

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND DAILY LIFE: TURNING THE BIBLE INTO A MANUAL FOR PRACTICE, THE CASE OF AFRICAN INITIATED “APOSTOLIC” CHURCHES IN ZIMBABWE

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## Introduction

Many works have been written on the founding and developments in and of African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Africa and in Zimbabwe in particular yet there has been little in terms of seeking an understanding on how these churches interpret the Bible, the basis upon which the beliefs and practices of these churches are founded. In short, how does the Bible feature in the daily life of these churches? Alternatively, what is the relationship between the Bible and practice in these churches? Demographically, the AICs have now taken over a significant percentage of the Christian population in Zimbabwe, including urban areas<sup>1</sup> and Togarasei is right when he writes “during weekends shades of trees are turned into seas of red, white, blue and all sorts of colours of religious regalia.”<sup>2</sup> This assertion is an apt summation of the impact of AICs, as they are the ones that do not congregate in buildings at the same time challenging the oft raised assumption that these churches are rural based. That these churches have become an important part of the religious or Christian landscape in Zimbabwe cannot be understated hence the need to understand more aspects associated with these churches. While it is a question of accessing the doctrines and dogma of mainline churches to understand their beliefs and practices, “foundational to these churches (AICs) are definite theological presuppositions, found more in the practice of their Christianity than in formal dogma.”<sup>3</sup> It is therefore contented in this article that the use of the Old Testament as a

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<sup>1</sup> Masiwa Ragies GUNDA, “A critical analysis of the survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches” in: L. Togarasei and E. Chitando (eds.), *Faith in the City: The role and place of religion in Harare*, Uppsala: Universitetstryckeriet 2010, 41-62: 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> Lovemore TOGARASEI, “One Bible Many Christianities: Christianity in Zimbabwe Today”, *Unpublished* 2005, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Allan ANDERSON, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Asmara: Africa World Press 2001, 17.

manual for daily practice is readily observable from the practices themselves.

The lack of systematic dogma in these churches cannot be taken to mean the lack of dogma, since by literally basing their practices on the Bible and enforcing their observance; a kind of dogma is established. This study therefore seeks to critically describe the interpretational trends of the biblical texts, especially the Old Testament, in these churches and the biblical basis upon which some of the practices and belief systems in these churches are founded upon. While the Old Testament is the basis upon which practices in these churches are legitimized, there is no denying what John Mbiti observed when he writes;

African religion has prepared the religious and spiritual ground for many of its adherents to listen carefully to the teachings of the Bible, to reflect seriously upon them, to find a high degree of credibility in them, to discover meaningful parallels between their world and the world of the Bible, and in many cases to convert to the Christian faith without feeling the sense of spiritual loss.<sup>4</sup>

This is despite the open war between these churches and traditional religious practices, which they declare to be their pre-eminent enemy.<sup>5</sup>

### ***African Initiated Churches***

The designation AICs comes from an attempt to categorise the different strands of Christianity in Africa. This has been an attempt by scholars to respond to Gifford's challenge when he asks, "in the light of the new alignment within African Christianity, how adequate now are older typologies (like Ethiopian, Zionist etc)? What typologies exist now to categorise the vast array of churches in Africa's major cities?"<sup>6</sup> Generally and taking cognisance of Makhubu's work, AICs are churches founded by Africans with no missionary links, in essence these are churches founded by Africans for Africans in Africa.<sup>7</sup> While it has generally been noted that most of these churches were founded on nationalistic

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<sup>4</sup> John MBITI, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press 1986, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Masiwa Ragies GUNDA, "Christianity, Traditional Religion, and Healing in Zimbabwe: Exploring the Dimensions and Dynamics of Healing Among the Shona" in: *Swedish Missiological Themes*, 95 (3) 2007, 242-243.

<sup>6</sup> Paul GIFFORD, (ed) *New Dimensions in African Christianity*, Ibadan: Sefer 1993, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Paul MAKHUBU, *Who are the Independent Churches?* Johannesburg: Scotaville Publishers 1988, 6.

grounds, there can be no denying that biblical interpretation played a part in arousing the need for an African founded church in the minds of some Africans. This is especially pronounced in these churches because “Africans hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the pages of the Bible.”<sup>8</sup> The close correlation between pre-colonial African practices, some of which have continued to date, with especially Old Testament practices and worldviews led to the claims to ownership of the Bible in many AICs.

