of Christ (*Ad Gentes*, No.1) is supposed to manifest in tangible ways the hidden but victorious and super abounding grace of God to other peoples. In doing so the Church would thus be able to define herself as an instrument of the incarnational mission to the nations. Beautifully capturing what was in the mind of the Council Fathers, E. Hillman elaborates this unique role of the Church when he says,

Indeed, this is why the Church exists: to body-forth herself in the sight of each people, so that all may see what she is, and who she is, and who they themselves are: God's beloved people, reunited in a

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<sup>48</sup> *Ad Gentes*, No. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 149.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 42.

second Adam's fellowship, which transcends all ethnic, cultural, regional, national, political or economic boundaries.<sup>51</sup>

From this analysis of the Church's assigned role in the face of other religions, it stands out clearly that the action of God in history was taken by the Council Fathers as the paradigm of the Church's action. In executing this unique role, however, the Church needs to constantly draw lessons from the history of Israel. While indeed God did not call every nation in a special way by which Israel was called, it does not mean that God was neglecting other nations in favour of Israel alone. In the book of Amos, we find the prophet correcting a misunderstanding which was developing among the Israelites by reminding them that the distant peoples were just as much objects of Yahweh's solicitude as they themselves:

"Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?" says the Lord. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir? Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom [...]" (Amos 9:7-8).

The prophet did not stop at that, he reminded them also that God was so concerned with what these foreign nations were doing to one another in as much as He was concerned with Judah and Israel (Amos 1-2).

Though Israel proved oft forgetful of this, entangling herself thus in ethnocentrism, her special election was a call to service to the rest of humanity. This call to service is quite loud especially in the 'Songs of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh' captured in Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah (Is.42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:13-53:12). Commenting on these 'servant songs' P. Kalilombe says,

In these texts the meaning of Israel's calling, history, suffering, and final triumph is of world-wide validity: Israel lives, suffers, dies and rises again, as an instrument of Yahweh's salvific designs for the whole world.<sup>52</sup>

What, however, should be noted with Kalilombe's interpretation of these texts is that it is one among many.<sup>53</sup> What he repeats here is the tradi-

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<sup>51</sup> Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 149.

<sup>52</sup> Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 140.

<sup>53</sup> The question as to whether the prophet is speaking about some actual entity such as Israel, the exiles, the suffering Jews or an actual person such as himself, a contempo-

tional Christian interpretation which has been in existence from the earliest Church onwards. Such an interpretation, observes J. Alberto Soggin, was particularly acceptable among Jewish scholars and is based on Isaiah 49:2-5 where the servant is understood as 'Israel'. Soggin goes further to point out that the interpretation already existed in the *LXX* and the *Targum*, thus may not be said to be based on the text only but also on a very ancient exegetical tradition.<sup>54</sup>

Looking at the special election of Israel, one finds that the history of salvation relates to a diversity of cultures and to an interaction between them. Thus even though other nations were not racially or physically related to Israel, in a sense they were all brought into association with her. Israel, as envisioned by the prophet, was to be a light to enlighten the nations and make them realize their God-given destiny and not only proselytes were to be joyful in God's house (Is.56:1-8) but all nations were to walk in Zion's light, bringing with them their wealth into a world-wide commonwealth of the redeemed,

[...] And all nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. [...] the wealth of nations shall come to you [...]. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord [...] (Is.60:1-16).

Having assumed for herself the name 'New Israel' or the 'New People of God', the Church in fulfilling what is expected of her namely: to body-forth herself in the sight of each people, should look up to Israel the prototype example. Further identifying herself also as the 'universal sacrament of salvation' (*Ad Gentes*, No.1) and the 'light of nations' (*Lumen Gentium*, No.1), the Church is supposed to 'light' to 'leaven' and to 'salt' the earth, functions symbolically echoed in the New Testament (Mt.5:13-16; Philippians 2:14-16) and which assure the world that God is in the midst of his people.

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rary or some future person or whether he is speaking of an ideal entity or person has been much the field of scholarly speculation. One line of thought focuses on the great figures in Israel's history who passed through serious trials, from Moses to Jehoiachin or later, Zerubbabel. Others, for example, I.V. Engnell, point to the story's adaptation from the ritual of the akitu festival, the Babylonian day of expiation celebrated during the New Year festival whereby the monarch vicariously took on himself the guilt of his people, sometimes even to the point of suffering death. Cf. J.A. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1989); John Hayes, *Introduction to the Bible* (1971).

<sup>54</sup> J.A. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Kentucky: 1989, p. 369.

By looking at the Church and hearing its prophetic utterances, so remarks P. Kalilombe, “the rest of the world is challenged by the judgement that, like light, reveals the dross and the good metal, and that like fire, burns the dross and refines the precious metal.”<sup>55</sup> What this goes to mean deeply for the Church is that while recruiting new members and bringing back the lost is still necessary, more focus needs to be put on the authenticity and efficacy of her witness in the world.

Having assumed, as we saw, the name ‘New Israel’ or the ‘New People of God’, the Church inevitably inherited also that feeling of being a privileged people more like Israel. What this means is that she should guard against the danger that stalked Israel in its history. Were it not for the prophets who constantly reminded Israel of God’s solicitude for other nations as well, Israel was often a victim of an exclusivist ghetto-mentality. The history of the Church itself shows how close she has often been to this mentality also but there is now every reason and opportunity to outgrow it so that it would not be repeated in the future.

## **Conclusion**

From a rather vague *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* position characterizing her early history, the Church during Vatican II moved to an open admission that salvation was possible even outside the visible institutional Christian Church. The stance she had taken towards the ‘separated brethren’ following the Reformation was softened as recognition was made that members of these other Churches were actually members also of Christ’s Body hence, deserved respect and acceptance.

Desisting also from a heavy-handed approach to what were once perceived as ‘pagan practices’, the Council Fathers redefined both the Church’s relation and approach to non-Christian religions when they declared that the Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions but rather looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life and mandated a return to the incarnational principle of evangelization. Since she is not tied indissolubly to any race or particular way of life, the Church is called upon to enter into communion with all cultures so as to enrich both herself and the cultures themselves. Being the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ and a ‘light of the nations’ her role is to ‘leaven’, to ‘salt’ and to ‘enlighten’ the earth, assur-

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<sup>55</sup> Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 141.

ing the world that God is in the midst of his people. The following chapter is an attempt to put into action more concretely the teachings of Vatican II for it seeks to reverently lay bare the 'seeds of the Word' that lie hidden in the funeral practices of the Shona.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Salvific values in Shona funeral rites**

#### ***Introduction***

At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything there is (Heb 1.1).

The above passage from the letter to the Hebrews helps sum up the focal point of this chapter as well that of the whole thesis. It is hinged upon the conviction that God has ever been present among his Chosen People in the same way as he has been present to all peoples, cultures and religious tendencies of the world though in different ways. Since his Spirit has ever been actively present, it is possible thus to assume that there are a lot of good and valid elements in the cultures of humankind and these positive elements, in the spirit of Vatican II, must be worthy of respect, preservation and integration into Christianity since they are the result of God's activity among his created people.

The aim of this chapter therefore is to examine the providential values in Shona funerary customs upon which Christianity, when it first encountered Shona peoples, was supposed to be built on. Surely, in every culture of a people, there lie providential values which have stood the test of time and these stand as indicators of where an engrafting work can be carried out. Apart from providing the platform from which to work on, such values could enrich the understanding of some teachings and symbols in the universal Church. To fulfil the aim of this chapter, my objectives are to begin with general notions on culture dynamics, to provide a brief overview of each funeral rite and to examine the providential values which can be drawn from each of these rites.

#### ***General notions on culture dynamics***

When one begins to reflect on culture, a whole gamut of complex elements comes to mind which may thus lead to a variety of possible definitions. Since, however, the complexity of defining culture is not the pri-

mary matter in this chapter, I shall make use of one of the most celebrated definitions by Sir Edward Tylor who defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”<sup>1</sup> What this working definition of culture helps show is that culture is an integrated system composed of functionally organized elements that unite into larger and larger units and finally into a single whole. The units constitute as it were a kind of living organism with a ‘soul’.<sup>2</sup> It helps also show that culture belongs to the concept of humanness itself for it is subject to human society.

While individuals of a society transmit, learn and acquire culture, it is a phenomenon capable of development and change. Every culture is subject to constant change because the individuals of a society, the very architects of culture itself are, as Louis J. Luzbetak observes, “constantly modifying their cultural plans, improving and adjusting their ways to the whims and demands of their physical, social and ideational environment.”<sup>3</sup>

When talking of cultural change, it is worth bearing in mind that it is not so much the observable external features say of dress, dances, funeral or religious rites that really matter, what is key is rather the ideas of these phenomena. In cultural change, the socially acquired or learned set of ideas is the one that does change because what we call ‘culture’ as such exists in the mind and not on streets or places of worship. Cultural change therefore, as is evidently clear, means the propagation of new ideas. Cultural change, as rightly attested by L.J. Luzbetak, takes place according to psychological laws. As he goes on to affirm, it is so much the laws of thinking, feeling, evaluating; how thoughts, attitudes and goals change, how they fuse, how they grow and diminish or even how they may eventually disappear that are involved in cultural change.<sup>4</sup>

While all cultures do change, it is a known fact that some cultures may change more rapidly and thoroughly than others. As the process of cultural change takes place, new elements are constantly being

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<sup>1</sup> E. Tylor cited by A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, London: 1988, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. L.J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, Illinois: 1963, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> Luzbetak, *Church and Cultures*, p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Luzbetak, *Church and Cultures*, p. 196.

added to while older elements are constantly being lost, substituted or fused. A brief look at each of the ways in which change occurs helps shade more light on how traditional elements of any culture may stand the risk of being swept away by new currents or survive such currents.

## **Substitution**

Substitution in the context of cultural change should be understood as the dislodging of traditional elements by new ones. It may be partial or total displacement of the given elements. Partial displacement occurs as a result of the fact that innovations as a rule of life are unable to fulfil all the functions of the corresponding traditional pattern. The use of clear beer or chibuku (opaque beer) for ritual purposes in town settings, for example, can hardly be said to fulfil the place that traditional home-made beer holds in traditional rites of the Shona. Even the holding of such rituals in town settings itself cannot be said to replace completely the importance placed on them when they are held at the traditional rural homestead. In some cases, however, it may occur that the novelty satisfies adequately the traditional pattern and when that occurs, the old is completely dislodged by the new.

## **Loss**

Loss is to be understood as the dislodging of the traditional pattern without at the same time providing a substitute. At the funeral of traditional Shona people, for example, it was customary to shut away the children in a hut or granary for fear that the sight of the corpse would make them blind. With the passage of time, however, such a custom has since been lost. Young children, especially if they are the offspring of the deceased person, are actually encouraged to look at the dead parent so that in the future they would not bother anyone by asking, 'Where is my mum or dad?'

## Incrementation

Incrementation hereby refers to the introduction of additional elements into a culture without corresponding displacement. Due to intermarriages among various Shona tribes and even intermarriage with the people outside the Shona group, it can be noted that burial customs of almost every Shona tribe have tended to accommodate certain customs initially foreign to it. The mourning ritual, for example, among the Manyika has now come to accommodate the place of a *sahwira* (ritual friend) prevalent among the Zezuru people.<sup>5</sup> The role of the *sahwira* is to relieve the tension at the funeral by making fun of the immediate relatives of the deceased or imitating what the deceased person used to do or wear. For a time people are as it were drawn from the intense pain of loss as they break into laughter.

## Fusion

Fusion in cultural change refers to the amalgamation of an innovation with an analogous traditional pattern. The custom, for example, among the traditional Shona of throwing a handful of soil into the grave by close relatives of the deceased to cast away evil and misfortune was fused with the Christian understanding of 'dust unto dust'. Nowadays the custom continues as a way of implying 'I have buried you' hence no misfortune is expected, as well as a way of bidding farewell.

## Persistence

While we have observed that cultures do change, it is important to keep in mind that cultures have a double tendency; there is also that tendency to persist. Individuals of a society tend to retain certain socially acquired or learned ideas in their original form while other ideas, as we have seen already, are given up in favour of new ones. Persistence in cultural dynamics can be viewed at from various angles. L.J. Luzbetak suggests four

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Bourdillon alludes to the idea that this phenomenon of a *Sahwira* appears also not to have its origins among the Zezuru themselves but rather a possible result of Malawian influence. Such an allusion is quite probable given the fact that a number of Malawian people have come to settle among the Zezuru people as migrant workers. Cf. M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples*, (1998).

possible ways of looking at persistence and these are: general persistence, sectional persistence, token/partial persistence and survivals.<sup>6</sup>

### **(i) General persistence**

Such a form of persistence is found whenever members of a given society are intent upon limiting or resisting change in a wide area of life. To ensure that no radical reforms are accommodated, positive effort is made to inculcate in the young a dislike of radical changes. A case can be recalled during early colonial times when Shona elders were reluctant to let their children enrol in schools which had been opened by the Whites.<sup>7</sup> The Shona feared that the schools would make their children lose the sense of their cultural values hence such a move had to be resisted in every way.

### **(ii) Sectional persistence**

While some elements in a given culture are subject to change, there are certain aspects which one may call the 'hard' parts of the way of life which are particularly resistant to change. The need to wash the corpse, for example, in preparation for burial has stood the test of time. Whether it is the close relatives of the deceased or modern day funeral companies who are taking care of the corpse, the custom of seeing to it that the corpse has been washed is never overlooked. In fact, most of what one may regard as the seeds of the Word in any particular given culture falls under those so called 'hard' parts of the way of life which are resistant to change.

### **(iii) Token/ partial persistence**

This kind of persistence is a special form of sectional persistence in that a custom is carried out with reduced frequency or only in restricted situations. One example in Shona customs is the burial of infants near the river or swampy areas.<sup>8</sup> Another example could be the screening of a

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Luzbetak, *Church and Cultures*, p. 198.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Zvobgo, *Christian Missions*, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> From the investigations of Herbert Aschwanden among the Karanga people, infants who die before teething, aborted or premature children are buried in the river bed so that they can play with water which attracts rain. They used to play in water (amniotic fluid) so if one does not bury them in 'the same' place, a drought threatens also. If they are buried away from water, so it is believed, they suffer from dryness and they will in-

chief's corpse from the eyes of mourners or shrouding it in the skin of a black ox.

#### **(iv) Survivals**

Survivals in the context of cultural change, refers to those cultural traits which have with the passage of time changed their function and have at the end remained mere conventions or formalities. One could cite, for example, the Shona custom of leaving a dish, calabash or cup and a small port over the grave to ease the deceased's passage to a new environment. Nowadays no one really believes that the dead will need these utensils but they just leave them as a formality.

To sum up on general notions, the foregoing analysis has brought to light that like any living organism, cultures have a double tendency, the tendency to persist as well as the tendency to change. Persistence and change are thus two sides of the same coin or in other words, the positive and negative aspects of culture dynamics. Having made these preliminary remarks the following section moves on to look in depth at Shona funerary rites, fishing out elements which have stood the test of time and on which an engrafting work can be done in the process of inculturation. For an easier analysis, I will break the rites into three main categories; (i) the pre-burial rites, (ii) the burial rites and (iii) the post-burial rites.

#### ***Pre-burial rites***

What is undeniable with most Shona rituals in general is that the details of those rites tend to differ from area to area. That is precisely what we find when we look at Shona funerary rituals, they tend to vary even for different clans within a given locality. Be that as it may, it is possible to trace out a general structure of the rituals which is common to most Shona peoples. A detailed account of these funeral rites can be gleaned from the works by M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples* (1998), H. Aschwanzen, *Symbols of Death* (1987), M. Gelfand, *The Spiritual Beliefs of*

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evitably cause the same to happen in nature symbolically. Thus the manner in which they are buried shows the attempt to avert the impending disaster. Cf. H. Aschwanzen, *Symbols of Death*, (1987).

*the Shona* (1977) and other works which touch on Shona culture. What I touch here are only key areas to this research.

### **Kupeta Ritual**

It has been and it is still in some localities a custom among the Shona to move someone who is perceived to be nearing death to some place outside of his homestead. The place could be his/her son's or son-in-law's homestead or some close relative, away from the noise of children and others in the main village. Only very close relatives are informed of his/her whereabouts and they are the only ones who have access to the hut where he/she will be agonizing in pain. If there is anything the dying person would want to disclose this is the opportune time when such revelations are said. He/she may have nothing to disclose but may simply want to give some important message to someone close so that when he/she is gone all will be in order in his/her homestead.

The idea behind this isolation, as cited by Berry Muchemwa, is that death is believed to be a dangerous and infectious thing. Chances are that the illness was a result of witchcraft, spiritual disapproval of the ancestors or an avenging spirit hence, the danger of death, so it is believed, is removed by isolating the sick person from his homestead.<sup>9</sup> With the advent of hospitals and clinics, however, this custom is slowly fading out since most people would not want to be blamed for not caring enough by failing to send their sick relative to a hospital or clinic. The presence of mortuaries also at these institutions is another push factor to send someone to a clinic or hospital just in case they would be denied access to the mortuary if the person were to die at home. Gordon L. Chavhunduka's observation is also worth noting when he says that relatives might be forced to take a seriously ill person to the hospital for fear of police should the person die at home. Generally deaths which happen outside hospitals are considered as police cases and when such happens the funeral is often delayed for several days while the police investigate the cause of death.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. B. Muchemwa, *Death and Burial*, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G.L. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine in Modern Zimbabwe*, Harare: 1997, p. 69.

Customarily, when a person comes to die at home, elders who were in the company of the deceased during his/her last hours see to it that a ritual called *Kupeta* (folding) is performed. If the eyes of the dead person are still open they are closed,<sup>11</sup> hands and legs straightened and placed in the right posture for burial. The body is then ritually washed and anointed after which it is ceremoniously wrapped in a new cloth or blanket and then laid on a reed sleeping mat or in a coffin in modern days. In the event that the person passed away at a clinic or hospital, it is a known fact the corpse would have been folded whilst still there but what cannot be taken for granted is the ritual washing. Even if the person had already been washed, a known duty with modern day funeral companies, elders still see to it that a ritual bathing is done though it may not be the whole body but the face only.

Coming to the reasons as to why such a ritual bath is so important in the eyes of the Shona, B. Muchemwa writes that in ordinary life no one would like to attend a social gathering or receive visitors unless one is looking smart and clean. In the same way, the Shona believe that the dead would not like to be surrounded by people or appear in public unless he/she is smart or decently dressed. Again it is the belief among the Shona that the dead would not be accepted by ancestors if he/she is not washed and properly dressed.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, as observed by H. Aschwanden among the Karanga people, this is a ritual washing whereby the Shona would want to wash off symbolically anything unpleasant of this world still adhering to the deceased as seen in the words, '*chisiya svina yose yapasi*' (leave all the dirt of the world). A new life without sins has to begin like when one is born.<sup>13</sup>

## Mourning Ritual

Among the Manyika people, it is customary that if the deceased was a male head in the family, relations and friends are informed of the death by a ritual beating of the drum called *chima*. In some places an audible

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<sup>11</sup> By closing the dead person's eyes the Shona demonstrate the difference between life and death. Open eyes imply that the person is alive but once one is dead there is no more light and life, light would have gone together with the soul.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Muchemwa, *Death and Burial*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. H. Aschwanden, *Symbols of Death: An analysis of the consciousness of the Karanga*, Gweru: 1987, pp. 229-230.

horn is blown or the message is passed around by word of mouth. The first shrill of women crying sends also a signal that death has stalked the village.

On hearing the message, the Shona feel it is a sacred duty to go and express loving sympathy and condolences with the living relatives and friends of the deceased. Failure to show grief and sympathy earns one the suspicion of being a witch that bewitched the deceased. For the funeral, mourners bring along *chema* (tokens of sympathy) in the form of mealie meal, firewood or money to assist in the feeding of those who would gather for the funeral. What matters most is not so much the amount of the gift but what that gift signifies namely: relationship. In some places the mourner places near the head of the corpse the gift he/she would have brought and addresses the deceased in such similar words, 'So- and- so, it is I your child (brother, friend, mother, sister and so on). You have left us today, look after us well'. The address could be long or short and before leaving the corpse the mourner respectfully claps his hands to the deceased. The failure to give a parting present, as M.F.C. Bourdillon comments, is likely to arouse suspicions of malevolence and witchcraft. In other words, such a failure is viewed as anti-social and would be unthinkable by any except a witch.<sup>14</sup>

To feed the crowd of mourners usually a beast is ritually killed. In the understanding of the Shona, the slaughtered beast serves not only the purpose of feeding those who are gathered; symbolically it serves as provision for the deceased's journey. Thus before the beast is slaughtered, it is offered to the deceased so that he/she knows that this is the beast that will be killed in his/her honour. The meat of the bull or cow which would have been slaughtered is not cut randomly but should rather follow prescribed regulations because not every part of the beast should be availed for public consumption. Something similar happens with chicken meat which is grilled especially for those digging the grave. The chicken as well as the meat from the slaughtered beast which is sent to the graveyard is supposed to be consumed saltless otherwise if eaten with salt one is believed to be salting the spirit thus arousing its fury.

To dispose of the human remains, an appropriate relative is appointed to choose and mark the site for the grave. The reason behind appointing a relative to mark the grave site is the understanding among

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 207.

the Shona that no one is given a 'house' by a stranger. Once the grave has been marked, other people not directly related to the deceased can now come in and help in the digging of the grave. Those involved in the digging of the grave among the Manyika people have to preserve at least one root which they come across during the digging which would later be mixed with other herbs for a later rite called *kudya mbeu* (eating of the seed).<sup>15</sup> Such a rite which is usually done after *Chenura* is reserved for the father as the head of the family. It is said to confer blessings of fruitfulness and protection among the children.

Going back to the digging of the grave, whilst others would be in the process of digging others wander in the nearby surrounding area in search of stones. It is a taboo among the Shona to carry two stones at a time for it is believed that once that is allowed the spirit of the deceased would strike two or more people at a time. The other belief also is that in the event that the spirit comes back to strike, it would invite two or more spirits to assist it in causing havoc to the living.

### ***Salvific values in pre-burial rites***

Before delving into a deeper analysis of the rites under discussion it may be worth reiterating the basic fact that if, as Holy Scriptures say, everything was created in and through Christ then also in traditional Shona religion Christ must be found in some form, no matter how embryonic or seminal. It is also a basic truth, as writes P. Kalilombe that in all serious efforts of humankind to make sense of its own life and destiny, the spirit of God has been in and with his peoples for it filled the whole world as an active agent.<sup>16</sup> Thus in the same way, even the religious systems of the Shona ancestors were not just tolerated by God, they were the normal divinely-given means of salvation willed by God himself for the salvation of his people. Such a general observation, however, does not override the possibility of the existence of some evil elements in the

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<sup>15</sup> According to my informant Fr F. Chiromba, on the second night of the *Chenura* ceremony among the Manyika, old women cook edible bulbs and roots all night which children, nephews and nieces of the deceased have to eat at dawn. Just one bite per person is enough as they are hand fed. Such a ritual activity is done to guarantee the continuity of the clan. Cf. *Interview with Fr. F. Chiromba*, Harare, 7 May 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kalilombe, *Salvific Value*, p. 142.

religious systems of the Shona. From our knowledge of the Scriptures we are reminded that human nature and its strivings are under the shadow of sin and therefore constantly subjected to divine judgment. With this in mind I now move to look at the salvific values in pre-burial rites.

### **Respect for life**

In the eyes of the Shona life is such a sacred gift to be cherished and not tampered with. Giving birth to a child is the greatest thing that can happen to a Shona couple without which marriage would be at risk. To a Shona man or woman, life must be given, lived, enjoyed and is to be long and peaceful. Such a high respect for life accounts for the great care that is given to someone nearing the sunset of his/her life on earth. As noted above, effort is made to save the person from the grip of death by moving him/her (*kusengudza*) from his/her homestead with the hope that the evil powers of death will not be able to locate where he/she is. Such a respect for life is also seen when one is too old to move or rise easily but not yet on his/her deathbed. Traditionally, elders take cow dung and rub it on the back of that person to ease the pains of old age when rising or sitting down. It would be unheard of for a Shona person to have terminated the life of his/her mum or dad on the account that he/she was too old or too sick.<sup>17</sup> To cause this to happen knowingly and willingly constitutes one of the worst crimes against oneself, the community and society at large. Writing on the general African understanding on the value of life Laurent Magesa says,

[...] what is demanded as the ultimate good is that life is to be preserved and perpetuated in every possible way, in its past, present and future forms. This is taken so seriously in Africa that for a person to so much wish otherwise, even without verbally articulating such a wish, is seen as evil. Even such a wish represents an internal personal trait of seeking to destroy life that must be struggled against, for it can externalize itself in various sinister ways, including the practice of witchcraft.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> L. Magesa, *African Religion: The moral traditions of abundant life*, New York: 1997, p. 64.

In some cultures of the Africans, such a respect for life was seen even in war situations. When one killed an enemy, one had to undergo ritual ablutions to purify oneself for the earth was believed to abhor bloodshed.<sup>18</sup> The respect for life among the Shona contrasts sharply with an anti-life mentality which is developing in some parts of the world. In this modern world of science and technology, it appears a non-bother issue to the conscience of some people to terminate a pregnancy, for example, or ask for euthanasia. As for euthanasia, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg are on record for legalizing such an activity. Such a legalization of euthanasia, however, does not rule out the possibility of the existence of pro-life activists in these countries who might be fighting for the repealing of such laws. Learning from the Shona on this aspect of the sacred value of life can thus go a long way in correcting this anti-life mentality and it can also be used as a reminder of God's original intention in creating man and woman in his own image and likeness.

### **Sacredness of the verbal last testament**

As we saw, the sunset of one's life was the period when one was expected to say his/her last verbal testament. Even when one had finally come to rest with his/her ancestors, people would be keen to know the contents of those last words as reflected in the oft-asked question; *Akasiya ati chii?* (What were his/her last words?). Customarily among the Shona, there is no way in which the verbal last testament of a dying person is subtracted from, added to or disputed. Even if those words were disclosed to a young person or if it was only one person who may have heard it, that word is always honoured. It is unheard of that a person would put into the mouth of a dying person what he/she would not have said.

Generally, African traditional religion does not tamper with the spoken word. Before the advent of the Whites, the word of mouth was considered as much more sacred than what the written word is now which is open to contest. The manner in which kings were installed, initiation rites were done, warriors commissioned and so on through the word of mouth only, without anything written down, speaks volumes on

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 99.

the sacredness which the word of mouth was accorded. To break a verbal oath, as Clement Majawa rightly notes, is one of the greatest felonies or taboos in Africa. Once leaders, ancestors and the Supreme Being have uttered a word, people are urged to obey, respect and uphold that word.<sup>19</sup>

The Church and the world can learn from the Shona in re-directing attention to the power of the word. Jesus even displayed in clear terms the value which is in the word of mouth when he founded the Christian religion through the power of his word, writing nothing down himself. In a way this paper culture of the modern world shows the decadence of our societies. Though what is written down is what is glorified, written evidence, as perceived by C. Majawa, exhibits the worst in humanity.<sup>20</sup> Very few, it appears would feel obliged to pay for their travel fares if there was no check on tickets or pay for the bills if there was no cross-check.

Fidelity and conviction in the last verbal testament as displayed by the Shona goes a long way to remind the Church to be faithful and committed also to Jesus' golden rule of loving one another (Jn 13.34-5), a key command in his last verbal testament among other things. The Shona system here leaves an indelible lesson that religion is all about fidelity and conviction. Thus even though there is nothing written down in the form of Scripture, the effectiveness of Shona traditional religion is in no way compromised. The Shona system stands as a testimony to the 'purity' of religions in their original form. In time immemorial, as is well known, religions have existed and survived because of oral traditions. Religious teachings and practices were simply passed on from one generation to another orally.

## **No dualism**

In the Kupeta ritual of the Shona, the concept of wholeness stands out clearly. A human person in the eyes of the Shona is a unity of spirit and body thus he/she must be treated as such. *Nyadenga* (God) created both body and soul. Such a perception explains why the Shona make sure that a corpse is treated with great respect and accorded proper rites in preparation for burial. Though the person would be dead in the eyes of the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 86.

living, his/her spirit is believed to be still lingering around the corpse hence the formal addresses which are made to the corpse lying in state. Even after burial, says Fr Kenneth Makamure, people do not say that we have buried the body of John but they rather say that we have buried John.<sup>21</sup>

The concept of wholeness displayed here in the practice of the Shona is actually a phenomenon which touches the whole of their life style. To the African, as C. Majawa testifies, “the rigid dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the secular and the religious, the material and the immaterial, is artificial.”<sup>22</sup> Religion is not divorced from the ordinary life of the Shona; it permeates a person’s life from the cradle to the grave.

Wholeness as manifested in the beliefs of the Shona is a theme which the universal Church cannot afford to brush aside as of less value. The Church has always taught on the wholeness not truncated person of Christ. The Church could thus be enriched by this theme and use it to drive home in a more understandable way its teaching that Jesus had the nature of God and the nature of man at the same time. The Church could use it also to bring light and correction to the many problems of today’s world which stem from the artificial barrier which humanity has now come to place between the religious and the profane.

### **Sense of community**

On hearing the message of death as we saw in the mourning ritual, neighbours, relatives, friends, non-relatives, people from various Churches or even passers by come in their numbers to express their sympathy and pay condolences to the bereaved family. A funeral in a Shona set-up is never a family or single village event rather it attracts people from various corners of the country for the matrix of relationships goes beyond tribal boundaries. The African family is very much extended and most of these extensions come as a result of marriages. Marriage, in other words, widens one’s circle of intimate contact. There are also cases of friendship whereby the bond of friendship becomes

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Interview with Fr K. Makamure*, Chishawasha Seminary, Harare, (10/02/09).

<sup>22</sup> Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 96.

even much stronger than the bond between one and one's own kinsfolk. Speaking on the centrality of relationships in an African set-up Harvey Sindima had this to confirm,

We cannot understand persons; indeed we cannot have personal identity without reference to other persons. The notion of being-together is intended to emphasize that life is the actuality of living in the present together with people, other creatures and the earth.<sup>23</sup>

K.A. Opoku expresses the same sentiment proverbially when he says, "Life is when you are together, alone you are an animal."<sup>24</sup> With the encroaching spirit of individualism in the modern world, the Church has a lot to learn from Shona practices. Baptism as we know incorporates us into the family of Christ which has no racial, social, national or even continental boundaries but the reality of things shows that we are still miles from this ideal. The sense of community attested in the mourning ritual of the Shona could even motivate the Church to explore ecumenism with more earnestness. In Christ, as St Paul would say, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3.28). All these ingredients which would go to form a true extended Christian family as the Church would aspire can thus be gleaned from the African social structure.

### **Richness of symbolism**

Going through the rite of mourning also, an observation was made of the richness in symbolism displayed when the Shona pay their condolences. Note was made that every mourner places his/her gift near the corpse or in some places, people make their contributions via someone who would have been chosen for that task. The most important thing here as observed was not the size of the gift but what that gift symbolizes, namely: relationship. Even the beast which is killed as provision for the deceased's journey, in no way would the Shona imply that the deceased would physically consume part of the meat. It is more a symbolism of honour and love given to the dead. It is not an offence when noth-

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<sup>23</sup> H. Sindima cited in Magesa, *African Religion*, p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> K.A. Opoku cited in Magesa, *African Religion*, p. 65.

ing is killed. The daily life of the Shona is pleat with evidence of such cases whereby certain families, due to financial constrains, have simply bade farewell to their dear ones with tissues of green vegetables hanging between their teeth. It may, however, be offending to the deceased as well as to his/her relatives if a beast is deliberately not slaughtered yet it would be there.

Looking at religions the world over, it is an indubitable fact that symbols are indispensable in any religion. Coming in contact with the deity is not in the normal course of things hence religionists use some kind of a bridge. The bridge, as well articulated by C. Majawa, may take the form of words, postures, gesticulations, objects, signs and so on but they are not the reality itself. What they do is to give us an idea of the reality. They are, in other words, the connecting links between the seen and the unseen.<sup>25</sup> Thus, without the use of symbols, religion would almost be impossible.

In almost all African cultures, symbols still play a vital role in the day to day lives of people. Be it in schools, political rallies, social gatherings like marriages, funerals and so on what is evidently clear is that African culture is a symbolic culture. While the same could be said of the Western world, it appears a host of symbols are becoming meaningless to the present generation. As the Western world continues to lose the true value of symbols it is no wonder also that it is gradually loosing the sense of religion itself. Religion, without the use of symbols, as observed earlier on, is almost impossible. Here again the practices of the Shona could be challenge to orthodox Christianity, re-awakening thus the sense of the lost treasure found in symbols. Jesus Christ himself, whose glory the Church seeks to spread, symbolized the Father's love for humanity and at the same time symbolized humanity's response to that immense love of the Father.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 97.

## **Burial rites**

### **Times for burial**

The last point of discussion on the narration of funeral rites was the digging of the grave. It would sound systematic to pick this discussion from there. When all is done with the digging, burial would be possible to take place any time from then on. At most, burial takes place within twenty-four hours of death unless there are some sticky issues which need to be ironed first. One thing the Shona would ensure with utter caution is that the burial takes place either in the morning or late afternoon. Under no circumstances should the burial take place during mid-day. The reason for such a strict rule is that ancestors have a timetable. As tabulated by B. Muchemwa, ancestors are believed to operate from 4:00am to 12:00pm then from 2:30pm to 10:00pm. Any time outside those hours would be futile since the ancestors would be far away.<sup>26</sup> Given this scenario of the ancestors' timetable, the Shona would not want a burial to be done in the absence of these crucial figures since they are supposed to receive their child.

### **Procession to the graveyard**

When the time comes to take the corpse out for burial key close relatives are called in where the corpse would be lying and the ancestors are informed that they are now taking out their child for burial so they should please receive him/her. After the clapping of hands, a general announcement is made to all present paying particular attention to the mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, uncles, aunts, grandsons and granddaughters of the deceased that it is now time to take the corpse out for burial. The corpse is then placed outside and all present go round bidding farewell for the last time. Some pass before the corpse silently while others may feel the need to say a few words direct to the corpse expressing their grief. This is one of the saddest parts in a Shona funeral as people give vent to the grief that would be in their hearts.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Muchemwa, *Death and Burial*, p. 38.

When all is over with the farewell and depending on the local custom, the corpse is either taken straight to the graveyard or is taken round the yard first. One reason for taking it round is the belief that the corpse needs to say good-bye also to its once place of habitation and the other reason is to confuse the spirit. In the event that the spirit seeks to come back to torment the living, it should not find its way back. On the way to the graveyard some make a pause at a special place called *pa-zororo* (place of rest). The understanding behind such a pause is that when one is on a journey, he/she needs some rest, so does the corpse. For the Shona, death is a journey to the world of the ancestors and the living are responsible for its success. Before proceeding people kneel or sit and salute the spirit, men respectfully clapping their hands whilst women shrill. A round or two may be made again to confuse the spirit before it is taken to its final destination.

### **The burial itself**

After some speeches at the grave site, preparations are made to lower the corpse into its final home. A *rukukwe* (reed mat) is in some place cut into halves and laid on the floor of the grave as bedding for the corpse. Traditionally, the *rukukwe* is the most decent thing to sleep on hence the corpse is supposed to be provided with such. Sons-in-law are usually tasked with the lowering of the corpse into the grave. Close relatives throw a handful of soil into the grave as a way of casting away evil and misfortune as well as to say, 'I have buried you, good-bye'. Able-bodied men help with the filling of the grave with soil and when that is over the grave is carefully swept with a branch of a special tree so that any footprints indicating violation of the grave by witches at night will be clearly visible on inspection the following morning when people go for *rumuko* (awakening).

Upon return to the homestead of the deceased and before entering the yard, all who took part in the funeral ritually cleanse themselves with medicated water. Such a ritual action stems from the Shona perception that death defiles for it is evil and so everyone and everything that came into contact with the corpse should be cleansed. After the cleansing of the homestead also, the deceased's possessions are sealed away in a granary and nothing of it should be used until after the inheritance

ceremony. Cases of such belongings being distributed just after the burial are becoming more common these days as people, among other things, factor in travel expenses. Once a distant relative has managed to attend the funeral people know that he/she might not find it easy coming back for the *kurova guva* ceremony.

## Rumuko

Early morning, the following day after burial, it is customary for the close relatives to go and pay respect to the spirit at the new grave. Formal address may be done to the spirit on the purpose of the visit and this is concluded by the clapping of hands. Such a salutation, as observed by M. Bourdillon, is reminiscent of salutations at spirit shrines and is intended as an honour to the deceased.<sup>27</sup> Inspection is made also to see if there was any tampering with the grave, signs which may confirm the suspicions of witchcraft. Afterwards no one may just at will visit the grave unless it is a distant relative who was not present at the funeral and would want to be shown where his/her relative was laid to rest. The visit also should not be just at any time, it is done either in the morning or evening before sunset. The dead, so the Shona believe, should be given time to rest, so, except for ritual purposes, graves should be avoided. Such a general rule is coupled also with the fear of occult powers which are believed to linger around any grave.

## Gata ceremony

In the traditional understanding of the Shona, there is nothing like natural death. Even if it is the death of an old man/woman who may appear to have died naturally as a result of old age, the Shona would always ask: Why him/her and not the others? There is always a suspicion of foul play as a result of witchcraft. To iron out their suspicions, a day or two after burial, a delegation is sent to a diviner so as to establish the cause of death. A second opinion from another diviner is sought if the first happens not to come up with something which confirms his/her clients' prior suspicions. Behind the desire to know the cause of death is the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 204.

need to avert further deaths in the family. If a satisfactory cause has been diagnosed, the diviner usually prescribes some ritual action to safeguard against further catastrophes.

### Rite of purification

Depending with local custom, a further ritual which is given different names in different places is performed by the Shona two weeks or so after the burial. Some call it *doro remvura* (beer of water) or *doro remasadza* (beer from *sadza* left-overs) and others *doro rendongamabwe* (beer of arranging stones) or *doro remasuka foshoro* (beer to cleanse the shovels). The main purpose of the ritual is to 'cool' the spirit since it may be harbouring evil intentions. In the words of Herbert Aschwanden,

Normal human emotions like love, hatred, envy etc complicate matters because the dead man retains them. In addition, he has been cast out by death which makes him homeless and causes him suffering. This may arouse feelings of revenge in his 'heart'.<sup>28</sup>

When the beer is ready relatives once again gather and a brief moment of weeping may be observed in memory of the deceased and slowly the sad moment passes as people begin to sing and dance. The sorrow is drowned also through beer drinking. As noted by Bourdillon, the ceremony marks also the end of official mourning, thus any ritual signs of mourning are taken off or ended at this ceremony.<sup>29</sup> A wife of the deceased, however, may continue to clad in black up to the period of *kurova guva*. The ritual is also intended to purify the participants from the defilement caused by the deceased's corpse, thus preserving the participants' well-being. The delegation which would have had been sent to consult on the cause of death utilizes this opportunity also to tell the gathered kin and friends on their findings. It would be up to the family to agree on what action, if any, they would need to take. Though the deceased's spirit is said to be 'cooled' by this ceremony, it is still considered unfriendly to associate with until after *kurova guva* has been performed.

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<sup>28</sup> Aschwanden, *Symbols of Death*, p. 272.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 208.

## Rite of a person who dies away from home

When it comes to occur that a person dies and for some reason or another cannot be taken to his/her rural home for burial but rather is buried in town or some place far away, it is traditional for the Shona to send two or so elderly people *kundотора mudzimu* (to take the spirit). The motive behind the Shona getting out of their way to bring the spirit home is their belief that the deceased is attached to his home where the umbilical cord lies buried. On reaching the site where their relative would have been buried, they introduce themselves whilst touching the grave and inform the deceased's spirit that they have come to take him/her home. A little amount of soil is then taken from the grave and wrapped in a piece of cloth and the delegates head for home. Relatives gather and the soil is placed on the floor with people weeping as if at an actual funeral. Afterwards the soil is taken for burial in a cave or in a new grave and as in other funerals, the Gata ceremony usually ensues afterwards.<sup>30</sup> In such cases then a deceased person ends up with two graves; the first one where the real remains were interred and the second, where the soil brought home is re-buried. With more and more people, however, dying in towns these days and the traditional structures gradually breaking down, some Shona are slowly abandoning this practice and some even are buying beforehand graves in town, a sign that they would not wish to be buried in their rural places.