This paper will focus on the practices and beliefs in some of these churches, especially those that Inus Daneel classifies as the Zionist-type, those that emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit<sup>9</sup>, which in this paper we shall conveniently call the “Apostolic” churches. It is also important to note that the issue of categorising these Christian churches has been at the centre of many scholarly works and possibly cannot be exhausted since the starting point does not seem to be similar among the different scholars who have dealt with the issue. However, in this paper we are more interested in those AICs of the “Apostolic” type. These churches are so named because of the prevalence and prominence given to the name “apostolic” as shown below in the names of these churches: Bethsaida Apostolic church, Paul Apostolic church, Followers of Jesus Christ Apostolic church, The Miracle of God Apostolic Church, *Kudana* Apostolic church, *Simbaguru* Apostolic church, Pentecost Apostolic church, Bible Apostolic church, St. Joseph Holy Apostolic church.<sup>10</sup> Further, as Allan Anderson observes, “the largest and the second or third largest denomination in Zimbabwe, is the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange (AACJM), known as *Vapostori*, estimated at almost one million affiliates in Zimbabwe in 1999.”<sup>11</sup> These seem to fit into Daneel’s classification of the messianic-type churches where the attention of the members is captured by the eminence of the leader.<sup>12</sup> Since the main focus of this paper is not on the categorisation of these churches, we shall confine our arguments to the general designation given above and to a lesser extent that suggested by Daneel.

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<sup>8</sup> MBITI, *Bible and Theology*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Inus DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1987, 30.

<sup>10</sup> GUNDA, A critical analysis of the Survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches“, 44-45.

<sup>11</sup> ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 116.

<sup>12</sup> DANEEL, *Quest for Belonging*, 30.

Of central importance is that while the names of these churches are New Testament inspired<sup>13</sup>, as seen in the adoption of names of New Testament personalities, the practices and beliefs appear to be dependent on the Old Testament more than the New Testament. There is no denying that the New Testament is important in these churches, as seen in the idea of the Holy Spirit and the belief in Christ as saviour. However, the daily life of adherents to these churches is governed more by the laws and injunctions of the Old Testament. To that extent, the central characteristics of these churches are that the “preachers in Zimbabwe wore [wear] white robes, carried staffs, shaved their heads, and grew beards, and taught Old Testament laws.”<sup>14</sup> This, seemingly as a challenge to the “life of faith” which gives individuals huge responsibilities to decide what is acceptable and not. These churches wanted a life governed by biblical injunctions at every turn, and the Old Testament gave them just as much if not more. To that extent, the Old Testament is not simply a document or documents that prepare the way for Christ but are documents that are as relevant and valid as the New Testament itself, especially when it comes to daily life. It appears that in the Old Testament,

Africans feel that their own lives are described..., they as human beings are affirmed in it and that they belong to the world of the Bible...The world of the Bible did not vanish two or three thousand years ago. People [Africans] discover that it is for them a world of yesterday and today, a world of their own lives and communities.<sup>15</sup>

AICs do indeed call into question the Christian understanding of the Canon. Especially so because when Johane Marange received a vision in 1932, he was told that he should inform the people to keep Old Testament laws and the seventh-day Sabbath.<sup>16</sup> From observations of these churches, they have developed a canon within the Canon as widely understood in mainline churches, and their Canon also adds “the visions and personal experiences of Marange [or the respective founders], called *The New Revelation of the Apostles*.”<sup>17</sup> The Canon of most AICs does not treat the Old Testament as the Old Testament in the manner in which it is understood in mainline churches, rather the Old Testament in these

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<sup>13</sup> GUNDA, *A critical analysis of the Survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches*, 45.

<sup>14</sup> ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 116.

<sup>15</sup> MBITI, *Bible and Theology*, 26-27.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 116.

<sup>17</sup> ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 117.

churches should be understood as the earlier Testament but still valid and at the same level with the New Testament, if not higher. There is a greater prevalence of combinations of practices from both the Old and New Testaments such as foretelling the future and speaking in tongues, exorcism and faith-healing. With these observations, it becomes laudable to argue that “the entire movement of independency [AICs] across Africa takes on the aspect of a drive to recover a more biblically based religion.”<sup>18</sup> This quest is central if we are to appreciate the role of the Bible in the ordering of lives of the *Vapostori*.

### ***The Old Testament in African Initiated Churches (AICs)***

A general analysis of the AICs’ beliefs and practices reveals aspects and concepts replete with Old Testament reminiscences, these churches appear to have seriously attempted to establish a biblically based religious tradition. In fact, participatory observation in these churches is a journey back to the Old Testament times. The adherents of these churches literally “live the Old Testament, or some sections of the Old Testament.” So many factors can be cited to demonstrate that the fundamental beliefs and practices of these AICs rest on the Old Testament teachings, this notwithstanding the fact that some of their practices are adopted from the traditional heritage.<sup>19</sup> It is the intention of this paper to critically outline how these churches have depended so much on the Old Testament for their beliefs and practices. This dependence has been sustained by an interpretation of the Old Testament as will be demonstrated below. The following key aspects will receive attention, as an overview analysis, in this paper: laws, prophecy, healing, the position of women and festivals. In short, the practical lives of these churches have been fashioned after the lives of ancient Israelites and Jews, as gleaned through the pages of the Old Testament. This is the perspective one gets from talking to members of these churches, there may be some similarities with traditional practices, but these churches justify their practices by resorting to the Bible, especially the Old Testament.

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<sup>18</sup> David BARRET, *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (1968), in: Mbiti, *Bible and Theology*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> GUNDA, “A critical analysis of the Survival and Relevance of Post-colonial African Initiated (Apostolic) Churches”, 46.

## **Laws and Purity**

The history of Christianity is replete with incidences where Christians are opposed to each other regarding the observances of Old Testament laws by Christians, this is already present in the works of the Apostle Paul and the epistle of James, where faith and law are juxtaposed. While, Jesus is believed to have simply given two laws to humanity, that is, Matthew 22:37,39 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” This would appear to be revolutionary in Jesus’ time since there is overwhelming evidence and general consensus among scholars that the Old Testament religion has texts that point towards a legalistic religion whose foundation was the law.<sup>20</sup>

Legalism “is a term Christians use to describe a doctrinal position emphasizing a system of rules and regulations for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth. Legalists believe in and demand a strict literal adherence to rules and regulations.”<sup>21</sup> The assumption of legalists being that Old Testament religion and its adherents are portrayed as having been governed by a set of rules and regulations. All aspects of the life of the community were legally governed from how members of the community relate, what they ate and how they conducted sacrifices. It is clear that, as argued by Vriezen, the Priestly Code (and thus also some other sections of the Pentateuch) makes a direct connection between the cultic legislation and the actual institution of the religion by Moses. It is envisaged as having been given directly at Sinai (Exo. 25ff; 35ff; Lev. and Num. 1- 10:11). It is in this light that we can understand that even the whole construction and design of the tabernacle, the laws concerning the priests and the high priest, the sacrificial system, rites of purification, festivals and so forth, are included.<sup>22</sup> While the Old Testament religion might not have been entirely legalistic there is no doubt that its interpretation among AICs has more often than not emphasised the legalistic dimension. This centrality of legalism in religion can be detected in AICs in Zimbabwe today as shall be demonstrated below.

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<sup>20</sup> Paul J. ACHEMMEIER, (eds.) et al, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, San Francisco: Harper 1985, 548.

<sup>21</sup> Got Questions Org, “What does the Bible say about Legalism?” available online: ([www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html](http://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html)) accessed 04 Febr. 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore C. VRIEZEN, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, London: Lutterworth Press 1967, 257

Legalism is a characteristic phenomenon of most AICs and this, according to Oosthuizen, comes naturally to the African, who finds it difficult to accept teaching as binding unless it is supported by outward sanctions.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that legalism also characterises the African Traditional Religion (ATR) hence nothing would suit the traditional African mind better.<sup>24</sup> While we acknowledge that legalism was part and parcel of the traditional religion, it should be appreciated that these AICs disown such traditional religion but they remain attracted to legalism. This fascination with laws may be explained in terms of worldviews, while there is the movement from traditional religion to Christianity, it would appear that there is yet another movement which is below the radar, the movement of Christianity from the Western worldview to the traditional African worldview. In this worldview, teachings are always accompanied by external sanctions. This legalistic interest is then fulfilled when these churches turn to the Old Testament. While these are Christian churches, they emphasise the Old Testament in as much as a legalistic religion is concerned hence in these churches legalism is found in their adoption of almost all the legal requirements contained in the Old Testament such as dietary and purity laws.

### **Dietary Laws**

Almost all AICs of the apostolic type in Zimbabwe follow Leviticus 11 to the letter. This chapter specifies what animals were considered clean and unclean hence edible and inedible respectively. It is not surprising therefore that among these churches; followers are prohibited from eating swine, hare, any fish (water creatures) without fins and scales, as well as the ostrich. According to Madzimai (Female title meaning simply Woman) Presnagne:

*Mukereke medu hatitenderwi kudya mhuka dzinorambidzwa muchitenderano chekare. Mhuka dzacho dzinosanganisira nguruwe, turo, mbeva, kana hove dzakadai nemuramba, nyamasasi, hunga kana hwakwa nekuti hadzina mahwamba.*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> G. S. OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa: A Theological and Anthropological study*, London: Hurst and company 1969, 171.

<sup>24</sup> OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa*, 171.

<sup>25</sup> Madzimai PRESNAGE, *Interview*, Harare: December 2004.

In our church we are not allowed to eat unclean animals as stipulated in the Old Testament; these include pigs, mice, hare, as well as fish such as the eel or any other such fish without scales.