In cases where a person's burial place is not known, the *kurova guva* ceremony is done for him/her once the diviner establishes that the deceased wants the ceremony done. Such has been the case for many of the sons and daughters of Zimbabwe who perished during the liberation struggle. While some bodies were exhumed and given proper burial some remained hidden in unknown bushes within and outside the borders of Zimbabwe. When the reburial of former freedom fighters began in 1989 at Gutu Mission<sup>31</sup> in the Masvingo Province, the primary aim was to 'heal the dead'. In Shona belief, as attested by T. Shoko, such a process of reburying and according the proper rites effects 'drying the tears of the dead'. Depriving the deceased decent burial is viewed as abominable and demeaning for it is to deny that they ever lived. Thus

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. M. Glefand, *The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona: A study based on field work among the East-Central Shona*, Gweru: 1977, pp.44-5.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Shoko, *My Bones Shall Rise*, p. 6.

reburial, as 'healing', reasserts their position, acknowledging their identities and affiliates them to their families once again.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Salvific values in burial rites***

### **Spiritual view of life**

Looking at African traditional religion one finds that its constant and general foundation is the spiritual view of life. Such a view goes beyond the animistic concept, a misnomer which was the choice of many early writers in describing African traditional religion. The spiritual view of Africans is a deeper, broader and more universal concept which considers all living beings and visible nature as essentially linked to the invisible world of spirits. The Shona, in paying caution to the times of burial as we saw, display nothing other than acknowledging that the living cannot do anything without the help from the invisible world. It is a display of humility as well as a way of showing honour to the living dead by entrusting everything into their hands. In the spiritual view of the Shona, a person is never considered as consisting of mere matter, limited to earthly life but rather the presence and power of a spiritual element in virtue of which human life is always related to the after-life is strongly recognized and acknowledged.

At the helm of the spiritual view of the Shona is the idea of *Nyadenga/Musiki* (God). *Musiki* among the Shona is perceived as the ultimate cause of all things and enjoys a status immeasurably higher than any other being. In commending the deceased to the ancestors before burial, the Shona ask the ancestors to present further their child to the *Musiki*. Acknowledging the importance of the idea about God and his presence in the spiritual worldview of African cultures, Pope Paul VI wrote to say that this concept:

perceived rather than analyzed, lived rather than reflected on, is expressed in very different ways from culture to culture. But, the fact

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Shoko, *My Bones Shall Rise*, p. 12.

remains that the presence of God permeates African life, as the presence of a higher being, personal and mysterious.<sup>33</sup>

### **Admission that no one is perfect**

After death, the spirit in the eyes of the Shona acquires new spiritual powers as it passes to a completely novel existence in the community of spirits. It is at this stage that the spirit is regarded as unpredictable as no one knows quite well how it will react to its new environment nor what secret grudges the deceased could have harboured before death.<sup>34</sup> Aware of such unpredictability on the part of the spirit, elders warn against a 'just do it' attitude in the performance of the burial rites. They too are often heard saying, *Wafa haasisiri hama yako* (the deceased person is no longer your relative), a statement which shows that there is now a gap between the living and the deceased. The presumed possibility of the deceased coming back and causing havoc on the living displays an admission on the part of the Shona that no one is perfect. Such an admission by the Shona as we saw is displayed when they take the corpse round the hut or yard to confuse the spirit and later after the pause along the way to the graveyard. It is only after the spirit has been cleansed in a later ritual that it is considered safe to associate with.

### **Belief in the existence of an evil force**

Related to the admission that no one is perfect is the belief among the Shona in the existence of an evil force that should be dealt with to avoid further catastrophes. The Shona, as we saw, ensure that after burial everyone and everything associated with the deceased is ritually cleansed. This evil force is associated with the powers of witchcraft and that explains also the reason why when the Shona go for a *rumuko*, they would inspect closely to see if there were any signs of tampering with

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<sup>33</sup> Paul VI, 'Africae Terrarum (Land of Africa) Message to the Countries of Africa 1967', in T. Okure (ed) in *32 Articles Evaluating Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, Eldoret: 1990, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 204.

the grave. If there happens to be any signs that something was done to the new grave, a diviner is called in immediately to deal with this evil force. The same would apply even after the Gata ceremony, if a diviner confirms the suspicions of witchcraft he/she would normally advise on what precautions should be taken to root out this evil.

### **Responsibility of the living for the success of the deceased's journey**

Death, as we saw, is a journey in the eyes of the Shona whose success depends so much on the living members. The desire of every spirit, as the Shona would perceive, is to reach a place of rest. To reach such a place of rest it should look up to the members of the family to perform on its behalf the necessary rites for its admission in the world of the ancestors. If such rites are not done or improperly done the ancestors refuse to receive the spirit and in turn the spirit has a way of manifesting itself to the living to make its demands known and this could be in the form of sickness of one of the family members. Once the living members respond positively the illness disappears, a sign that the spirit has been granted what it wanted and can now rest in peace. Even in the world of the living dead, the living still play a part, they are, according to Fr K. Makamure, the ones who sustain those in the immortal life. Once there is no one to remember a deceased person his/her name just disappears and this is why the Shona place much value on the importance of children for through them their names live forever.<sup>35</sup>

### **Respect for the place of the dead**

As noted in the previous discussion, the graves are generally avoided by the Shona except for ritual purposes. While the memory of their dear one they would have laid to rest vividly still clings on, the Shona would not want the dear one to be disturbed by continuous crying or some unrespectful actions. The dead, so they believe, deserve their rest. When need be that someone should visit the grave, salutation is made through

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Interview with Fr K. Makamure, (10/02/09).

the clapping of hands. In respect of the sacral value of the graves, no tree near the graveyard should be cut away except just pruning when need arises. As for those among the Shona who bury within the courtyard of their homes, they ensure that the graveyard is kept smart through regular sweeping and removal of any plants which may be growing within the vicinity.

## ***Post-burial rites***

### **Kurova guva ritual**

Though some remarks on this rite were made in chapter two it is essential to note that it was on the Christianized Kuchenura Munhu Rite and not the traditional understanding of it *per se*. Hence it becomes necessary here to have a re-look at the rite from its traditional perspective.

The Shona believe that when a human being dies, his/her soul wanders in the veld until it has been brought into the group of all the other *vadzimu* at the bringing home ceremony. If all this has not been done, the dead person is believed to sulk because the living would have shown no concern for him/her or for his/her wealth or the things which he/she left behind. He/she is also believed to be still dark (unclean, black) because no cleansing would have been made as yet. The living that would have lost the relative are said also to be still black (dirty) if they have not yet brought back their dead person. The *kurova guva* feast therefore is one to reconcile the living and the dead. Grief, desire, even other things which might have been obstacles between the living and the dead are supposed to be brought to an end by this feast.

Before the feast kicks off it is customary for the elders, a year or two after the burial, to sit and make preparations for it. They either consult a diviner first to inquire on the way forward or they just go ahead to gather millet for the beer. On an appointed day, millet is taken to the river where it is ritually soaked in water. On the lead would be women who are past the child-bearing age since this cleansing ritual requires purity right from the start. The impurities of menstruation and child-birth, especially the blood, are believed to defile the ritual thus even after the millet has been dried and made ready for use it is again old women who are involved in the preparation of the beer. Sometimes the older

women have to prepare such beer with the help of young girls who have not yet started their menstrual cycle. Younger women would simply be there to assist in the carrying of water, cooking and other small duties pertaining to them.

Before even the beer is ready, people in the whole neighbourhood would be aware that there is *kurova guva* at such and such homestead on this particular day. When the actual day comes, the whole place would be full. At the start of the ceremony, a small pot of beer (*kapfuko*) is offered to the ancestors informing them of the forthcoming ceremony and a formal address is made also to the spirit of the deceased that this is his/her cleansing beer. Once this introductory part of the rite is over people dance away the night through traditional songs and beer drinking in honour of the deceased.

Early morning the following day and depending with the local custom, the *kapfuko* is carried in procession to the grave and its contents are poured over the grave. Formal address is then made to the spirit to come home. A lot of diversity in practice exists among the Shona on how the spirit is to be symbolically taken home. Michael Bourdillon mentions of a goat which is used by the Shangwe, a pathway which is made from the grave to the family among the Valley Korekore or a small branch which is cut from a ceremonial tree by the Shona who live in the north-east of the country.<sup>36</sup> Among some tribes of the Shona, for example, among the Manyika, such symbolic actions can hardly be noted. A delegate may, however, leave the homestead before dawn and then come back without even reaching the grave. Their return is associated with the coming back of the spirit. Unlike most other Shona tribes, the Manyika have a further ritual called *Svitsa* (bring up) whose focus is to bring the cleansed spirit into the ranks of the family spirits.

### **Inheritance ceremony**

Before the *kurova guva* ritual is concluded it is customary among most Shonas to distribute all the personal belongings of the deceased which had been sealed away after the funeral. Sometimes one finds cases whereby such personal belongings are distributed immediately after the

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 211.

funeral but most Shona wait till after the *kurova guva* ceremony. Personal belongings, if the deceased was a woman, in the form of blankets, pots and plates are usually taken by those from her maternal home and if it was a man most of the things including his wife or wives are inherited by those of his paternal home. The wife or wives to be inherited normally have to pass through a rite (*kudarika tsvimbo*) to prove that they did not commit any act of adultery since their late husband's death. If there was any foul play on the part of the woman then she is regarded as having defiled her late husband's belongings and this would require ritual cleansing first.

If there were no qualms on the *kudarika tsvimbo* rite, the wife may choose whom she wants to inherit her from the line-up of her late husband's brothers. She may as well choose not to be inherited by any of them and give rather the responsibility of looking after the family to her eldest son. In other instances also, she may choose to go away to her paternal home to live with her parents. Once the inheritance matters are over the Shona would rest satisfied that anything which had to do directly with the deceased is at least now over.

### Rituals of honour

After a certain period of time, at most annually or in the face of calamity usually a misfortune like complex illness or even death in the family, the Shona perform rituals in honour of their *midzimu* (ancestral spirits). These rituals generally known as *doro raanasekuru* (beer of the ancestors) are appeals to spiritual forces primarily made to avert the ills of life. The annual rite of honour is normally addressed to the deceased head of an extended family. As one who would have founded the family during his life on earth, he constantly brings the family members together on ritual occasions and ensures that the family continues to live long as a group. Referring to the dead paternal grandfather M. Gelfand says, "His spirit protects his grand-children on earth in all ills and gives them their character, personality and good behaviour."<sup>37</sup> The spirit elder may have a medium in the family through whom he can from time to time direct his wishes to the living descendants.

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<sup>37</sup> M. Gelfand, *Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona*, p. 91.

When it comes to the rite's actual performance, it normally starts in the evening with the offering of *kapfuko* (small pot of beer) to the spirit elder, informing him of the forthcoming ceremony. The one leading the ceremony, usually the *muzukuru* (sister's son) formally addresses the spirit, informing that this is the beer brewed in his honour and should therefore look after the grandchildren and in the process refrain from causing trouble in the family. In the event that members of the family, as M. Bourdillon observes, consider the spirit as having been failing in its obligations towards them, people accompany the formal address with shouts of reprimand to the spirit, expressing their discontent.<sup>38</sup> When the family members feel that their grievances to the spirit have been aired and heard, men salute the spirit by rhythmic clapping of hands and thereafter women follow suit with a gentle clap. When all is done with the offering, people make merry as they drink and dance in honour of the spirit.

A ritual of honor may also be performed towards a *shavi* (alien) spirit in search of accommodation and respect. Such spirits are those of aliens from neighbouring peoples like Mozambicans (*shavi rechisena*), white people (*shavi rechizungu*), of infants (*shavi rechipunha*) or of certain animals such as baboons (*shavi regudo*) which just wander around restlessly and having no living descendants they seek to express themselves by taking possession of an unrelated person.<sup>39</sup> When the presence of such a spirit is diagnosed through divination and a ritual of honour made to the spirit, the possessed person becomes its host and thereafter other family members when the first host dies. Such spirits tend to be tolerated because they usually are associated with certain skills, for example, hunting, divination or dancing. It is not all rosy with *shavi* spirits for some are known to bestow negative gifts on their hosts like prostitution, witchcraft, theft (*shavi regudo*).

### Rituals of Appeasement

Among the Shona, angry spirits are the most formidable phenomenon in their religious experience. Angry spirits are known to attack suddenly and harshly leading to succession of deaths in the family. In those cases

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. M. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 228.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Shoko, *My Bones Shall Rise*, p. 5.

where the ancestral spirits are known to have withdrawn their protection due to displeasure, the *ngozi* (avenging) spirit is raging havoc or disillusioned *shavi* spirits are inflicting the living with serious diseases such as epilepsy, madness or other complexities, a diviner is usually consulted for him to prescribe the necessary propitiation, averting thus further catastrophes.

As for the rituals of appeasement, they tend to vary according to the relationship between victims and the spirit, the crime that provoked the spirit to anger as well as the nature of the spirit's supposed activity.<sup>40</sup> If it was a murder, the propitiation may range from a number of cattle to even a young girl to be paid to the family of the spirit. In the case of an ill-treated father, the sacrifice of two or three beasts might be required to appease the spirit. For a child who may have ill-treated his/her mother, the appeasement is usually done through *kutanda botso* which is a way of humiliating oneself by dressing in rags and begging grain for a feast in honour of the mother. At such a feast, a beast is slaughtered in honour of the mother and the offending child is required to abscond from the feast. If the angry spirit is that of an unrelated person stirred up possibly as a result of witchcraft, a diviner may have to plant protective charms in and around the homestead as well as to traditionally 'vaccinate' all the inhabitants to avoid further visitations by the spirit. In the case of a neglected spouse, the offending husband may be required to live in his dead wife's room, keeping it clean and performing her duties.

## ***Salvific values in post-burial rites***

### **Immortality of the spirit**

Looking at all the post-burial rites of the Shona, one thing which stands out so clearly is the belief in the immortality of the spirit. Death in the eyes of the Shona is not the end of a person but rather a simple change of state. As we saw already, the Shona conceive death as a journey to a better world where one would live forever. Just as their fellow African brothers and sisters, the Shona too believe that in that better world where one goes, a person is not indifferent to what happens among the

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 234.

living, he/she is rather so alive and active, is interested and actually takes part in the affairs of the living. This would explain why the Shona would now and again brew beer in honour of their ancestors and remind them in case they would have forgotten their sacred duty towards the living.

Attached to the idea of immortality is the notion of retribution among the Shona. The Shona in a way believe that a person is judged after his/her death in accordance with his/her deeds on earth. Though most Shona tend to subscribe to the oft-said sweeping statement, *Wafa wanaka* (once dead one is good) there are some reservations to such a general perception. Such reservations would explain why the Shona would not perform the *kurova guva* ritual for someone who was a real moral disaster during his/her life on earth. The same would apply to persons who would have committed suicide. The Shona fear that reinstating such spirits would bring a real bad omen to the family.

### **Communion of the living and the dead**

Going hand-in-hand with the concept of immortality is the belief that the living and the dead sustain each other. The living offer sacrifices to honour their ancestors and in so doing ensure that their names do not die out but rather are remembered in perpetuity. The dead, on their part, apart from responding to the material needs of their living members, they assist the living to observe faithfully all the injunctions that they left them with as a lasting legacy. Though the belief in God, as seen already, is quite strong among the Shona, the dead tend to be more 'user friendly' in that they can easily be approached with daily less complicated problems. *Nyadenga*, so the Shona would believe, has left certain things in the hands of his lieutenants (ancestors) to deal with for it is right to delegate. It was only in real serious matters like drought that direct recourse to *Nyadenga* was made in traditional Shona religion.

Those who have died, so the Shona would believe, operate in communion in their dealings with the living. Thus when it comes to offerings made to ancestors during rituals the offer passes through a bureaucratic kind of system, junior A tells senior B and senior B tells more senior C and on and on till it reaches the spirit head of the family who may also pass it on to *Nyadenga* (God) when need be. The dead play a vital role in the lives of the living, doing everything possible to assist

the living each time they cry for their intervention. The ancestors, as Laurent Magesa would note, are not separate from the family lineage or clan from which they come but are rather part and parcel of it and in the same relationship, the father will always be the father, mother as mother and so on. The expectations from them will also not change but remain similar to those that govern the social order among the living.<sup>41</sup>

A glimpse into the Church's teaching on the Communion of Saints and the parallel between the Triumphant Church and the Militant Church had as it were their seeds in the Shona belief in the communion between the living and the dead. A revisit to these Shona traditions would boost the reception of the Word among the Shona.

### **Sense of family bondedness**

The *kurova guva* ritual brings to light the precious gift among the Shona which is the sense of family. For the Shona, just as with the majority of Africans, the family

[...] comes to be the natural environment in which man is born and acts, in which he finds the necessary protection and security; and eventually through union with his ancestors has his continuity beyond earthly life.<sup>42</sup>

Without the help of the family one would not have someone to assist him/her in the journey to the world of the living dead. Such a person, as we saw, wanders restlessly as an alien spirit.

In the *kurova guva* ritual the bond of togetherness characteristic of ideal families is clearly demonstrated. The sharing of a meal in honour of the deceased who would have been brought back into the family illustrates the oneness of the family since the African family comprises also the dead and the unborn. Likening *kurova guva* to the Eucharist which is partaken of in a spirit of familyhood, Tawanda E. Waire had this to say, “[...] it (*kurova guva*) brings the people to eat the meal to-

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Magesa, *African Religion*, p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum*, p. 17

gether, celebrating the salvation of the soul after its transformation to new life in the spirit. It is Easter of its own kind."<sup>43</sup>

### **Respect for the role played by the father**

In the family, which is also reflected in the *kurova guva* ceremony, it is worth to note the respect for the part played by the father of the family and the authority he has. During his life on earth as well as even after his death, the father in a Shona family set-up has a typically priestly function assigned to him whereby he acts as a mediator not only between the ancestors and his family but also between *Nyadenga* and his family. The *kurova guva* ritual re-accords this temporarily lost role to the father of the family, giving him his rightful place in looking after the family. In the case of a misfortune, for example, which occurs in the family after the *kurova guva* ceremony, the family knows whom to appeal to for mediation.

The respect for the role played by the father of the family is well demonstrated also in the rituals of honour. As we saw, the spirit head of the family is accorded his rightful place in the family group through the annual festivities held in his honour. Plea is again made to him to continue and not tire in his mediatory role for the survival of his clan group. As one who is considered the most senior in the family lineage, he is believed to be near *Nyadenga*, capable thus of receiving blessings for the whole extended family group.

### **Progeny should be looked after**

Flowing from the value placed in the family is the strong conviction among the Shona that children of a deceased person have to be cared for. The inheritance ceremony is the external sign which tries to perpetuate such an understanding among the Shona. The wife/wives and children as we saw are placed into the hands of a brother to the deceased man so that he assumes the duties of his deceased brother to the family.

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<sup>43</sup> T. E. Waire, 'Kurova Guva Ceremony: Easter of its own kind' in *Catholic Church News*, Issue 78, A. Kugwa (ed), Feb/March 2009, pp. 22-3.

Such a transfer of roles ensures that the deceased's family does not fall apart but maintains its position within the extended family structure.

In this modern world where many families are breaking up following the death of parents, the Church could learn from the Shona in sending a message of care for progeny. Though institutions which try to cater for orphans are there in the world, the love in these institutions is less comparable to the love one would receive in a family set-up. Cases of exploitation by the masters of these institutions may as well not be completely ruled out.

### **Our interaction with the dead should not be a one time event**

If there is anything which the Shona rituals of honour demonstrate also, it is the idea that our interaction with the dead should not be a one time event. Sometimes people have a tendency of forgetting once they have done the *kurova guva* ritual as seen in the oft-said statement of the Shona *takamugadzira zvakapera* (we cleansed him/her, it is over).<sup>44</sup> The Shona family, as we saw, comprises also the dead, so as fellow members constant interaction with them is believed to ensure lasting memory of them and helps also secure favours of life from them. In poetry form, Lawrence Binyon's words help as it were sum up the central point in the Shona rituals of honour:

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old,  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn  
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning  
We will remember them.<sup>45</sup>

### **Faithfulness to one's obligations**

African traditional religion lays emphasis on fidelity; one has to be faithful to one's pledge or obligations. African traditional religion, as C. Majawa rightly notes, stresses the horizontal dimensions of life and once that is in order, so it is believed, the vertical relationship of man to God

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Interview with Fr K. Makamure, (10/02/09).

<sup>45</sup> L. Binyon cited in P.S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs*,  
<http://www.sacredtexts.com/etc/fcod/index.htm> (accessed 11/05/09).

will then be regularized.<sup>46</sup> It insists on faithfulness to one's religious duties, authority, relations, traditions and so on as a concrete indication of love. Failure to be faithful is treachery of the highest ideals of the society and such a person who betrays his/her people by exposing them to suffering, ridicule and disdain is simply viewed as a disgrace to the society. It is basically such cases of disgrace that the Shona rituals of appeasement seek to address. In instituting such rituals, the Shona were indirectly sending a strong message on the need for one to be faithful to one's obligations. During life, so is implied by the message of the Shona, a person must and should never do anything that could provoke someone to return as an avenging spirit. Covered here is the need for respect and care for one's parents, faithfulness in the payment of one's debts and in the distribution of property after death, care for one's spouse, hospitality towards a stranger and so many other acts of virtue towards fellow human beings.

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing analysis was really an eye opener to the values that are embedded within Shona funerary rites. Apart from providing the platform from which to evangelize the Shona peoples, we saw that such values, if well explored and utilized, can act as corrective measures in today's world where some of the things are just going haywire. The encounter with Shona culture, in other words, will enrich Christianity and elevate it to a plane higher than where it has reached within the Shona peoples. The same can equally be said of the Shona traditional religion itself, through encounter with Christianity, it will shed off its objectionable aspects and this will enable the Shona to come to a level of finesse which can only be attained through the influence of Christ. Many of the values in their funeral rites, as we saw, were *preparatio evangelica* and what this entails is that they need the perfection of Christ himself. The elements of fear found in Shona traditional religion, often the motives of religion and cult, need more light from Christ. The same goes with the customs of widowhood which are generally oppressive of women.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 102.

There are many other aspects in this context of encounter which shows that African traditional religion needs Christianity for elevation and transformation. It would not be out of the way to rally behind Clement Majawa's observations that it was impossible, for example, for African traditional religion to have discovered the Trinity by itself or attain knowledge of the Incarnation. Neither could African traditional religion have come to accept suffering which it views as an evil caused by other people's wickedness nor acknowledge the need for love of one's enemies. While the love of one's neighbour was entirely acceptable to African traditional religion, the love of enemy proposed by Christ was an entirely different proposition.<sup>47</sup>

Having seen and admitted the existence of some providential values in the funerary rites of the Shona which will also go a long way in enriching the Church once they are explored and utilized, there is, however, one sticky element that calls for further exploration. In the discussion on the Christianized *Kuchenura Munhu* in chapter two we saw the position of the diviner in the funeral rites of the Shona being shoved to the background as an issue not worth of consideration in the process of trying to inculturate these rituals. The questions which, however, remain are; how balance-minded has the Church been in handling the issue of diviners? As leaders in the traditional systems of the Shona, are they not the key figures to be engaged as partners in trying to dialogue with Shona traditional religion? If dialogue is all about giving room to your opposite partner, what room have they been given to express themselves before condemnation, if at all there is room for condemnation in a dialoguing environment? These and other matters are the issues to be explored in the coming chapter.

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Majawa, *Integrated Approach*, p. 103.

## Chapter Six

# The Traditional Medical Practitioner and his/her profession

### *Introduction*

In the spirit of the polemics of Christian Catechesis in Africa which still sees ATR as the citadel of Satan and label its ministers as *Juju* priests, fetish priests, witch-doctors or simply agents of the devil, Shona traditional medical doctors were dismissed as of no value or a sign of retrogression were they to be accorded a role in the proposed Christianized rite. It is basically this disdain for the Shona traditional medical practitioners that this chapter seeks to address for there is a feeling that less study and tolerance of them was done. The conviction that sets this chapter rolling is that sincere dialogue can only happen when each dialogue partner defines what it means to be an authentic member of his/her own religious tradition and this accords so well with the Vatican II and African Synod spirit. Only a Buddhist, for example, can define from the inside what it means to be a Buddhist. While indeed one may claim to know something about someone's religious system, it is imperative, however, to listen to the believer's perspectives of faith and truth, and be open to that faith as he/she holds it. It would actually be wrong to judge others in terms of one's concepts and worldview. As the chapter unfolds therefore, it is my intention to let the voice of the *n'anga* himself/herself be heard. Among other things, we need to know, for example, his/her source of power, code of conduct and his/her functions in society. At the end of the chapter, an evaluation of his/her position vis-à-vis that of the priest in society would be made.

### *Traditional medical practitioner as the victim of scathing attacks*

Prof. Gordon L. Chavhunduka, an academic who has done extensive research on traditional healers in Zimbabwe and is himself now part of them as a result of interest generated through his researches, says that

before the colonial era, traditional healers enjoyed tremendous prestige in Zimbabwe for they were the only health specialists in the society. Not only were they expected to deal with medical problems, their service was required also when it came to problems of a social nature.<sup>1</sup> With the advent of the colonial era, however, traditional healers saw themselves suffering a heavy blow that would nearly have seen them thrown out completely from their profession.

Their almost being pushed to the brink of oblivion by the colonial government and early Christian missionaries was not without its own reasons. Before, however, I move to look at the reasons why the traditional medical system was being suppressed, it would be good to note that not all early missionaries were against traditional medicine. A case can be recalled in chapter two where we saw, for example, a person like David Livingstone treating traditional healers as colleagues and appreciating the valuable knowledge of the herbalists.

Coming from a background where almost everything medical had to pass through a test tube to prove its effectiveness, some early missionaries and their counterparts in the colonial government were stunned by the locals' use of traditional medicine. In their eyes traditional medicines were of no effect hence those who administered them had to be suppressed.<sup>2</sup> As with the missionaries, in particular, another reason which led them to view the traditional healer with every form of negativity was the traditional healer's known belief in ancestral spirits. In as far as the traditional healer was known to believe in his/her ancestors it was felt that he/she encouraged other people to divert from the worship of God to the sinful worship of ancestors. The two, that is, the patient seeking medical attention and the traditional healer were blanketed in the same category of devil worshippers deserving nothing but hell fire unless they converted to Christianity. Apart from being viewed as a catalyst in the worship of the devil, the traditional healer was seen also as one who encouraged belief in witchcraft, an art which was considered as standing in the way of missionary efforts at evangelization.

What those in the colonial government and the missionaries could not stomach also was the competition for patients with the traditional healer. In opening both government and mission hospitals, the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of Traditional Medicine*, Harare: 1998, p. 6.

authorities of these respective institutions thought that the locals would flock to them for treatment but were proved wrong when they saw many people shunning these institutions in preference of the traditional healer. Father Shropshire tries to bring us into the picture of what was going on way back in the 1930s when he says,

At our mission we had a ward of beds for years, but they were so little used that we were finally reduced to a dispensary, minor operations and the extraction of teeth. Yet the whole reputation of a mission or even of the church may depend on that mission being able to render the medical aid that people need at any particular moment when faith in the White doctor or nurse become strong.<sup>3</sup>

Yet another factor behind the efforts at suppressing traditional healers, as argued by Chavhunduka, was an economic one. He argues that it was the desire on the part of colonial administrators to force Africans everywhere to depend solely on medicines produced in Western countries since that would benefit those Western countries and their pharmaceutical companies.<sup>4</sup> For him, such attempts at making Africans depend completely on Western medicine are still going on even up to this day.

Apart from building mission and government hospitals so as to ensure a final blow to the traditional healer, other measures were also put in place. The creation of centres of education was looked upon as an effective means to reform that traditional African man/woman, nailing thus a final blow to his/her traditional beliefs and practices. Those who would fail to act in accord with the Western system of education would simply see themselves being classified as ignorant and superstitious. Such an attitude, as noted by Chavhunduka, led schools and universities into contrasting what they viewed as knowledge derived from Western scientific work with something they viewed as utter ignorance, that is, the work of non-Western practitioners. Since the work of non-Western practitioners was viewed as tantamount to mere superstition, it was therefore regarded as not worth of serious study, a move which Chavhunduka describes as professional irresponsibility.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another measure taken by the colonial government through its Medical Council was to deny cognizance of traditional healers as

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<sup>3</sup> Father Shropshire cited in G. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 8.

medical practitioners. Shedding more light on the authoritative voice of the Medical Council on its doctors, Chavhunduka brings it to light that doctors were instructed neither to refer patients to traditional healers nor to work in collaboration with them. Any violation of this rule was taken as a breach of ethics liable to penalties through the Medical Council. To further boot out the traditional healer, Chavhunduka adds that any letter or certificate coming from a traditional healer confirming that a worker was absent from work whilst consulting him/her was viewed as utter rubbish resulting in either dismissal from work or reduction of the salary. Those who produced letters or certificates from Western doctors feared neither dismissal nor the reduction of salaries.<sup>6</sup>

Since the dominant tendency was to like what was familiar and devalue that which was viewed as superstitious, the colonial government through its Medical Council denied traditional healers of any room for further development. Being in control of the public funds, it ensured that no budgetary provision was there for the promotion of traditional medicine as a system of health care in its own right. Only that which was budgeted for, as pointed out by Chavhunduka, was the development of Western health institutions plus also funds to fight the indigenous health sector and where possible, exploit its knowledge so as to advance the cause of Western medicine.<sup>7</sup>

The passing of the Bill, *Witchcraft Suppression Act* in 1899, so goes to argue Chavhunduka, was yet another design by the colonial government to suppress the activities of traditional healers. Analysing the phraseology used in the Act to define witchcraft, he argues that the definition says nothing about witches and witchcraft for witchcraft is defined as “the throwing of bones, the use of charms and any other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery.”<sup>8</sup> The throwing of bones, as he goes on to argue, is a means of divination used by traditional healers just as the use of preventive charms also. Witchcraft, to him, involves rather the use of medicines, poison, harmful charms, magic and any other means aimed at causing illness or death in any person, animal or property.<sup>9</sup> His argument, in other words, is that traditional healers were un-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 9

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 9.

fairly blanketed under the definition of witchcraft as a way of trying to suppress them also.

Another grey area in the attack against traditional healers was the use of inappropriate terms to describe them. Commonly used during the colonial era were such terms like witchdoctor, witch-finder, diviner, medicine man/woman, herbalist, magician and birth attendant. From the traditional healers' perspective, terms such as witchdoctor or witch-finder are actually offensive terms because traditional healers do not just attend to illnesses caused by witchcraft; they heal also illnesses caused by spirits, bacteria and germs. As with the term diviner, it too does not fully address the phenomenon of traditional healing because a diviner is just an expert at carrying out a diagnosis using spirit possession or other traditional methods.

The term herbalist suffices not also in characterizing traditional healers because their work is not just confined to herbs only. The same would go with the term medicine man/woman, traditional healers argue that they do not just handle medicines and others do not at all handle medicines but deal only with the religious and cultural issues that affect health. Neither does the term magician suffice also for there are traditional healers who use medicines and other methods of healing besides magic, nor the term birth attendant, for the work of those traditional healers involved in midwifery is much broader than just attending to births. Apart from providing pre-natal care, they also provide post-natal care like attending to child illness as well as providing sex education, contraceptive counselling and other needs.<sup>10</sup>

Terms which traditional healers are more comfortable with are: doctor of traditional medicine, traditional medical practitioner, traditional health practitioner or just the term traditional healer itself. Other acceptable terms may be titles such as spirit medium, prophet or faith healer.

Notwithstanding all the fight by some early missionaries and their counterparts in the colonial government to suppress the traditional religious system, a large number of people continued as they still do today to seek the service of traditional healers. It indeed appeared to have been a battle fought in vain. A number of reasons have seen the tradi-

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, pp. 8-9.

tional healer and his/her activities rebounding from almost the point of oblivion to which he/she had been thrown.

### ***Factors favouring a rebound of traditional healers***

While colonial officials and some early missionaries did not know the effectiveness of traditional medicines in curing a number of illnesses, a lot of the local people knew that traditional healers were indeed successful in curing a large number of illnesses. Even when judged by modern scientific methods, a lot of herbs and other ingredients like parts of animals, birds, insects, snakes and fish recommended by traditional healers contain useful substances. It is not only herbs and ingredients they recommend which are effective, many of their traditional practices also accomplish what is essential in objective scientific terms for curing a patient. As evidence, one could possibly point to the sucking out of the venom by a traditional healer if a client had a snake bite.

The traditional medical system has also stood the test of relegation because many of those who consult traditional healers do not do so solely on medical grounds. Many have psychological, spiritual, political, religious and social problems which they are convinced traditional healers are quite competent to handle. Some view traditional medical services as much better than the Western medical system because of its tendency to 'treat the whole man/woman'. It addresses a person's physical needs concurrently with his/her psychological needs. In affirmation to this H.E. Sigerist says,

The very unity of primitive medicine, the fact that it never addresses itself to either body or mind but always both, explains many of its results also in the somatic field. That a ceremonial in the course of which the patient comes into complete harmony with nature and the universe must have a strong psychotherapeutic value goes without saying.<sup>11</sup>

Leaving room also to the persistence of traditional medical system was sometimes the failure of modern medical science to get better or satisfactory results in certain types of illnesses like chronic dysfunctions. A.

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<sup>11</sup> H.E. Sigerist cited in Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 14.

Barker, a modern medical doctor who worked in Zululand had this to admit,

Where we failed, in hopeless cancers or in chronic ailments, the spirit world again would be invoked but often only in despair, which prompted fond relatives to leave no avenue unexplored which might lead to a last minute restoration of their sufferer's health. When this happened, European know-alls were ready to point a finger: 'You see doc? They're a primitive lot at heart, and given a chance, always go back to their old ways; you'll never change them'. Yet I fancy that the return to the magician owed more to love than to fear; more to a desire to help in an extremity than to the persistence in superstition [...].<sup>12</sup>

Related to the above factor is the fact that most locals tended and even now tend to put illness into two broad categories. The first category consists of those illnesses people view as normal or natural like coughs, colds, slight headache, fevers or stomach-aches. For most of these minor complications people have no problem in consulting a modern medical doctor. The real problem begins when that which was initially viewed as normal tends to persist over a long period of time and worse when treatment with modern scientific means had been sought but no sign of improvement is in place. People would be left with no choice except to regard it as abnormal. To deal with illnesses of this second nature people believe that consulting a traditional healer is the only way out since most modern doctors are believed unable to attack the ultimate causes of abnormal illnesses. Such causes range from witches, sorcerers, ancestor spirits, angered spirits to alien spirits.

Cases of people vacillating between the traditional healer and the modern doctor are thus a common reality. As demonstrated above, an illness which was initially viewed as normal and thus referred to a modern medical doctor may be re-defined as abnormal by the patient or by members of his/her social group, requiring thus the service of a traditional healer. It is not surprising to find the same patient or members of the social group seeking the services of a modern doctor again if, for example, their suspicions about the abnormality of the illness is not confirmed by traditional healers, when traditional healers fail also to

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<sup>12</sup> A. Barker cited in Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 10.

effect a cure or when symptoms which were initially viewed as strange just disappear.

### ***The fight for legal recognition***

Convinced of the genuineness of their profession, the effectiveness of their healing sorties/medicines and enlivened by the large client base which still sought their services, traditional healers began their long battle to seek legal recognition and acceptance through uniting among themselves. What they wanted first and foremost was to be treated not as criminals but as professional people by the colonial government. The fight, as Chavhunduka recalls, was not against colonial administrators alone, it was also against Christian Churches, Western medical institutions, the country's educational institutions, in fact, a fight against all the forces of colonialism. Adding more light, he says that the fight was not just about health policy or patients' interests but rather a fight for political power so that traditional healers could survive in a hostile and increasingly bureaucratic society.<sup>13</sup>

Around the 1970s eight traditional medical associations had been formed and these were: the African Ngangas Association; the True African Ngangas Herbalist Association; the Rhodesian Herbalist Association; the United Ngangas Association; the African Chiremba Council; the Mabweadziwa Association; the Rhodesia Ngangas Association and the Central African Chiremba Association.<sup>14</sup> Through the formation of these associations it was hoped by the traditional healers that their former prestige and status could also be restored. Lack of good leadership and intense rivalry, however, with each association claiming to be the 'true' medical association, failed to see these associations unite. Most if not all, remained too small in terms of membership and were quite weak also.

Apart from the formation of medical associations; attempts to gain public recognition and acceptance were also made through the persuasion of Chiefs, teachers and other community leaders to speak in favour of traditional medical practice during public meetings. One such case was the address given by the Acting Chief Makoni in 1968,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 10.

I thank all n'angas here because you have done a good job by forming an association which is bringing back the ancient customs into practice. The association is good because it is coordinating African doctors together and it is capable of driving out bad spirits [...]. I ask you to send your medicines to the laboratories so that it can be tested and used to help other patients. The n'anga was sent by God to help people on earth.<sup>15</sup>

Efforts were also made to invite medical scientists and modern doctors from the University of Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to come and inspect their traditional medicines and practices with the hope that those experts would pressure the colonial government to give the traditional healers legal recognition.<sup>16</sup> It was unfortunate, however, that many of those who had been invited showed no interest except for people like Professor Michael Gelfand whose interest with the Shona had since developed through his own researches also.

Whilst some sought legal recognition by the government, others sought recognition by Christian Churches through the use of the Bible. An excerpt from a newsletter written by the African Ngangas Association appears quite interesting to note,

We fear God and we work with the Bible. Our work is blessed by God [...]. We practice proper medicine as shown in Jeremiah 46:11 [...]. We admit that illness is natural, but we believe that it can be healed up. So we try to give what we consider is the remedy, e.g. for boils, 2 Kings 20:7; fractures, Ezekiel 30:21; stomach-ache, 1 Timothy 5:23; use of oil curing ailments, Luke 10:34; James 5:14 [...]. We do not believe that there is anything wrong with our practice of medicine according to our traditional way of herbalism. We believe and maintain that we are just as good as any European doctors in as far as we are able to do according to our knowledge of herbalism.<sup>17</sup>

Despite all the efforts by the traditional healers to seek legal recognition, nothing came their way. It was not until after Zimbabwe had become independent from colonial rule that traditional healers were granted what they had long sought for by the new government. In 1981, the new Parliament passed the Bill, *The Traditional Medical Practitioners Act* and

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<sup>15</sup> Acting Chief Makoni cited in Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> African Ngangas Association Newsletter, 21 Oct. 1972 cited in Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 33.

this was just after the formation of a new national association of traditional healers called the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) on July 13, 1980 with Prof. Gordon Chavhunduka as its first President.<sup>18</sup>

Though the Parliament had passed the Bill, it was still a very turbulent time for the traditional healers. A look at a few excerpts of letters written to the editor of one of the various newspapers in Zimbabwe shows the deep animosity and discomfort some people still had towards traditional healers and their association. On 27 June 1982 under the heading 'Heading back to the Stone Age' someone by the name Gono Goto wrote to the *Sunday Mail*,

The marvel of this century is that a man like Professor Chavhunduka, who has seen many school and university doors and who is teaching at the University, should be the protagonist of n'angaism (traditional healing) and witchcraft. I pity his students. Since he is a professor of witchcraft they are students of witchcraft –students of retrogression, studying at the feet of a professor of retrogression. Indeed that is what the belief in witchcraft stands for. It stands for the Stone Age [...].<sup>19</sup>

Writing also to the *Sunday Mail*, D.A.B. Robinson on 23 October 1988 wrote,

The two points in Dr Mawema's article [...] which I think are well made are: firstly, that there is need to have Government and the party and all public administrative institutions condemn the evil practices of, and beliefs in, witchcraft and *ngozi* (avenging spirit) and secondly, that Government and the party made a grievous mistake in legalizing ZINATHA because the majority of its practitioners practice and propagate witchcraft and believe in *ngozi*.<sup>20</sup>

Yet still, there were some who saw it more convenient to write directly to the President of ZINATHA himself. One such writer wrote,

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Gono Goto 'Heading Back to the Stone Age' in *The Sunday Mail*, 27 June 1982 cited in Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p.13.

<sup>20</sup> D.A.B. Robinson, *The Sunday Mail*, 23 October 1988 cited in Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 15.

## The President, ZINATHA

I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who is coming soon. I write this letter to let you know that ZINATHA is not a good association since it is not based upon the Word of God. We know from the Bible that the dead cannot communicate with the living. The spirits which can speak through *n'angas* and mediums are not spirits of the dead but devils which work to deceive the whole world [...]. The dead cannot help the living. There is no need to respect the dead [...]. The worshipping of the dead is against the Word of God. Read Lev.20:27; Lev.19:31; Is.8:19; [...] Acts 16:16-18; Dt.18:9-12. Yours in love.<sup>21</sup>

Not everyone, however, was critical of the activities of ZINATHA. Some sympathizers wrote, phoned or went directly to the offices of ZINATHA, encouraging the association to bring to a good end the work it had just started. Great tribute in the fight for recognition, however, as most members of the association feel, is given to Prof. G. Chavhu-nduka and other key figures like Dr Ushewokunze who was then the Minister of Health when the association was formed. Making reference to Prof. Chavhunduka, in particular, Dr Nelson Jambaya, the Vice President of ZINATHA had this to say,

Wherever we have travelled around the country, pastors and even ordinary people thank Prof. Chavhunduka because he kept holding on our religion given the fact that soon after independence many were saying, 'let us abandon all that is traditional and follow the way of the Whites.'<sup>22</sup>

When ZINATHA was now able to lawfully publicize its activities through publications and the opening of traditional medical schools, a number of people began to have a change of perception towards traditional healers. Some Christian leaders also are beginning to shift their positions, from one that was condemnatory to a stance that is more accommodative especially when it comes to the effectiveness of herbal medicines. Recalling his ordeal with the Catholic Church leadership in particular and the change of attitude he now sees, Prof Chavhunduka had this to say,

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<sup>21</sup> Anonymous letter cited by Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Dr Nelson Jambaya, Harare, 17/02/09.

For the past 10 to 15 years ago Fr Wermter was my greatest opponent, despising what I was doing, saying, 'You are a University man, a Christian, what are you doing with these heathens? You are promoting useless things, going to the government to defend *n'anga*'. And the government at one time wanted to ban this thing influenced by the Catholic Church especially as well as other Churches. They saw me as an enemy. But over the years he (Fr Wermter) is beginning to greet me for he also has been studying. He has now come to accept some of the things he used to denounce me for and as a result I am now being invited to the Catholic Church to give a lecture on the role of ZINATHA in society.<sup>23</sup>

Many Christian leaders, however, still remain suspicious of the spiritual aspects of traditional medicine. The same can be said with modern medical scientists, while some are beginning to be interested in analyzing herbal medicines, they are less prepared to venture the rituals and social techniques of traditional healing practices. What it means then is that most people are still skeptical of the spirit possession of traditional healers and all that goes with possession. Many question the authority or power with which a traditional healer performs his/her duties. It is to this subject that the following headline turns to focus on.

## ***Becoming a traditional healer***

### **Spirit possession**

There are several ways of entering the profession of traditional healing but the two main ones being spirit possession and apprenticeship. As for spirit possession, it is a phenomenon restricted just to a fraction of the traditional healers. Those who become healers in this way are believed to have inherited their healing spirit from a deceased healer in the family or from an alien spirit or both. Such people are generally known as spirit mediums or spirit diviners and most of them claim not to have undergone any form of apprenticeship, attributing thus all their knowledge to the guidance of the healing spirit.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Prof. G. Chavhunduka, Harare, 17/02/09.

It is not easy, however, for an individual to become accepted as a spirit medium. Contrasting the surmounting task of qualifying to become a spirit medium with that of obtaining qualification papers in the modern medical field, Michael Gelfand says that it is indeed in many ways less difficult to qualify at a University where at least medical studies are open to anyone with the necessary entry qualifications than for a Shona to become accepted as a genuine spirit medium.<sup>24</sup> In the Shona context, one has to show that he/she is possessed by a healing spirit and that this spirit has been passed to him by a deceased relative who himself/herself was a practicing spirit medium. Those without a family healing spirit will have to prove that a healing *shavi* (alien) spirit has selected them as hosts. What all this means is that the initial qualification lies beyond the neophyte's control.

The most usual sign of becoming possessed for the first time is abnormal illness by the neophyte. In reference to this Dr Jambaya emphasized, "*Haungonzi un'anga hwauya, ndaa n'anga chete, un'anga unorwarirwa*" (One does not just get up one day and declare himself/herself being a traditional healer. One has to be sick first).<sup>25</sup> After a series of unfruitful attempts to have him/her cured, family members usually are forced to seek the services of a diviner so as to establish the cause of the illness. On learning that a deceased traditional healer's spirit wishes its young relative to accept and practice its healing profession, the family head, once back to their homestead, kneels besides the *chikuva* (pot-shelf) of his hut and addresses the deceased healer's spirit to release the sick person from his/her illness in promise that the deceased healer's will is done. If this ritual is rewarded with recovery, the family is delighted and accepts the recovery as an indication that the deceased healer's spirit indeed wants to use him/her as host.

Before, however, the healing spirit is fully accepted in a ritual ceremony that is usually held in its honour, the neophyte has to undergo further preliminary tests prescribed by some accredited medium. Such tests may take a number of years and usually end with more searching tests conducted by a senior medium. During the more searching tests, as noted by G. Chavhunduka, the neophyte is supposed to fall possessed in the presence of the senior medium of the area and is probed with regard

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. Gelfand, *Witchdoctor*, London: 1964, p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Dr N. Jambaya, (17/02/09).

to the deceased healing spirit's past life, the site of his/her grave, the boundaries of his/her province or district and above all, the genealogy which connects him/her to the possessing spirit of the senior medium.<sup>26</sup> Apart from responding to interrogation, the spirit also is expected to recognize the spirits of all the other spirit mediums who would be gathered for the ceremony and know at least something about them. In the event of possession by an alien spirit, the spirit is expected to say something of its own history.

Not every neophyte subjected to intense examination makes it. Some may be dismissed totally as false or evil spirits like those of witchcraft while others are told to go away for some period and call for the ceremony again when they are properly possessed. In those cases where the senior medium is satisfied with the responses to the interrogation, he/she introduces the new spirit to those who would have been invited for the ceremony as well as members of the new medium's family. Among the assembled, according to Dr Jambaya, would be chiefs who, upon recognition of the deceased spirit medium's manifestation, ululate and give gifts in honour of the new *n'anga*. From then on chiefs begin sending sick people to the new *n'anga*.<sup>27</sup>

Early the following day after the acceptance of the spirit, the senior spirit medium, as observed by M. Bourdillon, initiates the new medium with a hair-cutting ritual. All the hair from the initiand's head is removed and deposited in the veld outside the homestead. This is followed by a second hair-cutting ritual after a short period of time and this time the medium has only his/her back and sides cut. Though it may be trimmed occasionally, the new hair is said to belong to the spirit and so should never be shaved off completely.<sup>28</sup> The significance of this ritual is more to mark the medium as belonging to the healing spirit, setting him/her thus apart from other people. Once initiated, the new medium enters full-time into his/her profession and may hold ceremonies whenever he/she wishes in honour of his/her healing spirit.

Generally, spirit possession can be characterized as one of the most fascinating aspects of traditional religion in that spirits can reveal their existence or presence to the community by actively taking control

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Dr N. Jambaya, (17/02/09).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, pp. 239-240.

of particular individuals of their choice and it could be a child or an adult, male or female. The medium may remain in that state of possession for a brief period of time or for many hours but certainly, the host does stay permanently in that state of possession. Though the Shona believe that a medium is chosen by his/her spirit, they also believe that one can fake possession so in practice, the respect accorded a medium depends so much on his ability to convince people when he/she is in state of possession.

### **Apprenticeship**

Turning to the second way in which one becomes a traditional healer, it is usually the case that a healer designates his/her heir before death. The heir could be a son, daughter, grandchild or some other close relative. As for a grandchild, it could be that the child may have been sent by his/her parents to stay with the grandparent as is the custom normally among the Shona or the child may have insisted even against his/her parental wishes on living with a grandparent who is a healer. A special bond normally develops between the child and the healer since much of the child's time is spent in the company of the healer, taking part in the trips to collect herbs or even in treatment sessions.

Stage by stage the child is instructed in the art of traditional medicine. Around the age of 9-10 years the neophyte is instructed in the identification and naming of herbs, insects, birds, snakes and certain animals whose properties are relevant to the traditional medical field. As the neophyte grows up to around 13-15 years of age, he/she may begin to collect herbs and other ingredients on his/her own initiative, prepare them and even administer them to some patients according to the healer's instructions. Once the young adult is showing improvement and success in what he/she does, he/she is introduced to the treatment of progressively more complex illnesses and thereafter begins to fully treat patients on his/her own. Such a process is how herbalists and midwives have entered and qualified in the field of traditional medicine. Those who may have been designated as heirs to a healer's spirit possession may at this stage, after the death of the healer, begin to fall ill or experience strange dreams and the whole process of initiating someone as a medium, as we saw earlier, would begin from here. Some healers

receive formal training at a school of traditional medicine, for example, at the Herbal College in Pretoria, South Africa. ZINATHA once opened also such medical schools in Harare and Bulawayo but due to financial constraints the colleges were closed in 1984.<sup>29</sup>

### **Njuzu (river) spirits**

A less common way of becoming a traditional healer is by being taken by *njuzu* spirits to be trained in the art of healing under water for a certain period of time. A mysterious force is believed to pull one into the water and the force may take the form of a whirlwind and this normally happens in areas with big pools. When such a thing happens oral tradition teaches that none of the family members is supposed to cry but all are encouraged to contain their emotions. If any of them were to mourn, the person who would have been taken is believed to be killed straightaway by the *njuzu* spirits. If the family, however, manages to contain itself, the person after a period determined by the spirits themselves is said to be brought up to the surface of the water by these spirits and from then onwards he/she can start his/her healing profession. Coming from a place (Mutasa district) with many rivers and pools, I grew up knowing which pools were sacred or not and I actually recall a local *n'anga* popularly known as *tete* (untie) Susannah whom we used to see coming out from one of the pools after having gone in to collect her medicament.

It is a general belief among the Shona that a traditional healer who learns the practice of medicine through this way is probably the most endowed of all. Pungwe River, as noted by M. Gelfand, which runs through the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe down into Mozambique, is a river from which some of the most famous *n'angas* are said to have emanated.<sup>30</sup> What I could not establish, however, is how ZINATHA verifies claims of people who say that they got their healing gift from these *njuzu* spirits since they appear to be extraordinary spirits which hardly have connections with people living on the land.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Gelfand, *Witchdoctor*, p. 61.

## Dreams

Yet another way of joining the ranks of traditional healers is through dreams. During sleep, a candidate is shown where a particular medicine is to be found in the woods. When he/she goes there the following morning he/she finds the medicine as exactly shown in the dream and would use it to cure a particular ailment. Such people who discover medicines this way may register with ZINATHA so as to obtain a licence to practice traditional healing but are only allowed to cure those particular ailments curable by medicines they would have found.

Dreams are not a preserve of this special group of people alone, the spirits are said to use the dreams of traditional healers to achieve many purposes. Pamela Reynolds in an interview with one of the *n'angas* was told that spirits use dreams to call, test, endow, inform, instruct, guide, warn, permit, reprimand, correct and shape the very lives of healers. Apart from effecting a direct influence on the *n'angas* themselves, spirits also use healers' dreams to reach the community, to diagnose patients, foretell the future, call for the redress of a neglect, caution against immoral behaviour and to make connections between the past and the present.<sup>31</sup>

## *The code of conduct*

The process of maintaining oneself in the traditional medical field involves much more than the acquisition and use of knowledge about flora and fauna. It involves an acceptance of given principles and some laid restrictions. In other words, one who is a healer is expected to live in accordance with a code of conduct of his/her profession which may include particulars laid down by the possessing spirit as well as more general restrictions laid down by the association to which one belongs. The precise nature of the principles and restrictions depend to a great extent on local custom and on the status of the spirits hence, certain aspects of the code tend to vary from healer to healer.<sup>32</sup> Be that as it may, it is possible to sketch out a general code adhered to by most healers.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. P. Reynolds, *Traditional Healers and Childhood in Zimbabwe*, Athens: 1997, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 241.

The symbols of office put on by some healers, for example, copper bangles, *ndoro* (a shell-like white ornament) or black and white beaded necklace; single them out from the common folk as initiated mediums. These symbols of office, as observed by P. Reynolds, signify that the bearers should not be angry or made to feel angry, should never beat or harm another even in self-defense, may not use their power to threaten others and should not kill or cause an abortion since it is considered an act of witchcraft.<sup>33</sup>

Extra purity is demanded of healers when it comes to the healing of a seriously ill patient. In such cases, it is demanded of them to abstain from sexual intercourse. The herbs that belong to the shades, as noted by Reynolds, have healing power and therefore should be touched only by someone who is pure. If they are tampered with by someone who is impure, the healer is believed to fall ill also.<sup>34</sup> Purity is demanded also of the *makumbi* (healer's personal assistant). Before he/she is enrolled, he/she is cleansed of impurities with water, incense and medicated smoke. Even when it comes to the selection of a possible host, the spirit is believed to look for the purity of the heart and a character that fits its own. No form of impurity also is entertained in the hut where a medium performs his/her healing sessions otherwise that would invoke the spirit's anger down upon the perpetrator. Misbehaviour, for example, as in the sexual excesses of young men and women is said to annoy the spirits also.

In the traditional medical field, a person who has been granted healing talents is obliged to use them for the good of others. If a healer fails on this bounded duty he/she is believed either to fall ill or lose patients. Thus the sacred duty which hangs over the heads of traditional healers is never to forsake others. Making reference to the *Second Chimurenga War* in Zimbabwe, Reynolds argues that some healers explained their support of the comrades during the war in terms of their duty towards anyone in need. However, some healers refused to assist either side arguing that their spirits hated bloodshed and so could not contribute to the war effort in any way. Such healers often saw themselves either being beaten by the comrades or imprisoned.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Reynolds, *Traditional Healers*, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Reynolds, *Traditional Healers*, p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Reynolds, *Traditional Healers*, pp. 16-17.

The moral goodness of a traditional healer often manifests itself also in the manner in which he/she charges service fees to clients. The poor are treated for free but may give anything they have as a token of gratitude to the spirit and this is said to ensure the effectiveness of the medicines they would have received. The spirit also is said not to allow any fee to be charged to a person who would be on his/her death-bed though such a person may be healed.

Such a spirit of kindheartedness towards the less privileged and those dying as well as the expectation of *musharo* (fee for the cure) only when a proper cure has been effected is less comparable to the cash upfront demanded by some modern Western-trained doctors. Some of these Western-trained doctors do not care whether the patient will die or not, what they just need is their payment. As for those who are charged something by traditional healers, the fee is conceived not as payment of the healer as such but rather as an attribute of thanksgiving to the healing spirit. Thus even a kin is obliged to pay something otherwise the spirit would be angry and the medicine become ineffective. The only reward that comes in the way of healers as individuals, so writes Reynolds, is the status that accrues to themselves and their families from healing and from access to the world of the shades.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult at times, however, to make a distinction here between the medium and the spirit since the one who receives the payment on behalf of the spirit is the medium. This has often resulted in some traditional healers becoming overly rich than their peers in the society and one cannot say that it is the spirit which is rich but the *n'anga* is rich.

Another indicator to a high code of ethics among traditional healers, though unwritten, is their preparedness to seek the help of fellow healers. When a good healer sees that his/her treatments are not proving effective enough, he/she usually advises the patient to consult another named healer known to him who specializes in the field of the patient's complaint. It would be up to the patient then either to accept the advice or to find someone else.

Failure to abide by the *muko* (avoidance rules) has its own consequences on the part of the traditional healer. He/she may become ill or receive no patients any more. Cases of a healer temporarily losing memory are also said to happen and this may result in the healer failing

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Reynolds, *Traditional Healers*, p. 18.

to find his/her way home. In the case of such minor breaches, before a healer can resume his/her duties, it is required of him/her to propitiate the spirit with some kind of ritual so as to please the spirit into returning. When a healer, however, seriously breaches his/her *muko* the punishment may be in the form of the host being completely deserted by the healing spirit. The general belief among the Shona, as observed by Bourdillon, is that when such a situation happens that the medium has indeed been deserted by the spirit, he/she will die shortly or turns mentally ill.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from the principles and restrictions laid down by healing spirits, the national association, ZINATHA, does discipline members also. It too does have a code which is expected to be followed by all registered members. The ZINATHA code of conduct is enshrined in the *Traditional Medical Practitioners Act, Chapter 27:14*. Section 7 of the Act, deals with conditions of disqualification from appointment as a member of the Traditional Medical Practitioners Council while Section 19, deals with offences in connection with the Register plus a few other things. Part V of the Act is devoted to disciplinary matters, with Sections 27 and 28, in particular, dealing with the exercise of disciplinary powers by the Council after inquiry and on conviction of an offence. On the General Section in Part VI one finds restrictions and charges which are put for any person who is not registered as a traditional healer but tries to act as one. For a fuller view of the Act, see *Appendix C*.

### ***Social functions of a traditional healer***

Having carried out an in-depth study of Shona traditional healers, M. Gelfand, by the very facts he saw, was forced to conclude that the *n'anga* is the kingpin of African society. Expounding on the centrality of the traditional healer he writes,

He is a doctor in sickness, a priest in religious matters, a lawyer in legal issues, a policeman in detection and prevention of crime, a possessor of magical preparations which can increase crops and instil special skills and talents into his clients.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 241.

<sup>38</sup> Gelfand, *Witchdoctor*, p. 55.

What Gelfand saw was indeed a true reflection of reality in the life of the Shona. The *n'anga* fills a great need in Shona society. In other words, his/her sphere of influence embraces almost everything affecting a Shona man/woman and his/her family. A brief look at each of these roles helps throw more light on what a *n'anga* is actually.

### **A doctor in sickness**

As expressed already in the previous paragraphs, many people believe and know that traditional healers are capable of curing a large number of illnesses. Before even the moment of conception right through the period of pregnancy, early childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, up to the point of death, the expertise of a traditional medical healer is sought to cure any form of illness that may endanger the life of the individual and to prevent any form of mishap that may occur in the individual's life. In brief, the *n'anga* is essentially a family practitioner. On their part, traditional healers, as observed by Gelfand, believe that nature provides cures and remedies for most types of illnesses either in the form of plants or trees. Such cures and remedies could also be in natural matter such as the excreta of certain animals and birds or even in particular parts of their bodies.<sup>39</sup> What a qualified *n'anga* does is simply to tap this power in nature for the common good of his/her fellow brothers and sisters. This is in opposition to an unqualified *n'anga* or witch who manipulates the forces of nature to achieve his/her own evil ends and at most such ends are to the detriment of humanity.

### **A priest in religious matters**

Traditional healers who act as spirit mediums have a typically priestly function assigned to them each time they are consulted, whereby they act as mediators between the client and his/her ancestors. In this role, they are able to relay the message from the spirit world of the ancestors to the family as well as to take back word from the family to the ancestors. Through their *hakata* (divining dice) traditional healers are able to decipher what the ancestors would be saying on either the cause of the illness or the cause of death in the family.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gelfand, *Witchdoctor*, p. 28.

Note has to be made that there are various ways, apart from throwing *hakata*, used by traditional healers to get messages from the spirit world. Some use calabashes, horns and yet others simply fall into a trance kind of state during which spirit possession takes place. A *makumbi* is at times needed to convey the message from the diviner to the clients if it happens that the diviner would be using a language not understandable to the clients. This normally happens with *shavi* spirits which may be of foreign origin. Since the traditional healer would no longer be his/her original self during the divining process, he/she may also ask from the *makumbi* what *vanasekuru* (ancestors) were saying after the spirit would have left him and thus back to his/her senses.

### **A lawyer in legal issues**

When a rich polygamous man, for example, dies after having fathered many children, disputes over the legal inheritance of his assets are not a far-fetched possibility in Shona societies. If nothing was said in the last verbal testament, a deadly war can easily crop up among his offspring and it is in such circumstances that a traditional healer is called in to settle the dispute. The reason behind the calling for his/her services is the belief that words expressed by a possessed *n'anga* are derived from the spirit world and therefore constitute the truth. His/her state of being possessed, in other words, is perceived as giving guarantee to an unbiased interpretation of what the deceased man wants done with his property. Agreements reached under the traditional healer's aegis are perceived as more binding than those reached by any other means.<sup>40</sup> Mystical sanctions are believed to be invoked against the parties to the dispute should any of the agreements be broken.

### **A policeman/woman in the detection and prevention of crime**

As a result of the belief in his/her powers of detection, a traditional healer is often consulted to recover a lost or stolen property. Not every *n'anga*, however, is tasked with this work; only highly skilled diviners are

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Professionalisation of*, p.26.

called in or consulted to perform this kind of 'detective work'. G. Chavhunduka makes reference to a quite popular *n'anga* in the 1980s called Jambo who diagnosed using what is generally known now as a video screen. This video screen was just a blank wall in a dark room. What Jambo would do was to move clients into this dark room after having administered to them a certain concoction. With full visual aide clients were said to be able to see their queries or problems being answered. Events leading to the cause of a relative's death, for example, were screened and relatives of the deceased could pick out faces and voices of those people allegedly responsible for the death. Some clients reported finding a lost relative and others recovering a stolen vehicle after visiting Jambo.<sup>41</sup>

In those cases where witchcraft is suspected, the traditional healer is known to administer a *muteyo* (trap). *Muteyo* is a special concoction prepared by a traditional healer and given to all adults in the family or village. If a person is innocent, the concoction induces vomiting but where one is guilty, the culprit is said to develop diarrhoea or even die. Under the new laws in Zimbabwe, as noted by Chavhunduka, the administration of *muteyo* is now regarded as illegal,<sup>42</sup> but this does not rule out the possibility of it still being used secretly.

Apart from sniffing out crime, the traditional healer is known to dispense special medicines which deter ordinary people from committing anti-social acts. If a man, for example, believes that his wife is being unfaithful to him or fears that she may be seduced during his absence, he consults a diviner who gives him *runyoka* (fidelity charm/fencing/safety lock) to safeguard his interests. There are various types of *runyoka*, a subject, however, which I am not in a position to develop in depth here, except just to note that one type of *runyoka* is put on the bed and is said to harm any foreign person who may sleep on it. Another is secretly added to the wife's food or drink and is said to cause a terrible itch to the body of the secret lover as though he were covered with stinging ants.

Yet another kind of *runyoka* is said to cause severe abdominal pains to the secret lover. In some cases also, the secret lover is said to develop a terrible urge for contact with water, hence, he is obliged to

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 73.

wash himself continuously. A more dramatic kind of *runyoka* is one which is said not to allow the two sex offenders to separate once they engage in the sexual act until the legitimate husband returns. In spite of its painful and shameful effects, *runyoka*, according to Chavhu-nduka, is administered by a good traditional healer because it is given to safeguard a couple's marriage. Though the one to whom it works against perceives it as witchcraft, the one who administers it and the society at large where it is practiced, perceive it as a just means to safeguard one's interests.<sup>43</sup>

### **A possessor of magical charms for the good of others**

To many, a traditional healer is indeed a person to whom one can turn in almost every kind of need. When, for example, one is fed up of the same gender among his/her children, a traditional healer comes to the rescue with his/her special medicine which ensures delivery of a child of the desired sex in the next pregnancy. Those who wish a perfection of skills and talents, for example, in football, boxing, or any other kind of sport, have their needs also met by a traditional healer. The same would apply for a boy who wishes to win love from a girl after his heart but who appears to be giving him lots of headaches in trying to win her love. A love charm from a traditional healer is likely to see him smiling by the end of the day for it would be more-like a walk over. Some may not even be in need of charms as such but may simply be anxious to know their future; again it is to the traditional healer that they make recourse.

### **A psycho-therapist and exorcist**

The post-war experiences during the 1980s saw a rise of mental illness in the Zimbabwean society. The spirits of those who had been wrongfully killed as witches or sell-outs by men and women who had fought the war on either side were believed as returning in search of retribution from the perpetrators. Among the affected were children whose behaviour just turned odd. To normalize the situation those who had fought in the war or their relatives, or parents on behalf of their children, turned to

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 77.

traditional healers for cleansing. Traditional healers responded to their needs by conducting rituals of cleansing and protection. They too listened and probed for the truth in the belief that a concealed truth makes cleansing ineffective. Where there was need to advise for a compensation for a serious harm caused, they would do so without hesitation to ensure full recovery. As far as their response to the post-war trauma was concerned, Reynolds rightly observes that traditional healers were creative, flexible and caring in such a manner that demonstrated their integrity within the Shona society. She further adds, "Healers were sensitive to individual and community needs because they too experienced war and observed the range of response, activity and emotional play that war calls forth."<sup>44</sup>

Connected to their healing of individuals who had been affected by the war was their active role in national healing when the reburial of fallen heroes was embarked on during the late 1980s. With the cooperation of local people and the burial committee, traditional healers sniffed out graves of the freedom fighters leading thus to the exhumation, identification and reburial of the remains. Since reburials help restore human hood and dignity to its original state as in life,<sup>45</sup> the exercise was carried out with the central purpose of helping the nation recover from the devastation which the war had unleashed.

Yet another contribution made by traditional healers in facing the evil after-effects of war was their help in the killing of witches' familiars. While the colonial administrators, on the basis of European belief that witches do not exist and conceiving witch-hunting exercises as hampering productive labour, managed to legislate the *Witchcraft Suppression Act* in 1899 this, however, had the unforeseen effect of making the Shona believe that Whites were working to protect witches. Freedom fighters thus took it upon themselves the task of stamping out witchcraft. To them, witches undermined a united front which was necessary for fighting a guerrilla war at the time since their activities rendered communities apart. Gushongo, a *n'anga* interviewed by Reynolds argues, however, that while the comrades had managed to kill those whom they identified or told were witches, they had failed to kill witches' familiars. Thus after the war, hyenas, snakes, crocodiles, owls and other familiars

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<sup>44</sup> Reynolds, *Traditional Healers*, p. 67.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Shoko, *My Bones Shall Rise*, p. 12.

which had belonged to witches roamed the countryside stirring up evil and it fell upon traditional healers to kill them or neutralize their powers.<sup>46</sup>

### ***General remarks on the profession of traditional healers***

While I am not trying to romanticize the profession of traditional healers, the foregoing analysis shows that they deserve a highly respectable recognition for their concern and commitment to the welfare of many. The general perception of traditional healers as agents of the Evil One, a residual of a die-hard colonial mentality, of necessity calls for a review. The same would apply to the Church's past and current, pronounced and unpronounced attempts to substitute the medical expertise of traditional healers with that of modern Western-trained doctors and the traditional healers' spiritual, psychological and social competence with that of priests. It goes without saying that such a move is just but a futile exercise. A point that possibly needs to be noted here is that each of these professions is a call in its own right and thus would necessarily defy attempts at supplanting one by the other. Rather than viewing them as antagonists, more should be done in appreciating and improving the divinely-ordained collaborative nature that lies hidden between them.

In the medical field, some, following in the footsteps of David Livingstone, have since seen the need for cooperation between the modern and traditional health sectors. Chavhunduka alludes to the existence of such cooperation between the two sectors dating back to almost the colonial period itself. He notes that in many districts of the modern day Zimbabwe, nurses and other modern medical health personnel, unofficially though, have always worked very closely with traditional healers, exchanging secretly patients, information and some medicines.<sup>47</sup> Behind the official eye much of the traditional healers' medicines found their way into modern hospitals and clinics. A lot was done during visiting hours. Even traditional healers themselves could easily slip through the crowd of visitors since there was no strict vetting on what one would have brought for the patient.

Since the establishment, however, of the Traditional Medical Practitioners Council when ZINATHA was formed, the cooperation

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Gushongo cited in Reynolds, *Traditional Healers*, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 40.

between the two health sectors has been made much easier since it is now officially recognized by the government. Of the three models of cooperation between modern and traditional health systems namely: integration, professionalisation and independent, the government of Zimbabwe, according to Chavhunduka, settled for the independent one which is characterized by mutual respect, interest in learning and understanding of the other. In adopting this model, the government allowed the traditional sector through its Traditional Medical Practitioners Council to develop on its own accord without government control, thereby allowing the government only the control of the modern health sector.<sup>48</sup>

The integration model which would have allowed the incorporation of all or selected traditional healers into the State-run health services was feared to undermine the traditional system through subordination by the State. Incorporation would also have meant the government being forced to address the remuneration issue of these traditional healers, something which the government was less prepared to do. As with the other model, that of professionalisation, whereby the government would control the activities of traditional healers by means of laws and regulations, it was viewed as a retrogressive step. What it would have allowed, as noted by Chavhunduka, is the imposition of some of the analytical, bio-mechanical concepts of modern medicine on the traditional healer. This would have forced the traditional healer to abandon those elements of traditional healing which do not fit in the test-tube.<sup>49</sup>

The collaboration between the priest and the modern doctor calls for no great attention for they have since been treating each other almost as siblings. While the modern doctor specializes on the treatment of physical ailments, the priest comes in as a healer of souls through the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick and this is seen as a perfect match. When, however, a traditional healer tries to come in also as a healer of both soul and body, he/she is viewed as an evil competitor in Church circles. Time has come, I think, when the Church should pull off the mask of prejudice and embrace the traditional healer as a colleague in the healing field.

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 40.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Chavhunduka, *Traditional Medicine*, p. 41.

## ***Areas of possible collaboration between priests and traditional healers***

### **Healing and deliverance**

Healing is not a phenomenon limited to a cure for physical ailment only; rather it embraces all aspects of suffering which affect even the moral, psychological and spiritual life of the sick person. The process of healing therefore involves the taking away from a sick person a stumbling block or disturbance to his/her physical or spiritual life, inhibiting him/her from human self-fulfillment. Leading to this blockage in human fulfillment is a whole plethora of causes ranging from ancestors to even attachment to vice, not granting forgiveness or the refusal to accept it. Faced with such causes, neither the priest nor the traditional healer can claim to be the jack of all trades.

Where the cause of illness is interpreted as cultural or social, people usually do not wait to be told where to go. In as much as they would avoid going to modern practitioners whom they know are not able to attack the ultimate cause of such an illness, so also they avoid going to the priest. Many shun the priest for fear of being misunderstood especially if the priest concerned is an expatriate. Many of the expatriate priests are known to dismiss many of the cultural issues as mere superstition hence, calling for no serious attention. In those cases involving the local priest who may be thought to understand the sick person's cultural background better, chances of being turned away also without the much needed help offered are there.

Certain illnesses may even require the deliverance of the sufferer from the forces of the darkworld. This indeed is a challenging area and the dread in many priests when it comes to dealing with such evil forces need not be overstated. Many priests know that exorcism is not a mere repetition of a given formula but rather demands purity of life and a determined effort towards sanctity on the part of the exorcist. Aware of their failures here and there many would not dare enter into that field. On the other hand, on those rare occasions, as affirmed by M. Bourdillon, when a priest by his own initiative gets involved in healing and the exorcism of traditional evil spirits, he is likely to get trouble with his

Church.<sup>50</sup> Among the popular figures of our modern times, one needs to think of Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo in the Catholic Church and Fr Nerwande in the Anglican Communion for a confirmation of this.

While there is some form of wisdom in the move by the Church of having one or two exorcists in a diocese considering the delicacy of evil spirit possession, it indirectly creates an excuse in some priests from dealing with evil spirits since one would simply claim not to be the official exorcist and it also limits as it were the powers to exorcise conferred through sacramental ordination to all priests. In limiting the number of official exorcists, the Church has also unintentionally created room for traditional healers to assume their rightful place in dealing with peoples' social and spiritual problems. Not every lay person even in most dioceses knows who the official exorcist in that particular diocese is. Such information is somehow shrouded in some kind of secrecy and as always, people opt for what is practical in their localities by seeking the services of a renowned traditional healer when need arises.

Since, however, illness is not limited to cultural and social causes only but can be a result of sin also; the priest through the Sacrament of Reconciliation has an important part to play also. After healing a person from a physical illness Jesus is at times seen in the Gospels saying, 'My friend, your sins are forgiven you'. What all this implies is that sin at times blocks or delays physical healing and so the person has to be helped reconcile with God, himself/herself and with fellow human beings.

Given the important roles played by both the priest and the traditional healer in the life of a sick person, it would be nice to envisage the possibility of the two joining hands in attending to a sick call or referring patients to each other. While to conservatives in Church circles this may sound unheard of and not even worthy of exploration, it is important, however, to remember that the ultimate source of healing is God whether that healing is effected through the priest or the traditional healer. The gift of healing comes from God so the priest, modern doctor and the traditional healer are simply mediators of God's healing powers. 'He that is not against us is for us' (Mk.9:40) was Jesus' reply to those who felt a competition in the service of the Lord and the same applies

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<sup>50</sup> M. Bourdillon, *Where are the Ancestors? : Changing Culture in Zimbabwe*, Harare: 1993, p. 92.

fittingly with traditional healers given the fact also that most of them are Christians. Such a view finds echo in the words of Prof. Chavhunduka when he said,

If the Church says *kune mahedheni akazara kuZINATHA* (ZINATHA is full of heathens) it offends us for we will be there also for the Service in the Catholic Church, Anglican Church and other Churches. We are together, only functions do differ.<sup>51</sup>

Of course I am alive to the reality that there are some evil spirits which, through the medium of 'certain' traditional healers, can cause illness and also heal by removing the sickness they cause. Be that as it may, it would be hard to say this of reputed traditional healers recalling the intense examination they undergo in qualifying for the profession as well as the strict code of conduct they have to adhere to. Charlatans who abuse the profession of traditional healing are sure bound to be there but one cannot argue from a particular 'darnel' to a demonisation of the whole profession of traditional healing.

A similar argument goes to those attempts at dismissing the traditional medical profession on the basis that traditional healers know also medicines which can cause harm because knowledge does not entail usage. It would sound really illogical to dismiss traditional healers on that basis and accept instead modern doctors because they too know medicines which can cause harm or even death among patients. Moreover, modern doctors like witches sometimes use human parts and products in order to heal yet no one complains about that. What is the fuss then with traditional healers when they claim their knowledge and competence to be equal to that of modern doctors? Traditional healers may sure fail here and there like diagnosing wrongly or advising wrongly on a social problem but it is important to remember that such failures can be made by healers in any healing sector. As with charlatans, more should be done I think by ZINATHA to flush them out otherwise the existence of such parasitic rogues among its ranks will make ZINATHA lose its credibility.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Prof. G. Chavhunduka, (17/02/09).

## Ministry to the dying and the dead

The last moments of one's life in a Shona life-setting, as reflected earlier on in the thesis, are crucial not only for the dying person but also for the close relatives. Almost everything is done to try and save the life but many a time people stand speechless when the grip of death proves clearly irreversible. It is at such moments that the services of both the priest and the traditional healer are called for. Though the traditional healer cannot do much in such cases, his/her presence is enough to instil confidence in the gathered relatives that the spirit world has not abandoned them. H. Aschwanden echoes a similar sentiment when he notes that in the understanding of the Karanga, "the presence of the medium reassures everybody because if the medium is present, then the ancestral spirits are too."<sup>52</sup> Since the dying person is prepared to meet not only his/her ancestors but God also, the presence of the priest too is important with his Sacrament of *Viaticum* and Anointing of the Sick to effect both the strengthening and forgiveness of sins to the dying man/woman.

Some deaths are complex and only the traditional healer can help correct the anomaly. An example of such complexities is when the Shona see a *mumvuri* (shadow) on the wall where the corpse would be lying in repose. It is the general belief among the Shona, a matter captured in Bourdillon also, that a person has two 'shadows', the black reflection of physical stature as well as the white shadow which is the *munhu* (person) and which becomes the *mudzimu* (spirit) after death. Soon after death the white shadow is expected to disappear but if it lingers this is interpreted as a sign of the deceased's displeasure over something. When such a thing happens, no one may enter the room or touch the corpse until the shadow disappears.<sup>53</sup> The presence of a traditional healer helps thus figure out the cause of this displeasure to the deceased which could be an omitted ritual, the presence of a witch or someone having failed to pay respects to the deceased.

In those cases where a diviner is not called, close relatives gather in the room where the corpse would be and one by one goes out from that room and if the culprit is among them, the moment he/she goes out, the shadow is said to disappear. If all go out and still there is

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<sup>52</sup> Aschwanden, *Symbols of Death*, p. 221.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Bourdillon, *Shona Peoples*, p. 200.

no change then it necessitates the summoning of a diviner. Such issues are not referred to the priest because people know that he is not competent in cultural issues of this nature.

Another issue not referred to the priest is the *Gata* consultations. People simply know that priests are not involved in the sniffing out of witches. The desire to know the cause of death so as to avert further calamities of that nature pushes them to go where such knowledge can be found. Traditional healers have often come under vehement attacks from the Church on this matter as they are accused of causing mayhem in the society. How justified those attacks are is something that is given less attention. When people visit fake traditional healers, divisions and tearing of each other are sure bound to be the resultant. Those among the traditional healers who are true to their profession are not permitted by their *muko* to divulge the witch by name if the death involved elements of witchcraft. He/she may just provide some vague clues to it, leaving it thus to the clients to match the clues with their prior suspicions. If the people are not satisfied with the outcome, they are always free to seek second opinion which may confirm their pre-conceived suspicions. At the end of the day one sees that if there is mayhem in the society it is basically the clients who carry the greater blame since they would simply be working more on their pre-conceived suspicions. One thing to remember is that the main push behind seeking the cause of death is not a retributive agenda as such but the desire to block the same cause from bringing another death in the family.

In the ministry to the dead, the services of a traditional healer are important also when it comes to dealing with causes of mysterious deaths in a family. The priest is usually viewed as helpless in such cases except just being called to say one funeral mass after the other in the victimised family. Since divination is not his domain, the priest may sure be unable to determine if the cause of death is an angry spirit, *shavi* spirit, *ngozi* spirit or anything tied to cultural causes of death. Though he may incense the homestead it often turns out to be a temporary solution for certain spirits are so stubborn to be chased away by simple cleansing rites until they are genuinely acknowledged and appeased in the proper way. It is only through the help of his brother/sister 'in arms' the *n'anga* that effective help can be given to the family.

When it comes to the most controversial issue of *kurova guva*, one finds that if the priest and the *n'anga* were to work together then it

would bring the true satisfaction to most people especially those who live in those regions where it is almost a must to consult a traditional healer before *kurova guva* is done. Among the Karanga in particular, if *kurova guva* is done without the involvement of the *n'anga* as proposed in the Christianized *Kuchenura Munhu Ritual*, people do not feel satisfied. The priest's sermon whereby he admonishes people to live well and look forward to a better life in the next world as well as the mass he says though considered good and necessary, are often felt to leave a certain gap in peoples' expectations, a gap which only the *n'anga* can fill. As noted by Fr K. Makamure,

People get satisfaction when they follow what the *n'anga* says and when he/she approves what they do. Part of the satisfaction is that no harm will come to them since they are more worried about this life and not the future life. The fear of making mistakes and any repercussions forces them to call a *n'anga*.<sup>54</sup>

While such a collaborative ministry I am proposing between the priest and the traditional healer may find people who are quick to criticize, the reality on the ground, especially on the larger part of the faithful reflects this collaboration. Part of the on-going hidden transcript reveals that people have always assigned a working partnership to their key helpers, that is, the priest and the traditional healer as this is reflected also in their vacillating between the two. When all is calm in the family, they know God has to be thanked in the Church but when the going gets tough and there appears to be less help from the priest, they too know that the spirit world has to be consulted.