The New Testament texts that appear to challenge these dietary laws are interpreted allegorically or ‘spiritually’ in these churches. A clear example is the vision of Peter in Acts 10:9-16, which in these churches has nothing to do with the dietary laws but with the spread of Christianity to non-Jews. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 8, is also interpreted to mean the “weaker brother” is the one who continues to be drawn to forbidden foods and therefore requires the patience and tolerance of the stronger brother, that is, those who have moved on to live by God’s laws.<sup>26</sup> On dietary laws, the New Testament is interpreted in the light of the Old Testament calling into the question the general assumption that all Christians see the New Testament as the fulfilment of the Old Testament and therefore taking precedence over the latter.

Besides the lists of prohibited animals and food items, other important observations have to do with Leviticus 11:39-40, which reads;

If an animal of which you may eat dies, anyone who touches its carcass shall be unclean until the evening. Those who eat of its carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening; and those who carry the carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening.

On the basis of this reading AICs therefore prohibit their members from eating not only those animals declared unclean in the text but also those clean animals that die without being slaughtered. This, according to Makava and Moffat of *Kutenda Kwe Vapostori* (Faith of the Apostles) church, is associated with the Old Testament teachings<sup>27</sup> such as Leviticus 7:26, which reads; “Moreover you shall eat no blood whatever whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwellings,” as also does Leviticus 17:10, which reads “If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people.” Anyone who fails to live by these injunctions would have to undergo costly purity rituals for them to be able to commune with fellow church members. It is therefore, crystal clear that the Old Testament determines the dietary rules and regulations observed in these churches as illustrated above.

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<sup>26</sup> D. MAKAVA and N. MOFFAT, *Interview*, Harare: May 2005.

<sup>27</sup> MAKAVA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.



These dietary laws impact also on the manner in which church adherents in these churches relate with non-church members within their communities of abode. In those communities where most have access to meat from the so-called “unclean animals”, the *vapostori* do not eat in households belonging to non-church members, because of the fear that their utensils are contaminated. At funerals these Christians do not partake of meat provided at the funeral because of the traditional custom of dedicating the slaughtered beast to the dead. Indeed, being a member of these churches means taking on a new lifestyle, dependent on the laws and injunctions of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. This dependence does not pertain only to dietary laws but can also be observed in purity laws.

### **Purity in Apostolic Churches**

In the above section, we noted the close relationship between dietary laws and the quest for purity in these churches. Eating prohibited foods makes one impure and therefore not whole. The quest for purity is also felt in the manner childbearing women and women in general are treated in these churches. Makava and Moffat bluntly put across this treatment:

*Kana mudzimai abatsirwa anenge akasviba saka haatenderwi kupinda panzvimbo yekunamatira kwemwedzi kana abatsirwa mwana mukomana, kana mwedzi miviri kana abatsirwa mwana musikana.*<sup>28</sup>

When a woman gives birth she is considered unclean such that they are not allowed to attend church services with others for a month if the child is a boy and two months if the child is a girl.

Literally, these churches cite Leviticus 12, which lays down a cleansing programme for women who would have given birth. In admitting the existence of these purity demands on women in general, Loveness Mabhunu writes, “If a woman is menstruating, she is forbidden from attending church services...she will be, they believe, unclean. Furthermore, if a woman gives birth to a baby boy, she is purified after thirty-three days. In the case of a baby girl she is purified after sixty-six days.”<sup>29</sup> It is clear

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<sup>28</sup> MAKAVA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

<sup>29</sup> Loveness MABHUNU, „Revolting against the biblical and traditional stereotypes of women? Women prophets in African Initiated Churches”, in: L. Togarasei and E. Chitando (eds.), *Faith in the City: The Role and Place of Religion in Harare*, Uppsala: Universitetsstryckeriet 2010, 63-84: 74.

from this assertion that their perceptions are Old Testament conditioned, especially the lack of gender sensitivity on the position of women in purity codes, as illustrated in the cleansing programme, which discriminates against the sex of the child. For a woman who would have given birth to a baby boy, the cleansing period is one month while the one who would have given birth to a baby girl, the cleansing period is double. It would appear that women are generally impure, particularly because they have a consistent monthly impurity through their menstrual cycles, which is also recognized as impure in the Old Testament where Leviticus 15:19 reads; “When a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening.” Blood makes one impure, hence consuming or discharging blood is considered impure in the Old Testament and has been adopted in these churches also.

Sexual intercourse is also another cause of impurity as understood in these churches, where adherents are advised against having sexual intercourse on the eve of prayer meetings.<sup>30</sup> While in traditional settings there were instances when sexual intercourse, especially heterosexual, was understood as weakening and dirty, traditional communities appear to have largely sacralized sexual intercourse. In these AICs however, the Old Testament has been the basis of their understanding of sexual intercourse and Leviticus 15:18, “If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bath in water, and be unclean until the evening,” appears to have given the basis for the discouragement from sexual intercourse before church meetings. Since this prohibition is directed against married couples/people, it should be noted that through the ritual of “Mazambara” (gates), members who are unmarried are screened for adultery and other offences by the prophets and those found to be impure have to undergo cleansing rituals before they can be allowed within the congregation.<sup>31</sup>

As has been illustrated above dietary laws and purity codes as set forth in the Old Testament particularly in Leviticus provide the basis for the legalistic nature and emphasis of AICs, in terms of what adherents may eat as well as the observance of festivals hence Rosette notes that every member of these AICs should partake in the celebration of the Passover

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<sup>30</sup> MAKAVA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

<sup>31</sup> Madzimai PRESNAGE, *Interview*.

festival, the festival of the Unleavened bread or the festival of the Tabernacles.<sup>32</sup> While Rosette also emphasises the observance of the Sabbath supposedly on a Saturday, this however needs special mention in that some of these AICs due to New Testament influence now worship on Sundays. This study will therefore argue that while not all AICs observe the Sabbath on Saturday, those who do so like John Marange as cited by Rosette do so under the influence of the Old Testament. In essence, the law found in the Old Testament has been used in the creation of a legalistic religion among AICs in Zimbabwe. In essence, these churches stand far away from Martin Luther's "Justification by faith alone" and apparently have adopted James' "faith without works is dead" perspective. While there are many laws that are operational in these churches, these few examples will suffice for this article. Below we consider the understanding and practice of healing in these churches.

### ***Healing in African Initiated Churches***

Zimbabwean Apostolic churches attract most of their converts due to the centrality they accord healing. This centrality of healing can best be understood in the light of the economic environment where conventional medical practice has been priced out of the reach of many. In fact it is because of the centrality accorded healing in these churches that M. Schofeleers argues for the designation "healing churches" because in these churches healing in its broadest sense plays a pivotal role, especially in the recruitment of members.<sup>33</sup> In an economic environment that thrives in extreme individualism, these churches have become more attractive as Gundani writes,

"the prophets in particular churches distinguish between community work and private consultancy. The former is a free contribution to the corporate image of the church, while the latter is career-based self-development. The benefits from the former normally come in the way of more members for the church, while for the latter gifts are extended to the prophet as token of appreciation."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bennetta JULES-ROSETTE, *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the John Maranke*, London: Lornell University Press 1975, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Martin SCHOFELEERS, "Healing and Political Acquiescence in African Independent Churches" in: *Religion and Politics in Southern Africa*, ed. C. F. Hallencreutz and Mai Palmberg, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1991, 90.

<sup>34</sup> Paul H. GUNDANI, "Church, Media, and Healing: A Case Study from Zimbabwe" in: *Word and World, Volume XXI, Number 2* (2001) 139.

From the above assertions, it is clear therefore that these Apostolic churches exploit the prohibitive medical environment among other factors by offering free health care to converts and therefore resulting in them controlling a significant percentage of the Christian population in Zimbabwe today. While we appreciate and acknowledge the important observations made by Gundani, he however does not seek to uncover the basis upon which the healing practices of these churches are founded upon, an attempt this paper will try to demonstrate.

To understand the concept of healing in these churches, we must again reiterate the double movement we noted above, that is, movement from traditional religion to Christianity and equally important, the movement of Christianity into the traditional worldview. As I argued in another paper, disease was traditionally understood both in physical and spiritual terms hence any successful cure would have to deal with both aspects of disease. This is why missionary medical centres failed to uproot traditional diviner-healers.<sup>35</sup> While the diseases that affected and continue to affect the adherents of these churches have remained the same, their refuge has changed hence they can no longer seek the services of the traditional diviner-healers. These churches, through the creative use of the Bible have found ways of replacing the diviner-healer without leaving their adherents lacking in any of the services they once got from such religious functionaries. AICs unlike their mainline counterparts have taken fully on board, the traditional worldview of their adherents, bringing to light an almost authentic version of African Christianity.

Healing in AICs is associated with a number of tools and other objects. Gundani argues that the prophets' healing methods are similar to those of traditional healers (*n'anga*) because they specialize in exorcism and the extraction of pathogenic objects from the clients. Further the prophets also prescribe some weird solutions such as egg and salty water, egg and milk or salt and Coca-Cola.<sup>36</sup> While these observations are important in understanding the healing methods, this paper seeks to demonstrate that it is not enough in that an attempt has been made to relate them only to traditional religion when it is known that traditional religion is not highly regarded in these churches. In fact, part of the challenge has been that scholars have quickly subsumed the traditional worldview

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. GUNDA, "Christianity, Traditional Religion, and Healing in Zimbabwe," 239-243.

<sup>36</sup> GUNDANI, "Church, Media, and Healing", 141.

under traditional religion. What we see in these churches is a continuation of the traditional worldview and not of traditional religion. It is our contention therefore that by noting the possible links to traditional religion, Gundani could have also extended his observation to the Old Testament religion which is arguably closely related to traditional religion. The concept of healing among these churches could have been greatly influenced by the Old Testament in that it is a compromise between being a “western influenced Christian” or an “African traditionalist” hence the Old Testament influence makes adherents of these churches “African influenced Christians.”