Though the Church is not specific on what matters she admonishes the laity to refer to the help of natural law, her teaching can be said to be giving a green light for the Shona laity to continue with what they have always been doing. In *Gaudium et Spes* the Church teaches,

Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution,

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Fr K. Makamure, Harare, (10/02/09).

or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In all truth it has to be admitted that the *n'anga* is indeed the kingpin of Shona society for much that goes on in the society in a way revolves around his/her presence. Though attempts were made during the colonial era to wipe off his/her existence from the face of the earth, the *n'anga* has prevailed those trying times and has emerged more refined after legal recognition was granted to him/her and having accepted the Christian faith also. Ordained by God for the well-being of his people, the traditional healer is indeed a colleague to count on in the health delivery system as well as in other countless social, cultural and spiritual problems. It is unfortunate, as Fr Makamure rightly noted, that people have long been given a picture that a *n'anga* is bad and once a priest tries to work with a *n'anga* some are quick to conclude '*warashika*' (he is lost). Inculturation when one is so polarized becomes very difficult.<sup>56</sup> What comes up in the following chapter is an attempt to fight this polarization as it seeks to apply the incarnational principle to Shona customs.

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<sup>55</sup> Gaudium et Spes, No. 43.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Interview with Fr Makamure, (10/02/09).

## Chapter Seven

# Applying the incarnational principle to Shona funerary customs

### *Introduction*

The action of God in history, as reflected in the thesis, was mandated by the Council Fathers of Vatican II as the paradigm of the Church's action in the world as she meets new cultures. There being no cultural system foreign to the Holy Spirit since it has ever been working salvifically in all, it follows that every culture is presumed to be compatible with Christianity. Where doubts of compatibility exist, there has always been a practical rule in the Church, formulated well even before Vatican II by the well known missiologist, Albert Perbal (1950), that the missionary has the task of proving that the custom is "indissolubly linked with error or immorality or absurd superstition" <sup>1</sup> if he/she suspects anything. The presumption, however, should be in favour of the custom, not against it as reflected in Perbal's further explication, "Insofar as this proof is not conclusive, the custom holds; it has the force of law; it possesses a legal right."<sup>2</sup> Perbal's formulation can still be appreciated in the context of an earlier and more authoritative directive by Propaganda Fide (1695),

Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring any pressure to bear upon the people to change their manners, customs and uses, unless they are evidently contrary to religion and sound morals [...]. There is no stronger cause for alienation and hate than the attack on local customs, especially when these go back to venerable antiquity. This is more especially the case, when an attempt is made to introduce the customs of another people, in place of those which have been abolished.<sup>3</sup>

Having there been some elements in the Church who were suspecting that Shona funerary customs are not compatible with the Christian faith and in their own ways tried to prove the errors, the foregoing chapters

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<sup>1</sup> A. Perbal cited in Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Perbal cited in Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> Propaganda Fide cited in Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 156.

have basically been a counter to those arguments and a proof that Shona customs are indeed compatible with Christianity. What follows now in this chapter is the application of the incarnational principle to these customs and as expected, it will be seen how the Church will be enriched by them and they themselves getting enriched also. Factoring in the cultural dynamics of Shona culture, the chapter proposes three ways of applying this incarnational principle which may result in the Church feeling at home among the Shona and they too feeling at home in the Church. The three proposed approaches are: integration; independent and substitution. What these terms entail in the context of this thesis will be seen as the chapter unfolds.

### ***Integration Approach***

Attempts at integrating the Christian message with Shona customs have since been initiated as evidenced in the publication of the Christianised rite, *Shona Ritual: Kuchenuira Munhu* (1982). While I agree with the spirit behind and some sections of it, this thesis has managed to highlight that it is not comprehensive enough since it focuses only on one aspect of the Shona funerary rituals, that of *kurova guva*. A more embracing approach, so the thesis argued, was needed because leaving out other rites relating to death among the Shona would have been a serious blunder that would have relegated efforts at inculturation to a piece meal exercise. Highlighted also in the thesis is the position of a crucial figure whom I feel was unfairly, unacknowledgedly and unrespectfully handled in the debates leading to the Christianised rite, and this figure is the traditional healer. What is needed thus is taking into consideration these highlighted aspects if the integrated approach is to bear fruit. To be noted, however, is that this thesis intends not to come up with a new rite as such but simply intends to map out the ingredients that may need to be factored in if at all a new rite is to be considered.

Recalling the methods of inculturation highlighted in the earlier part of this thesis, namely: dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation, it is possible to see that the integrated approach will benefit a lot from the use of these methods.

## Dynamic Equivalence

It is worth reiterating that while accepting as a starting point the established doctrinal, liturgical and pastoral forms of the Church's teachings, dynamic equivalence tries to re-express them in vernacular and cultural forms of a people so that the message can be transmitted suitably. Facilitating this transmission, as we saw, is the reality that there are certain aspects of a culture that by their very nature witness to the highest realities of the Gospel. In the re-expression of these forms one should not be drawn to seek a formal correspondence as such because formal correspondence remains only on the level of form or external appearance and does not take into consideration the cultural patterns, history and life experience of the local community.

Looking back on the catalogue of the Church's teachings, one finds that various themes relating to death constitute the official body of teachings which she wants explained to the nations. Included on that list of teachings are such themes like: ecumenism, family unity, communion of saints, fidelity to one's obligations, care of the less privileged, immortality of the soul, sinfulness of humanity, the existence of the Evil One, the holy duty to respectfully lay the deceased to rest as well as to pray for the deceased's soul, commitment to Christ's words, the sacral value of graves and quite a number of other themes. Such themes can be beautifully re-expressed in the living language, rites, customs and symbols of the Shona community enabling thus an easier grasp of them by the Shona. Indeed, as will be witnessed in the coming selected reflections, certain aspects of Shona funerary customs have connaturalness with the Gospel values which the Church teaches. One little challenge is that Shona traditional religion does not have a written body of teachings which should have made the re-expression much easier, but exists in oral form and much of it is reflected in praxis.

### (i) Ecumenism

To foster unity among her members as well as with other Christians, the Church in *Unitatis Redinte-gratio* teaches,

There can be no ecumenism worth of the name without change of heart. For it is renewal of the inner life of our minds (Eph.4:24), from self-denial and unstinted love that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way. We should therefore pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the ser-

vice of others, and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity towards them. St Paul says: "I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph.4:1-3).<sup>4</sup>

Coming to Shona practices, this teaching can be re-expressed concretely by pointing to the ecumenical spirit which characterizes the mourning ritual of the Shona. In the Shona mourning ritual, as reflected in the thesis, life is acted out as rendering service to the bereaved and expressing that love and sympathy to them by remaining with them during their most painful moment of sorrow. The forbearing of one another in love and the eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit which St Paul talks of finds expression also in Shona funerary songs. Praising the deceased's spirit of neighbourliness people usually sing such songs as 'Aigara zvakanaka nevamwe muraini' (He/she used to stay well with others in the community). Such acts of love which help foster unity among the Shona, know not of boundaries as people from all walks of life and Churches come to pay their condolences to the bereaved family.

Surely, the Church would be enriched by adapting this live demonstration of ecumenism, her message would not remain *flatus voci* and she may even be motivated to explore ecumenism with more earnestness. The Church is not the only one which stands to benefit when she incarnates this way, the Shona community also, through the encounter with the Gospel is strengthened when it realizes that its ecumenical actions are actually the mind of Christ who not only desires but prayed that all be one who believe in his name (Jn.17:1-21). The Shona community too would find comfort in the words of Paul who desiring all people to recognize their unity in Christ, not only calls people to lead a life worthy of their calling and eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Eph.4:1-3) but says also,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal.3:28-29).

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<sup>4</sup> Unitatis Redintegratio, No. 7.

## **(ii) Communion of Saints**

In Catholic belief *communio sanctorum* (communion of saints) is a spiritual union of all Christians living and the dead. The union revolves around the mystical Body of Christ, with Christ himself as the head and each member contributing to the good of all and sharing in the welfare of all. As articulated more explicitly in *Lumen Gentium*, the Church teaches,

[...] all are subject to Him, some of his disciples are exiles on earth, some having died are purified and others are in glory beholding “clearly God himself triune and One, as He is [...] all who are in Christ, having his Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in Him. Therefore the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ [...] is strengthened by the communication of spiritual goods [...].<sup>5</sup>

While recognizing the spiritual union, the Church makes a distinction between the Militant Church, that is, those members who are alive and still struggling on earth, and the Triumphant Church, composed of those members who have fought the fight and are already in heaven.

Crossing over to the cultural forms of the Shona, such a teaching can be re-expressed through adapting the Shona belief in the communion between the living and the dead. As portrayed in the thesis, the Shona believe in the spiritual union between the living and those in the *Nyikadzimu* (world of the dead) and each member is believed also to contribute and share in the welfare of all. The dead do everything possible to assist the living and the living themselves from time to time make offerings to ensure lasting memories of their dead. In incarnating herself in this way, the Church stands to benefit in that her message will quickly and firmly find a home in the hearts of many among the Shona since that message would be seen to concur with already known beliefs. In receiving the Church’s teaching on this subject, Shona culture gets enriched also in that its adherents come to know of the subjection of all things, including their ancestors also, in Christ (1 Cor.15:24-28) and the possibility also of attaining that beatific vision of God.

## **(iii) Holy duty towards the dead**

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church stands written,

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<sup>5</sup> Lumen Gentium, No. 49.

The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honours the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

It is also Catholic belief that the dead no longer have the ability to pray for themselves so the living members have a duty to pray for the souls of the dead that God may grant mercy and rest unto them. It is a result of this belief that she asks mass to be said on behalf of the dead and for the souls in purgatory since during mass, the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world is once again enacted.

Actions speak louder than words when it comes to the care of the Shona over their dead. The Shona believe, as seen already, that death is a journey whose success depends so much on the living members so, in their actions, we find a concrete expression of the Church's teaching. Emphasizing on the need to bury the dead with respect and charity, the Shona often use the saying: *Munhu haavigwi sembwa* (A person cannot be buried like a dog). Adapting such a saying can thus enable the Church to express more meaningfully her message among the Shona. The Church is enriched also when she incarnates the concrete demonstration of Shona care for their dead for her teaching will not remain simply on the level of words but would be expressed also in real practice. Once the Church is able to live the message of her teaching it would go a long way to challenge the barriers which some members of the Church at times create when it comes to who deserves funeral mass or not on such grounds like whether one was paying or not his/her *mugove* (Church contribution). In receiving the Church's teaching, Shona culture on the other hand is fired with the hope of resurrection, a life beyond even its world of the dead.

#### **(iv) Sacral value of graves**

In Catholic belief graves are sacred places not to be tampered with and this is evidenced by the existence of certain places at most Mission Institutions which have been designated especially for the burial of Church

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<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2300,  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc\\_css/archive/catechism/p382c2a5.htm#2300](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p382c2a5.htm#2300) (accessed 10/08/09).

members. As enshrined in the *Code of Canon Law*, Catholic teaching holds,

Canon 1205 –Sacred places are those which are designated for divine worship or for the burial of the faithful by a dedication or a blessing which the liturgical books prescribe for this purpose.<sup>7</sup>

Though Shona tradition lacks written evidence it is not difficult to see that such a teaching can easily be re-expressed by making reference to the salutations the Shona make when they visit the graves of their deceased relatives. In respect of the sacral value of graves also, as we saw, no tree nearby is cut away, graves are generally to be avoided except for ritual purposes and those graves in the courtyard are kept smart through regular sweeping around them as well as the removal of any growths. In expressing her teaching through the medium of this Shona custom, the Church is enriched in that her message finds easy appeal in the Shona community. There is nothing which pleases the Shona save that of seeing their customs being appreciated. The blessing of the graves which the Church does stands to benefit the Shona community also in that at times they suffer effects of evil powers associated with burial places. Those who die wicked and are buried at common burial places are believed to make the place at times impassable during the night. Reports of people seeing a ghost or people being mysteriously beaten during the night usually become the order of the day when such happens. Thus when the Church blesses these places and incenses them such evil powers are believed to be subdued.

### **Creative Assimilation**

During the age of Patristic creativity, so was noted, one method through which inculturation was carried out involved the integration of pertinent rites, symbols, linguistic expressions and so on of the Greco-Roman culture into the worship of the Church. Such a method now popularly known as ‘creative assimilation’ accepts, in other words, cultural practices that are not already part of the Church’s tradition. As further clarified by L. Magesa,

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<sup>7</sup> T.J. Green (ed.et al), *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Paulist Press, 2002, p. 1425.

It endorses them as part of the faith practice of a particular people based on the conviction that the spark of divine creativity animates every culture and that God can be encountered and worshipped in myriad ways, many of which have not yet been realized by Christians brought up in the Western tradition.<sup>8</sup>

To enhance creative assimilation, Patristic writers, as noted also, often made recourse to biblical typology, a more or less way of analogical thinking. When applied to the funerary rites of the Shona, this method is set to bring amazing results for there are quite a number of powerful symbols and expressions in these rituals which can be integrated into the worship of the Church. These symbols and expressions provide also a rich source from which to craft Shona contextual theology.

### **(i) Beast of provision**

As a symbolism of love and honour to the deceased person, a beast, as reflected already in the thesis, is slaughtered as provision for his/her journey. Before the beast is killed, the deceased person is informed of such an offer in such words like: 'N, this is the beast we are killing for you and shall be used also as relish for the people who are gathered here to mourn you. Do not say later that you were not accompanied. Remember to look after your family'. What happens to the meat or how it is cut and distributed varies so much with local custom. In some places part of the meat, as noted by B. Muchemwa, is roasted on a hearth inside the hut where the corpse will be lying in repose and this process is known as *pfungaidzo* (incensing). Since the meat would be the provision for the deceased's journey such incensing is done to suffice the corpse with the fragrance of the meat.<sup>9</sup>

Such a symbolic gesture of providing meat as provision for the deceased's journey can be creatively assimilated into the worship of the Church in the light of Elijah's experience on his journey to Horeb (1 Kings 19:4-8). Knowing the journey was long, the angel of the Lord had to suffice Elijah with enough food that would carry him through and this can be understood as analogous to the symbolic action of the Shona in sufficing the corpse with the fragrance of the meat before it embarks also on its long journey. Just as Elijah also was to meet God at the end of

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<sup>8</sup> L. Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, Nairobi: 2004, p. 195.

<sup>9</sup> Muchemwa, *Death and Burial*, p. 37.

his journey, the Shona too conceive death as ultimately a journey back to the *Musiki* (Creator) though one has to do it through his/her ancestors.

In the light of the New Testament, one would interpret this symbolic gesture of the Shona as fore-shadowing the Eucharist. When administered together with the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick to a dying person, the Eucharist is often referred to as *Viaticum* 'with you on the way' meaning by that the Eucharist is to act as provision for the journey. In integrating this ritual, the Church would be enriched in that more Shona people would be inclined to embrace its message since they would be recognizing part of their culture in the worship of the Church. Her message also that Christ is the true provision of life who makes those who partake of him live forever (Jn.6:35-59) enriches Shona culture for it would have been brought to perfection.

### **(ii) Mbudzi yeshungu neyenhorwa (goat of anger and of provision)**

Some groups among the Shona have a goat of anger killed during the *kurova guva* ceremony to reconcile the living and the dead. Such a ritual action is done for the sole purpose of trying to bring to an end any kind of animosity that could have existed between the living and the dead person. The forgiving of one another that is effected through this ritual is conceived as healthy for the living members of the family and for the deceased too since he/she would now be enabled to rest in peace when the ancestors take him/her to their side, seeing now no trace of dirt in him/her. The goat of anger is consumed by almost everyone belonging to the same lineage with the deceased person and any stranger present may partake of it as well but not obliged. As with the other goat, that of provision, it is given to non-members of the family who drive it away from the homestead and kill it there. Family members are not allowed to partake of it. It is consumed without salt so as not to 'salt' the spirit and any remains of it after people have consumed of it are burnt on fire.

In the attempt to assimilate this ritual, the 1982 Christianized rite compares it with what the Israelites used to do on great days, for example, on the Day of Atonement. The Christianized rite notes that four animals were killed: two goats, a ram and a bull (Lev.16:5-11, 21, 26-28). One goat was for the sin offering of the people while the other was

sent away into the wilderness to Azazel after all the sins of the people were put on its head.<sup>10</sup>

What the Christianized rite failed short of doing was to bring in a New Testament perspective to an understanding of this rite. It would sound more complete I think if this ritual is to be understood in the light of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Compelled, as it appears, by the felt need of his community to resort to Jewish customs in order to come to terms with their sense of sin against God and the need of atonement, the author of the letter to the Hebrews writes to them to clarify on the complete and abiding efficacy of Jesus' death as an atoning sacrifice. The writer, as noted by Samuel Ngewa, relates Old Testament sacrifices to the work of Christ and shows how Christ represents the ultimate fulfillment of all they were meant to accomplish (Heb.9:11-10:18).<sup>11</sup> *Mbudzi yeshungu neyenhorwa* can therefore be interpreted as fore-shadowing Christ who was killed to free people from their sins. In adapting this ritual, the Church is enabled to articulate its message in terms more understandable to the Shona. In accepting also the Christian message, the Shona reach that level of awareness that Christ's death is the perfect sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world, fulfilling thus the yawning gap that always existed in their culture and they would surely begin to appreciate the sacrifice of the mass recommended by the Christianised rite.

### **(iii) Kudya mbeu (eating of the seed)**

Among the Manyika, on the second night of *chenura/kurova guva* ceremony which is being performed for a family head, women beyond child bearing, so it was noted, cook all night edible bulbs and roots which all the children, nephews and nieces of the deceased have to eat at dawn. There is no need for them to consume much as such since just one bite of that boiled concoction is perceived as enough. Such a ritual activity is done to guarantee the clan's continuity. If one child fails to partake of this due to some unnecessary reason and is seen later to be in some kind of trouble, be it illness or any other kind of misfortune, the Manyika

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Appendix A.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. S. Ngewa, 'The Place of Traditional Sacrifices' in T.Ademoyo (ed et al), *Africa Bible Commentary*, Nairobi: 2006, p. 1502.

would often be interested to ask: *Akadya mbeu yababa vake here?* (Did he consume the seed of his father?).

Looking closely at the *kudya mbeu* ritual, one finds that it was indeed a prophecy which revealed to the Manyika in their own cultural set up God's eternal truths before the advent of missionaries. The *mbeu* (seed) represents Jesus Christ who gives the power of continuity to those who belong and partake of him. Speaking of his flesh as the life of the world Jesus says, "[...] unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn.6:53-54).

The boiling all night signifies the agony Christ underwent to give life to the world. Just as the seed is purified through the intense heat of the fire so also Christ was purified with much suffering. Reminding his readers, the author of the letter to the Hebrews says, "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted" (Heb.12:3). In a similar vein, the First Letter of Peter reminds readers of Christ sufferings for humanity when it says,

[...] Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Pet.2:21-24).

Just as one bite is enough, so also with the Eucharist, it is not quantity which matters when it comes to sharing at the Lord's Table. In most rituals of the Shona, old women are often associated with ritual purity and in the ritual under discussion; they symbolize the purity which is expected of the priesthood, upon which lies the responsibility of bringing Christ into the world. Not only is the Church enabled to become truly catholic when she incorporates this ritual but her proclamation among the Manyika is catalysed. On their part, the Manyika become an informed people who know that Christ is the ultimate *mbeu* which gives everlasting life to the world when they accept the Christian message.

#### (iv) Traditional Medical Doctor

Outside the realm of rites and symbolic representations, there sounds to be no harm if creative assimilation is extended to the traditional medical doctor whose role in the funeral rites of the Shona is quite central. Recalling that creative assimilation may include also the contextualization of certain biblical texts so that they reflect the contemporary experiences of a given group, it would be nice to think of such passages like Sirah 38:1-2, 4, 6-15 in view of the Shona traditional medical doctor. In this passage we read,

Treat the doctor with honour that is his due, in consideration of his services; for he too has been created by the Lord. Healing itself comes from the Most High, like a gift received from a king [...]. The Lord has brought forth medical herbs from the ground, and no one sensible will despise them [...]. He has also given some people knowledge, so that they may draw credit from his mighty works. He uses these for healing and relieving pain: that druggist makes up a mixture from them. There is no end to his activities; thanks to him, well-being exists throughout the world. My child, when you are ill, do not rebel but pray to the Lord and he will heal you [...]. Then let the doctor take over [...] do not let him leave you, for you need him. There are times that give him an advantage, and he too beseeches God that his diagnosis may be correct and his treatment bring about a cure [...].

Engaging what Gerald O. West terms 'reading in front of the text'<sup>12</sup>, it is interesting to note that in making reference to the doctor, the passage does not make a distinction or state whether the doctor is to be a scientifically trained one or a traditional one. The key matter highlighted in this text is that healing itself comes from the Most High and that it is actually the Lord who has brought medical herbs from the ground. Equally central is the fact that the doctor beseeches God so that his diag-

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<sup>12</sup> Reading in front of the text is whereby the reader is not so much interested in the author's intentions or the usual historical-critical concerns. Throughout the reading one would be interested in the final form of the text, paying careful attention to the literary detail and the central themes. Meaning is conceived as residing in the text and not in the mind of the author, thus the text enjoys a certain kind of 'autonomy' which conditions the hermeneutic openness of the act of reading. The text's openness awaits new addressees with their own world. The reader mobilizes the semantic potential of the text by selecting codes of meaning that correspond to his/her situation and context. Cf., G.O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African context* (1995).

nosis may be correct and his treatment bring about a cure. The question which then one has to battle with is: How can this text be understood in the context of the Shona who often find themselves in a split situation due to a condemnation of their traditional systems, and in particular, of their traditional medical doctor?

What one finds is that the text is in the first place a reminder to the Shona that well-being comes from God. It comes as an invitation to them to give thanks to God for the flora and fauna that he has planted in their midst which their own experts, that is, traditional healers; using the knowledge that they receive from God, use for healing and relieving pain. In relating to these experts, the Shona are called upon to give them that respect which is their due. Thus, in appropriating its message, the Shona find that there is really no reason for them to remain in a split situation for what is found in their culture was actually divinely-ordained for their well-being. The text, in other words, liberates them as they come to realize that the existence of traditional medical doctors in their midst is well in accord with God's plans for them. The text also sends a message to the Shona traditional healers that if their diagnosis is to be a success and their treatment bring about a cure, there is need for them to seek the help of God since he is the ultimate source of all healing.

Another passage which can be contextualized is that of Hezekiah's healing in 2 Kings 20:1-7,

[...]. Turn back and say to Hezekiah the prince of my people. Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold I will heal you; [...]. And Isaiah said, "Bring a cake of figs. And let them take and lay it on the boil that he may recover."

Highlighted in this text is the use of nature 'cake of figs' to effect a healing. In His concern for the well-being of humankind, God has endowed nature with the power to relieve pain and He Himself remains the source of that healing. When read by the Shona, what meaning do they derive for themselves?

More like the text in Sirah, I feel the passage is a reminder to the Shona also that healing takes place only when God has willed it. As a result of the love to preserve life, the Shona often find themselves in a situation of knocking at the door of every renowned traditional doctor as well as surgeries of specialized modern doctors so as to save themselves or their relatives from the grip of death. This text therefore indirectly

shows that no matter how many traditional healers or modern doctors they may seek help from; it turns out to be in vain if God has not given a Yes to it. They too should not look down upon nature, for God manifests his healing powers and works in nature. One thing the passage confirms also to the Shona is that God has indeed always been with them since time immemorial as reflected in his healing power which resides in the flora and fauna that their experts use for healing.

When such passages are contextualized, one indeed sees no justification in the attempts at dismissing traditional doctors. What they do is basically in line with what God has ordained for the well-being of the Shona. What adds leverage to the argument also is the fact that quite a number of traditional healers are Christians, a proof which further shows that they too seek God for guidance in their profession. Though some have healing spirits as aides, they believe that the ultimate source of healing is God and that the first ancestor in that particular family to have a healing spirit received the gift from God, the source of everything that is good.

If the Church incorporates believing traditional medical doctors into her system, she would be enriched in that she would now be able to cope with that area which most of her priests tend to shun away from, namely: exorcism. Not only is she helped in dealing with the forces of evil but her children find answers whenever they are faced with the hard-to-explain situations of life. On the part of the Shona community, they stand to benefit also when the Church incarnates this way because they would have been saved from living a kind of split life. There is nothing which brings joy and comfort to the mind as doing something which one knows that no one disapproves of it.

The Church should actually seek to work more closely with traditional healers, not only attending to their personal spiritual needs but also guiding and counselling them in their profession. They too love Jesus and are actually continuing the work of God among his people. If the Church is still complaining that traditional healers are evil it is because she is not helping ZINATHA to root out rogue elements like some self-styled healers who deceive the whole nation into believing that pure refined diesel can be obtained from rocks<sup>13</sup> and some who move around

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<sup>13</sup> Claiming to be Changamire Dombo's medium, so it is told, Rotina Mavhunga found an abandoned fuel tank in the bush near the northern town of Chinhoyi in March

in villages claiming to be *tsikamutandas* (cleansing prophets) yet wrecking havoc in these villages. One such self-styled prophet Thomas Mutasa had his case brought before the courts when it was alleged that during his cleansing errands he raped a woman then rubbed his victim's private parts with a concoction of water, salt and charcoal to 'cleanse' her.<sup>14</sup> In the name of helping people deal with evil, some of these *tsikamutandas* are actually profiteering in this lucrative business of theirs as they sometimes demand payment in large sums of money or take away cattle as payment for their services. While some of them are registered with ZI-NATHA some are not.

To sum up on the integrated approach, it is important to see that it is still a work in progress, a process which calls for more openness to the Spirit who has always been working salvifically in the culture of the Shona. Such a work should not just be confined to one aspect of Shona funeral rites but should embrace all the rites that have to do with death and after-life among the Shona. While it looks good and innovative, its challenge is that more in terms of research needs to be done if ever the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe is still dreaming of coming up with another integrated Christian rite. Buffeting it also is the fact that Shona culture is an oral one. This makes the re-expression of the Church's written teachings a bit more surmountable job because Shona culture knows not of any fixed formulae, for example, of prayers, nor does it have fixed functionaries who perform religious ceremonies. The way to perform certain rites is at times attained through a process of consensus seeking. Counting, however, on the fruits of a conscientious application of dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation, methods which have fuelled past successful forms of inculturation, chances of the

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2007 then she filled it with diesel, attached a pipe to the outlet and concealed it at the top of a rock. She then went to summon top government officials to witness her 'discovery'. With the help of a hidden accomplice, the tape would be turned on and the officials would gasp in amazement as refined diesel poured down the side of the rock. Thinking it was true that the ancestors were providing refined diesel, the cabinet task force which had been dispatched by Mugabe's government went back to report that Zimbabwe's persistent fuel shortages at the time were now over. Cf. W. Nyamukondiwa, *Mudede Role Queried as Diesel N'anga Convicted*, [http://zimbabwesituation.com/jul28\\_2009.html#Z10](http://zimbabwesituation.com/jul28_2009.html#Z10) (accessed 07/08/09).

<sup>14</sup> S. Mandizvidza, *Police Watch as Witch Hunters Wreak Havoc*, <http://www.thezimbabwestandard.com> (accessed 08/08/09).

Church feeling at home among the Shona and they too feeling at home in the Church are greatly enhanced.

### ***Independent/Compartmentalisation Approach***

Equally to result in high chances of the Church finding a comfortable home in the hearts of the Shona and they themselves identifying with the Church is when the Church, recognizing and appreciating the values in Shona traditional practices, leaves these practices to go on independently without interference and only add Christian rites before or later as a supportive bulwark, filling the yawning gaps that exist in traditional customs. As she portrays herself, though a bit separately also, the Church can be able to correct if there is anything wrong in the traditional customs. She would simply have to stick to her core business which is to live out an authentic and efficacious witness of life in the world and all would be in control.

Working in favour of the Shona traditional practices being left to go on independently is the issue of the Spirit's presence in these practices and, as earlier noted, the Spirit has ever been functioning salvifically in them. Even now, the insubordinable Spirit has not ceased his work in the cultures of different peoples. He still guides his people in their search for God, leading them thus to find salvation. This explains why the Council Fathers during Vatican II called for respect and preservation of those good and valid elements to be found in non-Christian religions (*Ad Gentes*, No.11). What this means is that even for those among the Shona who choose not to accept Christianity as their religion, as did Mahtma Gandhi, it would almost be difficult to imagine that the doors of salvation are sealed off completely to them as long as they continue to seek and serve God through the dictates of their conscience.

To be seen as providing room also for the traditional practices to be left going on independently are the words of Cardinal Maurice Otunga in his address to the 1977 Synod of Bishops in Rome. Analysing the pre and post Vatican II periods, he notes that African cultural and religious heritage was seen before Vatican II as *preparatio evangelii* that could be set aside once the proper work of evangelization had started. During Vatican II, however, as he goes further to note, a new and more dynamic image, that of the *semina verbi* was created and under this new image Christ is seen as the real sower who had already planted the seeds

in African cultural tradition. These seeds, as he came to conclude, after being watered by the waters of evangelization “[...] can produce flowers which have never been seen before.”<sup>15</sup>

Looking at some of the salvific values of Shona funerary rites it is possible indeed to concur with Cardinal Otunga that African cultures possess seeds that can produce flowers. It sounds reasonable also to add on to his words that the blooming of flowers from these seeds did not just begin with the advent of Christianity as such, the flowers have ever since been blooming, it is just that they were not appreciated when the missionary first reached the African soil. Whatever new colours Christianity brought, it was more a matter of adding to those which were already there in God’s universal botanic garden.

Insofar as some Shona values can be used in the correction of some way-ward behaviour in the world, it demonstrates the undying nature of these flowers. The Shona respect for life, for example, as argued in the thesis, can be used as a point of reference in the attempts at correcting an anti-life mentality developing in some parts of the world and can be utilized also as a reminder of God’s original intention in creating man and woman in his own image and likeness. The same was argued with the sacredness of the verbal last testament among the Shona, it leaves an indelible lesson that religion is all about fidelity and conviction. The ecumenical spirit displayed in the mourning ritual of the Shona, so was noted also, can be utilized to curb an encroaching spirit of individualism in the modern world. What all this shows is that left on their own, the funerary rites of the Shona can be a tremendous source from which to draw lessons. Theirs is a deep well that never dries as evidenced in them having stood the test of time and they actually show that they will still be intact in the foreseeable future.

Equally favouring an independent continuity of Shona funeral rites are the words of Fr Fraderick Chiromba which he made during a presentation to the *World Council of Churches (WCC) Eighth Assembly Padare* (1998) in Harare. Critiquing the Christianized *Kuchenura Munhu* rite he asks what the fuss is all about with *kurova guva* that the Church should want to be involved in all the traditional aspects of it, which, however, is not demanded of other related rites and rituals? Citing the

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<sup>15</sup> M.M. Otunga, ‘African Culture and Life-Centered Catechesis’ in *32 Articles Evaluating Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, T. Okure (ed), Eldoret:1990, pp. 144-1445.

progress that the Church in Zimbabwe has made in producing Shona rites of Baptism, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage, rituals for rain and others, he tries to dismiss the fuss when he points out that,

[...] the same child presented for baptism may undergo traditional initiation rites; the same person to be anointed may be consulting a *n'anga* or spirit medium in the quest of healing; the same couple for marriage will have gone through the whole process of customary marriage (in which the Church is not usually involved); the same congregation praying for rain on the Sunday of prayer for rain may be conducting traditional rain rituals simultaneously in their homes and villages.<sup>16</sup>

Using these parallel cases, he proposes that the Church should come up with its own purification ritual in consultation with but independently of traditional intricacies. To this, he adds that if ever the Church officials are going to be involved in the *kurova guva* ceremony, they should do whatever they have to do, for example mass or blessings, on the first day of the traditional ceremony which usually lasts for three days and complete their duties before the family goes into festivities. Drawing yet another parallel with Christian marriage, he makes an interesting remark when he says,

Surely no one punctuates a wedding party with prayers over various aspects to make it Christian! [...]. The priests do not have to remain with the wedding couple until the last pint is drunk or the last piece of cake eaten unless they so wish for reasons other than making the marriage truly Christian!<sup>17</sup>

What Fr F. Chiromba says here with *kurova guva* applies fittingly to all other funerary rites of the Shona. The Church should not just rush to poke her nose into these rites for it often results in people getting dissatisfied by the end of the day. From my own experience of having been brought up and worked among the Shona it is undeniably true that most of the Shona people only get satisfied when they follow almost everything that is laid down in the tradition of their ancestors. Though these rules and regulations are not to be found anywhere written down, there exists in every community of the Shona custodians of these traditions,

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<sup>16</sup> F. Chiromba, *The Why and How of Kurova Guva*, Harare: 1998, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Chiromba, *Why and How of*, p. 4.

especially the elderly, who pass on to the younger generation what should be done and what should be avoided. During the lowering down, for example, of a corpse into the grave, such instructors are often found at the edges of the grave directing those who would be lowering the body. Part of the satisfaction also, as noted in the thesis, is that no harm should come to them. The fear of making mistakes, which may thus result in some repercussions from the spirit of the deceased, often leads them to seek the expertise of a traditional healer rather than that of a priest. People know that traditional practices are the domain of the traditional healer so they go to him/her.

Considering that many Christian communions profess to be followers of the Lord yet differ in mind and go their different ways as if Christ was divided (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, No.1), there appears to be every reason to argue for the independent continuity of the traditional funeral rites for they are among the few ceremonies in Shona culture which can bind the whole family together irrespective of individual denominational affiliation. Funeral rites at most gather together scattered family members as each one of them is driven either by the desire to bid farewell to a beloved one or due to fear of repercussions once one absconds unnecessarily. They provide also opportunities for children to meet and get to know the bigger family as well as a few other relatives.

Where one finds Churches poking unnecessarily in these traditional rites there is always some kind of resistance from some family members who themselves may be members of other denominations but less concerned with a spirit of ecumenism and worse when they are non-affiliates of any denomination. They either make unnecessary noise while the Church activities would be going on or they just sit at a distance as a sign that they have no interest in what would be going on, only to come and join others once the traditional practices resume.

Given, however, that culture is a human creation and therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be 'healed, ennobled and perfected' (*Redemptoris Missio*, No.54). What it therefore means in the context of the current discussion is that the funerary rites of the Shona stand to benefit more if they accommodate Church activities especially the sacrifice of the mass which is a re-living of Christ's atoning death. While indeed the Spirit has been actively present in these customs, human nature is always prone to sin due to the gift of human freedom. Though part of the Shona customs try to deal with this problem of sin, it was argued earlier

that Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross dealt effectively once and for all with sin (Heb.10:1-12). In a similar vein Paul argues,

[...] since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith (Rom.3:23-25).

It should, however, be quickly added that unlike the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought which tries to dismiss completely the practices of the Shona on the grounds that Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, the Shona are saved through their customs and not in spite of them. What it means, in other words, is that Shona customs just need to be perfected through giving Christ his place in them and not dismiss them as such. There is no stronger cause for alienation and hate, as we saw earlier being raised by Propaganda Fide, as the attack on local customs especially when these date back to venerable antiquity.

In defining himself Christ says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn.14:6), a fact that the Shona cannot afford to ignore. Though this statement on the surface projects a picture that not all roads lead to Rome, it does not, as reflected in the thesis, mean that one cannot possess eternal life without being declared Christian. Salvation, as was argued by Karl Rahner, is guaranteed also to those who live according to natural law and live in God's grace without the acknowledged title of Christian. To this, John Paul II added that followers of other religions can be saved by Christ without being converted. By the end of the day one finds that Christ is eventually the one who leads people to God.

Following Christ, however, is the most sure and easier way of finding salvation. He himself tried to assure his listeners about this when he said, "[...] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Mt.11:29.30). More like the Pharisees who had developed a burdensome religious legalism that weighed people down, some practices of the Shona due to the base nature of humanity, can actually turn out also to be a burden. Some cases of widow inheritance, for example, tend to suppress individual freedoms on the grounds that it is cultural. Taking refuge therefore in Christ tends to

restore the lost dignity and through the support of the Church most widows can be helped fight the unjust systems in their culture.

Giving way to Christian activities to be added to the traditional practices opens up room for an acknowledgement of the Trinity's *perichoresis* in the lives of the Shona. The Shona would come to appreciate that the Spirit who has always been with them throughout the history of their traditions was not actually alone as there has always been an eternal circumincession between the person of the Father, the person of the Son and the person of the Spirit himself. Such has always been the working of God in their lives. The economy of salvation, however, as we saw, was not carried out at the same time, in the same manner and by the same persons. God, as it were, allocated each period in the history of salvation to each person of the Trinity.

From a theological perspective, the Old Testament looks to be the period of God the Father, the New Testament belongs to the Son while the period of the Church is devoted to the Holy Spirit. Though the concept of the Trinity was unknown to the Shona, the theological outlook looks a bit different from the history of the Shona in that God the Father and God the Holy Spirit appear to have been more actively present in their past history and now, for them, is the period of the Son but already being handed back to the Holy Spirit as witnessed in the mushrooming of a quite number of independent Churches in which possession by the Spirit is dominant. Whatever the little differences may be, it is important to note that the *perichoresis* of the Trinity is given recognition if Christian practices are added to Shona practices.

In terms of when and how Church activities are to be added to the funeral rites of the Shona, discretion, I propose, should be left to the Church official designated to conduct the rite and this should be done in consultation with the family whose rite is to be conducted. The official, as was pointed out by Fr F. Chiomba, should not seek to get involved in the traditional intricacies but should rather finish his/her duties before or after the traditional celebrations.

Such a side-by-side kind of approach, unlike the integrated one, is likely to benefit people more for it leaves an individual with the freedom to choose which kind of rite to attend. If one on the grounds of faith is not comfortable to partake of the traditional rites then he/she would simply have to join others when Church activities are on and the same applies also for someone who has no interest in Church matters,

he/she would simply have to avail himself/herself during the time for the traditional activities. No one at the end of the day is pricked by the conscience that he/she did not attend or join others at such moments of concern to the family and the society at large. Judging from the day to day life of the Shona, however, very few would dare ignore the traditional practices for they appear to carry a more binding force than Church activities which are open even to one's 'taste' considering the plurality of denominations.

The side-by-side kind of approach helps also avert the kind of antagonism that often characterizes relations between traditionalists of Shona religion and Church adherents. Some traditionalists despise Christians as people who are not proud of their own ancestral religion but just followers of a foreign religion and some would even label Jesus as *mudzimu vavarungu* (ancestor of the Whites). The age-old association of the missionary with colonialism in a way still lingers on as some of these traditionalists attack missionary Churches of diluting traditional religion through their teachings and practices. Surely a traditionalist would not understand why a widow, for example, should refuse to be inherited by her married brother-in-law as prescribed by the traditional customs as she tries to abide by the Church's teaching of one wife, one husband and so would not wish to disturb anyone's marriage. Equally some preachers have a share also in brewing this kind of antagonism. They appear as if they were once in heaven where they were shown the whole nature of God, all that he likes and dislikes, as they tear down traditional religion through their scolding sermons. Nothing but hell fire is promised to adherents of traditional religion but what they seem to forget and underestimate, however, are the lengths and depths of God's mercy.

What is simply needed between the two camps is tolerance of each other. Such tolerance is bound to be inculcated as they give platform to each other on the same occasion for which they would have been gathered. When they come to realize that after all they have a common motive which either is to help the deceased's spirit to rest in peace or to comfort and strengthen the bereaved family, efforts to help each other so that the function goes on smoothly at times begin to manifest themselves. Many would not wish to offend the spirit of the deceased through causing unnecessary commotion. The deceased deserve their rest, so is the Shona belief reflected in the thesis.

To the liberals, such an independent approach to the rites provides opportunity to enjoy the benefits of both worlds. From the festivities that usually mark traditional rites, they cross over to partake in the festivities organized by Christian adherents or vice versa without any problem. Some actually find it healthy for they are able to associate with the spiritual realities in both worlds. As they partake in both worlds, they are convinced that the unique mediation of Christ the Redeemer does not exclude but gives rise to a 'manifold cooperation'. It is Shona belief, as was pointed out in the thesis, that *Nyadenga* (God) is conceived as having left certain things in the hands of his lieutenants (ancestors) to deal with. This was the mind of John Paul II when he extended the concept of the 'manifold cooperation' (*Lumen Gentium*, No.62) to non-Christian religions, thereby recognizing in them 'participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees'. While to many, the Christian life and the traditional life may appear worlds apart; to the liberals it is actually one world. They simply acknowledge the workings of God in the different phases of their history and see Christianity not as a break with their traditions but rather a continuity.

### ***Substitution Approach***

By substitution here I mean, not out of a spirit of disdain as such for the traditional customs but as a sign of growth in the faith, the entrusting of everything into the hands of Christ. The incarnational principle, in other words, is allowed to take effective and complete control of almost everything but not from the wrong motives. A look at what Emmanuel Milingo says about ancestors helps shed more light on this approach:

[...] I am certain that Africans will themselves do the sifting of their values when they come across the power of Jesus Christ. It will not be strange to them to carry Jesus in place of their living-dead ancestors by whom they are used to being possessed. The living-dead ancestors are cultured and well-mannered people. They will give way when Jesus comes in, provided that Jesus guarantees protection and guardianship to the living members of the clans and tribes. He will undoubtedly do so with pleasure, since we know that He has spent

Himself completely for the restoration of man's dignity and for his redemption [...].<sup>18</sup>

In proposing this approach I am not trying open room for a back-lash on traditional customs on the understanding that one has been 'born again' but rather the proposal is made from a spirit that if one feels so compelled to go back to the traditional customs, he/she should not feel guilty to do so because he/she still sees nothing bad in them. One can still search and find God in them. Even when Paul makes an argument from created nature to the knowledge of God whose existence has been fully revealed through the coming of Christ (Rom.1:19-21), he does not thereby imply that God could not still be sought and found in nature with this coming of Christ. In surrendering everything into the hands of Christ one is simply acknowledging that Jesus is the last revelation of the Father who is the ultimate source of everything, life and well-being. In revealing Himself in His Son, God opened an easy and most sure way of finding Him. Since Christ also is the person to whom everything will finally be subjected (1 Cor.15:24-28) there is every justification in surrendering everything to Him. What simply one may need to learn is perseverance in prayer (Lk.18:1-7) for Jesus can still help him/her out in those compelling situations without necessarily having to go back and seek help from traditional religion.

Providing a sense of direction to this approach is the manner in which the Church mourns and buries her priests and nuns, both missionary and African ones. Providing direction also are some of those practices like *Nyaradzo* (Memorial Service) and the Unveiling of the Tombstone which are already being practiced in some sections of the Shona community.

### **Mourning and burial of priests and nuns**

While every Catholic Christian has a right to Christian burial (*Canon 1176*) unless one is deprived of such by ecclesiastical law, for the laity it is not easy at times to have a 'purely' Christian rite only used on them without some elements from the traditional customs. For the priests and

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<sup>18</sup> E. Milingo, *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival*, Gweru: 1985, p. 87.

nuns, however, a 'purely' Christian rite is used since such people are normally viewed as elements which had already been set apart and therefore not to be 'tainted' with anything traditional. *The Order of Christian Burial* itself consists essentially of three main parts: (i). The Vigil Service in the form of a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word or Office of the dead in the home of the deceased person, in a funeral parlor, or in the Church where the body of the deceased has been placed during the period before the funeral rite. (ii). The Eucharistic celebration/Funeral mass in the Church. (iii). The Rite of Committal.<sup>19</sup>

Without going into the finer details of the *Order of Christian Burial*, it is worth to mention that when the funeral is that of a priest, the needs of the people to whom he last ministered are often respected. The Vigil Service or an additional memorial mass may thus be held at the place of the priest's final ministry. Consulted also in the funeral arrangements are the priest's family. With nuns much seems to be centralized at their Generalate which acts as the Mother House of the respective Congregation. The family of the deceased nun will be there too and more like the priest's family also, there is hardly anything from their tradition which they do to their dead relative since much will be in the hands of the Church which was now almost the new family to the deceased. When the remains of the priest or nun have been interred in their final place of rest, what usually would remain to be done are memorial masses in various communities of the Church then later, the yearly anniversary masses since neither *doro remvura* nor *kurova guva* is done for them.

Adapting such a way in which priests and nuns are mourned and buried as well as later remembered sounds the best way for the laity also who would have committed everything into the hands of Christ. What one may, however, need to do before his/her death is to write out a will and let it even be discussed among his/her family members and relations that he/she wishes to be mourned, buried and remembered in accordance with purely ecclesiastical norms. Such a wish can also become part of his/her last verbal testament so that it becomes even more binding. I would like to believe that people would always try to respect someone's wish though of course there are some traditional elements who think that traditional norms take precedence over individual wishes

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Muchemwa, *Death and Burial*, p. 25.

hence, would want these to prevail. In my pastoral errands I have met some who at times argued that the whole family community cannot be put at risk because of an individual's personal beliefs and in such cases a priest is at times incapacitated also as he cannot go ahead with anything against the wishes of the family. In a way this reflects one of the weaknesses of the substitution option for it has no binding force on every member of the larger extended family, it remains only a preferential wish of an individual or two in the family.

## Nyaradzo

A lot of push factors are seeing many adopt *Nyaradzo* as a way of honouring and remembering their dead. Those who are moving away from the traditional obligations like *doro remvura* or *kurova guva* on grounds of faith resort to *Nyaradzo* as the best substitution. There are some families, for example, who have since moved to town and identified themselves with town life and by so doing have lost touch with much of the traditional life in the rural areas. Such people have come to adopt *Nyaradzo* as more convenient to them. Factoring in also the almost unstoppable series of deaths which can occur in a family due to the AIDS nightmare, many are left with no resources to have *svitsa* or *kurova guva* conducted and as a result they are forced to abandon the traditional practices and resort to *Nyaradzo* which generally is not that demanding to host.

Though *Nyaradzo* seems not to have been Catholic in origin among the Shona, it is now generally blended with some Catholic practices. It essentially consists of the Liturgy of the Word, prayers and testimonies, and where possible, a priest is called to say mass after which he can bless the tomb with holy water to 'cool the spirit'. Insofar as *Nyaradzo* is viewed as having the capacity to 'cool the spirit' it has been made to replace *doro remvura* which has also the same intended purpose of 'cooling the spirit'. The intended purpose of *Nyaradzo* replacing *doro remvura* is seen also from the timing in which *Nyaradzo* is planned. Just like *doro remvura* which is timed two or so weeks after the burial, *svondo yeNyaradzo* (memorial week) also is announced to take place during that same period.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. E.L. Kadenge cited in J. Elsner, Kuchenura Munhu: The Continuing Discussion around an Example of Inculturation, Appendix G, p.3.

## Unveiling of the Tombstone

As a way of expressing the undying, strong and unbreakable love and honour towards a deceased person, relatives usually buy an expensive tombstone to place at the grave of their beloved one. This serves as a mark also especially where there are common graves or simply to avoid trees and grass making the place invisible. Such a practice appears to have been unknown to the Shona before the advent of the Christianity but they had their own ways of marking graves. Though they had nothing written on these graves, certain signs always reminded them whose remains were housed where and grandchildren would grow knowing where their ancestors were laid to rest. In this literate age, marking graves has been made a lot easier as one can buy a fairly expensive tombstone with an epitaph inscribed on it.

To Christianize this sign of love, it is becoming a common practice to call a priest and other members of the Christian community to witness this expression of love and then ask the priest to bless the tombstone. The unveiling aspect comes in that after the builders have finished their task of re-building the grave and setting the tombstone; they usually cover it with a piece of white cloth symbolizing purity of the deceased's spirit. A chosen member of the family is then asked to remove the cloth thus unveiling the tombstone to the onlookers. Shona Catholics appear to be adopting this practice from other denominations either in its wholeness or some elements of it. Such an absence of uniformity stems from the lack of an agreed Catholic rite of conducting this unveiling of the tombstone. Proposed rites, one by Fr Mavhudzi and the other by Fr Murphy have so far not yet gone beyond being tried *ad experimentum*. To a sizeable number among the Shona, unveiling of the tombstone is becoming a replacement to *kurova guva* and is normally timed also at almost the same period around which *kurova guva* is usually done. Cases of the two being combined abound also since unveiling of the tombstone is not a preserve of Christians only.

While it is to be admitted that quite a number of people are moving away from traditional practices in favour of such practices like *Nyaradzo* and Unveiling of the Tombstone, I feel most tend to go to extremes as evidenced in them using these occasions as opportunities to bombard traditional customs. Such an unenlightened, unforbearing and unpluralistic attitude towards traditional religion and customs needs really in all fairness to be brought to an end. As more of a counter to

missionary catechesis which appears to be the root cause of this negative attitude towards traditional religion and customs, there is need I think to de-catechise the false notions and then re-catechise people on the values of their traditional customs and make them feel proud of who they are. In surrendering everything into the hands of Christ, one should first appreciate God's purpose in having created him/her in that particular traditional set up and not regard oneself as one who all along had been lost. It sounds ungrateful really when one claiming to have been 'born again' begins to pillage what was divinely-ordained for the salvation of the Shona. Reflections from the book of *Wisdom* on God's love for his creation are worth considering here, "Yes, you love everything that exists, and nothing that you have made disgusts you, since, if you had hated something, you would not have made it" (Wisdom 11:24).

One shortfall also with the substitution approach is that it is more of abandoning one's own customs and a taking up of other people's customs for there is nothing like 'pure' Christianity without accretions from other cultures. The Bible itself to which many would like to turn or forward as a proof that what they would be doing is purely Christian, bears the imprint of the epoch in history and culture within which it was written. The discussion that this thesis has engaged on the social and historical background of monotheism has been one such example of how texts are influenced by the settings in which they are produced. Even the *Order of Christian Burial* itself, it has so many accretions from other cultures also. If one were to trace the evolvement of this rite, no doubt would he/she find that early Christians followed 'pagan' customs of those people among whom they lived. The use of, for example, crown of flowers, incense, holy water, the manner of laying out of the body and bearing it to the grave with lighted candles and so on shows nothing that is distinctive of the Christian faith even though later ages found a pious symbolism in many of these things.<sup>21</sup> Speaking of another accretion which seems to have stemmed from family quarrels on the estate of the deceased, B.S. Puckle says,

[...] the ceremonious viewing of the body by friends and relations before the burial – a custom to which we still unthinkably subscribe – was originally an obligation, in order that those who were present at

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. 'Christian Burial' in *Catholic Encyclopedia*,  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03071a.htm> (accessed 13/08/09).

the death might clear themselves of any suspicion of complicity in foul play. Those who attended the funeral came quite as much with the a view to satisfying themselves that murder had not been committed, and that the estate should be faithfully divided, as from any pious interests in the spiritual welfare of the deceased.<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

‘Great things happen when God mixes with men [...]’ so at times sing the children of the Church. Such a truism finds echo when the incarnational principle is allowed to take effect in a culture of a people. Just as Jesus emerged with an undisguised mode of existence that was not his previously when he took up bodily form, so is the Church when she incarnates into the various cultures. She emerges not with a disguised form of those cultures but shares in the intrinsic values of those cultures and may actually use them to enrich the universal Church.

This chapter has basically been a proposal of the ways in which the incarnational principle can be applied to the funerary rites of the Shona. Suggesting the integrated, independent and substitution approaches, the Chapter has outlined how each of those approaches can be used and during the course of the analysis, note was made also of the merits and demerits of such approaches. When looking at these approaches, what I feel is that the Church need not prescribe a particular method as such for none is involved in great error; all are feasible and valid ways. Christians should be left free to go for what suits them in their respective family circumstances. Cultural changes and growth in the faith often will determine what is best for each family. If a Church functionary, however, desires uniformity, for example, in his/her parish, he/she may only recommend and not prescribe as such. I have known of parish priests who enquire first if there would be future plans in the family of conducting *kurova guva* when they are called to say a funeral mass. If they happen to gather bits and pieces of information pointing in that direction then theirs is an absolute NO to the request. Such priests and their collaborators need to understand that we are living in a pluralistic world. The mentality of seeing the priest and the Church as the be-all and end-all of everything should be acknowledged as a thing of the

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<sup>22</sup> Puckle, *Funeral Customs*.

past. Real pluralism, as noted by Pedro Arrupe, is “the most profound unity”. To this he adds, “the present crisis of unity, in many cases, is due to insufficient pluralism, which fails to provide the satisfaction of expressing and living one’s faith in conformity with one’s own culture.”<sup>23</sup>

In dealing with human realities whereby one can never claim to have the monopoly of knowledge and goodness, it would be more advantageous if one sees variations and differences as complimentary rather than as oppositions. In doing so, one discovers that there is actually a plethora of things that are valid and good in a position different from one’s own. As a word of admonition to all her pastors, the Church in the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* says,

By unremitting study they should fit themselves to do their part in establishing dialogue with the world and with men (and women) of all shades of opinion. Above all let them take to heart the words which this council has spoken: “Since humanity today increasingly moves toward civil, economic and social unity, it is more than ever necessary that priests, with joint concern and energy, and under the guidance of the bishops and the supreme pontiff, erase every cause of division, so that the whole human race may be led to the unity of God’s family.”<sup>24</sup>

It is unfortunate at times that some of her priests, the day they leave Seminary doors is the very day they call it a day also to books. Having the keys to every door at the mission they think they know everything and theirs the prerogative to direct. Actually, the Church’s teaching authority, from top to grassroots level, should not seek just to dictate things. The ordinary members of the laity may appear less educated or experts in other fields outside of religion but they too have something to contribute from their own life experiences in those circumstances. A ‘banking system of education’ is what those who have been tasked to impart the teachings of the Church should be seen shunning from. Such functionaries should be humble enough to sit and listen and where need be, to be taught even by those they are called to minister.

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<sup>23</sup> P. Arrupe cited in Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 156.

<sup>24</sup> Gaudium et Spes, No. 43.

## Chapter Eight

### Summary and concluding remarks

As I draw now to the close of my work, it is necessary perhaps just to have a recap of the line of argument that has been running through the chapters of this thesis. To begin with, the thesis grew out of the context of a stalemate in the *kurova guva* debate in the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. With the desire to address the stalemate in a more profound way, chapter one of this thesis has been devoted to the clarification of terms as well as to the provision of some relevant background information. The term 'Shona peoples' was used in the thesis in reference to the Shona-speaking peoples of Zimbabwe, who can further be classified into Ndau, Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika and Korekore ethnic groups. Given attention also was the term 'funeral rituals', where it was noted that rituals are highly symbolic acts that confer transcendental significance and meaning on certain life events or experiences of which death is one of them. Recognised as falling under the gamut of Shona funeral rituals were: the Kupeta ritual; Burial ritual; Rite of Purification; Rite of Bringing Back the Spirit; Ritual of Inheritance; Ritual of Honour and Rituals of Appeasement.

Problems encountered in the scholarly attempts to delineate the term 'African Traditional Religion' were highlighted. One sticky matter, as observed, was that followers of ATR are more preoccupied with its practice than with its theory. Equally seen as calling for attention was the realization that the key terms 'African' and 'religion', are Western constructs involving both misconceptions and changing perceptions. Be that as it may, wherever the term 'African' appeared in the context of ATR, it was used in reference to the region in sub-Saharan Africa and in particular, to Zimbabwe. Though the term 'religion' is absent from most African languages it was noted that what it stands for is observed in the lives of Africans if one is to go by the general understanding of religion as a complex of ideas and practices that give ultimate meaning to human existence and enhances the quality of life. As with the term 'traditional', it was understood and used in the context of the original experience of the sacred cultivated by the African man/woman and the concrete expression of that experience within the different ecological and socio-historical background that this African man/woman finds him/herself

in. Wherever the nomenclature ATR appeared in the thesis, its singular form was employed.

The form of dialogue that the thesis took was an inter-religious one. Understood in the religious sphere, dialogue was defined as a formal process in which authoritative members of at least two religious communities come together for an extended and serious discussion of the beliefs and practices that separate the communities. In view of ATR, the African Synod advocated two forms of dialoguing with ATR adherents and these are: dialogue of life and deeds, and the dialogue of specialists. While it was noted that the current thesis lies in the latter context, the wisdom of ordinary ATR adherents was viewed also as a treasure and therefore worth of tapping.

Seen also as calling for clarification was the term 'inculturation'. The term 'inculturation' was seen to have surfaced as a replacement to the term 'adaptation' since Vatican II. Inculturation was defined as more than mere external adaptation since it signifies an interior transformation of authentic cultural values through integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures. The two methods of inculturation adopted in the thesis were dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation. These methods were chosen on the basis of them having fuelled past successful forms of inculturation in the history of the Church.

Chapter two of the thesis looked in-depth at the events and causes which led to the stalemate. It began by noting that when the early missionaries first arrived to work among the Shona in Zimbabwe, they encountered a religious culture that was so unique from theirs. This religious culture was unique not only in terms of it not having been written down but its adherents appeared to be ancestral worshippers; hardly was there an idea of a Supreme Being; the religious beliefs were made up of superstitions about spirits, ghosts and witchcraft; though belief in immortality was there, nothing was known about the future; the principal priest was most frequently a woman who pretended to communicate with *Mhondoro* (Lion) spirits and importance was attached also to a witch doctor who in popular opinion is possessed of some higher science but who in actual fact abused the credulity of the people to enrich himself. Such was seen to be the picture of Shona religious culture in the eyes of the colonialists and missionaries that eventually prompted

a ban on *kurova guva* on the grounds that it was a breaking of the first commandment in the Decalogue.

Note was made in the thesis that with the rise, however, of the African Christian consciousness, a challenge to this ban on *kurova guva* was raised by the Catholic Association (CA), a lay group. This, as articulated in the thesis, marked the beginning of a long contentious debate that engulfed almost the whole Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. The call to lift the ban was so strong that the Catholic leadership in Zimbabwe eventually was forced to give in to those demands and they in turn, mandated a deeper study of Shona culture with a view to finding better ways of integrating the rite in question. The fruit of this study was the publication of the Christianized rite, *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu* (1982).

As immediately noted, while the Bishops thought that they had achieved a great milestone in the Africanisation of the local Church, the rite, unfortunately, failed to receive publicity in the Church. Its poor reception helped ignite another serious debate on the same issue of *kurova guva*. A certain clique among the African clergy revived the missionary observation that *kurova guva* was against the first commandment. Various Scriptural passages were cited as part of the proof that *kurova guva* custom was indeed involved in great error. This was, however, not without much opposition from other members of the clergy as well as members of the laity.

Facing the reality of an unconcluded issue, what the thesis has done in chapter three was to take up the debate, starting off by analysing the missionaries' use of the Scriptures in their encounter with non-Christian religions. The work identified a parallel between the missionaries' use of Scriptures and the manner in which they are approached also by that clique among the African clergy, now characterized as the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school of thought in the thesis. Both were identified as having an interest in a certain trend of the Scriptural message, the rigour of monotheistic statements. In their eyes, so was observed, it was easy to see the Christian church as the New People of God (the Israelites) and the non-Christian religious systems as the practitioners of idolatry and abominations being lambasted and ridiculed in the monotheistic texts.

In order to have a focused and better picture of the opted for texts by missionaries, the thesis analysed the social and historical context

within which they had emerged. In that journey it was discovered that monotheism is an inner community discourse seeking to establish a distance from outsiders using the language of Yahweh's exceptional divine status beyond and in all reality, absolutizing also Yahweh's claim on Israel and expressing Israel's ultimate fidelity to Yahweh. Such a discourse so was observed, developed especially during the post-exilic period in Judah. Running parallel, however, to these monotheistic texts which helped instil an exclusivist ghetto-mentality among the Jews were texts also which had an inclusivist outlook. These inclusive in outlook texts, the missionaries and the Mavhudzi-Muchabaiwa school, appear to have by-passed, a great blunder indeed.

Further, making a head take on with the school in particular, the thesis made a critical analysis of most of the texts which the school banks on and discovered hardly anything in common of what is prohibited in those texts with the practices of the Shona. Despite even the elusive nature in meaning of what is being prohibited in those texts, note was made that the Shona traditional worldview recognizes a single Supreme Being, something quite contrary to a polytheistic set up which those texts try to address. The Chapter ended by questioning the hermeneutics of the school when it roped in Luke 16:19-31 to warrant its argument that no soul is permitted by God to return to earth, an issue which is not at all alluded in the text. Not only was such a move seen to expose the weak nature of the school's hermeneutics but was seen to contradict even the Church's teaching on the Communion of Saints.

In order to build up a strong argument on the validity of the Shona traditional practices, the thesis in chapter four began by digging into the various periods of the Church in regard to her understanding of salvation. Note was made that the Patristic period was characterized by two classes of statements relating to a famous axiom: *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. One category was seen to consist of restrictive statements which appear to exclude from salvation all those not fully members of the Church while the other defines Church membership in broader terms. Both forms appear to have existed side by side throughout the Church's history coming up to Vatican II but with the exclusivist one tending to have an upper hand. Vatican II was noted to have played a pivotal role when it rectified the anomaly through its official recognition that salvation was possible even outside the visible institutional Church.

The issue of 'separated brethren' was tackled by Vatican II and admission was made that non-Catholic Christians merit salvation also insofar as they believe in Christ also and a lot of good is found in them. The same was with non-Christian religions, recognition was made that they too were divinely-ordained normal channels of God's salvific activity and that the Catholic Church looks with respect upon those ways of conduct and of life found in these teachings. The Council Fathers urged all the children of the Church to bear more fruitful witness to Christ by the example of their lives as they interact with adherents of these other religions and to reverently lay bare and uphold the seeds of the Word that lie hidden in these religions. Contributions by Karl Rahner and John Paul II were seen as adding a theological pivot to the position of Vatican II on these non-Christian religions. Karl Rahner developed an anonymous Christian theology while John Paul II extended the 'manifold cooperation' in the unique mediation of Christ to non-Christian religions as well as argued that all religions possess a 'common soteriological root'.

In obedience to the great commission (Mt.28:19-20), what Vatican II did was to mandate a return to the incarnational approach in evangelization which characterized the Early Church since it had now been officially recognized that non-Christian religious forms, structures and experiences are impregnated with innumerable seeds of the Word. The Church's unique role in the face of these religions was defined as that of being an instrument of the incarnational mission to the nations. As the 'universal sacrament of salvation' and a 'light of the nations' the Church is supposed to 'light', to 'salt' and to 'leaven' the earth in such a way which assures the world that God is in the midst of his people.

Utilising the recommendations of Vatican II, the thesis took a step in the fifth chapter to search for the 'seeds of the Word' in Shona funerary customs. Walking a mile further from the *kurova guva* discussions, the thesis examined most of the rites of the Shona that have to do with death on the conviction that dealing with *kurova guva* only would have been a piece meal exercise. Upon analysing the traditional practices of the Shona, it was found that salvific values abound in them. These values, for example, respect for life, sense of the community, respect for the last verbal testament, admission that no one is perfect, responsibility of the living to a deceased's journey, respect for the place of the dead, faithfulness to one's obligations and others were recognized as the nor-

mal divinely-given means, willed by God himself for the salvation of the Shona people.

What it means, in other words, is that Shona funerary customs were not just tolerated by God; it was actually his plan that it be so. Recognition was made that since the creation of the Shona ancestors, God's Spirit which fills the whole world, has also been in their midst as an active agent. There is so much, so the thesis argued, that the Church stands to benefit when she takes these Shona practices seriously. The fact that human nature and its strivings are under the shadow of sin was noted and therefore acknowledgement was made that there exists also the possibility of finding some evil elements in the practices of the Shona.

To do justice to the Shona traditional systems, the thesis in chapter six moved to look at the traditional medical practitioner and his/her profession, a figure whose role in the funeral rites of the Shona had been dashed down in coming up with the Christianized *Kuchenura Munhu* ritual. In tracing the history of the traditional medical profession, it was noted that prior to colonialism, traditional healers enjoyed a privileged position in the Shona society but such a prestigious position was almost decimated with the coming of colonialists and the missionaries. Traditional healers and their followers were branded as worshippers of the devil worth of hell-fire unless they converted to Christianity and worse that they were perceived as diverting people from the worship of God to the worship of ancestors. The same condemnation was extended to their medicine, it was considered as of no effect since it did not pass through the test tube.

Despite the attempts to ban the traditional practitioner and his/her profession, it was noted in the thesis that the locals continued to seek the help of the traditional medicine till eventually traditional healers managed to organize themselves into various associations to strengthen each other and with the coming of independence in Zimbabwe, a more national association ZINATHA was formed. With the passing of the Bill: *The Traditional Medical Practitioners Act* in 1981, traditional healers finally got the official recognition that they had long sought for. Once again traditional healers were able to reclaim their lost prestige.

The thesis went to examine the ways through which one becomes a traditional healer. Spirit possession, apprenticeship, dreams and being trained underwater by *nzuzu* spirits were cited as the com-

monest ways through which one enters the ranks of traditional healers. Further, an examination of the code of conduct that traditional healers operate with was made. The soundness of the code was hailed and the failure to abide by the *muko* was seen to bring disaster to the healer's profession. A section was devoted also to the social functions of a traditional healer and in the process, observation was made that the traditional healer is the kingpin of the Shona society. Not only was the traditional healer seen to be a doctor in sickness, his/her services were seen to include also being a priest/ess in religious matters, a policeman/woman in the detection and prevention of crime, a lawyer in legal issues, a possessor of magical charms for the common good of the society and other smaller functions.

Towards the end of this chapter, a proposal on a collaborative ministry between the priest and the traditional healer was made. Note was made that the two would do a wonderful job if they helped each other in the areas of healing and deliverance as well as in ministry to the dying and the dead. Novel and challenging though it may seem the thesis argued that it is a step worth undertaking because the two rely on God as the ultimate source of well-being.

Having noted the salvific values in Shona traditional funerary customs as well as the central role of the traditional healer in the traditional practices the thesis, in chapter seven, finally explored on the possibilities of applying the incarnational principle on these funerary rites. Three approaches were proposed: the integrated approach, the independent approach and the substitution approach with a view to make the Church feel at home among the Shona and they too, the Shona, feeling at home in the Church.

As with the integrated approach, tribute was made to the Christianized *Kuchenura Munhu* rite but its lack of comprehensiveness as well as its dismissal of the traditional healer was cited as its major bleeding wounds seeking to be dressed. Applying two methods which have fuelled past successful forms of inculturation in the history of the Church namely: dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation, it was noted that there is much from the Shona practices which can be integrated with the Christian message. Though different in that the Church's teachings are written while those of the Shona are oral and more to be seen in praxis, a common denominator was found to exist between the two which makes a re-expression of the Church's teachings in the living language and

practices of the Shona something feasible. Through creative assimilation, a lot of the symbols in the traditional practices of the Shona were seen to open room for a Shona contextual theology.

Moving on to the independent approach, note was made that the traditional funerary practices of the Shona could actually be left to go ahead independently of a direct Christian influence and Christian practices only to be added independently also later or before as gap fillers. Having been divinely-ordained as means of salvation for the Shona, an argument was made that Shona practices just need perfection since human nature and its strivings are under the shadow of sin. The atoning death of Christ was noted as the best perfection to these traditional practices. Letting them exist side-by-side was noted to enhance individual freedom as well as to avert an antagonism that sometimes exists between Christian adherents and traditional ones.

Proposed at the end was the substitution approach whereby an individual with the correct motive surrenders everything into the hands of Christ. He/she in other words, substitutes everything traditional with what is Christian but not out of a disdain of traditional religion but giving precedence to Christ in one's life. Christ is made to take the place of one's dear ancestors who themselves would be glad to give way to Christ since they are a well-mannered and cultured people. The manner in which priests and nuns are mourned, buried and remembered as well as the on-going practices such as *Nyaradzo* and Unveiling of the Tombstone were suggested as signposts in this direction. The tendency, however, of it being an individual preference likely to result in clashes with the family or communal interests was highlighted. Equally posing as one of its major weaknesses, as noted, is the fact that the substitution approach is more of abandoning one's culture and replacing it with a foreign culture.

Concluding the chapter was a remark that the Church should not seek to prescribe a particular way or approach as such since all appear to be valid and feasible ways. Cultural changes and faith, as pointed out, should be seen to determine the best for each family. More should be done by the Church, as argued out also, to promote pluralism in matters of faith since we are already living in a pluralistic society.

In reviewing the Africanisation of the Church in Zimbabwe, one sees that while progress was made in the area of Church music, translation of the Bible into local languages and mass being said in the lan-

guage of the local people, there is still, however, some kind of hesitation especially in the hierarchy when it comes to new innovations. How true indeed were the words of John Baur who traces the roots of this hesitancy to a chain spirit of mistrust which is affecting the Body of Christ. He notes, "Rome mistrusts the African bishops, the bishops mistrust the priests, the priests mistrust the lay people, whenever a new initiative is started or a new idea proposed."<sup>1</sup> What tends to be given less thought is that these innovations could actually result in the Church feeling much more at home among the locals and they, the locals, feeling more at home also in the Church. Many fear the changes that would come along with a sweeping wave of inculturation hence; they would prefer to defend the status quo by clinging to the model set by missionary activity. They would feel more comfortable, in other words, with a continual importation of the Western experience of Christianity.

Part of the fear stems also from the realization that one does not have the guts and wisdom to defend such innovations in the face of ecclesiastical bureaucrats were he to introduce any in his diocese or parish without the approval of higher authorities. It is unfortunate that ecclesiastical bureaucrats at times forget the embarrassing lessons of Christian history when they censure advocates of change as people compromising the mission of the Church among nations and prefer rather defenders of the status quo. Such an unfortunate scenario is well captured in Karl Rahner's rhetorical question,

Do not the Roman Congregations still have the mentality of centralized bureaucracy, which thinks it knows best what serves the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls throughout the world, and in such decisions takes the mentality of Rome or Italy in a frightening naïve way, as a self-evident standard?<sup>2</sup>

In line with Karl Rahner's words, I do not really see the need to send almost everything to Rome for approval as was done with the 1982 Christianized *Shona Ritual: Kuchenura Munhu*. In pursuit of the Vatican II spirit, Rome should be seen to distance itself from a mentality of centralized bureaucracy. Rome knows quite well that if authority is too centralized even in matters which can be dealt with continentally, regionally or even locally, growth becomes an endangered species. In requesting

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<sup>1</sup> Baur, *2000 Years*, p. 517.

<sup>2</sup> K. Rahner cited in E. Hillman, *Missionary Approach*, p. 151.

Episcopal Conferences to set up study groups whose tasks were to examine peoples' ideas about the universe, humanity, peoples' attitude about God and to undertake theological reflection on what is good and true in their culture,<sup>3</sup> Pope Paul VI opened up room for these Conferences to come up with what may be termed the fruit of their own initiative and not just rely on being spoon fed almost everything by Rome.

It is a fact of reality also that Rome does not always have or may never have people with unquestioned authority over the nitty gritty, for example, of African customs and in particular, over Shona customs of Zimbabwe. While certain issues may of course need consultation with Rome, on other matters, like the one which has been the subject matter of this thesis, Rome simply has to be informed of the developments without necessarily seeking its approval as such. Leaning on the principle of subsidiarity<sup>4</sup> I feel that it is a local matter which can be dealt with locally with much success and end at that.

To address the hesitancy in the hierarchy, I feel there is need to look at the example which was set by the late Pope John Paul II. During his pastoral visits to Africa he made powerful gestures of recognition and dialogue with ATR. In one of his speeches captured in the Vatican publication, *L'Osservatore Romano* he said, "The adherents of African Traditional Religion should [...] be treated with great respect and esteem

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pope Paul VI, 'Ecclesia Sancte' cited in A. Flannery (ed), *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, N.York:1987, p. 857.

<sup>4</sup> The word subsidiarity is derived from the Latin word *subsidiarius* and has its origins in Catholic Social Teaching. The principle goes back to the Bishop of Mainz, Emmanuel von Ketteler. His work shaped the social teaching of Pope Leo XII in *Rerum Novarum*. It (principle) is based upon the autonomy and dignity of the human individual, and holds that all other forms of society, from the family to the state and the international order, should be in the service of the human person. Subsidiarity assumes that these human persons are by their nature social beings, and emphasizes the importance of small and intermediate-sized communities or institutions, like the family, the church, and voluntary associations, as mediating structures which empower individual action and link the individual to society as a whole. What it implies, in other words, is that a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good. Cf. *Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, [www.catholic.com/thisrock/2007/0704fea4.asp](http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/2007/0704fea4.asp) (accessed 04/10/09).

and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided.”<sup>5</sup> He matched his words with action in 1986 when he invited among several religious leaders, the representative followers of ATR to a Day of Prayer in Assisi. The three were: Togbui Assenou of Togoville (Togo), Amegawi Ottoto Klouse of Be-Lome (Togo) and Okomfo Kodwo Akom of Cape Coast (Ghana). Six years later, he invited leaders of various religions for yet another Day of Prayer for peace in the world. Present among those invited was a Voodoo Priest from Benin Republic and in 1993 he visited Benin itself when there was an international Vodun festival and addressed Vodun people. Both the international festival and its recognition by John Paul II gave Vodun religion an unprecedented visibility.<sup>6</sup>

On a final note, it is worth recognizing that the thesis has tried to do justice to the observation by E. Ikenga-Metuh who says,

Inculturation does not come so easy. Any authentic inculturation effort must be preceded by in-depth research by a team of experts in various fields ranging from Biblicists, theologians, liturgists, anthropologists, speci-alists in ATR, Church historians etc [...].<sup>7</sup>

Though I admit the thesis not to be exhaustive, I have tried to make reference to some reputable authorities in most of these fields so as to respond to the particular concerns of the thesis. Where the thesis demanded a Christian historiographer’s input, I have consulted the wisdom of some Christian historiographers. Where it demanded a biblical perspective, I have quoted also some Biblicists. Where there was need of a missiological input, I did not shy from consulting authorities in that area. Where there was a call for a phenomenological insight, I have also appeared a phenomenologist in a way and where there was need for some theological, anthropological, and liturgical insights; experts in these areas have not been left out. In making reference to all these different fields I do not claim to have masterly and therefore exhausted everything in all these fields. Those who are experts in these different fields can always have something to point a finger at or help develop further what I did not exhaustively adumbrate. Moreover, “The whole of

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<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, ‘L’Osservatore Romano’ (11/05/1994) cited in C.D. Isizoh, *Dialogue with Followers of ATR: Progress and Challenges*, [www.africaworld.net7afrel/dialogue-with-atr.htm](http://www.africaworld.net7afrel/dialogue-with-atr.htm) (accessed 15/04/08).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Isizoh, *Dialogue with Followers of*.

<sup>7</sup> Ikenga-Metuh cited in Elsener and Kollbrunner, *Accommodating the Spirit*, p. 53.

history”, writes G.R. Elton, “the whole of a person, or a problem –can never be got between the covers of one book [...]”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> G.R. Elton cited in Gundani, *Changing Patterns of Authority*, p. 1.

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# Appendix A

## APPENDIX

### SHONA RITUAL THE RITE OF THE INSTALLATION OF THE SPIRIT OF A DECEASED PERSON<sup>1</sup>

#### CATECHESIS

Before we begin with the purpose (of this book), we want to explain first a bit about the subject of the midzimu<sup>2</sup>. The elders say, "There is a great mudzimu who is called God (Mwari), or the owner of the heavens (Nyadenga<sup>3</sup>), or Creator of peoples (Musikavanhu)." This mudzimu, God, they say, was not like a human being<sup>4</sup>; he has no race (tribe, clan); he has no father, he has no mother. To say, how he has come about, no one knows. It is Mutangakugara ("The first to be around"), Muwanikwa ("Original inhabitant), Chidzivachepo (?).

But when we usually say midzimu, it means those people who have died, who once lived on this earth, who used to walk on earth as we are doing too, eating, being happy, procreating children, just as we do nowadays. Therefore, when a human being dies, his body is buried, but there remains something, which is not buried, this is what we call mudzimu; some people call it 'spirit'<sup>5</sup>. The mudzimu cannot be seen with the eyes, but it is there, as is God too, whom we cannot see with the eyes.

In the past, the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe was investigating the issue of the rite of the installation of the spirit of one deceased and tried to seek a good way, which might be followed by Christians (Catholics) in this custom. Everything important of what is valuable in this custom is explained below. We know, that there are small differences in people's districts. Therefore, they who are teaching should know, that, what has been written can differ from the customs of different districts, e.g. the Manyika, the Ndau, the Zezuru, the Karanga and others.

If you give this paper to different people, whom we have mentioned, you can find some, who say some things, which we have mentioned, are not to be done. Nevertheless despite these small differences, we

<sup>1</sup> Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1982, *Shona Ritual - Kuchenura Munhu*, Gweru. Translated by Herrmann, Karl, 1997.

"The rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased" is my translation of "kuchenura munhu; kurova guva; kugadzira muli", which all denote the same religious rite.  
- kuchenura: 1. Acquit. 2. Cleanse or purify (ritually). 3. Divert punishment from; Hannan, 1987, *Standard Shona Dictionary*, Harare, p. 56.  
Therefore "kuchenura munhu" means literally, "to cleanse or ritually purify a person."  
- kurova guva (literally): to beat the grave. Hatiti zvokurova guva kana mushakabvu aiva tsvinborume: we do not carry out the ceremony for uniting a mudzimu with his fellow spirit elders when the deceased was unmarried. Hannan, 1987:567.  
- kugadzira: settle spirit of dead person. Hatisati tagadzira baba: we have not yet had the ceremony for putting my father's spirit to rest. Hannan, 1987:180.

<sup>2</sup> also vadzimu, both pl. of mudzimu; the Shona term will be retained in this translation, both in sing. and pl. See Hannan, 1987:372: "1. Spirit elder of family. 2. Soul of a dead relative." There is a difference between the mudzimu (deceased) before 'the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased' is performed and after. See chapter on 'The Thinking of the Shona concerning their Midzimu.'

<sup>3</sup> nya-: prefix to nouns to express ideas of Owner, guardian, user; of identification with object or state specified by noun or infinitive to which prefixed. Nyadenga: Supreme Being. Hannan, 1987:477

<sup>4</sup> or: This mudzimu was not previously a human being.

<sup>5</sup> mwewa: Air. Breath. Vapour. Spirit. Soul. Disposition. Smell; Hannan, 1987: 433.

can say, that all the tribes of the Shona agree completely in the way they think about this matter and in what they are aiming at in the custom of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased. For these reasons the Catholic Church saw it as worthwhile to give a way, which is satisfactory and can be followed by all Christians (Catholic). We encourage again all those who might give an enlightened understanding of these, and all who can inquire from those who know in their districts, that the arrangements which we have made in this issue are satisfactory.

TO OFFER TO THE VADZIMU:  
WHAT DO THE SHONA MEAN WHEN THEY SAY, 'TO OFFER'<sup>6</sup>.

1  
If a Shona says, 'to sacrifice', what does he mean?

The word 'to sacrifice' is used in different situations, e.g.: if a message from a district is given to the chief, the sabhuku (the village-head) says, "Sir, I have come to inform you that in our district you have been attacked; people have killed each other a lot." This is to offer a message to the chief.

2  
To offer beer to an elder who has arrived at the village, the father or grandfather. When the grandfather is being given the pot of beer, he who gives this beer tells the young one near him to say, "This beer we gave to grandfather, that he finishes his thirst. Tell your elder brother, he then tells his elder brother, his elder brother then brings to the grandfather to say, what has been said, 'We said, this beer, to sprinkle the throat with, (because) you are thirsty, you came out of the sun'". Now all people clap hands; if women are present they ululate. He who was given says, "I thank you, receive (my) words, carry on like that." We say, this beer has been given (offered) to the living grandfather.

3  
To offer (sacrifice) to the vadzimu, we mean the same as we said in (2), only this person is no longer alive. Therefore concerning the grandfather whom we spoke of in (2), this is the very great difference, that this one is alive; the other is dead. It is offered like this: "See! You, (1st name), our younger father. Tell also (2nd name), your elder, he too, (2nd name), he then tells to grandfather (3rd name), that, it has been said by your grandchildren, 'There was a long time before we gave you a little pot for sprinkling the throat. Therefore, we have said, see for yourself this little pot.'

People now clap hands; the women ululate. Now they themselves drink this beer at the place of the deceased<sup>7</sup>. Some pour a small amount of beer on the earth with a ladle not as a real offering (not as a real thing), but just an imitation which means, "This beer has been given to a human being who is in the grave (literal: earth)."