In these churches healing is associated with rods or staffs (*tsvimbo*); water, salt and oil. While other objects and substances as cited by Gundani are also used these seem to be the pivot of healing practices in these churches because their centrality is derived from some Old Testament texts. While the manner in which these objects and substances are used in AICs may differ with the denominations, it is their common appearance that is of interest in this paper. The use of a rod or staff by men or the church leaders is understood in the context of Moses and other Hebrew ancestors who were shepherds. It seems from Exodus 4, it was customary for Jewish men to have a rod but in the activities of Moses the rod or staff assumed a new significance as it becomes the most prized asset in miracle working (Exod. 4:3ff). It is this literal understanding that dominates the significance of a rod or a staff in AICs. In Exodus 7:20, it becomes crystal clear that the rod has become a miracle-working vehicle in that:

Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, he lifted up the rod and struck the water that was in the Nile, and all the water that was in the Nile turned to blood.

It is in this light that we can best understand the use of the rod in many AICs. In some AICs like the African Apostolic Church, the Bishop, senior leaders in the church and prophets use rods.<sup>37</sup> Prophets use the rod or staff, especially in their healing sessions and attribute it some supernatural powers and equate such rods to that of Moses hence the contention of an Old Testament basis in the healing practices.

Plain water is also used extensively in these AICs as a cure of many illnesses. This plain water is known as *mvura yemuteuro* (water that has

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<sup>37</sup> N. M. CHIMBADE, *Interview*, Harare: October 2005.

been blessed and medicated with prayers, the prayers are supposed to give the water medical and curative powers). This water is supposed to have been taken at a waterfall for those who have access to running water while in urban areas, even tap water is accepted.<sup>38</sup> The scriptural basis for using water as rightly observed by Makhubu is that Naaman in II Kings 5 was healed by simply washing himself seven times in the Jordan River at the instruction of Elisha.<sup>39</sup> With Naaman being washed clean in the Jordan, it is understandable why most AICs prefer using water from the river and also explains why more often than not, all river cites that are commonly used by these churches are known as “*Jorodhani*” a Shona rendition of Jordan.

Another commonly used substance is salt. While the use of salt can also be traced within traditional religion, there is little doubt that AICs detests ATR and traditional customs and practices openly and seem to find their justification from the Old Testament. It is commonly believed that salt is used to unmask (*kufumura*) evil spirits or in preventing the evil from attacking an individual.<sup>40</sup> It seems this use of salt is based on the understanding that Elisha, the man of God, used it because in II Kings 2:19-22, he asked for salt which he used to cure the water which was regarded as bad. It is this understanding which is the basis of faith healing in AICs where the use of herbs is considered pagan and evil because their role models used simple objects and substances as in the case of Elisha.

The traditional worldview in which AICs are steeped is one which acknowledges the existence of multiple spirits, both bad and good. The bad spirits are always attacking individuals, including those who are members in these churches. Further, diseases, misfortune and other mishaps are understood to be the result of the work of these spirits. In order to cleanse people from these spirits, exorcisms play a central role. The spirits are believed to influence the behaviour of individuals and when not exorcised, it is believed the individual can never prosper in any venture. This is mainly based on New Testament texts, which are interpreted within the African worldview. Texts such as Matthew 10:8, which reads; “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give,” become central in justifying exor-

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<sup>38</sup> CHIMBADE, *Interview*.

<sup>39</sup> MAKHUBU, *Who are the Independent Churches?*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> MAKAZA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

cism in these AICs. Exorcisms are also central in the maintenance of purity and good health within these churches, such that all services always include sessions for “exorcising evil spirits.”<sup>41</sup> The practice of healing is intimately connected to prophecy in these churches.

### ***Prophecy in African Initiated Churches***

Among the most revered offices in AICs is the prophetic office. While so much has been written by scholars on the origins and significance of prophecy in the Old Testament, it is important to note that prophets were understood as messengers of God whose main duty was to intercede between God and human beings<sup>42</sup>, as can be seen in Genesis 20 verse 7, which reads; “Now then restore the man’s wife; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live ...”. It is in this and other texts that the basis for understanding prophets as miracle workers in Israel and in AICs is founded upon. The second characteristic understanding of prophecy in AICs appears to be based on 1 Samuel 9:6, in which the servant of Saul says, “There is a man of God in this town; he is a man held in honor. Whatever he says always comes true. Let us go there now; perhaps he will tell us about the journey on which we have set out.” Besides being miracle workers, prophets are also understood as foretellers, men and women who possess an unnatural gift of seeing into the future.