N.B. This is a purely symbolic gesture without sacrificial connotations in the theological sense<sup>8</sup>.

You have seen, that the offering which was done in (2) is the same as that done in (3), there is no difference. In (2) there is no worship of the grandfather; he has not been made God or equal to him. The grandfather is only honoured and respected by his grandchildren, who has been given a pot of

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<sup>6</sup> kupira: - "to make ritual offering (e.g. to spirit elders), Hannan, 1987:533;  
- "sacrifice, offer to the spirits", Dale, D., 1989, *Duramazwi*, Gweru, p. 179.  
- "to make performances (rites) of introducing the midzimu, or to pray to God", Chimhundu, H., 1996, *Duramazwi rechiShona*, Harare, p. 392 (my translation)

<sup>7</sup> Deceased translates 'muff' or 'akafa', words derived from the verb 'kufa': Die. 2. Spoil. Break. 3. Be in need. Lose consciousness; Hannan, 1987:159

<sup>8</sup> The original is in English

beer. In (3) it is the same. (We are happy and grateful for all who buried the deceased). In Shona custom, to sacrifice the vadzimu is to serve them, in the same way as we serve the living on this earth.

#### THE THINKING OF THE SHONA CONCERNING THEIR MIDZIMU

From immemorial times, the Shona have believed that a human being dies, but his spirit<sup>9</sup>, the mudzimu, is imperishable. The Shona believe that a human being will just die, his soul (mudzimu)<sup>10</sup> wander in the veldt until it has been brought into the group of all the other vadzimu at the feast<sup>11</sup> of the rite of the installation of the spirit of the deceased.

In Shona, when we say to cleanse<sup>12</sup>, we mean that when a human being has died he just leaves the life of this earth, and he is about to begin another life in the land of the ancestors<sup>13</sup>. The relatives of the deceased are left with a great work, which they must arrange together and fulfil completely. They must bring back the deceased, together with bringing the mudzimu into the group of the other vadzimu. They must arrange the distribution of his possessions and the safekeeping which is given to the deceased's belongings, like his wealth, and the guardianship, that is given to his family and other things. If all this has not been done yet, the dead person<sup>14</sup> is not happy about things. He sulks because the living have no concern for him or for his wealth and the things which he left behind. And he is not happy too, when his relatives continue to leave him in the veldt wandering, without being brought back into the village to be cleansed.

Therefore, the Shona, when they say, to cleanse, they mean that wherever an adult (elder) has died everything about the bereavement of one of theirs in the family and in their clan, and the things, which he left at once disturb the (normal) way of life which was there. Therefore in our Shona custom things in such an state are not what is seen merely with the eyes. Since long ago, if things were like that, we had to have arrangements which were known and had to be followed for the proper settlement of these issues. If a human person<sup>15</sup> is not yet settled<sup>16</sup> we hear the elders say, "Our (or your) village is still black" meaning that the dead person has not yet been cleansed. The dead person is still dark (unclean, black) because he is not yet brought to the other vadzimu; he is said to have not yet returned to his village, he is still in the veldt. The living who lost a relative are said to be still black (dirty), if they have not yet brought back their dead person. Often where an elder dies, it is not possible that all his relatives are present, therefore he can die with an anger (grief) or a longing for the need to bid farewell to his next of kin. The living who remain have an emotional upset and longing which says, if only they had found him still alive, he would have died, having said the last words of his heart.

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<sup>9</sup> see 5

<sup>10</sup> The bracket is not mine, but taken from the original. See note 5 and corresponding text.

<sup>11</sup> mutambo: 1. Dance. 2. Game. Dramatic Presentation. Entertainment. Feast. 3. Hobby; Hannan, 1987:412

<sup>12</sup> see note 1

<sup>13</sup> nyikadzimu; not in the dictionary; composite of nyika (Territory of a chief, ..., land, world, the earth, ..., soil dug out to form a grave, Hannan, 1987:489) and mu/vadzimu

<sup>14</sup> "Dead person" always translates: **mushakabvu**: 1. One who has died young; 2. Person who has died; 3. the late lamented; 4. **Dead person who has not yet become mudzimu**; Hannan, 1987:406

<sup>15</sup> munhu: person. Here however it means 'dead person'.

<sup>16</sup> see 1

As this feast is one to reconcile the living and the dead, grief, desire, even other things which might have been obstacles between the living and the dead should be ended, therefore the elders say, "He died well." Therefore cleansing means to wash the dead, so that he can co-operate (be in relation, be at peace) with the living and the vadzimu.

This feast is called to settle matters because if it is done, all the relatives of the dead have a good conscience which is free, that all things have now been settled, and have been arranged well. For example, if the dead left a wife, who is still of marriageable age, it is possible now that she can marry. If a man was bereaved of his wife, he is now free to marry someone else.

At the feast of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased person the living hand over the mudzimu to all his ancestors, who have already gone before, that they receive him. He enters also into the group (communion) of all the vadzimu, who are in the air, who are united with him in looking after and interceding for the living with the Nyadenga (God), who is the great mudzimu.

#### TO BRING THE MUDZIMU INTO THE VILLAGE

To bring the mudzimu into the village and to bring the mudzimu into the company of the vadzimu are two precious ideas, because the dead person had to be handed over to all his ancestors, that they take him, and bring him into their company, staying with them in the land of the vadzimu. He has been returned into his village, so that he protects his family. The rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased is usually done after six months or a year. Why are they usually taking six months? Many say, 'let the grave be hit and begin to be pressed down by rain so that the mudzimu of the dead is cooled, and it stops being angry.'

#### THE THINKING OF CHRISTIANS<sup>17</sup> CONCERNING THE DEAD

St. Paul says, "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." (1 Th 4:13). All Christians believe that the soul<sup>18</sup> of a human being can never perish (Chishawasha Katekismo Q. 5). We Christians believe again that if a human being dies his soul can go to heaven, to purgatory or to hell. The human being is judged by God at his death, therefore it is God who judges him, so that he goes to heaven or goes to purgatory and then to heaven, or he is lost in hell. A human being who died, if he was united with God, is also united with Christ together with all the saints who are in heaven. He, who goes to purgatory, is the believer, who dies still having sins, therefore his soul fails to arrive at God. While it is waiting, it is cleansed in purgatory, it needs help, so that it arrives in the courtyard of all the saints. The souls who are in purgatory want the help of our prayers, the living, so that God forgives them, and they hurry to enter in the courtyard of heaven. It is a holy thought of love to pray for the dead (2 Macc 12:44f).

All who have died, that is to say, all midzimu, who used to live in accordance with the laws of God, or with the laws of past times<sup>19</sup>, are with God (Nyadenga), where they are happy together with all Christians who have been keeping the laws of God. Therefore we say, all our ancestors and all others who have been keeping a way of life not opposed to what is wanted by God (Nyadenga), are in his courtyard, where we hope, we will arrive too, if we do too, what agrees with what is wanted by the Creator.

<sup>17</sup> Here and in general the Catholics are meant.

<sup>18</sup> mweya, see note 5.

<sup>19</sup> pasichigare: olden days; Haman, 1987: 511. Here it means the law of the traditional Shona religion and culture

## THE THINKING OF THE SHONA CONCERNING THE RITE OF THE INSTALLATION OF THE SPIRIT OF A DECEASED PERSON

The thinking of the Shona concerning the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased is not crooked. We Christians should have already enlightened or carefully investigated this practice with the understanding which we have of our faith to ensure that the customs of our tradition are good, otherwise agreeing with the customs of Christianity like earth and kraal manure. What belongs to the practice of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased has come from the past, before Christianity came, therefore we expect that this practice needs to be investigated carefully.

### THE WAY OF DOING<sup>20</sup>

#### THE RITE OF THE INSTALLATION OF THE SPIRIT OF A DECEASED PERSON

##### THE RETURN OF THE MUDZIMU INTO THE VILLAGE

The Shona believe that death does not cut off the relationship between the living and the dead, therefore they do the rite of the installation of the spirit of the deceased to show that they still have a relationship with the dead person.

As Christians, we do these, having the intention of bringing the mudzimu to God (Nyadenga) asking Jesus and all of the lineage<sup>21</sup> of the dead person that they bring him to God, the Father.

##### THE CLEANSING OF THE DEAD PERSON

We said before that since long ago our elders believed that the souls of all people, when they died, wander in the veldt until they are cleansed (brought into the village)<sup>22</sup>.

In Christianity, this is a little bit different from the thinking of our elders. We say, when a human being dies, his soul can go to heaven or purgatory or hell. We do not know whether our relative who died is in heaven, purgatory or hell, but what we know is, that, if he has not arrived to be with God, his soul desires the great help of our prayers. He too is not happy, if we do not pray for him and we allow him to remain outside the village of heaven. Our elders knew that the deceased is not happy, if the living have allowed him to remain outside the village.

At the feast of the rite of the installation of the spirit of one deceased, we Christians, are praying for the soul of our relative who has died and of all others, who have not yet entered into the courtyard of heaven, that God forgives them, and that they hurry to enter the heaven. The soul of a human being can be with God, if it is clean, without sins. If a soul has not arrived to be with God, it wanders in a fit of rage, suffering greatly, and it has no happiness, therefore we pray for it too, that it is brought into the village of heaven.

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<sup>20</sup> practice

<sup>21</sup> vedzinja from dzinza: Line of descent. Tribe. Clan. Stock. Family name; Hannan, 1987:149. (Dzinza implies always a blood relationship.)

<sup>22</sup> Bracket in the original

#### TO BRING THE MUDZIMU INTO THE COMPANY OF THE OTHER VADZIMU

It is the custom of the Shona that many relatives of a person should gather wherever one of them is doing something like marriage or burial, or the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased.

We shall say at 'the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased', "tit for tat". Because if we do not move the dead to the ancestors, he is not going there, and again he cannot return to his family. He remains dirty (dark), being in the veldt. We too, the living, if we do not do the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased for him, he is not protecting us; he returns as a ngozi<sup>23</sup> to us. Our ancestors admonish us, saying, "Why do you allow our child to remain in the veldt?"

#### THE GIVING OF THE NAME OF THE DEAD PERSON

With the Shona it happens as follows, if a human being dies, who had many sons, on the day of inheritance the eldest son is given the name of his father. This means that he should do the work of guarding the remaining family and be responsible for it, because, it is he, who is now the head of the bereaved family. He should guard the family with love just as this is done by Christ, the Head of the family of God.

#### INHERITANCE

As Christians, the distribution of the property of the dead should be done in love and understanding. In every family husband and wife help each other in making a livelihood together and in gathering their wealth. Therefore wherever one of them dies, this consideration should be understood first by those who distribute the things of the dead. Let us say, may be it is the man who has died, the property should be distributed. They begin by observing the distribution of the property that was left and arranged by the dead, if it exists and they see that the wife has her right in this wealth too. It is the same, if it was the wife who died, her relatives together with the relatives of the husband should see that the wealth is not just put on one side. This means that wherever one distributes the things of the dead person, the whole family on the side of the husband together with that on the side of the wife should see, that all things are done in love without leaving the husband or wife frustrated with two sufferings, which are, to be bereaved by one's next of kin and have one's wealth taken away.

#### Step 1

#### TO TAKE OUT THE GRAIN CROP<sup>24</sup>

The way of doing the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased begins by taking out the grain which is dedicated and then immersed in water. With the Karanga, it is the vatete<sup>25</sup>, who does this; she introduces it and informs all of her family, who are in the air (all ancestors) about this matter, that they are about to prepare the feast of their child. The vatete does this as her place and her work which she continues to do for all of her family is between the living and the dead. In other districts people follow different customs. If the priest has been called to bless the grain, let him speak to the midzimu of the dead person like this,

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<sup>23</sup> 1. Aggrieved spirit; 2. Revenge inflicted by such a spirit; 3. Harmful or dangerous influence or happening of any kind. Hannan, 1987: 455

<sup>24</sup> Any cultivated grain crop (often restricted to finger-millet, zviyo). Hannan, 1987:756

<sup>25</sup> paternal aunt

'Ee (name of the deceased), I am a stranger myself in blood. I am not from your tribe<sup>26</sup>, but in Christianity I am not a stranger. You and I, we have been made one by one baptism of Christ. We have one Lord, one baptism, one faith.

Therefore you have seen, I came like this to bless the grain with which will be brewed beer and with which you will be brought to God, to your ancestors<sup>27</sup> and you will be enabled really to guard your children, praying for them every day.'

"Holiness" (Ritual cleanliness)<sup>28</sup>

The feast of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased is taken as a completely sacred<sup>29</sup> thing by the Shona, therefore there is needed real "holiness" from the beginning (preparation) until to the very end of this feast. The one who is cooking the beer of the rite of the installation of the spirit of the deceased should be an old woman who is beyond child-bearing age and of good standing. If there is no old woman, who may do this, there can be taken a young girl, who has not yet lived with a man (young girl, 11 - 12 years old<sup>30</sup>) at the place of the vatete.

Grain and holy<sup>31</sup> water

Since long ago the feast of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased is taken as a sacred thing. We often hear the elder saying that such and such is sacred at the feast. Therefore to sprinkle them with holy water when they are about to take them (the grain) out of the water (and hold the sprouted grain for making beer).

Step 2

GOAT OF ANGER AND OF PROVISION<sup>32</sup>

In some districts, some kill the goat of anger only, but somewhere else, they kill a second one - the one of provision. The goat of anger is killed to reconcile the living and the dead. The Shona, doing this, want that, if there was something which caused division between the living and the dead person,

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<sup>26</sup> rudzi: Race. Breed. Tribe. Sort. Species. Clan. Hannan, 1987:570

<sup>27</sup> Ancestors translates madzitateguru pl. of tateguru: Great grandfather (paternal). Ancestor. Hannan, 1987:637

<sup>28</sup> "Holiness", "holy" is the translation of utsvene, dzvene, tsvene.

Utsvene: Purity. Chastity. Holiness. Hannan, 1987:711

dzvene: adj. 1. Right (as it should be). Sound. Acceptable. 2. Holy. Hannan, 1987:155

mutsvene: adj. Right (i.e. as it should be). Sound (i.e. in a good condition). Acceptable. **This word is used in the literature (e.g. in *Ishe Komborera Afrika*) to translate "holy"**. Hannan, 1987:420

<sup>29</sup> sacred is the translation of kuera.

kuera: 1. Be object of avoidance rule. 2. Be sacred.

1. Reverence. Abstain from. Uncoerei? what is your mutupo (i.e. what do you abstain from)? Hannan, 1987:159

<sup>30</sup> bunha. Hannan, 1987:30

<sup>31</sup> in Shona: tsvene, see note 27

<sup>32</sup> mbudzi yeshungu neyenhorwa; nhorwa: 1. food for a journey (-nhora: make long journey). 2. ritual offering of beer or goat to spirit elder. Hannan, 1987: 467

it be ended, that they forgive each other. The goat of anger belongs to everyone of the lineage of the dead person, but it is not sacred, although it has been eaten by strangers<sup>33</sup>.

In other districts again, the goat of provision is given to the strangers and it is said like this, "It should not at all be eaten by anyone of the tribe of the dead person or anyone who is a relative of the dead person. This goat should not be killed near the village, therefore, those who are given it (strangers) go with it far away from the village, on arriving there they kill it, and they eat it without salt. What is left should be burned in fire there, its bones and hide and everything.

In other districts again, the custom of the Shona, who are in districts in which both goats are killed: the goat of anger and of provision, compels us to compare it with what Israel did on great days, e.g. at the day of reconciliation (Day of Atonement); there they killed four animals: two goats, a ram and a bull (Lev. 16:5-11, 21, 26-28). The first goat was the one of reconciliation of the people (offering of expiation), the second was called Azezeri, it was taken and dedicated, and all sins of the people were put on its head. This goat was given to a man who went with it in the veldt far away, where no people are living and he drove it there (cp. the release of the scapegoat). This is repeated again where the black people do it, if they drive out (cast out) a ngozi<sup>34</sup>, when they take a goat or chicken which is released<sup>35</sup>.

#### Step 3

##### TO SHOW THE ANIMAL

For the Shona there is nothing which is done casually, first it has to be introduced to all others. Very often a cow is the animal which is used at the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased. Although all might know this cow and its stature and its name, it is not possible to introduce it to those who are at the house. All go to the cattle kraal, it is shown to all who are there, together with introducing it to the dead person and to those who are in the air (ancestors).

The presentation of this cow to the living and the vadzimu is a great sign of unity, that the living and the dead make at this feast. We, as Christians, should also see, that we introduce all these to all vadzimu, and also to Christ, that he brings us all these to God (Nyadenga).

#### Step 4

##### TO OFFER (SACRIFICE) BEER AND MEAT

In some districts they make three pots of beer (of the ancestors, of the paternal aunts and of the dead person) and meat (nziu, chishava and intestine), this the most important part of the feast of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased, so that all guard them, so that there is nothing found of them being lost. In Shona custom, snuff is smoked for making peace by those who agree, therefore in some districts we see the living and dead person reconciled by snuff which is sprinkled at the pot of the beer. This beer and meat is the centre of the whole feast of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased. These are dedicated to the vadzimu; there now remains another important step: to take the mudzimu and bring him back into the village.

<sup>33</sup> pl. of mutorwa: 1. One who lives with a family though not kin. < -tora. Hannan, 1987:417

<sup>34</sup> see 22

<sup>35</sup> kurasira: release a fowl or animal upon which troubles have been laden. Hannan, 1987: 555

## PRAYERS

### THE RITE OF THE INSTALLATION OF THE SPIRIT OF A DECEASED PERSON

These prayers have been made by many Shona faithful. We know that the districts have different ways of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased, but the faithful should obey what agrees with Christianity.

#### STEP 1

##### **The presentation of the grain of the beer of the rite**

This grain is presented by the one who is chosen by the family of the dead. If he who presents the grain is a Christian, he can bring this grain to God and the midzimu with a prayer similar like this:

Presenter<sup>36</sup>: (name of A<sup>37</sup>), you, see the grain which we brought out, this is to brew beer, which is drunk by the people when they bring this child to Christ and to you.

(name of A), tell also (name of A), he also tells (name of A), who tells (name of A), all those lay it down before God, the Creator, that the grain which we brought out, is to brew beer, that we bring your child (name of D<sup>38</sup>) to you and all his ancestors, and to all the saints and his friends, that, if God has not yet admitted him into his courtyard of heaven, he opens the gate for him and unites him with all of his lineage who went before.

You too, (name of D) if you are there, with God, Mutangakugara, do not forget that you left a family, and your relatives on earth, continue to pray for them, that they follow the way of Christ and keep the laws of the Father, the Creator. You do not want your family to embarrass you with what it continues doing on earth. You may not be happy with their bad deeds. Therefore, go on interceding for them with Christ, that they be able to arrive at everlasting happiness.

All: Amen.

The presenter sprinkles the grain with blessed water saying:

Presenter: I sprinkle the this grain with holy<sup>39</sup> water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Joyful cry and hand clapping.

#### STEP 2

##### **To offer the beer**

As we know no intercession is made at the grinding that is done with the sprouted grain of the beer, which brings the person into the village. The married women<sup>40</sup> give each other the grain and help each other to grind. When it is finished the beer is begun.

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<sup>36</sup> musumi

<sup>37</sup> name of Ancestor (madzitateguru, vadzimu)

<sup>38</sup> name of deceased, the one to be installed as ancestor (mudzimu).

<sup>39</sup> In Shona: kuera, see note 28

This grain is presented by the one who is chosen by the family.

Presenter: (name of A), tell (name of A) who tells also (name of A), it just goes on until it reaches the great mudzimu, he is the Creator (Musikavanhu), the owner of the heavens and all creation (Muridziwamatenga nezvisikwa zrose), that: it was said, (name of D) this beer, which says, return to your village to guard your family. And again, it says, we gather together and beg God, that he receives you, that you stay with him in his courtyard together with the midzimu of your whole tribe, you will be happy together with Christ, and his Father, and with your ancestors who have some who we do not yet know.

When the presentation, which is done in the house, is finished, the people may be given beer. It is a good thing that people dance, play the drums, or mbira and sing Sunday-songs and pray, and read the gospel and other things as they are done in this district.

### STEP 3

#### **The presentation of the animal (nhevedzo<sup>41</sup>)**

This animal is presented to the dead person, that he presents it to the ancestors who presents it to God with this prayer.

Presenter: (name of A), tell also (name of A), who tells too (name of A), you tell each other until it reaches Christ, who himself brings to God, the Creator, that this animal is the one which enables your child, (name of D), to go, we are presenting him to you and his ancestors, that they present him to you, the Creator. We have sprinkled this animal in your name and that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

He sprinkles with holy<sup>42</sup> water.

Presenter: All you midzimu of his lineage, guide him to Jesus who opens to people the courtyard of his Father. It is he, who is the bridge which we cross, when we go to the new country full of saints and angels.

#### **The presentation of the goat of anger**

This custom is done in some districts. The presenter prays saying:

Presenter: You, (name of D), if you died with anger with us, we say, 'Let us forgive each other. Where you go, there is no resentment. At the courtyard of the Father, who says, he who has repented, he is forgiven. This goat, which we are killing, it is the one of extinguishing your anger, like the extinguishing that was done for the sins, which we committed, by the blood of Christ. Therefore we say, tell everyone else, who bring us too to those who are in the air and to the great mudzimu, God (Nyadenga).'

All: Amen.

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<sup>40</sup> madzimai: married women. Hannan, 1987:315  
pl. of mai, mother. Hannan, 1987:318

<sup>41</sup> The beast killed for burial ceremony. Hannan, 1987:465

<sup>42</sup> In Shona: sande

#### STEP 4

##### **To bring the mudzimu into the village and to bring him to God and the ancestors.**

This is the custom of times long ago which, we say now, agrees with Christianity. Different districts can have a practice of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased which is different to many other districts, but this very practice should agree with Christianity.

When the people have arrived at the grave, in some districts people pour beer at the grave of the dead person. If it is this, which is done, the presenter prays saying:

##### **For those who pour beer at the grave**

Presenter: You (name of D), tell (name of A), who tells also (name of A), which goes on like that until to Christ. He brings it to the Father too, that we pour this beer at your grave, that we are united with you, as the unity which was achieved for us by the blood of Christ.

The Presenter pours beer saying:

Presenter: We do this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

##### **For those who pour blood at the grave**

Presenter: You (name of D), tell (name of A), who tells (name of A), they bring it to Christ. He gives it to the Father, that this blood, which we pour at this grave of (name of D), is what reminds us of the salvation, which was accomplished for us by the blood of Christ.

Now let us hand over to our ancestors, who hand over to Christ, he, Christ himself hands over to the Father, that we take our person (human being) today, going to the village.

See, you (name of D), and you (name of A), and (name of A), tell each other, you all say like this, it just goes on until to him, the Creator, the great mudzimu, that your child, this (name of D), today, we are taking him, we bring him into his village. And again, we say, you ask Christ, that , if (name of D) has not yet arrived at the courtyard of heaven, accompany him, that he arrives there.

See, you (name of D), we are doing everything in the way of our faith, because, it is you who agreed to be a believer. Therefore we ask that you come, enter your village, and guard your family. And again, we ask, that God, the Father, opens to you his courtyard. Always pray for your family, which you left on this earth. Pray also for us all, who are gathered here and all your relatives and the whole Church. We sprinkle you with this holy water asking, that Christ cleanses you by his precious blood, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

He sprinkles with holy water.

##### **POSSIBLE READINGS**

The presenter may choose to read the reading which he wants of the readings which are below from the bible: 2 Macc 12:43-45, or Thess 4:13-18, or 2 Tim 2:8-13

After this, if there are some who want to speak, they may speak. After the speakers, the people put the petitions to God, praying for the dead.

After the petition, the presenter says:

Presenter: (name of D), let us go. You are sleeping alone here, you are not at the village, the children are longing for you, you long for them. Arise, we go, you follow us, we are going to the village, your village. Now, Christ, our Lord, will take you too. We ask that, Christ takes you now, going with you to the courtyard of the Father where everlasting happiness is. Your ancestors and all of your lineage say, "Good! Today, you came too, you follow us. It is good, stay, we are happy, in the courtyard of our Father, there is everlasting happiness, but do not forget your children. It is your work, which we give you, to guard your family, that it follows you too to the courtyard of the Father."

Now, let us ask the ancestors (name of As) and all others who are in heaven, that they bring him to God, if he has not yet arrived there.

See, you ancestors of (name of D) and you all others who are in heaven, we ask, that you bring this your child (name of D) to God.

Presenter: You (name of A) and (name of A) and (name of A) who are in heaven, see this is your child.

All: Go with him to God.

Presenter: You all of the generation<sup>43</sup> of his father, who are in heaven, this is your child.

All: Go with him to God.

Presenter: You of the generation of his mother, who are in heaven, this is your child.

All: Go with him to God.

Presenter: You who used to stay with him, and you all who used to go with him to mass, who are in heaven, this your brother/sister.

All: Go with him to God.

Presenter: You saints all, this is your brother/sister.

All: Go with him to God.

Presenter: And you saint (name), this is your name's sake.

All: Go with him to God.

Presenter: You, angel, who guarded him on this earth, this is your human being (person).

All: Go with him to God.

Presenter: You, mother Mary, this is your child.

All: Go with him to God.

Priest: Our Lord, Jesus Christ, say to the Father, we all, who are here say, God, our Father, we may not know, whether our relative is with you or not. But we know, that if he has not yet finished his punishment, he has not yet arrived with you. And again, his ancestors have not yet seen him. Therefore, if he has not yet arrived, we say, "Forgive him his sins, take him, let him stay with you, happy with his ancestors. He will guard us and protect us from what we have done to him and angered him with, when he was still with us. This we say, you bring us to God, the Father.

All: Amen.

If these prayers are ended, or the mass, and all arrangements have ended, the people make a line and return to the village singing and praying for the dead.

<sup>43</sup> chizvarwa: 1. Generation of people of same age. ... 3. Kinship complex of five succeeding generations. People of one patrilineage who come together for ritual purposes. Hannan, 1987:102

## Appendix B

### Cultural practice destroys Christianity: bishop

Herald Reporter

THE cultural practice of "resting the spirit of departed relatives" (kurova guva) is destroying Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church Bishop of Mutare, Right Reverend Alexio Churu Muchabaiwa, has said.

The bishop's declaration was a bombshell for many of the more than 800 Catholic men gathered for the St Joseph's Guild National Congress at Regina Mundi School in Gweru at the weekend.

Catholics in Zimbabwe have, for many years, passionately and emotively differed on the thorny matter that has left the Church deeply divided with battle lines drawn between priests and nuns, on the one hand, and congregations, on the other.

Presenting a paper on the position of the Catholic Church on the age-old ceremony to rest the spirit of the dead, Bishop Muchabaiwa said: "If there is anything that destroys Christianity it is kurova guva. It destroys Christianity fundamentally."

By engaging in this practice, which is linked to the belief that ancestral spirits are capable of acting as intercessors between the living and God, Christians were fundamentally destroying the very basis of their faith — that Jesus Christ is the only way to get to God, said Bishop Muchabaiwa.

The highly contentious matter, which stirred heated arguments during a two-hour long debate among the delegates at the congress, is likely to generate further debate not only in the Catholic Church, but also other Christian denominations, whose membership still consults spirit mediums and n'angas (traditional diviners).

Strongly bound by the desire to uphold such cultural practices that touch on core aspects of their lives, some delegates pointed out that it was now extremely difficult for Christians to extricate themselves from this practice because they were nurtured in the credo.

Said Bishop Muchabaiwa: "The biggest problem most Christians face today is that of transition. But, fortunately, God is a God of freedom.

"As Christians we should, however, make up our minds which side we want to belong to. Either you follow Christianity or the ancestral route — it's that simple."

<http://www.herald.co.zw/index.php?id=31499&pubdate=2004-05> The Herald - Zimbabwe News Online —Page-2-of 2

Leading the camp of delegates who supported the practice of resting the spirit of the dead were a sizeable number of elderly men who argued that there was nothing wrong in partaking in such ceremonies as Christians since this was in line with the Vatican's acculturation initiative.

However, presenting a different topic during the same congress, one of the Catholic Church's oldest practicing priests, Father Xavier Munyongani of Masvingo, fired a broadside at Christians who justified unchristian practices and also taught what they did not practice.

"There are too many Christians practicing double standards who declare during the day that they don't consult n'angas on matters of appeasing the spirits, but secretly do so at night," said Fr Munyongani.

"If all these born again people swear that they don't talk to n'angas, where are the n'angas getting all their money to buy all the Mercedes Benz cars they own? Who is fooling who?" he asked.

Drawing delegates from the Church's eight dioceses of Hwange, Bulawayo, Gokwe, Chinhoyi, Masvingo, Mutare, Gweru and Harare, the congress ended yesterday with no clear resolution after Bishop Muchabaiwa left the issue open for further debate.

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## Appendix C

ZIMBABWE

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# Traditional Medical Practitioners Act

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Chapter 27:14

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*Revised Edition*

1996

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CHAPTER 27:14

TRADITIONAL MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ACT

Act 38/1981. ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

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TRADITIONAL MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS ACT

AN ACT to establish a Traditional Medical Practitioners Council; to provide for the registration and regulation of the practice of traditional medical practitioners; and to provide for matters incidental to or connected with the foregoing. [Date of commencement: 16th October. 1981. except for s. 31 (2) and (3).]

PART 1

PRELIMINARY

1 Short title

This Act may be cited as the Traditional Medical Practitioners Act [Chapter 27:14].

2 Interpretation

(1) In this Act—

"Association" means the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association;

"Council" means the Traditional Medical Practitioners Council established by section three;

"improper or disgraceful conduct" means any conduct which, when regard is had to the practice of traditional medical practitioners, is improper or disgraceful, whether defined in by-laws referred to in section thirty-four or not;

"member" means a member of the Council;

"Minister" means the Minister of Health and Child Welfare or any other Minister to whom the President may, from time to time, assign the administration of this Act;

"Register" means the register of traditional medical practitioners established in terms of section eighteen;

"registered" means registered in the Register in terms of Pan IV;

"Registrar" means the Registrar of Traditional Medical Practitioners appointed in terms of section seventeen.

(2) For the purposes of this Act—

^'practice of traditional medical practitioners" means every act, the object of which is to treat, identify, analyse or diagnose, without the application of operative surgery, any illness of body or mind by traditional methods.

PART II

TRADITIONAL MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS COUNCIL

3 Establishment of Council and functions and purposes thereof

(1) There is hereby established a council to be known as the Traditional Medical Practitioners Council, which shall be a body corporate and shall, in its corporate name, be capable of suing and being sued and, subject to this Act, of performing such acts as bodies corporate may by law perform.

(2) The function and purpose of the Council shall be—

- (a) to supervise and control the practice of traditional medical practitioners;
- (b) to promote the practice of traditional medical practitioners and to foster research into, and develop the knowledge of, such practice;
- (c) to hold inquiries for the purposes of this Act;
- (d) to make grants or loans to associations or persons where the Council considers this necessary or desirable for, or incidental to, the attainment of the purposes of the Council.

(3) Any expense incurred by the Council in the exercise of its functions or attainment of its purposes in terms of this Act shall be made out of the funds of the Council.

#### 4 Composition of Council

The Council shall consist of twelve members of whom—

- (a) one shall be the chairman who shall be appointed by the Minister after consultation with the Association;
- (b) one shall be the vice-chairman who shall be a person who, except in the case of the first Council, is a registered traditional medical practitioner, who has practised as a traditional medical practitioner for not less than five years and who shall be appointed by the Minister;
- (c) five shall be registered traditional medical practitioners who shall be appointed by the Minister.
- (d) subject to section six, five shall be registered traditional medical practitioners who shall be elected by the registered traditional medical practitioners in the prescribed manner.

Provided that, in the case of the first Council— (i) the Minister may, for the purposes of paragraph (c), appoint any five persons who have practised as traditional medical practitioners;

(ii) the Association may, for the purposes of paragraph (d), appoint any five persons who are members of the Association.

#### 5 Conditions of office of members

(1) A member shall hold office for a period of three years:

Provided that, in the case of the first Council—

- (a) three of the members appointed by the Minister, other than the chairman or the vice-chairman, who are designated by the Minister, shall retire in two years;
- (b) three of the members appointed by the Association, who are designated by the Association, shall retire in two years.

(2) A member shall—

(a) hold office on such conditions; and  
(b) be paid out of the funds of the Council such remuneration and allowances, if any; as the Minister may in each case fix.

(3) A retiring member shall be eligible for re-appointment or re-election as a member.

#### 6 Appointment of members on failure of election

(1) If the registered traditional medical practitioners fail, neglect or refuse for any reason whatsoever to elect all or any of the members referred to in paragraph (d) of section four or to fill a vacancy in terms of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section ten, the Minister may appoint to the Council the number of members which the registered traditional medical practitioners have failed, neglected or refused to elect or may appoint a member to fill the vacancy, as the case may be.

(2) A member appointed by the Minister in terms of subsection (1)—

- (a) shall, except in the case of the first Council, be a person who is a registered traditional medical practitioner; and
- (b) shall be deemed to have been duly elected to the Council.

#### 7 Disqualification for appointment as member

No person shall be appointed or elected as a member and no person shall be qualified to hold office as a member who—

- (a) has, in terms of a law in force in any country—
  - (i) been adjudged or otherwise declared insolvent or bankrupt and has not been rehabilitated or discharged; or
  - (ii) made an assignment to, or arrangement or composition with, his creditors

which has not been rescinded or set aside: or

- (b) has, in the period of five years immediately preceding the date of his proposed appointment or ejection, been convicted—
  - (i) within Zimbabwe of a criminal offence: or (ii) outside Zimbabwe of an offence by whatever name called which, if committed within Zimbabwe, would have been a criminal offence: and sentenced to imprisonment for a term of six months or more without the option of a fine, whether or not such sentence has been suspended, and has not received a free pardon; or
- (c) has, in the period of five years immediately preceding the date of his proposed appointment or election, been found guilty of improper or disgraceful conduct.

#### 8 Vacation of office

A member shall vacate his office and his office shall become vacant—

- (a) one month after the date he gives notice in writing to the Minister of his intention to resign his office or after the expiration of such shorter period as he and the Minister may agree: or
- (b) thirty days after the date he is sentenced by a court to imprisonment referred to in paragraph (b) of section *seven* after conviction of an offence referred to in that paragraph:

Provided that, if during the said period of thirty days an application for a free pardon is made or an appeal is filed, the question whether the member is to vacate his office shall not be determined until the final disposal of such application or appeal, whereupon the member shall forthwith vacate his office and his office shall become va-

cant unless he is granted a free pardon, his conviction is set aside, his sentence is reduced to a term of imprisonment of less than six months or a punishment other than imprisonment is substituted; or

- (c) if he becomes disqualified in terms of paragraph (a) of section *seven* to hold office as a member; or
- (d) thirty days after the date he is found guilty of improper or disgraceful conduct:

Provided that, if during the said period of thirty days an appeal is lodged in terms of section *twenty-nine*, the question whether the member is to vacate his office shall not be determined until the final disposal of such appeal, whereupon the member shall forthwith vacate his office and his office shall become vacant unless the decision of the Council finding him guilty of improper or disgraceful conduct is set aside; or

- (e) if he is required in terms of section *nine* to vacate his office: or (f) if he is absent from two consecutive meetings of the Council of which he has had notice without the permission of the Council; or (g) if, being a member who is required to be registered, he ceases to be registered.

#### 9 Minister may require member to vacate office or suspend him

(1) The Minister may require a member to vacate his office if the Minister is satisfied that the member—

- (a) has been guilty of improper conduct as a member; or
- (b) has failed to comply with the conditions of his office fixed by the Minister in terms of subsection (2) of section *five*; or

- (c) is mentally or physically incapable of performing his duties as a member.

(2) The Minister may suspend from office a member against whom—

- (a) criminal proceedings have been instituted for an offence in respect of which a sentence of imprisonment without the option of a fine may be imposed; or
- (b) disciplinary proceedings are instituted by the Council; and while that member is so suspended he shall not carry out any duties as a member.

### 10 Filling of vacancies on Council

(1) On the death of, or the vacation of office by, a member who is—

- (a) a member elected in terms of paragraph (d) of section four, the vacancy shall be filled by an election held in the prescribed manner:

Provided that, if the remainder of the period for which the member whose office has been vacated would otherwise have held office is less than six months, it shall not be necessary to hold an election and the Council may, if it thinks fit, co-opt a registered traditional medical practitioner to fill the vacancy;

- (b) a member appointed by the Minister or the Association in terms of section four, the Minister or Association, as the case may be, shall appoint another person to fill the vacancy;

and the person so elected, co-opted or appointed, as the case may be, shall hold office for the remainder of the three-year or two-year period, as the case may be, for which that member would, but for his death or the vacation of his office, have continued in office.

(2) If any member is granted leave of absence by the Council, the Council may, if it thinks fit, co-opt a registered traditional medical practitioner to fill

the vacancy during the absence of that member.

### 11 Vice-chairman to act for chairman

If the chairman of the Council is unable to exercise the functions of chairman by reason of illness, absence from Zimbabwe or other cause, the vice-chairman shall exercise the functions and powers and perform the duties of the chairman.

### 12 Meetings and decisions of Council

(1) The Council shall hold its first meeting on such date and at such place as the Minister may fix and thereafter the Council shall meet for the dispatch of business and adjourn, close and otherwise regulate its meetings and procedures as it thinks fit:

Provided that a meeting of the Council shall be held at least twice in each year.

- (2) A special meeting of the Council—

- (a) may be convened by the chairman at any time;
- (b) shall be convened by the chairman within twenty-one days of the receipt by him of a request in writing signed by not less than six members and specifying the purposes for which the meeting is to be convened.

- (3) At any meeting of the Council—

- (a) the chairman or, in his absence, the vice-chairman shall preside;
- (b) in the absence of both the chairman and the vice-chairman the members present shall elect one of their number to preside;
- (c) six members shall form a quorum.

(4) All acts, matters or things authorized or required to be done by the Council shall be decided by a majority vote at a meeting of the Council at which a quorum is present.

(5) At all meetings of the Council each member present shall have one

vote on a question before the Council and, in the event of an equality of votes, the person presiding at the meeting shall have, in addition to a deliberative vote, a casting vote.

### 13 Validity of decisions and acts of Council

No decision or act of the Council or act done under the authority of the Council shall be invalid by reason only of the fact that—

- (a) the Council did not consist of the full number of members for which provision is made in section *four*, or
- (b) a disqualified person acted as a member of the Council at the time the decision was taken or act was done or authorized.

### 14 Funds and accounts of Council

(1) The funds of the Council shall consist of—

- (a) all fees and other moneys payable to the Council in terms of this Act; and
- (b) such other moneys and assets as may vest in or accrue to the Council, whether in the course of the exercise of its functions or otherwise.

(2) The accounts of the Council shall be audited at least once in each calendar year by an auditor registered in terms of the Public Accountants and Auditors Act [*Chapter 27:12*] appointed by the Council.

### 15 Annual general meetings of Council

(1) The Council shall at least once in each calendar year convene a general meeting.

(2) The Council shall give such notice of the annual general meeting as the Council deems fit.

(3) The Council shall submit to the annual general meeting called in terms of subsection (1) a report setting out the activities of the Council

since the previous annual general meeting:

Provided that this subsection shall not apply to the first general meeting held in terms of this section.

### 16 Committees of Council

(1) The Council may—

- (a) establish committees to assist the Council in the exercise of its functions under this Act; and
- (b) appoint such registered traditional medical practitioners as it may consider expedient to be members of a committee referred to in paragraph (a).

(2) The Council, with the approval of the Minister, may assign to a committee referred to in subsection (1) such of the functions of the Council under this Act as the Council may consider expedient.

(3) The Council shall not be treated as having divested itself of any function assigned to a committee referred to in subsection (1), and the Council may 'van,' or revoke any decision of a committee made in the exercise of that function.

(4) The Council may appoint a legal practitioner entitled to audience before a magistrate's court to advise the Council in the exercise of its functions under this Act or a committee of the Council referred to in subsection (1) in the exercise of any function assigned to it in terms of subsection (2).

## PART 111

### REGISTRAR AND REGISTER OF TRADITIONAL MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

#### 17 Registrar

(1) The Minister, after consultation with the Council shall appoint a person to be the Registrar of the Council.

(2) The functions of the Registrar shall be—

- (a) to be the secretary to the Council, in which connection he shall, on instructions from the chairman of the Council, convene meetings of the Council and any committee thereof and maintain the records of any such meetings; and
- (b) to carry out any other duties imposed on him by or in terms of this Act or by the Council.

**18 Register of traditional medical practitioners and certificates of registration**

(1) The Registrar shall establish a Register of traditional medical practitioners.

(2) It shall be the duty of the Registrar—

- (a) to enter in the Register, in relation to a registered traditional medical practitioner, his name, address and date of first registration and such other particulars as the Council may from time to time determine;
- (b) to make in the Register any necessary alterations in the name, address or other particulars of a registered traditional medical practitioner;
- (c) to delete from the Register the name of a registered traditional medical practitioner who dies;
- (d) when required to do so by or under this Act—
  - (i) to mark in the Register the registration of a person or, as the case may be, the suspension from practice of a registered traditional medical practitioner; and
  - (ii) to delete from the Register the registration of a registered traditional medical practitioner; and generally, in connection with the Register, to comply with the provisions of this Act.

(3) Where the Registrar deletes from the Register the name of a registered

person, he shall enter in the Register a record of the reasons therefor.

(4) If, in the performance of the duties imposed upon him by or under this Act, the Registrar—

- (a) registers an applicant, he shall issue to him a certificate of registration;
- (b) deletes from the Register the name of a registered person or marks in the Register the suspension from practice of a registered person, he shall, if possible, notify him in writing accordingly.

(5) On an application by a registered person the Registrar may issue to that person a duplicate certificate of registration—

- (a) if he is satisfied as to the identity of the applicant; and
- (b) on production by the applicant of an affidavit certifying that the certificate of registration has been lost or destroyed; and
- (c) on payment by the applicant of the appropriate fee, if any, prescribed.

**19 Offences in connection with Register, etc.**

A person who—

- (a) makes or causes to be made an unauthorized entry or alteration in, or deletion from, the Register or a certified copy thereof or extract therefrom or on a certificate of registration; or
- (b) procures or attempts to procure for himself or another person registration or a certificate of registration by means of fraud, a false representation or the concealment of a material fact; or
- (c) makes or causes to be made in connection with an application for registration a false declaration in a document used for the purpose of establishing his identity; or
- (d) willfully destroys or injures or renders illegible or causes to be

destroyed, injured or rendered illegible an entry in the Register; or

- (e) without the permission of the holder, willfully destroys, injures or renders illegible or causes to be destroyed, injured or rendered illegible a certificate of registration; or
- (f) forges or utters, knowing the same to be forged, a document purporting to be a certificate of registration;

shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or to both such fine and such imprisonment.

#### 20 Register as evidence

A certificate under the hand of the Registrar—

- (a) of the entry of the name of a person in the Register shall be *prima facie* evidence that the person is a registered traditional medical practitioner;
- (b) that the name of a person has been deleted from, or does not appear in, the Register shall be *prima facie* evidence that the person is not a registered traditional medical practitioner;
- (c) that a registered traditional medical practitioner has been suspended from practice as such for a period specified in that certificate shall be *prima facie* evidence that the person has been suspended from practice for that period.

### PART IV REGISTRATION

#### 21 Application for registration

(1) Any person who wishes to be registered shall apply to the Registrar and shall submit with his application—

- (a) the appropriate fee;
- (b) such information in relation to his application as he deems fit or

as he may be required by the Registrar, on the directions of the Council, to supply.

(2) The Registrar shall refer any application for registration made to him in terms of subsection (1) to the Council.

#### 22 Council may grant or refuse application for registration

(1) The Council shall consider every application referred to it in terms of subsection (2) of section *twenty-one* and after due inquiry—

(a) if satisfied that the applicant possesses sufficient skill and ability to practise as a traditional medical practitioner and is of good character, shall grant the application and direct the Registrar to register the applicant;

(b) if not satisfied in terms of paragraph (a), shall refuse the application.

(2) The Council, in granting an application for registration, may, where appropriate, direct the Registrar to record in the Register the qualification of the applicant concerned as a spirit medium.

#### 23 Honorary traditional medical practitioners

Notwithstanding the provisions of this Act—

(a) the Minister, after consultation with the Council and the Association, may direct the Registrar to register as an honorary traditional medical practitioner, with or without the qualification as a spirit medium, any person who, by reason of his special standing as a traditional medical practitioner, deserves to be so registered;

(b) it shall not be necessary for any person who has been registered in terms of paragraph (a) to pay the registration fee or annual fee in terms of this Act;

- (c) a certificate of registration issued to a person who has been registered in terms of paragraph (a) shall reflect that he is an honorary traditional medical practitioner.

#### 24 Appeal against refusal to register

Any person who is aggrieved by the decision of the Council not to register him may appeal against such decision to the Minister who may—

- (a) confirm the decision of the Council; or
- (b) remit the matter to the Council for further consideration and with such directions or advice as he deems necessary; or
- (c) direct that the applicant concerned be registered; and the decision of the Minister shall be final.

#### 25 Deletions from Register

(1) The Council may direct the Registrar to delete from the Register—

- (a) the name of any person who—
  - (i) has failed to pay the appropriate annual subscription:
    - has requested that his name be so deleted; has been found guilty of improper or disgraceful conduct in terms of this Act;
- (b) any entry which is proved to the satisfaction of the Council to have been made in error or through fraudulent representations or concealment of material facts or in circumstances not authorized by this Act.

(2) A certificate of registration issued to a person whose name has been deleted from the Register shall be deemed to have been cancelled on the date of the deletion and the person concerned shall be deemed not to be registered with effect from that date.

#### PART V DISCIPLINARY AND OTHER INQUIRIES

#### 26 Inquiries by Council

(1) Subject to this section, the Council may hold inquiries into an allegation that a registered traditional medical practitioner—

- (a) has been guilty of improper or disgraceful conduct; (b) is grossly incompetent or has performed any act appertaining to the practice of traditional medical practitioners in a grossly incompetent manner.

(2) Before exercising its powers referred to in subsection (1), the Council shall cause to be served upon the person concerned a notice setting out the allegations against him and the Council shall afford the person concerned a reasonable opportunity of being heard, either by himself or, if he so wishes, by a legal representative:

Provided that, where the person concerned is by reason of mental disorder or defect legally incapable of representing himself, the Council may apply to the High Court for the appointment of a *curator ad litem* and the notice referred to in this subsection shall be served on such *curator*.

(3) The powers, rights and privileges of the Council in an inquiry referred to in subsection (1) shall be the same as those conferred upon a commissioner by the Commissions of Inquiry Act [Chapter 10:07], other than the power to order a person to be detained in custody, and sections 9 to 13 and sections 15 and 16 of that Act shall apply, *mutatis mutandis*, in relation to an inquiry and to a person summoned to give evidence or giving evidence at an inquiry.

(4) The Council shall, in any inquiry held by it in terms of subsection (1), record the proceedings and any evidence heard by it and the decision made by it and the reasons therefor.

## 27 Exercise of powers by Council after inquiry

(1) At the conclusion of an inquiry held in terms of section *twenty-six*, the Council may, if it decides that the registered traditional medical practitioner has been guilty of improper or disgraceful conduct or is grossly incompetent or has performed any act appertaining to the practice of traditional medical practitioners in a grossly incompetent manner—

- (a) direct the Registrar to cancel the registration of the registered person; or
- (b) order the suspension of the registered person for a specified period from practising as a traditional medical practitioner or performing any act specially pertaining to the practice of traditional medical practitioners; or
- (c) impose such conditions as it deems fit, subject to which the registered person shall be entitled to carry on the practice of a traditional medical practitioner; or
- (d) order the registered person to pay a penalty not exceeding five hundred dollars, which penalty shall be payable to the Council; or
- (e) order the registered person to pay any costs or expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry; or
- (f) censure the registered person; or
- (g) caution the registered person and postpone for a period not exceeding three years any further action against him on one or more conditions as to his future conduct, including the conduct or nature of his practice during that period.

(2) If at any time the Council is satisfied that during the period of any postponement in terms of paragraph (g) of subsection (1) a registered per-

son has not complied with the conditions imposed in terms of that paragraph, the Council, after giving reasonable notice to the registered person concerned, may decide further to do one or more of the things specified in subsection (1).

(3) The Council may extend for any period determined by it the period of operation of, or withdraw or in any other manner amend, any order made in terms of paragraphs (b) and (c) of subsection (1).

(4) A person who has been suspended in terms of paragraph (b) of subsection (1) shall be disqualified from practising as a traditional medical practitioner and his registration shall be deemed to be cancelled until the period of suspension has expired.

## 28 Exercise of disciplinary powers on conviction for offence: court to forward evidence

(1) A registered person who has been convicted within or outside Zimbabwe, whether before or after the date of his registration, of an offence by a court of law shall be liable to be dealt with by the Council in accordance with this Part if the Council is of the opinion that such offence constitutes improper or disgraceful conduct.

(2) The Council may, if it thinks fit on proof before it of a conviction referred to in subsection (1) and without hearing further evidence, deal with the convicted person in accordance with this Part:

Provided that the convicted person shall be afforded an opportunity of tendering in writing or in person or by his legal representative, as he may elect, an explanation to the Council in extenuation of his conduct.

(3) Subject to the Courts and Adjudicating Authorities (Publicity Restriction) Act [*Chapter 87:04*], if, after the termination of proceedings before a court of law in Zimbabwe—

- (a) it appears to the court that there is *prima facie* evidence of improper or disgraceful conduct on the part of a registered person, the court shall direct that a copy of the record of the proceedings or a copy of such part of the record of such proceedings as is material to the issue shall be transmitted to the Council; or
- (b) the Council requests that a record of the proceedings before a court of law in Zimbabwe or part of such record be supplied to it on the grounds that it is of direct interest to the Council in the exercise of its functions under this Act, the registrar or clerk of the court shall transmit to the Council a copy of the record of the proceedings or a copy of such part of the record of the proceedings as is material.

### 29 Appeals to Minister

Any person who is aggrieved by the decision of the Council in terms of section *twenty-seven* may appeal against such decision to the Minister who may—

- (a) confirm, vary or set aside the decision of the Council; or
- (b) remit the matter to the Council for further consideration with such directions or advice as he deems necessary.

### 30 Improper or disgraceful conduct

(1) The Council may, under by-laws made in terms of section *thirty-four*—

- (a) define what in the case of a registered traditional medical practitioner shall constitute improper or disgraceful conduct; and
- (b) provide for the manner in which complaints or charges against a registered traditional medical practitioner may be lodged; and
- (c) provide for any other matters incidental to the investigation of, and inquiry into, a complaint against a registered traditional medical practitioner.

(2) If any registered traditional medical practitioner has counselled or knowingly been a party to the performance of any act in respect of which an unregistered person has been convicted of an offence under Part VI, the conduct of such traditional medical practitioner shall, for the purposes of this Part, constitute improper or disgraceful conduct:

Provided that the provisions of this subsection shall not be construed as exempting such registered traditional medical practitioner from prosecution in a court of law for any offence which such conduct may constitute.

(3) The by-laws referred to in subsection (1) shall not be deemed to limit the general power conferred on the Council to inquire into allegations of improper or disgraceful conduct not covered by such by-laws and to impose any penalty under this Part on any person guilty of such conduct.

## PART VI GENERAL

### 31 Practice of traditional medical practitioner

(1) Subject to this Act, it shall be of lawful for a registered traditional medical practitioner to engage for gain in the practice of traditional medical practitioners.

(2) Subject to subsections (4) and (5), any person who, not being registered as a traditional medical practitioner—

- (a) for' gain practises or carries on business as a traditional medical practitioner, whether or not purporting to be registered; or
- (b) pretends, or by any means whatsoever holds himself out, to be a registered traditional medical practitioner; or
- (c) uses the title "Registered Traditional Medical Practitioner" or

any name, title, description or symbol indicating or calculated to lead persons to infer that he is registered as a traditional medical practitioner in terms of this Act;

shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or to both such fine and such imprisonment.

(3) Subject to the provisions of subsections (4) and (5), any person who, not having the qualification of a spirit medium recorded in the Register in relation to himself, uses the title "Registered Spirit Medium" or any name, title, description or symbol indicating or calculated to lead persons to infer that he has such qualification registered in relation to himself in terms of this Act shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or to both such fine and such imprisonment.

(4) The provisions of—

(a) paragraph (a) of subsection (2) shall not apply to any person who is registered in terms of the Medical, Dental and Allied Professions Act [Chapter 27:08].

(b) paragraphs (6) and (c) of subsection (2) and subsection (3) shall not apply to any person who is not ordinarily resident in Zimbabwe and does not purport to be registered in terms of this Act.

(5) Subsections (2) and (3) shall come into operation on such date as the President may fix by a statutory instrument.

### **32 Designation of traditional medical practitioner**

(1) A registered traditional medical practitioner shall be entitled to describe and designate himself—

(a) by the title "Registered Traditional Medical Practitioner" or by the initials "R.T.M.P."; and

(b) if the qualification of a spirit medium is recorded in the Register in relation to himself, by the title "Registered Spirit Medium" or by the initials "R.S.M."

(2) An honorary registered traditional medical practitioner shall be entitled, in association with the appropriate titles and initials referred to in subsection (1), to use the title "Honorary" or the abbreviation "Hon."

### **33 Recovery by Council of costs, fees, etc.**

The Council may by action in any competent court recover—

(a) any cost or penalty ordered in terms of Part V to be paid by a registered traditional medical practitioner or former registered traditional medical practitioner; or

(b) any fee payable in terms of this Act by a registered traditional medical practitioner or former registered traditional medical practitioner; or

(c) any other moneys or other property that may be payable or due to the Council by any person.

### **34 By-laws**

(1) The Council may make by-laws prescribing all matters which by this Act are required or permitted to be prescribed or which, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or convenient to be prescribed for carrying out or giving effect to the provisions of this Act or the regulation of the practice of traditional medical practitioners.

(2) By-laws made in terms of subsection (1) may provide for—

- (a) the fees which shall be payable by applicants for registration and the annual fees which shall be payable by traditional medical practitioners so long as they remain registered;
- (b) the issue of certificates of registration and the fees in connection therewith;
- (c) the cancellation of certificates of registration of traditional medical practitioners who are no longer registered and the delivery of such certificates to the Registrar for that purpose;
- (d) the deletion from the Register of entries made in error or through fraudulent representations or concealment of material facts or in circumstances not authorized by law;
- (e) the notification to the Registrar of changes of address and prescribed particulars of registered traditional medical practitioners;
- (f) the maximum or minimum scale of fees that may be charged by registered traditional medical practitioners.

(3) By-laws made in terms of subsection (1) shall be submitted to the Minister for his approval and, after such approval, shall be published in a statutory instrument.

(4) The fees to which paragraphs (a) and (b) of subsection (2) relate shall be paid to the Council.

## Appendix D

### Catholic Beliefs and Our Relations to the Living Dead

#### *A Contribution to the Debate on the 'Kurova Guva' Rite*

The relationship of the living to those who have died in Shona traditional religion and according to our Christian faith is once again being discussed. The Bishops of Zimbabwe have requested that discussions on this issue be arranged in each Diocese. In previous issues of 'CROSSROADS' several articles have appeared which contribute to this debate. I am in particular referring to the article of Fr. Emmanuel J. Mavudzi "Kurova Guva, Kugadzira, Kuchenura Munhu: A second look at the rites" (CROSSROADS, No.164 Christmas 1998, P.15-16). I am also aware of other articles which he has written on the same or related subjects. (e.g. 'Inculturation: Christ Our Prime Ancestor' (Crossroads No.153 November 1996); 'A Theology of African Culture' (manuscript 1997); 'The Sacred Meal of the Proto-Ancestor Christ' (Crossroads No.162 August 1998)

I am not qualified to deal adequately with the traditional Shona relationship to the ancestors and the relevant traditional religious rites such as *kurova guva*, *kugadzira* or the role of the *n'anga* in them. I am therefore not commenting either on the merits or demerits of the *Kuchenura Munhu* Rite. But having followed closely the events which culminated in the publication of the rite on 4 October 1982 as 'commissioned by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference' and with an introduction by Bishop T. Chiginya as President of the Commission on Christian Formation and Worship, I would at least have to make a few corrections to Father Mavudzi's presentation of how that rite came about.

My main concern in this whole discussion is however that it is being limited to a narrow, fundamentalistic interpretation of "Christ's work of redemption". In an effort to uphold the unique role of Jesus as redeemer, Father Mavudzi and others are tempted to restrict Catholic theology to positions which are closer to narrower Protestant traditions. Many aspects of our Catholic faith have a bearing on this whole matter. I only mention a few: Christ as our Redeemer, the work of redemption, the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection, the meaning of sacrifice, the forgiveness or cleansing of sins, the Saints and our relationship to them, the value of African Traditional Religion, the fate of the pre-Christian ancestors. When

we therefore deal with this whole issue we should present the full Christian doctrine in its Catholicity and not limit it to some narrow-minded 'Penny Catechism' approach.

In this short article I cannot deal with all aspects but I should like to highlight just a few. They are not necessarily the most important but they seem to be neglected, overlooked or misrepresented.

## **1. Biblical Interpretation**

I notice a very fundamentalistic interpretation of Bible texts which is not in line with a Catholic use of Scripture texts and their interpretations. We should avoid falling into the trap of some modern fundamentalist preachers who are so prevalent in Zimbabwe. Catholic teaching on the interpretation of the Bible in the life of the Church holds that "the Bible does not present itself as a direct revelation of timeless truths but as the written testimony to a series of interventions in which God reveals himself in human history. ... It follows that the biblical writings cannot be correctly understood without an examination of the historical circumstances that shaped them." (Pontifical Biblical Commission. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.*)

Merely because a certain word is used in the Shona translation of the Bible e.g. 'kuvunza midzimu', 'kushopera' (cf. Dt. 18:10), 'kupira' does not mean that it refers to the same beliefs and practices in Shona culture. In this connection 1 Sam. 28:3-25 (King Saul consulting the medium of Endor) is often used as a condemnation of all communication with the dead. This scene and other texts against the consultation of the dead have to be seen in the proper context. "As the religion of Israel became more and more aware of the fact that Yahweh was the only God, the all powerful, there was a strong sense that the power and the importance given to the dead was at the expense of Yahweh. There was therefore a strong reaction against these competitors. ... In the period after the exile some groups in Israel insisted that people should seek guidance from Yahweh by searching the Scriptures, rather than consulting the dead or any other means." (P. Decock in '*Grace and Truth*' 1999/1, p.39) King Saul's action was condemned because "he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord" (1 Chron 10:13-14). "In the later texts of the OT consulting the dead was forbidden, because in some ways this was seen as unfaithfulness to Yahweh, as consulting a rival source of knowledge and power. On the other hand, the people of Israel were encouraged to consult the prophets of Yahweh, but they were warned of the dangers of false prophets." (Decock, p.41) It is therefore at least questionable whether the above texts of the OT can be applied to Shona practices and whether they can contribute much to the present-day debate about 'kurova guva'.

## 2. Heaven and Purgatory

It seems to me that much of the argumentation against traditional religious practices and their relevance to beliefs and practices of the Christian faith adheres to a world-view which sees heaven, purgatory, and hell as far away places, one somewhere in the sky and the other somewhere below and purgatory somewhere in-between. It separates too much heaven and earth, heaven ('kudenga') and home ('kumusha'), creator and creation, the material and the spiritual world, the physical and the metaphysical realities. It reveals a very limited theological view of heaven and purgatory as places rather than as states or dimensions of existence in which dead persons find themselves. It denies what John Mbiti calls "the prime NT emphasis on 'the nearness of the spirit world'" (*New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, p.143)

The official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* avoids talking of purgatory and heaven as specific places. It says about 'the Final Purification, or Purgatory': "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." (Nos. 1030, 1031) There is no mention of a place where this purification is supposed to take place since it is happening beyond the limits of time and space.

The same *Catechism* says about heaven: "Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they 'see him as he is, face to face' (1 Jn 3:2) ... This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called 'heaven'. Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness." (Nos. 1023, 1024) Heaven is therefore not a 'place' but a mode of life.

## 3. Communication between the Living and the Dead

A consequence of the narrow 'geographical' view of heaven, purgatory and hell as places is the view that "no *shū*, either good or bad is ever permitted by God to return to earth or remain on earth." (Mavudzi, p.16) To support this view Father Mavudzi uses the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) and states that it teaches "that no human spirit, after death, is ever permitted by God to return to earth to speak to the living, and less still, is ever permitted to roam about here on earth, hovering over grave yards, roaming about through forests, as is

believed by the people". (p.16) We have here another example of the fundamentalistic interpretation of a Bible text. John Mbiti says: "It is unfortunate that Lk. 16:19-31 should be the proof text in the argument against the traditional communication between the living-dead and their surviving relatives. The passage is concerned primarily with unbelief and lack of response shown by the Jews even when God's Kingdom has appeared, whatever other interpretations we might give to it. ... Surely Dives wants his brothers to be 'helped' and not 'afflicted' by someone returning to them from the dead. He does not say that he himself wants to return to his brothers." (see above, p.152)

Father Mavudzi's categorical statement also contradicts the common Catholic teaching about the living dead, their powers and their communication with those left behind. I do not want to go into details about what Catholic teaching accepts about apparitions of Our Blessed Lady and of other Saints. But I want to refer to the Catholic belief about the Communion of Saints. It is a community which transcends the limits of time and space. Vatican II describes it in these terms: "(Until the Lord comes in His majesty) some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, as he is'. All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same charity towards God and our neighbours, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together (cf. Eph 4:16). So it is that the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ is no way interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the constant faith of the Church, this union is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods." (*Lumen Gentium*, No.49) Again a place is mentioned only in connection with the 'church on earth' but not with the 'suffering church' and the 'triumphant church'. When talking about that 'exchange of spiritual goods' and the communication between the living and the dead, we have to leave behind such geographical categories as 'near' and 'far', 'here' and 'there' because such communications or contacts transcend such physical categories. The dead share in the 'nearness' of God who is not confined to a certain place but who is hidden to our eyes. The only way to experience that 'nearness' is our faith. But the more the dead person is in God - 'near' to God -, all the more he/she is also present to those left behind.

'*A New Catechism. Catholic Faith for Adults*' asks the question: "How are we to picture those dear to us who have died?" and it goes on to answer: "If we do try, we find that revelation does not lead us away to a distant other-world. It points to our own. What, after all, is the greatest manifestation of the fulfillment of God's promise to us? It is the Easter apparition of Jesus and his presence among us. We are shown how he is a friend who strengthens and consoles, and that he remained the same ever since in the life of mankind, giving force and

peace, new gentleness and love. This manifestation - the permanent influence of the risen Lord since the first Easter apparitions - is the purest indication that we have about the nature of eternal life, including that of those who have already fallen asleep in him.... Just as we know the risen Lord through the force that flows from him, in the same way we must try to recognise our dead by their good influence." (p.474-5)

#### **4. The Christian Attitude towards African Traditional Religion**

It is not surprising that Father Mavudzi's narrow theological approach leads him to the conclusion that "it is not *mudzimu*, but a demon posing as '*mudzimu*' which is taken from the grave and reinstated in the home" and that the custom of "*Kurova Guva* is a parody of Christ by Satan" and "cannot be adapted to Christian use". (p.16) The Catholic Bishops of Africa assembled for the African Synod in Rome in 1994 took a much wider and less negative view when they made the following proposition (No.36):

"In many African communities, the ancestors occupy a place of honour. They are part of the community together with the living. In many cultures, there are clear ideas of who merits to be called an ancestor. Were many of these not seeking God with a sincere heart? The ancestors are venerated, a practice which in no way implies worshipping them. We therefore recommend that ancestor veneration, taking due precaution not to diminish true worship of God or to play down the role of saints should be permitted with ceremonies devised, authorized and proposed by the competent authority in the church."

In the recent pastoral letter on the '*Church as Family of God*' (1998) of SECAM, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of the whole continent of Africa, the Bishops expand on the veneration of Ancestors. They say: "The veneration of ancestors is a common practice in Africa. because it is they who have passed on life, the gift of God, as well as the moral and cultural standards. They are guardians and protectors of this life and this patrimony with their descendants. This veneration is conceived in the monotheistic context. Its implication is the acute sense of awareness of the presence of the permanent actions of the ancestors in the life of their descendants." (No.4.6.1) They recommend that "theologians, sociologists and anthropologists employ themselves to an in-depth study of all the '*semina verbi*' (seeds of the Word = of God) contained in this belief."(No.4.6.1) They thus obviously take a less rigid view than Fr. Mavudzi who declares that "these beliefs and practices were shown to be in clear contradiction to and incompatible with what God tells us about our redemption and salvation." (p.16)

The Bishops of Africa continue to say: "Both our ancestors with upright hearts and all our Ancestors in the faith belong to (the) Church as Family of God which is at the same time earthly and heavenly. The Love which unites all the members of the Church as Family of God is such that all the members maintain between themselves fraternal relationship so to exchange their feelings and to remain within the same trend which keeps them related to their common source: the common father from whom everything that is perfect comes down (Jm 1:17)."

(No.4.6.3)

I can understand Father Mavudzi's pastoral concern about the 'split-personality syndrome' of African Christians (Mavudzi. *A Theology of African Culture*', p.14) and I share it with him, but it should be based on a much wider, more 'catholic', that is all-embracing, theology.

Fr. Josef Elsener  
IMBISA Harare

## Appendix E

14 March 2007

William Cardinal Levada  
The Prefect  
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith  
Vatican City  
Rome  
ITALY

Your Eminence,

Re: 50/95-24394

Sorry for the delay in responding to your letter of December 5 2006. Please, find below some information about the ZCBC Theology and Canon Law Commission.

Fr. Fradereck Chiromba  
ZCBC Secretary General

Title: Brief Summary of the Activities of the ZCBC Theology and Canon Law Commission since 2000.

The Theology and Canon Law Commission held a meeting on the 7th April 2000 at Chishawasha Seminary, which was meant to discuss the subject of Kurova Guva (Funeral Anniversay Ceremony). No discussion took place as no information on the matter had been received from the Dioceses.

Another meeting was held at the same place on the 24th October 2002, and was well attended. The subject of Kurova Guva was discussed quite at length. During the discussion, which was quite lively, the usefulness and the future of the present Rite of the Kuchenura Munhu was questioned. Suggestions made about the Rite varied from banning it, or reviewing it, to finding a substitute for it.

As a starting point and as a working basis it was suggested that the emerging ritual of Tombstone Unveiling could be considered for adoption and adaptation as a new rite that may replace the traditional practice of Kurova Guva.

Consequently, the Theology and Canon Law Commission formed a sub-committee and gave it the mandate to look into the specifics of a suitable rite that could be

a substitute for Kurova Guva, based on the emerging ritual of "Tombstone Unveiling." The sub-committee elected was as follows:

1. Fr. Mukosera (Convenor & Coordinator)- Mutare
2. Fr. Chiromba (Secretary) - Mutare
3. Fr. Mavudzi - Harare
4. Fr. Chapurutsa - Masvingo & Gweru
5. Fr. Mushawasha - Chinhoyi & Gokwe
6. Fr. Mkandla - Bulawayo & Hwange

Accordingly the sub-committee held a meeting at the Africa Synod House, on the 26th June 2003, and made the following observation. Quite a substantial number of Catholics had already abandoned the traditional practice of Kurova Guva, and were moving towards the new rituals of Nyaradzo and "Tombstone Unveiling", as a practical substitute for their traditional custom of Kurova Guva. Thus these rituals could replace Kurova Guva.

In the light of this phenomenon, the sub-committee came up with the following recommendations:

- i) That the practice of Kurova Guva be allowed to die a natural, but gently speeded, death.
- ii) That in the process of laying it to rest we exercise charity, and use language that encourages and builds up and not appear condemnatory to avoid polarisation.
- iii) That the present Kuchenura Munhu Rite be ignored and left to die together with the practice of Kurova Guva.
- iv) And most importantly that we, as a Church leaders, recognize and be sensitive to, the people's Situation in which they find themselves needing to pray for the expiation of the souls of their dead relatives in purgatory. This is something they need today. This expiatory ritual covers three stages: a) the Funeral Rite, b) the Memorial Rite or Nyaradzo, c) the Tombstone Unveiling Rite.

To answer these needs of the people, Fr. Emmanuel Muvadzi has worked out and produced a proposed Expiatory Rite, provisionally called "Tombstone Unveiling Rite", together with a catechism on eschatology.

The two productions:

- a) The New Rite
- b) The Relevant Catechism

Are to be considered by the Liturgical Committee before being presented to the Bishops' Conference for consideration. The process was, however, slowed down by an ineffective Pastoral Center and the death of the Bishop Chairman, +Helmut Rector SJ, in early 2004. The proposed rites are to be considered in conjunction with other rites the Liturgical Committee is working on.

1. The Theology and Canon Law Commission has not met since the meeting of the sub-committee in 2003, but hopes to convene under the new Chairman, Bishop Dieter Scholz SJ. The Bishop Chairman is the link between the Commission and the Bishops' Conference. Apart from the Bishop Chairman the Conference also appoints the Secretary for the Commission. At present all the teaching Staff at Chishawasha Regional Major Seminary are members of the Commission. Apart from the teaching Staff, each Diocese appoints its own representative on the Commission, who is usually a Theologian.
2. The Commission, as indicated above, is grappling with the cultural funeral memorial rite to see how it can influence the production of a more universally acceptable Christian rite.
3. The Commission needs to come up with a theological framework for some current issues, relating to, for instance, the HIV and AIDS pandemic, Governance, Leadership, the Economy, etc.
4. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith could list and share with all Conferences some themes common to several Conferences and call for a sharing of views on specific topics under consideration by those Conferences or by the Congregation itself.

Fr. Fradereck Chiromba (ZCBC Secretary General)

## Appendix F

### The Why and How of *Kurova Guva*

For WCC Eighth Assembly *Padare*, 3 - 14 December, 1998, Harare.

Presented by: Fr. F. Chiromba. Chishawasha Seminary.

#### 1. The Why:

According to the Shona Ritual, *Kuchenura Munhu*, Shona traditional belief has it that the deceased person does not proceed immediately to join the communion of ancestors but roams in the 'forests', with no specific habitat, until the purification or anniversary ceremony, *kurova guva*, is conducted. The immediate relatives of the deceased have the obligation to arrange for and perform the purification ceremony, introducing the deceased to the communion of the family ancestors, who will in turn introduce him/her to the wider communion of the dead. The immediate family also has the duty to organize the deceased's estate, planning for its proper distribution and the sustenance of his/her spouse and children. The ceremony is normally conducted for adults who had been married.

The ceremony of *kurova guva* is a sign that the family of the deceased cares for him/her, his/her estate, spouse and children. Thus, the family members show their love for the deceased by ending his/her sojourn in the 'forests' and pleading for his/her instatement within the communion of the ancestors.

The *Kuchenura Munhu* ceremony acknowledges that the departure of the deceased has upset the family pattern of relationships and a new order of being has to be established. The home and family relationships remain in disorder and darkness until the purification ceremony, *kurova guva*, is conducted.

Very often not all relatives of the deceased can attend the funeral at the usual short notice and so it is believed they may harbour a longing to bid each other farewell. This feeling is believed to be mutual, on the part of the deceased and the living. The *Kuchenura* ceremony meets this felt need and brings about peace of mind, harmony and reconciliation within the family and between the living and the dead. If there had been any misgivings between the living and the dead they are forgiven. Hence the saying, "*Wafa wanaka*", meaning literally, "One who is dead is good", or less literally, "We cannot speak evil of the dead" or "The dead are blessed." The ritual of *Kuchenura munhu* brings about reconciliation between the living and the dead.

Another consistently observed effect of the *kurova guva* ceremony upon the living is that it brings about some peace of mind, an end to mourning and even some relief, especially if all was well arranged and well conducted. The smooth conducting of the ceremony is often taken as a sign of the peaceful departure and successful integration of the deceased within the communion of the ancestors. His/her spouse is now free to remarry if they so wish. The *kurova guva* ceremony ends the period of mourning, integrates the deceased into the communion of the ancestors, sets people free of the particular death and enables them to live again according to a new family pattern of relationships encompassing both the living and the dead.

## 2. The How:

The Shona Ritual, *Kuchenura Munhu*, proposes an elaborate way of conducting the purification ritual in a Christian way. In my opinion, the proposed ceremony is too elaborate and this turns out to be a great weakness of the proposed Christian ritual, rendering it virtually impractical. One gets the impression that the intention of the writers was to make the priest or Church representative/s effectively replace the

roles of some of the family members and the *n'anga* or spirit medium in particular. The Church should propose its own purification ritual in consultation with but independently of the traditional intricacies. It should, at the same time, impart some Christian understanding of death, the dead and their fate (Christian opinion is divided on the idea of heaven, whether it is a state or a place; so too on the idea of purgatory, its existence or non-existence; and so too, hell, etc.).

Parallel cases may best explain my argument here. The Church has produced rites of Baptism, Anointing of the sick, Marriage, and some rituals for rain, etc., independently of other concurrent traditional rites and rituals. Thus, the same child presented for baptism may undergo traditional initiation rites; the same person to be anointed may be consulting a *n'anga* or spirit medium in quest of healing; the same couple for marriage will have gone through the whole process of customary marriage (in which the Church is usually not involved); the same congregation praying for rain on the Sunday of prayer for rain may be conducting traditional rain rituals simultaneously in their homes and villages. So what is all the fuss about *kurova guva* that the Church would want to be involved in all the traditional aspects, which is not demanded of other related rites and rituals? In fact most Christians who practise the traditional *kurova guva* ceremony claim that most of the practices are neutral, that is, neither Christian nor pagan as such, but meet a traditional obligation and some felt needs on the part of the bereaved.

I propose that if Church officials are going to be involved in the *kurova guva* ceremony then they should do whatever they have to do (mass or prayers, blessings, etc.) at the family homestead of the deceased on the afternoon of the first day of the traditional ceremony which usually lasts three days for its final stages, often

beginning on Friday afternoon till Sunday. Such an arrangement would enable Church representatives to complete their duties before the family goes into festivities, etc. Surely noone punctuates a wedding party with prayers over various aspects to make it Christian! The Church witnesses the marriage of the couple and leaves the rest to the family. The priests do not have to remain with the wedding couple until the last pint is drunk or the last piece of cake eaten, unless they so wish for reasons other than making the marriage truly Christian! And yet this seems to be what the Shona ritual, *Kuchenura Munhu*, in its present form seems to be suggesting by way of making the traditional ceremony Christian. The Church only needs to acknowledge the value or *why* of this ritual, and the *how* will gradually unfold on its own, with the presence of the Church at some stage/s of the purification ritual. The current sacramental rites of the Church developed over many centuries and are still being revised, adapted and adopted in some cases. The Christian ritual of *Kurova Guva* may need to have the same flexibility and adaptability given the different cultural tendencies even within the same region. Christians will continue to learn, adapt and adopt from each other. By involving themselves in the *Kurova Guva* ceremony, Christians may be able to influence and transform the traditional practices in a way similar to the manner Christian influence has transformed some traditional burial rituals and almost replaced them completely with its own.

## Appendix G

### ***Kuchenura Munhu: The Continuing Discussion around an Example of Inculturation***

*An overview*

#### ***I. Introduction***

In their message at the end of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, the Bishops of IMBISA and AMECEA give two reasons why they consider the African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and the dialogue with them as important: (1) the fact that there are (still) many followers of ATRs who are their brothers and sisters because they are rooted in the same African cultures, and (2) the need to study their beliefs and practices for the process of inculturating the faith. (Message IMBISA/AMECEA, No.9)

Whilst there seems to exist a fairly wide consensus on the need for inculturation of the Gospel into African culture, most difficulties arise when it comes to the application of general principles of inculturation to particular areas or aspects of the Christian Faith and Life. The ultimate aim might be clear but there is disagreement, hesitancy, passive and active resistance to the way and the steps to get there. It all points not only to the need to continue with serious thorough studies but perhaps even more so to the need for a dynamic catechetical and pastoral approach.

The practical problems related to inculturation are exemplified in a particular practice of traditional religious beliefs in modern day African life which has survived all changes of modern life and the influence of Christianity: the bringing home of the spirit of the deceased in Shona culture. It is sometimes also called the second burial. This article attempts to give an overview of the points raised around the effort to christianise this particular practice and the problems encountered in the process of inculturation.

#### ***II. The 'Kurova Guva' Ceremony of Bringing the Spirit of the Deceased Home***

According to African traditional belief death does not cut the relationship between the living and the dead. "In all the black-African societies, the relationship of the living and the dead, and in particular with the ancestors, is the aspect to which the African is most devoted to. It is without doubt the crucial point of African culture, and because of this, the most important heritage." (Gwembe, 1994, p.13)

In Shona culture this belief is given its most articulate expression in the ritual of *kurova guva* (to beat the grave) or *kugadzira mufi* (to prepare the spirit) or *kuchenura munhu* (to cleanse the person). It consists basically in the bringing home of the spirit of a deceased (*mudzimu*) into the family. Whilst the interment of the body usually has to be done fairly quickly and without much preparation, the *kurova guva* ceremony, which is done several months after the death, allows a more elaborate preparation.

The main purposes of this ceremony seem to be:

- 1) to introduce the deceased who has been roaming about in the bush to the world of those 'who have gone before us'.
- 2) to bring the spirit of the deceased home into the family of the living,
- 3) to acknowledge that the spirit has the function to protect the family, be concerned about its well-being, and to act as mediator with Mwari,
- 4) to give the name of the deceased to a member in the family,
- 5) to distribute the 'property' of the deceased, including his wife.

Without going into details (they can differ from place to place), the ceremonies include the 'presenting' of millet for brewing beer and a beast or goat for slaughter, the 'offering' of beer and meat at the grave, the accompanying of the spirit (*mudzimu*) to the home, the giving of the ancestral name to the eldest son, the inheritance ceremony.

### **III. The Christianised Rite**

In the first missionary period the traditional ceremony of bringing the spirit home was forbidden to the Christians. The catechism stated that *kurova guva* was, similar to other practices and beliefs, against the first commandment. It was simply assumed that such a prohibition would take hold among the Christians, not realising (sufficiently) into what difficult dilemma it was placing them. The practice continued to be done clandestinely and with a bad conscience, and some ways were devised by the Christians themselves to find a way out of the dilemma.

Around 1965 the discussion whether the ban should be lifted and the traditional ceremony be replaced by a Christianised Rite started, first in one diocese and later on at the level of the national Bishops' Conference. Various commissions dealt with it and consultations took place (among e.g. the National Association of Diocesan Clergy (NADC); anthropological and theological experts). Proposals of an adapted Christian Rite were circularised, and accompanying catechetical instructions were drawn up. The draft of the catechism was sent to Rome and received Rome's approval. (Gundani, p.143) Details of this correspondence with Rome and the wording of Rome's reply are not known.

The process took several years. Finally, on 4 October, 1982 Bishop T. Chiginya, Bishop of Gweru and chairman of the liturgy commission of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference published the "*Shona Ritual. Kuchenura Munhu*." The booklet contains a Christian catechesis, a description of the rites, and the actual prayers and rites. It is entirely in Shona without an English translation. (An unofficial translation can be found as appendix to the dissertation of Karl Herrmann. See bibliography). In his foreword Bishop T. Chiginya mentions in short the history of the proposed rite. The Bishop stressed that it was necessary to understand the meaning of the whole Ceremony before putting it into practice.

Although originally approved for an experimental period, it has now been in use for 15 years. This does however not mean that it has become part and parcel of the Christian Ritual and that it can be presented as an example of successful inculturation. As a matter of fact, some priests do not use it at all whilst some might use parts of it. (Gokwe 1997, p.19) At a meeting of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference in 1997 it was observed by one of the Bishops "that much confusion existed, among the clergy and faithful as to the use of the rites drawn up by the Conference in respect of the dead". (ZCBC Minutes 2/3 December 1997)

### **IV. The Themes of the Continuing Discussion**

The discussion about this rite has never completely died down. Over the years, at various occasions and in different forms, the discussion continued. It has taken on a new dimension during the last few years at meetings of Priests' Senates, Deaneries and Catholic lay and pastoral organisations and in articles and letters to the editor in '*Crossroads*' and in diocesan publications. In the following we outline the themes which emerged from these discussions in the last few years, that is, after the *Kuchenura Munhu* ritual has been in existence for some time. (For the debate previous to the publication of the rite, see Gundani 1994).