According to Daneel, in the Shona spirit-type churches, the prophetic office finds expression both in the reformed sense of the word of God being preached and in the Old Testament sense of revelations and divine communications being transmitted to the wider body of believers by individuals with special prophetic gifts.<sup>43</sup> It is clear therefore that prophets in these churches become the focal point for the believers in that they are understood as the conveyors of the word of God to the believers and also possess some gifts which separate them from ordinary members. It is in this light that we acknowledge that more often than not AICs of the apostolic type are centred on the personality of a prophet who would

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<sup>41</sup> ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Gerhard VON RAD, *The Message of the Prophets*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers 1967, 12.

<sup>43</sup> Inus DANEEL, *Old and New Shona Independent Churches*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1980, 23.

have had telephonic communication experiences with the spirit of God.<sup>44</sup> The role of the prophet in these churches makes practical sense in churches steeped in an African worldview where adherents are not only in search of total healing but are keen to know what the future holds for them.

Closely connected to the office of the prophet in both the Old Testament and AICs is the profound interest in mountains as areas of divine communion as can be found in the centrality accorded Mount Sinai/Horeb in the Old Testament. It is this centrality accorded mountains in the Old Testament that we can best understand the concept of *Masowe* (A place of worship more often than not a hill or mountain) in AICs. This concept can best be explained by noting the significance attached to prayers done in solitude, which could best be rendered in two ways:

(a) *Masowe* might be undertaken by an individual, who decides to go up a mountain for purposes of praying alone and this is done to avoid unnecessary interruptions to their communication with the divine. While normally the concept of *masowe* is associated with mountains or hills it can also refer to any place that allows the individual to pray without disruptions especially in those areas where there are no mountains.

(b) The concept can also be associated with a group prayer session. This also qualifies to be individualistic in the sense that the whole group is focused on one particular goal. The group might refer to the whole congregation or part thereof.<sup>45</sup>

Prophets are indeed the response of AICs to the traditional office of the diviner-healer and has somewhat succeeded where western missionaries failed because it is an office that is steeped in the Bible, while at the same time being well grounded in the African worldview. Adherents to these churches are not asked to change their worldview, only their religious affiliation while the essences of the traditional services are replicated in the name of the new religion. Even non-members who are also Christian have found these prophets attractive than traditional diviner-healers because the former are Christians also. Not only are people healed by these prophets, they are forewarned of impending dangers and are assisted to avoid what can be avoided. Through this prophetic ministry, the greatest fears of men and women are addressed.

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<sup>44</sup> OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa*, 35.

<sup>45</sup> MAKAZA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.



## **Other beliefs and Practices in African Initiated Churches (AICs)**

This section seeks to highlight other beliefs and practices that are found within these churches whose foundations are within the Old Testament, among them being polygamy, which is tolerated in most of these churches. While this practice was prevalent within traditional African societies such as the Shona, in AICs, it is primarily justified on the pretext that the most prominent figures in the Old Testament are presented as having been polygamous such as Abraham who married Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 16), Jacob married Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29), King David married Michal (I Sam. 18:20ff), Abigail (I Sam. 25:39), and Bathsheba (II Sam. 11). In the light of these texts, it is easy therefore, to appreciate Oosthuizen when he writes that the Old Testament has the atmosphere that is sympathetic to polygamy.<sup>46</sup>

Makhubu provides another aspect, which is deeply entrenched within the Old Testament as a basis for polygamy in these AICs when he writes that these churches justify polygamy on the pretext that when one wife is menstruating she is unclean (Lev. 15:19ff) hence she cannot discharge most of the duties expected of a wife until she is purified. During this time of uncleanness, other wives would therefore come in handy.<sup>47</sup> These justifications based on Leviticus are part of the thesis that these churches are too dependent on the Old Testament for most of their religious practices and justifications. It is in these contexts that Mbiti argues, "African Christians began to detect a basic discrepancy between missions and the scriptures on what were to them the major points of conflict, namely the traditional customs being attacked by the missions."<sup>48</sup> It is clear that those AICs that hold on to polygamy justify the practice by citing the Old Testament even though the practice could have been justified on the basis of traditional practices. By using the Bible, these churches have disarmed the major critique from missionaries and mainline churches, while at the same time the African worldview continue to be appreciated in their brand of Christianity.

Another important factor has to do with the veneration of important church leaders, especially the founding lineage. In some songs, Johane Marange is venerated as the 'king of heaven', without superseding

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<sup>46</sup> OOSTHUIZEN, *Post Christianity in Africa*, 169.

<sup>47</sup> MAKHUBU, *Who are the Independent Churches?*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> MBITI, *Bible and Theology*, 30.