At their Administrative Meeting of 2/3 December, 1997, the bishops "agreed that each diocese would arrange discussion on this issue, including lay people". The bishops reported back on the 1/2 February 1999 on the discussions held in the various dioceses. This article does not deal with those reports.

#### **a) Themes from Anthropological findings**

##### **1. Variations in terminology and in the traditional rite across the country**

Kumbirai (1977, p.123) says that the funerary rite a year or more after burial "has a variety of names depending on local custom: *kurova guva* (to beat the grave) is the most common in central Shona country ... but ceremonies known elsewhere as *kugadzira mudzimu* (to prepare the spirit), *kutamba guva* (to dance at the grave), *kutamba mudzimu* (to dance to the spirit), *kutamba n'ombe* (to dance to the sacrificial beast) are similar in function." Not only is there a great variety within in Shona culture but the rite differs also in some details from the Ndebele *Umbuyiso* (Tshabalala, p.24-25).

The catechesis to the rite acknowledges that what has been described in the catechesis "can differ from the customs of different districts e.g. the Manyika, the Nda, the Zezuru, the Karanga and others" but it considers these as "small differences and says that "all the tribes of the Shona agree completely in the way they think about this matter and in what they are aiming at in the custom of the rite of the installation of the spirit of a deceased." (p.5, translation K. Herrmann)

Although there are a number of description in the relevant anthropological literature of the rites and the terminology used, there is no comprehensive publication on the existing variety in terminology and practice in the different districts. In order to get an overall picture of the situation, such a survey would be highly desirable. It could also help to answer the question how far a unified rite for the Shona speaking ethnic groups in Zimbabwe is possible and desirable.

## 2. The traditional rites and cultural changes

The rite has been influenced by the spread of Christianity and by other social and cultural changes. In response to the official ban of the traditional *kurova guva* rites by the Catholic and other Christian Churches, the Christian developed a number of 'compromise or camouflage rituals' with different names. (Kumbirai, p.127; Gundani 1994, p.128)

"The African culture that one would now want to inculcate is fast being eroded by modernisation. Modernisation, and intercultural relations are building up to a universal world culture. Young Africans look forward to identifying with this rather than looking back to microcosmic ethnic cultures which are becoming irrelevant in the modern situation. However, the fact that second and third generation African Christians in crisis moments take refuge in traditional cults, is a clear evidence that the traditional African world-views still hold sway." (Ikenga-Metuh, p.174)

Particularly in the urban situation, and to a lesser extent in the rural areas, the different rites in connection with death have assumed new meaning and there is a certain blurring of previously distinct or locally unknown rites. One can notice this with the use of the terms *Nyaradzo* and *Magadziro* and the rites which are given these names. Just one example: "According to tradition, before *kurova guva* is done there is a mini ceremony done two weeks or so after burial. This ceremony is given different names in different places, some call it *doro remvura* (social beer), others call it *doro rendongamabwe*. ... The above ceremony has been replaced unconsciously by Christians with the *svondo yenyaradzo*." (Kadenge, p.8)

How far these and other changes in the traditional rites and practices have been influenced by the introduction and use of the christianised rite, remains a matter of assumption unless data are collected and some serious study is being done.

## 3. Purposes of *kurova guva*

"The major importance of the rituals surrounding *kurova guva* is to dramatise the common bond between the living and the dead. They underscore and reassert the Shona people's most cherished value of community. Through the rituals of *kurova guva* the deceased and the living are reunited. Bourdillon ("*Religion and Society*", 45) however makes an apt observation when he says that apart from the manifest purpose of *kurova guva*, there is a latent function, which is 'to help the living to cope with death and perhaps to overcome the conflict of inheritance'." (Gundani 1994, p.127)

"The purpose of *Kuchemura* or *Kurova guva* are: 1) bringing the spirit of the dead home, 2) to purify the spirit of the dead." (Chidavaenzi, p.18)

Different authors seem to put different emphasis on the purposes for which the *kurova guva* ceremonies are performed. (Kumbirai, p.123,127; Gundani 1994, p.140; manuscripts of proposed alternative rites in ZCBC Archive Box)

The catechesis of the *Kuchenura Munhu* Rite summarises the purposes in this way: The return of the mudzimu into the village, the cleansing of the dead person, to bring the mudzimu into the company of the other vadzimu, the giving of the name of the dead person, inheritance (p.11-14, translation K. Herrmann)

Different interpretations of the purposes of the traditional ceremonies have a bearing on any attempt of christianising the rite, by either accepting them in toto, rejecting some or giving different interpretation and importance to others, e.g. the aspect of cleansing (see below 16.).

#### **4. The nature of the ceremony as strictly family affair and for the married adults only**

"During *kuchenura munhu* there are practices which the elders have to perform in the absence or without the knowledge of the priest. The family elders are never satisfied with what the priest does at the graveyard. This suggests that there is more to the ceremony than any elders are prepared to admit to the Catholic Church." (Matindike, p.20)

If the traditional *kurova giva* is strictly a family affair which is performed by family members only and no outsiders are allowed, is it legitimate to have the family elder (or whoever of the family performs the rite) replaced by the priest or the Catechist? In a similar Zulu rite of 'bringing back home' (*ukabuyisa*), Father J.A. Nxumalo OMI suggests that the familial and the ecclesial aspects of the rite should compliment each other: the family elder has his functions, and so has the pastor. (Nxumalo, p.74-75) The *Kuchenura Munhu* christianised rite does not make such a distinction. The rite is to be performed by the *musumi* (presenter) who is chosen by the family of the dead. (Rite, p.19)

"This ceremony seems to be for adult married people only; what about teen-agers? Do they not need also to go to the others? What about the babies?" (Chidavaenzi, p.18)

### **b) Themes of General Theological Discussion**

#### **5. Theology of African Traditional Religion**

##### *Respect for positive elements of culture*

In the above mentioned message of the Bishops of IMBISA and of AMECEA, they "acknowledge that we have not paid sufficient attention to African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and to dialogue with their followers. ATRs are still very strong and have many followers, among whom we recognise the presence of the common values of our African cultures. We know that the followers of ATRs have much to teach us in our efforts to inculcate the faith." (Message IMBISA/ AMECEA, No.9)

Bishop Ignatius Prieto, Diocese of Hwange in Zimbabwe, spoke on the 5 March 1994 to the Pastoral Council of his diocese on the collaboration between the Church with other religious bodies. Dealing specifically with ATRs, he started off by giving the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* which is repeated in *Redemptoris Missio* (No.10). "We are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God". He added, "It would be incompatible with God's infinite love and goodness not to offer each willing person sufficient and effective means to attain salvation". Among the positive elements of ATRs he listed: their belief in one God who is just, holy, and good, and rewards good, and punishes evil; their regard and respect for ancestors and elderly people; their acceptance of life as a sacred gift of God, their sense of community and kinship. He listed as negative elements their ignorance of Christ as God's Son and Redeemer, of Sacred Scriptures, of sacramental life, of the Church as instrument to communicate the faith and salvation; their ethical standards fall short of the idealism and requirements of the Gospel in many ways. He concluded by saying, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all." (Prieto, *Crossroads* No.144, p.18)

"Christianity should permeate the African way of life (his religion is part of it), it should complete, purge and perfect it, and not destroy it. In the case of the *kurova giva* ceremony, this means accepting the

traditional way of honouring the dead with what additions or improvements the Christian Gospel has to offer." (Kumbirai 1977, p.129)

"Traditional religion is not a creation of the Devil but it was a means through which the Shona people could relate to God before the coming of Christ. ... Traditional religion was God's design for the salvation of the Shona people before the new dispensation. It is the duty of the Church to lead people into this new dispensation by showing the differences between the old and the new." (Mashonganyika 1997b, p.9)

## 6. Ancestor Worship as a case in point

### *Positive attitude to ancestor veneration*

Pope John Paul II in his homily at the opening Liturgy of the African Synod in 1994 said: "The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints?" (Text quoted in *Ecclesia in Africa*, No.43)

The Bishops assembled at the African Synod continued this positive approach when they made the following proposition (No.36): "In many African communities, the ancestors occupy a place of honour. They are part of the community together with the living. In many cultures, there are clear ideas of who merits to be called an ancestor. Were many of these not seeking God with a sincere heart? The ancestors are venerated, a practice which in no way implies worshipping them. We therefore recommend that ancestor veneration, taking due precaution not to diminish true worship of God or to play down the role of saints should be permitted with ceremonies devised, authorised and proposed by the competent authority in the church."

### *Argument for acceptance from Church history*

"The problem of having to accommodate a cult of the dead in the Christian faith is by no means a new one. The Church Fathers (Ambrose, Augustine) tell us about Christians celebrating banquets with and for the dead on their graves. Eventually an elaborate system of commemorating the dead through funeral and anniversary masses developed. ... Jesuit missionaries in China in the 17th and 18th century had to deal with ancestor cults." (*Crossroads* April 1994, p.15; See also Mashonganyika 1997b, p.10)

### *Total Rejection of the traditional practice*

"Let us resist the temptation, so very real and strong, to return to our old beliefs and practices with regard to our *vadzimu* and ancestors, realising that what we culturally believe to be communicating and dealing with as our dead kin, may indeed be evil spirits who come to us under the guise of our *vadzimu*." (Mavudzi 1996, p.9).

"It can be shown that the so-called *vadzimu* venerated by our people in their customs of *kurova guva* and *kuchemura*, in *mabira* and *madiro*, are not really their dead people, but are in fact 'evil spirits' who hide behind the identity and names and characteristics of their dead kin. Thus the people are deceived and are made to deal with 'evil spirits' (1 Cor.10:14-22). (Mavudzi 1998b, p.23)

"The custom of *Kurova Guva*, being a parody of Christ by Satan, cannot be adapted to Christian use." (Mavudzi, 1998c, p.16)

"It (*Magadziro*) is only a waste of time because it contains no salvation at all. It only serves to cryptically hamper spiritual progress of those not conversant with the studies of comparative religions." (Matibini 1997, p.8)

*Although the traditional practice is not bad in itself, the two are irreconcilable: 'either or'.*

"*Magadziro* is a central aspect of Shona traditional religion, and must not be confused with something which can be Christianised or inculturated. ... *Magadziro* as a central aspect of Shona (traditional) religion

must be left unadulterated and be believed and practised by those traditionalists of Shona religion." (Matibini 1997, p.7)

*The positive elements of ATRs have been fulfilled by Christ. There is no need 'to go back'.*

"At least they (these beliefs) are aspirations to be sublimated and fulfilled by Christ's Truth and Grace." (Mavudzi, 1994, p.4.)

"There is no need of *mbudzi yeshungu* or *mbudzi yenhorwa*, no need *kugadzira* or *kuchemura*, let alone *kwora mudzimu nokuipinza mumusha*. All these rituals with their socio-religious connotations, are now anachronistic as all ethnic religious rituals have been sublimated and fulfilled by the Paschal Mystery (Rev. 5:6-14)." (Mavudzi, 1998a, p.7; see also Mavudzi 1998b,p.23))

"Shona religion aims at saving the soul of the person especially at *Magadziro* ceremony - but this now is fulfilled by Christ's Holy Sacrifice - the Mass." (Matibini 1997, p.7)

#### *The arguments from Scriptures against consulting the dead through mediums*

These arguments are based on the first commandment: "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no gods except me." (Ex.20:1-2; Dt.5:6-7)

Deut. 18,10: "There must never be anyone among you who practises divination, who is a soothsayer, augur or sorcerer, who uses charms, consults ghosts or spirits, or calls up the dead. For the man who does these things is detestable to Yahweh your God. "

Leviticus 19, 31: "Do not have recourse to the spirits of the dead or to magicians; they will defile you. I am Yahweh your God."

Leviticus 20,6: "If a man has recourse to the spirits of the dead or to magicians, to prostitute himself by following them, I shall set my face against that man and outlaw him from his people."

Isaiah 8:19-21 Isaiah makes fun of those who consult the dead through the fortune-tellers and the mediums: "Should men say to you, 'Consult ghosts and wizards that whisper and mutter' - by all means a people must consult its gods and, on behalf of the living, consult the dead. To obtain a revelation and a testimony, without doubt this is how they will talk, since there is no dawn for them."

1 Samuel 28:7-20. Saul consults the witch of Endor. 1 Chron 10:13: "Saul died because he had shown himself unfaithful to Yahweh: he had not kept the word of Yahweh; he had even questioned and consulted a necromancer. He had not consulted Yahweh."

### **7. Inculturation versus Syncretism**

"African Christianity is hardly in sight. Some Africans, pastors and the faithful alike are not yet convinced of the need for inculturation. Many fear that it is one step towards syncretism. Some suspect that it is a snare by European missionaries to persuade Africans to accept a diluted or lower form of Christianity. Behind this suspicion is what they see as a volte-face on the part of the missionaries, who having convinced them to accept Christianity in the form brought by the early missionaries, now want to persuade them to return to aspects of the culture they were taught to reject." (Ikenga-Metuh, p.174)

"This inculturation is to be done by evangelising our Shona culture, not in a purely decorative way, as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a radical and vital way. ... Serious care must be taken not only to endorse people's beliefs and practices, and merely applying a thin and transparent Christian garb to them. What is false and superstitious in them must be replaced by the truth of the Gospel of Christ." (Mavudzi, 1995, p.4)

"We must be careful to maintain the sometimes very thin distinction between contextualisation and what scholars call 'syncretism'. Syncretism is defined as the "process by which element of one religion are assimilated into another religion, resulting in a change in the fundamental tenet or nature of those religions" (Evangelical dictionary of Theology)." (Pastor Dave Chikosi, *Sunday Mail* June 27, 1999)

"The general line of composition of the prayers [in the *Kuchemura Munhu* rite] is one of parallelism, to avoid speaking of syncretism."(Herrmann, p.47)

## 8. African and Christian world-views

### *The dichotomist view:*

"When a person dies we expect the person to go home to God and not return to the earthly home." (Chidavaenzi, p.18)

Much of the argumentation against traditional religious practices and their relevance to beliefs and practices of the Christian faith adheres to a world-view which sees heaven, purgatory, and hell as far away places, one somewhere in the sky and the other somewhere below and purgatory somewhere in-between. It separates too much heaven and earth, heaven ('*kudenga*') and home ('*kumusha*'), *nyikadzimu* (land of the ancestors) and the 'home' of God, the material and the spiritual world, the physical and the metaphysical realities.

"I feel that our discussion on *Magadziro* under the two slogans 'bringing Home or Sending to Heaven' ... might suffer from the ... dichotomy that separates too much heaven and earth, heaven and home, Creator and creation, grace and nature. At Msgr. I. Chikore's funeral I got the impression that we were really meant to send him to heaven to enjoy his peace with God ... whereas our message should have been: now as he is in God, he is all the more present to us." (Niederberger, p.5)

It can be argued that the *Kuchenura Munhu* Rite itself reinforces that view by explaining in its catechesis that "we Christians believe that if a human being dies, his soul can go to heaven, to purgatory or to hell" (p.12, translation K. Herrmann) and by talking of purgatory as a place (*kupurugatoriyo*, *mweya iri mupurugatoriyo*).

A dichotomist world view rejects as superstition the traditional view "of the Shona people, that a dead person's spirit hovers over the grave and wanders about in desolate places, awaiting ritual cleansing, induction into the spirit world and reinstating into the home. All these beliefs are superstitions at worst... There is absolutely no possibility for the spirit to hover over the grave or to wander about in desolate places or to return to earth as *ngozi* to molest people or to demand beer or meat or cloths." (Mavudzi, 1995, p.4)

### *The nearness of the spirit world in the traditional and the Christian world view*

The official 'Catechism of the Catholic Church' avoids talking of purgatory and heaven as specific places. It says about 'the Final Purification, or Purgatory': "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned." (Nos. 1030, 1031) There is no mention of a place where this purification is supposed to take place since it is happening beyond the limits of time and space.

The same Catechism says about heaven: Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they 'see him as he is, face to face' (1 Jn 3:2) ... This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called 'heaven'. Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness." (Nos. 1023, 1024) Heaven is therefore not a 'place' but a mode of life.

For the 'heavenness of the spirit world' in the New Testament, see also Mbiti 1971, p.140-156.

## 9. The Communion of Saints

In this connection it is perhaps interesting to note that in the whole discussion about the *kurova gava* rite there is relatively little reference to the Christian faith in the 'Communion of Saints' as a fulfilment of the belief in the relationship between the living and the dead. The only significant exception is perhaps the Pastoral Study Paper No.1 "Communication between the living and the dead" written by the Theological Commission of the ZCBC where it says: "The dividing line between the living and the dead is indeed very thin, provided they are all, in this life and the next, united with God, are living members of the Body of Christ and belong to the Communion of Saints which goes far beyond the confines of the visible Church (cf. Eucharist Prayer IV: '... all the dead whose faith is known to you alone')." (ZCBC Study Paper No.1, p.3)

Vatican II describes the Communion of Saints in these terms: "(Until the Lord comes in His majesty) some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating 'in full light, God himself triune and one, as he is'. All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same charity towards God and our neighbours, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God. All, indeed, who are of Christ and have his Spirit form one Church and in Christ cleave together (cf. Eph 4:16). So it is that the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the peace of Christ is no way interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the constant faith of the Church, this union is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods." (*Lumen Gentium*, No.49)

When talking about that 'exchange of spiritual goods' and the communication between the living and the dead, we have to leave behind such geographical categories as 'near' and 'far', 'here' and 'there' because such communications or contacts transcend such physical categories. The dead share in the 'nearness' of God who is not confined to a certain place but who is hidden to our eyes. The only way to experience that 'nearness' is our faith. But the more the dead person is in God - 'near' to God -, all the more he/she is also present to those left behind.

E. Mavuzi in an article 'Communion of the Living and the Dead' in *Crossroads* downplays this 'exchange of spiritual goods' in order to stress the unique role of Christ as mediator: "No saints, or *vadzimu*, even Mary Mother of God, can exercise the activity of mediation in his/her own right apart from Christ. ... So we as Christians, should accept the revealed truth that our traditional ancestors or *vadzimu* or family saints, do not, and cannot have a separate way of mediating between God and us on earth, but as family saints they can share the Mediation of Christ together with the family saints of other races that are part of the human race." (Mavuzi, 1998a, p.7)

#### 10. The Resurrection of Christ and our own Resurrection

"It is only in the light of the Lord's Resurrection that we can understand our own resurrection, and can hope for it with great anticipation and certainty (cf. Acts 23:6, Rom.6:4 f., 1 Cor 6:14,17;15:20 ff., etc.). It is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ which validates that of His followers." (Mbiti, p.164)

'*A New Catechism. Catholic Faith for Adults*' asks the questions: "How are we to picture those dear to us who have died?" and it goes on to answer: "If we do try, we find that revelation does not lead us away to a distant other-world. It points to our own. What, after all, is the greatest manifestation of the fulfilment of God's promise to us? It is the Easter apparition of Jesus and his presence among us. We are shown how he is a friend who strengthens and consoles, and that he remained the same ever since ... giving force and peace, new gentleness and love. This manifestation ... is the purest indication that we have about the natural of eternal life, including that of those who have already fallen asleep in him." (p.474)

#### 11. Psychological - pastoral considerations

##### *Double loyalty*

At the African Synod several Bishops had referred to a double loyalty of many African Christians: they are torn between the world of Christian beliefs and values and the world of African traditions and beliefs.

Bishop F. Mugadzi of Gweru, Zimbabwe: "All this (= evangelisation) can happen only within our culture so that Christians stop leading double lives, one foot in African tradition, another one in the Church."

Archbishop P. Pengo of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: "The life of many Tanzanian Christians is characterised by a deep dichotomy regarding the professed Christian faith and the concrete day to day living. This dichotomy becomes most obvious in situations threatening human life such as illness or death. ... It is necessary to realise genuine inculturation of the Gospel message in the life of the people."

In the particular situation of South Africa a third reason has been added: the people of South Africa are trying to find their own identity after the imposed identity of apartheid and are asking themselves, "What does it mean to be a South African and a black South African in particular?" Bishop Z.P. Mvemve,

Vice-President of IMBISA, in his opening remarks to a Conference on 'The Church and Culture' (February, 1995), put it this way: "The Church in Southern Africa has entered a new age. There is growing awareness that people can embrace their culture and still remain Catholics, that the Catholic Church can become more diverse in its expression of faith and yet remain Catholic. ... We are at last free from heaping critique upon critique on the colonial Church. We are now being challenged to live and teach the Gospel in our own cultural context. The challenge is simply this, if you claim to be an African Christian then become an African in the expression of your values and your Christian faith."

The SACBC in its 'Pastoral Statement on Inculturation' (1995) said: "Another difficulty (in the process of inculturation) we will encounter is the already existing deep wound caused when the local culture was neglected or even despised for many years. We have to work for the healing of such wounds. We begin our task of inculturation by asking pardon for having hurt others by not respecting their culture in the Church for so many years."

#### *Ending the 'split-personality syndrome' of African Christians*

African Christians suffer from "a double tendency that makes them live their Christian life in two parallel lines that hold them divided between their fidelity to Christ and their fear of *vadzimu*. This polarity becomes a confusing and disturbing factor in their Christian behaviour. It creates a painful tension in their conscience. And this tension, so devastating to their Christian faith, between the two forces of moral motivation, must, at all costs, be resolved." (Mavudzi 1997, p.14)

The descendants of Christ here in Zimbabwe "are bedevilled by conflicting and confusing beliefs and practices with regard to their traditional ancestors. Their tradition tells them that they have their own ancestors, on the other hand their Christian Faith tells them that now they have one, and one only, Proto-Ancestor who is Christ the Lord. And these two faiths create a painful tension for them wherein they find themselves pulled this way and that way by the feat of *vadzimu* or *madziteteguru* and by allegiance to Christ. This tension must be resolved." (Mavudzi, 1998b, p.23)

#### *Fear*

The question how far the traditional rites are motivated by fear needs particular pastoral and catechetical attention. "Parents are endowed with ultimate religious power to bless or curse their offspring effectively, as being their source of existence. Once they have passed into the spirit world, they continue their earthly function as ultimately sanctioning heads of the living, but their authority now infinitely enhanced and effective. Their displeasure is dreaded accordingly and must be averted, and their good-will ensured by minute attention to ritual activity." (Clerici, p.1)

"To ignore the *karova guva* ceremony also makes it impossible for the spirit to protect its family which will perish through lack of protection. ... Since the spirit cannot express itself and manifest itself, it will turn into a ruthless *ngozi* (angry spirit) that will come to avenge the frustration, isolation, oblivion, etc., imposed on it by the failure of its descendants and relatives to re-unite it with the world of the living and the dead." (Kumbirai, p.125/6)

"What is ... objectionable is that we believe that if a family does not perform this ceremony they are punished not by God but by the spirit of the dead or the spirits of the dead elders of the family." (Chidavaenzi, p.18)

#### *Transitional period / Psychological reasons*

For first generation Christians it might have been necessary to have a clear-cut break with the past in order not to slip back into traditional 'pre-Christian' practices. But history has shown that a mere ban of the traditional rites has not produced the desired results. Despite of condemnation and sanctions, Christians continued to practice the traditional rites 'behind the scenes'. As the danger of sliding back recedes in the second and third generation, a more accommodating attitude seems to be possible. On the other hand it should be kept in mind, that "The Church is not a museum for dying-out folklore, and she cannot want a reversion to a dead past without meaning for the young, forward-looking, partly already 'post-ancestral' generation. She appreciates all living, valuable tradition of any nation, as long as they hold meaning for the people. But not all societies, or all groups in a given culture, are at the same point in this general moderni-

sation or Westernisation process. She has to be a Church for the old as well as for the youth, and the Gospel is meant for both." (Clerici, p.3)

#### *The need for constant catechesis*

"All liturgical and catechetical means have to be employed in order that Christian faith and trust in God would more deeply penetrate even in the subconscious dependence and fears of the faithful regarding the dead. In the course of continuous education over years and generating Christian faith has to prove a more and more liberating power, changing the deepest roots of individuals and communities, and converting Catholic believers radically and fully to Christ. Along such an in-depth evangelisation will grow a more mature, committed and convinced Christian faith, and a pagan dependence on the ancestors will gradually lose its grip on the Christian people. They will learn to see their dead in the light of Christ and in the community of His saints." (Clerici, p.4)

"At *Magadziro* Masses we have a wonderful opportunity to explain to our people the real meaning of bringing our departed home to heaven. This can't be done by beer and meat but by God alone." (Mashonganyika, p.6)

## 12. General observations on the *Kuchenura Munhu* Rite

### *General rejection*

"The 'per Christum Dominum Nostrum' suffixed to the so-called prayers in the Shona *Kuchenura Munhu* Rite, and the name of God mentioned in those prayers, seem to be no more than a trick to give the prayers a Christian appearance." (Mavudzi, 1998c, p.16)

"The whole ritual smacks of double allegiance in a bad sense to the spirits of the dead and Jesus Christ." (Chidavaenzi, p.17)

### *Need to show that the Shona rite finds its fulfilment in Christian faith and sacrament*

"It is not enough just to forbid the ancestral rite of the Shona or to create a Catholic *Kuchenura Munhu* rite, which does not answer the question posed by the Shona religion. What has to be done, is to show how the Shona rite and its faith finds its fulfilment in Christian faith and its sacrament of baptism. Everything that *kurowa guva* offers (cleansing from all evil, state of freedom and new life, eternal life) is found in its fullness in the baptism; *kurowa guva* is a shadow of baptism. Of course that can be said only from a Christian point of view. One could say poetically the Shona rite has waited for the Christian rite to come so that it is created anew. A new creation, whose fulfilment is found in communion with God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Herrmann, Karl. Dissertation, p. 40)

### *Some additions of external signs not sufficient*

Given a basic positive approach to the traditional religious practice, it is not sufficient to inculcate the rite by adding the sign of the Cross and an invocation of the triune God here and there. It is here where it is felt that the present *Kuchenura Munhu* ritual needs an overhaul. As one opponent of the present rite puts it, "To all intents and purposes God and Christ are presented in the entire *Shona Ritual of Kuchenura Munhu*' as mere on-lookers, without any effective power and control over the dead and their ancestors. This certainly, is a false picture of things, which must be rectified rather than confirmed." (Mavudzi 1995, p.4)

### *Suggestions for giving Christian perspective*

In concrete, the Pastoral Council of the Diocese of Gokwe suggested some of the features in the practice of *kuchenura* which could be given a new meaning with a Christian perspective: (see Gokwe, p.19)

<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Christian</u>
Cleansing	Purification in purgatory
Induction	Taking to heaven through Christ
Re-instating	Communion of saints
'Home' from 'Bush'	Heaven - where there is light, happiness and unity.
'Bush'	Hell/ Purgatory, sinful world, suffering etc.
Beer, meat, blood	Eucharist - everlasting food, body and blood of Christ

### c) Specific Questions

#### 13. Christ the Prime Ancestor

*Christ has become our prime ancestor*

"Christ ought to be the ancestor, 'the first-born' among human beings and all of creation. He is the high priest, mediator between people and the Father; always present among people in Africa as well as elsewhere. (Mt.28:20) As the first born, he is the ancestor 'par excellence'." (IMBISA. Inculturation, No.107, p.29)

"Christ of Glory has been established by the Father as the universal Proto-Ancestor and the only Mediator between God and mankind. (1 Tim.2:4-5). Christ is thus at the centre of the universe, at the centre of the human race so that all human ancestors of various races are now actually and effectively and absolutely under the supreme power and control of Christ the Lord (Phil.2:9-11)." (Mavudzi, *Crossroads* No.162, Aug.1998, p.22)

#### 14. The nature of Sacrifice

*The nature of the 'offerings' to the ancestors: is it a sacrifice in the theological sense?*

The instruction (in Shona) to the *Kuchemura Munhu* Ritual takes pains to show that what is called *kupira* in the life of the Shona e.g. the pouring of some beer to the ground, being to living people such as the chief or to a dead person, is not a sacrifice. It even adds the statement in English: "This is a purely symbolic gesture without sacrificial connotations in the theological sense." (*Kuchemura Munhu*, p.6-7) It is no attempt to give them the status of 'Mwari' (the Supreme Being) or to put them on the same level.

Against this viewpoint of the instruction, it is argued that it "does not seem to take the Shona rite at this rite seriously, but gives it already an interpretation, which seemingly makes it more adaptable for Christianity. The sacrificial meaning of the rite is much more visible in the killing of the goat - which is not questioned by it - than in the pouring of the beer on the grave, which is taken by it, to explain that it is not a sacrifice. ... In a more critical interpretation, one could say, the catechesis empties the symbolic action of its sacrificial significance, and so makes it appropriate for a Christian rite. 'Purely symbolic gesture' can be easily misunderstood, to mean, that it is just an empty sign without religious meaning." (Herrmann, p.43-44)

*The sacrificial nature of the killing of the goat*

"There are aspects of sacrifice in this *Kuchemura Munhu* Ritual. ... This beast (= goat) is compared to Christ and its blood to the blood of Christ. It is offered to the Spirit of the dead while the blood of Jesus is offered to the Father." (Chidavaenzi, p.17)

*All sacrifices have been fulfilled in Christ's sacrifice*

"The sacrifices of our African Traditional Religion, in whatever form and for whatever motive, were foreshadowing the unique sacrifice of Christ which has now, once and forever, replaced and sublimated all those inadequate sacrifices of old. ... All the old sacrifices were, and are not only ineffective, but also no longer have any meaning and purpose. To continue to practise them is for us as well as for the Jews to indulge in a vain and empty hope." (Mavudzi, 1996, p.9)

*The celebration of the Eucharist*

Defenders of a complete break with the past argue that "*Magadziro* and Holy Mass are not compatible. ... At the worst it is a mixture of two different religions. ... Having Mass and *Magadziro* undermines the efficacy of the Mass, and this is totally unacceptable to us Christians." (Chirikadzi, p.6-7)

The present *Kuchemura Munhu* Ritual does not explicitly speak about the place of the Holy Eucharist in connection with this ceremony. It does not necessarily presume the presence of a priest for the ritual. It ends with a Service of the Word which can be conducted by a lay leader. The Eucharist could be celebrated in its place.

A previous proposal of a rite had suggested that, if the Eucharist is to be an integral part of the Rite, it should be celebrated after the people have returned from the grave and before they beginning the festivities

of eating and drinking. "The Mass would preferably be celebrated not at the house, but at some convenient place outside the house, e.g. under a big tree outside the homestead. ... Such a location for the Mass would have the symbolic value of showing that the Mass most fittingly completes the triangular procession of calling the *mudzimu* back home, i.e. from the house to the grave, then to the place for the Mass, and finally back to the house for the feasting. In other words the Mass would stand out as the main rite which brings the *kurova guva* proceedings to their climax and completion." (*Christian Rite of Kurova Guva*, p.5)

### 15. The role of the *N'anga* (diviner)

"If we study carefully why Christian communities make little progress, we would see that the cause for this is the *n'anga*. Christianity is built on love - God so loved the world that he gave us His Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life (John 3:16-17). Whenever or wherever death occurs the *n'anga* is at work. His role is to bring about division and hatred in the family or community by always pointing out that death was caused by so and so. How can anyone bring about God's family with a person who has bewitched your relative or neighbour? In other words, God's kingdom cannot be built through hatred and division. He, the *n'anga* is an enemy of love and unity and therefore of the whole Christian concept of building the body of Christ. Our duty is to fight evil and hence the *n'anga* should not have any role in *Magadziro*." (Mashonganyika 1997, p.6)

"One unmistakable sign that all this is the work of 'evil spirits' is the association of these 'so-called *vadzimu*' with diviners and mediums and sorcerers, linen cloths and snuff, and causing misfortunes, illnesses and even death." (Mavudzi 1998b, p.23)

At their meeting in December 1997, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference "agreed that the role of the *n'anga* was central to this issue and that recourse to the *n'anga* could not be approved under any circumstances". (ZCBC Minutes 2/3 December 1997).

### 16. Ritual and Moral Cleansing

By calling the Christian Rite *Kuchenura Munhu*, the rite stresses the cleansing aspect because *kuchenura munhu* means literally 'to cleanse or ritually purify a person'. The catechesis explains, "The Shona, when they say, to cleanse, they mean that wherever an adult (elder) has died everything about the bereavement of one of theirs in the family and in their clan, and the things, which he left at once disturb the (normal way of life which was there. ... If a human person is not yet settled we hear the elders say, 'Our (or your) village is still black' meaning that the dead person has not yet been cleansed. The dead person is still dark (unclean, black) because he is not brought to the other *vadzimu*; he is said to have not yet returned to this village, he is still in the veldt (bush)." (translation K. Herrmann)

Herrmann in his Doctoral Dissertation (Hekima College Nairobi 1997) points out that "the problem of cleansing in the rite seems to be based by the mixture of two different concepts of Holiness and Ritual Cleanliness." (p.45) He explains: "The catechesis recognises that the Shona rite makes the spirit of one deceased to a true ancestor, but it stresses the cleansing of the spirit more than anything else and this is a misinterpretation. It interprets the idea of cleansing (which is a Catholic invention into the rite in view of the purgatory) as reconciliation for the Catholic rite. The Shona religion has its own rites of appeasement different from *kurova guva*. The spirit of one deceased can only be appeased (worshipped), if he is already installed. If the idea of cleansing is put in the centre of the Shona rite, contrary to its original intention, and interpreted as reconciliation, it seems so obvious to compare the *vadzimu* with the souls in purgatory." (p.44)

He goes on to say: "The catechesis says, that 'the souls who are in purgatory need (want) our prayers, so that God forgives them,' and again in the second part under 'The Cleansing of the Dead Person', that 'if a soul has not arrived to be with god, it wanders in a fit of rage.' Both ideas express the Shona faith and are not Christian. That a Christian soul in purgatory, being almost in the presence of God, is still angry with the living, is more than strange, because unlike the spirit of one deceased before *kurova guva* is outside his 'eternal abode', the soul in purgatory is neither outside the Church, nor Christ. Such statements give a rather pessimistic view, instead of Christian hope and optimism. ... The whole Christian life is one of forgiveness (cleansing, purification). We are cleansed or purified insofar as we accept God's forgiving love, visible in his Son, mediated through his Church." (p.45)

### 17. Possession of a Living Person by the Spirit of an Ancestor

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference has issued a Pastoral Study Paper (No.1 'Communion between the living and dead.'). The Shona version of the Study Paper in particular speaks about the 'possession' of a living person by the spirit of a deceased person: "According to our traditional custom of *kurova guva* the people want that the spit of the deceased person goes to the other deceased and that he returns to his home and looks after his family. But some of these spirits, when they have been brought home, they do not simply come back home; they also want to take possession of a person calling this person their residence." (p.1; personal translation)

The booklet tries to give a 'Christian Response to Spirit Possession'. It wants to free the Christians from their fear and to overcome that fear by the spirit of faith, the Holy Spirit. (p.6)

### 18. Alternative Proposals such as Blessing of the Tombstone

"The Africans have now introduced the unveiling of the tombstone. Whites do not unveil the tombstones for their dead relatives. The concept of unveiling of the tombstones is an African innovation. This was done for their need to lure the pastor to their occasion. Now pastors feel comfortable to go to sparkling stones and by so doing they are meeting the African need. The dilemma the African Christians find themselves in is that some of them hold both the traditional *kurova guva* and the tombstone unveiling and sometimes at the same time. ... I want to propose that there is no need for both. Traditionalists may continue with their *kurova guva* but Christians should adapt the unveiling of the tombstone ceremony. ... Christians should be satisfied with the tombstone unveiling, remembering their deceased relatives there. They will end their mourning then and finally will settle their estate after the unveiling." (Kadenge, p.8)

Perhaps the practice of the unveiling of the tomb stone is, at present, the best way of *kuchemura* centred on the Eucharist. It has the following congenial characteristics: a) It is done for everybody, adults, teenagers, married and the unmarried; b) It is done by all cultures in Zimbabwe; c) It is done in all the churches; d) There is no involvement of the *n'anga*; e) There is no involvement of offerings and sacrifices; f) There is a ceremony about it; g) it makes people feel they have done something for the dead relative." (Chidavaenzi, 1999, p.18)

## V. Conclusion

- It can be said that the continuing debate has by and large not raised any new arguments for or against that were not being discussed in the years leading to the publication of the *Kuchenura Munhu* Rite.
- On the factual level there seems to be very little new evidence what is *actually going on* in the parishes and communities, as distinct from what people *believe* is being done or *say* is being done.
- On the theological level, the basic positive approach to other religions and cultures initiated by the Second Vatican Council and continued since then e.g. by the African Synod has hardly sunk in.
- Whilst there might be a fairly wide consensus on the missionary principle of inculturating the Gospel into African culture, most difficulties arise when it comes to the application of the general principle to a particular aspect or ritual, as the *kurova guva* ritual shows.
- On the pastoral level, there seems to be, at least in the urban areas, a slow movement from the traditional *kurova guva* (which would in any case more likely to be done at the traditional *kumusha*) to rituals of *nyaradzo* and the blessings of the tombstone some months after the burial.

The whole debate confirms the observation of the Nigerian theologian E. Ikenga-Metuh: "Inculturation does not come easy. Any authentic inculturation effort must be preceded by in-depth research by a team of experts in various fields ranging from biblicists, theologians liturgists, anthropologists, specialists in African Traditional Religion, church historians etc. which many African dioceses or even episcopal conferences can ill afford. However, a firm commitment to inculturation towards the realisation of African Christianity is enough to make a modest beginning. Then should follow intense study, research, experimentation of theories and praxis in inculturation. ... The research efforts should be accompanied at every stage by intense enlightenment programmes to educate the people on the meaning and importance of inculturation." (Ikenga-Metuh, p.175)

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*Death and After-life Rituals in the Eyes of the Shona* is a passed PhD thesis handed at Universität Bayreuth, Germany. The author examines burial customs and rituals among the Shona and sees a definite pattern comparable to the Judeo-Christian practices. He contends that these practices among the Shona were a preparation for the Gospel of Christ or 'preparatio evangelica' as Vatican II would identify this phenomenon. He laments the fact that the early Missionaries did not make full use of this preparation which would have laid the foundation for the fullness of the Gospel message they brought. On the contrary, some Missionaries sought to destroy the foundation instead of building on it, a temptation which lingers to this day, given the different conceptions of these customs and rituals by different theologians and evangelizers. The author argues strongly and with conviction in favour of the foundation for Christian evangelization, which tradition has already put in place, as embodied in the death and after life rituals among the Shona. Given the controversy concerning the rituals among some, the author assumes a Christ-like approach, who asks his disciples, 'Who do you say I am' (Mk.8:29). Individuals and communities will respond to this question in unique ways and should not be coerced. Jesus does not coerce his disciples but invites them to respond in love. He leaves them to mature in the faith until he can challenge Peter saying, 'Do you love me more than these?' (Jn.21:15). The author embarks on a similar loving process of affirmation and positive critical analysis in the hope that the past will help propel the Shona into the present and future of Christ. The author charts a new and interesting way of reading Scripture in the light of the Shona death and after life rituals.

- Rev. Dr. Frederick E. Chiromba, Synod House, Harare.



### The Author

Dr. Canisius Mwandayi was born in Mutasa District of Zimbabwe. He studied Philosophy and Theology at the The Regional Seminary, Chishawasha. He holds BA Hons (2002) and MA in Religious Studies (2006) from the University of Zimbabwe. He received his doctorate in Theology of Cultural Encounters from Universität Bayreuth, Germany (2011). Bible related cultural encounters remain his area of interest and his most recent publications include *Judaic Traits in Funerary Customs of the Shona of Zimbabwe: A Comparative Case Study* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2011); *The Queen Mother Jezebel: A Rebuttal of the Deuteronomistic Bias* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2011). He is currently preparing the publication of *The Lad Jesus: Revisiting the Formative Years*.

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