Christ.<sup>49</sup> In the John Marange and John Masowe apostolic churches, one often hears the members pray to “*Mwari vaJohanne* (The God of John) in such a way that reminds one of the Old Testament idea of the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob (Ex. 6:2-3).” This seems to be what Daneel above refers to as the centrality of the individuals in these churches that sometimes one may fail to appreciate the difference between Christ and the founder of the church. While again it is common among some African societies such as the Shona people of Zimbabwe, the justification lies in the Old Testament. While there are many of these churches founded by women prophets, patriarchy is still prevalent in most of them. It is in this light that we can also understand why women are hardly given positions of authority in these churches unless the Holy Spirit possesses them. These churches exude patriarchal biases prevalent in the Old Testament. At a service of the Faith Apostolic Church (Mugodhi) attended by the writer it was interesting to note the protocol followed in the church by speakers, which goes as follows:

*Ndinokwazisa baba vakatanga rino sangano ndichidzika nezvidanho zvavo kusvika kumukomana vekupedzisira; Ndozokwazisawo mai mukuru ndichidzika nezvidanho zvavo kusvika kumusikana vekupedzisira.*

(Literally, I greet the founder (a man) of this church and all other men in the order of their ranks to the last boy, I also greet the Senior woman (normally wife of founder) and all other women in the order of their ranks to the last girl.)

After a careful and critical analysis of the implications of this protocol, this writer was convinced that in these churches women are not treated as equal to men in the mode of Galatians 3:28, rather the social hierarchy of the Old Testament is followed to the letter. It is therefore no coincidence that all men are greeted before any other woman because they are ranked higher than all women regardless of age.

Through participatory observation in some of these churches, this writer observed that in all these churches, no one is allowed to wear shoes within the demarcated area set aside for church service. On approaching the area, men, women and children have to take off their shoes. This practice is not limited to the place where the church congregates only but it applies to all places where members may be holding prayers, be it in private homes or in the *masowe*. Upon enquiry, this writer was informed;

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<sup>49</sup> ANDERSON, *African Reformation*, 117.

*Tinobvisa shangu nekuti Moses akanzi naMwari abvise shangu apo akataura naMwari. Nekudaro, patinonamata tinenge tichitaura naMwari saka tinotedza gwara rakasiwa naMoses rekubvisa shangu panzvimbo dzinoyera uye panguva yekunamata.*<sup>50</sup> (We take off our shoes when in a church service because Moses was instructed to do the same by God. Hence when we pray we will be talking to God thus we follow in the footsteps of Moses by removing shoes.)

The text upon which this practice is based is Exodus 3:5, which relates Moses' encounter with the burning bush. The text reads, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." On the strength of this text, most AICs also understand their worship centres as holy places hence they have also adopted the Old Testament aspect of removing shoes when approaching holy ground for purposes of worship. They also maintain that their worship centres constitute the holy places and also when they pray even in homes they also remove shoes, as they would have turned the home into a holy place since they would be communicating with God.

While there are many other practices that are prevalent in these churches whose existence is testimony to the manner in which the Bible has been turned into a manual for daily practice, it is hoped that these suffice to augment the claim that AICs have developed a legalistic religion that is closer to biblical religion, in particular Old Testament religion. These beliefs and practices have been aided by the translation of the Bible into local languages, "in this sense, therefore, it may be concluded that vernacular scriptures have been a major causative factor in the spread of independency in Africa, though not of course the only one."<sup>51</sup> With the scriptures in vernacular, African Christians have responded by identifying aspects of the scripture that cohere with the traditional worldview.

## **Conclusion**

While this paper is not exhaustive on the subject under discussion, some concluding remarks and observations can be noted from what this paper has done. Primarily it is clear that in these churches as highlighted throughout this paper we seem to witness African traditional practices and Christianity being married, despite the justification coming from

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<sup>50</sup> MAKAZA and MOFFAT, *Interview*.

<sup>51</sup> BARRET, in: Mbiti, *Bible and Theology*, 30-31.

one source the Old Testament, there is no doubt some of the practices are traditionally inspired. Central to this marriage is what we have called the double movement manifest in these churches; on the one hand, they have crossed from traditional religion to Christianity, while on the other hand they have moved Christianity from a western worldview to a traditional African worldview. The result has been an authentically African influenced Christianity. A literal interpretation of the Old Testament therefore offers a convenient compromise between the two hence the centrality of the Old Testament in these churches. It is interesting therefore to note that while AICs publicly denounce traditional religion and its practices, sometimes more than mainline churches, they are in the forefront of christianising such practices by seeking biblical justification to some practices which are also African.

Another important observation is that from an analysis of this nature it is possible to see these churches as turning the Christian canon on its head in that while mainline Christianity makes the Old Testament necessary only in as far as it points to Jesus, in these churches, it points nowhere but to itself. It is important to note therefore that the Old Testament assumes higher importance in these churches than in other strands of Christianity. The Old Testament therefore speaks more clearly and easily, in a language an African can easily understand, in images and practices an African can readily identify with hence it has been given a new dispensation as it has been used to redefine African Christianity as opposed to Western Christianity that places the New Testament at a higher level, a form of Christianity most of these churches have rebelled against.